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Nurturing Blossoms – The Role of Three Indian Women Pioneers in Early Childhood Care and Development written by Dr. Rama Narayanan was released during the Bala Mandir Founder's Day celebrations on September 24, 2025

Nurturing Blossoms

**The Role of Three Indian Women Pioneers
in Early Childhood Care and Development**



Dr Rama Narayanan

Sakunthala Sharma of Children's Garden School remembers 'she was known to my mother Ellen Sharma in the early days of both our institutions and had many discussions and exchange of ideas. These women with great struggle built up their institution brick by brick and the selfless work paved the way for the concept of childcare and child help.

Andal Damodaran who took over as the secretary of TN-ICCW for a record 25 years, fondly recalls she was a great administrator and planned for the institution to have a steady income – she acquired the nearly building, built the German Hall which was rented for meetings and functions and started the carpentry unit to make pre-school educational aids.

An excerpt from the Foreword ...

"It seems almost providential that these three diverse yet equally driven women came together at Bala Mandir. Their shared vision - to change the narrative of child care in India - transcended personal backgrounds and professional boundaries"

Uma Narayanan who started the SOS village in Tambaram says 'what Manjumma achieved in the India of early 1949 is a tale of dedication to build a child welfare institution which incorporated idealism with the modern time-tested principles with the other women—Dr Anandalakshmy and Jaya Krishnaswamy.

From the Editor's Desk!

A New Academic Year Comes Around!

As the new academic year begins, it brings fresh energy, new learning, and joyful experiences. Whether in the classroom or on the sports field, every child's discoveries and connections reflect Bala Mandir's belief that *Every Child Matters*.

July saw the observance of **Kamaraj Day**, honouring our Patron, Shri Kamaraj, followed by **Independence Day** celebrations with the flag hoisting. **Teachers' Day** was marked by fun activities and an awards ceremony recognising our teachers' dedication and commitment. On **Founder's Day**, a *Villupattu* on Manjuma's life, **Long-Service Staff Awards**, and the release of Dr. Rama Narayanan's book *Nurturing Blossoms – The Role of Three Indian Women Pioneers in Early Childhood Care and Development* were highlights, ending with a delightful music programme. The much-awaited **Fun-Sports Event** for the staff was a resounding success, and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day.

All units were vibrant with classroom and outdoor activities, making this quarter truly reflect Bala Mandir's mission — to help every child blossom and grow

Happy reading!

Till next time.

Rukmini Amirapu

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List of Abbreviations

- BMKT - Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust
- BM SMHS - Bala Mandir Satyamurthi High School
- BM MNC - Bala Mandir Madhuram Narayanan Centre for Exceptional Children
- EIC - Early Intervention Centre
- BM KC - Bala Mandir Kinship Care
- KG - Kinder Garten

- BM RRC - Bala Mandir Research and Resources Centre
- ECCD - Early Childhood Care and Development
- IEC - Information Education Communication
- CDPO - Child Development Project Officer
- AWC - Anganwadi Centre
- CSR - Corporate Social Responsibility
- TNSCPS - Tamilnadu State Child Protection Society
- DCPO I/C - District Child Protection Officer In-Charge
- DSO - District Safety Officer
- HR - Human Resources

Shri Kamarajar's birthday celebrated as 'Education Day' at Bala Mandir



Education Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at BM SMHS. A series of engaging activities and competitions were conducted, including quizzes, art, oratorical, and essay writing competitions in both English and Tamil, tailored to each level.



Students of Vidyalaya School presented a Villupaattu on the life and achievements of Shri Kamarajar. Two students of Class 5 gave a dialogue presentation about him.



At BM Home Chennai, on Sri Kamarajar Day, children from Class 1 to 12, along with the staff, visited Kamarajar Illam as they do every year since 1975, where they sang bhajans and offered flowers in remembrance of the great leader. Later, Education Day was celebrated in the BM Cultural Hall.



At BM Home Nagercoil, Kamarajar Day was celebrated with Ms Anushiya Selvi, Rtd Joint Director, Directorate of Employment & Training as the Chief Guest, who delivered an inspiring speech on Kamarajar. Various cultural programmes were conducted.

Annual Day @ BM Schools



The Annual day of Bala Mandir schools was held on August 23. Ms Praveena, Chief of Staff & CSR Leader, Boeing, South Asia, was the Chief Guest. The cultural events were based on the theme 'Technology - a Boon or Bane'. Students of both schools presented colourful dances based on the theme and a thoughtful skit and mime, with a meaningful message to the student community on the judicious use of gadgets. Students of the KaRe team presented a lively dance on stage.

