

BALA MANDIR 75

Every Child Matters



BALA MANDIR *Every Child Matters* 75



Copyright © Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust
Email address: main@balamandir.org

Printed at Sivasakthi Offset Printers, Chennai

Design and Typesetting by Jouve India Pvt. Ltd.

Cover photo by Ganesh Raja

All rights reserved around the world. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, electronic or otherwise without the prior permission of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust

For private circulation only

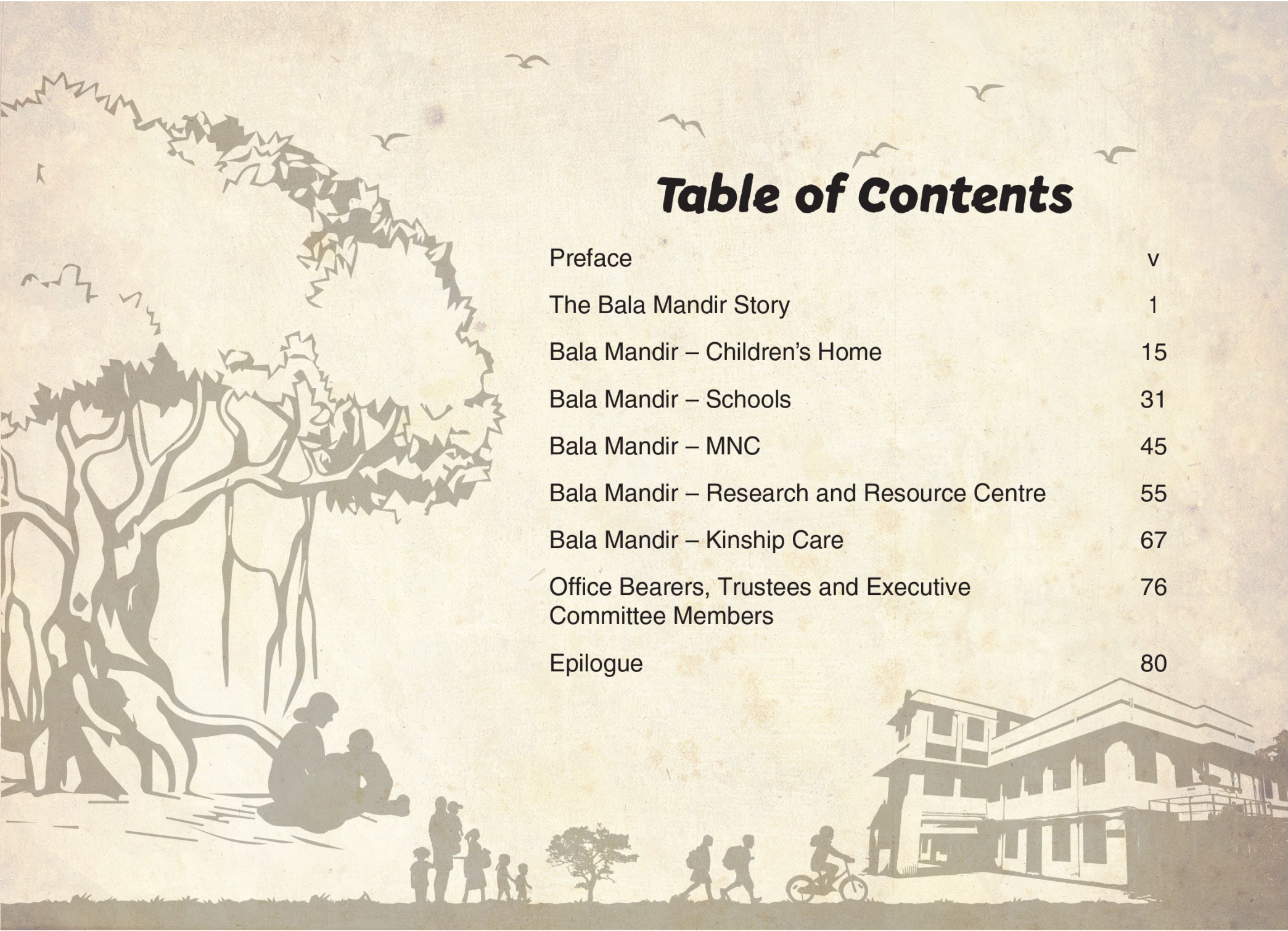


Table of Contents

Preface	v
The Bala Mandir Story	1
Bala Mandir – Children’s Home	15
Bala Mandir – Schools	31
Bala Mandir – MNC	45
Bala Mandir – Research and Resource Centre	55
Bala Mandir – Kinship Care	67
Office Bearers, Trustees and Executive Committee Members	76
Epilogue	80



Bala Mandir Vision

Bala Mandir endorses the rights of all children and envisions for them loving care, good upbringing and opportunities for development especially for children in difficult circumstances.

The Vision statement is based on the following values that drive Bala Mandir's actions

- All children need loving care, good upbringing and opportunities for development
- A child without a family needs these all the more

Bala Mandir Mission

- To serve foundlings, orphans, abandoned, destitute, special needs children, socially and economically deprived children and youth, irrespective of caste, creed, gender and religion through Institutional and Non-Institutional programmes for care, all around education, medical support, rehabilitation and related research
- To collaborate, coordinate and affiliate with Indian and International agencies in similar fields of work
- To work with the Government for the formulation of suitable policies in the area of childcare and provide support for its effective implementation

Bala Mandir Values

The following code of conduct guidelines capture the Bala Mandir values:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Child-centric Behaviour | 6. Caring for the Environment |
| 2. Integrity | 7. Secular Outlook |
| 3. Equality and Teamwork | 8. Continual Improvement and Striving for Excellence |
| 4. Professional Approach | 9. Inclusion |
| 5. Respect for Law and Rules | |



Preface

Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust management is happy to present this commemorative book, chronicling the remarkable history of Bala Mandir. This book is a tribute to the visionary individuals who laid the foundation in 1949 and to the countless individuals who have nurtured the organisation over the years, collectively steering it towards its present trajectory. Bala Mandir's rich history is meticulously preserved through the minutes of meetings dating back to 28 January 1949, even preceding its formal registration on 10 March 1949. Although these documents hold the potential for scholarly research in the future, the primary goal of this book is to encapsulate the essence of the organisation, its evolution, current status and the envisioned path forward.

Representing an update to the historical record, this coffee table book marks a continuation of the practice to document the institution's journey every 5 years, albeit in different formats. Notably, the 65th year witnessed the launch of the Bala Mandir website, serving as a comprehensive repository not only for historical data but also for a wealth of old photographs and pamphlets housed in its archive section. Subsequently, in the 70th year, Bala Mandir introduced a desk calendar featuring a succinct summary of activities and captivating photographs capturing various facets of the organisation.

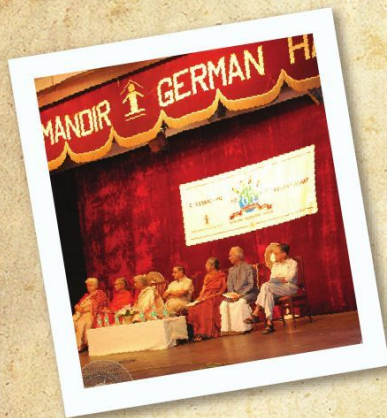
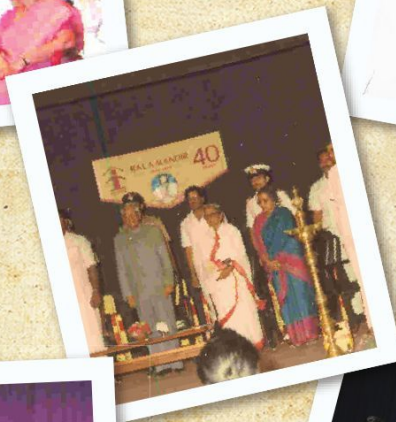
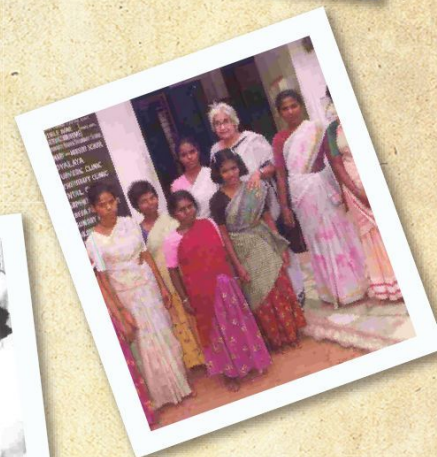
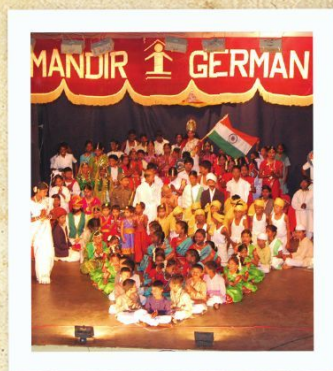
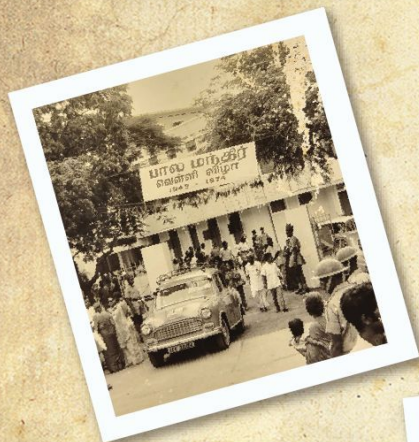
On the occasion of our 75th anniversary, this book endeavours to recount the history through the unique perspectives of each of the five units, now operating independently yet united in the shared mission of supporting and caring for children facing adversity and guiding them to realize their full potential – a mission underscored by the profound belief that 'Every Child Matters'.

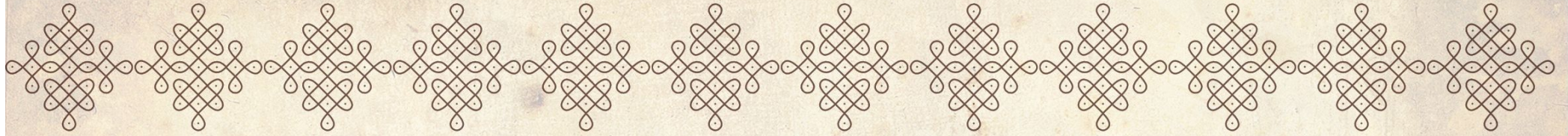
The 75-year milestone prompts us to express gratitude and celebrate the collaborative efforts of all Bala Mandir stakeholders, including the children, their families, dedicated employees, volunteers, members, government agencies, donors and other well-wishers. Each of these groups has played an integral role in the success of our organisation, making a significant impact on the lives of the children we serve. We invite all stakeholders to share their unique stories through Bala Mandir's blog page on the website, recognising the diversity of experiences and perspectives that have shaped our journey.

A list of Bala Mandir Trustees, Office Bearers and Executive Committee members over the years has been included in this book. This list shows the strong support that Bala Mandir has enjoyed over the years. In addition, a very large group of volunteers, donors and dedicated employees have contributed to the success of the organisation. As we reflect on Bala Mandir's 75 years of dedicated service, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to one and all who have been part of this extraordinary journey, contributing to the lasting legacy of the organisation. May the coming years be marked by continued collaboration, growth and positive impact on the lives of the children we are privileged to serve.

Management of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust







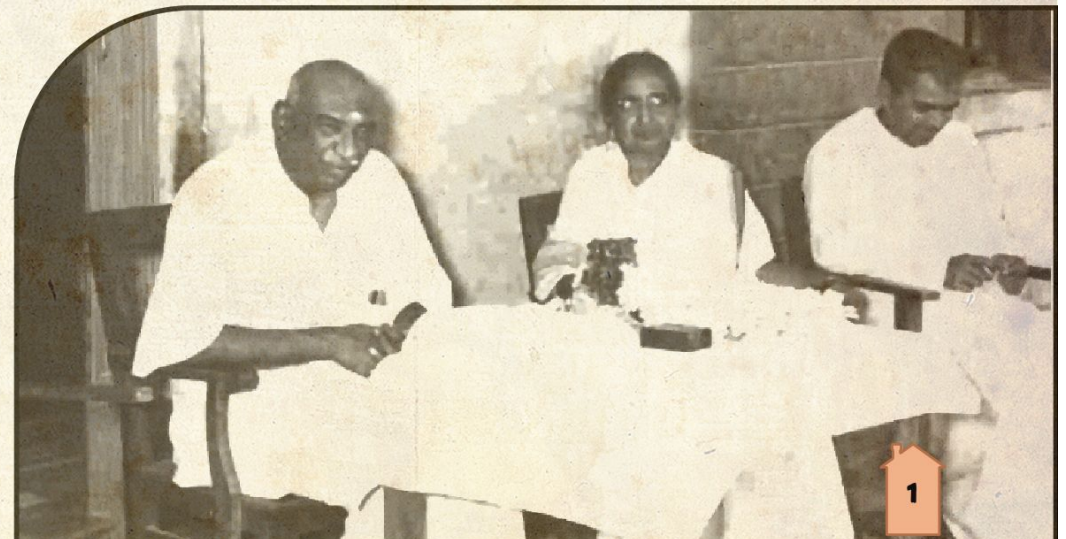
Chapter 1

The Bala Mandir Story

The genesis of Bala Mandir can be traced back to a moment of profound compassion experienced by Sri K. Kamaraj in 1949. The spark ignited when two abandoned newborns found their way to the model hut in Congress grounds in T. Nagar, Chennai, stirring the depths of his empathy. Responding to this call of care, Sri Kamaraj entrusted the infants to his esteemed associate, Smt. S. Manjubhashini (Manjumma), a distinguished freedom fighter and charged her with a noble mission – to establish a Home for these innocent lives.

