

Adyar Newsletter

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Asian Koel amidst the Fruits of the Tree of Life

CONVENTION NEWS

The 148th International Convention of the Theosophical Society that took place during 31 December 2023 – 4 January 2024 took a deep dive into the theme: 'Exploring and Understanding UNIVERSAL INTELLIGENCE' with approximately 675 in-person delegates and over 1,000 online ones on the opening day.

After the lighting of the lamp by the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, and the Prayers of the Religions, Mr Boyd gave the keynote address on 'Adyar Extension', elaborating on the developments that have taken place during the past few years and the works-in-progress. The President's report, in the form of a video, highlighted the theosophical activities around the world during the last year.



Mr Tim Boyd lighting the lamp

The lectures, profound and very thought-provoking, were well attended and the public lectures attracted many people from the community outside. Mr Joss Brooks, veteran Australian ecologist from Pitchandikulam Forest, Auroville, gave a public lecture titled 'Remembering the Future Garden'. On the last day of the Convention, Mr Boyd delivered the President's Lecture on 'The Land and Us'.

Like in the previous year, workshops took place in different venues on the campus: 'Chanting' (Ms Jaishree Kannan), 'Theosophical Education' (Mrs Sonal Murali), and sessions handled by the World Federation of Young Theosophists.

Exhibitions were a big part of the Convention too. The Adyar Library and the Surendra Narayan Archives had two displays: 'Radha Burnier — A Multi-Faceted Leader' and 'The Spirit of Adyar — A Journey into the Past'. The Art Conservation Studio had an exhibition titled 'The Renaissance of Art in Adyar: Paintings of Florence Ada Fuller'. The Blavatsky Museum was open for viewing by the delegates and showcased its priceless exhibits. There was an Art Exhibition as well, by Indian sculptor and painter, S. Hemalatha, at the ALRC meeting hall.



Radha Burnier Exhibition at the ALRC



Exhibition on Adyar at the Archives



Art Exhibition at the ALRC Conference Hall



Exhibition of Florence Fuller's paintings

In between meetings, delegates were afforded an opportunity to visit the Social Welfare Centre, and the two schools on the campus: the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary

School, and the Adyar Theosophical Academy. There were also some artistic programs: New Year's World Music Concert by LEAP Boundary Breakers, BEAT Choir, a Skit by the Bombay Theosophical Federation, and a cultural evening by members and the Adyar Choir.

As in the previous years, the World Federation of Young Theosophists met at Adyar from 27 to 30 December 2023 and engaged in a focused exploration of Annie Besant's illuminating book, *The Spiritual Life*. They also immersed themselves in various workshops, including the transformative practice of chanting, storytelling, and the arts.

ADYAR DAY

17 February was suggested by Mme Irma de Manziarly in 1922 as a day on which Adyar should be honoured and strengthened throughout the world. The gathering at Adyar witnessed a heart-warming procession of over 400 students of the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School reverentially carrying the garlanded portrait of Colonel Olcott and singing devotional songs. They passed through the portico of the Headquarters building and went on to the Olcott Memorial on the banks of the Adyar River. This tradition symbolizes the school's respect and gratitude for Col. Olcott's vision and contribution to the education of the underprivileged.

the reasons why this day was so special to theosophists worldwide.

This was followed by two talks. The first speaker was Dr Baden Offord, Emeritus Professor of Cultural Studies and Human Rights, Curtin University, Australia, who spoke on the topic: 'Adyar: Intangible Heritage'. He shared his memories from the time that he had spent at Adyar in the past and the precious and invisible legacy of Adyar that has more to it than its outward physical beauty. This was followed by a talk by Dr Geetha Jaikumar, a researcher at the Adyar Archives, on the 'Shrines of Adyar'. She concluded by saying that all of Adyar is a shrine, as it is hallowed by the magnetism and invisible traces left behind by the Masters who have appeared here in their physical bodies and the great theosophical leaders who have trodden the paths here.



