

BALMAHOTSAV -- THE CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL

The most exciting event in the recent past was undoubtedly "Balmahotsav-99".

Balmahotsav was conceived and organized by 'Our Children' Trust, first time in 1985, and Vinimay joined hands in the event in a small way. Thrilled by the sheer joy and exuberance it created in the children, Vinimay got involved more and more in the subsequent Balmahotsavs which were held in 1986, 1990, 1993, 1995 and 1997. Balmahotsav-99, which was held from 18th to 21st of November 1999, was the seventh one of the series.

Balmahotsav is a sports-cum-cultural meet of the children of child welfare institutions as well as their ex-students. The main aim of the festival is to provide an opportunity to as many children as possible and stimulate the talents dormant in them rather than to spot and reward the best talents in a few.

Balmahotsav-99 was much grander than the earlier events, with more number of institutions and children participating this time [see box below].

THE GROWTH OF BALMAHOTSAV			
	1995	1997	1999
No. of institutions	17	19	23
Daily attendance	1100	1200	1400
No. of matches	71	87	102
No. of events	70	70	62**
** : Number of events were less since Balmahotsav was held only for four days this time; earlier Balmahotsav were for 5 days			

As those who attended the programme would vouch, the spirit of Balmahotsav cannot be expressed in words, much less in terms of numbers. In order to grasp this, it has to be seen and felt.

Imagine more than 1200 children and 200 adults spending the day together daily from 8am to 7pm, sharing breakfast and lunch and snacks; half a dozen competitions being run simultaneously with no clash or confusion; more than a hundred volunteers, who have taken leave from their work for this purpose, straining every nerve to make the children happy and comfortable; tiny-tots having their own fun with the 'fun-games' specially arranged for them; 'curiosity corner' where the children can try their hands at clay modelling and computers; cultural programmes by children in the evening; children themselves presiding over the functions, taking the salute and distributing prizes; grand inaugural and closing ceremonies attended with police / municipal bands; a fun-fair as a finale; children from different institutions meeting each other and sharing experiences.

And, above all, no one complains about anyone or anything, because, all -- the volunteers, the children, and officials of the participating institutions -- feel that is their own function.

We can never sufficiently thank Children's Aid Society for their permission to use their premises at Chembur Children's Home, Mankhurd for Balmahotsav this time again. But for this help, half the fun of Balmahotsav would have been lost. Aptly this year's Balmahotsav was dedicated to the Diamond Jubilee celebration of Chembur Children's Home.