

## NAL Nursery School

### An idyllic world for our tiny tots

Tucked away in a corner on the NAL campus is a small building that houses the NAL Nursery School. This pre-school was started over a decade ago to prepare children of NAL employees for Kendriya Vidyalaya and its syllabi. Mrs Shyamala Valluri, wife of former NAL Director, Dr S R Valluri, is the School's genial principal. We catch up with Mrs Valluri.



*Mrs Valluri speaking at the School Day function*

#### *How did it all start?*

There were several reasons for starting the school. First, it was to serve as a preparatory school for children wishing to enter Kendriya Vidyalaya, NAL. But even more so because both Dr Valluri and Prof Satish Dhawan felt that we must find a way to actively encourage children of NAL employees, especially from lower economic backgrounds, who might be very intelligent but who have no chance to go to a school simply because they cannot afford it.

#### *How did you join the school?*

I was actually working those days in Army Service Corps School. I was not very happy there because it was a bigger school and I was spending more time in managing the staff than actually teaching and interacting with the children -- which was what I really wanted to do. So when Dr Srinivasan asked me to suggest someone who could run the Nursery School, I offered to take up the job myself!

#### *How has it been like? Are you thinking of expanding the school?*

No. I don't want to expand this school either horizontally or vertically. Pre-school teaching is an entirely different concept which doesn't jell with the higher classes. I don't want to expand horizontally as that means more children and less time and attention.

#### *Have you used any novel teaching approaches?*

We don't follow any particular training methods. The Montessori system, for example, uses education equipment. But these are expensive and we can't afford it. So we use chalk, blackboard and oral teaching! But to tell you the truth, pre-school teaching involves many more things than this. We have to find time for every child. The children need a lot of psychological boosting and encouragement. We give this to the children. We have to make a lot of effort. The whole idea is to build the child's self-confidence and self-reliance. So it is more a psychological approach than anything else.

*What are your views on exams?*

At the pre-school level, we have to constantly test the children. Before we proceed each day we must see whether he or she has learnt what was taught the previous day. You have to go step by step and make sure they know. So if you look at it, the children are being tested every day. At the end of the academic year we do have exams but we try and make them as less traumatic as possible. Pre-school is really memorizing. Analyzing comes later. Writing requires physical co-ordination and comes even later. It is only in lower kindergarten (LKG) that children learn and improve their handwriting. Parents don't realize this. They ask us why their child is not able to write and don't take our explanations too kindly. We also give home work so that the children form a habit of working at home. And we don't encourage parents to help their children with the home work! Children should learn to be responsible for their work.

*And reward and punishment?*

Of course it is very important. We have to keep alternating continuously between reward and punishment so that the idea gets instilled in their young minds. In fact I think it is just like teaching pets. Learning not to do what is wrong takes time but once it is learnt it comes naturally to them. Actually I don't really punish them as such. I don't believe in corporal punishment. I put children in the corner when they make a mistake. They feel left out. It makes them so miserable that they never do it again. I'll give you an example. If a child is beating up another I don't let the child play and make him stay in class. It really improves him. You postpone what they want. That's the best punishment.

*What about extra-curricular activities?*

We actively encourage such activity. Nursery children mostly play with toys. The older children play on the ground. We also have jigsaw puzzles to improve their physical and mental skills. Playing makes them learn faster but they don't realize that.

*The Annual Day functions must be a pleasure to organize.*

Oh, they are simply wonderful! The children really love it. It is a chance for them to participate in different cultural activities. We teach the children songs in Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and quite a few patriotic songs. We organize Children's Day in a big way. From November 1 to 14, we have talent competitions in a lot of things like drawing, recitation, games, songs and others. Sports Day is another big event. All children participate in everything. Practice itself takes a month or so. After this we have the semi-finals and the finals. The way the children participate is itself a treat to watch. I love to watch them enjoying themselves.



*Apart from this do you have any other way to hone their skills?*

We do have a timetable in which we have some time for drawing, colouring, singing and other activities.

*Every school has its share of mischievous kids. How do you handle them?*

I talk to them. Make them feel a little repentant. I also separate them. They don't want to be away from the activity, so they learn. It always works. I have been very lucky to get good teachers who work whole-heartedly and really love the children. This is very important for a school to run

smoothly.

*Did you deliberately choose to teach younger children over older ones?*

When I was at the Army Service Corps School I found it nice to be with small children. So I just continued. And now I suppose I prefer to work with younger children rather than older children. That is why I am very particular about not expanding.

*What frustrates you the most?*

When children don't improve. Children with learning disability are very sad and disheartening. There are one or two every year. I think I can do more with the help of the parents. If we don't do it now, when they are young, it snowballs later. And that makes me very unhappy.

