



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Due to unavoidable circumstances we were unable to release the newsletter for October to December 2019. Hence we bring to you this double issue, covering news from October 2019 to March 2020.

When this half year started in October, no one could have foreseen how the world would have changed in such a short period of time due to the spread of coronavirus and COVID-19, and the resulting lockdowns announced by the government of India, and of Tamil Nadu. As with all families across the world, from March onwards, the Bala Mandir family has made the health and safety of the children, staff and members its first priority. In this daunting time, the staff has taken up tremendous responsibility, even staying away from their own families to care for and protect the children in the Home. It is another testament to the service orientation and values of Bala Mandir as an organisation.

The half year between October to March is always fun for the children who get to celebrate many festivals! We have covered glimpses of these festivals over the next few pages. In addition, we have many seminars and workshops during this period. A key highlight was the International Conference conducted by the Madhuram Narayanan Centre, and Mr. S. Krishnan from the MNC shared the history of the conference, and a behind the scenes look at what it takes to put it together. Our sincere thanks to Mr. Krishnan for his contribution to BM Connect!

Many more such special events, fun times, outings, initiatives, celebrations, and of course, our happy children, are covered in this issue. Do read and send us your thoughts at the mail ID below.

We hope that you and your families are keeping safe and healthy in these difficult times.

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Awareness sessions were conducted for the children on COVID-19

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CELEBRATING FESTIVALS: OCTOBER 2019



Visits to the Homes of Members make Navaratri special! ←

Navaratri Kolu was arranged in the Home, and the children gathered for prayers →



On the ninth day of Navaratri, Ayudha Pooja was celebrated in the Home



Ayudha Pooja was celebrated in MNC by worshipping books and implements



Diwali celebrations in the DCC



The Nagercoil Home celebrated Diwali on October 27th



Dr. Reddy visited the Home for Diwali



↓ Members participated in the Diwali festivities →



Diwali was celebrated in the Schools with fun competitions and a pledge for a Green and Safe Diwali →



CELEBRATING FESTIVALS: NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2019



Children's Day was celebrated in the Day Care Centre with a puppet show by the staff, followed by singing and dancing

Children's Day was celebrated in the Schools with competitions for painting, craft, and poster making, and a dance competition between the teachers



Children from the Nagercoil Home acted out a mime in the Children's Day programme by the DCPU ↑



The children from the Madhuram Narayanan Centre went to Guindy Park for Children's Day with their parents. The children enjoyed themselves on the slides and swings, and had an outdoor picnic with lunch brought by the parents. The children could connect their experience with the lessons they learnt in classes.



Lamps were lit in the Home for Karthigai Deepam ↑



Sarva Dharma Day was celebrated on November 23rd ↑



1

Capturing the joy of Christmas Celebrations at:

1. Chennai Home
2. MNC
3. Day Care Centre
4. Nagercoil Home
5. SMHS



2



3



4



5

CELEBRATING FESTIVALS: JANUARY-MARCH 2020



Kolam for New Year's Day in the Home ↑



Dr. Reddy enjoyed the Pongal celebrations with the children in the Home ↑



1



2



3



4



5



6

Pongal was celebrated in the different units:

- 1, 2, 3: For Pongal in the Home in Chennai, the children performed a dance, did yoga, and participated in the Pooja
- 4: The children in the Day Care Centre did a dance as Pongal was celebrated traditionally with a Pongal pot
- 5: The children of Vidyalaya participated in fun activities for Pongal, including making greeting cards and rangoli
- 6: In the Nagercoil Home the children made Pongal and prayed to the Sun God
- 7: In MNC, a rangoli competition for mothers followed the traditional Pongal making, and a dance by mothers and children



7



Shivaratri was celebrated in the Chennai Home on February 21st with ashtotrams followed by bhajans till midnight, in honour of Lord Shiva
←

S. GOVIND SWAMINADHAN (SGS) LEGAL EDUCATION

The 6th S. Govind Swaminadhan Legal Education Programme was held on October 19th in the Bala Mandir Cultural Hall. The topic for the day was “Freedom of Speech and Expression”. The programme was presided over by Justice K. Kannan, Judge (Retd.) of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, and moderated by Mr. N. L. Rajah, Senior Advocate. The audience consisted of representatives from the Legal fraternity, Bala Mandir members, and students and teachers from city schools. Seven schools, including SMHS, participated and gave presentations on the topic.