On the historic day of 10 March 1949, the first chapter of Bala Mandir unfolded when it was registered as a Society, marking the commencement of a remarkable journey. For 75 years, Bala Mandir has stood unwavering as a beacon of hope and care for children. Its roots, embedded in the compassion of its founders, have grown into a resilient tree of nurturing support and holistic development. As time has unfolded, Bala Mandir has evolved, not just in scale but in its profound social impact. Today, it continues to be a guiding light, illuminating the path towards a brighter future for countless children in need.

Sri Kamaraj was motivated by humanity, compassion and instinctive understanding of the suffering of the poor, the deprived, the destitute and the orphaned. Bala Mandir is an expression of those great human qualities and concerns of Kamaraj. Manjumma was born in an affluent family but was attracted towards the clarion call of Mahatma Gandhi for freedom and immersed herself in the freedom movement. She was a person who had total love for the children under her care and was instrumental in laying the foundation for an organization with utmost integrity, which is child-centric, ethical and law abiding to this day.





1949

Bala Mandir Home Starts



1956

Elementary School + Carpentry Unit start



1974

Silver Jubilee - Chief Guest - Smt. Indira Gandhi



1979

Bala Mandir renamed "Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust"



1988

Higher Secondary classes start in the school



1951

Nursery School starts



1961

Satyamurthi High school starts



1975

K. Kamaraj passes away



1983

Bala Mandir Research Foundation starts



1989

MNC starts its services and moves into BM complex.





1990

Nagercoil
Home starts



1996

Manjumma
passes away



2015

Big Floods.
Rebuilding
project
initiated



2018

BMRF
and MNC
integration



2020

School
re-engineering
project
launched



1993

Day Care
Centre
Starts



1999

PH Mortensen
ITC starts.
Golden
Jubilee.



2016

Vidyalaya
started as
independent
school + GH
project



2019

ITC closed.
Building
converted
into Vidyalaya
school.



2022

Kinship Care
programme
becomes a
separate unit





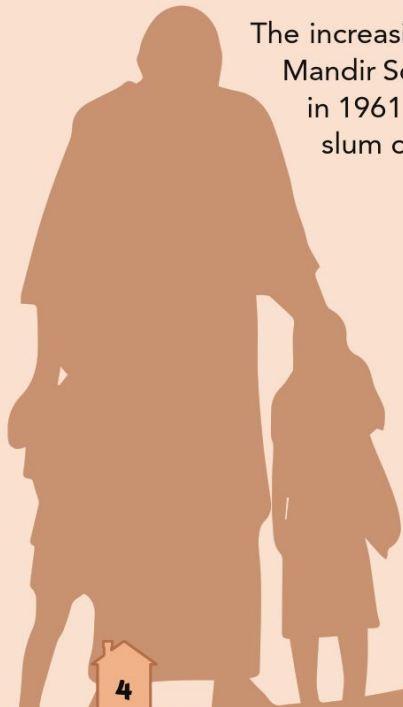
The two founders, along with Sri Ramnath Goenka, established the institution with a strong foundation and paved the way for the holistic and all-round development for thousands of orphans, destitute and socio-economically deprived children, who come under its care.

The Early Years – 1949 to 1975

The Silver Jubilee Booklet of Bala Mandir in 1974 mentions, 'A Child needs protection and a sense of security. An unwanted child needs it even more'. This philosophy continues to drive all the activities of Bala Mandir to this day.

In the early years, the admission policy was for infants below 3 years of age. Over time, this has gone up to 6 years. It was not easy to nurse a rejected child back to life and health, but in Bala Mandir this was done with patience and understanding. The Home was set up on land assigned by the Madras Government in 1950, and the Main Block was completed in 1952. In 1957, Bala Mandir was recognized as a 'Fit Person Institution', and destitute and deprived children started getting referred for admission by the Juvenile Courts. The institution grew quickly, and the first marriage of a Bala Mandir girl happened in 1961 and the adoption process started very early in its history. Over time, this became a formal process with the proper approval of the Institution's Executive Committee.

The increasing number of children joining the Home meant that there was a need for a dedicated school and that is how the Bala Mandir Schools came into being – the Nursery school in 1952 followed by the Elementary School in 1956 and then the High School in 1961. The schools were fully staffed, recognized and aided by the State Government. The school supported the nearby urban slum community as well as the Bala Mandir children.





Sri Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Madras State in 1954 and even during the 9 years when he was the head of the state, he continued his active involvement in Bala Mandir. His official car would be parked outside, and he would walk in as an ordinary member to spend time with the children and discuss Bala Mandir's issues. The Bala Mandir Silver Jubilee in 1974 was a grand affair with the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi as the Chief Guest, with the Chief Minister Sri M. Karunanidhi attending. Sri Kamaraj remained the President of Bala Mandir till his demise in 1975. He worked closely with Manjumma in these early years to lay a strong foundation for the institution. It was only appropriate that

For children with low academic potential, vocational training units were set up. The Carpentry Unit was set up in 1956 and the Laundry Unit some years later. These units were expected to be financially viable and were generating revenue by selling products made by the trainees. The Kitchen/Dining Hall was built in 1963 and the Hospital building was extended in 1968, both gifts from Oxfam, India.

The first 26 years of Bala Mandir's life seem to have been a difficult period with heavy constraints of finance, the expanding requirement for land and buildings to house the growing activities, and the need to build rapport with the Government and follow the new rules and laws laid down in post-Independent India. Equally difficult was to attract staff, on one hand, for administration and, on the other hand, for the Home to take care of children and build a culture of integrity, selfless service and loving care. Kamaraj's personality attracted many of the well-known figures of Chennai City.





Sri Kamaraj was honoured posthumously with India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna, in 1976, for his services to the nation.

During this period, four proactive members emerged – Sri V.Y. Gaitonde (VYG), popularly known among the children as 'Balusir', started coming to Bala Mandir from 1955 and slowly, he introduced many of his colleagues and more specifically his mentor Mr. P-H. Mortensen in the early 1960s; Smt. Kalpagam Narayanan, popularly known as 'Kathai Teacher' to the children started coming to Bala Mandir in 1965, and Dr. P.J.N. Reddy came to Bala Mandir in 1970 as a medical student and both continue till date, while Sri V. Sethuram started coming in 1981. All four of them were young and were destined to play a major role in the future development of Bala Mandir.

The Expanding Years – 1975 to 1996

Although Sri Kamaraj's demise initially left a big vacuum in the management of Bala Mandir, in a few years, by 1979, through the efforts of his successors, the structure of Bala Mandir underwent a change, and it was renamed 'Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust' while retaining the essential nature of the entity – a registered society. Through a well-documented Memorandum of Association (MOA), the management structure and processes and the role of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee were formalised. Sri S. Govind Swaminadhan, an exceptional advocate, known for his acumen, integrity and leadership, took over as President of Bala Mandir. He brought in necessary organisational changes, which set Bala Mandir on a firmer footing and enabled the organization to move forward and add new activities. In 1990, he passed the baton of President to Sri T.T. Vasu who was the President from 1990 to 1993.

In 1983, the Bala Mandir trustees decided to set up an independent entity by the name Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF) to focus on research,





on issues related to destitute, foundling, deprived, handicapped and mentally retarded children. In 1987, a Transit Home was set up in Nagercoil in partnership with Annai Sarala – a Gandhian, to rescue abandoned babies and save the girl child from foeticide and infanticide, all of whom were sent to the Chennai adoption centre. This was later converted into a full-fledged Home for girls in 1990. The School expanded to add Higher Secondary in 1988 and the English medium section in 1989 under the self-financed category. The Day Care Centre was set up in 1993 in response to the problem of high absenteeism amongst the high school girls who had to take care of their younger siblings while the mothers went to work.

Right through this period, Manjumma continued as the Honorary General Secretary (HGS). Always clad in simple white khadi, Manjumma made Bala Mandir her daily pilgrimage for nearly 50 years. It was a lifetime commitment to a cause. She functioned day-in and day-out as the father, mother and teacher of the children under her care. All her strength, capacity and energies went into building up of Bala Mandir. Under her able guidance, the institution grew like a banyan tree, sheltering and caring for children under extremely difficult circumstances, and spreading its branches into Education, Vocational Training, Rehabilitation and Health Programmes.

As a true visionary institution builder, in 1984 Manjumma persuaded Smt. Maya Gaitonde, the young wife of VYG to start volunteering in Bala Mandir. To enable her to develop and grow, she allowed her space by giving her the full responsibilities in the Boys' Section and later the newly formed Research wing and the Vidyalaya Primary School sections where the Bala Mandir Home children were being educated. Keeping in mind the need to develop an identified successor, she also started involving her in Trust affairs.



(Foundling Hospital)
(Registered)

A FEW FACTS

1963

14, Gopathy Narayanaswamy Chetty Road,
T. Nagar, Madras-17.
Published 10-3-1949. Tel: 5

an impossible. Hence, institutionalisation comprising the integration of the triple curates of parents, teachers, and community, which LA MANDIR provides, is the only way through which the wholesome care and assimilation of these parentless, homeless and discarded children in society could be achieved.

Bala Madir - A Temple

Bala Mandir is not a mere institution. It is a temple of love for more than 412 children demanding motherly care and affection. It is one of the few founding Homes in the State, the earning of which is to see that no child, homeless and penniless, which comes to its doors and knocks for succour, is turned out. The gates of the Bala Mandir are always wide open to welcome a child in need of relief and care! Its birth in 1919 was, as astonishingly sudden as its subsequent growth and expansion have been. It was a momentous day, when a group of enterprising

25
BALA
MANDIR

1949 - 1974

BALA MANDIR



Inauguration—
Nursery School and Hospital Buildings—Smt. Indira Gandhi 1954

Can you sponsor me!



BALA MANDIR
serving homeless children

*The only
enduring gift...
Love.*

We care ...



Therefore we



BALA MANDIR
- Serving deprived children
from 1949

BALA MANI
a home for homeless children

BALA MANDIR

126, GOPATHY NARAYANASWAMY CHETTY ROAD
MADRAS-600017

FOUNDED MARCH 1949



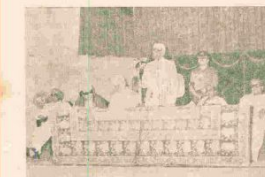
29
YEARS

BALA MANDIR

126, GOPATHY NARAYANASWAMY ROAD
MADRAS-600 017

Tel: 443688

FOUNDED - MARCH 1949



*Dedication of Bala Mandir as a Memorial to Thiru K. Kamaraj
by President of India Thiru Sanjeeva Reddy*

All children need loving care.

A child without a family
needs it all the more.



Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust

BALA MANDIR



Financial Statement

1960 - 1961
1961 - 1962

BALA MANDIR

-44, Gopathy Narayanaswamy Chetty Road
T. Nagar, Madras - 600 017

HOW MUCH CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE

Can you give any of these :

1. Used clothes, toys and books.
2. One Rupee to the Rupan Annex inaugurated by Babu Rajendras Prasad in 1951.
3. Rs. 10/- to buy a School-bag for a child.
4. Rs. 30/- to buy one set of clothes for a child.
5. Rs. 35/- for a child's School-Books for a year.
6. Rs. 40/- to give every child a banana.
7. Rs. 50/- to maintain one child for one month.
8. Rs. 100/- to supply every child with one cup of milk.
9. Rs. 150/- to give all Bala Mandir children a sweet and vadai.
10. Rs. 160/- to buy Vitamins and Tonics for 75 children for one month.
11. Rs. 350/- for the marriage expenses of one girl of Bala Mandir.
12. Rs. 400/- to give all children a feast.
13. Rs. 800/- to maintain one child in Bala Mandir for one year.

Kalvi Press, Madras - 600031



Our President, Kamaraj with our
First Baby
1949



Children at School

1959



Bala Mandir Bride
1959



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It gives me great pleasure to include in this newsletter, for the first time, the events and activities of the Madhuran Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (MNC). MNC caters to children with special needs, and has been a partner with Bala Mandir in the areas of early childhood development for many years. This year MNC became a part of Bala Mandir, adding to the array of services that Bala Mandir provides to society and to children in need. We hope to cover more about MNC in the coming few issues as well.

This quarter has been packed with activities, initiatives and efforts, as always. This newsletter is but a glimpse into the myriad activities being carried out. In addition to what is covered here, we have many staff enhancement training programmes, different volunteers who spend or spare time with our children, and new opportunities to interact with different organisations in the same field. If you would like to know more, or participate in any of these activities, you could step into Bala Mandir, or write to us.

Finally, a milestone for BM Connect itself. This issue marks the first quarter of the fifth year running for our newsletter! Being its fifth year, we would love to hear from you about what you would like to see more / less of, and how you think we could improve - or we would love to just hear from you about your experiences that we can publish. Do write in to the mail ID below. In the meantime, happy reading!

Archana Natarajan, Editor
archana@balamandir.org

CONTENTS

From the Editor's Desk

Madras Youth Choir Program

News Bytes

Teachers' Day Celebrations

Tree Planting at Vidyalyaya

Oration for Parents

Founder's Day

Excelling at Sports

Independence Day Celebrations

Miranda and Benedict's Ann

Kamaraj Day

Medical Day

Annual Day at Schools

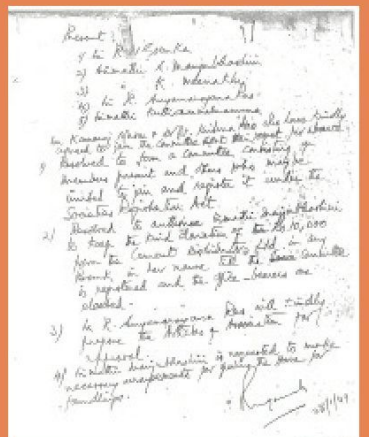
Children's Corner

Alumni Initiative

HR News

MADRAS YOUTH CHOIR PROGRAMMES

The Bala Mandir children who are part of the Madras Youth Choir's Junior Choir performed Week celebrations at the Madras Literary Society at DPL and Nataraj Park in T. Nagar.



repair, type-writing and electrical wiring; some girls are being trained in book-binding, creche course and as composers.

