

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR COLLEGE

Updated Version

S. Elancheliyan

## LOCATION



**Velanai Central College**, which is situated at Velanai, has acted as a gateway for the development of educational, cultural, and scientific features for the residents of the Islands, southwest of the Jaffna Peninsula Ilankai. Due to this fact it has been called as **The Golden Temple** of the islands, whereas its former name was Velanai Madya Maha Vidyalayam and it is also known as J/Sir

Waithilingam Duraiswamy M.M.V, Velanai. **We are proud to say that the college has completed sixty nine successful years despite facing many unexpected problems due to the civil war.**

## INITIAL STAGE

During the 1940's the late Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara (Minister of Education, best known as the father of the free educational system) had introduced to the idea of establishing a central college for each electorate. In accordance to that, Sir Waithilingam Duraiswamy (the speaker of parliament) had taken action into establishing a central college for Kayts electorate at Velanai. There were, of course a number of local Hampdens - too numerous to mention here... chief of whom was a trail blazer, an outstanding teacher and a community worker, the late Saravanaiyoor Pundit Ramanathar Maruthainar who collected money from the people to start the college. By that time, Mr. Maruthainar was the manager of the Saiva Pirahasa Vidyasalai and also serving as an indispensable link between the school and the community. In 1945 initial attempts were underway to start the college within the premises of Saiva Pirahasa Vidyasalai, Velanai, and a big cottage had been constructed there for that purpose. By the request of Sir Waithilingam Duraiswamy the college had been declared open by the Minister of Education on Nov 01 1945, and it should be noted that the college started functioning with only five teachers and fifty students alone. The foundation for the present beautiful building was laid down in 1952 by Lord Soulbury, the Governor General of Ceylon (as Ilankai was then known) and then dedicated to the public by Sir John Kotalawela, the Prime Minister of Ceylon in 1954. In memory of this, the beautiful Melia dubia (Malai vembu) tree was planted. Furthermore many wings of the building had been reconstructed from time to time. More than these, student hostels for boys and girls were also built simultaneously along with the main building.

**To all the above and to many of the unnamed, unsung heroes, the school and the community owes a debt!**

## ACTIVITIES

Mr. A. K. Kandiah had assumed as the first principal of the college in 1945 and served there until 1950. Mr. Kandiah the founder principal whose coinage is the beautiful and lofty 'college motto' (**lead kindly light**). During his career he had introduced future plans for the development of the College and these had been fulfilled by Mr. V. Thampoe his successor who had the office from 1950 to 1963. He was an excellent administrator and academician who selected the new site for the college, laid foundation and opened the new buildings, introduced the G.C.E. A/L classes, and also helped with activities in sports and cultural competitions. Mr. Thampoe and Vice Principal Mr. Sivagnanam visited each and every house in the surrounding areas for the betterment of the College, which during this period had been upgraded.

Informal education on textile, carpentry and agriculture had been introduced and inter-house sports meetings were held regularly along with inter-college matches between Jaffna based schools. The proudest achievement of this young institution within the 10 years of its establishment was being able to appoint a great number of its old students who, after graduating, were welcomed back to the school as proud staff members. Some of the most outstanding of them were Mr. S. Shanmuganathan, Mr. P. Ketharanathan, Mrs. T. Ketharanathan, Mr. E. K. Nagarajah, Mr. K. Gopalapillai, Mrs. T. Sothivetpillai, Ms. T. Sivanapillai, and Mrs. V. Shanmuganathan, all of whom greatly benefitted the school and the students they taught. With the passing of time more graduates came back to the school seeking work where they were welcomed and appreciated, however the Principal was also very happy when the students entered University from the College during his time. It should be mentioned here that Late Prof. S. Balachandiran (Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna) and Mr. V. Sivanathan were the very first students who entered University directly from the college in 1963 and this has been continued. Mr. Thampoe's period could be treated as the '**Golden Era**' in the history of the College.

