



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Welcome to the seventh edition of Bala Mandir's newsletter, BM Connect. This covers the quarter between January and March 2016 – usually a busy quarter for the organisation, made even more so because of the start of the rebuilding efforts after the floods. Many corporates and individuals have come forward to support Bala Mandir in this time, and the organisation wishes to thank all those who stepped up to help and support.

With this, Bala Mandir made a new beginning to the new year 2016, looking around with fresh eyes, taking stock of what needed to be done, and moving forward with its own inimitable, indomitable spirit. Work began in right earnest, so that normalcy could be restored as soon as possible.

Normalcy was also sought to be restored in all the units through the usual activities. A glimpse into these festivities is provided in this newsletter.

There was also good news for the Nagercoil home – the long-awaited new building work has begun in this quarter. More information about this is provided in the last page.

We hope that you enjoy reading through this newsletter. Please do write to us with your feedback. You are also most welcome to contribute to this newsletter in the form of any articles and / or photographs you might have.

Archana Natarajan, Editor
message@balamandir.org

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EYE CAMP AT NAGERCOIL

An eye camp was held in the Nagercoil Home, in partnership with Bejansingh Eye Hospital, one of the leading hospitals in Nagercoil. Dr. Sahil Ahamed and eleven hospital staff spent time in the Home and carried out complete eye check-ups for all the girls. Mrs. Swarnalatha Raju helped organise the camp.

Fourteen girls had problems identified for follow-up and referral during this check-up. The girls were taken for consultation to the hospital, and three girls were fitted with spectacles to correct for refractive problems.

The hospital provided spectacles at half the price. Consultation fees were waived as well.



NEWS BYTES: JANUARY TO MARCH 2016

Value Education Seminar

Every year the Bala Mandir Cultural and Learning Centre conducts a Value Education Seminar in March, targeted at teachers, to help them teach values to children in their schools and educational institutions. The theme this year was 'Value Education through stories from the Mahabharata'. 24 participants from 6 schools and BM educational institutions were part of this interactive and interesting session.

Annual Day at the Day Care Centre

Annual Day was held for the Day Care Centre on 18 March 2016. The theme was Integrity. The children put up a play and a dance based on the theme. The Annual Day usually sees participation from the entire Day Care Centre; however, this year the baby section was unable to participate, since many of the children had chicken pox.

Republic Day Celebrations

Republic Day was celebrated in all the different units of Bala Mandir. In the Chennai Home, TAMBRAS members hoisted the flag. In the Nagercoil Home, the flag hoisting was attended by members of the Rotary Club of Nagercoil. In the Primary and High School in Chennai, Mr. Ramakrishnan of Voltas Limited presided over the occasion, and distributed stationery items and school bags to all the children.

Creche Day in Nagercoil

Crèche Day was celebrated in Nagercoil, where the children put up a programme for their parents. The highlight of the celebration was a recording of the daily activities, which was played on a TV for the parents to see. Material used by the children everyday was displayed as well.

Employee of the Year Awards

Employees of the Year for 2015-16 were chosen and awarded with certificates during Bala Mandir's 67th anniversary celebrations for demonstration of Bala Mandir values in action. The awardees this year were Mr. Chandrasekar (VTC Instructor), Mr. Naresh Kumar (Social Worker), Ms. Anandi (Bala Mandir Home) and Ms. Shakila (Infant and Toddler Block).



DCC Annual Day



Republic Day – bag distribution



Employees of the year – Anandi, Naresh, Chandrasekhar, Shakila



Crèche Day at Nagercoil

FRIENDS OF BALA MANDIR

Every February since 1985, Bala Mandir celebrates its annual 'Friendship Day' – the occasion that honours the friendship shared by Bala Mandir since 1962 with the Late Mr. P-H Mortensen. This year, Bala Mandir decided to expand Friendship Day's meaning, by remembering and honouring the friendship that it has experienced in the near past from many. Those who were honoured as part of the celebration were:

Mr. Lars Odd Pettersen: Chairman of Braade Stiftung, the trust set up by Mr. P-H Mortensen for the benefit of Bala Mandir. Mr. Pettersen visits India and Bala Mandir every year and spends a week to strengthen the bonds of friendship. This year, he brought a very welcome confirmation of a building project expansion in Nagercoil.

