

A vintage black and white photograph of a schoolyard. In the foreground, several young children are playing. Some are sitting on a low, curved wooden structure, while others are on rocking horses. In the background, a group of children is sliding down a wooden slide. Several adults, including women in saris and a man in a patterned dress, are standing around the play area, observing the children. The scene is set outdoors with trees and a building visible in the background.

Let none be like another

The Children's Garden School Society • 1937 - 2007

Let none be like another



The Children's Garden School Society

1937 - 2007

This is the story of a very special school
A school whose gardens
Echo with the laughter of
Four generations of children
A school where children
Learn without fear
Where education is fun
And teachers are loved
A school which shelters all
Uniting the many faces of India
Where 'normal' and 'special' children
Work and play together
A school which believes...

*"Let none be like another, Yet each be like the highest
How can that be; Let each be perfect in himself"*

- Goethe

Published by

THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN SCHOOL SOCIETY

2 & 4, Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai VII Street
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Tamil Nadu, India.

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THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN SCHOOL SOCIETY

(Registered Under Act 21 of 1860)

2 & 4, Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai VII Street, Mylapore,
Chennai - 600 004, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Mrs. Ellen Sharma

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S.J. Nithya Sri Uga

8th September 1937,
Brindavan Street,
Mylapore, Madras

Dearest Mother,

On the 7th September, we went to open our Kindergarten -we have engaged a young teacher. She shall be with us from 8-11 am. On the three evenings when I am teaching at the University from 4.15-7.30 pm she shall look after our own children so that Sharma can be relieved. We must pay her a salary of Rs.12/- and Rs.4/- for her conveyance. Next week I can write to you whether she will get some children in our school.



It is still very hot and sultry. At night we almost always sleep on the terrace under the palms, stars and moonlight. If it suddenly begins to rain we hurry inside-we can now all sleep quite well on the floor.

It was really a wonderful thing: We had a big exhibition of all our toys and Kindergarten material, e.g. a room for the small ones-little houses, animals, dolls, cars, doll-house, pots and pans.

Table for Handwork: Paper weaving with a needle, paper cutting with children's scissors and paper dolls, pasting-needle-work such as beads.

Tables for individual occupation: different kinds of little sticks, figures. A table with different building blocks.

Table for group work: Lottos, star game, fruit game.

Table for school material: Paper, colour pencils, water colours, scissors, gum, counting machine, alphabet blocks, little sticks and seeds for counting. Books and pictures.

The Head Swami of the Ramakrishna Math opened the school with very clever profound and good words. Almost 40 people were present. We have now 3 children and 5 more are expected who can more or less not pay anything.

Your
Ellen



N. Maritha III std A

Birth of a Vision





I like abacus
Hema IA

Ellen

A cold Christmas morning in the year 1900. A little two-year old was gifted a new doll and a doll's pram. "Slowly she approached it, stood for a moment swiftly in front of it, then she lifted the sheet, shook it out, smoothed the covers, newly arranged the cushions, made herself active with circumspect movements of the entire activity, motherly, protective, womanly, impartial. Then she ran away fetched her old and very worn out doll. There arose a moment of indecision or being at a loss which was, however relieved through renewed activity. The new doll was cuddled and placed at the foot of the pram, the old one with its worn away nose was placed at the head of the pram and with a sign of content she pushed the pram up to the Christmas tree" (extracted from autobiography of Alwina von Keller, unpublished document). The little girl was Ellen Teichmuller, the scene a forerunner of the loving care she was to bestow years later on thousands of children in the heat and dust of distant South India.



Ellen and her brother

Ellen was born in Berlin, on 15th November, 1898, to the dynamic and multi-faceted Alwina von Keller. Teacher, educationist, psychoanalyst and student of Indian religion, philosophy and culture, Alwina exerted a powerful influence on young Ellen. Ellen's father, Hans Teichmuller, was a solicitor, and tragically passed away a few months before she was born, leaving the young Alwina to her own resources. Working as a teacher, Alwina soon joined the noted educationist Paul Geheeb at his school, the Odenwald Schule as an English teacher.

This was a unique school, renowned for implementing new methods of education, with great emphasis laid on holistic approaches and individual attention paid to the needs and development of each child. Alwina's studies also led her into the fields of Hindu philosophy and she was deeply inspired by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the Upanishads. Later, the political situation in Germany forced the Geheeb's to shift the school to Switzerland where it opened under the name Ecole d'Humanite. In later life, Alwina moved to Ascona in Switzerland where she was closely associated with the renowned psychoanalyst C.G.Jung and proceeded to treat numerous patients from all over the world.

Under the influence of her close friend Josephine Macleod, Alwina visited India in 1929. "I did not visit India as a tourist", she wrote "On my lecture tours on modern education which led me from

Madurai in the south up to Almora in the Himalayas I lived only during the brief period of the All India Women's Congress in a hotel in Bombay, otherwise always with Indians. The longest and for me the most essential period was the one with Josephine Macleod in the monastery of the monks of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda at the banks of the Ganges." Deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and his new 'Scheme of Basic Education', Alwina wrote and lectured about levels of freedom for students, teaching in tune with nature, and on close contacts between the teacher and the taught. She had a special affinity

for Rabindranath Tagore, who had visited the Odenwald Schüle, and was inspired by the peace, joy and enthusiasm of the children and teachers at Tagore's Viswabharati, Shantiniketan.



Paul Geheeb and Ellen



Alwina von Keller, Paul Geheeb and Ellen

Ellen was deeply influenced by Paul Geheeb's philosophy of education, as also by numerous eminent personalities who visited the Odenwald Schüle. Continuing her education at Berlin, Basel and Münster, she graduated with degrees in history, art and psychology. She then went on to get a Master's degree in Education from Kassel University. Studies formed only a part of her life. Deeply practical with a great sense of humour, and sound commonsense, Ellen managed the house, her mother and younger brother, from a very early age onwards.

And in these early years the ideas were planted; the vision of a school where children could learn without fear, develop their inborn talents, learn to share and to respect one another. A vision where children could learn from nature, from activities beyond the classroom and from the world around them. A vision where each child would be given individual care and attention.

V.N.Sharma

Venkatesh Narayana Sharma was born in a small village in Ongole district, Andhra Pradesh, on 14th June, 1897. He lost his parents at an early age, and was brought up by his uncle Pandit Gopalakrishna Sastri, who gave him the best education at the American Baptist Mission School and College in Ongole.

Apart from school, the young boy was deeply influenced by three major revolutions ongoing in India-the freedom movement, the *Granthalaya* movement, aimed at promoting rural libraries; and a campaign for literacy. Sri Gadicherla Hari Sarvothama Rao played a pivotal role in these movements and young Sharma was inspired by him. Carrying books to interior villages on a bullock cart, he accompanied Rao *garu* traveling to remote villages around Ongole. He also participated in organizing night schools for adult education. Rao *garu* recognized his genius and encouraged him to come to study in Madras (modern Chennai). The boy followed this up and soon got a job as a journalist in the 'Andhra Patrika', the first Telugu daily in India.

Deeply influenced by the views of Dr. Annie Besant on education, he commented later;

"Writing to her straight away I was blessed with a letter in her own hand and a parcel of books and magazines some written and published by herself. Out of that gift, the one that touched me and gradually shaped for me my future life was a copy of the Central Hindu College magazine which brought the true glory of our motherland, India, her Hoary Past, her Gods and Heroes to the heart of the young. As though in answer to my quest, the announcement of a National University by Dr. Besant and an invitation for ten young people to come and join the same, appeared in the newspapers. This led me to Madanapalle much against all obstacles the objection of my people and material difficulties. My search guided me this time to become a direct student of Mr. G.V. Subba Rao in the pre-university class to which I was admitted by Mr. Trilokekar, the then principal of the college there..."



V.N. Sharma and Edith Geheeb



This passion for Indian history, art, architecture and archaeology continued till the end. His knowledge of Indian philosophy later drew countless students from India and abroad.

He soon joined the staff of the National Theosophical School as a part time helper to handle Telugu classes in the school, and then as a staff member. G.V. Subba Rao treated V.N.Sharma as his younger brother and aided in resolving many of his problems. The young man led a simple, rather austere life, walking daily to work, and spending time reading and writing. He was awarded a degree in Teacher's Training at the National University, Adyar.

In order to expand his knowledge he planned a journey to the United States of America, via England. Fate willed otherwise, and he stayed on in England visiting different schools unique for their experiments in children's education and never reached the States. He worked for a while as a visiting teacher at St. Christopher's School, Letchworth, Frenshaw Heights near Farnham, Surrey and in the Garden School, Wycombe. Very soon, he learnt about the fascinating work of the famous Odenwald Schule and decided to change course and proceed to Germany. At the school, he was directed to meet Mrs. Alwina von Keller and

refer to her excellent library on Indian culture. It was there that he met her daughter Ellen-a meeting that changed the course of their lives.

Towards India

Drawn together by a common love of India's rich culture and inspired by the vision of new and exciting methods of education, Ellen and Sharma were married in 1931. For a while (1930-1934), they taught at the school. In 1932, Sharma enrolled for his Ph.D. at the Heidelberg University, his topic dealing with ancient Indian education. With a doctorate in hand in 1935, he was invited to serve as a Professor in the University of Jena for a year. This was not a good time to live in Germany. With increasing intolerance, and the growth of Nazi power, the Sharmas were advised by Alwina von Keller to return to India and to convert their dreams to reality.

Their vision of creating a new system of education, uniting the best of what they had learnt in Europe, with the ancient traditions and culture of India grew stronger. Resigning from their jobs they set out to India, and were at first invited by Mr. G. V. Subba Rao, Dr. V.N. Sharma's mentor, to teach at the J. Krishnamurthi school, Rishi Valley, Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh. Soon after, they moved to Chennai and their vision now took root. For Sharma, the experience was of coming home at long last. Young Ellen was being transplanted into a whole new world-a culture magnificent but often harsh, an environment of great beauty and immense hardships. The struggle was enormous, the courage incredible. Ellen bore everything with patience. In her simple cotton dress, often barefoot, she appreciated and adopted many aspects of Indian culture, without losing her identity and pride in her own roots.



V.N. Sharma, Rabindranath Tagore
and Paul Geheeb



I v Nivetha

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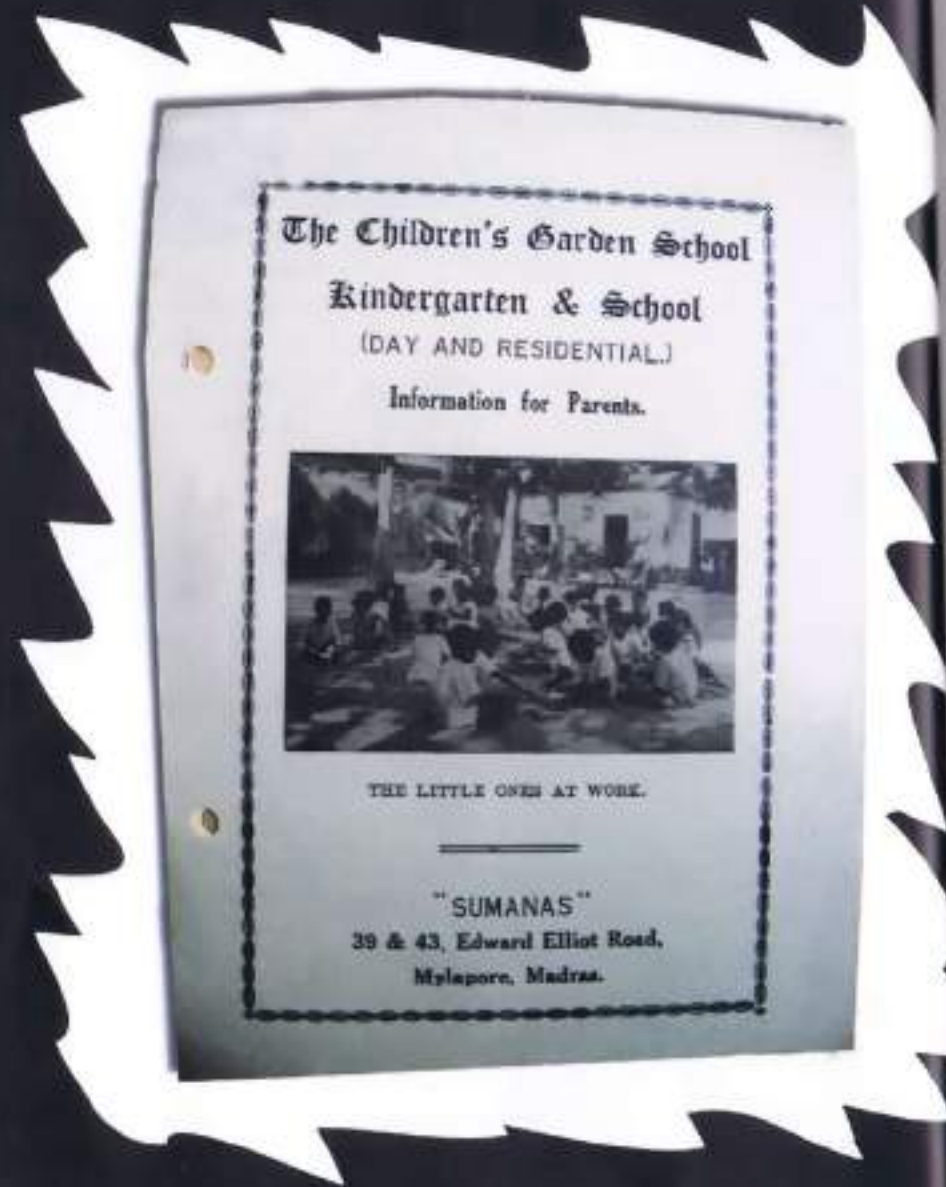


I like games

I like activity



Seven Children And a Banyan Tree



One Morning in 1937

On September 7th, 1937, a little house in Dwarka Colony, Mylapore, Chennai, witnessed a quiet revolution. The Sharmas opened the doors of their school to a new vision of education. On this eventful morning, three little children soon joined by four more, sat down to a new method of education.