Independence Day Celebrated across Bala Mandir



The 79th Independence day of India was celebrated by BM Schools in the Vidyalaya Playground. Mr Subramanian, Immediate Past President of Rotary Club of Madras Northwest Regional Head – Takasho Garden Living India Pvt Ltd. (Takasho Group, Japan) hoisted the National Flag. Students presented a patriotic song and a speech on Independence Day.



Independence Day was celebrated at BM Home Chennai with the National Flag being hoisted by the Superintendent, Ms Veena, along with the children. National songs were sung, and chocolates were distributed to the children.

At BM Home Nagercoil, Mr Raymond Singh, President of the Rotary Club of Yarn City, hoisted the National Flag and delivered a wonderful speech on 'Independence'. Cultural programmes were held, and prizes were distributed to the winners of various competitions.



Vinayaka Chaturthi Celebrations



On the occasion of Vinayaka Chaturthi, the Vidyalaya KG children made idols of Ganesha using clay, sang songs and coloured pictures of Lord Ganesha.



In BM Home Chennai, the children decorated the Bala Mandir Vinayagar Temple and later visited the nearby Vinayagar and Raghavendra temples. The day concluded with bhajans and aarathi offered by the children and staff.



At BM Home Nagercoil the children made a Vinayakar statue out of mud. Special prayers and poojas were conducted in observance of the festival

Celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna - Janmashtami



At BM Home Chennai, on Krishna Jayanthi, the children actively participated in preparing seedai, decorations were made with rangoli and drawing Sri Krishna's footprints. A Krishna dance was performed by the High School girls.



While at BM Home Nagercoil, to mark the arrival of Lord Krishna, the children drew footprints using rice flour.



On the occasion of Gokulashtami, students of BM Vidyalaya Kindergarten were dressed up like Krishna and Radha. Students of Primary and UKG chanted verses from the Bhagavad Gita.

The Bala Mandir Founder's Day

Bala Mandir celebrated Founder's Day on September 24, with the release of a specially brought out book on the Founder, Smt S. Manjubashini and two other pioneering women who have been the pillars of the organisation. Titled ***Nurturing Blossoms – The Role of Three Indian Women Pioneers in Early Childhood Care and Development***, the book, written by Dr Rama Narayanan, is a tribute to three remarkable women, Smt S Manjubhashini, Dr S Anandalakshmy and Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy.

They made a lasting impact on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in India, particularly through their close association with Bala Mandir. Their efforts transformed how child welfare is understood and practised, particularly for children in difficult circumstances.

The Founder's Day's programme featured the *Villupaattu*, as always, on 'Manjummavin Vaazhakai' by the children of Bala Mandir Home. Maitreem Ladies Group presented 'Ondre Kulamendru Paaduvom' - a music programme.



The book was received by three persons who are direct descendants of the women featured in it – Dr Suma Balagopal, niece of Dr S Anandalakshmy, Mr P C Ramakrishna, grandson of Smt Manjubhashini, and Dr K Vijayaraghavan, son of Ms Jaya Krishnaswamy. Seen on the extreme right is the author Dr Rama Narayanan.



Other News from the Chennai Home



On July 17, Mr Gurmeet Singh (Programme Manager, TNSPCS, Government of India), Ms Pooja Negi (Delhi), and DCPOs (I/C) from Chennai South and North visited the BM Chennai Home on a routine inspection. The officials observed the renovation works in progress at the Infant and Toddler Block, being carried out to increase capacity and provide better facilities.

Varalakshmi Viratham was celebrated with devotion on August 8. The children sang Bhajans and performed Aarathi, making the day spiritually uplifting and focusing on Women Empowerment.



Social workers organised club activities on August 10, in the Boys' and Girls' sections. Various fun and team-building games were conducted, encouraging teamwork, bonding, and creativity among the children.

Happenings @ the Nagercoil Home during the Quarter

A civil supply inspection by the DSO was conducted on July 1 to ensure the proper allocation and utilization of rations and essential commodities in the Home. Stock registers, consumption records, and the quality of supplies were thoroughly verified.

At an Awareness Programme on July 5, Ms Shantha Kumari, Inspector of All Women Police Station-Kanyakumari, gave a speech on the POCSO Act. She explained it through several real-life incidents.

A team from the District Child Protection Unit visited the Nagercoil BM Home on July 5, for inspection of Aftercare facilities. They met with the children who had applied for the same.

