



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We are happy to present the third issue of BM Connect, Bala Mandir's quarterly newsletter, albeit later than planned!

It was another hectic quarter for Bala Mandir from January to March 2015, with the children in Satyamurthi High School preparing to write their examinations, especially those in Standard X who were facing board exams. As we prepare this newsletter, we have also received news about the very good results that have been achieved this year, thanks to the hard work put in by those at the school. Our congratulations go out to the children and to the school staff who have made this happen.

The end of the financial year in March has meant a lot of year-end activities as well, with a look back at the positives and the opportunities for learning from the past year. It has been a year of much change for the organisation, and the support of our donors, volunteers, and well-wishers has been one of the biggest driving forces behind us stepping up with new initiatives, and new ways of taking Bala Mandir forward. We thank you for all the support you have given us during this time of change, and hope that you will continue to support us in this manner, going forward.

Your support has been a wonderful positive for BM Connect as well, and we hope to keep connecting with you through this newsletter. Please write to message@balamandir.org with your suggestions and feedback.

Archana Natarajan
Editor

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RANGOLI ART WORK

The children of Bala Mandir participated in Rangoli held by the Community Health Centre for their anniversary celebration. Their art contained relevant social messages, and was praised by attendees.



Rangoli by Bala Mandir children



NEWS BYTES: JANUARY TO MARCH 2015

Annual Sports Day conducted in Schools

The Annual Sports Day was conducted in the schools, with the students from Bala Mandir Primary School and Satyamurthi High School showcasing various formations. Ms. Kamala, Headmistress of Vidyodaya School, was the Chief Guest for the function, and gave away the prizes. The Manjubhashini house won the overall trophy this year.



Project Day conducted in Primary School

Project Day was conducted by the Bala Mandir Primary School on the topics of Inclusion, Integrity, Loving Care, Empathy and Equality. The project was inaugurated by Ms. Kusuma, Headmistress of Karnataka Sangha Higher Secondary School. It marked the first time that thermacole was not used by the students, who used only cardboard to make their projects, for environmental protection. The projects created were deeply appreciated by all.

Library Inauguration at Schools

In partnership with YRG Foundation, as part of their Endrum Punnagai project, libraries have been created for the Primary and High School, and were inaugurated in the presence of Ms. Suniti Solomon, Director of YRG Foundation, on February 10th. Library class has now been included in the time table, and volunteers from YRG Care are assisting teachers during this class, as part of this project, to encourage the reading habit, build confidence, and bring in more awareness on issues in society.



Magic Bean's Waste Management Project

A project was started by the organisation Magic Bean for growing an organic garden in Bala Mandir, with the involvement of the children. Standard IV and V children were involved in the project. The children were taught the scientific background of the whole exercise. They learnt to prepare the compost pit, which was made out of kitchen waste and dried leaves. Seeds were planted for growth of vegetables and greens.

National Meet on Adoption

Ms. Chitra Krishnan, senior Social Worker at Bala Mandir, and Coordinator for Children's Programme, was invited to attend the National Meet on Adoption, held in New Delhi on February 20th and 21st. Problems faced by adoption agencies were discussed, and the government has given new policy guidelines for agencies to follow.



CELEBRATIONS AT THE DAY CARE CENTRE

January to March is a busy time for the children and staff of the Day Care Centre in Bala Mandir since they celebrate Sports Day in February and Annual Day in March. In addition to this, they also celebrate the Tamil festival of Pongal in January. Glimpses of their celebrations are given here.

Pongal is the harvest festival of Tamil Nadu, celebrated usually over a week's time. It also corresponds with Makar Sankranti, the winter harvest festival in the rest of India. The word "Pongal" means abundance or overflowing. The festival is dedicated to the Sun God as a thanksgiving for his blessings upon agriculture.

The main day for celebration is called Thai Pongal, which fell on January 15th this year. On this day, a special dish called Pongal is made, where milk is boiled and allowed to overflow. The festival is meant to celebrate new beginnings and new opportunities. Houses are cleaned and old things are discarded, to make way for new things.

As with other festivals during the year, the young children of Day Care Centre are told about the significance of this festival, and why it is celebrated. It is a great way for Bala Mandir to impart knowledge to children about the culture of the country. It is also a source of enjoyment to the children!

Pongal Celebrations

The children performed a dance, talked about the festival, and were told about its significance by the Hon. Joint Secretary, Ms. Swathanthra Sakthivel.

The children performed a harvest dance



The children gave a speech on what is done during Pongal, and how it is celebrated in Tamil Nadu

Ms. Swathanthra explained the significance of Pongal to the children



Sports Day

Young children and toddlers participated in the Sports Day, that combined physical activity with learning – showing a true demonstration of learning while playing!