Mr. T.V. Kini: who has been a friend of Bala Mandir for many decades now. Mr. Kini's contribution has been significant. He helped in the creation and running of the BM-PHM Vocational Training Centre, and created personal endowments for sponsorship of the trainees. Recently he and his family gifted the new lunch hall for the VTC.

The Late A. Ramakrishna, Design Engineer and later President (Operations), L&T ECC: His technical expertise was a major driving force in the construction of many of Bala Mandir's buildings, including the German Hall and the Vocational Training Centre. He served on the Trust till his sad passing in 2013. His family continues the good work that he was doing – his wife Surya, his three sons Raj, Prasad and Kishore, and his daughter-in-law Dhvani, all have special connections with Bala Mandir, including providing technical advice, bringing in donors, and volunteering their own time and service. They also contributed to the refurbishing of the infant toddler block of Bala Mandir.

Madhuram Narayanan Centre (MNC) for Exceptional Children: a friend of 25 years. The focus of MNC on children below 6 years of age with 'special needs' is very much in line with Bala Mandir's own vision of supporting children in difficult circumstances, and this has led to a natural partnership over time, where MNC has been able to advise Bala Mandir on how to deal with children with learning disabilities. Mr. Krishnan represented MNC.

Mr. Murali of Shri Krishna Sweets: a pillar of support for Bala Mandir in times of need. During the monsoon season and flooding, Bala Mandir invariably turns to Mr. Murali for his support and help to provide tasty, and neatly, hygienically packed food for the children, at no cost, every year.

Murugappa Foundation: They supplied high quality food grains to replace the stock damaged during the floods. Importantly, their support of the re-vamping and re-engineering of the entire plumbing system will prevent the sewage backup that has been a constant problem in Bala Mandir for many years, and will create a more healthy and hygienic environment for the Bala Mandir children. In addition, they continue to sponsor trainees in the VTC as well. Mr. M.V. Murugappa was present at the event – it was his first visit to Bala Mandir.

Voltas Limited: They replaced most of the destroyed refrigerators, mixies and washing machines in the aftermath of the flood. They also gave the 750+ school children school bags, stationery, note books, toilet items, sheets and mats, which brought them great joy, especially to the children in the slums, who had recently lost many of their belongings.

Calibre Consultants: The organisation supported the replacement of the damaged plumbing system and the extension of the walls of the infant-toddler block. Their end-to-end support has meant no extra work for Bala Mandir.

Mr. Parekh, from Tulsi Silks: Bala Mandir has begun a project for the removal of water from the main complex, which floods every year, which he is funding. The project has been extended, and so has his generosity and support.

Mrs. Rajani & Mr. B. Santhanam: They have involved Bala Mandir in a very unique way in their family, during the marriage of their son Navaneethan and daughter-in-law Hruthika. The young couple, who got married in December 2015, chose to request their guests to provide donations to Bala Mandir in lieu of gifts for themselves.

Mr. Ravi: A project engineering consultant, now a familiar figure in Bala Mandir, he volunteers many days, including Sundays, going around all the units of Bala Mandir, working on the planning and re-building, to make them more child-friendly, safe and free from engineering flaws.

Mr. Murali Venkatraman: He has been a sponsor of the Bala Mandir children for many years, but with the involvement of his son Sriram also, the nature of his relationship with Bala Mandir has changed. Sriram is a student of Sishya School, and a football enthusiast, who has made friends with the young boys in Bala Mandir, teaching them how to play football regularly on Sundays. Thanks to the support of Mr. Murali, Bala Mandir held its first ever inter-school football tournament, which was a resounding success.

