



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It has been another interesting and inspiring quarter at Bala Mandir. Annual celebrations were completed, a first-ever inter-school football tournament was organised, and staff and members got together for a first ever 'family gathering'. Life is never quiet at Bala Mandir!

The ones who inspire us forward are the children. We see different children every day, with different interests, goals, talents and aspirations. To try to tap their inner potential, to bring it out and make it shine – this is something that our organisation believes firmly in. Many of the initiatives we have taken up are focused on trying to get the children to make the most of themselves. 'Holistic development' ceases to then be mere jargon – it is the way Bala Mandir wishes to work and operate, so that the children get every opportunity possible to discover and hone their own talents and skills.

Much of this newsletter is dedicated to this and its various aspects – mentoring and self-development, sports, health and hygiene, cultural and religious awareness, celebrations and social events, and music and dance – all of which supplement school studies and homework. We hope you get to learn more about our different programmes. Please reach out if you would like more information.

Of course, as always, we welcome your comments, feedback and suggestions on the newsletter. Do write in at the mail ID below. Happy reading!

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FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS

During this quarter Bala Mandir children celebrated three important festivals – each with a different message.

Varalakshmi Vrutham celebrations were conducted with the theme of empowerment and excellence of women, through the stories of the Pancha Kanyas. **Krishna Jayanthi** saw the production of an excellent play about the birth and childhood of Lord Krishna, and its significance – bringing joy to mankind. The cradling of the baby Krishna is especially symbolic in an institution. **Ganesh Chaturthi** was celebrated with emphasis on the importance of devotion to the parents, and the symbolism of the unique form.

The children acted out roles of the opposite gender quite naturally.

These festivals provide the children with an opportunity to learn more about the traditions in India, and moral lessons about life.



Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations

NEWS BYTES: JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2015

100% Placement for VTC Trainees

The academic year for the VTC trainees was completed in August, with the trainees attending the NCVT examinations. All trainees also received excellent placements. Godrej and TVS were the major employers who made offers to the students. Since this is their first job, Bala Mandir will track the progress of each trainee for two years, and provide guidance and counselling as required.



Best Teachers Awards

Every year during Founder's Day celebrations, teachers from different sections are awarded the 'Best Teacher' award. For 2014-15 the teachers awarded are **Ms. Kokila** from the pre-kindergarten section; **Mr. Koteeswaran**, who handles PET classes in the schools, and **Ms. Logasundari**, who is now working as a Nurse in Bala Mandir.

20 Years of Service

Two helpers, **Ms. Sangeetha** and **Ms. Bhooma**, in the Infant and Toddler (Hospital) Block completed 20 years of service with Bala Mandir this year, and received long service awards this year. Both women were orphans, brought up in Bala Mandir, and decided to dedicate their lives to the service of the children. Bala Mandir thanks them for their committed service!



Independence Day Celebrations

Independence Day was celebrated on August 15 in the school, with **Mr. Srinivasan Rangarajan**, immediate past president of Rotary Club of Madras North, hoisting the flag and planting a tree. J. Swetha Sri of IX A gave a speech about Independence. Sweets were distributed to the children.

Festivals and Functions in Nagercoil

Nagercoil celebrated Kamaraj Day on July 15, with performances by the children, and a prize distribution ceremony. Festivals such as Krishna Jayanthi, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Onam were celebrated with fervour. In addition, the unit also celebrated World Youth Day and Tree Planting Day.



HEALTH FOCUS: ENDRUM PUNNAGAI PROJECT

Health is a subject that has received much focus in Bala Mandir. Different initiatives have been taken up over the years, targeted at improving the physical and mental health of the children in the Home, schools and Vocational Training Centre. This led to the establishment of the Vinayaka Clinics in the late 1980s, which started with a paediatric clinic and a homeopathic clinic. These expanded over time to dental care, eye care and physiotherapy, culminating in a full-fledged School Health Education Programme, covering all classes from Standard I to X.