First the obstacle race, then threading of the needle



Stringing beads and arranging them in a circle

A child from the Montessori section demonstrates mathematical place values



Annual Day

The theme was Love, Empathy, Integrity, Equality. The children put up a dance, drama, and songs based on this theme in both English and Tamil.



Toddlers did a drama on "People Who Help Us"



Pre-Schoolers did a drama on Integrity



KG Children did a dance on "Unity in Diversity"

THOUGHTS FROM THE STUDY CIRCLE

In this quarter, some interesting topics were taken up for discussion during the Study Circle sessions – but one of the most fascinating was on Hanuman. Most people are familiar with his story, which is taken from the Ramayana, one of Hindu mythology's best known epics. He crosses the Indian ocean in a leap, from the tip of South India to Lanka, where he meets the hero Ram's wife Sita, who has been kidnapped, and brings back news about her to Ram, who had been searching for her. His adventures during this epic journey were the points of discussion in this session, and were related back to how we need to manage difficulties, face up to challenges, and deal with different kinds of people in life.

Our story begins in south India, where the troupe of monkeys who had set out in this direction in search of Sita, reach the ocean. They receive confirmation that Sita lies across the ocean, in captivity under the King of Lanka, Ravana. The monkeys discuss who can cross this ocean and meet Sita. As each one discusses his own prowess, Hanuman stays quiet. He is then reminded about his own strength by a member of the troupe, and his eyes are opened to his capabilities – the capabilities that he had forgotten because of an old curse. He knows that he will be able to complete this journey, and sets out, taking Ram's name. One can see how a person's realisation of their own capacity and abilities can be a great motivation to take up any job or project.



There is no false modesty about Hanuman – once he knows he is the best person for the job, he takes up the mantle of responsibility to carry out the task. However, even with his confidence, he evokes God's name, and put his trust and faith in a higher being to help him carry out this task. It is a wonderful lesson to learn about self-confidence, capability, faith and how one can rise to a challenge.

As he flies over the ocean, Hanuman meets three kinds of obstacles. The first is an old mountain Mynaka, who is a friend of his father's, who kindly asks him to rest before he proceeds further. Hanuman does not seize the temptation of personal comfort, or procrastination. Neither does he react in any adverse way. Instead, he deals with this well-wisher with affection, letting him down easily, and continuing ahead. He is then stopped by Surasa, a demoness who insists that he must enter her mouth before proceeding further. He agrees to fulfill this wish, and starts increasing his size. Surasa opens her mouth wider and wider. Suddenly Hanuman makes his form tiny, and flies into her mouth and out. Surasa is amused and appreciative of how Hanuman fulfilled her condition. He does not argue with this person who is out to stop his journey and progress, but handles the situation with intelligence and strategy. The third obstacle comes in the form of Simhika. Simhika is a demoness with the ability to capture and drag shadows, and represents bad habits, which drag down a person completely and derail one's progress in life. Hanuman feels a pull as Simhika tries to capture his shadow, and he lands one mighty blow on Simhika and kills her to get himself free – just the way one needs to kill a bad habit before it can cause more damage to oneself. How we deal with the different blockades that come our way when we are carrying out a project or task is very important – and Hanuman provides three great examples of different ways of dealing with situations that arise when one is on the path to fulfilling duty.

After meeting Sita, as Hanuman is returning, Ram is fraught with worry, awaiting his news. As soon as Hanuman is in hearing distance of Ram, he shouts to him, "Saw Sita!". Ram's worries vanish immediately. Hanuman, through clear and succinct communication, was immediately able to provide relief to Ram – he made it clear that he has completed his task, and played the role of communicator to perfection.

The tale of Hanuman has inspired the attendees of the Study Circle to try to inculcate some of his own practices into their day to day working. Many other such practical examples can be found in scriptures and tales from across all religions, which are veritable founts of wisdom about management and leadership. The Study Circle hopes to take up more such stories for discussion in the future.

CREDIT / DEBIT CARD DONATIONS NOW POSSIBLE

In response to some requests from our donors and well-wishers, Bala Mandir has recently enabled credit and debit card payment facilities at the main office. You can now use your card for donations to Bala Mandir. An online portal for credit and debit card payments is being launched shortly, and is will be online on our website by the end of June. You can also continue to make your donations through cash, cheque, demand draft and / or bank transfer (direct remittance) as well. Do reach out to our office to find out more details!

ANNUAL VISIT OF BRAADE STIFTUNG

The last newsletter covered Bala Mandir's association with Braade Stiftung. In February, the Chairman, Mr. Lars Odd Pettersen came to India for his annual visit to Bala Mandir. He was accompanied by his family. The family spent time in the different units of Bala Mandir, interacting with the children. They also made a visit to Bala Mandir Nagercoil. The visit culminated in the celebration of Friendship Day in Chennai – a cultural programme on February 13th, when the children put up a play on the History of Bala Mandir. Some pictures from the visit are given here.