The Home children made a beautiful Pookalam, with great enthusiasm and fervor to celebrate Onam. A special Onam Sadhya was served.



DSO Inspection



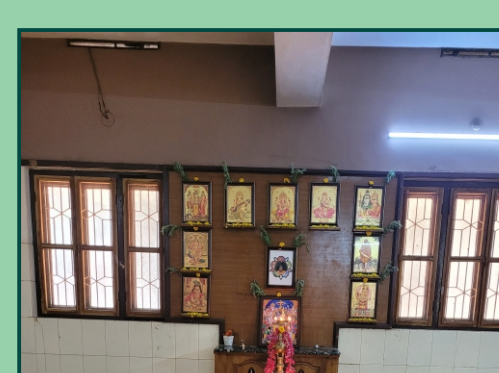
DCPU Visit



Medical Camp on Independence Day



POCSO Awareness Programme



Aththapoo Kolam on Onam



News from the Bala Mandir Schools

Teachers' Day Celebrations

Teachers' Day was celebrated with great joy at both Vidyalaya and Satyamurthi Schools. The teachers of both schools had a fun-filled session on Teachers' Day which included a game and an award ceremony to encourage and motivate the teachers who have put in commendable efforts in their role as teachers.

At Vidyalaya, Teachers' Day awards were given to:

Best Overall Coordinator - Ms Snega R
Child Friendly Teacher - Mr Praveen B
Perfectionist - Ms Kaushikaa Devi J M
Teacher with a Helping Hand - Ms Chitra Devi S
Best Newcomer - Ms Lavanya V
Role Model - Ms Gowrilekshmy P

At Satyamurthi the Awards were given to:

Best Overall Coordinator - Ms Sudha
Child Friendly Teacher - Ms Hepsiba
Perfectionist - Mr Citrarasu
Teacher with a Helping Hand - Ms Gajalakshmi
Best Newcomer - Ms Ponni
Role Model - Mr Vignesh
Ms Bhuvaneswari of SMHS was also honoured with a 5-year long service award, recognizing her commitment to teaching.



@ BM Vidyalaya

The Student Council election was held in Vidyalaya on July 8. Students of classes 3 to 5 were involved in the process. Teachers explained the process of election to students one day prior to the voting. The Investiture Ceremony was held on August 11 when the student leaders were honoured with a sash and badge.



Master Lovish Kumar S of Class IV, won the third prize in the National Sports Silambam Championship held on August 10 in Montford School, Mylapore.



A medical camp was conducted for students of the Primary section by the Rotary Club of Madras Elite on August 28. The camp covered eye tests, dental and general health checkups for all students.



At Vidyalaya, a session on Lunar eclipse was held for children of classes 3, 4 and 5. The concept of lunar eclipse was also explained using a model.



To empower our teachers to understand the needs and strategies to handle children with remedial needs, a six-day training was conducted by the Madras Dyslexia Association.

@ BM SMHS



On July 19, BM SMHS's Vikalpa lab hosted the inauguration of its Road Safety Patrol (RSP) program. The event was graced by Mr Madana Gopal, Sub-Inspector of Teynampet, who emphasised the significance of road safety to the students.



Two teams from BM SMHS participated in the Madras Day Quiz Competition organised by the Inner Wheel Club of Chennai Presidency Dist 323, on August 26 at Kumara Raja Muthaiah Hall. The girls team emerged victorious, securing 3rd place in the competition.



The Sustainability Kondattam Fest was conducted on September 12 with the vision of promoting environmental responsibility. Our school had the privilege of sending students from Classes 9 and 11 to participate in this programme, which was organised by the students of Grade 9 of Pathashaala School. Dr Rajnish Kumar, Head, School of Sustainability, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, was the Chief Guest. The Fest concluded with an engaging session by the Kuddle Life Foundation, which introduced students to scuba diving and showcased the wonders of marine life.

Nine students from BM SMHS participated in the 'Tritiya Sopan Test Camp' for Rajyapuraskar applicants, held on August 25-26. The overnight camp provided them with hands-on experience and training in scout skills and camping techniques, helping them develop valuable life skills and teamwork.



Students from BM SMHS embarked on an industrial visit to Aavin factory in Madhavaram, gaining insights into milk processing and pasteurization techniques. The visit was followed by a trip to the Integrated Coach Factory (ICF) Rail Museum, where students enjoyed a mini train ride and explored miniature train exhibits, delving into the rich history of the Indian Railways.



