

Children Preaching Program- ISKCON Chennai

Brief History

This initiative flagged off in the year 2000 with the 21 day Summer Camp of 3 hours each day with around 50 children. Newspaper publicity was used to spread awareness among people around the temple. The very next year another new group of students had joined and by 2002, this had spread to other areas of Chennai. Under the instruction of H.H Bhanu Maharaj, more congregational matajis were roped in to conduct the Bhakta Prahlad Shiksha Samaj (BPSS) Program (weekly program) in their houses. Training and schedule of activities was given to them. As the number of Bhakti Vriskshas (BV) grew, more matajis could be engaged in this seva and now, there are 60 units where BPSS Program is held.

Features

- Following activities are conducted in the BPSS Program:
 - ✓ Mangalacharan
 - ✓ Japa
 - ✓ Bhagavad Gita (12th Chapter)
 - ✓ Story session (Krishna's pastimes)
 - ✓ Fun time- learning English rhymes and play games.
 - ✓ Prasadam
- With the help of VOICE books from Pune, 4 levels are established:
 - Getting to know Krishna
 - More About Krishna
 - Wonderful Krishna
 - Devotees of Krishna

Having these books for the different levels saves the time and effort to place a separate syllabus in place.
- BPSS starts in June and ends in March. At the end of each academic session, an Annual Day is held where children's parents and relatives are called. Children perform a dance or skit and participation certificates are given to them. A feedback session is conducted where many parents have revealed positive transformations in their wards' behavior. In this way, through children, parents are also brought close to Krishna.
- Fees charged are Rs. 1,000 for the whole year.

Strategy

Following ways and means are used to attract people to the BPSS Programs:

- ✓ Press release on ISKCON's letter head. It carries more weight than an advertisement due to trust factor.
- ✓ Pamphlets/leaflets are given to BV members who distribute it in their locality.
- ✓ Children from earlier batches go on Nagar Sankirtan distributing pamphlets
- ✓ Notice board of residential societies.

Course of Action

- BV leaders are entrusted with the responsibility to appoint competent volunteers who are capable enough to manage children. The selected volunteers are made to observe teachers for upto a year to get a hang of the teaching process.
- Even parents are invited to the programs so that they could help their wards practice bhakti¹ at home and they themselves could also get preached.
- Zonal Coordinators are in-charge of teachers in their respective zone. This makes communication, handling of finances and their accounting easier. All teachers are kept in touch with and they regularly share their problems and realisations to keep each other inspired.
- Before BPSS begins, all teachers come together and have sessions and educative seminars with education experts. H.H Bhanu Maharaja also inspires them and gives them gifts.
- For children aged 10-15 years, a Krishna Club is conducted. Following books are included:
 - ✓ Glories of India- to teach children the spiritual significance of various places in India.
 - ✓ Divine Nature- to teach the importance of rivers, ponds, kunds, gopi chandan, etc.
 - ✓ 2 books on Temple Tales which talk about the history and significance of deities like Guruvayur, Pandurang, etc.By the time they are youths, understanding of scriptures becomes easy.

School Preaching

- Many-a-times, the number of children who turn out for BPSS are very less and this prompted matajis to approach schools.
- Preaching currently continues in 20 schools. 20 minutes of morning assembly time is allotted for preaching in which Bhajans, sloka recitation and japa take place. Sometimes, 40 minutes are allotted during which a quiz is conducted and children are taught rhymes.
- In some schools, 2/3 periods in a week are allocated to Value Education. No moral values are taught-just pastimes of Krishna are told and obedience, honesty and such other good qualities come naturally to the children.
- Different books are in place for different classes:
 - ✓ Class 1 students- Krishna the Superhero and Art of Story-telling.
 - ✓ Class 2 students- God and Universe- Qualities of God such as his many names, beauty, Omni-presence, etc. are taught. Knowledge of Demigods and the significance of festivals are also taught.
 - ✓ Class 3- Krishna's various avatars and their pastimes.
 - ✓ Class 4- Book called Divine Nature which talks about the divinity and spiritual significance of trees, rivers, nature, ponds, etc.
 - ✓ Class 5 & 6- Temples of India- History of 32 temples from South India and 32 from rest of India. Spiritual significance of the deities in the various temples is also taught.
 - ✓ Class 7- Sages & Saints- History and pastimes of 7 rishis, Madhvacharya, Ramanujacharya, Mirabai, Suradas, etc.
 - ✓ Class 8- Values will be presented with examples of Mahajans like Prahalad Maharaj.
 - ✓ Class 9- To introduce Bhagavad Gita and its importance in daily life. Lessons from BG about discipline, goal setting, ambition, etc. are taught.

Lessons

- Through schools, around 7600 students are being touched.
- Many schools don't have a proper book or guidance and don't know what to teach under value education. It is important to not hide behind the secular curtain but to go forward and preach.

Future Plans

- To hold examinations and competitions for school children, where they read books and appear for exam.
- To put up bhajans, rhymes and stories on website to reach out to more people.