



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The quarter from July to September 2021 was an eventful one – in the literal sense! Many of the annual functions and festivals were celebrated in this quarter, including days honouring our Founders, Kamarajar and Manjumma. While the lockdown restrictions were made more lenient, the units celebrated these functions separately to remain safe. These are covered in brief in this newsletter. Also covered are the Units' events connected to India's Independence Day, with the children participating with enthusiasm and joy.

Alongside this, the units were all preparing for the imminent school reopening in various ways – from making sure classrooms are ready and that the school is meeting the created SOPs for social distancing and COVID protocols, to checking if the uniforms still fit! The hubbub of preparation was especially exciting for the children, some of whom had not gone physically to school for about 18 months. We will cover more about this in further detail in the next newsletter.

I would especially like to thank Ms Punitha Ramalingam, the featured Member in this issue, for the time she took out for us. Words cannot do justice to her contribution to Bala Mandir for over 20 years – though we have tried our best!

Hope you enjoy reading this issue. Do write in with your feedback, or with any articles / poems / pieces / drawings you wish to contribute for future editions of this newsletter, to the mail ID below.

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PTA MEETING IN VIDYALAYA

A PTA Meeting was held on September 29th in Vidyalaya. Parents of the children from Standard I to V attended the meeting. Headmistress Ms Hepzibah Beulah addressed the parents, and briefly explained about the initiatives being taken up in the school to improve the academic standards, such as Read-a-Story, online / WhatsApp classes, AhaGuru programme, and remedial classes. She also explained about the subsidised school fees structure. PTA meetings were also held for the parents of the children in the Day Care Centre and Kindergarten in July and September. Overall, the feedback from the parents was very positive – both on the school infrastructure and the initiatives being taken up.



NEWS BITS FROM ACROSS BALA MANDIR

The Bala Mandir Research Foundation took an initiative to reconnect with partners, consultants, well-wishers and members of the Network for Information on Parenting through a **webinar orientation session on Learning Through Play – In My Own Way**. The webinar was conducted by Ms Usha Ramakrishnan, consultant and international trainer on parenting. Over 35 members from different parts of India attended the session.



The organisation AhaGuru, which is consulting as an academic advisor for Vidyalaya, conducted a **refresher training programme** on Skill Assessment for the teachers on July 7th, 8th and 9th.



Government officials from the Child Welfare Committee North, State Child Protection Society (SCPS) and the Child Welfare Committee Chairperson and Member came for inspection in the Home. They were appreciative of the work done and identified areas for improvement.



Admissions have gone up in the educational units. Increasing admissions have led to Vidyalaya now needing 2 sections for their classes. In MNC, EIC (below 6) has 24 additions, while Jivikam (above 6) has 28 children.

The **Annual General Body Meeting** was held online through Zoom for the second consecutive year on September 18th. Members appreciated the good work by the team in a tough year.



Deepa, a girl who grew up in Bala Mandir, had an arranged marriage with Rajesh. Deepa had been working in a lawyer's office after completing her law degree, and also helping Bala Mandir. A 'nalangu' function was organised for her in the Home by Members and staff members.



The **High School reopened** for children in Standard IX and X on September 1st, with all safety and COVID protocol norms being followed.



The Freedom Trust organised a camp in MNC to distribute **mobility aids and appliances** – the second such camp undertaken by them in 2021. About 30 children benefited from the camp.



BMRF was the **consultant to Bhumi organisation for their social and emotional learning programmes**, which they are conducting in government-aided primary schools. Ten sessions were held in which, along with BMRF resource persons, a few external experts were called in. Topics covered included classroom culture, child assessment and reviewing teacher interactions with children.



CELEBRATING BALA MANDIR'S FOUNDERS

During this quarter, Bala Mandir celebrated the birth anniversaries of both its Founders through Education Day (on July 15th for Sri Kamarajar) and Founder's Day (on September 24th for Smt Manjubhashini). Usually this is celebrated as an organisation-wide function – but due to the pandemic, functions were held in the Children's Home, and the other units also conducted events internally to remember the Founders.

Education Day – Celebrating Kamarajar



Villupaattu about Kamarajar



A song about patriotism and social good



Drawing of Kamarajar



Celebrating Kamarajar in the Nagercoil Home through a cultural programme



Education Day in SMHS

Founder's Day – Celebrating Manjumma



Villupaattu about Manjumma



Dedication to Manjumma



Reiterating the Pledge on Founder's Day



Founder's Day celebrations in Nagercoil



Founder's Day in BMRF



SMHS remembers Manjumma



SAMYAM AT MNC

The Madhuram Narayanan Centre's annual celebration **Samyam**, which brings together students – past, present and new entrants – was held online through Google Meet. The event was held over four days, with a Chief Guest presiding over each day. Each Chief Guest addressed the gathering, and their thoughts. While the teachers attended the event in the office, children, parents and Chief Guests logged in online. Much hard work, planning and coordination among the staff made the event a success even in the online format.