Paying homage at the Olcott Memorial

At the meeting in the great hall at Adyar, the international Secretary, Marja Artamaa, in her address to the audience, mentioned



NEWS FROM THE TS SCHOOLS

Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS)

Cyclone Michaung which dropped copious amounts of rainfall in Chennai in the first half of December 2023 caused extensive flooding in many parts of the city. The OMHSS classrooms and grounds were also badly flooded and water-logged and this resulted in the closure of the school for almost two weeks. The staff went on an overdrive to help to drain the water and clean up the classrooms in order to enable the school to start functioning again. Some old students of Olcott school also volunteered in the mammoth task of cutting and disposing off the trees uprooted by the cyclone and in restoring normalcy to the school campus.

At the International Convention, OMHSS students participated by singing devotional songs at the inaugural session and also entertained the delegates at the tea party.

Apart from the regular academic activities, there were a number of excursions, educational trips, and other extra and co-curricular activities as well. On 3 January, the school celebrated Project Day with Mrs Vishalakshi, the Headmistress of Rani Meyyammai School, as the chief guest. The event showcased the students' innovative projects across various disciplines.



Mrs Vishalakshi at the Project Day celebration

On 26 January, Republic Day was celebrated with the chief guest, Dr Rajeshwari Ramachandran, Consultant Neurologist at the Kamakshi Memorial Hospital, unfurling the

national flag. Students performed the march past and house captains saluted the chief guest, demonstrating discipline, respect, and patriotism, during the ceremonial proceedings.

On the sports front too there were many achievements. Vishnupriyan, a 12th grader, secured the first place in 'Mallar Kambam' at a state-level match and the third place in the national competition while representing Tamil Nadu, earning a prize of Rs 50,000. He also received the Achiever Award from the Rotary Club for his outstanding performance in this sport. Raised by a single mother, Vishnupriyan honed his skills over 8 years at a sports academy. He also excelled at Khelo India in Trichy, securing the second place as part of a team and fourth place individually. Congratulations to this talented student!



Vishnupriyan honoured by the Rotary Club

Christmas and Pongal festivals were celebrated with gusto and the students' enjoyment and enthusiastic participation was a sight to behold! The students of the Interact Club visited an old-age home called 'Vishranthi' where they entertained the elders with games and songs, followed by a hearty meal. An eye-screening camp was held at the school premises to promote student wellness. Dr Ramesh, an eye specialist, examined the students and nineteen students were provided with prescription glasses following the screening.

The Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA)

At ATA, school events serve as an opportunity for students to discover their talents and foster collaboration.

Christmas Day celebration saw the school adorned with festive decorations, including a Christmas tree, Christmas crib and handmade wreaths. A special assembly capturing the essence of the Christmas spirit served to foster a sense of unity, spread cheer, and reflect on the spirit of giving.

On 2 January, delegates from the TS Convention visited 'Wonderscape' — an exhibition of ATA's primary and middle school explorations into the history of the Indian textile industry, different methods of dyeing cloth, and fabric printing. The walls of ATA had vibrant and thought-provoking paintings by the school's budding artists. A collection of math games and activities to encourage critical thinking, problem-solving skills and collaboration, made mathematics enjoyable and engaging for the visitors.



Convention delegates at ATA's 'Wonderscape'

ATA's annual cultural program, 'Umang' that means a joyous enthusiasm that wells up from the heart and spreads outwards, was held over two days this year. On 20 January, Grades 3–6 presented a medley of traditional songs and a dance drama titled 'Dance of a River' that traced its meandering journey from its place of origin to its final merger with the ocean. Three unique plays were also put up by Grades 1–6, from different genres like eco-literature, mime, and detective fiction.

There were exciting field visits too. Children from different grades visited the Vayal farm, Marine Kingdom, and the Agastya Science Centre in Andhra Pradesh. Grade 6 went on a 4-day trip to Madurai and delved into its rich traditions and culture. The guided story trails, museum and excavation site at Keeladi, visit to Samanar Malai, Kalaingar museum, and potter's village, introduced them to the world of archaeology and the mysteries of the past.