REHABILITATION THROUGH ADOPTION AND MARRIAGE

Apart from rehabilitation through careers, children are given in adoption to suitable couples. Several children have been happily absorbed into families.

Social rehabilitation through marriage has been successfully achieved in the case of several girls.

HOW EXPENSES ARE MET

The State and Central Governments Service Organisations and individual Donors in India and abroad all contribute. Some gifts come in kind; any help, small or big is welcome.



Sri Kamaraj with Children



BALA MANDIR

A child needs protection and a sense of security and child needs it even more. The role of Bala Mandir is to provide a parental roof, affection, education - in short a home.

It all started in a humble way. Twenty-five years ago, two foundlings came under the care of the late Gandhians. Bapu's ideals of service to the community translated into concrete shape, in a sphere where there was need. Over the years more than a thousand children have been born through these portals and found a new life which has been denied to them.

Bala Mandir is unique as a founding hospital and home which receives with warmth and open arms any infant under



Consolidation, Rebuilding and Renewal Years – 1996 to 2024

In 1993, Mr. Sethuram took over as President of Bala Mandir and continued till 2017 while VYG became the Treasurer, a post he held till his demise in 2013. In 1992, Sri Manoj Sonthalia, grandson of Sri Goenka became a trustee and continues till date ensuring continuity of policy and approach. Ms. K. Vedam – one other long-standing member who had helped transform the Carpentry unit – became the HGS after Manjumma's demise in 1996 for a short period. In 1997, Smt. Maya Gaitonde took over as HGS and continues to date. The first 15 years of this period were marked by a drive towards consolidation – putting in place processes and best practices. The activities were organized into groups, sub-committees were formed and quarterly review processes were introduced.

This period also coincided with the active support and participation of Braade Stiftung in the growth of Bala Mandir. The directors of this Denmark-based organisation, set up by P-H. Mortensen

for long-term support to Bala Mandir, visited Bala Mandir annually to take stock and approve the support plan for the next year. One of the first gifts by Braade Stiftung was the building in which the Industrial Training Centre (ITC) was set up in 1999. The Institute itself was named





after P-H Mortensen, and Fitting, Electrical and Carpentry trades were taught as per the government syllabus. The ITC was later closed in 2019 when Bala Mandir decided to focus more on children below 18 years of age. The main anchor person for the ITC and the Carpentry unit during this period was Smt. Punitha Ramalingam.

Over these years, Braade Stiftung has helped Bala Mandir add many new buildings and also strengthen its infrastructure by providing an annual grant for the maintenance of the building. Braade Stiftung sponsored the new building in Nagercoil which enabled the Nagercoil Home to expand its capacity in 2017. The annual visits of Braade Stiftung Board member in February of every year helps the Bala Mandir management team to look ahead and plan the next steps. Their team spends time with the children in all the units, and the visit culminates with a grand event called 'Friendship Day', which today involves other donors too.

The severe flooding of Bala Mandir in 2015 came as a wakeup call for the institution and exposed many of its infrastructural weaknesses. The overwhelming response to Bala Mandir's call for support to rebuild showed the strong goodwill and respect that the organisation enjoyed and that continues to date. The infrastructure review also exposed the problem with the 800-seater auditorium by the name 'Bala Mandir German Hall', which was built in 1978. It needed major refurbishment, but the project was not financially viable. After much deliberation, a decision was made to monetise the asset and enter into a joint venture to build an office complex, which would provide a steady stream of rental income and put the organisation's finances on a firmer footing, thereby enabling it to think of its future with renewed optimism and confidence.

Around the same time, discussions with the management of Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (MNC) led to the decision to bring it under the Bala Mandir umbrella. MNC had been running an Early Intervention Centre for children with special needs in the Bala Mandir premises since 1994 as a tenant. The values of both organisations were completely aligned. As part of this consolidation exercise, it was





also decided to merge the BMRF into Bala Mandir. These actions led to Bala Mandir emerging as a much larger and multispecialty childcare organisation in 2019 when it celebrated its 70th Anniversary.

The Bala Mandir School headcount has been on a decline for many years due to the change in community perception and shift in demand to more of English medium education. In response to this, Vidyalaya was converted to a full-fledged English medium primary school in 2015, and in 2020 the Tamil medium government-aided Bala Mandir Primary School was closed. Along with this, a long-term project for the re-engineering of the Schools has been launched, which will ultimately lead to Bala Mandir having an integrated English medium school from KG to Standard XII to provide the best quality education to the very needy section of the society, which includes the children living in the Bala Mandir Home.

The lockdowns following the global COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021 were a major challenge for all organisations, and Bala Mandir managed to weather this storm mainly

because of the organisational strength it had built in the prior years. The various activities of Bala Mandir adapted well to the pandemic by switching to online mode for learning and managing, including all its administrative processes and functions, which seamlessly shifted to the cloud server. The pandemic also created a crisis for thousands of children who lost their parents. The Bala Mandir team responded by finding ways to support these children in various other ways to ensure that the children overcome the setback and improve chances of their reaching full potential.

The result was a discovery of a novel way to support children who lost one or both parents but continue to live with their kith or kin. Kinship Care, the name given to the new programme, combines Bala Mandir's insight in running the Home for orphaned and destitute children and the educational units. It has over time spread to nine districts of Tamil Nadu and is supporting over 950 children in 14 districts of Tamil Nadu.



In the same way, BMRF's Early Childhood Care and Development project to support Anganwadis also grew and now covers 21 villages. The MNC unit has added the Jivikam unit for children above 6 years of age with special needs and is currently working with many other organisations and helping them by sharing best practices and scaling up the impact of their work.

Bala Mandir has been lucky to have the services of dedicated Members who have stayed immersed in the organisation and ensured its success. While following in Manjumma's footsteps, in the last 25 years, the HGS has brought in the professionalism needed to grow the organisation, in its multiple dimensions, and build a strong base for the future growth.

Bala Mandir – The Way Forward

As Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust celebrates its 75th anniversary, it looks forward with renewed commitment to its enduring principles. Established 75 years ago to offer shelter to unwanted children, the organization has had significant impact on the lives of thousands over the years. Bala Mandir now aims to cultivate an environment where every child, facing adversity, can unfold their full potential and become responsible contributors to society. The vision is no longer restricted to the children under the direct care of Bala Mandir. This shift in focus signifies not just the passage of time from 1949 but a profound evolution in the organisation's mission, highlighting that every child deserves an opportunity to flourish. In celebrating this milestone, Bala Mandir reiterates its unwavering dedication to actively nurturing each child's potential. This implies increased scale, social impact and sustainability.

Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust's 75-year journey is a testament to the enduring power of compassion and the positive impact a caring organization can have on the lives of children. This coffee table book serves as a tribute to the rich history, unwavering dedication and bright future of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust.





Chapter 2

Bala Mandir Children's Home

The Children's Home remains the core activity of Bala Mandir and is the very reason for its existence – very appropriately called the 'temple for the children'. The two foundlings who triggered the compassion of the founders were the first children admitted to Bala Mandir Home. Over the years, the home has sheltered thousands of children. The story of the Children's Home is deeply intertwined with the changing regulations related to the homes and how the various practices, which are its integral part, have evolved.

In the early days, the activities were referred as those of 'Foundling Hospital', which is an institution for the reception of foundlings, that is, children who had been abandoned and left for the public to find and save. A foundling hospital was not necessarily a medical hospital but more commonly a children's home, offering shelter and education to foundlings. Later such children were also referred as 'orphaned' children, and the word foundling is rarely used anymore. However, in Bala Mandir, one can still hear references to foundlings and the 'Hospital Block', which houses them – now renamed the Infant and Toddler Block.

Orphaned children are one of the most vulnerable groups. Like every other child, they too have rights and interests that need protection and special care. They are more likely to be exploited and abused when they go out into the world and hence require extra care in their upbringing. The Bala Mandir founders were also of the opinion that it is not enough to provide





1949

Bala Mandir
Home Starts



1958

Reception
Unit
Started



1963

Kitchen and
Dining Hall
building
completed



1975

Destitute
Home cottage
scheme started



1980

Transit
Home for
girls in
Chennai



1952

Main Block
completed



1961

Marriage
of Bala
Mandir girl



1968

Hospital
Block
extended



1977

German Hall
Added



1987

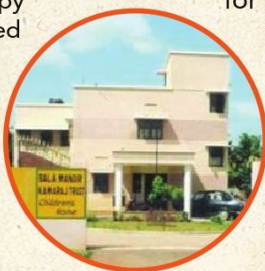
Transit Home
for babies in
Nagercoil





1988

Dental and
Physiotherapy
Clinic Started



2008

Life Skill class
for rehabilitated
children



2015

Big Floods
in Bala
Mandir.
Re-building
project
launched.



2017

New
Nagercoil
building
inaugurated



2020

Boys section
dining hall
constructed



1990

Nagercoil
Home starts



2014

I&T block
renovated
+ roof work
completed



2016

Kitchen and
Dining Hall
revamped



2019

Cultural
Centre
Inaugurated



2020

Landscape
improvement
project
launched





It is interesting to note that Indian Council for Child Welfare, New Delhi, was first formed in 1952 to protect the basic human rights of the child and to enhance its quality of life. The Tamil Nadu branch was started in 1953, with Smt. Manjubhashini (Manjumma) taking the lead as Founder Secretary and the State Health Minister as President. Thus, in the early days, Bala Mandir was at the core of the evolving regulation.



them with just food, shelter, clothing and education, but also love, a sense of belonging and purpose as well as a healthy environment for them to grow and develop like other children. This has remained the core philosophy of the Bala Mandir Homes.

One often reads about various problems reported in the management of Childcare Institutions. Most of the government regulations for the Homes are intended to address the commonly seen issues. Going above and beyond this, the Bala Mandir children get the best of facilities, and the children are truly happy and well cared for. This explains the impeccable record of the Children's Home in terms of adherence to statutory norms and regulatory requirements.

Reception Home

This is a Home for temporary stay of the children who are either found missing, abandoned or came to the Home due to parental neglect or their inability to care. The earlier nomenclature for this was Observation Home when it was started in 1958. These children always came in a very pathetic condition and needed constant care by nurses and doctors. All infants and toddlers entered the Bala Mandir Home through a welcome ceremony and where necessary, given a 'name'. Symbolically there used to be a cradle placed at the G.N. Chetty Road entrance, where the unwanted children could be left anonymously. The District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) initially known as the Juvenile Welfare

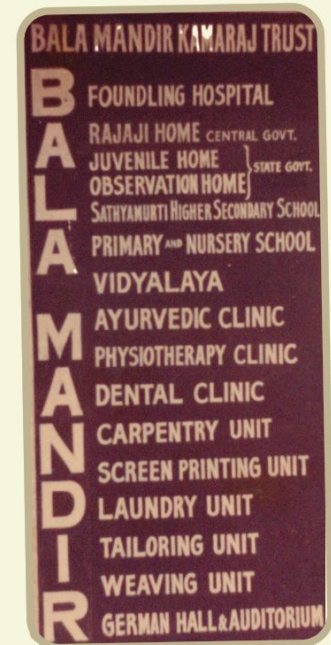


Board (JWB), an autonomous body under the Juvenile Justice Act, decides on the admission of children and their further placement in case there are no claimants.

Children Home

Those children who need to continue to stay in the Home as per the decision of CWC are moved under the category called Children Home (earlier called Juvenile Home). In these cases, the family visits the child regularly and can take them home for vacations and festivals. CWC decides on the tenure of the children's stay, which could range from 1 to 18 years.

For some years in between, there was a Central Government Cottage Scheme, which was called 'Rajaji Homes' under which the destitute children were admitted with a certificate of destitution issued by Tahsildar. The age of admission of the child was from 6 to 12 years. The scheme ended in 2004. Till 2012, there was a Foundling Home Scheme wherein children were admitted at the discretion of the management. Donors sponsored a child in Bala Mandir and their profiles and yearly reports of progress were sent. The children often had sponsors from West Germany through Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (DWH), as well as from the United States, Italy and India.



Adoption Home

Surrendered as well as abandoned children with no claimant are placed in Bala Mandir Adoption Home. Eligible families can adopt children from this Home after following the due process as prescribed by CARA (Central Adoption Regulatory Agency). In Bala Mandir, the adoption process started in the early years with 'Sweekaram ceremony'. Each case of adoption was well documented and formal approval for adoption was obtained from the Statutory Committee in Bala Mandir appointed for the same. More recently, older destitute children with no claimant, who have grown up in Bala Mandir can also go into adoption and/or foster care with CWC orders.

Adoption has always been accompanied by counselling and due follow-up in all cases. For the first four decades of Bala Mandir, adoption was slow and many orphan children had to continue to grow up in Bala Mandir. In 1997, after the introduction of new procedures, legal adoption has steadily grown and has seen many children happily absorbed into loving families across the country as well as abroad. It is always a happy occasion when adopted children and their families visit Bala Mandir after many years.



Government Grants and Sponsorship

Historically, Bala Mandir has worked closely with the central and state government and received grants for maintenance of the Home as per prevailing schemes. The scope of the grant has changed over time and now covers more areas than in the past. The grant process is very involved and needs a lot of documentation and paperwork. The norms have also been changing over time and the understanding of the guidelines also changes and needs a separate focus. There are separate rules for grant for Adoption unit and there is also a child corpus sum received when the child is given for adoption.

Apart from the grant, the other important source of funding for the Children's Home is the sponsorship of children's food. This practice has been in place from the very beginning. In the past, there were more of in kind donations of food materials, and now it is more of sponsorship of meals as per standard rates. The donors are allowed to serve the children and participate in the meals. Separate food booking slots are there for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner and each donor has a unique slot. Many families have kept in touch with Bala Mandir through generations due to this food sponsorship scheme.