The house was rented from Dr. E.V. Srinivasan, father of the famous doctor, Dr. E.V. Kalyani. The school was inaugurated by Sri Swami Saswatanandaji Maharaj, the president of the Ramakrishna Mission. The name chosen was inspired from Froebels Kindergarten; the 'Children's Garden School'. -A garden of learning, where children could learn through play, without fear, and with freedom to express themselves and to awaken their innate talents. The symbol of a banyan tree (an ancient Indian symbol of wisdom and shelter) with children swinging from its roots was chosen as the logo. A special three-day exhibition of educational toys and materials organised for this occasion, was opened to the public.

Years later, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee, the Sharmas wrote; "When the school was founded, 25 years ago with three children, the main idea was not to establish what one usually calls a school, but a place where the little children below five years and perhaps upto seven years could develop according to their own speed and capacity. At that stage writing should not be forced on minds and hands not prepared for it, but could be prepared by lots of joyful occupations like drawing or painting on big light boards and large sheets of paper, or by clay-modeling and bead-threading which makes the fingers skilful and sharpens the eye. Picture Books, stories and matching games may lead one day to reading games introduce numbers-in short, we planned originally a KINDERGARTEN-and not a preparatory school", (CGHS Souvenir 1963).

Over a period of four years during which they stayed in this new and peaceful colony, the Sharmas shifted from house to house, with an ever increasing number of children. Looking back they remembered; "These first years will



always remain unforgettable. Even before he became the first president of our school committee, Mr. Panchanadeswar used to sit on the floor of the room where his first grandson Giri learned to become an independent little boy—yes, this first president played all the games, handled all the materials which the little ones had at their disposal", (CGHS Souvenir 1963).

A Himalayan Task

Many years later they could laugh at their blissful ignorance of the huge task ahead of them, "Trusting that ours was a much needed work we started the school without any financial help and never imagined the Himalayan task that we had unwittingly undertaken. Thank God we did not know what financial difficulties were awaiting us, perhaps we would not have mustered the courage to go ahead and admit more and more children, engage more and more teachers, taking finally this big house, to build up higher classes till we had not only a kindergarten, an elementary section, a Middle School and a Kindergarten Teacher's Seminar, today a strength of 1,050 children, 40 trainees, 60 staff members, still living from hand to mouth—with an ever increasing deficit."¹

From this point onwards, the founders and the school were as one entity, always striving selflessly towards achieving the welfare of many. By July 1938, 25 new children joined the school. They moved into a bigger house with a spacious play ground, and tried their best not to depart from the homely atmosphere.



Despite the increasing number of children, the sense of all 'Being Family' was not lost. In the words of the Sharmas, the Children's Garden School, was to be a Garden of Learning, where, "...the older ones, the teachers are the careful gardeners of the delicate plants; the little ones. Thus the school has endeavored since its inception, to encourage children to move freely with the teachers, freely like the members of a FAMILY" (CGS Annual Report 1938). Within the context of small classes, the experimental methods begun by them were a great success, and the 'little ones expressed themselves naturally and without shyness or self consciousness or fear' (CGS Annual Report 1938).

1. Durgabai Deshmukh, *The Story That Speaketh, The History of 57 Years*, Andhra Mahila Sabha, Hyderabad, 1976, p.10

A New Faith

One of the core philosophies of this new school was beautifully summarized by the founders, "...we welcome children of all races, religions and castes. All children are equally loved and no child is compelled to do anything against his or her creed. We have neither a religion class nor a cult which emphasises a particular faith, but we try to teach religion through the atmosphere of the school life i.e. to be good and kind towards others, respect and love others", (CGS Annual Report 1938).

Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh, the founder of the Andhra Mahila Sabha, and an eminent social worker was their neighbour; and remembers these early years. She wrote "Among our neighbours in Dwaraka were Dr. V.N. Sharma and Mrs. Ellen Sharma. Their house adjoined ours in Dwaraka. They also started developing a regular school for the children and the school has now become one of the most leading institutions in Madras. It is a high school now, but is still called by its old name the Children's Garden School (Deshmukh 1976).

The Sharmas wished to draw out the natural gifts of a child-creative activity, full of fantasy and imagination. They aspired:- a) to develop the child as an individual, drawing out all the best and highest it has in itself; and b) to educate and train the child as a member of the community sharing its life with others and helping comrades as a preparation for wider and fuller services in the world. To bring out leadership and organisation in work and play was a part of what they saw as a true education..

In one of their early writings, the Sharmas laid out their vision; "The school will provide all possible opportunities for the expression of the most varied activities of the child. Hand work, music, dancing, eurhythmics, drawing and painting, clay modeling and paper cutting and many of the latest educational toys and materials specially made for the training of senses and mind as well as for the development of social responsibility will be utilised. The Directors (the Sharmas) will watch the activities and interests of the child, keeping careful records of its psychological and mental reactions. Thus they will lead gradually from the often neglected play world to the domain of mere intellectual training in reading, writing and arithmetic, (V.N.Sharma and E. Sharma, An Appeal, Madras, 1937)



Extract from a Brochure 1939-1940

"The day's work begins at 8.a.m and continues till 11. a.m .Boys and girls between the ages of 3 (and in special cases even children below 3) and 8 will be admitted. The medium of instruction will be in English, Tamil and Telugu. The fees will be Rs. 3 per month with an admission fee of Re 1.

Arrangements can be made for the conveyance of the children to and from their homes. The Directors (principals) will be happy to meet parents and others interested in the education of the children for the purpose of discussing educational problems. Special classes will also be arranged if so desired on the principles and methods of modern education and psychology. Full particulars can be obtained from the Directors".

A Time to Play

“**T**he little ones do not learn reading and writing at this stage, but begin to experience the joy in painting and building, music and movement with other little ones. The children are always encouraged to work out a self initiated task alone or with a teacher or in natural groups. The little ones have a daily 'dance' class and even the most shy will join suddenly in the fun; yes it is for many of the undisciplined wild little fellows the height of the morning, not knowing what strict discipline and obedience it involves, obedience to an idea, not to a person. The five year old children are eager to begin reading and writing and grouped according to intellectual achievements, physical and mental developments and they can progress at their own speed. The Kindergarten teacher with



the help of the trainees of the Brindavan Training Section, can give to the small groups as much individual attention as necessary; without pushing them forward too quickly or allowing the enthusiastic beginner to get bored and distracted by the slow process of the teaching. Those children who take their food in the school compound are given 30 minutes rest so that they may relax. The afternoon is short and general topics are taken up for discussions. Transition from Kindergarten to class 3 of the middle school takes place without any feeling of strangeness, the familiar face of the Kindergarten teacher is often seen in the open class rooms in the garden or house" (CGS Annual Report 1949).



"As we wanted to secure for the children who had outgrown our Institution a safe admission into other schools, and required employment of well-trained teachers, as we needed financial help, our private little enterprise had to be recognized by the Education Dept. Early in 1939, Sri R.M. Stratham, Director of Public Instruction convinced of the necessity for a school of our type, appointed Miss. Gerrard, a Special Officer to inspect our school. And what an Inspection faced us!

*'Who is arranging the toys', she challenged us,
'The Children'.*

'Who carried the climbing ladder for the little ones into the garden?'

*'The little ones',
What did she mean?*

'This afternoon I want to see handwork'.

Eagerly the teachers sat down in the interval to cut paper strips which the children should fold or organize into garlands in the afternoon but what a thunderstorm came down on us 'Why don't the children cut or tear papers themselves, why do you do, what they can do?

We gave up hope, but she strongly recommended our school and we got recognition, (CGS Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1963).



REMARKS DATE
TO BE FURNISHED BY THE
1/11/1937

Dear Mr. Sharma

Your kind letter of the 24th ultimo received. I am delighted to learn that your effort to have a building for the Children's Garden School is now going to be realised soon. I am exceedingly happy to know that you found the Hon. Mr. B. R. Ramaswami Reddy, a member of the Government, to be the really appropriate person to take up the matter.

Within a period of ten years the institution has firmly established itself in the affection of the people. It has proved to be a real need of the community. I have watched with genuine pleasure the splendid growth of the institution from its very inception in 1927. I shall like to send you & Mrs. Sharma my sincere congratulations on the achievement of the past and my best wishes

and prayers for its prosperous growth in the future.

With my best wishes to you all
Yours in Service

Saxawatanda

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The Children's Garden School

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Education to-day is based on the fundamental principle that KNOWLEDGE is within the child itself and that it is the duty of the educators—parents and teachers—to remove impediments in the child's pilgrimage here on earth (Upanishad). As such, it is recognised by all educators, in the West as well as in the East, that childhood is the most important and precious period in the life of the individual.

It is with a view to establish educational practice on this fundamental axiom that the Children's Garden School was opened in September 1927. In all its plans, the School endeavours to combine the ancient truths of Indian Education (Gurukul) in harmony with the methods of the West as expounded by the pioneer educators, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, Dewey, Paul Gebhart and others. *Page 14*

The School is looked upon as a family where home atmosphere is always inculcated and the older ones help the younger ones and thus live as members of a happy family. All enjoy that freedom which makes life normal and natural, so that the relationship between the teacher and child, the school and home, is friendly, intimate and informal.

Pages from the past

In 1999, Mr. A. Ramji (Principal Advisor RITES and former General Manager, south-eastern railway and Botswana Railways, wrote, "...They learnt without fear. Let me give an example. During one of the exhibitions organized by the school, where the children put up their work to be seen by parents, a certain student found that for over an hour nobody came to see her stall. The child had no hesitation in climbing upstairs to the room of Mrs. Sharma and complaining about it. Mrs. Sharma asked the child not to worry, came down to see her work, appreciated it and directed the parents to go and see the work of all the children. The child was overjoyed when a large number of parents came to see and to appreciate her work" (Extract from speech presented on 15th November 1999). A parent once stated, "On one



occasion when my slightly indisposed child was asked not to go to school, the child cried and insisted on going..."

Soon after, there was a need to formalize the little enterprise and the Children's Garden School Advisory Committee was formed in 1938, soon followed by a Parent's Committee founded by Mrs. Vasundara Devi and Mr. P.A. Panchanadeswara Iyer in 1940. Very soon, parent's Day began to be celebrated, where children put up an entertainment and exhibitions of their work for parents. By 1942, the number of children rose to 132, with a staff of 13, a Kindergarten, Standards III, IV and V, and a transition section with 5 to 6 year olds. The Sharmas were gradually winning the struggle to convince parents that "...that education need not necessarily mean only reading and writing, but the building up of all the faculties of the whole body itself towards a definite aim".

In the beginning



The First Committee Members:
The Children's Garden School Committee,
formed in September 1939 was now
reorganized under the name of the Children's
Garden School Society and the first meeting
of the general body was held on
August 9th 1942.

The first Committee of Management
comprised President: S. N. Panchanadeswar,
Elected Members: Sister R.S. Subbalakshmi
Ammal, Mrs. R. S. Swarnambal,
Mrs. N.V. Raghavan, and Sri T. B. Balagopal,
Nominated Members :
Mrs. A. T. Sundaramma,
Mrs. Lakshmi Srinivasan,
Dr. Hamid Ali, Sri M. Rajagopal.



Early days

Children's School Anniversary

PLAY-WAY OF EDUCATION

MRS. ELLEN SHARMA'S LECTURE

MADRAS, March 13.

"Children are the same imaginative little beings in all lands and their various ways of

CHILDREN'S GARDEN SCHOOL

The Children's School MADRAS, Dec. 21.

Praiseworthy Educational Experiment
The Children's Garden School, Madras
by The Editor

THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN SCHOOL MADRAS

Dr. and Mrs. Sharma, Principal of the Children's Garden School, Mysore, Madras, March 13, have taken us that a few friends, interested in the work of the School, are number of the City of Madras and various parts of the State.

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

DR. DEY ON ROLE OF TEACHERS

MADRAS, July 1. The middle school section of the Children's Garden School was inaugurated by Dr. B. B. Dey, Director of Public Instruction, last evening, at the school premises in "Somastha", Edward Elliott Road, Mysore. A large gathering of parents and friends were present.



THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN

A School for the Little Ones

MYLAPORE, MADRAS

"Let none be like another, yet each be
like the Highest. How can that be?
Let each be perfect in himself."
Goethe.

In all western countries, schools for little ones, commonly known as Montessori Schools or Kindergartens, play a prominent part in the scheme of New Education. Many prominent educationalists felt that the education of the little ones is the most important task and have given their life's experience and training towards the success of this part of human education.

A beautiful, at the same time, simple environment is needed so that the small ones could live close to nature. Moreover they should feel complete freedom, so that they could express themselves freely with the utter absence of fear, and become a centre of creative activity. Out of their questioning and working will come the first real instruction. Through such a method, the school can guide the child with his own needs. It can thus make an endeavour to make children happy, balanced and independent, by means of same freedom both in their life and in their work, and thus teach them to find their own peace in life and realise their way to be like the Highest, which is the aim and purpose of all true education.

To meet the wishes of parents and guardians living in Mylapore, Kovapettah and Triplicane, it is proposed to open such a school for small children based on the latest methods, from September, 1937, in the new garden colony "Dvaraka" in Brindavanam Street, Mylapore.