This year's Friendship Day celebration aptly captured how the institution is blessed to have advice, support and guidance from many across different spectra of life.

PONGAL CELEBRATIONS – JANUARY 2016



Surya Namaskar – worshipping the sun



Dance for the sun



Children watching the festivities



Cooking Pongal

BALA MANDIR ANNIVERSARY – MARCH 2016



*The children put up a play
Iyarkkayin
Seetramum,
Mandinanin
Pangum – about
the floods and
their aftermath.*



Dance by the Primary school



Song by the Bala Mandir choir



Dance by the High school

KNOW OUR DONOR: ACTION CHILD AID

One of the donors with whom Bala Mandir has had a long history is Action Child Aid. Action Child Aid is a Denmark-based organisation, which has been engaged in helping economically deprived children in India since 1965. Action Child Aid, or ACA, works closely with Indian partners, homes, and educational institutions to secure education for children, and make sure they receive nutritional meals. They also support vocational training for young women and men from economically and socially deprived backgrounds in India. ACA acts as an intermediary between donors in Denmark and institutions who require the donations in India.



ACA has been a donor to Bala Mandir for over 40 years now. The support started with Bala Mandir's milk programme. In the early 1970s, ACA started with the shipment of milk powder for the children. Milk is one of the key ingredients in a balanced diet, and the provision of milk by ACA was used for the babies and toddlers (whose primary dietary supplement is milk), yoghurt and curd for the older children, and additionally for porridge for the Day Care Centre. The milk powder from ACA was shipped directly from Denmark for this. From 2003, this support was changed to a donation towards procurement of milk locally, which continued until recently.

Currently ACA provides sponsorship for the trainees in the Vocational Training Centre, supporting those who avail of the hostel facility. ACA acts as liaison between individual sponsors and Bala Mandir, collecting money from them on behalf of Bala Mandir and transferring the amount to Bala Mandir once or twice a year.

ACA has also supported many infrastructure projects of Bala Mandir, including the day care centre, the mid-day meal kitchen and the dining hall. They also donated all the machines in the erstwhile laundry unit, and helped with needed infrastructure for the children's programme and the schools. In 1997, they donated the Computer Centre for the school as well.

Bala Mandir has been lucky to enjoy an interesting and long association with Action Child Aid. The organisation's professionalism has also been an inspiration. The values and vision of the organisation are similar to Bala Mandir's, which make it a perfect partner for Bala Mandir.

KOLAM COMPETITION

Every year, along with the Bala Mandir anniversary celebrations, competitions are held for the children. One of the most popular is the kolam competition. This photo essay shows a glimpse into the fun the children had during the competition.



SPORTS DAY IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

As previous newsletters have also covered, sports is counted as one of the important facets of life for the children in Bala Mandir and its educational institutions. Sports Day is celebrated in all the educational units – the Day Care Centre, Primary School, and High School during the months of February and March. The children play games which are appropriate to their respective ages and developmental stages. The Day Care Centre focuses on games which have learning and fun, and the children learn shapes, develop motor skills, and even do math through the sports day games. The children in the Primary School and High School play more traditional sports, and create formations and pyramids, along with the more traditional marching. A quick view of the sports days is given below.

KINDERGARTEN (DAY CARE CENTRE) SPORTS DAY



HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS DAY



PRIMARY SCHOOL SPORTS DAY



EDUCATION EVALUATION

Bala Mandir's motto of self-improvement has been the starting point for many new initiatives and changes in the way of working. This, of course, leads to much evaluation of the current practices, and creating a strategy and plan for the short- and long-term future of all Bala Mandir units. Education has especially been a focus area, and Bala Mandir has been looking for ways for improvement. To this end, an education consultant, Ms. Nitya Ram, was called in to visit the educational units, to provide her expert views on their functioning and give ideas for the way forward.