*What about funding for the school? Is the funding comfortable or is that too a source of worry?*

Funding is pretty difficult. NAL pays for the water and electricity and I thank them for that. But we have problems in paying salaries to our teachers. For nearly 15 years, salaries didn't change. Last year we could finally raise salaries, but at a price: we find that we now can't give enough concessions to worthy students. I felt very happy when Dr Somashekar and some others created a trust to support the two most deserving poor children in each class. But apart from this we don't have anything. We don't want to increase the fees,.. but we do want to ensure that the school remains attractive. It is quite a dilemma. I wish people come forward to support our scheme to sponsor a child for a year. People should come forward! People who can afford it, like someone who doesn't have many financial worries, whose children themselves are doing well...

*Do you have a role model?*

Not one but several. My parents, one or two teachers. Things people have said have stuck with me and influenced me.

*Your future plans?*

I think I have continued for a long time already. People don't want me to leave. I want to stop.

*Ending on a more general note, what do you feel about the Government's recent move to make Saraswati Vandana compulsory in schools?*

I see no harm in this. The sentiments in the prayer should apply to every child. Nothing wrong. We try and make the prayers in the school as 'secular' as possible.

*Sindhu Srinivasan*

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## **"Let's do the Boogie Woogie!"**

The Annual Day of the NAL Nursery School is an event one always looks forward to; tiny tots in the age group of 2.5 to 5+ regale the audience with their antics, charm and innocence. This year's Annual Day (the NAL Nursery School is now in its 14th academic year) was held at the Systems

Auditorium on 17 December 1998. As is customary, Mrs Shyamala Valluri, the School's Founder-Principal, first presented the School's annual report. The report confirmed what one knew all along: the Mrs Valluri and her colleagues continue to do a marvellous job in creating an enchanting world full of discovery and joy for its little children. The chief guest was NAL's former Director, Dr K N Raju. "I must be getting old, that's why I have been asked to be here today", Dr Raju joked; adding that he was "delighted to get away from the anxious moments at work to behold the pure and innocent smile of a child". Dr Raju also made another unusual proposal to the School Principal: "declare one day of the year to be a Mischief Day!" Mischievous the children could certainly be, but the variety entertainment programme which followed confirmed that the children were definitely a bundle of talent. There was a welcome dance in engaging red and cream uniforms followed by a captivating qawali spreading the message of communal harmony; one admired the scrupulous attention to detail here -- the young qawals even twirled a red handkerchief adroitly between the fingers. There was a Rajasthani dance around the 'fire' (and the engaging sight of a child waving excitedly upon being spotted by her parents), there were little 'couples', not quite 3, out shopping, there was a 'filler' song by a lad who was too tiny to reach the mike, there were smiling faces and exuberant dancing as the children 'did the Boogie Woogie', and, finally, a captivating play on the 'inauspicious' repercussions of killing a cat.

### ***Bachpan ke din bhi kya din the***



The Annual Day of the NAL Nursery School (now most thoughtfully renamed "Vidyodaya"), was held at the S R Valluri Auditorium on 23 December 1999. It was a wonderful and festive occasion, as doting parents and grandparents, and the gentleman who lends his name to the Auditorium, assembled to witness another enchanting performance from tiny tots aged 3-6.

The Nursery School function now has a well-defined pattern: the first part (which the School Principal Mrs Shyamala Valluri calls the "business part") features the presentation of the School annual report (the School has now completed 15 years!), remarks by the Chairperson of the School Committee and a brief address by the chief guest; the second part contains all the fun and frolic as little children sing, dance and entertain with a presence and aplomb which is truly captivating.

This year's chief guest was Dr A C Raghuram, who retired last month from NAL's Materials Science Division. "Childhood memories always remain so fresh", he mused, "I still remember all those wonderful events in my life which took place over 50 years ago!". "I even remember my childhood functions where we used to pray that the chief guest ends his speech quickly!", he said -- even as he ended his brief 2-minute speech. Dr V Shubha's remarks, as the School's Committee Chairperson, were equally brief: she expressed her happiness at the generous contributions made to the Children's Welfare Fund and thanked the School's teachers for creating an idyllic world for the little children. Mrs Shyamala Valluri's annual report was, as is her wont, a very faithful narrative of the activities of the School. Being extremely modest, the gracious lady chooses not to mention her stupendous contribution to the blossoming of the School. But the NAL Nursery School is really Mrs Valluri's labour of love; her noble edifice to bring joy and happiness in the lives of little, impressionable children.