S. MANJUBHASHINI MEMORIAL (SMM) SEMINAR

The S. Manjubhashini Memorial Seminar was held by the Bala Mandir Research Foundation on 21st December. This year, a parenting resource kit, “Learning to Play in My Own Way”, that acts as a guide and tool to all those in parenting roles and those involved in child development was launched. This kit was developed in collaboration with the Learning Institute, Sick Kids International, Canada. Ms. Usha Ramakrishnan introduced the tool to an audience of over 56 people comprising teachers, Special Educators, Social Work Counsellors, ECCD Professionals and others.



GANDHI CONNECT

The Gandhi Connect Workshop, conducted with Aseema Trust, focussing on “Truth and Non-Violence” was held on February 15th. This was the first year when performing students were included in the workshop, in addition to the teachers. Children from five city schools, including SMHS, participated and presented their views on the topic through song, skit, mime, etc. The moderators were Dr. V.R. Devika, of Aseema Trust and Dr. Mohan, Chairman of the Gandhi Study Centre, Chennai, and they gave an insight into the topic and the kind of impact Mahatma Gandhi had on all aspects of life.



HAPPENINGS AROUND BALA MANDIR



On February 23rd, to celebrate State Girl Child Protection Day, AWPS Inspector Ms. Santha Kumari gave a speech on self-protection to the girls in Nagercoil. She explained the laws for the protection of girl children, and motivated them to excel in studies as well.



A game carnival was held by Pothy's in the Dining Hall in Bala Mandir on December 8th. The children played different kinds of games, like archery, air hockey, etc., and enjoyed themselves very much.



A Light Music Mela was held in the Bala Mandir Dining Hall on October 26th. Ms. Sudha Lakshmi Rao and Mr. Venkat sang songs for the children, who thoroughly enjoyed themselves.



Ms. Lalitha and Ms. Radha from Grandma Tales held a Puppet Show in the Main Block on December 1st. They covered stories of Birbal and Tenali Raman.



The police addressed the children in the schools on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act



An Aadhar Camp was held in Bala Mandir on February 29th, organized by the Department of Social Defence headed by Ms. Suriyakala, DCPO. Nearly 15 Homes participated in the camp with 100 children receiving their cards.



Intra-Home competitions were held group wise. Essay writing, drawing, Rangoli and sports competitions were held.



Project Day was held in the School on January 26th on the theme "Holistic Education". There was a very informative display of models, charts, skit etc. by the students, and they demonstrated in Tamil and English the links between their syllabus and Holistic Education.

MNC's annual Nutrifest was held on March 13th. The theme this year was "Dal and Pulses in Everyday Diet". A cooking competition was held on the theme for mothers of the children.



MNC MEMORIAL ORATION

Triennial Memorial Orations are held by the Madhuram Narayanan Centre to honour one of its founding members, Air Vice Marshal V Krishnaswamy. The importance he gave research, and his vision of spreading awareness through technology are some of the values the MNC continues to uphold even today. The Orations are held in conjunction with MNC's triennial International Conferences.

The fourth Oration in the series this year was delivered by Dr. Beena Koshy, Professor and Head of Developmental Pediatrics, Christian Medical College, Vellore on November 7th at Hotel Savera, Chennai. She delivered her oration on "Reduction in Disability and Beyond", emphasizing the need for Inclusion if the disabled have to move beyond their challenges.



