

Newsletter



This issue has dispensed with an editorial to be replaced by articles contributed by members. The sentiments expressed are exclusively those of the writer. I am indeed extremely grateful to them and I wish our members happy reading!

Editor: Priya de Silva

Education Beyond "Self": Rejuvenating the True Spirit of Visakha Vidyalaya

If Visakha Vidyalaya seeks to maintain the identity upon which it was founded, the tone of the education it imparts must conform to a primary tenet of Buddhist philosophy: shedding of 'self'. This requires looking beyond oneself towards a diverse and evolving world. However, caught in the competitive rat-race that education has sadly become, we need to produce more civic conscious women citizens who are accountable to all equal aspects of our social organism: humans, animals and the environment. I hope that the following observations provoke some thought, if not action, to rejuvenate the true spirit of our alma mater.

We learn the science involved in climate change and yet remain undirected to make genuine personal sacrifices to prevent global warming. We are trained to worship teachers within the precincts of the school and yet remain unlearned in the discipline of treating elders, the less able and animals with respect, compassion and care outside the school gates. We are compulsorily taught minority languages as part of the school curriculum and yet remain unprotected from extreme nationalism when exercising our vote or facing the prospect of our children entering into inter-cultural relationships. These examples are attributive to a disconnection that has come about between principle and practise, one that is propelled by fear, suspicion and denial of the outside world. Yet, such resistance to societal changes, other cultures which include values of

VVOGA Executive Committee 2008-2009

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CONVENERS OF SUBCOMMITTEES

Continued from overleaf

minorities in our own country or the west and unconventional choices, some of which may not appeal to a limited or false sense of self, runs contrary to the very core of Buddhism

In fact, if you wish to effectively challenge what you see as a negative socio-cultural phenomenon, it is wise to first acquire knowledge in that culture. For instance, when the Empire writes back in post-colonial times, it writes back most successfully in English itself. That is the edge that education in the social sciences gives you. Yes, scientific and technological advancement will equip you to develop and make more convenient your “living conditions”; but it does not teach you social skills in “life”. Subjects such as history, politics, languages, literature, music and art open up an array of new worlds which allow you to experience and perhaps even appreciate the “other” as well as challenge it if necessary. It is paramount to acknowledge that a wholesome quality of life is dependent upon the physical pleasure of fulfilling *human needs* which is achieved by scientific progress and the mental joy of performing *humane duties* which is inculcated through learning in the arts and humanities. I do not intend to elevate one discipline over the other, but only wish to highlight that the latter offers an opportunity to create the attitudinal change that is necessary to see beyond a selfish lens.

The present culture of national education is under threat of becoming increasingly insular and intolerant, serving one’s own socio-cultural community only, as it attempts to clutch onto an illusive purity and a past that cannot be recreated. Transforming that trend into one of selflessness is the call of education in the future; what I see as the responsible response that Visakha Vidyalaya should generate as a leading Buddhist school in the country and its past, present and future students should exemplify as Sri Lankan citizens.

Avanti Perera

Avanti Perera (Visakha Vidyalaya A/L batch of 1995)

B.A. in English (Honours) (Colombo);

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The writer is a State Counsel currently reading for her D. Phil. in Law at the University of Oxford.

Social activities	<i>Ishani Ariyapperuma</i>
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Foreign branches	<i>Sarala Kodagoda</i>

Mrs Sita Rjasuriya who celebrated 91 years on 2nd September 2008

On her 91st birthday, I recall my long association with Sita, who throughout my school career became a close friend along with Beryl, Lakshmi, Swarna, Sumana and Bona.

Her long association with Guiding is well known. She was the first Guide Commissioner of Ceylon.

In 1947 she took over as the Captain of the 11th Colombo Guide Company and was the first Asian to chair a world conference of Girl Guides in the year 1975.

It was at her request, during her tenure as Guide Commissioner that the words of the Girl Guide promise ‘I promise to do my duty to God and my country’ were changed to ‘my religion and my country’.

Besides leaving her mark in the Guide movement she gave invaluable service to the Sarvodaya movement and is now the President of the Women’s section of this. .

She was an unforgettable personality, as a student excelling in drama, as a kindergarten teacher and as an active OGA member and she would always be an example in the field of social service. May this good karma follow her on to the attainment of the Goal of Nirvana!

