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**ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH SCHOLARS, CHENNAI**

Registered Office: 737 Anna Salai, Chennai 600002

**ANNUAL REPORT 2012 – 2013**

**28th Annual General Body Meeting – Friday, September 06, 2013**

**British Council, Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002**

Good Evening! On behalf of the Executive Committee, I extend a warm welcome to all, at the twenty-eighth Annual General Body Meeting of the Association of British Scholars, Chennai. In keeping with the changing times, this year the Secretary’s Report for 2012 – 13 will be combined with a slide show of the various events, to enable members to glimpse the year that was, in pictures as well as in words.

Over the past year, the Executive Committee conducted a variety of events that reached out to varied communities and their interests. These helped reinforce the Chapter’s presence in the public space of Chennai and brought in renewed goodwill from the members of the public.

**EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES: 2012 – 2013**

**September 2012:**

ABS was the knowledge partner at a Debate held at IIT Madras conducted by the Dialogue Foundation. Various members provided their inputs and skills for the sessions as judges, moderators and speakers. The event reached out to young people and influential members of the student community and brought in much goodwill from these segments of society towards the ability of ABS to provide and share knowledge and resources through its members.

**December 2012:**

ABS launched the English rendering of the Subramaniya Bharathi book “Panchali Sabadam” titled “Panchali’s Pledge” at an event in Chennai. While the author Usha Rajagopalan, read a selection from her book, the musical rendering of a couple of famous Bharathiyar songs added flavor to the evening making it a memorable occasion.

ABS Chennai Chapter also has been supporting the British Council in their much awaited annual event – Debating Matters. Members from ABS Chennai provided their support as judges and experts to the event that has seen lively participation and interest from schools.

**March 2013 & English Language Training:**

English language is one of the key barriers to enabling artists reach out for national and international exposure. A unique proposal to provide English language training to artists was mooted and a series of discussions held with prospective trainers and institutions. Artists across the city who were contacted to ascertain their interest showed overwhelming response, underlying their keenness to gather English language skills. The format of the training was finalized in a participatory format through discussions with the artists.

The first meeting was held in April 2013, with ABS member and English language trainer Mr Robert Bellarmine facilitating the proceedings. A background, education and profile baseline was gathered from over 50 artists at the meeting at British Council. The second meeting in July, was at English training institution VETA, where English levels of a small group of artists were assessed. Artists who express interest in English language training would now be partially supported by the ABS Chennai chapter to undergo the English training course.

**April 2013:**

The “ABS Gazetteer Lecture Series” was an innovation introduced into the event calendar of ABS Chennai. The 3-part publication “Madras (Chennai): A 400-year record of the first city of modern India” of which two volumes have been released – has a number of well-researched articles. In order that members of the public may benefit from these talks, the Gazetteer Lecture series makes an effort to facilitate interaction between the authors of the chapters and the audience. Three such lectures were held in this year.

In April, Pradeep Chakravarthy, speaker, writer and historian interacted with the audience on “The History of Madras Temples a priest will not tell you” – a lively and participative event that had various new and interested members of the audience.

**May 2013:**

ABS in partnership with the British Council organized event titled “Equal Opportunity and Diversity” – an event that combined book reading by author Shobha Warrier of her book on stories of marginalized people along with a street play by BC climate champion Arun and his team. The poignancy of the event was enhanced by presentations by children from the CHES Ashram on their struggle for an equal life. The event reached out to young people and other members from society.

May was also the time for a look into “How Madras served its society” as Professor Vidhya Srinivasan served up the next in the Gazetteer lecture series on Social Welfare Institutions in Madras. Students and especially those interested in social work benefited from the talk and the subsequent discussion. In each of these events, the volumes of the publication were made available for sale at the venue.

**June 2012:**

Nature writer and Trustee of WWF, Mr Theodore S Baskaran took audience through a pictorial journey on "A Squandered Heritage – Wildlife of Chennai” in the next of the Gazetteer Lecture series. A discussion that brought in wild-life and environmental enthusiasts, Mr Baskaran’s talk saw a full house that was eager to discuss various issues with him well after the completion of the talk. All of these talks by ABS members who have achieved something in their own professional space, served to reinforce the role members play in their individual capacities in public life.

**July 2013:**

It was a moving moment, when ABS Chennai provided an opportunity to children of “Arunima Illam” – mainly children of prisoners – to listen to a special performance by noted musician Mr Anil Srinivasan. The girls were enthralled by the show. As a gesture of the social consciousness of the association, ABS Chennai also presented the school with a contribution to purchase some basic necessities for their institution, thereby reinforcing its reputation as a socially conscious pillar of society.

ABS Chennai EC member and representative Vikas Chawla participated in the Student Farewell hosted at the British Council South India in July. Besides sharing his experiences, it was also an opportunity for giving students an overview about ABS Chennai and its activities and urging them to enroll as members on their return.

**August 2013:**

In connection with Madras Week, ABS Chennai held a series of programmes aimed at varied audiences.

