

August 11, 2007

Dear Friend

Greetings from Ananda Bharathi in the year 2007. For us the year that went by, began on a sad note with Janaki Akka's continuing ill health, and her demise on 16th September. We sent out a special newsletter to share this sad news. On 8th October, we had a memorial meeting in the school to share our experiences and memories. Friends spoke about Janaki Akka's work, her steadfastness of approach and humility. They committed support towards continuing the work that Ananda Bharathi has begun in the year 1989. We also read out a few letters written by Janaki Akka's old students from Green Lawns School, Bombay where she had taught.

This academic year began with strength of 35 children, with 6 full time teachers and 5 part time teachers. Like last year, this year also some of our senior children went around Tarnaka area to talk about Ananda Bharathi and convince children to join. With this effort we have 7 new admissions, which is encouraging. The tailoring class too has 8 new students this year. Vishalam and Padmavathi continue to be in charge of the tailoring section.

Sailaja teaches Telugu, General Science and Social Studies. Anuradha takes care of the entry level children and Social science classes for multiple groups. Radha has settled down well and has turned out to be an excellent find for Ananda Bharathi. Chandram, who was introduced by a teacher from MV Foundation, joined in October to teach Mathematics. With his experience of teaching children from similar background, he has been a welcome addition. Our senior student Ruthamma who passed BSc taught Mathematics from June to October 2006. Radhagaru joined in September and worked till April this year.



Aditi has returned after a break; she teaches Hindi on Wednesdays preparing senior children to appear for the Prathama exam conducted by the Dakshina Bharatiya Hindi Prachar Sabha. Manisha is now coming two days in a week to teach Hindi and English for beginners. Madhavi continues to teach Science once a week. Sowjanya, a new entrant who works in a Software firm, has started teaching Social Studies every Saturday. Joanne has started teaching flower making once a week. Rekha helped our college going girls to improve their English language skills. We acknowledge Poornima's help with 7th class Maths at a crucial time. Dr.Jhansi, the Homoeo doctor, visits school once a month and Bhagya continues to supply nutritional supplement every day.

We are happy to tell you that Swapna, Shanti and Rama have passed the 7th class examination this year. Rajitha has joined Lalapet Govt High School in class 6. Our other children in Lalapet Govt High School are Kanakamma (class 9), Manjula and Vanaja (class 10). Lalitha and Maria are in second year of Intermediate in ISO Junior college, Tarnaka. Yadalakshmi, Anitha, Premalatha and Tirupatamma are pursuing degree.

Our student, Bamma who was staying with Shyamala from Anveshi for over a year, has joined Government Short Stay Home, Tarnaka. Anuradha and Vishalam helped to get her an admission here. We can see that Bamma is happy and continues with Ananda Bharathi enthusiastically.

Our senior students Ruthamma and Venkatamma have completed degree and taken up jobs. Ruthamma is working as a data operator with a mobile service provider and Venkatamma, as an Accounts Trainee in a pharmaceutical company. Both are interested to pursue post graduation through Distance Education.

Shailesh, one of our friends who works in a software firm, has started helping in Accounts, with support from teachers. This has been very timely since Mr. Iyer (our President who has been managing all this while) may make occasional trips abroad to visit his children. Manisha and two friends of the school, Viswanath and Samasamajam, are working on a website for the school, (www.anandabharathi.org) which will be ready shortly.

Donations continue to be the main stay of our income. For the year 2006-07, the total income from donations and corpus interest is Rs. 5.3 Lakhs of which 75% is from donations. Donations included \$1250 from ASHA Irvine and Cornell Chapters. Expenses for the year 2006-07 are around Rs 4 Lakhs. Staff Recreation Club of CMC donated two sewing machines and two blackboards which has been useful and timely. Suresh donated us children's books and Lalitha an embroidery machine. We gave one of our old sewing machines to Rajamma, a senior student.

Events

On 15th August, children enacted a play "Mahila Lokam" on the subject of harassment by husbands. Written and developed by the children, it was very interesting to understand their views and their solution to the problem. Sujatha from Anveshi spoke on Reservations and how this facility should be used for improving the situation of the underprivileged. There were many questions from the children that showed that they could relate the talk to their own situation.

On Teachers' day we divided the children into 5 groups and asked them to read 3 stories each. Each group introduced the story to the other groups and discussed what they could appreciate in the stories. The programme was also done with the idea of introducing the concept of library to the new children in the school. Everyone enjoyed narrating the stories.



On Gandhi Jayanthi, Sajaya came with Gangaram, Aruna, Suresh and others from Helen Keller Institute for the Blind, Dilsukhnagar to talk to the children. They sang songs and read a page in Braille explaining how they read through touch. Children were introduced to an entirely new world and asked several questions. Even now they ask us to invite them to school again.

We had the Annual sale on 11th November. This was the first sale in Janaki Akka's absence and we were anxious about the response. It was good to see the stream of visitors including old friends, new friends and people from homes in the neighbourhood where our children work. One of them expressed happiness with the work done by the girl who works in her house and said that she would encourage and support her in future.

On Children's day this time, we took out all the toys and games available in school and children played with these in groups. This turned out to be an excellent idea; the children got an opportunity to explore the games that had remained unused for a long period due to lack of time. On 30th December we took children to the Indira Park, a local park in Hyderabad. Sukanya, Sharanya, Zaheer, Madhavi, MS and his father, Nageswar Rao garu helped in the arrangements.