Ms. Nitya's review was over three days in January, and included observation of academic and extracurricular activities in the schools, meetings with individual and groups of teachers in Vidyalaya, Bala Mandir Primary School (BMPS) and Satyamurthi High School (SMHS), meetings with students at various levels, and meetings with parents. She began her review with a meeting with the Hon. General Secretary and the Educational team, and ended it with a presentation of her observations and recommendations.

Her feedback was tailored to individual units, based on her astute and perceptive observations. She highlighted the areas of strength for the institutions, including:

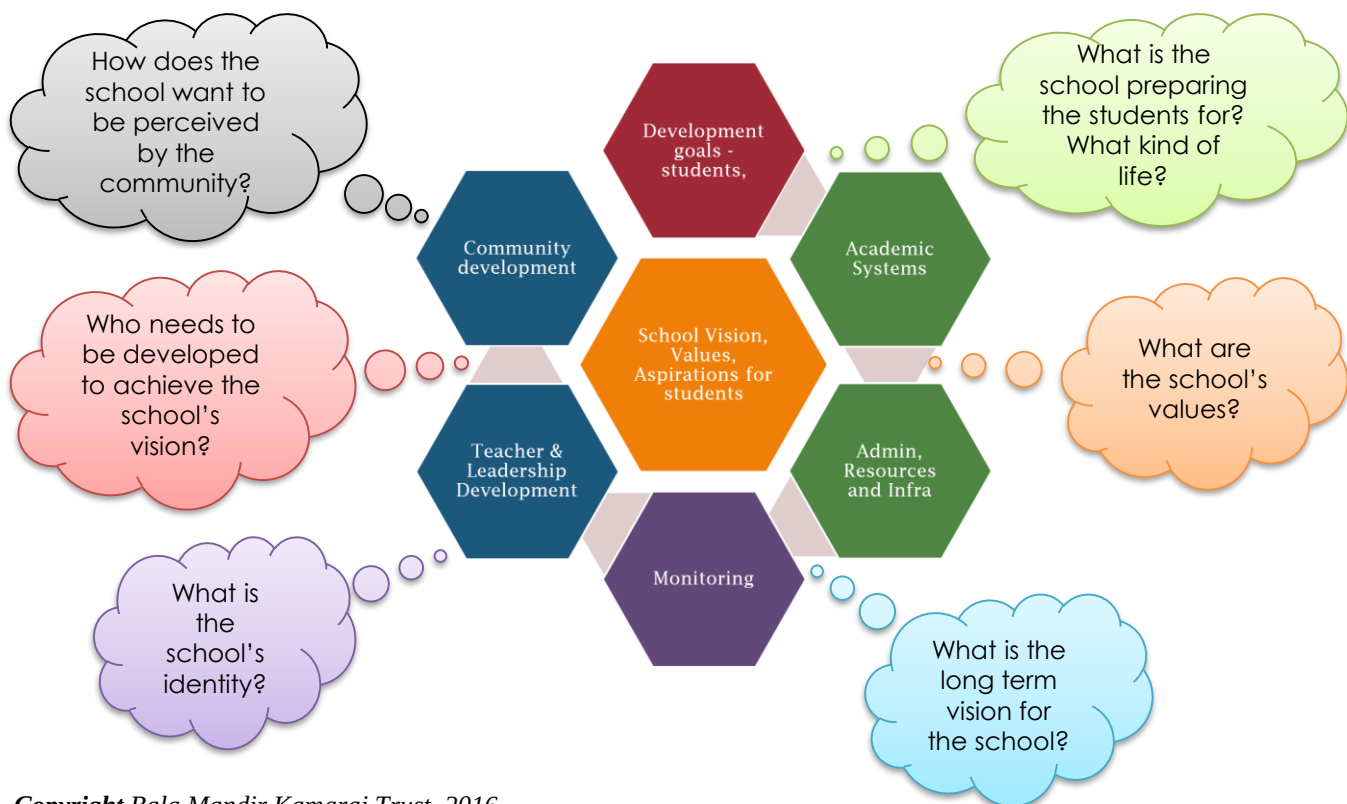
- Unique inclusive perspective – one of Bala Mandir's main goals
- Child-centred learning techniques and focus
- A team of committed and like-minded people