Mrs. Ellen Teichmüller-Sharma and Dr. Venkatesa N. Sharma will direct the work of the school with the help of a few co-workers. Mrs. Sharma has been connected for many years with the Odenwaldschule, well-known throughout the world for its educational and social experiments in Germany. She has taken special courses in Education and Psychology under prominent authorities on education, and took her highest University and State examinations (M.Ed.) in Germany. Dr. Sharma was connected, for many years with the National High School and College at

Adyar, Madras, before he left for Europe. He spent a year in England visiting different schools and settlements, unique for their experiments in the education of the little ones, and for some time, worked as a visiting teacher at St. Christopher's School, Letchworth, Frensham Heights near Farnham, Surrey, and in the Garden School near High Wycombe. For four years he took an active part in the educational experiments under the well-known educationalists, Paul and Edith Geheeb in the Odenwaldschule. He took his Ph.D. in Education and Philosophy with distinction from the Heidelberg University, and later on acted as Guest Professor for Philosophy and Education at the University of Jena. He also has taken special courses in Montessori Method in London.

The school will provide all possible opportunities for the expression of the most varied activities of the child. Hand-work, music, dancing and eurhythmics, drawing and painting, clay-modelling and paper-cutting, and many of the latest educational toys and materials, specially made for the training of senses and mind, as well for the development of social responsibility, will be utilised. The directors will watch the activities and interests of the child, keeping careful records of its psychological and mental reactions. Thus they will lead gradually from the often neglected play-world to the domain of mere intellectual training in reading, writing and arithmetic.

The day's work begins at 8 A.M. and continues till 11 A.M. Boys and girls between the ages 3- and in special cases even children below 3- and 8 will be admitted. The fees will be Rs. 3 per month, with an admission fee of Re. 1. The medium of instruction will be in English, Telugu and Tamil. Arrangements can be made for the conveyance of the children to and from their home.

The directors will be very happy to meet parents and others interested in the education of the children for the purpose of discussing educational problems. Special courses will also be arranged, if so desired, on the principles and methods of modern education and psychology.

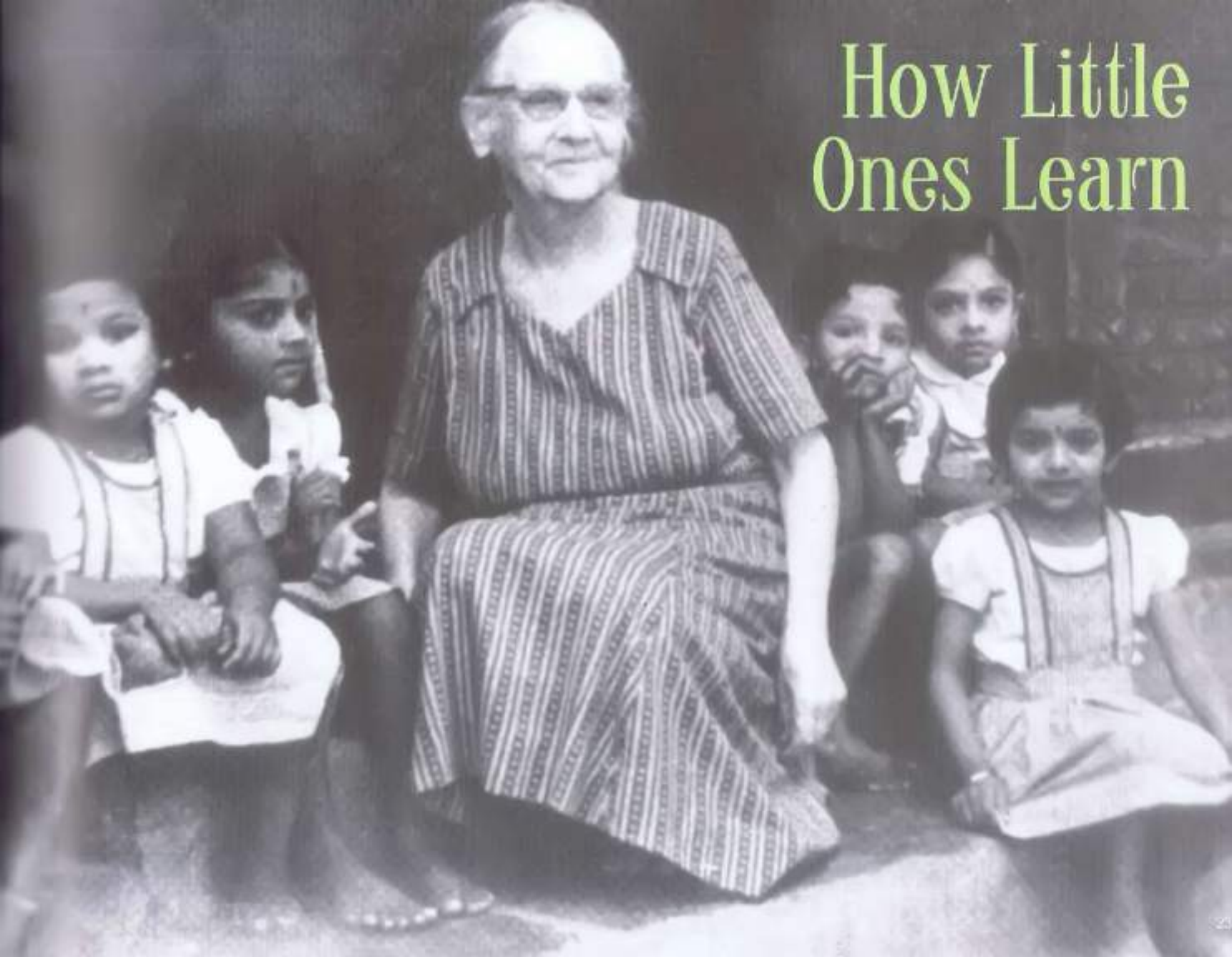
Full particulars can be obtained from the Directors, Children's Garden School, "Dvaraka", Brindavanam Street, Mylapore, Madras.

ELLEN & VENKATESA N. SHARMA,
Directors.

M. L. J. PRESS, MADRAS.



How Little Ones Learn



Eucalyptus Seeds and Mysore Beads

In the early years, a great flexibility characterised class structure. By 1941, the school was represented by eight educational stages. Children were divided into groups, not necessarily of the same age, but of the same mental stage of development. A child who accomplished the tasks of one group could immediately join another stage. The Sharmas believed that task of a school was not cramming information into the child, but to guide individually, encourage group work, overcome egoistic attitudes, cultivate real comradeship, provide all opportunities for developing leadership qualities and encouraging original creative individual work.

Drawing on the educational philosophy of Montessori, Pestalozzi, Froebel and other great educationists, they adapted these to suit the Indian context. Unable to bear the cost of purchasing the full Montessori equipment, Ellen Sharma devised new educational material and teaching aids, using Mysore wooden beads, tamarind and eucalyptus seeds, coconut shells, pine cones, waste paper, colourful threads, palm leaves, and whatever was available locally. Teachers willingly adopted these new teaching methods, worked out projects, and made their own equipment. Waste paper, matchboxes, cardboard, strings and cloth were transformed under the skillful hands of the teachers into exciting teaching aids. Dancing and singing, action-songs, traditional Indian *kummi* exercises and games, scouts and guides and many other activities were a part of the school's curriculum. Very soon, the Government granted recognition to the new school.



A Hostel in the House

In 1941, the school shifted to its present premises at 39 Edward Elliot's Road (Now Dr. Radhakrishna Salai). Situated amongst the Sharmas' beloved *Nagalingam* trees, opposite President Radhakrishna's residence, and surrounded by quiet old houses and friends, the new location was perfect. Today, with the destruction of old buildings, rapid and unplanned construction, and hazardous traffic, the children, as in other parts of India, struggle to find a way to school.

It was not long before the Sharmas realized that many of the children came from desperately poor backgrounds, deprived of proper care or nutrition. As early as 1942, they opened a little hostel and a small group of children began living with the Sharmas and their children, in the tiny quarters available. Within two years, health care schemes for such children were put into practice at the school. By now, there was not enough space and a number of sheds had to be erected creating the atmosphere of a typical *Gurukula*.

The Kindergarten remained the main focus of the school. In the words of Mrs. Ellen Sharma, "...the responsibility of a Kindergarten teacher is as high, if not higher than that of any other class teacher.....Moreover there are not only children of one language, but Tamil and Telugu children not to mention the children speaking Gujarati, Marathi; etc. Children want to be spoken to in their mother-tongue and not only to be spoken to but also encouraged to learn proper pronunciation and even taught separately when they reach the stage where reading and writing are introduced' (CGS Annual Report 1945).

Great emphasis was laid on handwork classes. Owing to the difficulty of getting enough paper and pencils, children did most of their drawings on slates. Alphabets and numbers were taught using art, music and games; children gained motor skills by decorating patterns drawn on the ground with colourful seeds and beads. A library was slowly built up with the help of friends and well wishers. Soon, the number of visitors increased, and included Her Excellency, Lady Grijel Hope. Students from training colleges visited the school and there was a growing demand to train teachers in these Kindergarten methods. Other visitors included Mr. C. Subramniam, Minister of Education and Mr. Bhakatavatsalam, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.



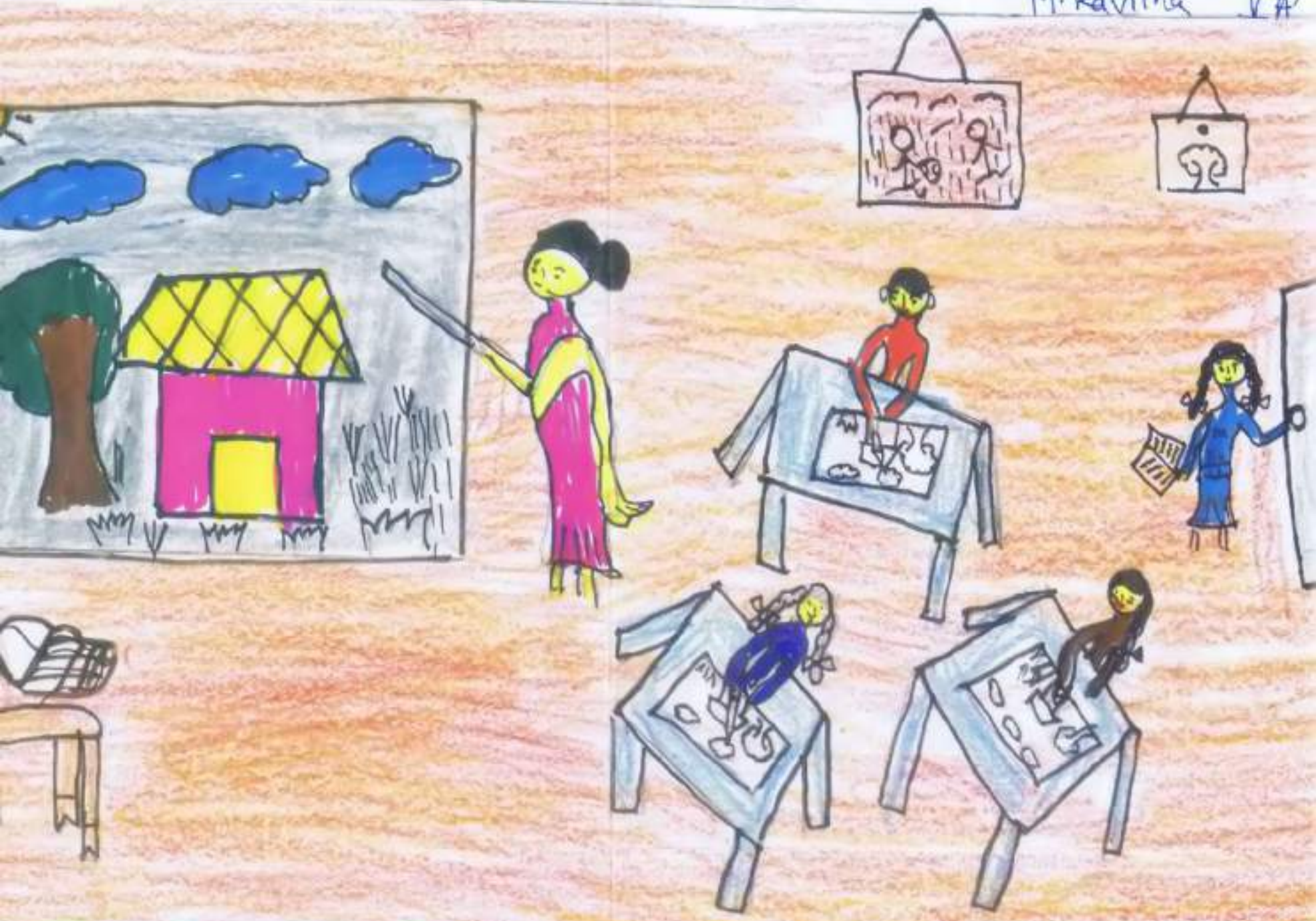


**1943: Letter by Sri S. V. Ramamurthi, Kt., C. I. K., then Prime Minister of Udaipur and
Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras:**

"A few days ago my wife and I visited the school. First we saw the children at play. We were struck with the freedom and happiness, with the joy of life with which children played and we felt that the spirit of their play was itself an indication of the success of the school. We then went in and saw children at work. Under broad lines of discipline, there was the fluidity of freedom. Each period was devoted to the same subject all over the school and in each class there was a large number of fluid groups and children could fit themselves into any group for which there were suited. There was too, a large amount of individual attention, the number of teachers being something like one for a dozen pupils. Everywhere the work of the school was enveloped by the care and affection of Dr. and Mrs. Sharma.

What a difference there is between this school and the general run of Elementary schools in this country! The mass of illiteracy in this country is so great that the Government and other agencies have primarily to devote themselves to the problem of quantity giving only a secondary place to quality. That quality should be secondary is necessary in a mass attack against illiteracy, but all the same it is an evil. Children are fresh as flowers and are as near the divine as human beings can be. To teach them one must have love of the past, joy in the present and hope for the future. How can we find such love, joy and hope in men and women who are paid a meagre salary and can hardly make both ends meet, who are often hungry and sore, and starved in body and mind. It is where children are free and happy and love to live and live to love that the pent up quality of children developed by a civilization thousands of years old can well out like water from a clear spring.