Agnes Abeysekera nee Gunaratna

Mrs Agnes Abeysekera, herself ninety years this year was a very popular Form Teacher at Visakha for many years. Much involved in the Old Hostellers’ Association she still attends many an OGA event.

Seminar on 'Prevention of Breast & Gynaecologic Cancers'



Organized by the social activities sub committee this was conducted by Dr See Hui Ti of Parkway Cancer Centre, Gleneagles Hospital, Singapore on 27 August 2008 at the Jeremias Dias Hall.

Open to the public, this addressed issues of early detection, latest trends in treatment and also interestingly of the prevention of cancers. Free consultations followed the presentation.

The Executive Committee of the OGA 2008/2009



Seated from L - *Srini, Manouri, Sabitha, Sharmali, Mrs R Gunaratna (Principal), Priya, Samiddhi, Chandima & Pushpika.*

Standing front row from L - *Buddhini, Nilusha, Himali, Ramani, Varuni, Sujeeni, Lankika, Shalindra, Taranga, Prashani & Nilmini*

Standing last row from L - *Eranthi, Sarala, Malika, Nimesha, Ramya, Darshi, Ishani, Nadeeka, Malin, Manisha, Dinusha, Anushi & Gitanjali*

Absent - *Manoja, Sepalika, Priyangani & Piroshini*

The Visakha Swimming Pool



Officially opened in May this year, the membership fees are as follows-

Life membership – 50,000/

Annual membership –

Visakhians & their families – 5,000/

Teachers – 2,500/

Students – 600/

These rates are effective only until December 2008

Visakha Dinner Dance 2008



Dehara, Poorna, Surekha & Chandima holding up the house colours for the matching game.

Held on 13 June 2008 at the Cinnamon Grand, Colombo and organized by the Fund Raising subcommittee of the OGA 2007/2008, Visakha Dinner Dance 2008 was a run away success both as a fellowship event and as a fund raiser.

The proceeds exceeding Rs 3,500,000 were towards, the English medium study development fund of our school.

Support from Overseas Branches

Visakha Alumnae Association of Southern California (VAASOCAL)

Our youngest branch association, the VAASOCAL has donated US \$ 14,000 equivalent to Rs 1,499,300/ from fund raising initiatives in 2007 & 2008 namely Project-One-Home-At-A-Time and 'Pahan Silu' to be used for much needed hostel renovations. The renovation work is now underway.

Melbourne Branch of the VVOGA

This branch association from down under has made yet another donation of Australian \$ 3,000 equivalent to Rs 300,000/, which is also to be used for further renovations to the school hostel.

The VVOGA is most grateful to the above branch associations for their wonderful generosity and continued support.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2008 - 2009

October 11th Universal Children's Day - Treat for Visakha hostellers

Inquiries: Ishani Ariyapperuma 0777769060

November OGA members' trip

Inquiries: Ishani Ariyapperuma

November 30th Benefit Show at JD Hall

Inquiries: Priya de Silva 0773185044

January 16th Bodhi Pooja – Commemoration of the founding of the school

Inquiries: Buddhini Medawatte

March Founder's Day - Donation to the injured of the Armed Services

Inquiries: Buddhini Medawatte 0777385764

May Wesak project - Donation to Cancer Hospital

June Production of an English play

June 23 Members' Day – Celebration of 75 years of the VVOGA

Achievements of Visakhians in 2008

The OGA salutes the following –

- Nayana Karunaratne crowned Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2007 at a ceremony organized by the Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce in August.
- Badra Jayaweera newly appointed General Manager of the Ceylon Electricity Board, and the first woman to be appointed to this post in the history of the CEB.
- Nela de Zoysa Chartered Architect received a commendation at the first ever Geoffrey Bawa awards for excellence in architecture.

Obituaries

The OGA records with sadness the passing away of the following Visakhians in the recent past –

- Mrs Irangani Perera nee Agalawatte a past member of the staff of Visakha who taught Botany to A level students for many years.
- Mrs Chitra Ranawaka nee Malalasekera, a trail blazer among Visakhians. She was a gifted musician and held the post of Deputy Director General (programmes) of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation.
- Mrs Swineetha Abeywardena nee Gunawardena a past Joint Secretary of the VVOGA

NEWS FLASH

The Ex. Co. of the VVOGA wishes to inform the membership that marks for support both in cash and kind extended to the school in the OGA category at student admission interviews, can be gained only if they are routed through the OGA.

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