Her feedback also highlighted areas of improvement, including the need for more teamwork, the requirement to extend the excellent work in some pockets to other areas, and the need for more dissemination of end goals.

Her overall findings were that:

- The Montessori and primary English medium school is operating well – the worksheets are excellent, but the teachers need more insight into the transition between the Montessori and 'traditional' methods of teaching
- Activity based learning (ABL) in the Primary school is implemented well, but all teachers do not use it consistently
- Activities in the High school are well done, and the children seem to enjoy them. The learning support programme in the High school also has interesting and active methods of teaching. However, there is a need to improve the performance, morale, initiative and awareness of newer teaching methods among all teachers.

Ms. Nitya further provided an interesting insight into the perspectives of all stakeholders in the school, including the students, teachers, parents and management. She focused on the aspirations of the parents and students, who look for an interactive learning experience, academic excellence, professional growth and upward social mobility. The simple framework she created (below) and the questions she raised has given much food for thought to the management about the way forward for the schools.



NAGERCOIL BUILDING

After a long wait the new Nagercoil building project has started in right earnest during the quarter. The current Nagercoil building has a size of 3,000 sqft and houses around 40 children while the new building will add 4,500 sqft extra and take the capacity of the Nagercoil home to 100 children. Initially only two floors are planned to be constructed, but there is provision to add an extra floor if there is a need to increase capacity further.

The new building is close to the current building and for the safety of the children the construction area has been completely cordoned off. Bala Mandir has also engaged the services of a civil engineer to supervise the work and ensure that the building is constructed as per specification. Engineers from Chennai visit on a periodic basis to check the work and clarify the engineering details. Bala Mandir has arranged for purchase of steel and cement in bulk from the manufacturer while the other material is sourced by the contractor.

The project is funded by Braade Stiftung. They have been patiently waiting for several years for the statutory approval to be obtained and were kind enough to agree for funding the increased project cost caused by the inflation in prices since the time the original project was conceived. Bala Mandir appreciates the donor's commitment and hopes to develop an exemplary new home for the children of Nagercoil.



Building ground floor



View from the current Children's Home

HR NEWS — JANUARY TO MARCH 2016

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Mrs. Jayalakshmi, Helper, Day Care Centre
- Ms. Thilagam, Matron
- Mr. Chandrasekar, Coordinator, Accounts

Welcome to Bala Mandir!

- Ms. Divya, Teacher, Vidyalaya
- Mr. Chitrarasu, Teacher (Tamil), Satyamurthi High School

Training and Appraisal

The year 2015 saw the preparation of appraisal forms for different categories of staff, who were then appraised based on the goals set. To make the appraisal process more effective in 2016, Ms. Sreela Kousik, an HR professional, was invited to conduct a workshop on March 21, 2016 about the performance appraisal process, and how it can be used as a tool for improvement for employees, the supervisor, and the organisation. She has also created a checklist for each appraiser to evaluate their own readiness to perform employee appraisal.

Ms. Sreela also held meetings with the Members-in-Charge and Coordinators for the Vocational Training Centre, and for the Vidyalaya, Day Care Centre, Bala Mandir Primary School, and Satyamurthi High School, to discuss the revised service rules of the organisation: understanding each rule in detail, discussing implementation challenges, and suggesting changes for improvement.

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Phone: +91 44 2834 1921

No. 8, G.N.Chetty Road, T.Nagar, Chennai 600 017
Email: main@balamandir.org Website: www.balamandir.org