Medical Plus Vinayaka Clinic

Dealing with the medical issues of the children has always been an important part of Bala Mandir activities. There has



always been a panel of doctors attached to the institution as visiting doctors, supported by Bala Mandir-employed nurses to take care of BM home children. The Home children have a regular annual health check-up covering all aspects of the child's health and for long there was a Physiotherapy Centre to help children who were physically handicapped and toddlers who had developmental delays in walking.

In the 1980s, the medical programme was opened up under the name Bala Mandir Vinayaka Clinic, to the staff as well as the nearby community and the large number of children who were attending Bala Mandir Educational institutions. The clinic had an eye department sponsored by Rajan Eye Care and a dental clinic run by Baskar Dental Foundation. In 1986, an ayurvedic clinic and dispensary was started, which is no longer functional. In 1991, the homeopathic clinic was set up by the late Dr. Koppikar and is still operational. Post pandemic, the Vinayaka clinic was fully closed down, but the health check-ups for the school children continue under the School Health Programme. The regular check-up and follow up for the Bala Mandir children also continues with twice a year check-up for infants and toddlers.

Infant & Toddler Block

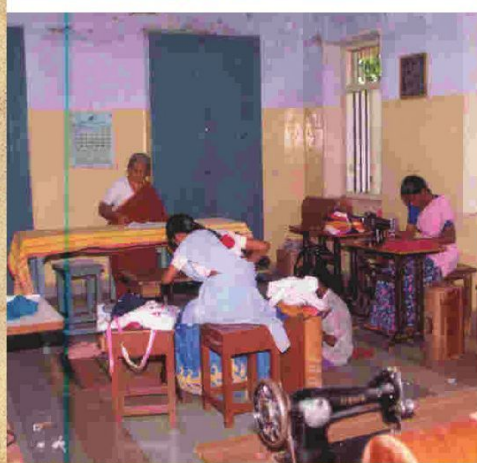
The Infant & Toddler (I&T) Block in the Chennai home is a unique place where there are a large number of babies and toddlers. The nature of functioning of the I&T Block poses many unique challenges. Everyone knows the challenges in dealing with babies in their first 12 months and toddlers up to 4 to 5 years. When there are 20 to 25 babies to manage together at any point of time in each age group, the situation becomes very complex. It is 24x7 work and one has to ensure that each child is given individual attention and stimulation for their development with



a high focus on hygiene. Full-time care givers have been difficult to employ post pandemic. However Bala Mandir has been lucky to have a core group of dedicated staff who left their homes and moved into Bala Mandir during the extended COVID lockdown when a bio bubble was created for the safety of the children.

The I&T Block tends to be the epicentre of the medical activities since the babies who are brought to Bala Mandir often tend to be in a fragile state with various health complications. Many a time, the doctors have to start without too much history or information and stabilising the child is often complex. The medical management is akin to running a children's hospital with daily check-ups and visits to the Children's Hospital or special test clinics, tracking of weight, height







and other parameters, ensuring immunisation shots are given as per schedule and most importantly ensuring good record keeping for future reference.

The Toddler section (above 1 year old) has a different set of challenges as does the KG section (above 3 years). Toilet training, self-feeding and dressing are some of the areas in which the children are trained. The processes for positively engaging and stimulating the children and tracking their development, and the various insights developed from the systematic study of the same by the Bala Mandir Research wing, have been well documented over the years and shared in the Network of Early Childcare and Development (ECCD) professionals. The infant or toddler growing up at home gets much of what it needs – however, almost all the children in the I&T block have encountered some form of trauma of rejection or abandonment very early in their lives but cannot tell you their 'story' and hence it takes time, love, care and stimulation for them to come out of it.

The Boys and Girls Block

The children from I&T Block move to the Boys or the Girls Sections when they are 6 years and have normally completed their UKG. They would have achieved a certain level of independence in their activities but would still need some help and guidance to become totally independent for the day-to-day routine and also to take care of their things. Here the children are organised by age/class and they join the older children in their daily routines, which includes morning prayers, celebration of festivals, attending formal schooling, evening playtime, homework time, night-time stories and sightseeing trips and cultural activities.



For over two decades now, there have been certain weekly routines in the home like the bhajans on Thursdays, value education class, and a separate schedule for the weekends that is marked by many special fun and learning activities. The older children have mentors from volunteer organisations who spend one-on-one time with them on Sundays. There are also programmes on foundational English that have become online and more systematic after the COVID-19 lockdown, when some of these processes were developed to engage with the children. Every festival is celebrated in a unique and traditional manner, and the stories related to these are explained to the children through well-scripted dramas and dances along with special songs that are performed class wise. These are featured regularly in the quarterly newsletter – ‘BM Connect’. Tailoring and cooking classes are also held for both boys and girls on a weekly basis. As part of their daily routine prayers in the morning, at food time and night, prayers have been introduced and more recently, the children are reminded everyday about their ‘pledges’.

During the summer and winter vacation, while the children with family go home, the remaining children have a special vacation schedule. The ‘Balu Sir’ (VYG) Summer Camp is conducted for 2 weeks in May wherein various arts, crafts and cultural activities are conducted. Various outings are planned to give the children an opportunity to visit places and understand things around them. During the winter vacation, the children have a class wise excursion and visit five places





of worship where the children are exposed to the salient features of various religions, go on a tour of Chennai, visit Dakshin Chitra to appreciate monuments and go on an excursion.

The Nagercoil Home

The Nagercoil Home is only for girls and here the admission policy is for children above 5 years. This Home started operating from 1990, and in 2002 moved into its current location in Irulappapuram where the first

building came up in 2004 and an additional new building in 2017, both with the support of Braade Stiftung. Most of the children admitted to this Home have a family and the children go home for vacation. The Home has a capacity of 75 children and follows all the regulations and guidelines as specified by the Department of Social Defence. While the Chennai Home children mostly attend the Bala Mandir School which is in the same location, the Nagercoil girls attend outside schools. Most of the girls attend the government school and some go to a private CBSE school with the support of one of the members. The processes followed in the Nagercoil Home in terms of the daily routine, the celebration of festivals and other routines are similar to the Chennai Home and are based on mutually discussed best practices developed over the years.

Rehabilitation

The successful rehabilitation of the children is the final goal of any childcare institution (CCI) and Bala Mandir is very conscious of this responsibility towards society. The ultimate objective of rehabilitation is to reintegrate children into family settings whenever possible. Efforts are made to reconnect them to their families and in the absence of this, other options such as foster care and adoption are also explored.

The final rehabilitation for most children who grew up in CCI happens after the age of 16 or 18. In some cases, they are sent to other institutions that offer higher education possibilities. In other cases, they go to their guardian's home where a relative takes responsibility for them. In such cases, Bala Mandir has a Home Sponsorship scheme under which it provides financial support to the children after they leave Bala Mandir. This scheme, which started in 1999, includes an annual review process and home visit to check on the children. Parents are normally encouraged

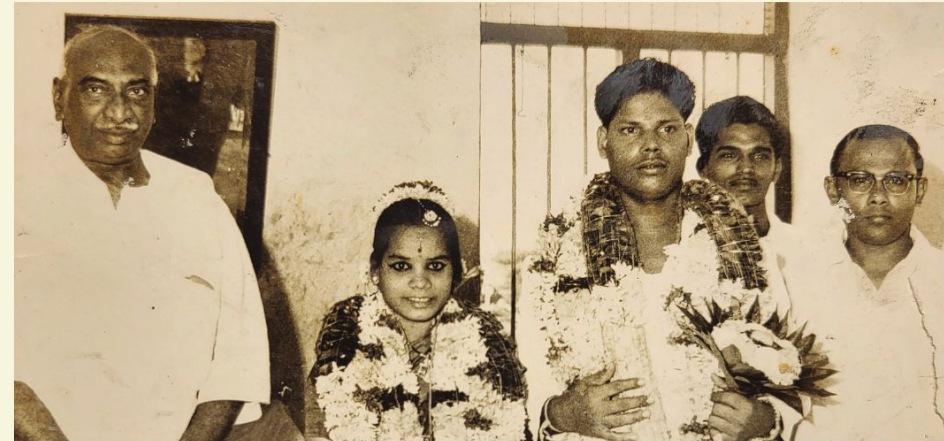




to take their children back after completion of Standard X so that the adjustment back with the family is easier. The journey of rehabilitation goes beyond providing necessities and supporting education; it encompasses comprehensive support systems aimed at restoring the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of these young individuals. The children are prepared over the years for rehabilitation and taught various skills and given various relevant inputs.

Marriage

Bala Mandir has been helping its senior orphan girls to find suitable life partners and start their own homes and families within the mainstream of society. Adolescent children are given training in household skills, such as cooking, tailoring and shopping to help prepare them for family life.



Prospective partners are chosen after careful screening, visits to the home and meeting with parents and relatives of the bridegroom. The girls are counselled about married life and other responsibilities. The marriage is finalised after the girl and the boy meet and they mutually agree. The marriage ceremony is performed in a simple, but traditional manner.



The young couples are provided with a basic trousseau and household essentials to help them start their married life. Donors and well-wishers have helped to sponsor marriages through generous contributions in cash and kind, with gifts such as cupboards, vessels, sarees, etc.

Role of the Social Workers

The social workers play a very important role in the running and the management of the Home. They are involved in all aspects of the child's development. An individual child plan is drawn up for each child and the visits by parents are closely monitored. Visits are also made to the child's homes to assess the situation so that an optimal decision can be made for each child. These processes are more recently supported by an in-house developed software that enables the data of each child to be tracked and updates made on incidents, medical and other issues so that these can be analysed over time to plan initiatives for improvement. The social workers also provide counselling for the children and track their overall performance including academic performance. They also interact with the CWC and Department of Social Defence (DSD) officials to take decisions on rehabilitation and complete all statutory reporting. The Superintendent of the Home oversees the work of all the Social Workers, House mothers and fathers, caregivers and helpers in all the Children's Home.

Common Facilities – Kitchen, Dining Hall and Cultural Centre

The Kitchen and the Dining Hall are important centres of activities. Over time, the Kitchen facilities have been modernised, and the kitchen is today run in a professional way. This change happened during the COVID-19 pandemic when it became a challenge to operate and manage the kitchen internally. The Dining Hall is a flexible general-purpose hall wherein the weekly bhajans and other festival events are also held. After the demolition of German Hall, a Cultural Centre that was built in 2019 above the Dining Hall, is a 200-seater air-conditioned



auditorium with the best of Sound and other electronic systems for hosting the Bala Mandir Home events including those of the other Bala Mandir units like the Schools, MNC, BMRRC and Kinship.

Way Forward

Bala Mandir Homes play a very important role in society, especially when it comes to the services to vulnerable children under 6 years of age, a space in which there are perhaps no other equivalent organisation. This activity is expected to continue in the future with better processes for improved quality of care and capacity to handle more children as needed.

For older children, the debate on admission policy and rehabilitation strategy is ongoing. On the one hand, while a childcare institution – with its structured environment, educational opportunities, professional care, access to resources and peer interaction – provides many advantages for the child growing up in it, it does suffer from the challenges of lack of individual attention, potential stigma of growing up in institutional care, separation from biological family and bureaucratic processes. As the government refines its policies concerning the role of childcare institutions, Bala Mandir finds itself at a crucial juncture, necessitating a thoughtful re-evaluation of its approach towards older children keeping in mind the larger picture of improving social impact and scale in a sustainable manner.

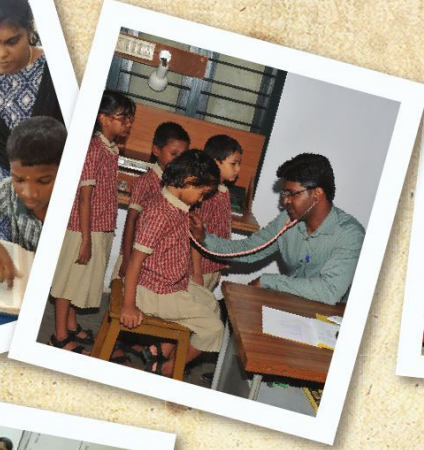
Bala Mandir Chennai Home is in a low-lying area and hence prone to flooding and the maximum impact of this is always felt in the Block for



Girls, which is the oldest building. It is necessary to think afresh on the future needs and upgrade the infrastructure in line with the evolving future needs for both the children below 6 years as well as the older children.

Bala Mandir is committed to not only preparing its children for the dynamic world they are inheriting but also to instilling and preserving core values of life. Striking this delicate balance is essential for ensuring the holistic development of character and nurturing individuals who contribute positively as responsible citizens, both to our nation and the global community.





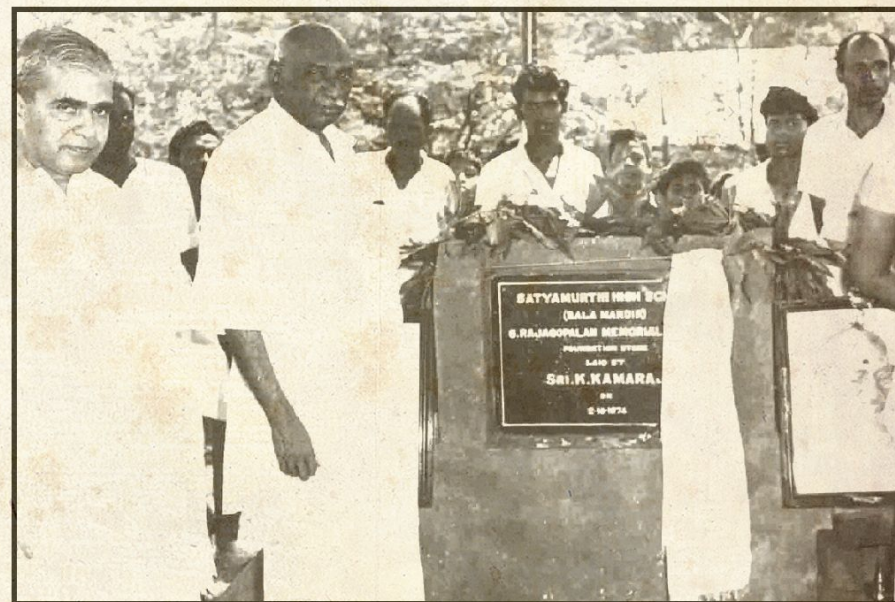
Chapter 3

Bala Mandir Schools

The story of Bala Mandir schools is closely linked to the evolution of the Bala Mandir Home for children in Chennai. In 1949, Bala Mandir started with two foundlings and when it was time for them to start education, Bala Mandir started setting up the schools that were also extended to the children of the nearby community. The first Bala Mandir school was the Nursery School which started in 1951 followed by the Primary school in 1956. These two were later merged into what became known as Bala Mandir Primary School (BMPS). This was a Tamil medium school, and it was set up with the support of the government. This school was constructed on the original land allotted to Bala Mandir for the 'Foundling Hospital'. In 1961, when it was time for the High school to be set up, it was called the Satyamurthi High School (SMHS) after the freedom fighter Sri S. Satyamurthi who was Sri Kamaraj's mentor. It started with just five children and three teachers.