Every child who studies in a Bala Mandir educational institution undergoes annual health check-ups, with follow-ups on referrals as required. The children also receive psychological support and counselling in case of academic or behavioural issues. The School Health Education Programme is tailored to educate all children about health and hygiene, with a list of specific topics to be covered for each class, based on their ability to understand and grasp concepts. Some of the topics covered include the human body, the importance of healthy food and nutrition, pollution, different kinds of diseases and disease prevention, first aid, the importance of exercise, substance abuse, communicable diseases and HIV, and community responsibility. Social workers and medical officers conduct these classes through interactive methods such as activities, charts, role-play exercises, and group discussions.



Left:
Classes for the children

Right:
Paper Plates Game

A natural extension of Bala Mandir's health programmes has been the 'Endrum Punnagai' project by Y.R.G. Care. 'Endrum Punnagai' translates from Tamil as 'Ever Smiling'. This project was started with a view of getting boys and girls from disadvantaged families to help build their confidence and have positive and healthy relationships with one another. The concepts covered in this programme include personal hygiene, gender sensitisation, nutrition, environment and reproductive health.

The project was launched in the Bala Mandir schools in January this year, with life skills classes for Standard VIII and IX. A scheduled class is held every week for different sections on life skills. In addition, as part of the initiative, Y.R.G. Care also extended its support to the schools for launching libraries, in both the primary and high school. A representative from the organisation coordinates the library period every week for each class.

Volunteers were identified first, and a 'Training of Trainers' programme was conducted, to familiarise the volunteers with the contents of the eight modules – Knowing Myself, Communication Skills, Relationships, Nutrition and Well Being, Coping with Emotions, Growing Up, Substance Use and Decision Making and Goal Setting. These are then taught to the children through interactive methods – activities, games, discussions etc.

So far three modules have been completed. The first session included a paper plates games, where the students write what they love the most about themselves – an exercise to build self-worth and confidence to mitigate issues related to self-esteem. This was an interesting insight into the child's psyche. The second session on communication included a game for the children to understand how verbal and nonverbal cues could give mixed messages. The third session had an interesting group discussion on decision making, and what decisions the child had taken on his / her own.

The 'Endrum Punnagai' project, with its focus on physical and mental health both, has provided Bala Mandir with the perfect supplement to the school health programme. The enthusiasm and interest of the volunteers have led to excellent channelized inputs to the children to hone different aspects of their personality. Remaining modules will be split across the next two terms.

Finally, a mention of Y.R.G. Care is incomplete without mentioning the yeoman contribution of Dr. Suniti Solomon, its founder, who has supported Bala Mandir in many of its health initiatives. Dr. Suniti passed away in July this year, and Bala Mandir extends its sincere condolences to her family. Her life has been a shining example of service and an inspiration to one and all.

INTER-SCHOOL FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

Playing sports is an important facet of holistic development for children. Research has shown that sports create a sense of physical and mental well-being in children, which sprouts from physical activity, team spirit and bonding, and a feeling of achievement. In the last few years, Bala Mandir has been able to build up sports facilities and, more importantly, generate excellent interest among the boys belonging to the Home, to the school, and to the Vocational Training Centre in sports, particularly in cricket and football. The passion of some young volunteers and Physical Education Teachers (PETs) has led to steadily increased interest in football. A special mention must be made of Koteeswaran, an ex-Satyamurthi High School student, who joined as the PE teacher for the Primary School, and has taken up regular after-school coaching. The boys in the Home especially get to interact every Sunday with Sriram Murali, a young boy who volunteers his time to play with them. They also get to play football each year with another young volunteer from the UK, Benedict Corti, who has been visiting Bala Mandir once a year since 2013 with his mother Miranda.

Inspired by these volunteers, Bala Mandir decided to conduct an inter-school five-a-side football tournament targeted at boys under the age of 14. Winners received the 'Bala Mandir' trophy, and runners-up received the 'Satyamurthi Trophy', with additional prizes for the third place and 'fair play'. Individual prizes were also given to the Best Player, Best Goalkeeper, Best Defender, Best Forward, and Top Scorer of the tournament. 20 schools participated in the tournament, which was held over three days: August 28, 29 and 30. PSBB (K.K.Nagar) won the Bala Mandir trophy, while Sishya High School won the second place.

Mr. Murali Venkatraman (Sriram's father), was the major sponsor for this tournament. Benedict Corti donated the goal posts. Mr. Murali from Sri Krishna Sweets supplied the teams with lunch and refreshments. Mr. Jayakumar, a senior football player, shared his knowledge to ensure the tournament ran well. Some moments below.