On Republic day, Dr. Vijaya Bharathi from Telugu Academy gave a thought provoking talk on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule. The children danced, sang songs and enacted a skit "Kutumbanni Maarchina Aadapillalu" (Girls who transformed family). We organised a meeting with mothers of our children on 10th February. Our friend Usha Raman, her mother, and Lalitha Iyer also came. Lalitha talked to the mothers. Chandram, the new teacher in the school spoke to the parents encouraging them to send their children regularly.

On Science day (February 28th) we had demonstration of various experiments by our children. The younger children showed models of 'places of living' such as thatched hut, mud house, brick house. Some of them showed how a cup floating in water drowns once weight is added. Other experiments were Matchbox Telephone, White light breaking into rainbow colours, Hot air is lighter, Why plants grow better in sunlight than shade etc. We also had a demonstration of algebraic formulae using geometric figures. The day was one of joyous learning for all, with the visitors raising questions and the children explaining.

On Women's day we had a reading session about the inspiring African American Civil Rights activist, Rosa Parks. In connection with the Domestic Violence Awareness Week, Aman Vedika members conducted activities on the theme. Children responded well and drew pictures and wrote about domestic violence as they see it.

CFL and Ananda Bharathi together organised screening of films sent by Shikshantar group. This collection called Nai Taleem Film Festival has films on children and education such as 'Kanavu' (about a Tribal school in Kerala), 'Children of Heaven' (an Iranian film on a brother and sister), and 'Colours of Devotion' (a short film on Pichchwari artists). The programme was very well received and many interested friends came for the viewing. We now have a copy of the collection.

Visitors

In October, one of the students of Kamakshi Balasubramanyan (ABA school, Muscat) came to school. She brought the letters written to our children by her and her classmates. In return, some of our girls wrote letters to them. This ongoing correspondence has been a learning experience for students of both schools.

Vikram Reddy and his wife Dr Sudha along with Raju (Lakshmi's brother) visited school on 9th March. Dr. Sudha made a second visit and talked to the students on health, hygiene and adolescence. This was an informative session for the senior children. In March we also had members from LIFE organization visiting, to know more about the school.



Reaching Out

Madhavi T, a special correspondent from Outlook magazine covered the school, in her feature "Making a Difference", in the December 18th issue. It is one of the well written articles on school. We received calls enquiring about the school from different parts of the country.

Sheetal and her team from TV9 Channel came on 23rd March to make a short video film on the school. The 30 minute programme was telecast on April 1st as part of "Naveena", a regular feature in TV9. All aspects of the school were covered and it came out as a very informative and inspiring account of Ananda Bharathi.

This year we could not attend the network meeting of alternate schools and the Learning Net meeting. An article remembering Janaki Akka, 'What an Institution Lives by', written by Lakshmi and Sreekumar was published in 'Revive', a Learning Net magazine.

Before closing

As part of events before closing, Padmavathi taught Kolatam to our children on 24th April. We had a meeting with mothers on the 25th April; the children performed “Kutumbanni Maarchina Aadapillalu” (Girls who transformed family) for them. We spoke to them about getting the children back to school after the summer holidays. These meetings are required to keep the interest alive and also to ensure that the family does not make decisions to employ the children in more houses on a long term basis during holidays. We arranged lunch for the children on 26th April and had a session of mask and puppet making by MS. With these events school closed for the summer.

This year we organised a 4-day summer camp from 27th – 30th April, for the older children in school, senior children (who have passed out of Ananda Bharathi), few children from the neighbourhood and few children from CFL. The events included block painting and greeting card making by Anuradha’s friend Lekha; flower making by Joanne, paper cap and cube making by Lakshmi and creative writing by Shyamala of Anveshi. For all of us it was a time of fun-filled learning and meeting new friends.

The three children who passed 7th this year and enrolled for 8th in the Lalapet Govt. High School, stopped going to school. In spite of the fact that they completed the admission process, collected the textbooks and notebooks, bought the uniform and attended about a week of classes, the children stopped attending school. One reason could be that they are over 16 years of age, and may like to directly complete 10th class. Understanding this has been a real challenge to our intellect and emotions. All the teachers, including Girija from Lalapet School tried in vain to convince the children. We brought it up as a subject of discussion among our children; they wrote letters asking the girls to overcome difficulties and go to school, or at least come to Ananda Bharathi for tailoring classes. It is not clear what will be the outcome. This has been an emotionally draining experience since these children studied with Ananda Bharathi for over 6 years. But, on seeing the response from the children who are now in school, we feel encouraged in our struggle to get a better idea of their circumstances, to gear up for the future.

From what we have written, you would have got an image of a vibrant institution with many interesting activities. We have been able to do all this with support from many quarters. We miss Janaki Akka – with her vast experience in the field of education and her enthusiasm and total commitment, she had a thought for school all the time. She could relate to each one of us with a deep understanding of our perspective, thus bridging gaps and bringing us together. We are acutely aware of the challenges ahead and realise that your enthusiastic support and our teamwork are essential to keep us going.

Cordially Yours,

V Sailaja