Satyamurthi High School (SMHS)

In 1960, the government allotted the current school land to Bala Mandir for playground purposes, and in 1963, they changed the purpose for building a school. The school started in thatched buildings and later a proper building was constructed. This building remains to date and is referred to as Building 1, which is now used for some of the common activities. The current main SMHS school building came up in 1976 and





1951

Nursery
School starts



1961

Satyamurthi
High school
(SMHS)
starts



1974

Primary school
building
foundation
stone laid



1978

Primary school
building
inaugurated



1988-89

Higher
Secondary
classes started



1956

Elementary
School
started
(BMPS)



1963

Land
allotted for
the school



1976

SMHS
building
completed



1984-85

Vidyalaya
section
for Home
children



1989

Additional
floor added on
Building 1



1989-90

English medium classes started in High school



1994

New Prakasam street building for Vidyalaya classes



2009

Primary school moved to Prakasam street



2013

Vidyalaya becomes an independent school & Montessori introduced



2022

English medium Higher secondary classes started



1993

Day Care Centre started



2004

Noon meal centre building added



2012

Primary school moved to SMHS location



2020

Vidyalaya moved into earlier ITC building



2023

SMHS renamed as "Bala Mandir Satyamurthi School"





the Rajagopalan Hall was added in 1978 along with the first floor. An additional floor was added to Building 1 in 1989 when it was referred to as the Higher Secondary Block. In 2004, the noon meal buildings and the toilets were added.

The Bala Mandir schools have always catered to the needs of the orphan and destitute children of Bala Mandir and the children from the socio-economically deprived strata of society of the nearby slums. The Government of Tamil Nadu recognised the schools and extended aid for the teacher's salary. Bit by bit from thatched sheds to tin roofs and finally to concrete buildings, the schools were built – a yeoman effort, considering that no financial support could be expected from the parents. The early years witnessed the struggle of teachers and management to enthuse and encourage children to complete education at least up to Standard X.

The primary and high schools were always in two separate locations in the Bala Mandir complex with little or no contact on a regular basis between teachers and children except at common functions of Bala Mandir such as Teachers'

Day, Children's Day, Independence Day, Founder's Day, Kamaraj Day, Bala Mandir Anniversary, etc. Administratively, while the Bala Mandir management was common to both, departmentally the Education authorities were different for the two – Directorate of Elementary Education and Director of School Education.

Over the years, a large number of children from the nearby urban slum community joined the educational units and at one point there were more than 1,200 children studying in the schools. There was always a close connect with the community around, and even now the parents of the children in the school speak at meetings of having themselves studied in Bala Mandir schools. To engage the many adolescents who were less inclined towards academics, a series of vocational training units were added starting with the Carpentry Unit in 1962 followed by Laundry and Screen Printing to provide employable skills for the youth. Later the vocational skill unit became a full-fledged Industrial Training Centre. All these activities have since been closed due to various reasons.



To aid the pursuit of higher education of the children, in 1987, SMHS was upgraded to Higher Secondary which was also in Tamil medium with Government Aid. However, in 2012, the Higher Secondary classes had to be suspended due to a drop in demand. In 1989, the High School added a self financed English medium section in response to the growing aspirations of the community.

Bala Mandir Primary School (BMPS)

For many years, BMPS was located inside the Bala Mandir main complex in a building on the Gurudwara Road. The foundation stone for this building was laid by Sri K. Kamaraj in 1974 and it was inaugurated in 1978 by Sri M. G. Ramachandran – two stalwarts for whom care for the needy and providing education for them were close to their hearts. The Madhuram Narayanan Centre (MNC) classes for special children were located on the first floor of this building while the primary school was on the ground floor. This building was demolished in 2009 when it developed cracks. In 2009, after the demolition of its building, the primary school was shifted to a building on Prakasam Road building where 'Vidyalaya School' classes were earlier in operation, and the MNC operations shifted to Building 1 in SMHS complex. Later in 2012, BMPS and MNC switched places with BMPS shifting to the Building 1 and MNC to Prakasam Street where it remains till date.



Day Care Centre (DCC)

In 1993, the Day Care Centre or Crèche was started in the ground floor of the building constructed as an extension to BMPS. The Crèche admitted children from the age of 6 months onwards and also catered to the Bala Mandir's KG children. These toddlers were provided milk – a programme supported by Action Children Aid, Denmark, for many years. They also provided for nutritive lunch and snacks as well as educational inputs. All the



staff were trained Bala Sevikas and Crèche workers. The DCC was started due to the growing concern over the dropout rate in high school among girl children who were being kept back at home to care for younger siblings. It also brought great relief to the working mothers as well as the destitute women who needed work. At one point, there were over 300 children in the age group 6 months to 6 years and the curriculum was based on the SPRUC concept of the developmental 'Learning through Play' Calendars and programmes. The DCC also acted as a model centre for the ongoing Parenting Projects undertaken by the Bala Mandir Research Foundation (now BMRRF).

'Vidyalaya' School

In 1984, 'Vidyalaya' was established as an exclusive bilingual primary school for the children of the Bala Mandir Home. Strong foundational skills in Maths and Science were taught in English, whereas Social Studies was taught in Tamil. This school was initially operating from a building that was behind the current Boys' Block, which was later demolished. It then moved to the first floor of the newly constructed extension to the BMPS building. It was not a registered school, and the students were considered as part of Section C of BMPS.

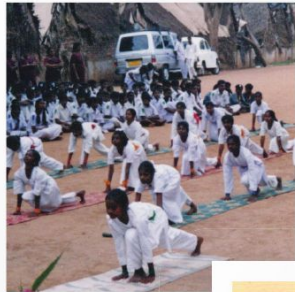


In 1990, P-H Mortensen during his visit suggested that he would like to give Bala Mandir a school building, and it was decided that the same would be built next to the old Bala Mandir Boys Home which was earlier built by him and named after his wife Gerda Mortensen. The foundation stone for the building was laid by P-H Mortensen in the year 1991 and the building was inaugurated after



his demise, in 1994 by Braade Stiftung Board member Patricia Tubog. This building has since been named P-H Mortensen Block and now houses the activities of MNC.

Keeping in mind the growing aspirations of the urban slum community, in 2014 Vidyalaya English Medium Nursery and Primary School was formalised as an independent school. This was welcomed by the community and the admission has been steadily growing since then. This initiative was supported by Saint-Gobain Indian Foundation from the very start. Their support has since grown to cover the English medium classes in High School also. Vidyalaya initially started operating in the erstwhile DCC building on the Gurudwara Road. In 2020, after the Vocational Training Centre was closed, the internals of the building was modified and, Vidyalaya moved to its current location. This building is named as 'Braade Stiftung' building in honour of the original donor.







Bala Mandir School Status

The total headcount of students in the Tamil Medium Bala Mandir schools had been dropping from 2010 onwards in both primary and high school due to various reasons. The shift of a large block of the slums from around Bala Mandir to Kannaginagar and the increasing parental demand for an English Medium accelerated the trend. Bala Mandir Vidyalaya offers the children living in the nearby area an excellent opportunity to study in a high-quality English medium school at very low fees. Bala Mandir is investing in best practices and offering children the best opportunity for quality education. It is also trying to involve the parents in the process to ensure a steady partnership and involvement in the child's education.

One of the unique features of Vidyalaya is the 'Inclusion' programme, which admits and supports children with special needs. This process of inclusion has evolved over many years of working from 2006 onwards

when the first special educator started working in Bala Mandir. Now a specialist group from Bala Mandir partner organisation, KARE monitors this activity, and the children are provided with various therapy inputs as needed. Shadow teachers help the children with the learning support. This helps mainstream the special needs children and gives them an opportunity to cope with academics. After the primary schools, the children who are not able to continue in the mainstream schools, go to other special schools for pre-vocational and other inputs.

In 2019, the Bala Mandir team decided to integrate the concepts of the Montessori pedagogy and the mainstream Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) teaching methodologies in the kindergarten. After consulting various experts and careful planning, the new methodology was implemented with excellent results. This continues to date and KG children spend 50% of their time in Montessori environment and 50% in regular classes with well thought out and fine-tuned processes to bring the best of both worlds.



Bala Mandir believes in holistic development of children. In addition to academics, importance is given to arts, music, yoga and other extracurricular activities. In both schools, the various activities and competitions are organised under four houses named after the four legends – Gandhi, Kamaraj, Satyamurthi and Manjubhashini. Celebration of festivals from all the religions have been made a part of the curriculum to help the children understand Indian culture and appreciate secular values. Yoga is regularly taught to the students and is part of the weekly activity, as are also Scouts, Road Safety Patrol, etc. Value education and Health education are taught with activities and a well-designed syllabus. Arts and crafts have always been a very important part of school activity. This





was initially integrated into the curriculum through an initiative with Nalanda Way. In the same way, focus on reading/library and spoken English have been given special emphasis.

Breakfast and lunch are provided to the children every day and if there are extra classes in the evenings then evening snacks and tea are also provided. The high school has arrangements for mid-day meals under the government scheme, whereas the Primary school food expenses are sponsored by donors.

Bala Mandir is working with AhaGuru, Learning Links Foundation, Bhumi, KARE and many such organisations to provide best of educational inputs to the children. The school has large playgrounds to support sports and has over the years won many prizes in sports competitions. Bala Mandir is also working with 'Enabling Leadership', Victory Sports, Madras

Youth Choir and other such organisation to support its extracurricular activities.

School Reengineering

With a view to transform the school, in 2020, a 'school reengineering' programme was launched, which focuses on transforming the current schools and providing the best quality and holistic English medium education to the needy children of Bala Mandir and the nearby community. This Reengineering Task Force, consisting of Trustees, Members, Headmistresses and teachers visited many schools including the Isha Schools and Eureka Schools belonging to AhaGuru. Both institutions have developed very innovative ways of teaching the first-generation learners. Following an agreement, AhaGuru is now providing



their proprietary teaching methodology to train Bala Mandir teachers and suggest improvements for Standards I to V.

When the headcount in BMPS dropped sharply in the year 2020-2021, a difficult decision was taken to close down BMPS. The remaining nine teachers were transferred to other aided schools and the few students left were accommodated in Vidyalaya in English medium. Various changes are also happening in SMHS. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, the Bala Mandir school teachers engaged with the children online and through various innovative initiatives. An innovation lab by name Vikalpa Lab was set up in the school in 2021 and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) related teaching started. This lab is now sponsored and supported by Boeing Company.

Bala Mandir introduced Khan Academy Maths in the year 2017. The computer lab is now strengthened, and smart boards have been added in classes to make digital learning part of the regular curriculum. To engage the children in a better way, Saturday is made a working day, which enables the school to take up the various extracurricular activities without impacting the core educational activities. Higher secondary classes in English medium have been started in 2022-2023.

Way Forward

Since the number of students in high school Tamil medium has also dropped, the plan going forward is to move from a 'government aided' school to become a 'private' school offering the best quality

education, without change in the fees policy to help support the very needy section of the society. This change will give the school good flexibility to adopt the best methodology and transform its processes. The Primary classes, High school and Higher Secondary are now being viewed as part of an integrated school. In line with this thinking, a plan has been worked out to build additional floors on the SMHS building to accommodate all classes from Pre-KG to higher secondary classes along with the best of the support facilities including computer and science labs and an auditorium for school activities. The school's name has also been changed to 'Bala Mandir Satyamurthi School', which will in future be an integrated private school catering to the children staying in Bala Mandir Home as well as the urban slum community around.





Chapter 4

Bala Mandir MNC

The Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children (MNC) is an Early Intervention Centre for children with intellectual disabilities and associated conditions like Cerebral Palsy, Down's Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and other metabolic disorder conditions. The start-up story of MNC is unique. A stroke of destiny is how one can describe three people who came together for a research project to bring technology into education that led to the establishment of MNC:

- Professor P. Jeyachandran who had presented the Madras Project (1968–1971) wanted to develop a programme in Early Intervention for children aged below 6 years with intellectual disability.
- Air Vice Marshal V. Krishnaswamy, an electronics engineer, and his wife Smt. Jaya Krishnaswamy, a mainstream educator and a qualified special educator, had a deep desire to work for children with special needs.
- Sri N. Kumar, who headed Indchem Research & Development Laboratory (IDRL), which was at the cutting edge of multimedia technology, came forward to support the research and develop the programme for the purpose.



The result was the development of an Early Intervention Programme, based on the Portage programme, which was originally created in Portage Wisconsin with an aim to provide services to young children with disabilities by developing and using early intervention systems. The programme, adapted to suit the cultural milieu of our country, was a result of intense research and constant interactions with experts in the field as well as the learnings from parents and grandparents about the rearing of children and their observations in the child's growth patterns.