That indeed is true education, not the passing of packets of knowledge like packets of sweets or bitters. It is the good fortune of Mylapore that such an opportunity for true education has been provided for it, thanks to the selfless, enthusiastic, understanding and loving work of Dr. and Mrs. Sharma. I trust that Mylapore will not only continue to appreciate the work but will also give in greater measure than it has done the assistance that is necessary to maintain it."



Latent Powers

A Middle School was added to the Primary Sections, and inaugurated on July 1st 1945 by Rai Bahadur Dr. B. B. Dey, Director of Public Instruction. He expressed the essence of what the school stood for;

'If education is to consist not merely in the imparting of knowledge but in the drawing out of the latent powers of a boy or girl, then I think the Principals of this institution are carrying out their task most admirably. After all, the mind of a child is not a clean slate on which the teacher may write what he pleases. Every individual child has a distinct entity of its own. The special characteristics of his faculties and tendencies have to be carefully studied in order that opportunities might be given to each child to develop and perfect its own latent faculties and powers. The real work of the educator is, therefore, to discover these special tendencies of the child and I think these are the ideals which Mr. and Mrs. Sharma have been specially keeping in view in carrying on the work of this Institution.'

Dr. S.R. U. Savor, Director of Public Instruction also encouraged the school and visited them several times. The increasing number of children, and growing demand for a place in the school, led to increasing pressure on the scarce resources. The founders were forced to comment; "Why are there not enough schools for children? Why must the parents stand desperately at the gates not finding admission anywhere for their little ones."

The school was so well respected that Mrs. R.S. Swarnambal Inspectress of Girl's schools, Fourth Circle, Madras commented; "This is one of the very few schools I have come across where in theory as well as in practice, 'children' are given their rightful place in school, in short, an almost ideal 'child centred' institution where 'teachers' play the part of guides; 'Subjects' form experiences, 'discipline' includes all the influences that help children to govern themselves".





The War and After

In 1942, when the Second World War broke out, the Sharmas were in a dilemma. They were asked by the government to close the school, owing to the general atmosphere of tension and fear in the city. They had no one to turn to for advice. "Shall we continue the school in Madras city or move it to some other safer place in the mofussil? Opinions differed as some friends suggested that we should move to Salem and others suggested Coimbatore as the safest place and some others advised us to run only a residential school. This went on till the end of June. But the school had become our dearest child whom we could not desert. The School Committee and the special gathering of parents which met on January 6th, unanimously resolved to continue the work of the school without any interruption. We requested the parents to continue to send their children to the school" (Extracted from a letter to parents, school minutes).

"Thus we took the courage to stick on to Madras and continue our work in spite of all difficulties. The house owner realising our difficulties did forego the rent for a number of months and thus encouraged our work. In the beginning of the school year in July 1942, we had very few children and we had to maintain a very large staff who stood with us in those difficult days and whom we could not leave alone. Gradually people began to come back to Madras; so a number of our old children and a good number of new children as well joined the school. When we closed the school year in April 1943, we had come back once again to our old



strength. Some entertainment was arranged by friends and the faithful staff to meet the deficit of the year.”(extracted from pamphlet-a review of Ten Years work at the Children’s Garden School, 1937-1947).

Following independence, the number of children rose dramatically. A daily scene in the school was one of children playing on the see-saw, some looking intently at picture books on mats under trees, others deeply engrossed in cultural and scientific experiments. The importance of “Atmosphere” and “Environment” was emphasized and the need to create an atmosphere within which each child’s individual personality could take colour and shape.

Musical dance dramas, *Thyagaraja* and *Thoti* brought together sixty little ones, and served a great educational purpose as well, demanding cooperation, discipline, devotion and concentration apart from being great fun. In addition to school work, children took part in All India Radio programs, and joined the Scouts and Guides.

By this time, knowledge of this unique little school had spread far and wide. When Sir. Archibald and Lady Nye visited the school, they were so impressed with the educational experiments and methods used that they later donated Rs.5000/- for the building fund. Other visitors included Sir John Sargent, Educational Adviser to the Government of India, as well as many other educationists and social workers from Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. All were impressed by the happy fearless children, who could march right upto the teachers and founders, share their achievements and problems and enjoy the process of learning. In particular, all were impressed by the Kindergarten, the only one of its kind in South India.

The Sharmas long-cherished dream of training teachers was fulfilled with the inauguration of the Brindavan Kindergarten Teacher’s Training Department in 1948. This was recognised by the



Director of Public Instruction to train a limited number of men and women in the latest methods of child education and psychology. The aim was to send these newly trained teachers all over India, deep into the heart of her villages to organise schools on the methods taught here.

By the 1950's thatched sheds were expanded to accommodate more children. In an attempt to promote welfare activities amongst destitute and needy women, Ellen Sharma conceived of the 'Stree Seva Mandir', which was founded in 1951, and arose out of her 'Mother's Classes'.

Financial burdens of sustaining the growing school lay heavily on the Sharmas. To support the school and her family Ellen Sharma taught German at the Madras University, a post she was to hold for thirty long years; and also at the Alagappa College of Technology. She often remarked that teaching little one's and adults was perhaps not so very different at all! Dr. V.N. Sharma translated books from Telugu to German and vice versa and continued with his passion for research in history, philosophy and literature. To meet expenses, they had simple needs, sharing whatever they had with the numerous poor children who now formed a major part of the school and hostel.



MOTHERS' COURSES ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION.

Commencing on Feb 24th Saturday.

The Directors of the Children's Garden School are very glad to inform the parents, that they, in response to the desire of a few mothers, propose to open special courses on children's education based on modern experience and method for mothers and mothers interested in all problems affecting the child. They feel that they can carry on their work in the field of children's education better if they can get the hearty support of the mothers who view the problems of the child with a new angle of vision. When alone the Home and the School can be the real field of the child's path without any interruption and disharmony.

There will be study circles, discussion groups, etc. to tackle the problems in all spheres affecting the child's growth. The medium of instruction will be, for the present, in English.

Classes will be conducted on Saturdays and Sundays at times convenient to mothers and others participating in the classes.

There will neither admission fee nor any other fee in this connection.

The inauguration ceremony of the classes will be held on Saturday Feb 24th at 4 p.m. just before the commencement of the Parents' Gathering of the School.

Mothers desiring to join the classes are requested to send their names to the undersigned.

Principal

Children's Garden School, Madras

16-2-1950.





Silver



Leaves



91-11-23794366
91-11-23014925

5, SAFDARJUNG ROAD
NEW DELHI - 110 011

R VENKATARAMAN
FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA

23rd July, 2007

MESSAGE

I recall that in the dim past 70 years ago to enthusiastic educationists Dr. V. N. Sharma and his wife Mrs. Ellen Sharma toiling hard to establish a new educational system on the model prevalent in German. A few active social workers like Narainaswamy and myself were enthused by the venture and gave encouragement to the idea. A small kindergarten school with a handful of students was started. The school adopted the Montessori system which was known in the theosophical society at that time but further extended the educational system by play-way

...2/-

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methods in the primary sections. The school grew step by step and has today blossomed as the finest school in Chennai. Dedicated workers like daughter of Dr. V.N. Sharma like Shankunthala Sharma and her sisters, the school grew into a Higher Secondary School.

The Children's Garden School has an unique place in education today.

I wish the Children's Garden School continued success and prosperity and celebrate their centenary in due course.


(R. VENKATARAMAN)

A Challenge Every Day

It has always been our earnest endeavour to approach the school every year as a new challenge, a new problem and enterprise; as if it were created just now; as in 1937 when the school started with seven children" (CGHS Souvenir, 1963).

Following Independence, the number of children increased to 350 in 1948, with 250 infants in the Kindergarten. Expansion came with its own special issues. By March 1951, the number of children on the rolls rose to 642. With only 10 trainees and a staff of forty members, times were difficult. Many plans could not be carried out, and the demand for more and more admissions grew increasingly difficult.

In 1952, Dr. Sharma, was invited by friends in Switzerland and from the British Council to visit and study places of education and social work. He was invited to lecture at the newly founded East Asian Institute in Heidelberg, West Germany, and spoke on Indian art, religion, culture and education. Far away from home, his thoughts were always with the school, as seen in this letter....

My beloved teachers and children,

My pilgrimage to Europe will be not a mere holiday. oneself, alone, far, far away from the living centre of more, sitting at the feet of great teachers who have Gurukula, an Indian school utilizing the rich immemorial - in harmony with the progressive West.

How can I forget my dear and sweet children, those every day and demanded that I should lead them in the forenoon? Their' innocent tricks with me, bide even now vividly before my eyes. God bless them! forms and of all sections, the Telugu and Tamil, are happy and cheerful whenever I was in a depression Sharma from time to time. Whenever I felt youthful the office, in the garden and in the playfield. I am sure even in my travels from country to country and from continent to continent. Dear children, my little ones of the Kindergarten and older ones in the school section, I thank you all always. I have come here to learn more and gain more experience to serve you more actively and with more enthusiasm when I come home. Children's blessings are holier than others and they are more effective than any other things; that is why our ancestors said that the speech of a child is as vital and forceful as that of Brabma."

V.N. Sharma, 1952



I hate holidays, escaping actualities and enjoying my work. It will be study time learning more and made teaching their life's work. Ours shall be a real material our ancestors bestowed on us from time - methods worked out by great educationists in the

babies in the Kindergarten who played with me down the steps of the front hall when they went home and seek games and so many pranks of theirs, I can see The children of the Middle School, of all classes and my friends and comrades. It is they who made me and desperate on things which worried me and Mrs. and thus ever active, it was all due to their presence in I shall have their presence in other bodies with me



In April 1955, Mr. Kamaraj Nadar, the then Chief Minister of Madras State, presided over the School Day Function. When the school could purchase a projector, films could be shown to the children, lent at first by the British Information Series and the American Information Office. All 700 children, in batches watched with wonder, films on plant and animal life, history and world cultures and landscapes (CGSS Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1937-1987).

By 1958, the school had firmly established several traditions:- small classes grouped according to intellectual capacities, a time-table arranged according to the child's physical and intellectual capacities, morning prayers in the garden, choice of handwork occupations, mingling of Telugu and Tamil children in common activities, excursions to near and far off places, class and public performances, parents-days, and many other little special features.

The stream of visitors continued including the Minister of Finance, Government of India, Mr. Chintamani Deshmukh, and Smt. Krishna Hathee Singh. In 1962, the Indo German Society in Munich presented Ellen Sharma with the prestigious Goethe medal, which she accepted with all her characteristic humility.



Ellen Sharma with Mr. Kamaraj Nadar



Wednesday Meetings

Inspired by the teacher's meetings held by Paul Geheeb at the Odenwald Schule, Ellen Sharma introduced 'The Wednesday Meetings', held in the afternoons for the Kindergarten staff and 'Tuesday Evening Meetings', for the Middle school staff. These were excellent forums for discussing strategies, new approaches and future plans. Over and over again, new ways of using play and sense training materials, games, painting and craft classes, music and dance and other activities were planned and revised. The teachers worked hard to

build qualities of sociability, adjustment, self discipline and confidence amidst the little ones. They added new equipment to the Kindergarten and devised new sense-training material.

All through these early years, children organised functions, and spoke on occasions such as Independence and Republic Day and put up performances for Parents Day. A unique feature was the preparation of charts of each child's physical and mental development. The simple little book brought out as an annual program booklet, was converted into a formal school souvenir in 1961. Finally, the little ones of the Kindergarten, moved into their own building, construction of which was started in 1949, but could only be completed two decades later with the help of German donors. The training section was now flourishing. Health, dietetics, and many other topics were taught. As always financial difficulties continued.

A Silver Jubilee

The Silver Jubilee celebrations in 1967 brought a sense of satisfaction at having overcome enormous difficulties in the initial establishment and growth of the school. Two public performances were put up by the children; one in the R.R. Sabha with almost 200 children taking part; and one in the school garden organized by the hostel children. These were attended by more than 1000 visitors.

Celebrations stretched over four days, beginning with the inauguration by Swami Kailasnandaji, president R. K. Math, and Sir Lakshmanswami Mudaliar the Vice Chancellor of Madras University. The impression of the 25 big oil lamps standing on the flower-decorated stage and the beautiful chorus of the girls in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu left a powerful impact. The school held an exhibition of educational material and handwork. Donations brought them the sum of more than Rs.16,000/- which were poured in to meet the ever present deficit.

During the year, Mrs. Luebke, the wife of the President of the Federal



Ellen Sharma with Sir Lakshmanswami Mudaliar

Republic of Germany, Mrs. Birla and her daughters, and many others visited the school. By this time out of the 1000 children, 250 were free, 100 had management concessions, 50 got free midday meals and 30 were given free boarding. A staff of 60 completed the picture. The free benefits for economically underprivileged children was essential, in the words of the founder; "if we do not want to give up all our ideals" (CGHS Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1963). The number of children on scholarships were increased with the help of the Aktionsgemeinschaft für die Hungernden.

By 1963, the Dining-cum-prayer Hall of the Hostel was donated by the F.A.O. In 1965, a section of the school, the Pestalozzi Centre was opened to provide a formal centre for dispensing aid in the form of free education, mid-day meals and care for needy hostel children and day scholars. This was inaugurated by Dr. Edgar H. Reichel, the then Consul General of Federal Republic of Germany. By 1966, the school saw a burst of activities, with the foundation of the literary association and other school clubs. The Educational Minister, Sri Nedunchezian presided over the Annual Day.

By now, parents began demanding a full-fledged High School. Children were reluctant to leave the loving atmosphere and move on, and a desperate appeal went out to parents and well-wishers to help add Standards IX to XII.

"We therefore appeal to each and everybody to help us in collecting the first installment of Rs. 35,000/- towards the prescribed Endowment Fund of Rs. 70,000/- without which we cannot get the permission to open the higher forms" (CGHS Souvenir 1966). After a years' struggle, permission from the Government was obtained to open the High School classes. This was however only in Tamil and English medium and for girls alone, and thus a great disappointment for the little boys and for Telugu children. As a special exception, they were allowed to admit boys upto Standard V but had to send away those who had completed 12 years of age, thus putting an end to the dream of a truly coeducational school, where both boys and girls could grow up in a truly happy family atmosphere. Despite this setback, there was a feeling of great joy, with the opening of the high school on the 30th school anniversary in 1967.