The following Principals, Mr. A.T. Sabaratnam (1963) and Mr. K. Sivasithamparam (1965-1967) both worked hard to maintain the school for two years respectively and in their period showed their dedication through their progress. Mr. Sabaratnam initiated some wise plans to increase the number of students for the University entrance. The fence around the school was constructed during his period too. Unfortunately, he had been transferred before he completed his plans. From 1967 to 1971, Mr. J. S. Ariyaratnam served as Principal and during his days he made to conduct the 'Silver Jubilee' celebration, unfortunately, however it was unsuccessful due to the political problems prevailing at the time. For a few months, a pioneer teacher Mr. V. Ponnuthurai became the Principal and after his retirement, Mr. C. Rajanayagam was appointed as Principal and served as such from 1971 to 1973. When his term was over, Mr. S. Thiyagarajah took the office for a few months and by then the number of students who entered University after attending the college had increased greatly from 1963, and the public was also cooperating with the College administration. The number of students was about 1700 and the staff about 60.

In 1974 Mr. C. Gunabalasingam was appointed as Principal, and following in the footsteps of his predecessors he upgraded the academic and administrative standard of the college. A new playground and a new building for the library was constructed, however, unfortunately the name of the college had been changed as Sir Waithilingam Duraiswamy Madya Maha Vidyalayam, Velanai in memory of former speaker in his period. After Mr. Gunabalasingam, Pundit Mr. K. Rasiah took the office as Principal from 1982 to 1983. He was a distinguished teacher, a Tamil Pundit and one of the senior most teachers of the school. He served as a Vice Principal for a long time and head of the Tamil Department as well. He was a fearless fighter for a principle and was a back bone of the school. After him and then, Mr. M. Sivarajaratnam served as principal until 1987. At the end of his term as Principal, Mr. S. Shanmuganathan was appointed as the next principal and during that time the cluster system was introduced in the educational administrative set up and he became the cluster principal as well. Unfortunately, ethnic war took place and due to that the IPKF regime had come into operation, even though he managed to run the College and the cluster. Mr. P. Ketharanathan was appointed as Principal and cluster Principal in 1989.

## **DISPLACEMENT**

In 1990 and onwards the war had restarted and finally in October 1991, the students, academic and administrative staff of the College and 99% of the public had displaced to the Jaffna Peninsula. Even though all this, Mr. Ketharanathan managed to run the College at Nawasivayagam Vidyalayam of Koddady, Jaffna and Vaitheeswararan Vidyalayam with a few hundred students. Parents, old students, and well Wishers made a numberless amount of contributions to keep the College running. He was instrumental in the formation of Old Students Associations in Colombo, Sydney, Melbourne, France, and Canada. Today, the OSAs are functioning well and helping to the school with their capacity due to the enthusiasm shown by Mr. Ketharanathan and his hard work. Mr. S. Kalatharan took the office as Principal in 1993 after Mr. Ketharanathan retired. During his term, the College found a new site at Kantharmadam, Jaffna, where the classes were conducted in temporary cottages. The situation had reminded the scene which was in 1947. Mr. Kalatharan's period was a glorious one for the displaced students of the College, all of whom were able to continue their studies even while under such dire circumstances. During October in 1995, again the entire public was displaced to the Thenmaradchi and Vanni region and the arrangements made by Mr. Kalatharan and the Golden Jubilee organizing committee to celebrate the Golden Jubilee, were cancelled due to the historical displacement.

## **RESTART**

In 1996, many people came to their own land and schools were being restarted. A few schools including Velanai Central College began to function again and in the beginning, the school was functioning at Velanai East Maha Vidyalayam, under the co-ordination of deputy Principals, Mr. Pon Easan and Mrs. V. Sivapalan. In the mean

time attempts had been taken by the deputy Principals and the senior teachers (Mrs. V. Arasaratnam, Mr. S. Kanaganayagam, and Mr. T. Ketheeswaran) to run the College separately. However due to the fact that the permanent buildings of the College was under the custody of Sri Lankan security forces, it was decided that the College was to be run at Saraswathy Vidyasalai of Velanai. Mr. K. Ganeshalingam was appointed as Principal in 1997, and it is noteworthy to remember that Mr. S. Radnarajah (former Zonal director of Education) and Mr. S. Ratam (Former Assistant Govt. Agent of Velanai) provided valuable efforts in trying to restart the College at its original campus.