Thus, in September 1989, the programme with its modules, aptly named Upanayan, meaning 'to lead along', was born. The modules consist of 250 discrete behavioural skills with fifty in each of the five developmental areas of motor, self-help, language, cognition and socialisation. The programme serves as both an assessment tool and an intervention curriculum. The first phase in Upanayan was aimed at the age group of 0-2 years to catch them young and early enough for detecting their disabilities and providing early intervention services, thereby preventing the occurrence of secondary disabilities in them. The programme for children in the age group of 2+ to 6 years followed soon after. Field testing was carried out at seven centres for the workability and suitability of the activities. Centres in Tirunelveli, Alwaye, Trichy and Hyderabad adopted it at once. Buoyed by the fact that people expressed a felt need to use the programme, it was decided to establish a Research cum Demonstration Centre at Chennai.

Indchem came forward to fund the centre, and it was named 'Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children'

after the mother of Sri N. Kumar and Sri N. Sankar of Sanmar Group. The unit was formally launched on 12 December 1989, the birthday of Smt. Madhuram Narayanan. The Upanayan Early Intervention Programme was formally released and dedicated to the nation by St. Teresa at Kolkata.

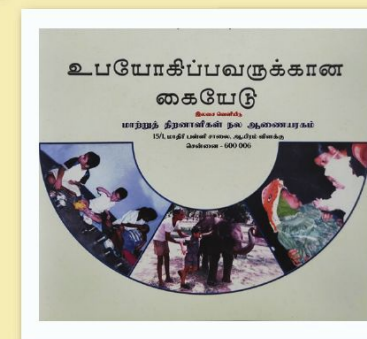
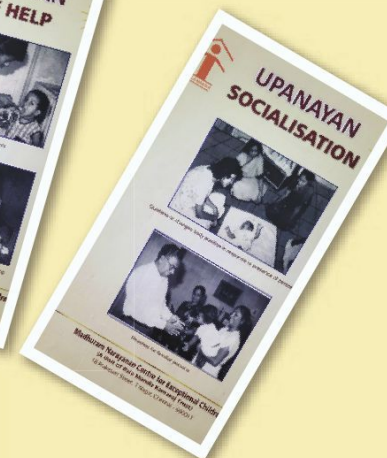
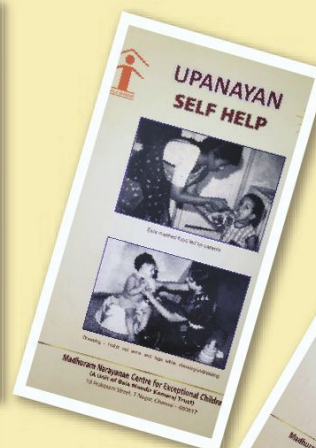
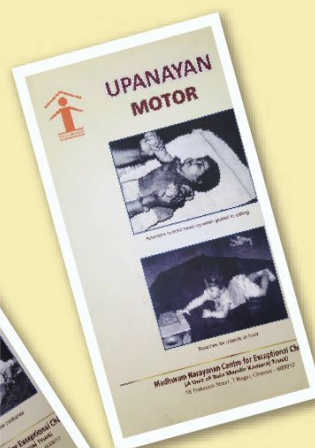
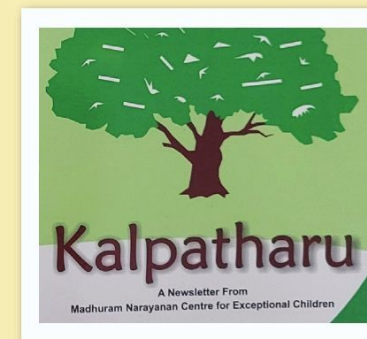
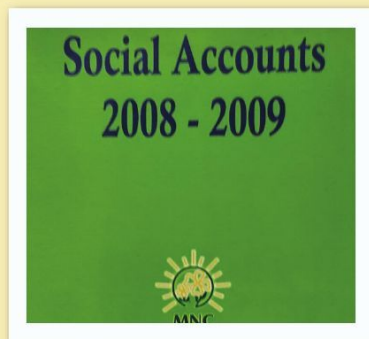
Under the able guidance of Prof. P Jeyachandran, in consultation with inter-disciplinary experts, and with Smt. Jaya Krishnaswamy taking on the responsibility of authoring the programme, the project began to take shape. MNC blossomed over the years establishing itself as a credible organisation in the field of early intervention with recognition from both the State Government of Tamil Nadu and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India.

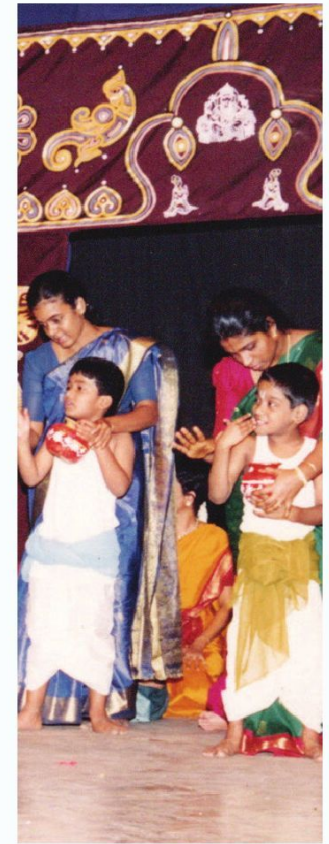
Along the way, MNC added special projects to strengthen the Early Intervention Programme and make it more holistic. One important aspect that was unique to MNC is parental involvement. MNC considers mothers to be natural teachers, and hence they needed them to be trained in



the programme so they can be the carry-over agents back at home to ensure that the skills learned by the children are translated into activities of daily living. Upanayan is supported by the software named Upaneeta, which helps in the documentation of every child and also evaluates the development progress made by the child on a quarterly and on an annual basis. Today, the programme has been updated and is available on cloud platform and has drastically minimised the paperwork.

In 2004, Annapoorna was initiated, which took care of the nutritional deficiency of the children and mothers by giving supplementary food at the centre, one item every day. The Sanmargam (good direction) came up in 2007 to identify children with better cognition and train them for mainstreaming. Sambhavam was launched in 2012 – an experiential learning where the children were taken out to public places to experience real-life situations and claim their place in the society. Samyam was started in 2013, which brought the alumni, present students and the new children together for mutual interaction and exchange of ideas between parents.







In 2010, MNC was selected by the State Commissioner for Differently Abled, Government of Tamil Nadu, to implement Upanayan programme in all of the District Early Intervention Centres and also be a mentor by conducting refresher courses to all the Special Educators/Therapists at these early intervention centres on an annual basis. So far ten such refresher courses have been conducted and the staff at these centres are being trained on the various projects connected with the programme implementation. In addition, the department of Differently Abled selected MNC to run the Autism Centre at their State Resource Centre located in K.K. Nagar, Chennai.

MNC identified the need to offer courses in special education and to expand the population of special educators, and for this in 2013, MNC was given accreditation by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) to conduct a one-year diploma course in Early Childhood Special Education (MR) named AVMVK Training Academy. So far fifty-eight students have successfully passed with distinction and a significant aspect has been that 53% have been mothers of MNC children, and the course equipped them better to help their children and empowered them to pursue a career.

To disseminate knowledge and also to share best practices with the other organisations in the field, MNC has so far conducted seventeen National workshops and six International conferences. These workshops have been conducted by both national and international experts from the field and have been felicitated as a platform for updating knowledge and sharing the latest happenings in the field (the strategies and techniques being implemented).

For self-evaluation of systems and also to know the social impact, MNC subjected itself to a social audit by an independent organisation called the Social Accounting & Audit Network, UK. MNC has so far completed six cycles of social audit and the accounts have been published.



In 2017–2018, MNC started the SUPA (Socially Useful Productive Activity) to support children with multiple disabilities who neither could be mainstreamed nor were able to attend other special schools on completion of their early intervention programme. Since many parents were requesting MNC to start a special school for those children who were not able to get into mainstream schools, in 2020, MNC started a skill development programme named 'Jivikam' (source of life). Jivikam is intended to help the child who has completed the early intervention programme with special education and prevocational training to become a self-sustaining earning member of the community.

Integration with Bala Mandir

In 1994, MNC moved into the Bala Mandir complex as a tenant. Initially, it was operating from the first floor of the primary school building, which was inside Bala Mandir, and later from Building 1 of the High School complex before finally moving in 2012 to the current location in Prakasam Street.

In 2018, MNC was integrated with Bala Mandir and became its unit. Both the organisations benefit from each other's experience in early childhood and also their organisational processes and related



strengths. The combined strength of the two organisations is able to help the needy children in many ways including better inclusion programmes in schools and research studies in related fields to measure impact, share best practices and become a centre of excellence. The integration of MNC into Bala Mandir coincided with the construction of a second floor on top of the P-H Mortensen building in which MNC had been operating since 2012. The adjoining Gerda Mortensen block was also added to the MNC operations to house the proposed expansion of the activities of the unit.

Like Bala Mandir, MNC has also had the benefit of dedicated members who have helped shape the organisation over many years. Besides the founders Smt. Jaya Krishnaswamy and Mr. N. Kumar who continue to support and guide the organisation, Sri S. Krishnan, since the start of his involvement in 2007, has helped professionalise all the processes and set a clear direction for the future. Another key person is Smt. Vimala Kannan, who joined as the first special educator and Principal in 1989 and continues to guide the team.

Way Forward

The 34-year journey of MNC has been a rewarding one, and it has emerged as a 'Model Intervention Centre' for intellectual disability and a mentor for many centres providing such services. Post the integration with Bala Mandir, the unit has extended its services to older children through the Jivikam programme and is well set to create a wider social impact by working with a wider group of organisations and supporting more children directly and indirectly.

1987

Research on
Upanayan



1994

MNC
moved into
Bala Mandir
complex



2004

Annapoorna
Started



2011

Sambhavam
Program
Started



2018

MNC became
a unit of Bala
Mandir



1989

MNC
Inaugurated



2003

First
International
Conference



2007

Sanmargam
Program
Started



2012

AVMVK
Academy
Started



2020

Jivikam Program
started





Chapter 5

Bala Mandir Research & Resource Centre

In 1983, the Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust management felt a need for conducting research on issues related to the operations of Bala Mandir viz. foundling, destitute, orphans, handicapped and mentally retarded children. As was the normal practice in those days, they decided to set up an independent entity named 'Bala Mandir Research Foundation (BMRF)'. This separate registered society soon got all necessary approvals, including income tax exemption under section 80G and approval under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

In 1989, BMRF was recognised as a scientific research organisation by DSIR (Department of Science and Industrial Research), which enabled the donors to receive 100% tax exemption when they donated to BMRF projects. During that period, the research was focused on alternative treatments including Ayurvedic drugs combined with counselling and psychotherapy. However, in 1997, after its partnership with the Hincks-Dellcrest Centre, Toronto, BMRF increasingly moved out of formal scientific research on Ayurvedic drugs, patents, etc., into the field of social sciences, focusing on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD).

The complete scope of BMRF's partnership with Hincks-Dellcrest included Parenting and Early Childhood Development based on Learning Through Play Calendar (LTPC), in partnership with NGOs in India. The LTPC resources were so powerful that BMRF slowly changed its focus to 'parenting' on ECCD and





the related psycho-sociological issues. It led to extensive promotion of the LTPC tools, developing new tools to go with this and its expanded usage through publications, seminars and training programmes, which spread across the country bringing in a new network of partners who were interested in this field.

Even though BMRF was an independent entity, it remained closely linked to Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust. The unit was housed inside Bala Mandir and used the common facilities with many common members and office bearers. Its area of work was also closely linked to Bala Mandir activities, and they also shared a common name. Hence the legal merger of BMRF into Bala Mandir in 2017–2018 did not have any impact on its work, which continued as before. The merger was just an operational convenience.

BMRF ECCD Parenting Programmes – Based on the LTP Resources

The 'Learning through Play' (LTP) Calendar tools were originally developed for the 'Parents Helping Parents' programme in the mid-eighties in Toronto and were based on the work undertaken with very poor and deprived communities in Nigeria, Africa, by Bea Aschem. Bea Aschem confirmed through research that psycho-social stimulus is as vital an input as nutritional inputs for the healthy growth and development of the child. Based on these findings, the LTPC tool was developed and further expanded in Toronto by Hincks-Dellcrest and Toronto Public Health, resulting in the LTP Calendars for children from birth to 3 years and 3 to 6 years. These calendars that were originally in English had been translated into various languages including Spanish, French, Vietnamese, Somali, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Tamil, Punjabi and Portuguese to cater to the growing immigrant population in Canada. The calendars feature multi-racial pictures with messages.

In the past 26 years, the tool has been put to effective use by BMRF in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and childcare professionals and educational institutions. BMRF translated the tools into various languages, including Tamil, Kannada, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi. The translation was done by a team of experts and field tested through community-based programmes conducted by NGOs before printing. This needed many years of meticulous working.



