



Banga Maitri Sansad

Activity report of Banga Maitri Sansad

(1st April 2020 – 31st March 2023)

Since the inception of Banga Maitri Sansad (BMS) in 1947, organising socio-cultural and charitable events have been at the core of all our activities. When the COVID-19 struck in 2020, the pandemic-related restrictions over the next two years put a stop on our regular activities, but it gave us an opportunity to look at some of these challenges with a new perspective. BMS witnessed many highs and lows during these pandemic years with life and livelihood losses within the family and friend circle of our members, and, also within the community around us, which served as our support system. Our difficulties were accentuated by great monetary constraints as donations dried up. Yet, notwithstanding these challenges, at every turn, effective planning and execution helped us to keep the wheels rolling.

The safety issues led us to focus on promoting COVID-appropriate behaviour. The hardships around us made our commitments firmer towards charitable causes. We provided financial support to families and helped them in restoring their livelihoods after the untimely demise of their main bread earners. We spent ₹1.85 Lakhs in FY20-21 towards this cause, despite the fund constraints we faced. We also continued our financial support to renowned Ramkrishna Mission – the social services and humanitarian organisation established by Swami Vivekananda in the 1800s – besides contributing to other NGOs and social services organisations such as SEWA for

women workers; SUPPORT Foundation for rehabilitation and de-addiction of street children; St. Christobel's Mother Teresa's Roses for poor and homeless; Goonj for disaster relief; humanitarian aid and community development; and Gharkul, a school for special children; along with local businesses and small-scale women-run businesses. During the peak of the phase-1 of the pandemic, we worked towards raising awareness about embracing COVID-19 safety measures and distributed masks and sanitiser amongst the vegetable and fruit sellers of Vakola in the Santacruz East area of Mumbai.

In FY21-22 too, our financial support to the COVID-impacted families continued. We contributed towards funding of education of children who had lost their parent/ sole earning member of the family; we got placements for some of the members who had lost their jobs during the pandemic; we supported local businesses and vendors who had suffered great losses due to the lockdown through our Durga Puja initiatives; and distributed food and ration to the poor. We also continued to support NGOs and charitable trusts by providing monetary support or donating ration or clothes, for example we donated 108 litres of milk tetra packets to Mothers Teresa's Roses for feeding the homeless and provided ration to SUPPORT Foundation for street children. This year, we extended financial support to the *Dhakis – the traditional drummers from the interior villages of West Bengal who are an integral part of Durga Puja and other festivities*. During the pandemic-imposed restrictions, when social gatherings were restricted, we sent financial aid to the *dhakis-the traditional drummers of Bengal*, when they were living in utter financial duress due to loss of livelihood as they could neither travel to Mumbai to be part of our Durga Puja nor there were any other festivities being celebrated anywhere else in the country during the lockdown. Our financial support helped them to feed their families for a few months. We used the opportunity of our 75th year celebrations in 2022 to once again support our *dhakis*, whom we called over to Mumbai and paid for their travel, stay and food during the Puja, besides providing them with financial aid and new clothes.

As the pandemic raged on and then it started to ebb from early-2022 onwards, BMS also stepped into its 75th year milestone. What had started as a reactionary process for

BMS with the onset of the pandemic, that is our multiplied efforts to come to the aid of as many people as possible and in as many ways during these testing times, we realised that there could be no better way to celebrate our 75th year milestone than to continue with our humanitarian efforts with more vim and vigour.

Remarkably, our year-long initiatives in commemoration of our 75th-year, began with a very humbling experience for us. Banga Maitri Sansad was called upon by the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra to celebrate the Bengali New Year at the historic Raj Bhawan of Mumbai on April 15, 2022. BMS was the only Bengali association in Mumbai to have this honour. On this day, we also published our first ever Bangla Calendar with our 75th year logo and held our 74th Annual General Meeting, where we resolved to make the 75th year memorable with our renewed commitment towards greater good.

