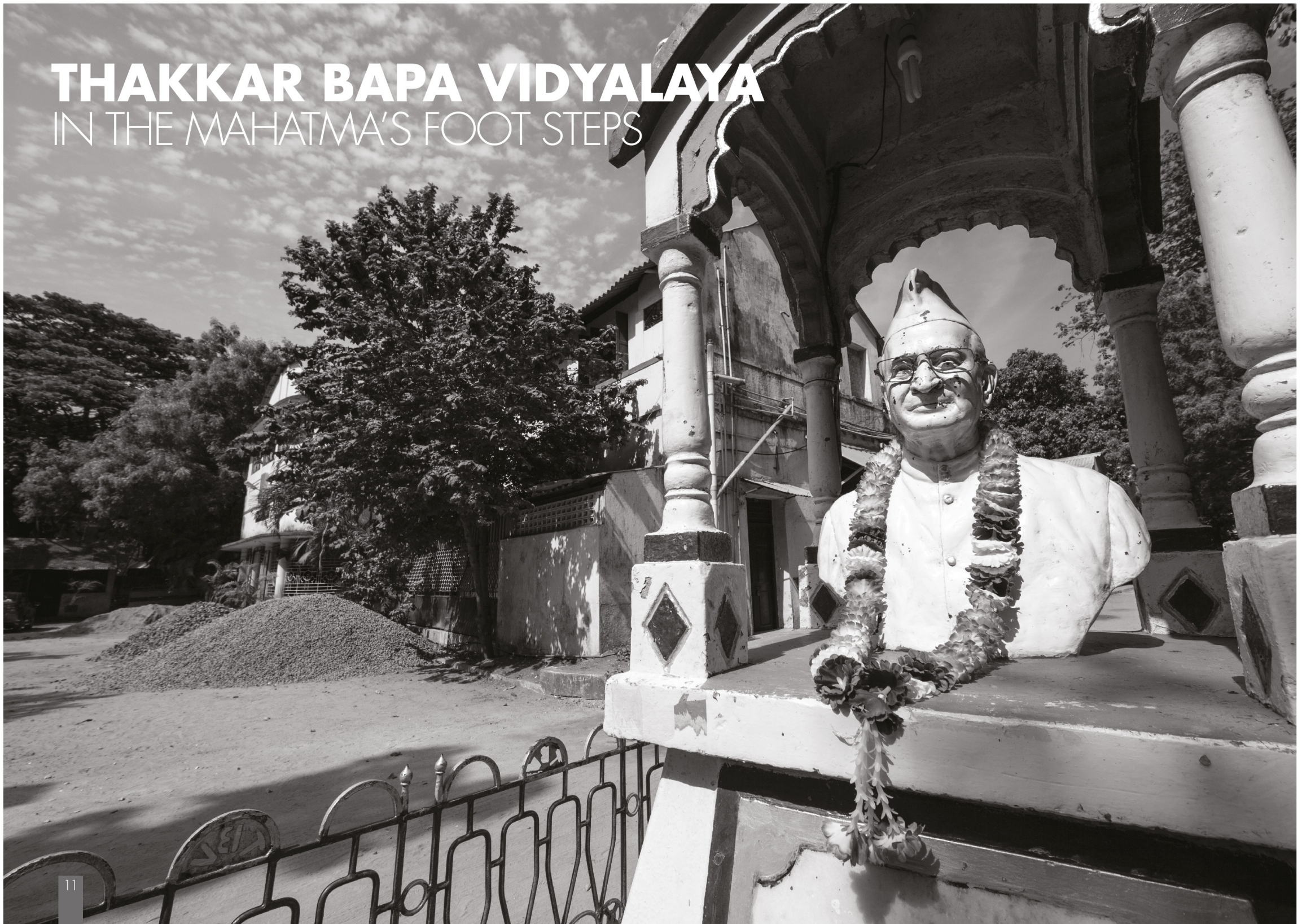


THAKKAR BAPA VIDYALAYA

IN THE MAHATMA'S FOOT STEPS



How relevant is Gandhi today? Almost every one of the '132 crore +' population in India carry his image in the several denominations of the Indian Rupee. But how many of us think his teachings are still relevant? Well, to witness that, one must go to this place, in our very own Singara Chennai, in Nandanam, where a rather large campus houses a series of small buildings with an arch at the entrance saying "THAKKAR BAPA VIDYALAYA – INDUSTRIAL TRAINING CENTRE; FOUNDED BY: MAHATMA GANDHI, IN 1933"

Once inside, you find a marble foundation stone laid by the Mahatma, a plaque which records the opening of the boys hostel by Rajaji and also safely archived are a trowel used by Gandhi to set the foundation stone and a well-polished Charka used by him. Apart from the tangible footprints of the Mahatma, you will find that everything here runs on Gandhian principles, says its current secretary Shri. P. Maruthi.