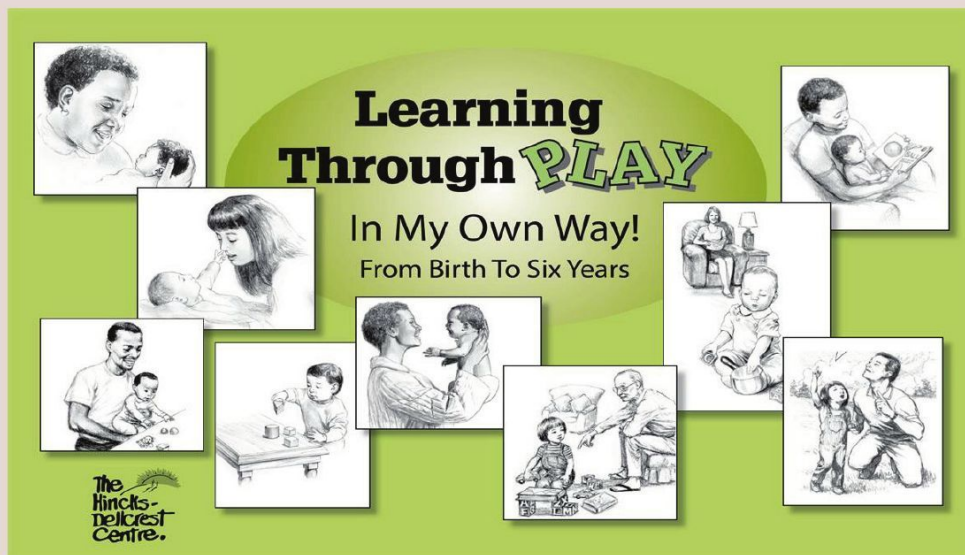
The LTP programme was first introduced within the Bala Mandir institution for the children below 6 years and the Parenting Calendars were used to train Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) personnel. The project spanned a range of critical issues, including institutional care, ECCD healthcare and Learning Through Play in the early years of education. When Bala Mandir established a Day Care Centre for children from neighbouring urban slums, parenting became an essential part of its work through the home visitors programme, which continues to this day.

In these early years, BMRF with the guidance of Late Dr. S. Anandalakshmy and Late Dr. Jayam, and with a resource team consisting of Hema Sreenivas, Lakshmi Gopal, Dr. Indu Balagopal, and Maya Gaitonde collaborated with other NGOs working in ECCD, health and nutrition area that led to the creation of the Network for Information on Parenting (NIP) in 1999, an all India body of which BMRF is the secretariat.

Over time, the training programmes were further enriched to include other important aspects of early childhood, including brain development and holistic child development leading to many adaptations of LTPC made to suit the specific needs:

- In 2002, LTPC (from birth to 3 years) was indigenised into a flip chart with visuals suitable to south India through a United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)-sponsored programme and in partnership with ICDS-Tamil Nadu. The flip chart was distributed to 30,000 Anganwadi centres. In September 2022, the booklet was revised and





reprinted by ICDS-Tamil Nadu for distribution to its 55,000 Anganwadi centres.

- In 2002, Usha Ramakrishnan, Member of BMRF, undertook a collaborative research project with Vidya Sagar, an organisation working with children and adults with special needs leading to the development of the 'Accepting Diversity' (ADLTPC) for parenting special needs children. It was used by many special educators, NGOs and educational institutions. In 2008–2010, the ADLTPC underwent a professional review in Canada by Hincks-Dellcrest and special educators across Canada and took a new form called IMOW (In My Own Way).
- In 2006, MSCERT (Maharashtra State Council of Education Research & Training) under the Sarva Siksha Abhyas Programme



indigenised the LTPC with visuals representative of north India and distributed to 20,000 Balwadi centres in Maharashtra.

- The Child Observation Record was enhanced from five to seven developmental domains of IMOW in partnership with Nipissing District Developmental Screening tool.
- BMRF developed a toy manual that explains play materials and methods of play based on LTPC SPRUC (sense of Self, Physical, Relationship, Understanding, and Communication) domains of development.
- In 2010, the training projects undertaken by BMRF helped to formulate a guidebook on 'Joy of Parenting' to accompany the LTPC.



The Research Projects

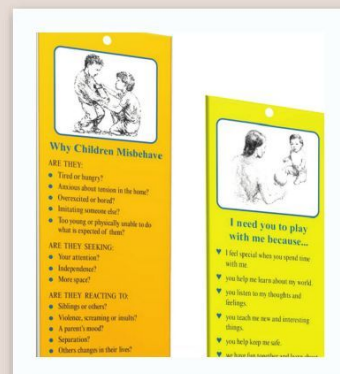
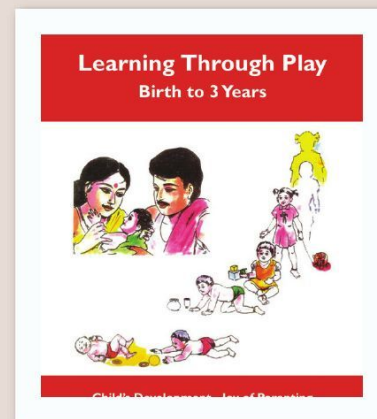
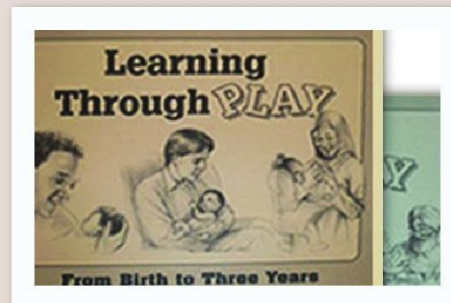
The strength of BMRF is its documentation, research and analysis of the situation of children, and the enhancement and dissemination of effective parenting and childcare practices. Over the years, BMRF has taken up several research projects in its area of work. These included many studies to check the effectiveness of LTPC and other resources that BMRF has developed in the area of early childhood development. A few studies have been conducted on the impact of effective parenting of young children and tracing the impact of changes in institutional care programmes and those of field workers on parents in the community they serve.

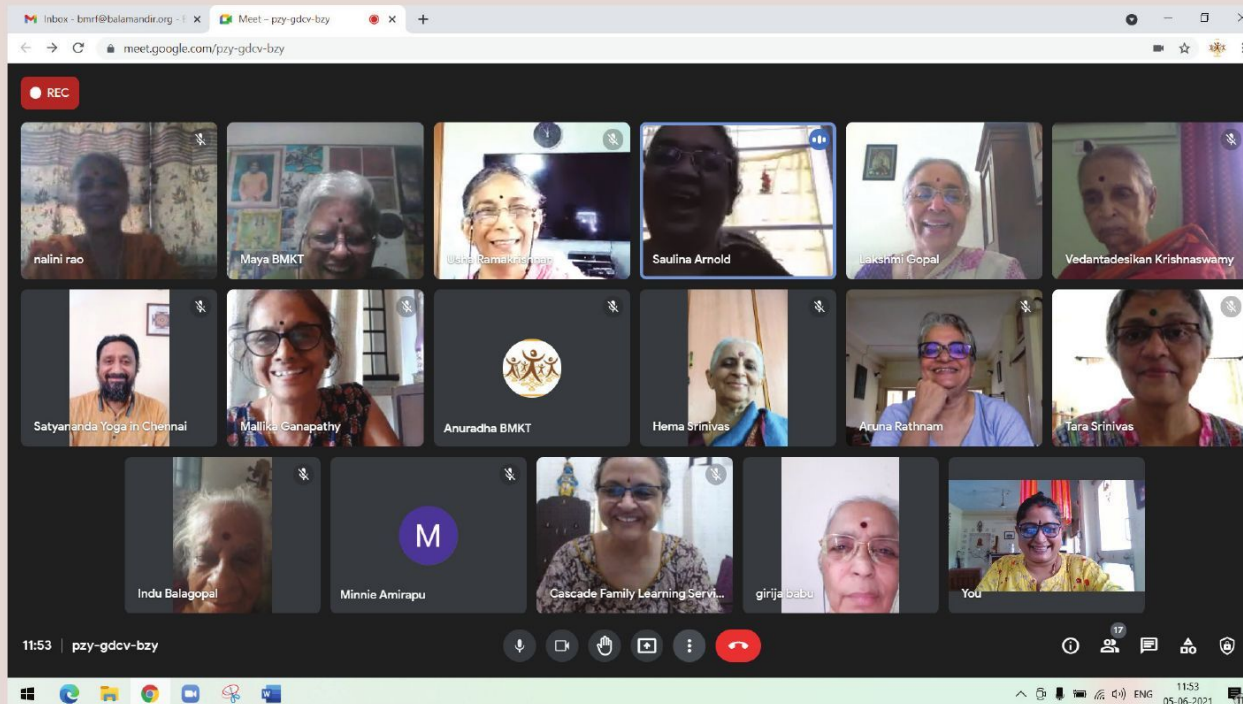
BMRF also initiated a landmark pilot Tracer Study research project, to track the progress of children on specific parameters based on SPRUC, through parenting interventions undertaken by specific organisations for the communities they served. The study also gave BMRF the experience and expertise to develop proper evaluating and monitoring tools in different settings – rural, urban, semi-urban and tribal – and to integrate its community ECCD interventions with health, nutrition and women's empowerment initiatives.

Some of the BMRF studies were also focused on Bala Mandir specific issues. For example there was a study on enhancing school outcomes through positive behaviour and academic support at primary, middle and secondary school levels. Another study called SPRUC for Primary School – to improve teachers' understanding of the psycho-social aspects of child development, parenting and school readiness. Additionally, there were programs such as the Adolescent Life Skills Programme, Learning Support & Behaviour Counselling for Adolescents, Parenting Capabilities of Bala Mandir Alumnus and so on.









Seminars and Conferences

- The S. Manjubhashini Memorial Seminar Series has been an annual event at the Resource Centre of BMRF since 1999 till date. At these seminars, important topics around ECCD, Parenting and Education are discussed and best practices are shared.
- National Conferences were held in 2010 and 2016 for partners of the Network for Information on Parenting (NIP) and other NGOs. The participants included child development experts, educationists, teachers, special educators, social workers and health professionals from across the country. These conferences highlighted the need for a holistic approach to childhood and parenting with a value for diversity and inclusion across all social groups.
- International LTP conferences were held in 2008 and 2010 and included LTP partners from Pakistan, Philippines and Canada.



Collaborative Projects

Over the years, BMRF has taken up several collaborative projects including the following:

- a) **Child Fund India:** For training their ECCD personnel with language-specific LTPC in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- b) **UNICEF:** In 2012 and 2013, in the Tamil Nadu districts of Salem, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri, BMRF brought together ten NGOs and trained over one hundred field workers to help create a network of informed ECCD Parenting.
- c) **Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR):** In 2016, under the 'Saving Brains' research project of Grand Challenges, Canada, BMRF was the technical consultant providing training support to a team of surveyors and implementers. BMRF also provided expertise on the content for the parenting messages.





Over the years, BMRF has been lucky to attract some of the best minds in the field of early childhood development, which has led to a rich collection of resources in parenting and early childhood practices. Although the focus on building new insights through research studies will continue, there will be a stronger push to leverage on the available resources and create a stronger social impact directly through projects such as the direct support to Anganwadi centres and Creche projects as well as indirectly, by empowering other organisations through training, seminars and other support.



1983

Estd as
Bala Mandir
Research
Foundation



1999

Creation of
Network
for
Information
on
Parenting



2000

Development
of Indigenised
ECCD
Parenting
Resources
begins



2011

Partnership
with NGOs
on ECCD
Parenting
Projects



2017

Merger with
Bala Mandir
Kamaraj Trust



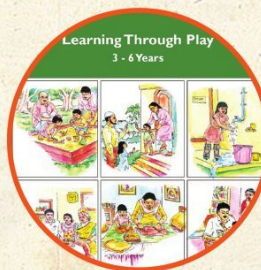
1997

Partnership with
Hincks-Dellcrest
International –
Learning Through
Play (LTP) Prog



1999

Smt. S.
Manjubhashini
Memorial
Seminar Series



2009

Tracer
Study – LTP
Parenting
Interventions
in various
environments



2014

Launch of
CSR projects
for ECCD in
rural areas -
Tiruvallur Dist



2023

Expansion of
Anganwadi
support





Chapter 6

Bala Mandir Kinship Care

The Kinship Care programme is the latest activity of Bala Mandir that started in July 2021 after the delta wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to an unprecedented social crisis due to a large number of deaths that orphaned many children. The genesis of this programme was the meeting called by the Chennai Collector asking Bala Mandir to be prepared for many new admissions, which, however, did not happen. In parallel, Bala Mandir was asked if it would be interested in partnering with Tata Trust to support the COVID-19 orphans across the country. Although the Tata Trust project did not take off, it turned out to be a wonderful opportunity for Bala Mandir to proactively brainstorm and launch a programme.

Three social workers from Bala Mandir were roped in and each of them was asked to visit twenty families in three different districts near Chennai for a social experiment pilot. The home addresses and contact numbers of the families of children who had lost one or both parents to COVID-19 was provided by the office of the Director of Social Defence. These children, it was learnt, were living with their surviving single parent, kith or kin. The goal was to determine the needs of the families and how Bala Mandir could help them. In over 90% of the cases, the father had passed away, and the mother being the caregiver for the children was not able to take up a job with young children under her care, in addition to the social stigma that added to her woes. A major concern in these families was the cost and quality of education for the children in both short and long term. The widowed mother was averse to the idea of sending her children to a home or hostel.





The field visits and the brainstorming at the end of the pilot study helped Bala Mandir understand and define the need for a 'Bala Mandir Virtual Home'. In the virtual home, the child would continue to live with her kith or kin but receive the attention and support that normally a child in the Bala Mandir Home receives for holistic development, through an individual child plan, anchored by a social worker. The term 'Kinship Care' seemed to describe this activity and that is how the unit came into existence. Bala Mandir's expertise on early child development helped define the entry level for children below 12 years of age and ensured continued emotional and financial support till the child becomes independent.

In September 2021, the Director of Social Defence and the Principal Secretary, Social Welfare were informed about the findings of the pilot study and the proposed plan for launching the programme. The Government continues to provide the initial list of Covid-impacted families in each district where the programme is started but no financial help. Bala Mandir funds the project through donations but keeps the Government informed about the impact of the programme on a periodic basis.

In March 2022, a 3-D mapping exercise was conducted. A team of involved social workers and Members/Volunteers mapped the current state and the likely future state, post the introduction of Kinship Care – to understand the various stakeholder



perspectives and develop processes to ensure a sustainable impact. This helped define the direction and the overall approach to the programme. On a day-to-day basis, the team operates like a typical 'social entrepreneurial start-up project', working on an agile mode with new initiatives and processes being continuously added, after a quick pilot to check the implementation issues and the impact. The inhouse developed 'Dhruva' software helps track the progress of the children and the individual plan for each child.