On May 9th, 2022, on the occasion of birth anniversary of the Noble laureate and world-renowned Bengali poet Kaviguru Shri. Rabindranath Tagore, hon'ble governor of Maharashtra Shri. Bhagat Singh Koshyari unveiled a Special (First Day) Cover and a postal stamp commemorating '75 years of BMS' at Raj Bhawan, Mumbai. The Special Cover and the stamp issued by Department of Posts, Govt of India, were unveiled in the august presence of Chief Post Master General, Maharashtra Circle and Post Master General, Mumbai. Publication of this commemorative First Day Cover and the postal stamp symbolises an unequivocal validation from both the State and the Union Government for Banga Maitri Sansad and our 75-years of unblemished track-record of contribution to the socio-economic-and cultural enrichment of this city.

The first social initiative as part of our 75th year celebration was a blood donation camp organised on May 29th, 2022 in collaboration with Samarpan Blood Centre, to aid Thalassaemic children, whose lives were at risk as the blood banks in Mumbai were running dry during the pandemic and the city was facing severe shortage of blood. In the blood donation camp, we also made arrangements for a doctor to perform basic health checkups of the donors and also distributed nutritious food to them. We pledged to extend this new collaboration with the blood bank in years ahead as well.

In line with our commitment, on April 30th, 2023, we once again organised a blood donation-cum basic health check-up camp and also distributed food. During the year, we continued to support all the aforementioned NGOs, including Ram Krishna Mission, in their social and humanitarian work. Our cultural activities focussed around preservation of our cultural heritage and supporting the folk and classical performers and upcoming artistes not just from Bengal, but also from Maharashtra.

In the two years of pandemic, we accessed technology to reach out to global crowds. More and more people are now visiting our websites and accessing our YouTube channel and other social media handles to watch live telecast of our activities and programmes. We have enhanced our capabilities for a future ready organisation. The result of us becoming a tech-empowered organisation translated into an overwhelming participation and footfalls we received during our 75th year Durga Puja. On the four-days of the Durga Pujas in 2022, we distributed food amongst communities in and around Prabhat Colony and we are happy that this year we could feed a record number of people during our 75th year Durga Puja. We again extended financial support to Ramkrishna Mission and the other NGOs. This time, we chose to support women entrepreneurs by providing them with free or subsidised stalls to showcase their products at our Durga Puja venue. Again, we chose our vendors for the puja, who were genuinely impacted by the ravages of the pandemic and were in dire need for financial support.

(Refer to Annex 1 for photographs of social initiative of BMS)

Cultural enrichment

Just like social causes are close to our heart, contributing to cultural enrichment of our society and preserving our cultural ethos is equally important for BMS. Before the pandemic, the BMS club premises in Vakola was used to organise cultural gatherings. Classical vocals and dance classes, art and craft workshops for children and youth, discourses on Bhagwad Gita and Ramkrishna Kathamritam by the Maharajas of Ram

Krishan Mission Math, Khar were regularly organised besides small festive and cultural gatherings such as music, poetry and literary *baithaks* on Holi, birth anniversaries of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, Independence Day, Saraswati Puja, Bengali New Year, Christmas and New Year. When the social gathering restrictions were lifted post pandemic, we planned a meticulous events calendar to resume our cultural activities, which began with Saraswati Puja in February 2022 and later a small cultural programme by our members on that evening.

While most of the Durga Puja organisers thrive on 'Star power,' Banga Maitri Sansad has always been committed to support poor artists, the folk and classical performers of India, theatre artistes, besides upcoming bands and cultural groups from in and around Mumbai and recesses of West Bengal. Hence, when we resumed our cultural activities post pandemic, we planned a mixed bag of programmes for our 75th Puja, which included folk performances, classical presentations and local upcoming bands, besides encouraging the young and upcoming talents within BMS.