FESTIVALS IN THIS QUARTER

During the quarter of July to September, festivals were celebrated in the Homes as always. Presenting some memorable and fun moments from the celebrations!

Varalakshmi Vrutham – Chennai Home – August 20th



Onam – Nagercoil Home – August 21st



Janmashtami – Chennai and Nagercoil Homes – September 10th



Vinayaka Chaturthi – Chennai and Nagercoil Homes – August 31st



MEET OUR MEMBER: MS PUNITHA RAMALINGAM

Hon. Joint Secretary Ms Leela Natarajan provides a glimpse into Ms Punitha's life and her service with Bala Mandir

Ms Punitha Ramalingam has played stellar roles in various capacities in her 23 years at Bala Mandir and is presently the Member-In-Charge of the Infants and Toddlers Block in the Children's Programme. She is also part of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) team. It is a pleasure to share about her journey of life and her continuing stint at Bala Mandir.



The major part of Punitha's schooling was in Vidyodaya School, where she also experienced hostel life. Hers was an early marriage. After fulfilling her duties towards her family and raising her daughters, she completed her education and also took up a Kindergarten course out of sheer interest. On her husband's transfer to Delhi, she did a Diploma Course in Interior Designing. This gave her an opportunity to discover her talent and creativity. Following this, she took up her first job as a Designer in a prestigious showroom specializing in Period Furniture. Later she freelanced and took up designing of residences and office interiors in partnership. While in Delhi, she also became more active in Sai Samithi – learnt and started taking Bal Vikas classes for school children. After a movement to Jaipur, Mr Ramalingam went on deputation to Zambia. There, while involving herself with the Bal Vikas, she was also part of cultural activities and putting up plays – a forerunner to her involvement with cultural activities in Bala Mandir.

On their return to India, through the Nungambakkam Sai Samithi, Punitha started taking Bal Vikas (value education) classes. Her contact there with Ms Maya Gaitonde led to her induction into Bala Mandir in a couple of years. Then she got involved in the Carpentry Unit, which was headed by Ms Vedam (Vedamma). The Unit specialized in manufacturing of Educational Aids for play schools and Kindergarten, and sturdy school furniture, with some prominent schools being regular customers. During this period she was also involved in developing and manufacturing low-cost Montessori materials for corporation schools in Chennai, which was sponsored by UNICEF. She said that this project was challenging and deeply satisfying for her.

Punitha was also involved in the Laundry Unit – she has fond memories of winning the approval of Vedamma and of personally going with Mr Vishy Gaitonde to renew the Laundry contract with the RBI Staff Quarters. Her husband Mr Ramalingam was also part of the Sub-Committee for the Socio-Economic Units. The units were quite profitable, but the rising costs, challenges of labour and the Government policy of NGOs not being allowed to make profit, made it hard to sustain them, and eventually they were closed down. She also became the Hon. Joint Treasurer at this time.



Punitha took over as the Member-In-Charge of the Vocational Training Centre which had two-year Electrical and Fitter courses and a one-year Carpentry course (and some short-term courses), until its closure in 2018. The role was administrative, since there was a Principal to manage academic matters, but she brought her deft touch to improve the Unit.

After the closure of the VTC, Punitha seamlessly moved into early childhood care and development, starting with the Day Care Centre, and then also moving into the most challenging unit – the Infants & Toddlers Block. Punitha says that whatever role she took up, she has always learnt on the job. She credits Maya for challenging her with questions, which helped her hone her skills and be aware of what were the requirements for the successful running of a Unit. To quote her, "I consider myself fortunate to be associated with Bala Mandir, which is an institution that stands on a strong foundation of integrity and transparency, doing remarkable service towards upliftment of underprivileged children."

Punitha's entire family has been involved with Bala Mandir and have donated towards the organisation. Punitha's daughter Premamala took the first computer classes for Bala Mandir senior girls, staff and some Members in 1998. Punitha's granddaughter Sanchitta, who was a student of Law, did a study of the Juvenile Justice Act to understand what Bala Mandir is following and what the gaps were. Her other daughter Shivamala and her family visit Bala Mandir when they are in India, and support the institution.

Being blessed with an eagerness to delve deep into a topic and understanding it fully before even commenting on it, is a great strength Punitha has. Thanks to this, she has been able to overcome challenges in the various roles that she has taken up. Recently, after a long stint, she stepped down as Hon. Joint Treasurer to focus on her other roles. Punitha has been a huge asset to Bala Mandir, and we wish her all the best and good health to continue her services for a long time.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS IN BALA MANDIR

India's 75th **Independence Day** was celebrated across the different units of Bala Mandir in various ways.