Geographical Spread

The project started with Chennai, Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, Chengalpattu and Tiruvannamalai districts, and it was extended to Krishnagiri district in January 2023. In April 2023, Vellore, Ranipet and Tirupattur districts were also included. As a result of this, the programme quickly grew and when





the number of children rose to 800, there was a concern on sustainability of growth and the likely challenges in increasing the scale since the goal was to support the children until they settle down in their lives.

To check the financial sustainability, in October 2023, a crowd-funding campaign was launched anchored by friends and well-wishers of Bala Mandir. The success of the fundraiser gave the confidence to move forward. The team is now working on trying to address the other concern on managing the likely problems associated with scale, in a project which needs a lot of attention to details – since many of the family needs are unique and the social worker judgement is a critical part of the process. To check this aspect, the Coimbatore hub has been established in January 2024. This hub has its own coordinator and social workers who operate in adjoining districts of Coimbatore, namely, Tirupur, Salem, Erode and Namakkal.



Value-Added Services for children

The social workers are the lifeline of the Kinship Care programme supporting around 60–70 families each. They visit the families and/or call them regularly to check on their well-being, track the academic progress of the children and ensure that the children attend the various value-added services that are designed to, help them. They also visit and keep in touch with the schools and are available for any emergencies or follow-ups. The social workers also proactively plan initiatives such as medical camps, summer camps and act as an extended member and well-wisher of the child's family. Financial support is incidental to the programme and ensures that no child drops out of school for want of fees.

Over time, many value-added services have been introduced for the various age groups of children. For many of these services, Bala Mandir works with other like-minded NGOs who are experts in their chosen field. In most of the families the father, who is normally the breadwinner, is no more and the trauma of sudden death is devastating. Hence the support starts with group counselling of the mothers, to cope with the sudden death of their husbands and face life's challenges with courage. The mothers are also counselled on how to deal with early childhood development or adolescent issues, as applicable. The mothers also speak to the Counsellor one-on-one for specific problems.

An important value addition is the Foundational English programme. This was started on pilot scale with "Read a Story", an NGO based in Pune and later adapted for the local situation with the help of another NGO "Gnana Sharada Foundation" who run this under the banner of 'Happy Reading'. This programme covers children from Standard II to V, but it often extends to Standard VI and VII, when learning gaps are identified. Through this programme, a volunteer calls the child one-on-one by phone and helps improve her English reading, through a well-developed curriculum, including simple reading, sight words and comprehension. Kinship Care has seen a good positive impact from Happy Reading, not just in fluent reading but also in comprehension, grammar and spoken English. Alongside English, the volunteers also act as role models and positively influence young minds and open up the world of careers and opportunities.









Similarly, in the Foundational Maths programme *Kai Mel Kalvi*, the children in Standard VI and VII are given Tablets with pre-loaded content for self-paced learning software developed by AhaGuru/Aid India. While the online sessions and lesson videos help in bringing conceptual clarity, the mentors assigned to each child are available to clarify doubts and follow-up on regular practice and completion of homework. When the children move into higher classes, customised programmes will be added on a need-basis to help children become confident and successful. The social workers track the academic performance of the children and plan inputs as needed in coordination with the mothers.



Financial Support for the families

Although not the focus of the programme, Bala Mandir does support the child's school fees to a set limit. The objective of this financial support is to ensure that no child drops out of school for want of money. Payment of tuition fees, van fees and financial support for extracurricular activities like yoga, karate, etc. are also added incentives to be active in the programme. Since the services are rendered online to the diversified stakeholder community, financial support is also being extended for mobile data plan. In specific cases, the mothers are empowered through a livelihood support scheme where they are provided with sewing machines, grinders, freezers – to name a few. The financial support needed by the children is bound to increase when the children pass out of the school and move to higher education.

Way Forward

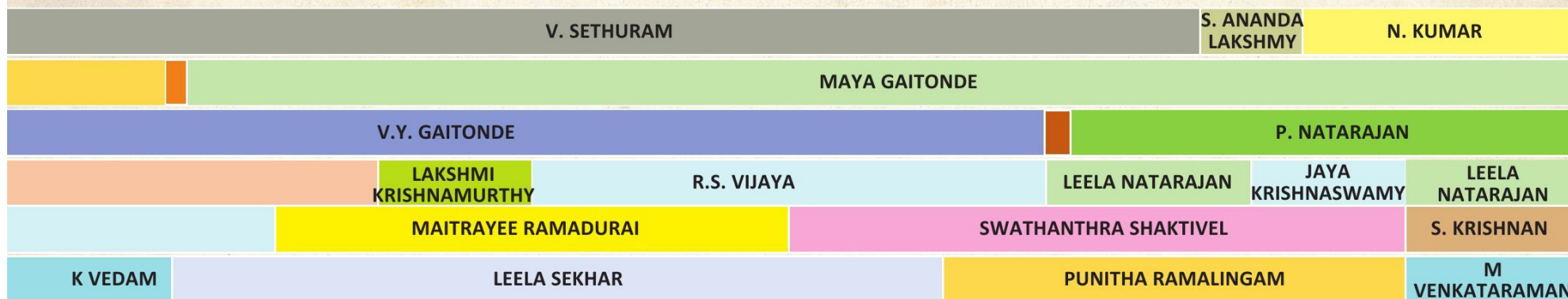
The Kinship Care programme stands out as a unique initiative, addressing an important societal need by providing crucial support to children facing significant setbacks in their lives. Despite the inherent complexity of offering individual attention to a substantial number of children, the programme has been swiftly expanded, underscoring the imperative demand for its services. The future expansion of this project hinges on the successful implementation of the Coimbatore hub and the viability of its financial and support systems.

Aligned with the core mission of Bala Mandir, the Kinship Care programme has garnered widespread positive feedback and fervent enthusiasm from the team. This robust support has fuelled its growth thus far, and there is a collective aspiration to sustain and build upon this momentum. Moving forward, the programme remains steadfast in its commitment to making a lasting impact on the lives of vulnerable children, driven by the dedication of its team and the success stories that resonate.



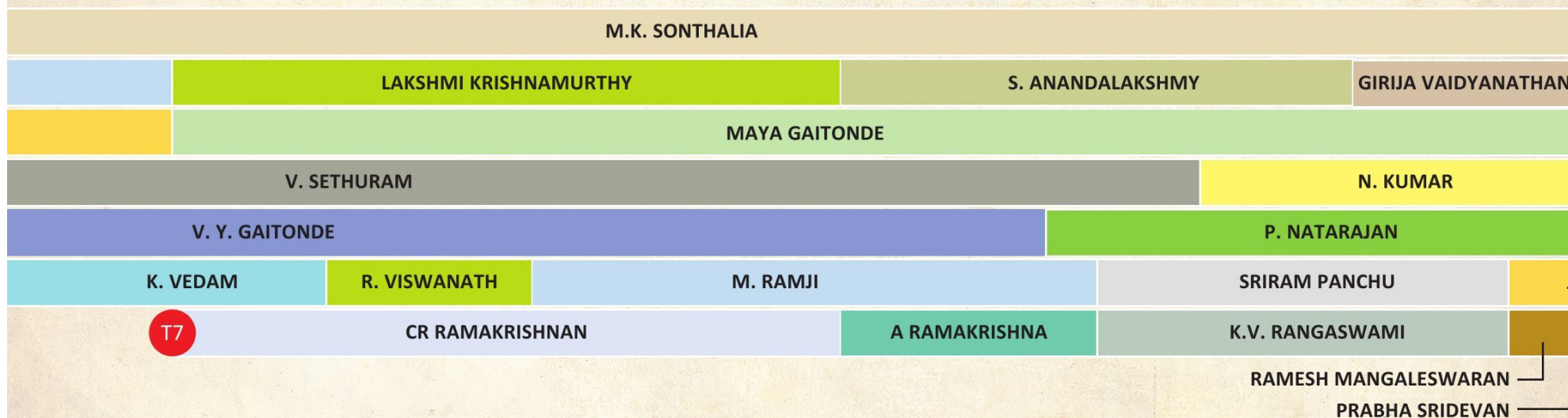
Executive Committee Members

1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	------

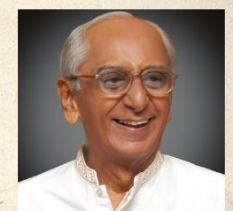
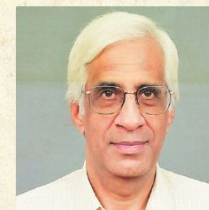
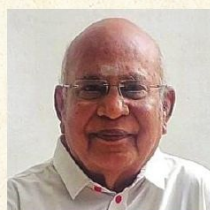
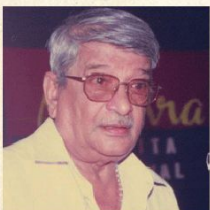
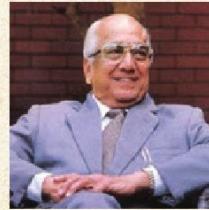
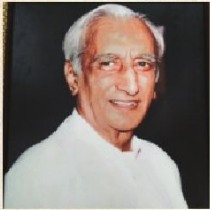
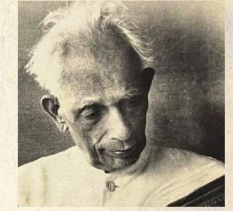
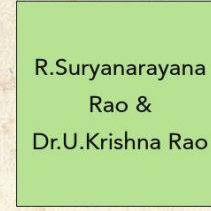
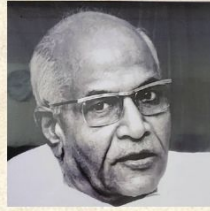
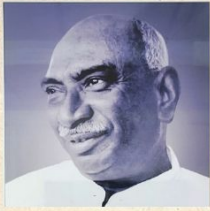


■ In 1996, K. Vedam was HGS for a short while

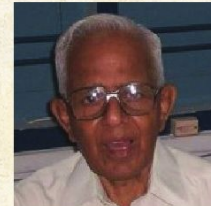
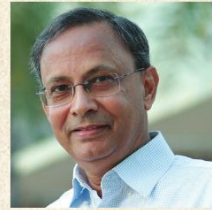
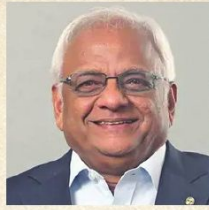
■ In 2014, Punitha Ramalingam was Treasurer for a short while and in her place Rukmini Amirapu was the Joint Treasurer



T7



Founder Members
←
Current Trustees
→



Epilogue

Bala Mandir: 75 Years – Every Child Matters

The rich history of Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust over the last 75 years has helped shape its values and approaches. As the name implies, Bala Mandir - a temple for children, is where every child is cared for and helped to develop and grow. Historically the organisation has chosen to work closely with the Government in all areas of its work and taken a conservative approach. In the last 10 years, the organisation is changing its approach and has successfully worked on many outward looking projects with good success. Without changing its intent and the core values, it is planning to leverage on inherent strengths to meet the needs of a much larger number of children who are facing various difficult situations.

As seen from the chapters of this book, each unit of Bala Mandir caters to groups of children who are facing different types of adversities. Each unit has its own unique strengths and opportunities to reach out to a larger group of children, who need to be brought out of their adverse circumstances. Every unit has drawn up its own plans to improve social impact and scale up activities both through direct support to the children as well as by empowering other individuals and organisations who support them.

The Bala Mandir story is a testament of how an old organisation can remain young by rediscovering itself and being open to change. Over the years, Bala Mandir has developed a reputation of putting the needs of the children at the centre of all its activities while adhering with its defined values which includes integrity, a secular outlook and respect for Laws and Rules. The organisation is known for its professional approach, which ensures that there is a continual improvement and excellence. It strives for harmony and team work not only within its team members but also with other likeminded organisations working to support the children and furthering the cause for inclusion. All these values are being constantly reinforced while venturing into new projects in non-traditional areas.

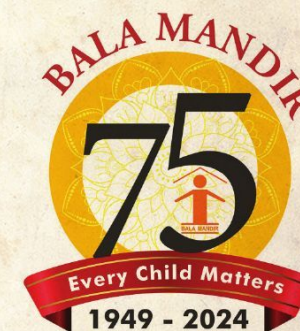
During the last 10 years, Bala Mandir has strengthened all its processes and focused on embracing digital technology to strengthen its services. Along with this, it has been focusing on improving the capability of its team. A group of dedicated Teachers, Special Educators, Caregivers, Social Workers and Coordinators ensure that every child gets the best chance to reach their full potential. The organisation has been investing in its people and adding professional directors to lead and manage all its activities. Bala Mandir has also strengthened its financials and administrative processes, which puts it on a firm ground to plan and go forward with confidence.

In the recent past, the integration of MNC and BMRF into Bala Mandir and the starting of the Kinship Care programme are examples of this positive outlook. The Kinship Care crowd funding project and the setting up of Bala Mandir USA are a testimony of the strong good will that the organisation enjoys amongst its stakeholders, well-wishers and the donor community. A large and stable organisation like Bala Mandir enables the donors to ensure that major part of their money is directly spent for the benefit of the needy children with minimal overheads. They can also be sure that the societal needs are properly assessed, and processes are in place to continue the support to children as needed in the future, to ensure sustainability.

Bala Mandir is an example of joint efforts of likeminded and dedicated persons. As it prepares for the future, Bala Mandir welcomes more well-wishers to join in its journey towards the centenary. To ensure the planned growth of its activities, Bala Mandir needs more volunteers with empathy, to join the current team, take charge of specific areas and lead the way forward.

Finally, in closing, we wish to place on record our gratitude to the Jouve India team which has put together this wonderful Coffee Table book. We also thank the large number of Bala Mandir employees and members who stretched themselves to bring out this book in record time.

The changing demography of the state and the country brings to focus the theme for the 75 Year Celebration - "Every Child Matters". This makes the task ahead of Bala Mandir even more important and urgent.



BALA MANDIR 75

Every Child Matters