Grade 6 at Keeladi Museum looking at a ship from the Sangam period

BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD)

The work of BMAD for street animals has increased exponentially, requiring a huge amount of funding to sustain it every year. The untiring and dedicated veterinary team has gone all out not only to provide succour and treatment for the injured and maimed animals on the streets, but their rehabilitation as well.

In recognition of the stellar work done by BMAD, the State Bank of India (SBI) has sponsored a large animal ambulance — an Ashok Leyland mini lorry costing ₹14 lakhs — equipped with hydraulic lifts (costing ₹4 lakhs) for lifting recumbent large animals that are unable to climb on to the vehicle. Apart from this, the State Animal Welfare

Board has sanctioned ₹50 lakhs from the Vallalar Kappagam Fund (a Fund for supporting NGOs working with street animals) and also approved a grant of 8 lakhs for the purchase of a small animal ambulance. All this will greatly enhance the capability of BMAD in carrying out their rescue work in the coming years.



Shravan Krishnan, Director, BMAD, receives a cheque from the SBI Head

The Wildlife Rescue and Treatment Centre run by BMAD from Shanti Kunj, an old building in the main campus, successfully rehabilitated 10 spot-billed pelicans that were rescued from the site of an oil spill in Ennore creek in December 2023. The birds

were adversely affected by the crude oil adhering to their wing feathers and other body parts. While the critically ill birds were housed in BMAD, the healthier birds were transported to Children’s Park in Guindy. After 70 days of observation and treatment (during which period the pelicans were rinsed and washed repeatedly to ensure the removal of crude oil which damaged their waterproofing), they were declared fit and released at the site of rescue in association and collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department and the Wildlife Trust of India. Kudos to the BMAD team!



A rescued pelican flies to freedom

ADYAR ECO-DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (AED)

We are excited to report about a new project, ‘The Adyar Eco-Development (AED) project’ that has been conceived to realize the enormous potential of the inherent natural and spiritual energy in the Theosophical Society’s lush, sprawling, 256-acre campus by the Adyar River in Chennai.

The TS, in partnership with Pitchandikulam Forest Consultants (PFC) will endeavour to demonstrate a way to preserve and maintain a fulfilling way of life, in harmonious co-existence with Nature, resonating with the theosophical belief in the Unity of All Life.

The venture will allow selective access to the land, and its natural treasures, to children, academics, conservators, artists, and the public, as part of the TS’s duty to understand and explore our deep-seated connections with Nature.



Logo of the AED project

PFC will form a team that will work closely with the TS, to plan, design, and launch, several programs in the space of restoration ecology, collaborative education, communal well-being, sustainable maintenance, public awareness, artistic ventures, as well as materializing a ‘Blue-Green Centre’ for transformative environmental education, research, and training, that will eventually become a springboard for similar undertakings in other communities.

CHRISTMAS TEA PARTY

Christmas Tea at Adyar has become an annual event. In an attempt to have 'a little bit of Christmas' at the headquarters, Marja Artamaa, international Secretary, and Nancy Secrest, international Treasurer, began hosting this event five or six years ago. This included the 'lockdown' years when, in lieu of a large get-together, Santa's elves delivered the delicacies to the residents and workers directly at their homes and offices.

This year's Tea was held on 22 December 2023 at the Leadbeater Chambers (LBC) dining hall. All employees, volunteers, residents, and guests at Adyar, were invited. Samosas, small boxes filled with sweets, and chai, was served to more than 200 people. For some of our more elderly residents, this is the only event of the year that allows them to meet their

old friends in one place. The newly formed Adyar Choir entertained us this year with Christmas carols, including 'Jingle Bells', sung in eight languages! The food, songs, festive decorations, and convivial atmosphere, made for an enjoyable afternoon. Marja and Nancy think they will do this again next year, too. A big thanks to both of them!