At the Montessori section



Friendship Day - group photograph, and Mr. Pettersen addressing the gathering



Playing with the Nagercoil girls



At the Special Lunch on February 12th



Visit to the Industrial Training Centre

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE QUARTER

January: Seminar on Gandhi

Topic: Gandhi – Connect – Character Building
Conducted by Ms. V.R. Devika, and targeted at teachers who teach adolescent children



Ms. Devika shares her thoughts

Group discussions in progress



Presentations by the groups

March: Bala Mandir's 66th Anniversary

All children of Bala Mandir participated in the play "History of Bala Mandir", which included dance and songs as well.



Founders of Bala Mandir



The singing group

A scene from the play depicting Members at a meeting in 1979



Dance performance by the Primary School

REHABILITATION: AN IMPORTANT STEP

*Hon. Joint Secretary for Bala Mandir, **Mrs. Leela Natarajan**, gives us a glimpse into the all-important process of rehabilitation back with the parents, and how it benefits the children from the institution.*



Bala Mandir girls who have been rehabilitated back with their family

The Rehabilitation Programme of Bala Mandir takes three distinct forms – Adoption (for young orphan children), Marriage (mostly for orphan girls) and Placement back with parents. April-May is the time of the year when most children who have completed Standard X are placed back with their families.

Bala Mandir has been strongly encouraging the rehabilitation with parents / guardians, after the completion of Standard X of the children growing up at the institution. While institutionalization helps when the children come from a background of destitution, they benefit from living with the parents / siblings in the home environment at a this vulnerable age, so that they can acclimatize to living at home, meet with relatives, and learn social courtesies and traditions, more than they can in an institution. The children are provided with monetary support by Bala Mandir for their studies, and in some cases with maintenance if the family requires it, under the Home Sponsorship scheme. The Home Sponsorship scheme provides educational support along with a fixed monthly amount for food and covers the period till the child completes Standard XII or a vocational training course.

The children are prepared for their rehabilitation from Standard VI onwards, when they go home for a month during their summer holidays. Prior to their rehabilitation, the social workers from Bala Mandir make home visits to see if the family is in a position to receive an additional member. Based on their reports, the decision to send the children back home is made.

The role of the social worker and counsellor in this process cannot be stressed enough, and Bala Mandir makes sure that there is sufficient access to emotional support from them even after the child is rehabilitated. Bala Mandir provides career counselling during the decision making times for the children – after Standard X and after Standard XII. This is extremely important since they need to be guided into making the right choices for moving ahead in life, with the consciousness of their own capacity. Once they go back to their parents, the children who live in Chennai and areas around it, come over to Bala Mandir on second Saturdays of every month, to go through Life Skills classes taught by the social workers – which has become an important requisite for their future. They are also provided with counselling where necessary, to help settle any adjustment issues with their home or with their parents. Until completion of their education, the children are closely monitored for their emotional and physical well being.

More and more children who are rehabilitated from Bala Mandir, and come from socio-economically deprived backgrounds, are recognizing that the way out of destitution and poverty is to equip oneself with education. So they are opting to go for higher education, showing an aptitude and willingness to go in even for technical courses. Bala Mandir has created the Higher Education Fund, supported by many donors over the years, to cater to the needs of these children and help them realize their ambitions to go beyond the circumstances of their family. Children are encouraged to study and take up jobs to make themselves economically self-sufficient.

With the increasing number of students going in for higher studies, it has become imperative to have them accountable for the course they opt to take up and ensure that the standard of their education does not drop. Hence Bala Mandir has put in some parameters from 2014-15 onwards, for eligibility of scholarship. Increasingly, children are also encouraged to take on part-time jobs to help finance their own education, provide income to their families, and give them some pocket money for their own expenses.

Rehabilitation has become one of the strongest ways in which Bala Mandir has been able to contribute positively to the overall well-being of the child, by providing stability in the home, and by encouraging the child to educate himself / herself, and stand on his / her own feet. The results this process has yielded are very positive, and today Bala Mandir has many children who come back to us with their heart-warming success stories.