BM SMHS hosted a special overnight session on the BMKT terrace, where 70 students from Classes 2-12 explored the fascinating world of eclipses, conducted by the Boeing Sukanya Lab.



News from BM MNC

SAMYAM 2025

Samyam was celebrated on July 19. Keeping to tradition, Ms M Anandhi, an alumna parent (mother of Abhinaya, ex-BMMNC student) and Founder of MAP Learning Centre, was the Chief Guest. Abinaya has completed Bachelor of Visual Arts at Stella Maris College, M Sc Textile Science and Fashion Designing in SIET. She is a certified key board instructor from Trinity College, London, and a Grade 3 vocalist from Annamalai University. She has been raised by Ms Anandhi as a neuro-typical child and has the achievements of a regular student. In the cultural show children presented an action song about animals and birds in the forest called மயிலை பாரு (Myilai Paaru) while the alumni children presented an action song ஐந்து சின்ன விரல்கள் (Aindhu Chinna Viralgal). The parents presented a concluding dance which was followed by a brief speech by Ms Usha Ramakrishnan on the topic 'Parents You are Special'.



The 106th Inception Day

In celebration of its 106th Inception Day, YMCA College of Physical Education, Chennai, organized an inclusive sporting event for special children from various schools and institutions across Chennai. Twenty-two children from BMMNC JIVIKAM and BMMNC EIC actively participated in the running race event, divided into different age categories. Every participant received a medal, and winners were awarded based on their performance.



Special Children Sports Academy's 17th Annual Sports Meet

The Special Children Sports Academy's 17th Annual Sports Meet was held at the Perambur Railway Stadium, Chennai. The event saw an overwhelming participation of 700 children from 17 schools, showcasing their talents and skills in various sports events. BMMNC's students from Jivikam and EIC won several prizes in the 50 metre dash.



Glimpses into the Father's Day Celebrations

Annual Children Mega Outing

The Annual Children Mega outing this year was to the MGM Dizze World. 68 children with parents and siblings participated in the outing, accompanied by 29 staff. This time children from the Centre of Excellence for Autism at KK Nagar were included.



Kinship Care Annual Team Meeting -

A physical meeting was organised on July 25 and 26 at Bala Mandir Kamaraj Trust campus, to bring together social workers, Management, and partner NGOs for reflection and planning. As most social workers operate remotely or in the field, this gathering served as a valuable opportunity for collaboration and review.

A breakout session was held to develop action plans for addressing stakeholder engagement gaps. Partner NGOs showcased impactful programmes in education, mentoring, and child development.



IEC Training

The first IEC training emphasising the importance of ECCD was conducted in July at JJ Nagar, Palavakkam and Thambunaidupalayam villages. A total of 147 attendees which included parents of both children from the AWCs and some non-AWCs, grandparents and other villagers participated in the programme and were greatly benefited.

Auto Campaign

A programme using an Autorickshaw Campaign to showcase the importance of ECCD was conducted in August at Villiyar Colony, Sengiagaram and Lachivakkam villages. The autorickshaw carried banners and sound systems, which emphasised the ECCD messages. The villagers from surrounding areas also benefited from this.

Visit of the Field Staff to Bala Mandir

A total number of 27 field staff visited Bala Mandir and its units - BMMNC, Vidyalaya and Creche in August, to observe the teaching methodologies and practices. This visit provided valuable insights into child-friendly practices, structured routines, and the use of Montessori and therapy-based approaches.

Training for Anganwadi Workers

In August, 42 AWC teachers from Ellapuram were trained on the importance of ECCD, disaster management in Anganwadis and SWOC analysis. The sessions were handled by Ms Chitra and BM Coordinator, Mr Anand Prabhakaran.

News from BM Kinship Care



Camps and Events @ Salem - The second Annual Meet of the Bala Mandir Kinship Care (KC) Programme in Salem was successfully held on August 24 at Sona Engineering College of Technology.

146 members from 40 families enthusiastically participated in the Meet. Chief Guest, Mr Indrajith, Child Protection Officer (DCPO), Salem appreciated the efforts of Bala Mandir for building a safe and supportive environment for children.

Events @ Kanchipuram - The second Annual Meet of the Bala Mandir Kinship Care (KC) Programme in Kanchipuram, *Metanoia – A Journey of Change*, was successfully held on September, 21.

180 members from 80 families participated with enthusiastic energy. The camp aimed to bring together the children and parents from the Kinship Care programme to strengthen relationships, foster emotional growth, and celebrate the journey of transformation and empowerment.