The entertainment section, compered by a four-year old, contained the usual mix of costume, dance and music: prayers to the Lord, a serene 3-year old Krishna "playing" the flute, folk dancers with gay turbans and dazzling sarees (who didn't stop dancing even after the curtain "fell"), ballroom dancers with frocks and bow ties shaking their tiny bodies energetically and a most picturesque finale to usher in the joy of Christmas. The skit, extolling the virtues of honesty, was also well-presented.



*Srinivas Bhogle*

## Heal the World

It would appear that we sometimes need children to tell us the obvious. In the closing closing sequence of their School Day function, the tiny tots of NAL's Nursery School displayed a placard with the message: "Heal the world" after they witness the horrific sight of their mates being "killed" in the crossfire between the militants and the police.

It was another delightful School Day function at the S R Valluri Auditorium on 21 December 2001 with half a dozen "mini-shows" by children aged 3-5. The shows celebrated the festive spirit with folk dances, ballroom dances (featuring jauntily dressed young couples already shaking the leg with some aplomb) and a dance drama depicting the triumph of truth over evil.

## Great commitment, great fun



On 28 January 2003 the usually sober S R Valluri Auditorium presented a picture of a lively mini-India. The occasion was the eighteenth annual day of the NAL Vidyodaya Nursery School.

The event commenced punctually at 10:30 in the morning with a simple song of invocation sung by the School's young choir. Among those present for this lovely function were NAL Director Dr B R Pai, Mrs Shakuntala Pai, members of the School Management Committee headed by Dr V Shubha and of course the adoring parents of the School's tiny tots (the gentleman that the Auditorium is named after -- who also happens to be the School's founder -- was also spotted sitting unobtrusively in a corner).

As is the custom, the 'business part' of the function was completed first. Mrs Shyamala Valluri -- the School's much-loved Principal, who has now guided the School for nearly two decades -- presented the annual report recounting the many laudable things that the School does with its limited resources: excursions, sports, exams, other co-curricular activity, besides the school's classroom activity. Dr V Shubha presented the management's perspective while Dr B R Pai, who was the chief guest, highlighted the welfare-minded genesis of the school. In an impromptu voice vote he was assured of the near-unanimous preference of parents to the NAL Kendriya Vidyalyaya after the preparatory phase that the Nursery school offered.

Then began the 'fun part. To parents like us, who find the bringing up of a kid or two to be energy-sapping, it is truly a wonder that a handful of teachers can manage classes full of boisterous 'kinder'. And then to organize them into such a pleasing eyeful of team activity (certainly any chaos one may have felt was totally 'adult')! The choreographed highland fling and Indian folk dances from Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, all replete with popular music and apt costumes (truly entertaining), were simple marvellous. The curtains came down with one's ears reverberating with the National Anthem sung by the whole school.

*R Swarnalatha*

## 19th Annual Day of the NAL Vidyodaya Nursery School



A lovely play about the Fourth Wise Man\* on the spirit of Christmas was one of the highlights of the



19th

Annual Day festivities of the NAL Vidyodaya Nursery School. Replete with period costumes and sound effects, one learnt of this story from the young actors. This, perhaps, is representative of the evolution of the school as it nears two decades, under very able and dedicated guidance by the few teachers and the School Committee.

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\*The original story was written by Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933). The Fourth Wise Man tells the touching story of Artaban who had originally planned to journey to Bethlehem with the other three wise men to pay homage to the new King of the Jews but was delayed by his acts of kindness to others along the way. He misses the birth of Jesus but continues a lifelong search of the King with a most wonderful journey and blissful end. Here's what the author had to say about his story: "Who seeks for heaven alone to save his soul, May keep the path, but will not reach the goal; While he who walks in love may wander far, Yet God will bring him where the blessed are."

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Earlier, the event began with prayers sung by a young choir in the presence of Dr S R Valluri, Dr and Mrs B R Pai, and members of the School Committee among the audience. There followed brief remarks by the Committee Chairperson Dr V Shubha about the Management's efforts at keeping parents, teachers and students happy. The School's Principal Dr Shyamala Valluri presented the Annual Report; therein one learnt of the curricular and fun-filled co-curricular activities for the students of the School all year long, especially their day out at the C-CADD hangar with the Hansa. Chief Guest Dr B R Pai's felicitous remarks included an assurance of continued support while also indicating the likely growth in numbers in view of new recruitment in NAL.

Thereafter the audience was given a visual treat through the colourful and trendy dance numbers performed by the kids with gay abandon. The successful attempt at involving and including every child was evident on stage. Kudos and best wishes to the teachers and their wards as they step into yet another year of growth!

*R Swarna Latha*

### **Colourfully dressed kid traipsing with myriad expressions**

For just once every year (usually in January or February), NAL's S R Valluri Auditorium sheds its scientific-technical sobriety and appears to don delightful regalia. On-their-toes teachers and traipsing, colourfully dressed kids with myriad expressions await their chance to happily show off their school.

