



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Annual day
- Arts Day
- Building of a new block for the middle and upper school.
- Field Trips



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## Rangachary Reports:

- The board of Vidya Vanam has approved the construction of 10 room class room block to meet the accreditation requirement of Tamil Nadu.
- Nandini has now joined as our Academic director full time and has taken over the day to day running of the school.
- Successful completion of our second project day—a study of the birds of Vidya Vanam and the active involvement of Salim Ali institute director.

## Highlights

- We added more students and our school strength after the beginning of June now stands at 234.
- The senior class is now broken into Krishna and Kaveri groups
- After a heavy rains we now have a great vegetable garden
- We have added six new faculty members and an equal number of non academic staff.
- The computer room is now operational and we have six computers for the children in the upper class.
- A new security gate and guard now keep the school safe from elephants!

When I asked ten-year-old Kanya if I could interview her for the Vidya Vanam newsletter, she enthusiastically agreed. During afternoon classes at school, she was easy for me to find among the faces of the Kaveri class students—she had a big smile on her face, and was energetically practicing a dance for our upcoming Annual Day.

Kanya comes from a tribal family from the village of Kondanoor. The long bus ride to school does not faze her. “I love my school,” Kanya says, “and so does my family. My father says, ‘Kanya, next year you will stay at Vidya Vanam.’ My family is very happy that I can go to this school.” Kanya comes from a relatively small family; she has one older sister and one younger sister, and no brothers. At

she is a very busy both schoolwork and she leaves Vidya Vanam in the afternoon. Kanya has been attending Vidya Vanam for over four years. Like many and Krishna class been a student here since Vidya Vanam



school and at home, young lady, tackling housework when nam in the after-noon. Kanya has been attending four years. Like many and Krishna class been a student here since Vidya Vanam

2007. I love all of my teachers here she says with a smile. Her favorite class is English, one in which she particularly excels. When I asked one of her closest friends, a fellow Kaveri class student named Vigashini, why she enjoys being around Kanya, she replied, “Kanya is always nice and making friends. She works very hard at her schoolwork.” Kanya is also known at Vidya Vanam for her passion for singing and dancing, both of which she is happy to be able to practice at school. For Vidya Vanam’s annual school project—this year entitled “Birds of Anaikatti”—Kanya drew pictures, stitched images of birds on cloth, and helped compose stories and explanatory charts for the exhibition. Now she is involved in preparations for the school’s Annual Day in February, in which she will be involved in a dance drama. Kanya looks forward to returning to Vidya Vanam next year as a Krishna class student.

Interview by Nicole Ferreira - visiting teacher

## Profile of Prema - Primary School Teacher - A chat with Ram Subramaniam

When I first arrived at Vidya Vanam, just a year ago, Prema didn't talk to me much. I later found out she was shy about her English. Today, I conducted an entire interview in English, and I found it very hard to believe that the confident woman I was speaking to had *ever* been shy about *anything*.

What made the difference, between then and now, was a Montessori course that Prema took at the urging of Vidya Vanam director Prema Rangachary. "The opportunity was for another teacher, actually," she said. "But she could not go, so I said yes, of course I wanted to go."

When she began attending the course, Prema was already a veteran of Vidya Vanam, having been here since 2007. Before coming here, she worked at a government school, which she described as a totally different experience. "It was no good," she says honestly. "The classes are too big. There were sixty or seventy children in every class. Also, there the classes were all book style. Here, every lesson – no, every *sentence* has to be prepared by the teacher."



Prema with her two children who also attend Vidya Vanam (left) and with her student doing the Montessori program with emphasis on tactile recognition of shapes (right).



**Profile of Prema—Continued**

Prema started attending the Montessori course in Coimbatore in July 2010. “For the first two months, I didn’t like it,” she says. “I had problems with English, and everything was too fast. The professor spoke too fast, and the class was too fast. I used to cry in the bathroom!” What changed her attitude was the encouragement of her husband. “He told me, what’s the problem? You can do anything!” After that, she became more confident and started to really enjoy the class. The Montessori method was a very new experience for her, and she was eager to come back to Vidya Vanam and put what she had learned into action.

Now that she has returned to take charge of the Vidya Vanam Montessori program, she says that she really loves it and never wants to go back to the old ways. “Other classes take lessons, poems, songs, worksheets. But here I can just observe the children, so I’m very happy. I can see the children learning in a different way.”

One more way that Montessori training has helped Prema is in her daily life. “Inside the Montessori class I talk softly, and my eyes are also soft. If a child is upset, instead of shouting I just talk quietly. I remember: I am a Montessorian. Then, when I go home, I do the same thing. If anyone is upset, I just talk softly, and we solve the problem.”