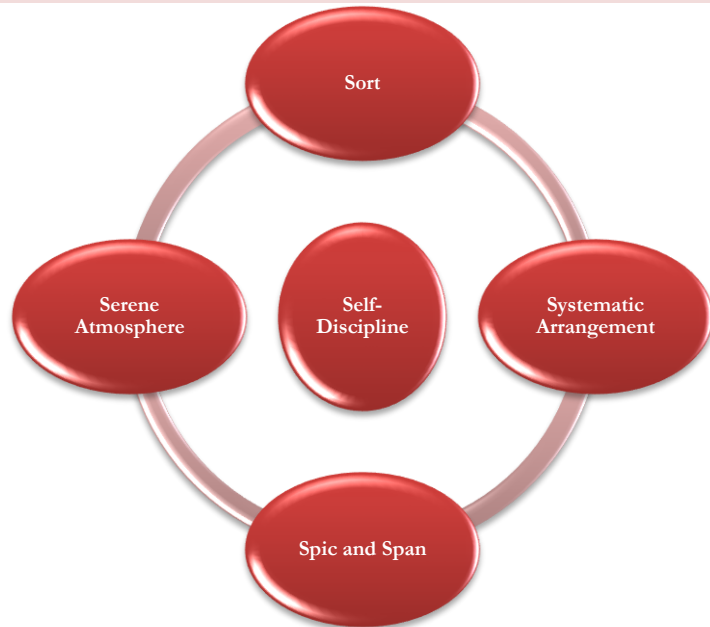


THOUGHTS FROM THE STUDY CIRCLE: 5S

5S – an oft-heard term, especially in the professional world. It is considered to be more than just a way of working; it is more a philosophy or a methodology that is and can be applied to daily life and work. Originating in Japan, 5S refers to five words used to describe how one can organise any area, more specifically the workplace. The 5S's are easy ways to remember, reinforce and internalize the concepts taught through this. Bala Mandir has also adopted the 5S methodology, with training programmes conducted for staff two years back, and revived by Mr. Ashok Aiyar, who has taken responsibility for driving this initiative in the different units.

The five S's are as follows:

1. **Seiri (Sort):** Sorting out – papers at your desk, computer files, based on importance, priority, urgency; discarding what is not required; not hoarding anticipating a future requirement
2. **Seiton (Systematic Arrangement):** Arranging belongings and daily use items, meetings and schedules, studies for children, information that is received, files at work etc.
3. **Seiso (Spic and Span):** Cleaning and returning things to their rightful place; doing one's share to dust and clean in the office space; eating in a neat manner; using restrooms in a hygienic manner
4. **Seiketsu (Serene Atmosphere):** Standardized processes to maintain a serene atmosphere with high standards; everything in its right place – more productive and efficient working
5. **Shitsuke (Self-Discipline):** Doing these regularly in a disciplined manner to sustain cleanliness



5S activities in Bala Mandir are now being tied to festivals. Stock-taking across is done during Tamil New Year's Day (April), repairs and sprucing up during Kamaraj Day (July), clean-up and maintenance during Ayudha Pooja (October), and clearing out old material during Bhogi (January). These old traditions are in line with 5S ideas and fit so naturally!

BALA MANDIR FAMILY GET TOGETHER

On September 26th, Bala Mandir members and staff got together to celebrate togetherness and the feeling of 'family'. Attendees were divided into teams, divided vertically across Bala Mandir's verticals. These teams planned and put up brief skits on socially relevant themes, using characters they received on the spot, all in an hour's time! The creativity of the teams was appreciated. Star performers included Mr. Bhoopal (Member), Mr. Arulraj (Social Worker), and Mr. P.R.Srinivasan (Principal, Vocational Training Centre), whose humorous and natural acting received huge applause!



CELEBRATIONS IN BALA MANDIR

Annual celebrations were carried out as always in July, August and September.

