

Adyar Newsletter

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A Coppersmith barbet carries a mouthful of figs for feeding its chicks

CONVENTION NEWS



The 147th International Convention on the theme 'Our Responsibility in the Inter-connected World' concluded on 4 January 2023. It was an in-person convention, made all the more special after two years of remote, online programmes, giving members a precious opportunity to connect real time, face to face.

A special feature of this year's convention was multiple workshops which happened between 3–4 p.m. parallelly, with delegates free to attend whichever was of interest to them. There was a Mini-School of the Wisdom on the theme 'Theosophy and Ecology: Practical Wisdom for Living in the Contemporary World' (Mrs Linda Oliveira, Dr Radha Raghunathan and Mr Pradeep Gohil); a chanting workshop (Ms Jaishree Kannan) where the participants learnt to chant the *shanti mantra*; a workshop on Transformative Education (Ms Sonal Murali); World Music and Dance Workshop (LEAP Boundary Breakers) and last but not the least, a workshop on 'Science and Compassion' by Janne Vuononvirta which investigated the connection between theosophical and scientific understanding of compassion and the practices.



Convention workshops in progress

Exhibitions

The Surendra Narayan Archives (earlier known as the Adyar Archives) had put up an exhibition where a few important entries in Colonel Olcott's diaries and some pages from Madame Blavatsky's famous Scrapbooks were displayed. At the Headquarters building, the completion of 100 years of *Brahmavidyashrama* and the School of the Wisdom was celebrated with an exhibition of old photographs from the Archives. The Blavatsky Museum at the headquarters had a makeover and was open to the Convention delegates who visited and marvelled at the priceless artefacts. Old manuscripts and rare old books were on display at the Library Display Room.

In addition, there was an art exhibition by artist Shivaram, who displayed his beautiful paintings which were also available for sale.

The Young Theosophists had a two-day conference prior to the starting of the Convention, with participants from India and other countries too. They studied Bishop Leadbeater's book, *The Hidden Side of Things*. They also enthusiastically volunteered their services in the conduct of the Convention, adding zest and vibrancy to the proceedings.



Youth Convention delegates at the Buddhist Shrine

Kashmiri Stall

For over three decades, it has been the practice to have Fayaz Mohammad, a textile trader from Kashmir, put up a stall and sell the exquisite, hand-embroidered clothes, shawls, stoles, sarees, and other accessories made by Kashmiri artisans, during the Convention. The small weavers and artisans in Kashmir have been greatly impacted by the Covid shutdown and the periodic extremist violence which erupts in the beautiful valley. The consequent reduction in the inflow of tourists, thus causes the drying up of their main source of income. The stall not only celebrates India's beautiful handicrafts but also helps in a small way to augment the income of the artisans.



Fayaz and Farhat display their wares

ADYAR DAY CELEBRATIONS

17 February is celebrated as Adyar Day in TS Lodges and branches all over the world. Originally suggested by Madame de Manziarly who was a resident at Adyar, and approved by Dr Besant, the day is significant for the following reasons: It was the day on which Col Olcott passed on to the higher planes; it was the birthday of C. W. Leadbeater; and it was also the day when Giordano Bruno was martyred in the year 1600. At 9 a.m. the children of the Olcott School, marched in a procession, carrying the picture of Colonel Olcott on their shoulders, singing songs of praise, and reached the Olcott memorial, to pay homage to that great soul, after which a talk

was given by Mrs Lalitha, Headmistress of the school, to the assembled children.



OMHSS students carry Col Olcott's picture in a procession, passing the headquarters building on the way to the Olcott memorial

At the TS headquarters, Adyar Day was celebrated in the great Hall, with a talk by Shikhar Agnihotri on 'Adyar, the Masters' Home', followed by an informative talk by Geetha Jaikumar on the topic "Colonel Olcott's Diaries, Treasure of the Archives: Insights into the Flow of Time". The meeting concluded with chanting by Jaishree Kannan and the offering of flowers to the statues of the Founders.



Shikhar Agnihotri



Geetha Jaikumar

NEWS FROM THE TS SCHOOLS

Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS)

On 3 January 2023, OMHSS conducted its Project Day, with Mrs R. Lalitha, Headmistress, as the Chief Guest. The big assembly hall was filled with excited children proudly displaying their models, charts and worksheets, covering the various topics learned during the term. Also on display were models of the festivals of Tamil Nadu, glowing the bulb using salt water, different types of sand, etc. The delegates of the international convention visited the school



OMHSS children display their models on Project Day

and interacted with the children much to their delight and joy.

Pongal festival was celebrated by the primary school students, with Mrs Lily Boyd as the Chief Guest. Various artistic performances were staged as part of the celebration. The annual sports meet for Primary School children was held on 24 February and was presided over by the Chief Guest, Mrs Vijaya Sundaram, President of the Innerwheel Club of Madras.



Junior School gymnastics during the Sports Day

The Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA)

An exchange of ideas and exploration of regional culture: Hallmark of Term III

ATA's final term began on an exciting note with a visit by the delegates of the annual Convention of the TS who walked through the displays covering ecology, the solar system, science and art, designed and created by the ATA students.