On a Full Stomach

From 1938 onwards, the Sharmas provided mid-day meals for poor children. In 1968, when the first midday meal schemes were introduced by the Government, they could add to this, their own special health drinks and diet supplements. By 1968, 200 children were given midday meals. The introduction of free education in the Middle School, placed a heavy burden on their finances. As noticed throughout the history of the school, times of great financial stress were often followed by help from unexpected sources. This time help arrived in the form of the Society for the Prevention of Starvation which fostered 100 children in the school, along with the F.A.O's gift of an electric water pump and bathrooms, and the Corporation of Madras's contribution towards drinking water arrangements. Through the years, donors provided help in the form of funding for building, equipment. A new dining block was donated and new classrooms could be added.



Inauguration of a new kitchen block

The Order of Merit

By the early 1970's the school opened its doors to Tibetan refugee children from camps in Karnataka. English medium in Standard III was introduced. In 1973, a one year Kindergarten Training course for graduates could be held. With the opening of Standard IX in Tamil and English, The High School began in earnest. Well-wishers and parents rose to the occasion and contributed funds to construct sheds and a well-equipped laboratory for the High School students. Additional land was acquired and at long last the debt for the school building was paid off. With hope and confidence, they sent their first batch of students to write the SSLC Board examinations and to their joy all 32 girls passed.

Examinations did not stop their cultural activities. Several teachers were trained in the 'Orff systems of music', and children performed the dance-drama, 'King Grisslebeard' in the Max Müller Bhavan. By 1970, the large number of children and numerous educational

activities, led to the need for a Parents-Teachers Association to promote a meaningful dialogue between parents, teachers and children. Under Mr. J. Lakshminarayanan as the first President, this started functioning with great energy. By 1971, with the construction of a new building, proper hostel rooms, bathrooms, a sick room and three school classrooms could be added.

The school finally made substantial inroads into the world of sports and were put in charge of the C Zone, being responsible for conducting sports and matches for 12 Girl's schools. For the first time, sports activities were formalized. High School girls learnt tenniquoit, volley-ball, kho-kho and throw-ball.

Immersed in their work, the founders had never sought any form of recognition or awards. In 1972, Ellen Sharma was awarded the prestigious Order of Merit, the highest award of the Federal Republic of Germany, for her humanitarian services in India. She accepted the award in all humility, attributed her success to the teacher's dedication; and then proceeded back to the classroom. In her devotion to duty she often forgot to put on her slippers, and many dignitaries were greeted by her barefoot and in a simple dress.



Things now began to move fast. With a strength of 1502 students, the construction of a new kitchen block and an additional dining room, and the inauguration of the clinic and health centre marked a phase of rapid expansion. From the 1970's onwards, the entire school from the Kindergarten upwards, held a three-day exhibition, with projects, maps, models and charts, handwork, albums, drawings and paintings. One of these functions was inaugurated by Mr. D. Roen Repp of UNICEF, in 1975, and he patiently listened to the children explaining their work. The school bookshop opened with the help of Mr. K. Seetharaman. This provided easy access to books and stationary and free aid. By 1976, a primary section comprising standards III-V, in English medium, was established and soon shifted to the Children's Club on V.M. Street, located nearby.

The Babies Arrive

With an increase in the number of working mothers, the need for a crèche was now urgent. The babies arrived in numbers in 1974, when a small crèche was inaugurated in the school. The need to train staff led to the beginning of a Crèche-cum-Training centre with the help of the Arbeiter Wohlfahrt and Deutsche Welthungerhilfe. Mr. B. Dressman, the Secretary General of the German Agro Action, Bonn, opened the milk kitchen in the crèche and very soon the number of babies rose to more than 70.

In 1973, the dental unit funded by the UNESCO, Holland, was inaugurated by Mr. Anbazhagan, Minister of Health. For the first time in Tamil Nadu, a regular dental care unit for children was established in the school, under the guidance of Dr. Kannappan, a parent and an eminent dentist. In addition, children were vaccinated for cholera, BCG vaccine, smallpox, polio, triple antigen, etc. Multivitamins tonics, ENT, skin and eye check-ups formed an important part of the routine. This expanded in two years into a full-fledged health centre.

The Kindergarten was still the most important part of the school and achieved the status of being an observation centre for trainee teachers. Once again, a demand for well trained staff, led to the introduction of a two month long special Kindergarten Training course for untrained private school teachers. New methods were developed and expanded on. The school was also selected under the system of the Comprehensive Educational Scheme, for organizing vocational training courses such as radio engineering. By 1976, the school introduced a Book Bank for distribution of free books under the Government 20 Point Program. The Junior Red Cross snapped into action with 90 students in 1976, and the small savings or Sanchayika scheme helped children understand principles of basic finance and savings. Two staff members and two pupils of Standard IX operated the bank every Tuesday.

Hope was in the air till death struck.







A Garden in Transition





An End...

On the 9th of June, 1978, Mrs. Ellen Sharma passed away. To those around her, she appeared indestructible and her demise was devastating. While the passing away of the founder often leads to the collapse of an institution, the Children's Garden School proved to be an exception. While death did not spare her, the true miracle lay in the continuity of the school and of her ideology.

This was possible under the able direction of her youngest daughter, Sakunthala Sharma, who had assisted her since the age of 13, and who carried on as the headmistress adding a new and contemporary direction to her mother's vision. In this she was supported by her elder sisters, Gita Sharma, who was instrumental in correspondence and in raising funds so essential to sustain the school, and later by Rukmini Pappu, who brought a new vision into the primary section.

The miracle was made possible by teachers, helpers and friends, who fought against all odds to hold the school together and to keep Ellen alive in every act of teaching and administration. Holding on to the original ideals of the founder, and giving them a new direction in the rapidly changing face of modern India-this was a miracle which Ellen Sharma would have been proud to see.



ELLEN SHARMA

DEAD

So read the stark headlines in the Indian Express, Chennai, on the morning of June 10th, 1978.

"...Throughout her life, Mrs. Sharma has passionately toiled with her husband to make the school a model institute in children's education in the City. She has also helped successive generations of children to get educated in an atmosphere of love, affection and attention and flower into responsible individuals. A humble person, Mrs. Sharma has been the recipient of the highest German honour for serving the cause of German language in India.Both she and her husband have also adopted more than 100 orphan children in the last 40 years".

Within days, shocked students, colleagues, friends, donors and completely unknown well-wishers poured in to share the grief of the family.

"We are extremely sorry to hear of the death of your beloved wife and our beloved friend, Mrs. Sharma. It may be a little comfort for you -to, feel that your sense of loss is shared by hundreds and thousands of friends in India", (K.P.S. Menon, former Ambassador to China and Russia, Ottapalam).

"...She was ever active, moving about the classrooms and the lawns imparting advice and instructions, giving attention to subtle details such as closing a running tap, humouring a visiting parent or guiding an erring student with soft spoken words" (M. Ranganatha Rao, Reader in Mathematics, R. K. Mission Vivekananda College, Madras: Whenever, I think of Mrs. Sharma, I cannot resist thinking of the Banyan tree which she adopted as the emblem for the school. She was indeed, the banyan tree, under whose

pervading protection, the poor and the meek found the world a better place to live in" (A. Ramji, Additional Director, Railway Board, New Delhi).

"The death of your beloved and also by me so highly revered mother has moved me deeply. I share with you your agony and can feel what you and the Children's Garden School have lost in her. Your mother was a great personality. The sacrifice for her life work has always filled me with the highest respect and esteem. When you think what has become of the small private beginnings of this school, one can well grasp how much courage and devotion the building up and direction of this school through so many years has demanded. That inspite of this she could still take time to write to her friends has always strongly touched me. I have collected all her letters and will now greatly treasure them" (Mrs. Dr. Gretel Keller, Member of Parliament, Stuttgart, West Germany).

"She was a very important person in my life and will always be. I never told her that, but perhaps she knew it. My friends who did know me before I met all of you and the hostel, recognised that it had changed my way of thinking about life. That change was mainly based on Mrs. Sharma. I adore her. I will never forget her. Since 1974 when I visited you, a photograph of her is hanging in my room" (Rainer Lerch, a young German student who spent a month in the hostel in 1974),

"The dynamic and brave soul that knew no rest for decades has now found its final rest. What a powerful story of dedication and service has her life to tell us all. Mrs. Sharma's memory, her untiring efforts and unique contribution towards child education will live as long as there are children in India. We have lost a pioneering servant of the orphans and destitutes but the lamp she had lighted for their guidance and deliverance shall be kept burning by you", (V. Krishnamurti, Consultant ASW, Gandhigram).

...And a Beginning

Sakunthala Sharma threw herself into the work of expanding the school. Years later, when awarded the Lady Kalyani Sivaswami Aiyar Best Teacher Award it was said: -

"She rose from modest beginnings as a teacher to the key position of Head Mistress by her selfless dedication to the cause of Education, and deep involvement in the affairs of the School founded by her beloved and illustrious mother Mrs. Ellen Sharma; and wears the mantle of authority with grace and dignity. As Correspondent, she has rendered monumental service to the CG Primary and Higher Secondary School and Brindavan Teacher Training School and raised them to be premier institutions in the State, the cynosure of other Educational Institutions."

She later won the Kalaimagal Award by Saraswathi Ammal Education Society (1986), the National Award of the Indian Council of Child Education, New Delhi (1987), and the State Award for Best Teacher by the Government of Tamil Nadu (1990).

A donation by Mr. R.S. Sharma and his family of a piece of land at Karaipakkam, enabled the school to stand poised for further expansion. With the addition of further land at Sholinganallore, a small vegetable farm and dairy were started, which could feed some of the rapidly expanding hungry mouths. By 1982, a crèche was started in the farms, to help village women, and was run by staff trained by the school.

By the 1980's, the Guides, Road Safety Patrol, Interact Club, and Sanchayika savings schemes were flourishing. The school health program now catered to both day and hostel children, training students and staff. A 24 hour clinic with visiting doctors, Drs. Kamala, Ragavachari, Jayanti, Champakalakshmi, Kannappan and Ambuja ensured that





children remained healthy and received immediate medical aid. By now, more than 300 children were provided mid-day meals. A new canteen provided employment for poor women, and subsidized snacks for students.

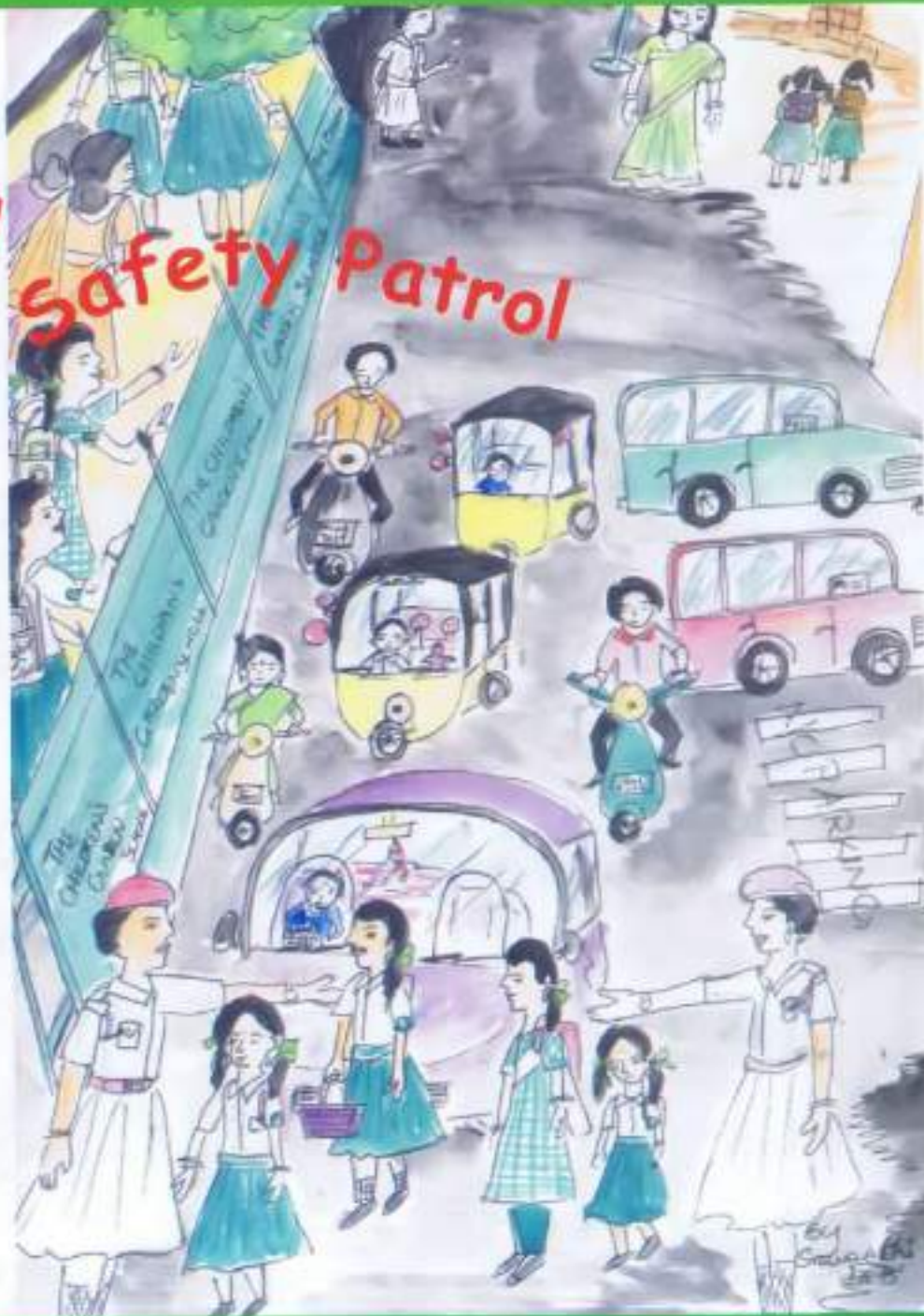
Numerous schemes were initiated to carry on helping destitute and poor women become economically self-reliant. A tailoring section was opened, whereby poor women could earn money stitching uniforms and other clothes for the children. A growing awareness of the importance of wildlife and nature conservation led to the establishment of the Nature Club in 1984, and the children began to actively participate in campaigns to create an awareness of India's vast natural heritage.