In the **Home in Chennai**, a series of activities were conducted on August 13th and 14th focusing on language and arithmetic. The activities were anchored by Ms Hemamalini and Ms Veena and were conducted by the senior girls, which was a first. The events included age-based games such as 'choose the correct option', 'jumbled words', 'sort the coins', Word Bingo, Maths Bingo, 'shopping spree' and 'survey graph'. The staff of the Main Block and Boys Section supported in this initiative.

On August 15th the traditional flag hoisting was carried out, followed by cultural events, including a dance by the toddlers, speeches by the high school children, enactment of a comedy skit, and music and dance performances.

As a new initiative, the concept of the '**Bala Mandir Pledge**' was introduced. This consists of 4 key values which each Bala Mandir child is expected to remember and inculcate in their lives – truthfulness, respect for everyone, giving your best + self improvement, and doing good for the society and the environment. Ms Leela and Mr P Natarajan explained the importance of the Pledge to the children.

Children belonging to the Junior Choir wing of the Madras Youth Choir took part in a **virtual concert** through Zoom for Independence Day and sang a patriotic song.



In the **Nagercoil Home**, Advocate Sahadevan hoisted the National Flag, and the children presented a cultural programme celebrating India and its culture. Ms Swarnalatha Raju addressed the gathering.

In **MNC**, Independence Day was celebrated over a Google Meet. Children dressed as patriotic leaders came online and wished their teachers. Children and parents sent video clips of action songs (patriotic) and displayed charts, finger art etc. through photos. The staff assembled together to watch the programme.



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Different vignettes from the lives of our children!

Children belonging to the Junior Choir wing of the Madras Youth Choir participated in a song video brought out to build awareness on maintaining a green environment by keeping surroundings clean and tidy.



Senior girls in the Home participated in an online programme conducted by Geethalayam, a dance academy, for their 50th year. They performed a song and a dance about India.



On August 3rd, a mass chanting of a Bhagavad Gita chapter was organised for world peace, and in commemoration of Swami Chinmayananda.



Bunker beds were introduced in the Main Block and Boys Section, to provide the children with individual space for sleep and study. A one-time government grant helped support the purchase of these beds.



Some of the children from the Home attended a very interesting online session on July 2nd with Ms Jessica Hawkins, Formula 1 racing driver. The session was organised by Cognizant and had participants from across the world. Ms Jessica spoke about sports and her journey in the field. The children asked questions, and she gave tips about building focus and achieving goals.



VIDYALAYA WALL PAINTING PROJECT

An interesting art project was taken up in Vidyalaya for painting the interior walls. The Vidyalaya and ECCD teams brainstormed, and conceptualized the theme of Education, including letters in English and Tamil, numbers, grammar, and a world map. Based on the ideas of the team, an art teacher from Sishya School, Mr Thiagarajan, was contracted to execute the project. Under his able guidance, some of the senior girls in the Bala Mandir Home were also involved and participated in painting the walls. The vibrant and colourful walls add a new dimension of joy and brightness to the school and also help create a very positive image of the school.



LONG SERVICE AWARDS

For many years now, Bala Mandir has been recognising and appreciating the efforts of those who have completed tenures of 20 years and more in the institution, at different milestones (20, 25, 30 years etc.). With the changing times, Bala Mandir felt that the contributions of those who have completed lesser years of service should also be recognised in some way, and so from this year onwards, the Long Service Awards have been extended to those who have completed 5, 10 and 15 years of tenure with the institution as well. For ease of administration, these would be awarded at the unit level in September every year – on Teachers' Day for the Education Unit and the Madhuram Narayanan Centre Unit, and on Founder's Day for the Children's Programme, Bala Mandir Research Foundation and Administrative Services. The awards for 20+ years will be given out during the annual Bala Mandir Anniversary function held on March 10th.

Here are some glimpses from this year's ceremonies, held for the Education Unit on September 4th, in MNC on September 6th, in the Home in Chennai on September 24th, and in the Home in Nagercoil on October 2nd. As is tradition, all the awardees received a certificate and a small token of appreciation.



HR NEWS

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ranjani M, Director – Education
- Sakthivel R, House Father, Boys Section
- Mariagnanaarulraj D, House Father, Boys Section
- Mani Selvi, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Bhuvana Priya, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Maheswari M, Adminstrator, Day Care Centre
- Sudha D, Helper, Vidyalaya

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Anand Prabhakaran, Field Coordinator, BMRF
- Varalakshmi B, Helper, BMRF
- Liji T J, Special Educator, MNC
- Jamuna Radhakrishnan, Special Educator, MNC
- Geetha K, Special Educator, MNC
- Nirmala S, Assistant Teacher, MNC
- Kalaivani M, Assistant Teacher, MNC

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