Kamaraj Day (Education Day) was celebrated on July 15th, in memory of Sri K. Kamaraj, Founder-President of Bala Mandir. The chief guest was Ms. V. Vasanthi Devi, former Chancellor of M. Sundaranar University. The students were awarded prizes for academic performance. Standard V students sang a villu paatu on Kamaraj's life. D. Prakash also gave a speech about him. The chief guest distributed uniforms from the baby section to the pre-KG. Helpers were given gifts in recognition of their good work. Children from Bala Mandir's choir also gave an impromptu performance on request.

Medical Day was celebrated on August 27th, with the theme "Yoga for Health". Dr. Kalavathi Sekar of Sky Yoga gave a talk about Yoga and its importance. Children from Satyamurthi High School presented yoga asanas at German Hall, based on the talk given.

Founder's Day was celebrated on September 23rd, and students from Standard II to Standard VIII attended the function. Vidyalaya children performed a villu paatu on the founder, Smt. Manjubhashini's life. Students from the primary school and high school performed a conversational skit on Children's Rights.

Medical Day ~ "Yoga for Health"



Yoga Demonstration



The audience participating in an interactive session



Mr. Jayanth Murali's address



Mrs. Latha Kumaraswami speaks

Kamaraj Day / Education Day



Villu Paatu about Kamaraj



Impromptu performance by Bala Mandir's Choir



Uniforms distribution



Speech on Kamaraj

Founder's Day (Children's Programme)



Skit on Children's Rights



Chief Guest Ms. Kumudu's address



Kalpamma speaks



Villu Paatu on Manjumma

VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS

Bala Mandir is fortunate to have the support of many organisations that work with the children to give them the holistic development that it wishes to foster. Three such organisations are Bhumi, RASA and the Madras Youth Choir.



A Bhumi session



The children enthusiastically practice choir songs



RASA Orientation Programme

Bhumi has been working with Bala Mandir for over nine years now. It is a not-for-profit youth volunteering organisation, working since 2006 with children to help them realise their potential and raise their aspirations. The main programme run by the volunteers in Bala Mandir is Lakshya – a mentoring programme for Standard VIII to X that runs through the academic year. The programme has structured modules, with activities on a specific theme / moral value, and a debriefing session. Following these modules are mentoring sessions, where the Bhumi volunteers work closely with groups of the children, with videos and stories, role play activities, quizzes, and arts and craft projects. Through January to March, special attention is paid to the children in Standard X, to help them do well in their examinations, learn how to handle stress, manage their time better, and set goals.

The Bhumi programmes have yielded very good results, with increased confidence in children while presenting themselves, better communication, improved public speaking abilities (especially in English), and enhancement in general knowledge.

RASA is an organisation founded in 1989, focusing on the holistic development of each individual, especially children, through experiences of music, dance, drama, storytelling, and arts and crafts. In Bala Mandir RASA activities involve children belonging to Standard IV and V, to help with behaviour modification initiatives. The programme uses techniques from theatre arts to reduce restlessness and inculcate a sense of discipline. Specific inputs are also provided for children with serious behavioural issues.

The sessions began in 2014. Volunteers from RASA first started with an orientation workshop held for the caregivers and teachers working with the children in these classes. The workshop covered basics about the psychology of the children in this age group and their behaviour patterns. Following this, a behaviour chart was implemented for each child in the Home and in school. The concepts of rewards and consequences of behaviour were introduced through this chart. Theatre classes happen in addition to these initiatives every week.

The RASA classes are popular with the children, who are enthusiastic and participative. The classes are providing the children with a chance to express themselves. They are also encouraged to participate in theatre based programmes, to boost their self-confidence and their ability to perform in front of audiences.

Madras Youth Choir (MYC) is a forty-year old not-for-profit organisation, started by Mr. M. B. Srinivasan, a prolific music director and pioneer of Indian choral music. The choir believes in and spreads the movement of ‘singing together’, by singing and teaching songs on national integration, patriotism, protecting the environment, and folk tunes.

The children from Bala Mandir are part of MYC’s junior and sub-junior choir groups. The children are trained in Indian choral music, and have performed as part of the choir in many places in Chennai. They have performed in the great poet Subramaniya Bharathi’s house for his birthday celebrations, in parks as part of “Madras Week” celebrations, and as part of programmes conducted by different organisations across Chennai. Further, MYC works closely with Bala Mandir to train the children for specific programmes internally, and to help them participate in music competitions. MYC is also Bala Mandir’s partner for the annual choral music workshop ‘Voices in Unison’, held every year in November.