TREE PLANTING IN BALA MANDIR

A massive tree planting drive was held in Bala Mandir in the month of December. This exercise was taken up to recover the loss of greenery due to the floods of December 2015 and the Vardah cyclone of 2016. Children from all units, Trustees, Members, friends and staff planted the various types of trees. Government officials from the Police Department, DCPU and CWC also planted trees in Bala Mandir, and the visiting children from the Nagercoil Home also participated. The Inspector of Police E3-Teynampet interacted with the children when he came to plant a sapling in the Infants and Toddlers Block. The greenery growing around Bala Mandir has been a great cause of excitement for the children.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Kousalya, Assistant Matron
- Akshatha, Nurse
- Anjeline Arokiya Mary, Assistant Matron
- Bhavani, Montessori Teacher
- Sridevi, Teacher
- Ramesh Namasivayam, Coordinator, Accounts Department

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Usha, Special Educator, ECCD
- Kamala, Helper
- Revathy, Helper
- Sandhya, Helper
- Sagunthala, Helper
- Sangeetha, Helper
- Amuradharani, Helper

EVENTS AND COMPETITIONS



The Bala Mandir children belonging to the Junior Choir of the Madras Youth Choir took part in a programme held on December 6th at Krishna Gana Sabha, to celebrate the birth anniversary of Mahakavi Subramaniya Bharatiyar. They performed songs written by him. The Chief Guest for the event was the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Mr. Banwarilal Purohit, and Sri Sri Ravishankar also graced the occasion.



On January 5th, the 16th Thiruppavai Thiruvizha chanting competition was held in SMHS by the Gokula Bhakta Bajanai Sabha. The children won prizes in various competitions.



On January 28th, the children performed a dance at Nehru Stadium for a special dance performance for the valedictory event of the sports and cultural meet organized by the Department of Social Defence.

The children from the Main Block and Daswani Block participated in the Christmas Carnival held at Savera Hotel on December 15th, organized by the Duchess Club. They were accompanied by the staff members. The children participated in various games and puzzles, had different kinds of snacks, and won many prizes.



On January 5th, the Department of Social Defence held zonal level games, sports and a cultural meet at Don Bosco Beautides Higher Secondary School, Vysarpadi. The children participated in Long Jump, 100mts Running and Kho-Kho. Pragathi from Standard IX won the second place in Long Jump.



On October 13th, Bhumi Nakshatra competitions were held. The children participated in various competitions like pot painting, clay modelling, paper modelling, singing, dance, quiz, Rangoli, storytelling, etc. and won prizes.

CHILDREN'S FIELD TRIPS



During the Christmas holidays, the children in the Home enjoyed educational outings to different places in and around Chennai, based on their age. Places visited included Dakshinchitra, five temples of five faiths, the Museum, the Planetarium, Crocodile Park, Puttur Temple, and Jeeva Park. Children from the Nagercoil Home, who were visiting Chennai, also accompanied them on some outings.

The children of Standards VI to IX were taken to the Coast Guard air station near Meenambakkam on February 1st. The Air Force personnel there explained the functioning of a CG618 helicopter and Dornier aircraft. They also spoke about how they were used for vigilance and rescue missions, and the role they play in guarding our coastline. The children got to watch landing of different aircrafts.



The children in the Nagercoil Home went for a one day picnic on January 18th to the Flower Show and to the Sai Baba temple in Kanyakumari District.



The children from Standard X went for a field trip to the Officers Training Academy, St. Thomas Mount in the month of October. The purpose of this trip was to broaden the children's perspective and show them the career options they could choose from.



Children from Standard VI, VII, VIII and IX from the school went in December to Aavin Milk Factory and Hatsun Agro Products Limited Factory respectively. They got to see the process of pasteurization, and received a treat of tasty ice cream.