The Institution runs vocational courses for electrician, fitter & wireman which are approved by National Council



It was Gandhiji's vision that providing Industrial training is the way to go about rather than main stream education

for Vocational Training, Carpentry & AC Mechanic courses approved by State Council for Vocational Training and their own welding, tailoring & other soft skills courses. Each year, about 200 students are enrolled

for these various courses, most of them from households of daily wage earners. Disciplined training empowers these youngsters and help them earn their own bread in the shortest possible time. With an ever increasing demand for skilled workers, Industries come to Thakkar Bapa's door step to recruit every year.

The campus also houses a primary school, working women's hostel, Vinobha hall – an auditorium and Gandhi Study Centre with a Library of rare books and magazines of pre-independence age.

To get greater insight about the Institution, we talked to Shri. Pandian its current President and Shri. P. Maruthi, Secretary of Thakkar Bapa Samithi.

In their words, Gandhiji was very keen to provide education to Harijan. In his era, there was no equal status for Harijan and Gandhiji felt that Harijan need to be empowered so that they can also lead a dignified life and be treated equally in the society. It was Gandhiji's vision that providing Industrial training is the way to go about rather than main stream education.



The recent floods in December 2015 when the institution was submerged in six to eight feet of water and had suffered extensive damage

In 1933, an industrial training school was started in Kodambakkam, Chennai, sponsored by Shri. Duraikannu Mudaliar. The school started providing Industrial training courses to under privileged students. The land which houses the current premises in Nandanam was bought in 1946 and the foundation stone for the new facility was laid by the Mahatma himself. The workshops and classrooms were then built and the Industrial School in Kodambakkam was then shifted to this present facility. It was Gandhiji's suggestion at that time, to name this new Industrial school as Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya, after the great man who worked for the betterment of the Harijan. Thakkar Bapa was working as a Chief Engineer in Mumbai Corporation and he was moved by the difficulties faced by Harijan and started serving them even before he met Gandhi. Thakkar Bapa dedicated his whole life for the upliftment of the under privileged and Gandhiji felt that it was only apt that this Institution carries his name. Bashyam Iyengar, Rajaji, L.N. Gopalsamy,

Vaidyanatha iyer and a few others apart from involving themselves in the freedom movement, also took part in social welfare activities. They were part of the Harijan Seva Sangam and this Industrial school was started as a unit of Harijan Seva Sangam. Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya was part of a Trust which was then converted into a Registered Society later.

Secretary Shri. Maruthi, recalls the recent floods in December 2015 when the institution was submerged in six to eight feet of water and had suffered extensive damage. However, the catastrophe proved to be a blessing in disguise in that some of the old buildings were taken up for renovation. Help from alumnus, neighbors, corporate houses, NGOs and a lot of individuals trickled in. Some of the contributions from Individuals were not big but came with an emotional attachment towards this Institution. A few of the alumnus helped in putting the place back in shape. The renovation of a few blocks started with a budget of Rs.16 lakhs and has now grown to about Rs. 70 Lakhs.

When queried as to how they will manage to bridge the gap, he replies with an anecdote....

Gandhiji's ashram once saw a huge influx of Harijan and a few donors who deferred with Gandhiji on this, started boycotting. When the funds dried up, the ashram inmates started worrying that there means may not be enough to support all of them. Gandhiji however was unperturbed. He said that he cannot ask them to leave and whoever wants to support will support the cause. That night they found a bundle of money and provisions at the Ashram door, left there by an anonymous donor. Similarly, he says, the cause will find its means. Another proof of the impact Gandhiji has left in the minds of these true Gandhians.

Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya is a shining example of how a practical solution can bring about a great transformation and as in its case, stand the test of times. A vision can lead

to a solution but it also needs people and resources to implement and bring them to action. In that, there are no dearth of people who still see relevance in Gandhiji's ideas and principles. A few of them have nurtured this Institution all these years and has brought it to its current form.

Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya is now administered by a committee comprising of President - Shri Pandiyan, Secretary - Shri. Maruthi, Treasurer - Shri. Kanakasabapathi, and Patron - Shri Sthanunathan, who had served the institution as its secretary for many years. It is also supported by a dedicated team of academicians, civil servants, advocates, auditors ...et all, a devoted set of well-wishers bound by Gandhian principles. Thanks to them, Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya stands today as a true Champion of Chennai, an institution which, through its deeds, walks the talk with Gandhian values at its core.