Sakuntala Sharma with Mr. Ambazhagan



Our Road Safety Patrol



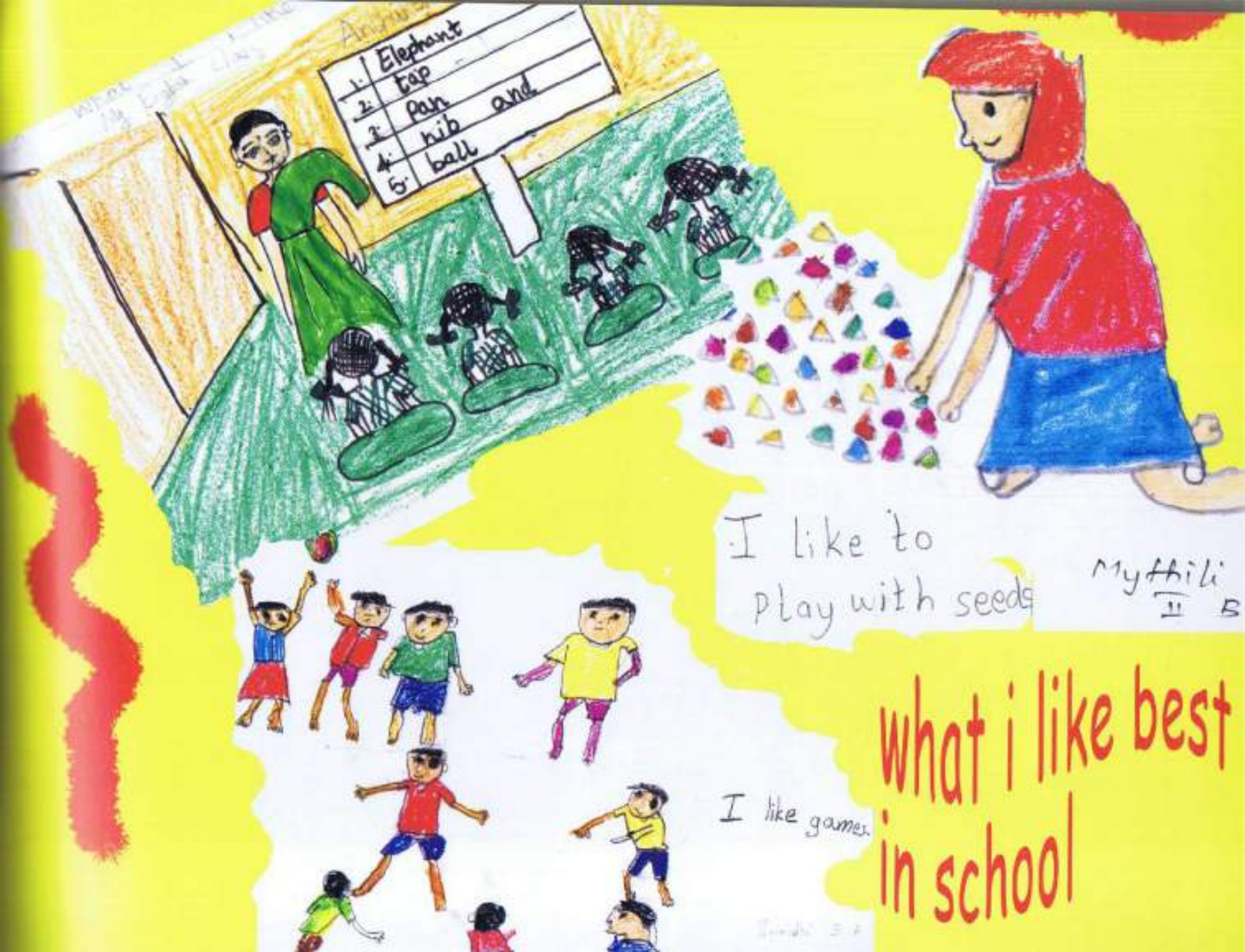
Loss of a Grandfather

Dr. V.N. Sharma passed away on 23rd April 1986 at the age of 89. A grandfather to all the little ones, he was immersed in his books and music till the very end, and passed away peacefully listening to *bhajans*. He left behind an intellectual void, and in his memory, the Dr. V.N. Sharma library and camping grounds were started.

As with the death of Mrs. Ellen Sharma, there was a sense of disbelief that his familiar figure bent over books and manuscripts was no longer to be seen.

The period between the death of Ellen and V.N. Sharma was a period of transition, of new developments and new visions, and of great struggle; and it was only in the next decades that stabilization of the new aspects of the school could be achieved.






- | | |
|----|----------|
| 1. | Elephant |
| 2. | Tap |
| 3. | Pan |
| 4. | kib |
| 5. | ball and |

I like to
play with seeds

My Aili
II B

I like games

what i like best
in school

A photograph of several young children in a computer lab. They are seated at desks with blue and yellow frames, each equipped with a small monitor displaying a colorful landscape. The children are wearing school uniforms; some are in white shirts with green suspenders, while others are in blue dresses with red accents. The text "SPIRIT OF THE BANYAN" is overlaid in a large, yellow, serif font on the left side of the image.

SPRIT OF THE BANYAN



*a lamp
for every
year*



Class of 1957

Class of 1987



a golden jubilee



A Golden Jubilee

Every Institute has its own characteristic spirit, which either ebbs or reinforces itself through time. In the 50th year of its foundation, a new energy flowed through the school; there being a growing need to maintain ideals while moving with the times. India was rapidly changing. With the Age of Electronics, television ariels could be seen clinging to the roofs of the poorest slums, while the increasing number of working mothers and preference for nuclear families transformed the way youth viewed the world. Children were more intelligent, more aware of life around them, and perhaps less innocent than before. The school had to meet these needs and changing demands, and did so in many ways. It was a golden time for development, more so as 1987 marked the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

The year was marked by a series of activities including sports competitions, music concerts and exhibitions, and began on a happy note with the children winning the 3rd prize in the Republic day parade for their Tibetan Snow-lion dance. On 7th September, a grand function was held, beginning with prayers by a Swamiji from the Ramakrishna Math, a Buddhist monk, and a Christian priest. Mr. Chitra Narayanaswami, an 'old parent' presided over this. Owing to unavoidable circumstances the main function could be held only in March 1988 at the Music Academy, when Mr. R. Venkataraman, President of India, presided over the function. Mrs. Janaki Venkataraman lit the lamp and Dr. P.C. Alexander, Governor of Tamil Nadu, graced the occasion. Mr. R. Venkataraman whose children studied in our school had fond memories of the Institute.



August 29, 1987.

MESSAGE

The Children's Garden School, Madras, lives upto its name. Having spent 50 years in the care of children, it is now regarded as one of the most distinguished institutions in our country. I have great pleasure in extending my best wishes for the flowering of many a blossom in this Garden School in the years to come.

R. Venkataraman
(R. VENKATARAMAN)

By the end of the 1980's, the two little village schools at Sholinganallore and Karaipakkam grew steadily. Rural empowerment for village women was initiated through the bakery, textile printing units, spirulina cultivation, and expansion of the dairy, poultry, a plant nursery and village farms. Later, a small mini-bus was bought to ferry village children to these new schools; and with the advent of computers, rural education was changed forever at Karaipakkam and Sholinganallore. The opening of the V.N. Sharma Camping centre at Sholinganallore, brought adventure in the heart of nature back into the lives of city children and was a huge success.

The Ellen Sharma Memorial Matriculation School at Sholinganallur, now included a hostel and classes upto Standard XII. The generous donations of Mrs. and Mr. R. Embacher, helped build classrooms, hostels, a health centre and halls. A playground, gymnasium and open-air stage, as well as a vocational training centre were constructed

at Sholinganallur by Mr. G. Fischer, the former German Consul General, and recipient of the Gandhi Peace Prize. Soon the Sanmar Group, the D.I.K., O.I.K., Dutch Unesco and many others chipped in to help this venture in rural education. At the same time a reorientation training program was conducted for teachers of the Corporation of Madras and 5000 primary school teachers were trained.

In 1993, when the city primary school at the Children's Club and the primary school at Karaipakkam were granted recognition by the Department of Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, there was a new sense of enthusiasm and relief for the management.



Library at Sholinganallur



The primary school at Karaipakkam

Diamonds in the Sand Pit

“7th September 1937 was only a moment ago”, commented some of the older staff members, as the Diamond Jubilee drew near. “It was only yesterday when Ellen dusted off a dirty child, and Sharma handed out sweets to a crying baby”. The Diamond Jubilee celebrations were presided over by Mr. P. S. Ramamohan Rao, Governor of Tamil Nadu.

The eternal struggle to maintain safe and secure surroundings for the children continued and the school fought to prevent illegal shops on the road. Unfortunately the construction of numerous multistoried buildings in the school lane led to increasing congestion and traffic problems which threaten the well-being of our children.

Over the next decade, the school saw numerous changes. The establishment of the Sharma Children's Museum in 1999, helped create new enthusiasm in studying the past, complementing Sharma's love of history with Ellen's wish to make learning fun. The inclusive education programs, including mentally and physically handicapped children in the mainstream, was a quiet revolution in education. From slates to Microsoft Power Point, children transformed the way in which they presented their work. Old time-tested methods worked well along with the adoption of new techniques. Teachers were trained in new approaches, and children moved easily to surf the world wide web for information and communicate with counter-parts in schools all over the world. As always, volunteers from different countries, stayed at the school, worked with the children, return home with a sense of wonder and fulfillment. Workshops by experts on drama, music, literature, archaeology, journalism, ecology, archaeology, and many other subjects were now the norm. Primary school children demanded and got their own little computers to work on, and 8 year olds patiently explained the world of the internet to puzzled senior teachers.



A workshop at the Sharma Children's Museum

SWEET MEMORIES OF MY OLD SCHOOL.

I walked into the Children's Garden School along with my friends from Rising Star Outreach (NGO), USA, who have come to India with the noble purpose of starting a boarding school for underprivileged children in Tamil Nadu. Most of the children are healthy children of leprosy affected people and the rest come from economically and socially vulnerable sections of the village where the school is located.

All of us were enchanted by the holistic approach of the Children's Garden School in educating children. The multifarious activities encouraged in the school prepare the children to face the ever changing and challenging world. Particular mention must be made of the integration of challenged children with regular children in the classes. This inclusive education not only helps the challenged children but also serves to bring out the compassion and understanding of other children, parents and teachers. The school is a beacon of hope for such children who are otherwise marginalized in our society.

The representatives of Rising Star Outreach were so impressed by the teacher-student relationship that they requested the Principal to train their teachers. We hope to get the continued assistance of experienced teachers from the School.

I was so proud to tell the visitors that I am an old student of this School. I still vividly remember the wonderful, loving couple Mrs. Ellen Sharma and Dr. V.N. Sharma visiting the classes often and interacting with the children. My younger sister loved to go to this School because she could play with lots of boys. Even in those days Children's Garden School followed the principle of learning through playing and playing through learning.

My very best wishes to the management committee, staff and students for continued success in their noble endeavour.

PADMA VENKATARAMAN

Education is perennial
Knowledge is eternal
Learning is ageless

Present-day little kids carrying a bundle of bags on their backs - that might bring back a memory of sixty years. My first exposure to the Children's Garden School. I first thought this must be a children's park. Some of the kids were playing, some on the see-saw, some merry-go-round, some engaged in story-telling etc. These boys and girls were playing with Dr. V.N. Sharma Garu as well and he was distributing segmentary tasks and from his latest long snail. Each child was getting his share. That was my first glimpse and interaction with this great institution under the shade of banyan tree which gave education to thousands and thousands of students and shaped them as responsible citizens of our country.

Dr. V.N. Sharma was more Indian than most traditional Hindus. He always used to walk barefoot on the premises. - He used to carry his books carrying his chappals to the school gate - a custom unique in India. He would collect the bits of paper strewn about and throw them carefully in the waste-paper basket. He was always busy and never wasted a single moment. Besides the school and hostel work, he would go to the meeting hall in the evenings to listen to the lectures by students there. He would till midnight writing special letters to his friends requesting them to sponsor needy students. Several students were benefited by such sponsorships and had turned out to be doctors, scientists, engineers etc.

Dr. V.N. Sharma was a linguist and a Sanskrit scholar. He had deep interest in Telugu and Odia literature. He translated several Odia books into Telugu and the Central Sahitya Akademi of New Delhi particularly asked him to translate the world-famous Odia Classic 'Kusum' into Telugu. That was very well appreciated by Telugu Readers. For his tireless services to Odia and Telugu literature that confers honour, dignity and companionship in Indian land. That treasure was offered to innumerable students by Dr. V.N. Sharma Couple under the big banyan tree - it makes giving smiles and joy. Their three daughters Dr. Kamini and Kamalini are Tripathi Singam following the footsteps of the parents. We wish the three sisters long long dedicated life.

14.11.07.

Murali - Sharma
greeting for
February 4.



I like computer class. M. Manikandan.



A STORY IN EACH LEAF



The School Family

Seventy years after the first seven children stepped into the school; we look back with wonder, nostalgia and a sense of the enormity of the task which lies before us.