The choir initiative has been a great way for the children in the Home to interact closely with children from other backgrounds and schools. It has also provided the children in the Home with an invaluable opportunity to develop an extra-curricular activity in the form of singing. The excitement felt by the children when they perform is palpable!

Bala Mandir thanks these organisations for the hard work they put in every year to develop skills and provide opportunities to the children to help them realise their potential.

IN REMEMBRANCE: MR. S. GOVIND SWAMINADHAN

Adapted from an article written by Mrs. Maya Gaitonde, Hon. Gen. Secretary

For the first few decades, after the inception of Bala Mandir in 1949, the founder Smt. S. Manjubhashini used to occasionally invite Mr. Govind Swaminadhan (fondly called Govind), the son of her close friend and associate, Mrs. Ammu Swaminadhan, to render legal advice to Bala Mandir. For three decades, Govind gave valuable legal advice to this growing social welfare institution. Members in Bala Mandir today recall him as a very reserved young man – who kept to himself, always spoke to the point – not given to chitchat and small talk. He grew in stature and made a remarkable name in society as an upright, ethical, perfectly honest and brilliant man.

In 1976, when the Founder President Mr. Kamaraj passed away, Mrs. Manjubhashini considered Govind the apt person to replace him. She approached him with a rehearsed speech and started hesitantly with – “Govind, we want you to become President of Bala Mandir...” Pat came his response “Yes – now what next?” That was it.



Govind’s grasp of any situation was very quick, and a few direct words of explanation were sufficient for him to understand. He steered Bala Mandir to be named “Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust” in 1979, and he completely monitored its growth into a premier social welfare institution. His direction has been one of the main reasons why Bala Mandir has been able to maintain a high standard of documentation, language, grammar, expression, legal and procedural correctness of reporting and meetings. He helped further define the values by which Bala Mandir works – integrity, professionalism, respect for the environment, and compliance with and respect for laws and rules – through his actions and words. His praise came as quickly as his reprimands. He was never partial. Right was Right and Wrong was Wrong, even if the very Founder herself committed the mistake.

Every project that was started in Bala Mandir received Govind’s approval only if it was expressed in humane terms – he would want to know if it was for the qualitative enhancement of the orphan, destitute and deprived children and if it was concomitant with the ideals of Bala Mandir. Whenever there was a plan for a building, he would question: “Is it absolutely necessary? – will the children be able to have breathing space? How many trees will be cut down?” Thanks to his constant and incessant reminders, Bala Mandir still has large areas of open space; gardens and old trees, which are standing testimony to his concern for the environment and those little ones who live in it.

His question for every new item of expenditure were: “Do you really need it ? Can you sustain and / or maintain it? How will it help the children?” Each short precise question had to have an equally short, succinct and well thought out answer. If you wavered or vacillated, or hadn’t given deep thought to it, Govind would catch you out on that one. His response would be: “No – now, let’s get on with the next item in the agenda.” The “No” was on these matters was not a final one – it only meant ‘Get your act together, think about it and come back and we will definitely consider it’.

Govind stepped down as President in 1991 to give way to a younger generation of workers. He carefully chose one of his juniors, Mr. G. Anbumani (now a member of the Bala Mandir Executive Committee) to continue to help Bala Mandir with all legal matters. Another of Govind’s associates, Mr. Sriram Panchu, has recently joined the Bala Mandir Trust. This solid foundation of legal correctness and propriety and counsel, that he helped establish, have seen Bala Mandir through moments of crises.

In the month of October the S. Govind Swaminadhan Legal Education Programme is held in his memory, for which funding is through the SGS Legal Programme Endowment, set up by his associates and juniors. This programme is targeted at school students to build awareness about legal and environmental issues, and has been very well-received by schools in and around Chennai.

HR NEWS – JULY TO SEPTEMBER

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mrs. Nalini Seshadri, Accounts Department
- Ms. Anitha, Health Assistant, Children’s Programme

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Lakshmi, Accounts, Research Centre
- Ms. Vanitha, Matron, Children’s Programme

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