Culturally relevant learning is a key part

of the ATA's academic programme, with the students celebrating various regional festivals. Pongal, the harvest festival of Tamil Nadu, was celebrated with the staff, students and guests, who later enjoyed the delicious *sakkurai pongal*, a dish made with rice, lentils and jaggery.

The Annual Sports Day was held at the Olcott School ground on 21 January 2023, with Mr Tim Boyd, international President of The Theosophical Society, as the chief guest. The highlight of the term was the student-exchange program between the ATA students and Peepal Grove School in

Andhra Pradesh, with visits by students to each other's school. It was an enriching experience for the students as they engaged in stimulating conversations, exchanged ideas and participated in many Nature-based activities.



Grade 3 sings a traditional folk song on the occasion of the harvest festival, *Pongal*



The graceful fan drill by Grades 1 & 2

Social Welfare Centre (SWC)

The TS runs the SWC which operates a day-care centre cum nursery school for young children of working parents from low-income families. SWC has four teachers, five ayahs, and one caretaker to look after the children.

This year the SWC took care of forty children who were provided with nutritious food, milk, and fruits. The children were taught numbers, alphabets, rhymes, colouring pictures, action songs, exercises, and dance. The children were also taken for visits to amusement parks.

Dr R. Revathy, the resident doctor on the estate, visited the SWC regularly for conducting health check-ups and also provided guidance to the parents on health care for the children.

On Adyar Day, dresses were donated by the TOS Adyar. Convention delegates were invited for a cultural programme and exhibition at the SWC on 1 January 2023 from 1.30–3 p.m. where the tiny tots put on an enchanting medley of music, dance, fancy dress and drama.



The cheerful facade of the SWC



Tiny tots learn numbers, alphabets and colouring



NEWS FROM THE BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD)

BMAD as always, has been terrifically busy — with new admissions in a critical condition, innumerable out-patients, and specialised surgeries. In the midst of all this bustle, they

also managed to conduct two birth control surgery marathons for street animals.

During the *Pongal* celebrations, the large animals of BMAD — cows and calves, bulls,

buffaloes, horses, donkeys, goats, pigs — all enjoyed a fruit treat and lots of pampering. The orders for the beautifully designed and curated BMAD calendar had to be packed and shipped as well. All in all, an extremely busy period indeed!

BMAD is the referral hospital for the Forest Department to bring in injured wildlife. Very recently, the Chennai Snake Park brought in two of their giant reticulated pythons that had sustained severe injuries when they fought with each other in their enclosure. Their deep wounds required suturing, and this was done by the skilful

BMAD vets under gas anaesthesia. Some-time earlier, an injured cobra had also been successfully treated and released after recuperation and recovery.



The large animals enjoy the Pongal fruit treat



An injured python receives veterinary treatment

APPOINTMENT OF NEW LIBRARIAN

Ms Jaishree Kannan assumed charge as the Librarian of the Adyar Library and Research Centre on 18 January 2023, in the place of Mr C. A. Shinde who retired after having served in the post for over 15 years. Jaishree had earlier worked in the Library in the capacity of Asst. Librarian for over twenty-five years (having joined in April 1992) before she took over as the Officer-in-Charge of the Archives, a position which she still continues to hold. She has undergone a special conservation course at the renowned Indian National Trust of Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) based in Lucknow, for the preservation of paper

and palm-leaf manuscripts. She says that returning to her old place of work is like a homecoming for her and she takes great pride in locating books which have temporarily gone into hiding! We wish her all the very best in her new post!



WISDOM FOR LIVING LECTURE

On 25 February 2023, we had the fourth lecture in the Wisdom for Living series which was started last year. An extremely insightful talk was given by Gita Krishnaraj on 'The Spiritual Science of Knowing'. She spoke about her personal experience of entering

into what she called the 'spiritual silence', the expansion of the mind and the bliss that follows which helps to overcome all barriers and limitations, while broadening one's perspective. The audience were wafted on an immersive journey to the 'final silence'.

ADYAR NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT CENTRE (ANEC)

On 18 February 2023, ANEC partnered with the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS) to

organize an extremely interesting talk and interaction with renowned Nature writer

and conservationist, Mr Robert Macfarlane, at the historic Blavatsky building. Known for his deftly woven narratives that reveal the historic and linguistic influences of our perceptions of Nature, his voice is

rare, refreshing and vital, in a world that is increasingly forgetful of such lore. The interaction which followed the thought-provoking talk was also extremely lively and enjoyable.

LEAVES FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Convention Story – A Brief History

The International Theosophical Convention had its beginnings in small anniversary meetings. The fourth such anniversary was held on 29 November, 1879, in Bombay, and was attended 'by a few English guests and about 500 Indians'. This was incidentally the first Convention held on Indian soil. It included a display of Indian goods — the first Swadeshi exhibition in the country. The sixth anniversary was held on 12 January, 1882, at the Framji Cowasji Hall, Bombay.