### **AGAIN IN IT'S OWN PLACE**

Starting in the August of 1998 the College once again began functioning properly at its permanent buildings with a small number of teachers and one hundred and fifty students, even though the Sri Lankan security forces were occupying the nearby hostels and the playground. However, the reopening ceremony was held on August 28, 1998.

As the hostel buildings and the playground were in occupation by the Navy, the smooth function of the school was thoroughly disturbed. The bus service along the road where the school is situated had been stopped by the navy because of the security reasons. The student and the teachers had to leave their push cycles (bicycles) at the navy check point which was about 1 km away from the school premises and proceed to walk up to the school, after undergoing body check at the check point. The students and the teachers were compelled to walk to and from the school even in the scorching Sun and rain.

The check point was located at the eastern side of the school premises but the western side of the road was completely closed. The students and the staff who come from the western side of the school had to deviate their normal route and gain entry only by the eastern side, after having walked many kilometers. Some parents were not sending their children to the school because of the non-availability of transport facilities. The students attended school got tired due to the long walk.

The name of the students and the staff with their national identity card numbers had to be forwarded to the security officers by the Principal in advance to enable them to gain entry to the school. Because of this system the education department staff, parents could not visit the school as and when they wish to do so. Also, the security staff at the check point did not help the old students to contact the Principal and make way for them to visit their Alma mater. Because of this restriction the development work of the school could not be carried out by the education department or by the school development society. The under privileged school children were debarred from taking part in the inter school athletic meet and other extra curricular activities of the school. Some students got illnesses such as malaria.

Under the above circumstances it was obvious that our school could not function like any other school in Jaffna district. However, The Principal, Mr. K. Ganeshalingam and his academic and administrative staff were serving the school as best as they could in the face of the many hardships the College, students and staff had had to face. **He started a nutritious lunch program for the students with the financial aid from Velanai Central College OSA - Canada in 1998 and continued till 2000.** Due to this vital program, the number of students had considerably increased from 150 to 500 during the next three years. In 1999, G.C.E A/L classes had also been conducted with 70 students. and the prize giving day was held on **November 1<sup>st</sup> 1999** with the **Golden Jubilee** celebration of the college.

Prof. S. Balachandiran (Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna) honoured the event having been the chief guest, and Messrs. Rasanayagam and Gunabalasingam honoured as special guests. An inter-house sports meet was held on March 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 after nine years. Mr. K. Balakrishnan (Director of planning, Jaffna) was the chief guest. They newly used an amplifier system that was donated by OSA-Canada.

Mr. P. Arunagirinathan was appointed as Principal in 2002. He had followed the ways of means put forward by the well-known Principals to upgrade the academic and administrative standard of the college. He had sincerely toiled for the success of the grand design of The Kandiah-Thampoe era! He has been recorded as one of the best Principals of the college. He left the school in 2011.

## **PRESENT STAGE**

The Present Principal, Mr. S. Kirupaharan was appointed in 2011. He and his academic and administrative staff are working hard to bring the school into a high standard like Jaffna based schools. Now, the Srilanka Navy has completely vacated from the school premises including the hostels. The hostels have been started functioning with minimal facilities such as furniture, water, bedding and etc. The number of students is estimated around 835 including almost 200 in the G. C. E A/L classes. The prize giving day of year 2014 was held on Nov 01, 2014. Every work undertaken by the school administration is open for everyone to see and examine. It is their immediate priority to provide an intensive course in Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, English and Computer Technology to the students. In this hour of grave need, all of us work towards our common objective of bringing back our "Alma Mater" Velanai Central College to its pristine glory.

***"Lead kindly light"***

**S. Elancheliyan, B. Sc. (Jaffna), B. Eng (Canada)  
Old student (1975-1982)**

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## **Version History**

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Version 1.11: On 2000-10-08 for Kalatheepam-2000

Version 1.12: On 2001-07-14 for Sangamum-2001

Version 2.10: On 2012-11-05 for VCCOSA-CANADA website.

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