Little did Ellen Sharma and V.N. Sharma realize that the building blocks laid down by little hands, would be transformed into an Institute with more than 3000 family members in three city schools and two rural ventures. The founder's vision of a system of education that would help children develop their innate creativity and talent and satisfy their physical and emotional needs; has never been lost sight of.

Over these years, we have concentrated on devising an educational system which includes creative teaching methods, within a framework which also caters to the child's physical and emotional needs. Despite enormous financial stress, the school never lost sight of its basic function-to provide quality education to children from all social economic and religious backgrounds, and to support as many underprivileged, destitute and refugee children as possible.

Needless to say visionaries often fail when their ideals are not supplemented by a strong management system. Ellen Sharma always found a balance between ideals and common sense. Sakunthala Sharma brought in management skills, policies of decentralisation and organisational structure, without compromising the pervading sense of a 'School Family'. While walking down the school corridors, one comes across faces and features of children, teachers or staff members, which bring alive memories of their parents and grandparents who walked through the same halls and gardens.



The Children's Garden
Higher Secondary School,
Mylapore,
English and Tamil
Medium :
1690 students

The Children's
Garden
Kindergarten School,
Mylapore,
Tamil Medium:
415 students

Mrs. Ellen Sharma
Memorial Nursery &
Primary School
Mylapore.
English Medium:
518 Students

The Children's Garden
School Society,
Creche, Mylapore,
100 Babies

Mrs. Ellen Sharma
Memorial Matriculation
and
Higher Secondary School,
Sholinganallore,
English Medium:
450 Students

Mrs. Ellen Sharma
Memorial Nursery and
Primary School,
Sholinganallore
English Medium:
375 Students

Mrs. Ellen Sharma
Memorial Creche,
Sholinganallore,
50 Babies

Mrs. Ellen Sharma
Memorial Nursery and
Primary School,
Karaipakkm,
English and Tamil Medium:
550 Students

Play

The Kindergartens form the roots of the school. The Children's Play-Way method for the first time in India. Ellen educational material and teaching aids

were widely applicable in both rural and tamarind seeds, pine coconut shells, cowries material simple toys, material could be created. children the basics of recognition, sounds, Cheap, easy to make and methods are now widely areas.

In a homely comfortable the little one's learn thorough learning, art and music, poetry to create a unique learning structured pedagogy and child-Kindergarten is an example of forms the basis for our children's children and teachers abreast with teaching aids supplement the old. At no point does methodology obscure the teacher's focus on the personality of each child in the classroom.

In the Primary sections, learning through interactive projects, science experiments, nature walks, music and dance, drama and puppet shows, arts and crafts, computers, and reading, help children develop creative and thinking skills. Text book information is always taught through these methods, and interlinking themes unite topics in various periods. The games designed by the school to teach



Garden School Society introduced the Sharma developed her own to suit Indian conditions, and which urban areas. Using local material, cones, palm fronds, bamboo, and other easily available raw instruments and teaching These are used in order to teach counting, shape and colour images, and much more. utterly reliable, these used in urban and rural

and colourful atmosphere, play. Free and organized and story telling, all unite experience. With a centred curriculum, the

evolving methods in children's education and attitude towards learning and life. Today, new innovations keep recent advances in the philosophy of education, while new materials and

நாளை
8 ஆம் (மாதிரி) வகுப்பில்

$0 \times 8 = 0$
 $1 \times 8 = 8$
 $2 \times 8 = 16$
 $3 \times 8 = 24$
 $4 \times 8 = 32$
 $5 \times 8 = 40$

Fun with numbers

TIME-TABLE

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
MON								
TUE								
WED								
THU								
FRI								
SAT								
SUN								



$6 \times 8 = 48$
 $7 \times 8 = 56$
 $8 \times 8 = 64$
 $9 \times 8 = 72$

mathematics, help children understand concepts. Teachers are sent regularly to seminars and workshops to update their knowledge and skills. From workshops on learning disabilities to alternate education and eurhythmics, etc. nothing escapes us.

Methods developed in the Middle and High Schools move children onto more structured systems in order to allow them to slowly adapt to mainstream Indian educational practices. However, learning follows a project-based approach. Topics are taught through the medium of projects supplementing text book information, active participation of the children in a wide range of clubs, theme based exhibitions, participation in inter-school competitions and programs, including that of the Republic Day parade, Gandhi Jayanti and many more. Art and crafts, poetry, story writing, drama and music and dance are intrinsic to our philosophy of education.

The girls are taught to be confident and self-reliant, emerging from school with a good understanding of life skills. Board examinations are an unfortunate fact of life in the modern world of intense competition. However, these do not dominate school

life. Obtaining good results

while boosting confidence of the teachers and girls do not limit our routine. Children who are less fortunate in passing examinations, are counselled to pass at their own pace, and guided towards other fields where their talents lie.

The Ellen Sharma Memorial Matriculation and Higher Secondary School at Sholinganallur, brought in the founder's true vision of a coeducational institute where girls and boys could share the experience of learning together; and become well balanced adults. Today, while the school has children from rural and industrial areas, underprivileged children and Tibetan refugees, it has also been much sought after by children from as far off as north-eastern India, Orissa, Nepal, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.



Holistic Education

From the Kindergarten onwards, play forms a powerful theme in education, where children are encouraged to enjoy the process of learning. In the higher classes, demands of the modern competitive world, and examinations, have necessitated modification of these methods.

Teaching is through projects, experiments and exhibitions. Every new topic is organised as a project, where the children take an active part in making charts and models or conducting experiments. They hold plays, quizzes and debates to enhance the value of their projects and proudly display their creations to admiring parents and visitors. The child's involvement in the learning process results in a thorough understanding of the subject which is absent in the case of a one-sided 'teacher dominated' mode of learning.



The Dr. V.N. Sharma library at Mylapore, the children's libraries in various sections in the city and rural schools contain more than 30,000 books, journals and magazines. The libraries are not static places, but organize projects, quizzes, debates, and other activities to generate an interest in reading. Bulletin boards are maintained by children in all the schools, where reports of news items, politics, new discoveries and other current issues increase their general knowledge.

One of the key components of the school has been a strong focus on teaching children the arts in the wider sense of music, dance, drama, art and craft. From

an early age onwards, these have been taught either as separate subjects or as a medium to teach other topics. A special focus has always been on classical music and dance, and folk music and dance, which are being forgotten rapidly today. Every year, the school choirs win recognition for their skill in rendering songs in various Indian languages. The dance and drama performances at the school annual day, are noted for their choreography and high quality of performance. Art and craft form an essential part of the children's day especially in the primary sections, and the use of differing techniques ranging from leaf printing to origami and clay modeling, and from simple crayons to batik and textile printing; form an important part of their course.

The modern world is increasingly moving towards the computerization of most activities. We prepare our children to face the challenges of the next century by introducing them to the world of computers from LKG onwards. Without doubt, children surpass teachers in their knowledge of information technology.



Training in tailoring, textile printing and batik, spirulina cultivation, radio-engineering and other skills, aid youth and women in being economically self-reliant. Today, most of our boys at Sholinganallur can dish up an excellent meal and prepare themselves for a career in the hospitality industry, while our young girls can fix complex gadgets and write software programs in minutes.

In our rural schools, boys and girls are provided with free coaching classes to aid them in their daily work.

Participating in sports is a wonderful outlet for a child's energy. Our sports ground at the farm is always full of batches of enthusiastic children playing football, cricket, badminton, basketball, tenniquoit and many other sports. Yoga, malkhamb and kho-kho as well



traditional Indian board games help develop mind and body control.

Our children are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities of the Nature Club, Interact, Red Cross, Scouts and Guides and Social Welfare Programs, in order to increase their awareness of social and environmental issues. Our Road Safety Patrol was set up to aid in inculcating a civic sense among our children. Our safety-patrol girls in their uniforms can be seen directing the traffic and helping their school-mates to cross the busy main road. In times of disaster, such as the Tsunami, children stepped in to contribute books, clothes, school bags and kits to school children in affected areas.

The Sharma Children's Museum brings India's past heritage alive through dioramas, models, antiquities and workshops.

Counselling, in particular of teenagers, is an integral part of our education policy. In guiding many young individuals through crucial phases in their lives. Examination



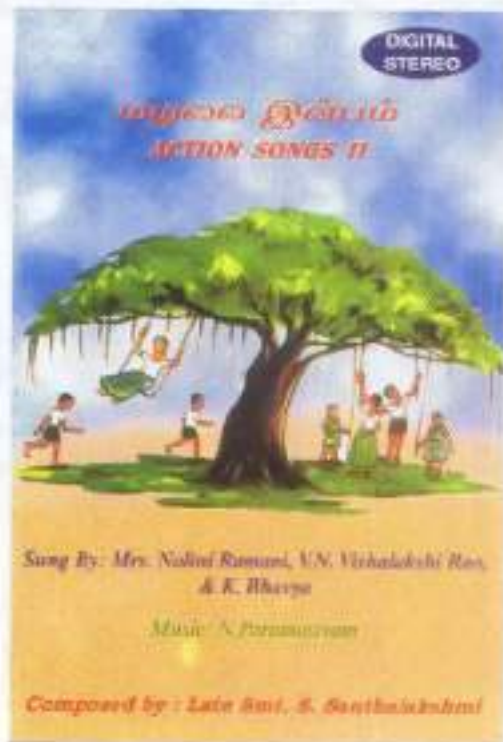
This help-line has aided results are never released by the teachers, without due counseling to children and guardians/parents, and no child is ever treated or made to feel a 'failure'. Teachers are trained to observe abnormal or changing behaviour patterns of children, follow this up with the parents/guardians, provide solutions or recommend psychiatric or other care for serious cases.



In a school with aims such as ours, with large numbers of children, providing an ideal classroom ambience is often hard to maintain. With little to no money for 'designer' classrooms, the school strove to provide clean basic facilities, light and airy and with greenery and stress on classroom decorations made by teachers and students. In the primary sections children sit on the floor, with their slippers neatly stowed outside the classroom in the true Indian tradition. Small benches provide space for the numbers. In higher classes, tables and chairs replace benches. Through the years, the need has been to focus on speedy construction with sturdy buildings. It is our aim to redesign many of our school buildings and bring in a new ambience in future.

Our Teachers

The Sharmas' vision of an eastern Gurukul with modern methods, transformed the concept of a kind, wise, but slightly aloof Guru into a compassionate, easily approachable figure. With her 'Tuesday' and 'Wednesday' meeting groups in the 1940's, Ellen Sharma drew the teacher's together to discuss pedagogy, resolve issues and structure methods. The teacher's training courses devised by her, have now grown along several streams.



The school is a Study Centre for the Tamil Nadu Open University Program for Pre-Primary Teacher's Training. Here, in a syllabus devised by the

school, teachers are taught issues including child development and psychology, early childhood education, nutrition, health and hygiene, communication skills and life coping skills.

The 30-day In-service Refresher Course organized by the school, updates teachers in the fields of pedagogy in language skills, number work, time table making, syllabus construction, environmental awareness, science, arts and crafts.

The Crèche training course, helps staff learn how to set up crèches and manage them.

The in-house training course for inclusive education, guides teachers on handling and teaching physically and mentally handicapped children.

The school is also a pioneer in preparation of their own innovative teaching aids, books on



nursery rhymes, cassettes on Tamil rhymes, games, etc. Special training courses for staff involved in the integrated education programs are also conducted.

Retired teachers repeatedly visit the school and willingly contribute their time and experience. Some retired teachers with no families or those living alone, are given accommodation and shelter in the school in their old age.

Breaking Barriers

One of the most important features of the school has been to break social, economic and religious barriers. Ram sits next to Rahim, Peter and Parvati play together and Den Zum's best friend is little Kavita. A child of a sweeper learns mathematics along with a software engineer's child, and a little Tibetan refugee shares his bench with a high-ranking government officer's only child.

In the inclusive education schemes, little Gita helps her autistic classmate to eat his lunch and friends run out to help handicapped Ayesha climb up the ramp. Children grow up free of the prejudices which characterize much of Indian society. Today, the child of a rickshaw driver, conducts experiments in the laboratory and can well realize her ambition to be a doctor. This is the greatest achievement of the school.

The farm at Shollinganallur, with its green fields, open spaces, ponds and gardens, serves as a means to introduce children to the wonders of nature and gives them a well-deserved refuge from the pollution of the city. Nature walks, picnics, camping and sports draw children from all sections here. The farm also supplies the hostels with milk, rice and fresh vegetables.



Serving the Girl-Child

Despite advances in various fields, the girl-child continues to be grossly neglected and despicably treated in most parts of the Subcontinent. Female foeticide, dowry and domestic violence, eve-teasing and other forms of abuse are unfortunately a part of modern Indian society. The Children's Garden School Society is one of the pioneer institutions which has consistently worked towards educating the girl-child and ensuring that she develops self-confidence to face life with courage and self-respect. Today our girls are involved in a wide range of professions, hold important posts or run their homes with confidence and skill.

The Parent-Teacher Association

Our school recognises the importance of a continuous and open channel of communication between parents and teachers. For this purpose, we have organised a Parent-Teachers association which is active throughout the year, holds meetings and takes an active role in the child's progress. We also believe in integrating parents in the process of education. In the absence of a teacher, mothers trained in teaching, step forward to help us.