Now that both she and her children are in Vidya Vanam, she has many positive things to say about the environment. “It’s a different kind of school, and a different kind of life,” she tells me. “The freedom of the children in thinking and project work is reflected in the house. Children learn how to think. They don’t learn that in other places.” She smiles and adds, “Now that I have been here, I don’t want to go anywhere else!”

Vidya Vanam celebrated its Sports day combined with celebration of Independence Day on August 15th. The program began early and after group songs, the national flag was raised by our visiting guest, Dr. Kulanaisamy from the Gandhi Peace foundation.



After the March Past which was done to music composed by Prema Rangachari and then it was on to games and dances. The games spanned the gamut of the old and the new with added twists. The children did the kangaroo, sack and frog races. Then there were races in which the children had to race to a point, thread a needle, bead a necklace, fill up

a bottle of water and then head home. There were races in which the children had to make patterns out of color tiles as part of challenge. The final event included the participation of the parents of the children in two different types of races as well.

The races was followed by dances from all over the country. In Vidya Vanam style, the dancers stole the show with the Pinal Kollatam, using brightly colored saris, Nagaland based bamboo dance, and an aerobic dance which enthralled the audience with the precise timing and execution followed by the Yoga exercises. Our chief guest was short on words to describe his experience and said that he has never seen an event like this ever before. The children were just eager to do the event all over again.



Pictures from Sports Day August 2011

**Nicole Ferreira came to VV in August 2011 and this is what she has to say:**

I am twenty-two years old and this is my third time in India. I visited the country briefly during my study abroad experience in Nepal in 2009. After graduating with my B.A. in History in December 2010, I returned to India to spend several months teaching at Sufi service project in Delhi, teaching KG aged students in the basti of Hazrat Nizamuddin. Over the summer, I learned about the opportunity at Vidya Vanam, and I came in August 2011, and I plan teaching here at least until the end of the school year.

At Vidya Vanam, I teach English, Science, and Storytelling to class of 2nd Standard students, also known as Peepal Group. The job is both demanding and gratifying. At first, communication issues with the children made it difficult, but we have all grown by leaps and bounds in the past six months, and enjoy a wonderful and open student-teacher relationship. Children who were hesitant to speak in English to me. Now it is often difficult to get them to stop talking!

What I enjoy most about teaching at Vidya Vanam is the freedom we have to experiment with different methods of teaching. We are encouraged to help the children discover their own individual interests and talents by exposing them not only to math and science, but to music, art, vocational skills, and different languages as well. We are also encouraged to be silly, which I have found is a wonderful way to reach many of the more quiet and shy children. In preparation for our upcoming Annual Day, I have been involved in teaching an American Square dance to the Peepal group, as well as directing an English play with the older students. My work at Vidya Vanam has been consistently challenging as well as fun, making it an ideal job for me.

**Comings and Goings:**

We said good bye to our teachers Riya, Shounik, Suresh, Tina and Bhuvana. We have however not lost them for ever. They keep coming back and look forward to serving VV some time soon.

The sad feature of the second term, is the departure of the veritable Krishnamoorthy our cook, on medical leave. We are all praying for his speedy recovery and he will join us back in the new year. In the mean time we have Mr Mani Iyer who has taken his place, a tough act to follow.

**Visitors to Vidya Vanam:**

Tasha Milkman and Becka, special educators from USA, and friends of board member Shanthi Ranganathan, spent two days with the children and teachers and spent time reading with the children and spoke to the staff on the importance of keeping the spirit of reading as a key element in learning of English.

Kalpana Guttman a teachers teacher from Boston, MA spent a week with the staff and children. Her report on her stay is encapsulated in the letter she wrote to us which is now uploaded in the web site under the drop down menu of "Testimonials".

Three sons of Dr. Prakash and Purnima Rau (Prashanth, Rohan and Sanjay) spent a week in July. They acted as teacher helpers, organized the books in the library and taught American games. They plan to return next year.

Arya Ravi, currently a graduate student Manchester UK spent 6 weeks with the higher grade schools. She observed and helped the teachers implement Math classes and more importantly found the innocence of beauty of the children in their eagerness to learn refreshing and moving.

Dr. Kuladasamy from the Gandhi peace foundation was the chief guest for the Independence day celebrations and the sports day activities which followed. After listening to the Tamil song, "Vidya Vanathil Kuzhandhaigal Nangal" he was dumbstruck by the governing ethos, and he shortened his speech concluding that he said, that he has nothing more to say!.

Teachers from Advait GNS Matriculation school, Coimbatore, came to experience the implementation of the activation based curriculum.

We also hired four new teachers. We have now Manjuma Devi, English teacher, from Coimbatore, Papitha from Tanjore (sports and extra curricular), Parameshwari from Erode, handles Tamil, Uma from Anaikatti, is our point person for the computer education and Tamil. Also included are, Sumitha teaching Hindi and Pankajavalli, handling the kindergarten groups, Mango and Orange.