The first was for children – where Mr Pradeep Chakravarthy, writer and historian engaged in a student interaction on Chennai, its music, its temple tradition and giving them an opportunity to learn a new song as well. The event was well-received by students, teachers and members of the public who attended the programme.

A Madras Week quiz conducted by ABS that was also opened to students and members of the public saw over 40 participants answered a series of questions in connection with the recognition of various buildings and institutions on the landscape of Chennai. Mr Muthiah who conducted the quiz himself, led the audience through an amazing journey of stories through each of the pictures in the quiz. It reinforced the objective of enabling audience to understand and learn more about the city they live in.

“Cricket, carnatic music and coffee” was another innovative take on the various activities that create the fabric of Chennai. A well-researched and anecdote-peppered talk by V Ramnarayan, writer, journalist and cricketer had the audience reminiscent and in splits through the journey back in time. A full-house audience with several prominent members, cricket and music lovers attending the talk indicated the good response it received.

An exhibition of paintings by select artists from Chennai – was on at the Taj Vivanta, Chennai. While reinforcing the importance of forging partnerships, the event also provided exposure and a platform to the artists on various themes related to Madras Week, to be presented in their individual styles.

ABS Chennai has announced and selected the Artist’s Grant awardee for this year from the applications received. Ms Sandhya Gopinath, a Chennai-based young contemporary artist, who has several group shows besides individual shows to her credit was chosen by the association for the promise in her work and confidence in her ability to benefit from the scholarship.

**Online presence:**

The ABS Chennai website has been updated and the Facebook page of the ABS Chennai chapter is also active. We have received the following website statistics for [www.abschennai.org](http://www.abschennai.org) from EC Member Vikas Chawla who manages the chapter’s online presence pro bono:

* From Apr 2012 to Mar 2013, 449 visitors visited the website cumulatively 514 times and spent an average 7 minutes on it
* From Apr 2013 till date, 452 visitors visited the website cumulatively 483 times and spent an average 11 and a half minutes on it, indicating an increase in number of visits and time spent
* On Facebook, from 63 “fans” in 2012 we now have 97 "fans"

Given that social media and the online medium is the medium of the present and the future, at least the near future, we do hope that this will be one space members will watch!

Since the last AGM, seven Executive Committee Meetings were held and provided an opportunity to strengthen the team, administer the association and to discuss and plan events that would keep audience engaged and interested in the various activities. It is to the credit of the events that we saw a wide and mixed audience from outside – usually full-houses. Participation of ABS members at events is one area that could be strengthened. Five new members were inducted during this period.

As we complete this year, I thank, on behalf of the Executive Committee, Mr Mike Nithavrianakis, Patron and British Deputy High Commissioner for his support and involvement in various activities of the ABS, while also involving the ABS Chennai chapter and its members in various activities spearheaded by the BDHC. We also thank Mr Paul Sellers, Director – British Council, South India, who has been readily and constantly with the ABS Chennai chapter’s activities, offering his time and his encouragement in support of the chapter’s efforts.

Facilitating the BC support is the friendly and willing team of members at the BC including their representative on the EC, A J Solomon and Mr Kumaran. We also had the opportunity to collaborate with the BC on some events this year and this proved to be an extension of the warm rapport that the ABS Chennai chapter has with British Council. We also recall the memory of the ever-smiling presence of Mr Nim Bahadur, who we sorely miss and who has been a continuous support to ABS through the years.

The media has supported us through various events with wide coverage and support and we thank them for this visibility and endorsement provided to ABS for the various activities.

I thank the Chapter President Mr A V Ilango for painting the ABS chapter in new and vibrant colours that aimed to bring in warmth and pleasure from members and the public alike. I also thank EC members – each of who is an accomplished professional in their own right – who have provided their support in spite of competing professional priorities, rising fuel prices, economic downswing, spiralling communication costs and of course personal commitments.

We thank the members who have been constantly encouraging, supporting and guiding us through the year and providing their feedback to ensure that the Chapter is vibrant and remains relevant in the days to come as well.

People talk about work – life balance, but as I complete the third year as Secretary, I have found that life can also be a triangle – with work, life and the ABS. After a day’s professional work, caring for the family and needs of children, my responsibilities at the ABS have been the third side to this life’s routine. It has been a hectic balancing act and it is only due to the encouragement and gratitude from several members of the ABS and the general public that I have been able to carry out these duties – to the best of my conscience. It is to these people that I dedicate the work done over the past year.

Thank you to all and do enjoy the rest of the evening!

***B Jayashree***

***Secretary, ABS Chennai***

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 2012-2013**

1. Mr A V Ilango - President
2. Dr Paul Chellakumar – Vice-President
3. Ms B Jayashree - Secretary
4. Mr Manohar Samuel - Joint Secretary
5. Ms Aparajitha V R - Treasurer
6. Dr Bernard D’ Sami - Member
7. Mr Vikas Chawla - Member
8. Ms Selvi Palani - Member
9. Ms Premalatha Seshadri - Member
10. Mr D Arivuoli - Member
11. Dr Sankar - Member
12. Mr N Pichaimuthu – co-opted member
13. Mr A J Solomon - British Council Representative