FRIENDSHIP DAY

This was held on February 8th at the Bala Mandir Cultural Centre, to coincide with the visit of Mr. Lars Odd Pettersen, Chairman of Braade Stiftung along with Mr. Ole Korva, Vice Chairman, both with their families. The Bala Mandir children presented a cultural programme showcasing various facets of “**Holistic Education**” – the theme of the year. The programme had a song of Mahakavi Bharathi, a fusion dance which showcased the various forms of Indian styles – both classical and folk, a presentation of Calisthenics through Action, Communication shown with a dialogue between four high school children, Compassion brought out through Mime, and finally a dance on Nature and Environment by the younger children.

Mr. P. Natarajan, Trustee and Treasurer, made a presentation on “Friends of Bala Mandir” sharing the history of foreign donors who have helped Bala Mandir over the years. Mr. Lars Odd Pettersen then addressed the gathering and spoke about the relationship of Braade-Stiftung and Bala Mandir, and about how happy he was to be associated with the institution.



BALA MANDIR DAY

The 71st celebrations of Bala Mandir Day were held on March 10th. The cultural programme that was put up for the ‘Friends of Bala Mandir’ on Friendship Day was presented again for the Bala Mandir staff and children. The Chief Guest for the occasion was Dr. Jaya Krishnaswamy, Director of the Madhuram Narayanan Centre. She gave an address about the importance of education and spoke on the various units’ improvement of Bala Mandir. Ms. Sudha Lakshmi Rao, who has been associated with Bala Mandir for many decades, gave a presentation on the history of Bala Mandir along the lines of the Calendar that was brought out during the 70th Anniversary celebrations, explaining the significance of each month. As always there were competitions for the children in the Home.



MNC'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2020

The Madhuram Narayanan Centre's 6th International Conference and the 16th National Workshop on the theme "Towards Inclusion: Evidence based supportive practices in Early Intervention" was conducted from 8th November to 9th November. The aim of the present conference was to take on the theme of the importance of Early Intervention for children with Intellectual Disability in training them towards inclusion. The conference was inaugurated by Mr. Robert Burgess, Consul General of the Consulate of the USA at Chennai, who expressed his happiness at being invited as Chief Guest. In his address he emphasized the partnership of the USA and India in the area of education.



Mr. N Kumar welcomed the gathering and mentioned the yeomen service that the MNC was doing in dissemination of important and latest trends in Early Intervention.

Dr. Sumantra Chattarji of National Centre for Biological Sciences shared new insights from recordings in human cells and Dr. Namita Jacob of Chetana Trust presented developmentally appropriate interventions for young children with Visual Processing Disorder. Prof Camille Cattlett, (Advanced Technical Assistant Specialist Emerita, University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute), led the first day with her session on 12 evidence-based practices for inclusion and follow up with a workshop on use of visual strategies. Dr. Petra Kern, (Professor at the University of Louisville, Kentucky) and Mr. Anil Srinivasan (Founder of Rhapsody Music Education), elucidated music therapy practices for young children.



The second day was dedicated to healthy relationships and life skills through use of organized outing, play, theatre arts and drama.

Dr. Anne Stewart (Professor of Graduate Psychology at James Madison University and a licensed clinical psychologist), ran a session on the power of play in forming healthy relationships.

The Madhuram Narayanan Centre's own team presented the benefits accrued by children during organized outings. Dr. Ambika Kameshwar of RASA and Mr. Dushyant Gunashekar of CreaShakti articulated how theatre arts and drama stimulate holistic development.

The Chief Guest for the Valedictory function was Mrs. Girija Vaidyanathan IAS, who served as Chief Secretary to Government of Tamil Nadu, and now is engaged as Principal Investigator in the Old Age Panel study carried out by the Government of Tamil Nadu. She mentioned how the Madhuram Narayanan Centre was chosen for the pilot project where the National Rural Health Mission established Early Intervention Centres at the Primary Health Centres in the districts of Cuddalore and Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu and the success of the project against all odds. She distributed a few certificates.