Marja and Nancy with the tables laden with Christmas treats for the party guests

PERFUME OF ADYAR

Much has been spoken about the beauty of Adyar — undoubtedly a treat for the eyes, yet also a treat for the olfactory senses! This is more potent and palpable, though invisible. Come summer, the myriad, winding paths of the estate, are drenched with wave upon wave of truly divine perfume, released by the flowers of numerous trees (many native, some exotic), which robe themselves in garments of fresh green, with boughs laden with fragrant blooms. The wild lemon trees (*Pamburus missionis*), a very important species in the fast-vanishing Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) belt, woman's tongue tree (*Albizia lebeck*), rain tree (*Samanea saman*), divi-divi (*Libidibia coriaria*), magizham (*Mimusops elengi*), the ancient stately tree of Tamil Nadu, Alexandrian laurel (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), are just a few examples of the trees contributing to

this heady cocktail. The profusely flowering frangipani, not to be outdone, adds its scented contribution as well. At various points, many of these scents converge, making one feel light-headed and in danger of getting intoxicated! One cannot get enough of this fragrant air to fill the lungs to capacity. Truly a perfumier's enchanted paradise. How lovely it would be if this air could be bottled and preserved, and distributed as the Perfume of Adyar!



LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITIES & WISDOM FOR LIVING LECTURE SERIES

The lecture series, 'Libraries as Communities', had three interesting lectures this quarter. In December: 'Natya — an Exploration' by Dr Ambika Kameshwar; in January: 'A panel discussion with the speakers of earlier sessions', with the General Manager of the TS, Mr K. Jaikumar, as the Moderator; and in February:

'Altruism, Compassion and Service' by Mrs Nancy Secrest, international Treasurer of the TS.

During this period, two 'Wisdom for Living Lectures' were held: in January: 'Hybrid Leadership: Embracing the AI Revolution'; and in February: 'Empowering Tomorrow — The Solar Revolution' by Mr Vivek Sridhar.

DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024

(Above Rs. 35,000)

	Rs.		Rs.
GENERAL DONATION		Sasimithran Muthurajan, India	36,000
Subramaniam Ravishankar, Singapore	60,000	Vikram Surana, India	35,100
BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY		Veronica Gamboa, USA	49,903
Krishna Mines, India	2,00,000	CONVENTION, CULTURAL & PUBLIC PROGRAMS	
Neelima Bajaj Swamy, India	1,80,000	Asko Artamaa, Finland	90,000
Tamil Nadu Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Service, India	12,50,000	ADYAR RENOVATIONS	
Vinodhini Gnanasambandam, India	1,30,000	Kuppenheimer Kimberly, USA	42,000
Samudra and Karishma, India	1,00,000	LILY BOYD'S PROJECTS	
A. K. Siva, India	75,000	Theosophical Society, New Zealand	7,36,194
R. Urjitha, India	50,000	SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRE BUILDINGS	
M. Srimathi, India	50,000	C. A. Vinayak Pandya, India	50,000
Gopal Seshadrinathan, India	50,000	ART RESTORATION	
Shunmuga Nathan Narendran, India	44,002	Theosophical Society, New Zealand	4,51,216

DONATIONS TO THE OLCOTT EDUCATION SOCIETY

1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024

(Above Rs. 10,000)

	Rs.		Rs.
INDIAN DONATIONS		Kauvery Hospital	5,00,000
Development Activities for Rural People	50,000	Jozh Universe	50,000
Dharma Paripalana Sabha Annadhanam and Charitable Trust	45,000	Wipro Cares	8,25,000
Vaasanthosh International Education Pvt. Ltd.	15,000	Theosophical Order of Service, Madras	15,000
J. Ramakrishnan	15,000	Asian Institute of Nephrology & Urology	50,000

Cover Picture: A. Chandrasekaran. Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) is a common bird on the TS estate. They are brood parasites that lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, usually crows, which will then provide parental care until the Koel fledglings are ready to fly. The eggs of the parasitic birds have evolved in such a way that they are similar in size and colour to the hosts' eggs to help avoid detection.

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