The Founders moved their Headquarters to Adyar in 1882 and thereafter the Convention was held annually at Adyar except during the years of Dr Besant's intense political activity for India, when the Convention met at the centre where such work took her. Thus, the Convention was held in Bombay (1915), Lucknow (1916), Calcutta (1917), Delhi (1918), Varanasi (1919), Adyar (1920) and back again in Bombay (1924).

At the 1883 Convention, the T. Subba Row Medal was instituted, to be awarded to the author of the most valuable contribution to theosophical literature. Of the many recipients, J. Krishnamurti in 1911 and C. Jinarajadasa in 1913, were noteworthy for having received the award at an early age. In 1893, Dr Besant commenced the Convention Lectures that have become a feature of subsequent Conventions. In 1899, Col Olcott announced that the International Conventions would be held alternately at Benaras and Adyar, and this was received with enthusiasm by the members.

Mrs Besant's Convention Lectures

At the beginning of this century there was great interest in Mrs Besant's lectures. It is reported that in 1903 the audience of 5,000 'crashed through the barriers, broke down the heavy western gates, and barged into the Hall to hear Dr Besant'.

The Golden Jubilee Convention held in 1925 was memorable in many ways. It was the biggest Convention ever to assemble, with 3,000 delegates, of whom 500 came from overseas. Loudspeakers were used for the first time during the Convention. The Bharat Samaj Temple was consecrated, and shrines of other religions were in various stages of construction. The Prayers of the Religions were offered for the first time, with the President leading the closing prayer, 'O Hidden Life, . . .'. A message to the Members of the Theosophical Society was received from an 'Elder Brother'.



1925 Convention gathering under the banyan tree including Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, and others

The Convention of 1933 was devoted to the memory of Dr Besant and tributes were paid to her unique work. In 1935, the

Diamond Jubilee Convention was held at Adyar with 75 overseas and 1,500 Indian delegates. During the war years also the

Conventions continued, although on a limited scale. The Double Diamond Jubilee Convention was held in 1950.

DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

1 December 2022 to 28 February 2023

	Rs.		Rs.
BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY		María Luisa Cabrera Padilla, Bolivia	16,107
Neelima Bajaj, India	1,80,000	DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVATION OF ADYAR ESTATE	
Varun Rajiv, India	60,000	Ram Alexander, Italy	63,736
Vikram, India	60,000	GENERAL DONATION	
M. R. Gayathri, India	53,000	TS In Brazil	15,71,020
A. K. Siva, India	42,500	N. Gautam, India	1,00,000
Ramya Ravikumar, United Kingdom	40,927	Thrity Cyrus Dalal, India	1,00,000
Lara Animal Rights Trust, India	38,050	Krishnaswamy Associates Pvt. Ltd., India	20,000
Manjula Ganesan, India	35,150	LILY BOYD CHARITABLE PROJECTS	
Brinda Indu, England	33,670	Italian Theosophical Society	40,587
V. R. Mira Dhurga, India	27,000	SCHOOL OF THE WISDOM	
Vikram Krishnan, India	25,000	Ekaterina Smirnova-Scherbov, Austria	27,930
Maria Antony, India	23,500	THEOSOPHICAL EDUCATION	
Vinodhini Gnanasambandam, India	22,500	María Luisa Cabrera Padilla, Bolivia	12,081
Sujatha Raghavan, United States	20,911	TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR TS EMPLOYEES' CHILDREN	
Jayabala Sathya, United States	20,197	Pandit Damodar Shastry Charitable Trust, India	1,00,000
Love All Animals (LAA), India,	20,000		
Beaula Robert, India	20,000		

DONATIONS TO THE OLCOTT EDUCATION SOCIETY

30 November 2022 to 28 February 2023

	Rs.		Rs.
INDIAN DONATIONS		ACTC Studio P.Ltd. — Tamil Marathon	50,000
NEB Sports Entertainment Ltd.	50,000	Rahul Sports & Youth Welfare Association	50,000
BrandM Events	50,000	Nishant S. Sundar	50,000
Durairaj Sethu	10,000	Dream Runners Foundation	50,000
Dharma Paripalana Sabha Charitable Trust	45,000	Mahalakshmi Venkatesan	45,000
Verizon Data Services India P.Ltd	33,80,896	Jain International Trade Organisation	50,000
Colors of Glory	25,000	Asian Institute of Nephrology and Urology	50,000
J. Ramakrishnan	2,000	The Theosophical Order of Services in India (Madras)	15,000
M. Raghavachari	2,000	I1 Sports Entertainment	50,000
Lily Boyd	2,000	S. Sowmya	15,000

Cover Picture: A. Chandrasekaran. The coppersmith barbet (*Psilopogon haemacephalus*) is known for its metronomic call that sounds similar to a coppersmith striking metal with a hammer. It is a resident bird in the Indian subcontinent and carves out holes inside trees to build its nest. It is predominantly frugivorous, but has been observed eating insects, especially winged termites.

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