Every conference leads to more learning, with interaction between people, professionals and experts. Awareness of Inclusion and its importance is still inadequate among parents, care givers and even among professionals. Therefore an annual workshop is a platform to encourage knowledge sharing between people at grassroots level and experts from various related fields, to help update skills and knowledge, networking etc. to set them thinking and follow evidence-based practices showcased at the conference towards effective inclusion. The two-day event showcased scholarship and experiential wisdom of national and international experts in the field of disability.



A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES – MNC’S CONFERENCE

Mr. S. Krishnan from the Madhuram Narayanan Centre shares with us the history of the conference and what goes into the planning and execution of this successful international event.

It was in the year late 2003 and early 2004 that Mr. U. Suresh Rao, who was a well wisher of MNC and close associate with Mr. K. S. Narayanan of Sanmar, brought up this idea of having a conference or seminar which would create awareness about Intellectual Disability and also showcase MNC’s activities. He further said that Mr. Murthy, his friend in the USA, would be willing to fund and encourage an activity such as a conference. This thought germinated into deciding to conduct an International conference, seemingly a daunting task at that time. This led to discussions with Air Vice Marshall V Krishnaswamy, Mrs. Jaya Krishnaswamy, Mr. N. Kumar, and Prof. Jeychandran, who put their heads together to take the idea forward.

Slowly the concept, topics, and speakers were selected. Mr. Krishnaswamy had a background in the Indian Air Force, and planning logistics meticulously was his forte. Prof. Jeychandran, with his knowledge in special education, had wide contacts both in India and abroad, and he could rope in Prof. George Bayroff from the USA – considered an authority in special education – to give the key note address. Mrs Jaya was the force behind the planning of academic sessions and also to identify appropriate resource persons for each of the sessions. Mr. Kumar put his office staff at the disposal of MNC to manage logistics, and, of course, in managing funding. Thus the 1st International conference was conducted in December 2004 successfully to the satisfaction of all concerned.

I joined in 2007 June and was involved in the management of the 2nd International conference, and have so far seen through 4 international conferences, conducted once every three years. The planning starts an year in advance. First a meeting of the core team is held to zero in on the theme and a rough sketch on sessions to be held is drawn out. This gets refined over a period of 3 months and the final blue print of the conference is made ready.

Normally the plan of the academic sessions evolves around research, new practices in the field of early intervention comprising special education, Therapy, and supportive therapies like Yoga, Movement, music, physical education, Play therapy, and concluding with Governmental policies. The sessions are divided as a 90 minute workshop, and a 30 minute presentation. The conference begins with an Inauguration, and concludes with a Valedictory function. International speakers are then identified. For the Inauguration an eminent person in society is identified, not necessarily from the field, and the Valedictory from the Government, since recommendations coming out of the conference are presented to the Government for their perusal and implementation where feasible.



Based on the previous years’ experience, a budget is prepared and a plan of possible sponsors is drawn up. Appeal letters are sent at least 6 months in advance to ensure that sufficient time is available for any midcourse planning that may be needed to mobilise funds. A checklist is prepared and persons within MNC are identified for each activity, which includes travel (both international and local), local transportation, hotel venue, banquets, conference materials, AV, video & photography arrangements, invitations and invitees lists, helpdesks, mementoes, banners, venue decorations and so on. Monthly review meetings are held for feedback and to track status for each activity.

Since 6 international conferences have been held so far, support comes in to identify the experts in the field from the past international and Indian resource persons. Delegates are from the various NGOs in the field of intellectual and associated disabilities, across the country, Government managed Early Intervention centres, students of special education, and associated disabilities. On an average 150 delegates participate during each international conference apart from special invitees, resource persons from the field, interested persons from the medical field, and the media.

I remember especially Prof. George Bayroff, an authoritative figure in special education worldwide. He was a resource person during the 1st and the 3rd International conferences. Being a septuagenarian, it was amazing to see his involvement, sitting through all sessions and actively participating in the Q&A sessions. MNC was also happy to celebrate his birthday during the 3rd International Conference.