In FY 2023-24, we are stepping into our 76th year of establishment. This year there is a new managing committee elected through our annual general meeting and in abidance with the rules and norms prescribed for registered charitable trusts. The new Management Committee has also pledged itself to uphold the rich heritage of Banga Maitri Sansad and work even harder to honour not just its existing cultural and social commitments but also enhance its efforts by multi-fold towards such causes in the years to come.

(Refer to Annex 2 for Photographs of Cultural Initiatives of BMS)

Annex 1:

Photographs of Social initiatives of BMS from FY20-FY23



Two Blood Donation Camps were organised by BMS in association with Samarpan Blood Centre in May 2022 and April 2023 at the Banga Maitri Sansad's registered office premises in Vakola, Santacruz East, Mumbai.



BMS donated ₹50,000 to the widow of Thakur ji, a fruit seller in Vakola Market who would set up his stall at the doorsteps of BMS office and acted as a caretaker the office promises. He was the first victim in Vakola area to succumb to COVID-19 in 2020.



Ration donated to NGO Support Foundation in 2020.



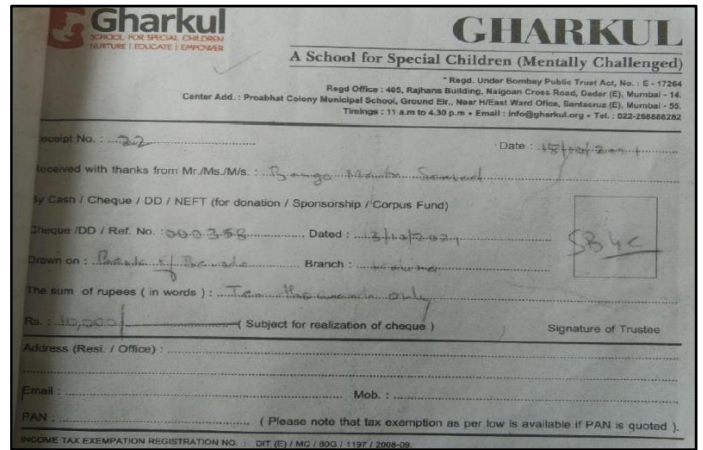
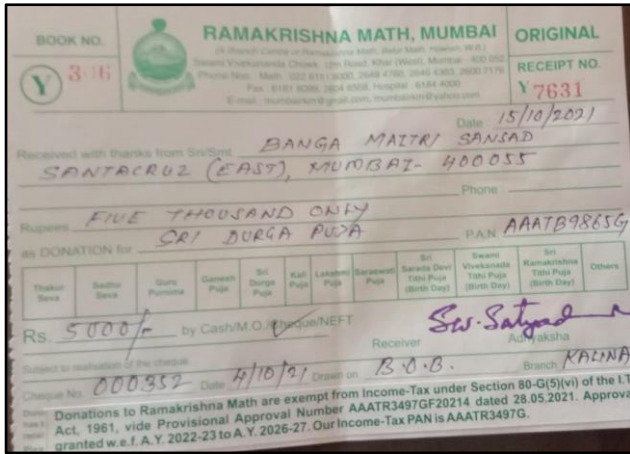
108 litres of milk tetra packets as donated to Mothers Teresa's Roses for feeding the homeless 2021 Durga Puja.



Mr. VS Parthasarathy (left), Vice Chairman of Allcargo Logistics, with CFO Mr. Deepal Shah (in white), hand out food items to NGO SUPPORT Foundation on behalf of Banga



Mr. VS Parthasarathy (left), Vice Chairman of Allcargo Logistics, with CFO Mr. Deepal Shah (in white), hand out food items to NGO Gharkul on behalf of Banga Maitri Sansad at the 2021 Durga Puja.



Receipts of monetary donation made to Ramkrishna Mission (left) and to the NGO Gharkul (right) in 2021.



No food was distributed to the public in 2020 due to pandemic-related restrictions. Food packets were distributed in 2021 (left photo) and a record number of people were provided free afternoon meal at the BMS 75th Year Durga Puja Pandal in 2022 (right photo).