For this year's annual day of the NAL Nursery School on 4 February 2005, those present included the chief guest Dr A R Upadhyya, Director, Mrs Sarala Upadhyya, Dr S R Valluri (who must surely have had mixed feelings about sitting in an auditorium named after him) with Mrs Shyamala Valluri (the Nursery School's "Founding Godmother") and Dr V Shubha, the Chairperson of the School's Management Committee.

The tiny tots were so well trained that a few of them anchored the whole event, with all the charisma of seasoned VJs. After the melodious invocation "Dhanya Dhanya..." Dr. Shubha welcomed the gathering, with small hands offering posies to the chief guest and others.

Dr. Upadhyya -- noting jocularly that, unlike other events at the Auditorium, more noise came from off the stage rather than from it,

annotated his address to the children with a story from Ramayana about the squirrel which helped Lord Rama in building a bridge. The Director's message to the children was meaningful: just as even tiny creatures could do small jobs, the children too could help parents at home and teachers at school in many different ways.

The school's Principal Mrs Neena Mercy read out the Annual Report, which included the year's highlight: the visit by the school kids to the SARAS hangar. Mrs Nirmala proposed the formal vote of thanks. All along, the tiny MCs did their bit (one of the announcers was a boy dressed up as a sage who tried to hold his moustache and beard in place every time he needed to open his mouth), inviting and thanking the speakers.

Then started the performances by the children: classical dancing to the song "Mahaganapathe...", a rhythmic rendition to the patriotically nostalgic "Nanha Munna..", including Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and Bharat Mata, followed by several popular numbers that had kids from the audience unexpectedly (but most delightfully) taking to the stage!

The adapted play showing how the Panchatantra evolved was the best yet. With a song in Kannada narrating the story of a king appointing Pandit Vishnu Sharma to teach his three sons, the stage turned into a real *darbar* replete with the king and queen perched on thrones, fan-waving maidens, soldiers guarding the palace and learned scholars and ministers seated in their places. The kids took the audience through the complete story of how the king is advised by his minister to appoint Pandit Vishnu Sharma as a teacher and of how the three sons turn over new leaves and return with great wisdom, to everyone's happiness. Abundant talent - among the children and the teachers alike - was evident. The curtains came down with the recital of the National Anthem by the whole school.

S T Aruna

### NAL's Nursery School gets a new hall



Things were noisy, but that's what you expect when about 150 excited kids, aged 3-6, assemble in a large new hall still smelling of fresh paint.

The new hall was needed. NAL's Nursery School, set up many years ago by Mrs Shyamala Valluri, keeps getting bigger and better with every passing year.



Dr A R Upadhyya, Director, NAL, officially lit the lamp to throw open the new hall to the excited tiny tots on 22 August 2005 . Three NAL former Directors also graced the occasion: Dr S R Valluri, Dr K N Raju and Dr B R Pai, and they all appeared delighted, especially after young Shreya's most charming thank you ("now we can have a lot more activities", the little girl said in a speech that was obviously well rehearsed and yet so endearing).

The guests were then entertained with song (a loud and deep-throated rendering of 'Old McDonald had a farm' ... it's amazing how these nursery rhymes are ageless, and often shockingly morbid) and dance.

The brief function ended with the children distributing baskets of red roses to everyone present. Dr Valluri received the largest basket. When the function ended, he distributed a rose to each of the pretty children and fondly wished that he could give away a rose to every child present. / SB



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## Annual Day, NAL Vidyodaya Nursery School



It was another jubilant day for the Vidyodaya NAL Nursery School on the occasion of the School's 20th annual day on January 25, 2006. As usual, the Valluri Auditorium was jam-packed. Commencing with an invocation, there followed a warm welcome speech and presentation of annual report by the Principal. The main highlight of 2005, the Principal noted, was the construction of a new classroom, staff room etc. The Director then addressed the children and parents. The Director

called upon the parents to 'open up the windows to the outside world' and develop an optimistic attitude among the children. The formal half of the occasion concluded with a vote of thanks.

By this time of course, the children were already on their toes ready to display their talents. The cultural events started with a brilliant Bharatanatyam performance by Baby Shreya that merited wonderful applause. An English number and a regional dance by the youngest class followed. Befitting the spirit of the Republic day, the poignant Hindi number 'Pyar Bant-te chalo' was perfectly played;



the costumes showing the unity in diversity of the rich Indian culture. A funny drama depicting a tussle among all the human organs seemed to reinforce the concept 'United we stand'. The popular Bhangra foot-tapper "Balle Balle" followed. Appreciation and a sense of appreciation were writ large on the