It is a challenging task to put together this conference, since it is done completely by internal resources, with no outsourcing. As one who has been managing these conferences, it has been a rewarding experience, and I must confess that the credit goes to Mrs. Jaya and Prof. Jeychandran for designing the programme and identifying the resource persons, Mr N Kumar for his support, and finally all the members of staff who manage the minute details to ensure that the conduct of the conference is like a precision clock work.

ANNUAL DAY CELEBRATIONS

On December 12th, MNC completed 30 years of service to children. The children, parents and staff presented a dance on the concept “Buds to Blossoms: Nurturing the Child”. The Chief Guest was Mrs. Padma Venkatraman.



BMPS and Vidyalaya celebrated their Annual Day together for the second year in a row on March 6th. Ms. Jyothshna Natraj was the Chief Guest. All the events were focussed on the theme “Multiple Intelligence”.



Annual Day and Creche Day Celebration was held in Nagercoil on February 29th. Mr.Thurai, Station Fire Officer, was the Chief Guest for the occasion.



The Day Care Centre’s Annual Day celebrations were held on March 13th. Mrs Hema Murali, Teacher, Vidya Mandir Senior Secondary School, was the Guest of Honour.



SPORTS DAY CELEBRATIONS

Sports Day celebrations were held across different units of Bala Mandir during this half year. All children in the unit usually participate in this event, and play games / sports depending on their age group, and the aim is to complete the sport. Here is a look at the events!

17th Annual Sports Day, MNC



Cultural and Sports Meet in Nagercoil (conducted by Prof.Dr.Malar and students of Tamil Dept, S.T.Hindu College)



SHMS Sports Day



DCC Sports Day



Vidyalaya Sports Day



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!



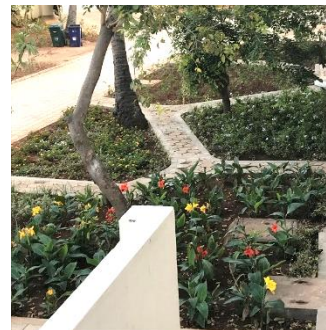
Children from the Nagercoil Home visited Chennai and interacted with the staff and children in Chennai. They visited all the different units On December 30th, a special interaction programme was held.



During the holidays, Vidyalaya children from Standard I to V did various activities like pot painting, greeting card making, free style drawing, puzzle making, Action songs conducted by social workers and staff. Senior Girls from Standard VI to X made greeting cards for the New Year.



Gardening Day has been initiated for the children in the Home from Standard I to X from January onwards. This happens every Tuesday from 4pm to 5pm. The children enjoy being outdoors and maintaining the garden and plants very much.



INITIATIVES IN THE EDUCATION UNIT

Many initiatives were taken up for improvements in the education units.

1. Bala Mandir school management team visited Isha school in Villupuram and Eureka school in Kalpakkam to study best practices in other schools catering to similar groups.
2. Bala Mandir started plying bus for pick up and drop of children from Kannaginagar with a view to reduce the commuting time and ease the load on the children.
3. A task force was set up for admission for the new academic year, for all the schools, across age groups. The team did a door-to-door campaign with a presentation in the nearby community clusters.



STAFF OUTING — EDUCATION UNIT

Staff members from the education unit went on a fun trip on December 21st. Over 80 staff, including teachers, helpers, and members-in-charge, along with some family members, spent the whole day together, doing fun activities such as boating, sightseeing and driving through the promenade in Puducherry. The trip also included a visit to Auroville and the Aurobindo Ashram.



STAFF OUTING — OFFICE

The staff from the office went on an outing on February 16th to Marundheshwarar temple, ISCKON Temple, Tiger Caves, Mahabalipuram, the Five Rathas and the beach. They had a great time and got a chance to bond, and especially enjoyed singing and dancing on the bus journeys!



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