News from BMRRC



Training for CDPOs - In September, a training programme for 41 CDPOs from 5 districts – Tiruvallur, Chengalpattu, Kanchipuram, Villupuram and Cuddalore was organised by the ICDS. The main topics were Importance of ECCD, Role of Officers, Teachers and Learning Environment. The training consisted of group activity where child play activities and Role-playing techniques were used and handled by Ms Chitra and Mr Anand.

Fun Sports Event 2025 @ BM - Staff Get-together

One of the most eagerly awaited events every September - this year the staff get-together was named Fun Sports Event



Enthusiastically participated by everyone, the staff were divided into groups based on coloured ribbons, which encouraged everyone to connect and get to know colleagues from other units. Two social workers from Nagercoil and Kinship Care joined the event.



The fun began with an icebreaker game of Dumb Charades. Each team was given 2 minutes to guess the name of an Indian personality, but most cracked it in less than a minute. The excitement continued with the Lemon and Spoon Race, which brought out plenty of laughter and cheer.

The showstopper of the day was the Relay Challenge, where all 8 teams jumped into action simultaneously. Teams had to complete 7 fun tasks — arranging flashcards, unjumbling words, drawing a kolam with dots, making a *maavilai thoranam*, stringing flowers, lighting a lamp with limited matchsticks, and stitching a button on cloth. The judges had a tough job deciding the winners, as all the teams showed great spirit, accuracy, and teamwork. The event concluded with the distribution of gifts made by BMMNC and Home children. Following this, snacks were served thus wrapping up the day with laughter and wonderful memories.



Next came Passing the Parcel, another engaging round where 2 members from each of the 8 teams took part, ensuring everyone had a chance to participate.



In Gratitude

Forty years ago (in 1986), when Smt C Parvathi walked into Bala Mandir with her two-year-old daughter and one-year-old son, she had no clue as to where her destiny lay, nor where their next meal would come from. Bala Mandir took them in with open arms and charted a course of happiness and peace.

The two-year-old Neelavathi and her brother Gopal were admitted to our schools, while Parvathi worked elsewhere as a cook. The children were discharged from Bala Mandir in 2000 and handed back to their mother, Parvathi.

Today, Parvathi is a proud mother as she walked into Bala Mandir with Neelavathi, her husband Kishore Kumar and their eight-year-old son Sarvesh Kumar. Their visit was not just to revisit their old Home but to offer their gratitude and thanks with a handsome donation of Rs. 5 Lakhs out of their hard-earned savings.

"We won't be where we are today without the love, affection and timely help that everyone at Bala Mandir extended to us. This donation is only a fraction of what we were blessed with by the benevolence of Bala Mandir", says a teary-eyed Parvathi.



SAMVAAD Sessions during the Quarter

Appreciation: The Power of Recognition & Gratitude

The session by Ms Mala Sankar, Head Mistress of BM Vidyalaya, in July, focussed on how appreciation and gratitude can positively influence relationships, morale, and productivity both at work and in personal life. Through inspiring quotes and examples, participants reflected on the deeper meaning of recognition beyond mere words.

Building Meaningful Connections

In August, the topic was addressed by Ms Uma, Head HR and Donations. The session focussed on connecting with self, organisation, and others. Participants reflected on self-awareness, values, and gratitude to build inner strength. The importance of empathy, active listening, trust, and collaboration in relationships was highlighted. The 'Circle of Connection' reinforced that a strong self builds a strong organisation, which in turn serves others better.

Cultural and Spiritual Values

The session in September was presented by Ms Maya Gaitonde, HGS and focussed on identifying and nurturing Indian values in children. Emphasis was placed on reviving past best practices, involving children in cultural events, and promoting campus cleanliness as part of value education. The importance of questioning, storytelling, and drawing lessons from Indian epics to address children's value systems on adolescent challenges was also highlighted.

Blogs from our Staff for the Quarter

- Chasing the Butterflies - blog on Bala Mandir Events by Ms Krithika P
- <https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/07/05/chasing-the-butterflies/>
- Opening our Home and Hearts - blog on Adoption and Foster Care by Ms Uma Lakshmi
- <https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/07/10/opening-our-home-and-hearts-a-week-of-joy-and-growth-with-umesh-and-ramesh/>
- The Joy of Volunteering - blog on Staff and HR matters by Mr Bharath N
- <https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/07/24/the-joy-of-volunteering/>
- Touching New Horizons - blog on Special Needs Children by Ms Thenmozhi
- <https://blog.balamandir.org/online/2025/09/30/touching-new-horizons/>