Ration donated to NGO Support Foundation in 2022.

Donation being made to Rama Krishna Mission Khar at the 2022 Durga Puja.



Monetary aid was provided to the *dhaakis* in 2021. In 2022, BMS donated new clothes and financial aid to them (*left photo*). *Dhakis* playing their *dhaak* (traditional drum) in their new clothes at the 75th Durga Puja in 2022 (*right photo*).



Donation to Gharkul being made at the BMS Durga Puja in 2022.

Strict COVID-19 protocols were followed during Durga Puja 2021, which included intensive sanitisation of the venue and of every visitor, free distribution of masks and sanitiser, strict adherence to social distancing norms, non-crowding inside the puja *mandap* and monitoring of temperature, oxygen levels and other vitals of every visitor. Masks and sanitiser was also distributed among vendors and shops in Vakola Market.



The lady COVID warriors of BMS, who were the volunteers to implement COVID-19 protocols at the Puja *mandap* in 2021. They distributed masks and santiser in the mandap and kept vigil in groups for implementation of social distancing, screening and non-crowding protocols. It was because of their efforts not a single Corona positive case was reported from BMS after the end of the Durga Puja festivities in 2021.

Annex 2:

Photographs of Cultural initiatives of BMS from FY20-FY23

Celebrations of the Bengali New Year with the Hon'ble Governor of Maharashtra



Banga Maitri Sansad (BMS had the honour of being invited to the Raj Bhavan, Mumbai to celebrate the Bengali New Year with the Hon'ble Governor Shro. Bhagat Singh Koshyari on April 15, 2022. The BMS Durga Puja Souvenir for the year 2020 was also presented to the hon'ble governor by the members of BMS.

Release of the commemorative '75th Year of BMS' Special Cover and Stamp of the Postal Department by the Hon'ble Maharashtra Governor



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A literary *adda* organised on the occasion of Basants Panchami at the BMS office in Vakola.



Joint celebrations of Rabindra-Nazrul Jayanti and Friendship Day at the premises of BMS office in Vakola.



A musical *baithaki* to celebrate Vasant Utsav (Holi *milan*) at the BMS premises in Vakola.



Celebrating Christmas with Santa Clause at the BMS office premises in Vakola.



The hon'ble governor of Maharashtra Shri. Bhagat Singh Koshyari paid a visit to Banga Maitri Sansad's Durga Puja-2022. He visited the BMS Puja mandap on Ashtami – the 8th Day of Durgotsav, offered prayers to *Ma Durga*, enjoyed cultural performances by BMS members, unveiled the BMS commemorative 75th Year 'Ma Durga' Silver Coin and the BMS Durga Puja Souvenir-2022. Before he left, he interacted with young members of BMS and encouraged them to always be culturally and literally inclined and stay connected with their roots.





A folk singer from an interior village of West Bengal was invited to perform at the BMS Durga Puja in 2022.



A Classical Dance Group accompanied by pandits of Indian Classical Music performed at the BMS Durga Puja-2022.



An upcoming Mumbai-based Indo-western fusion music group performed at the BMS Durga Puja in 2022.



All activities of Banga Maitri Sansad are premised on the value inclusivity and equality. BMS welcomed members of the LGBTQ family to its Durga Puja-2022 with open arms and presented sweets and gifts as a mark of honour and respect to every human being, irrespective of their cast, creed, colour or gender orientation.



Masood Akhtar, a noted theatre personality, TV and film artiste (*right*) along with the famous Bengali theatre artiste and playwright Shibaji Sengupta (*left*) were special invitees at the BMS Durga Puja-2022.



Shibaji Sengupta conducted a theatre workshop for BMS ladies' group and directed a play, which was put up at the Durga Puja-2022.



Masood Akhtar being felicitated at the BMS Durga Puja-2022.