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR: OUR NEW INITIATIVE

For the 66th anniversary celebration, held on March 10, 2015, a new employee motivation initiative was launched – awards for the Employee of the Year. As reported in the last newsletter, there was a plan to launch an Employee of the Month scheme, which has now been converted to the Employee of the Year, so that the employees who have demonstrated Bala Mandir's values in action throughout the year were rewarded for their performance. Nominees were sought from each unit, and the senior management took a final decision on the awardees as below:

Demonstrating Child Centricity: Ms. I. Kokila from the Day Care Centre, who took two children who could not speak under her wing, gave them special attention and coaching, and consistently followed up on them, till now they are both able to communicate and speak some words

Demonstrating Child Centricity: Ms. D. Sulochana, Hospital Block Superintendent, who is always found only with the babies in her room, giving them her undivided attention at a critical juncture in their growth, and dedicating her life to the work and children under 6 years in Bala Mandir

Demonstrating Child Centricity: Ms. Sakunthala, a Matron in the Main Block, a Bala Mandir girl who quit her job to come and look after the children in a time of need, and who took on much of the responsibility of the Superintendent in her absence, to make sure the Home runs smoothly

Demonstrating Integrity: Mr. D. Vedhachalam, Coordinator for Finance & Admin, whose knowledge of law and rules, and preservation and protection of Bala Mandir is a huge asset to the organization at every stage, and whose adaptability and handling of changing situations has been a source of support to all

Demonstrating Professionalism: Ms. Vijayalakshmi Suresh, Coordinator for Research & Medical, who has taken on the difficult mantle of handling CSR projects run by companies independently, making sure that all milestones are met, while also handling a myriad of other responsibilities with efficiency and dedication in Bala Mandir

Demonstrating Continuous Improvement: Mr. Paul Ignatius, Instructor in the Vocational Training Centre, who spearheaded the entire redone carpentry course as the instructor, from creating a new compressed curriculum, to coordinating with outside agencies, and improving the course content over time, while also being a complete team player by taking on additional duties in the absence of an injured member of the carpentry team

Demonstrating Continuous Improvement: Mr. Muralikrishnan, Coordinator in the Bala Mandir Schools, who took up the onerous responsibility of handling the Bala Mandir Primary School and Satyamurthi High School, and has caused many changes in the school by emphasizing on the need for better academics, bringing in new processes for more accountability, professionalism and team work between teachers, and creating a participative and enthusiastic environment for staff

Bala Mandir thanks these seven staff members for their dedicated service over the year!



Ms. I. Kokila from the Day Care Centre



Ms. D. Sulochana from the Hospital Block



Ms. Sakunthala from the Main Block



Mr. D. Vedhachalam, from the Office



Ms. Vijayalakshmi Suresh from the Resource & Medical Centre



Mr. Paul Ignatius from the Vocational Training Centre



Mr. J. Muralikrishnan from the Bala Mandir Schools

MEMBERS' CORNER: MR. V. Y. GAITONDE

Few people in Bala Mandir would have made such an impact on the lives and hearts of children as did Mr. V. Y. Gaitonde. He might have been Vishi or VYG to his friends, but to the children, he was their beloved "Balu Sir".

From 1954, Balu Sir was an integral part of Bala Mandir, taking out time from his busy job at L&T ECC to spend time with the children. Children were always special to him – they were his friends, his playmates, and his companions. Those from deprived circumstances received his extra care and love, and he especially loved spending time with the infants and toddlers. He played games with them, and taught them songs which he made up himself, about animals, birds, trees, nature, and things in the surrounding environment. He also told them stories, and made sure they were entertained. He related to every child, and knew them personally – every new admission, every child currently in the institution, and every rehabilitated child.



Balu Sir's care and concern extended to other parts of Bala Mandir too. He was the Treasurer of Bala Mandir for a long time, and made sure that the resources of Bala Mandir were protected and used appropriately. He took care of the infrastructure as well personally – suddenly one would look up and find him on the roof to check the tanks!

As a trustee, Balu Sir was also responsible for many new initiatives of Bala Mandir. Through his good offices, Mr. P-H Mortensen, General Manager of L&T, and his wife Gerda Mortensen, were introduced to Bala Mandir and its children, which started a long friendship with the couple, leading up to Bala Mandir being a beneficiary of their personal trust. Mr. Mortensen also helped set up the erstwhile carpentry training unit. This was expanded into the Industrial Training Centre (ITC) in 1999. Balu Sir was the Principal of ITC for its formative years – in many ways it was his baby.



Balu Sir passed away in July 2013, leaving an irreplaceable void in the hearts and minds of the staff and children of Bala Mandir. However, in the absence of his physical presence, his legacy, thinking, and dedication to Bala Mandir lives on. For two years now, in May, the Balu Sir Summer Camp is held at Satyamurthi High School in his memory, teaching the children creative arts such as dance, arts and crafts, and theatre, to inspire them to have a holistic learning experience. In the laughter and enjoyment of children, one can see Balu Sir's spirit shining once again in Bala Mandir.

HR NEWS – JANUARY TO MARCH 2015

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mrs. J. Padmalekha, Supervisor in the Main Office
- Mrs. Mahalakshmi, Helper, Primary School
- Mrs. Vidya, Helper, Hospital Block

HR Philosophy

Bala Mandir has articulated its HR Philosophy, based on its core values: ***"To be a fair, transparent, and impartial employer, with professional and open HR practices"***

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