Education with Compassion

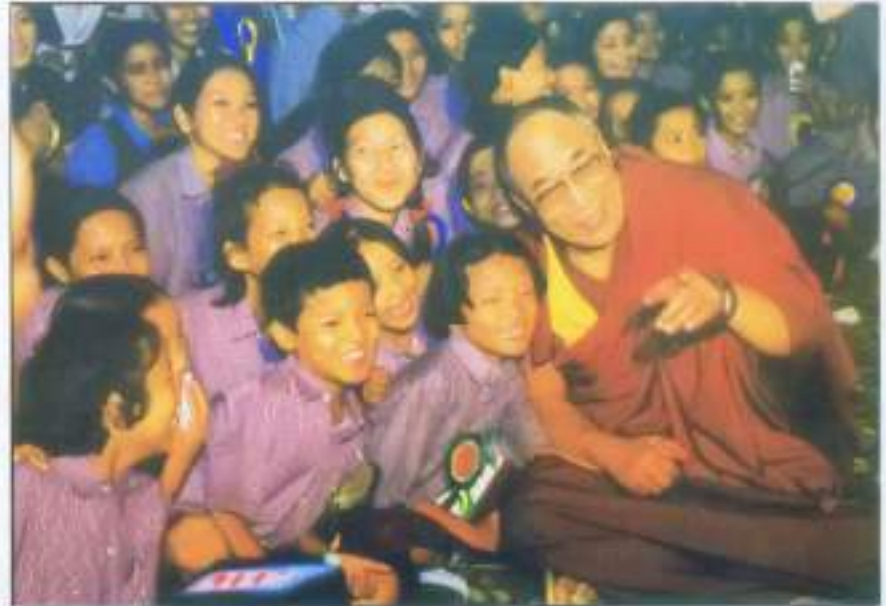
Education without compassion was, in the minds of the founders, meaningless. From its foundation onwards, aid was provided to children from poor backgrounds. Around 50% of the children comprising underprivileged children, destitutes, orphans and Tibetan refugees, are provided free education, books, stationery, and extra-coaching classes. Free text and note books were distributed to more than 500 day-scholars every year at the book shop.



GUIDE ACTIVITY

Shelter for Refugees

Since 1971 we have been providing food, shelter and education to a large number of Tibetan refugee children from the settlements in Karnataka. To enable them to maintain their traditions, we have introduced classes in Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan language, and a small Buddhist shrine enables them to follow their own religion. Indian children have learnt new dances and songs and above all have made new and lifelong friends.



Our children meet the Dalai Lama

Coming 'Home'

The school's programs do not stop with the graduation of the child. Poor children, orphans and destitutes are aided in higher studies as per their aptitude. Children are aided financially in college education, polytechnic courses, in job seeking or in marriage. Girls often return 'home' for delivering babies, which in turn move straight on to the crèche. For many, the school is the only true home they have ever known.

Adult Education

In India, a high percentage of the adult population is illiterate, and we have felt it essential to introduce programs of adult education. Helper staff are aided in literacy programs, and destitute illiterate women are educated and trained for a profession.

Inclusive Education

Children, whatever their handicaps, be they mental or physical, need the same degree of love and attention. We are happy to note that our Society was the first to introduce a comprehensive policy of integrated education. Children who are physically or mentally handicapped in various ways are integrated into general classes. We provide them with special attention and trained teachers guide them in the learning process. Our experience in this novel means of education indicates that the handicapped child, develops self-confidence and learns faster and with greater concentration. The remaining children learn a lesson of tolerance, consideration and a sense of concern for those among them who are less fortunate.



Today, we have a total of 60 challenged children of a total of 579, in our Kindergarten and Primary schools (age groups 3-9 years). These include mentally and physically challenged children who are autistic, with Down's syndrome, spastic, ADHD, slow learners, poor vision, hearing impaired, and polio victims. Teachers have been sent for special training workshops and also update their skills based on in-house training. Special educators and helpers are present to help out. Our school also conducts a training course for helpers.

Innovative and novel approaches are used in our teaching methods. Challenged children learn in the same environment as other children, and sit next to



'normal' children. Each child learns at its own pace, and classroom interaction and participation is stressed on. We have seen that this aids in removing any complex of being 'inferior', encourages communication, compassion and understanding; and true friendship between children. They are exposed to the outside world and gradually gain confidence in interacting with different kinds of people.

All challenged children actively participate in our school cultural programs playing drums, taking part in plays and sports activities; and feeling one with the group. Many of our children, previously considered to be seriously challenged, are now in high school and well adapted to learning in a more formal atmosphere. This has occurred even in the case of some autistic children for whom the parents believed no hope was possible. Above all, our method is suited for all children, rich and poor and materials used are those easily available which can be adapted by teachers and parents, irrespective of their economic background.

Nutrition and Health Care

Much before the government initiated mid-day meal schemes, Ellen had introduced this system for children. Ellen always recollected a story where a little boy was repeatedly leaving class to drink water. On enquiring, she discovered that he was drinking water to stave off hunger as there was no rice to cook in his house that day. A quick survey revealed more children who came to school hungry. Within a day the mid-day meal scheme was in place. Today more than 800 children in all schools benefit



from this and other schemes related to nutrition. In addition to the government aided mid-day meals, the school provides four meals a day, nutritious drinks and snacks including ragi drinks, kanji and health supplements to children in the city and rural schools. The dining halls built with great difficulty in the early days, are now expanded and include full fledged kitchens in all the schools, facilities for large scale steam-cooking, use of solar heating, reuse of waste products from the farms as fuel and recycling of water through root-zone water purification plants at Sholinganallur. The vegetables and fruits grown in the farms, dairy and bakery help supplement the diet. The food is purely vegetarian with eggs provided for those who need them, and special needs for students arriving from outside Tamil Nadu being taken care of to allow them to adjust slowly to the South Indian diet.



Breakfast, Lunch, dinner,



Snacks



*Learning
on
a full
stomach*



Healthy drinks

Along with nutrition, Ellen Sharma laid great stress on seeing to the health of each child. This informal system, soon resulted in a small dental care clinic. This grew into full-fledged child-care clinics with resident nurses and visiting specialists. Regular physical check-ups for ENT, skin, primary complex and other problems, and vaccinations for polio, triple antigen, etc. are provided. Medical records for each child are maintained by the resident nurses. For major problems financial aid is raised for long-term treatment of poor children. The health care clinics also provide special dietary supplements, yoga therapy for polio victims (reduced greatly in the last decade), and other handicapped children, and possibilities for alternate medicine such as homeopathy. The 'Little Doctor Program', initiated in the Ellen Sharma Memorial Nursery & Primary School, Mylapore creates awareness amongst children on health and hygiene issues.



Mothers and Babies



Ellen realized at a early age that mothers needed to be educated on many aspects of child care and psychology and very soon, initiated Mothers' Classes. These soon expanded into classes where mothers' could learn other topics.

A demand for child-care by the teachers, led to the first crèche, which opened in a small room. Today, there are two crèches with a total of around 160 children from 3 months of age onwards, of whom free care is provided to 35%, with the others paying a nominal fee. Specially trained supervisors and helpers look after the children. The crèches are richly stocked with toys and other educational teaching aids. Music, recitation, rhymes, songs, story telling and picture conversation keep the children busy and active. Trained helpers teach the little ones how to take care of

themselves, toilet training, changing clothes, eating and drinking. Balanced, wholesome and nutritious food (vegetable soups, fruit juices, milk, rice, dal, idlis, puffed rice, vegetables, fruits, biscuits, etc. are provided). Teachers help older children who come to the crèche after school hours with their homework. Indoor and outdoor games, picture conversation, and other activities keep them busy and happy. Carefully structured routines with work and play time, meal times and 'naptimes' help them develop regular habits. Courses to train women to open and manage crèches proved a great success and today the school has helped numerous organisations to open their own crèches.

Women's Welfare

From the early years onwards, the school raised its voice against injustice for women. Shelter for widows and deserted women, were followed by schemes to train them to become self-reliant. Tailoring, provision of funds for purchase of sewing machines, textile printing and batik, spirulina cultivation, etc. are a few of the schemes we have introduced to enable women to gain self-respect and economic independence. We also train women to be ideal house-mothers in the school hostels. Widow remarriage, still a stigma over most of India, is encouraged in our school environment. We also provide psychological counseling for women suffering from mental problems. We organise marriages for women who cannot bear the expenses alone, and provide them with vessels and equipment to set up their own homes.

Rural Welfare Schemes and Sustainable Development

With the growth of the farms and village schools at Sholinganallur and Karaipakkam, schemes for rural welfare were soon introduced.

Beginning with training women in batik, textile printing, spirulina cultivation, kitchen gardens, crèche and teacher's training, the schemes moved on to look into aspects of sustainable agriculture and development. Village women were gifted cows which served as an



Rural Welfare



Spirulina



wind energy



dairy & vegetables

batik & textile printing

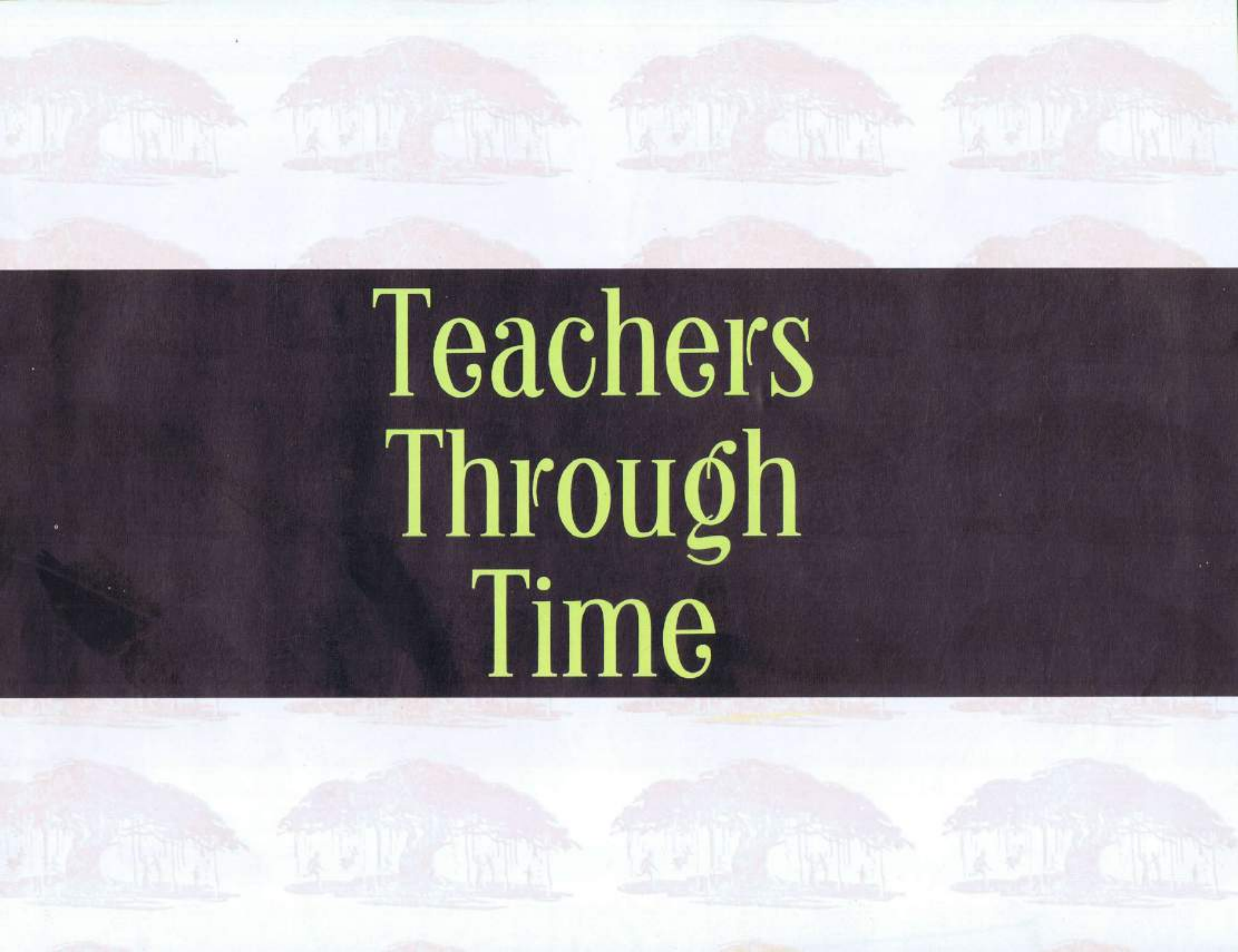
additional economic resource, and were aided in setting up their own kitchen-gardens. In the farm drip-irrigation, use of windmills for power generation, root-zone projects for recycling water to be used in the fields, solar heating, rain water harvesting, reuse of waste products for fuel, use of gobar gas plants and steam cooking-all these help in a 'Green approach'.

Shelter

No education is truly successful if the child does not experience an atmosphere of shelter, security, love, and discipline. We provide such an atmosphere at our hostels. A unique feature of our hostels is the lack of discrimination between children on the basis of caste, religion, wealth or social status. Rich and poor live, eat, study, play and "fight" together; all perform their assigned duties while housemothers look after groups of their 'families'. Our hostels, not only provide shelter and food, but inculcate a sense of discipline, a regular lifestyle, manners and proper codes of behaviour. Our school is the only home for a large number of destitute and orphan children who are provided with free food and shelter. The hostels at Mylapore were later shifted to Sholinganallur owing to water crisis in the city.







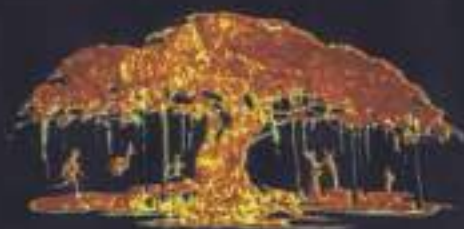
Teachers Through Time











No boundaries for the Banyan

The future of India lies in developing new and creative systems of education. Children should grow into ideal citizens, who can address social and economic issues with as much skill as they can solve a mathematical problem or write an essay.

Today, India needs to develop systems which can address the urgent need of providing high-quality education to a large number of children from diverse backgrounds.

The Children's Garden School Society has been doing just this for the past 70 years. From seven little ones in 1937 to an ever-expanding family of children, teachers, helpers, friends and donors, we have aimed at bringing in new approaches towards holistic children's education in India.

*‘Let none be like another
Yet each be like the highest
How can that be
Let each be perfect in himself’*

- Goethe