

# Adyar Newsletter

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The Great Banyan's Mystical Infinity Symbol

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY, ADYAR, CHENNAI, INDIA



## CONVENTION NEWS

The 149th International Convention of the Theosophical Society (TS) in Adyar, Chennai, India, took place from 31 December 2024 to 4 January 2025, on the theme 'Practical Theosophy and the Art of Self-Transformation'. International President of the TS, Mr Tim Boyd, lighted the lamp with four others, and the prayers of all the religions were recited as a reminder that the Divine Wisdom forms the common background of all faiths.

The main programmes were an opportunity to listen to the insights of 27 speakers/facilitators who elaborated their enlightening thoughts on numerous aspects of Practical Theosophy. There was a plethora of workshops, nature walks, short talks, dialogues, artistic programmes, and symposia, on different days in various parts of the campus.

Exhibitions too were a large part of the Convention. The Surendra Narayan Archives had on display 'HPB's Paintings, Satirical Sketches, and Doodles'; and the Adyar Library and Research Centre showcased 'Kanjur and Tanjur: The Holy Books of Tibetan Buddhism'. The Art Restoration Studio had an interesting exhibition on 'The Divine Hidden in Daily Life'. The Blavatsky Museum exhibited its permanent display of historical objects.

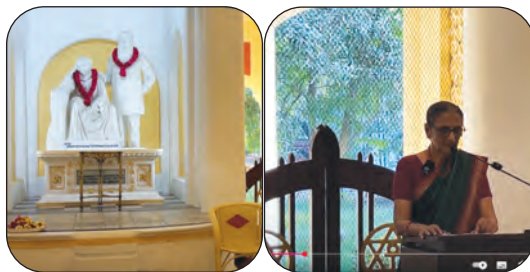


## ADYAR DAY CELEBRATION

17 February marks the date of the passing of Colonel Olcott to the higher realms and is celebrated as Adyar Day in TS lodges all over the world. At Adyar, at 9 a.m., the students of Olcott School came marching in a procession carrying a garlanded picture of Colonel Olcott to the portico of the Headquarters Hall, where they halted and sang songs expressing their gratitude to the Founder-President, the saviour of the poor. They then proceeded to the Olcott Memorial on the banks of the Adyar River, where they garlanded Col. Olcott's statue and offered prayers.

At 4 p.m. in the evening there was a gathering of members at the Headquarters Hall, to pay homage to that great soul

who had done so much to bring the light of Theosophy to all corners of the world. After opening remarks by Shikhar Agnihotri, there was a beautiful musical presentation by Jaishree Kannan, Librarian, the Adyar Library and Research Centre, on 'Gita, Kabir, and Krishnamurti.' Flowers were then offered to the statues of the Founders.



## NEWS FROM THE TS SCHOOLS

### Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS)

OMHSS focused on enhancing students' academic growth through various educa-

tional initiatives. The *Vingyanam* (Knowledge or Science in Sanskrit) Project, con-

ducted by the Rotary Club of Chennai Mitra, introduced the second smart board at the school, equipping educators with digital learning tools to help make the classes more interesting.

Several programmes were conducted to foster students' overall development beyond academics. இளந்தளிர் ('Tender Shoots' in Tamil), a motivational programme, featured renowned speakers who guided students on goal setting, brain stimulation techniques, and well-being. The Parent-Teacher Meeting addressed key issues such as discipline, punctuality, and skill development, ensuring better coordination between parents and the school. The Feelings Workshop, led by Austrian facilitators, encouraged students to express their emotions through drawings and interactive activities, enhancing their emotional intelligence. The school held an inauguration and dedication ceremony for a new building, which also featured an exhibit of Project Day models, showcasing students' creativity and academic innovations.

The Trail Nature Walk, hosted by the Adyar Eco-development Project (AED) at the Theosophical Society Campus, educated students about ecological systems and sustainability.

During the international Convention, the students presented a wonderfully energetic and informative performance of *villupaatu* and a street play on sustainable development goals and the future of the Adyar river, under the tutelage of educators from AED, which was very well received by the delegates.



Inauguration of the new block of classrooms  
by President Tim Boyd

## **Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA)**

### **A Season of Exploration and Celebration at ATA**

From December to February, ATA hosted a vibrant array of events and activities, offering the students enriching learning experiences while fostering community spirit and environmental awareness.

Students embarked on numerous field trips, engaging with history, Nature, and science. The field trips included visits to the Marine Kingdom, Kalakshetra, Egmore Museum, Agastya Creativity Campus, Keeladi — an ancient archaeological site, the Kalinga centre for Rainforest Ecology at Agumbe, and Auroville. Grade 5 learned about community-driven initiatives at ROKA, a voluntary association dealing with solid waste management. Grades 4 and 5 explored exhibits on Tamil Nadu's ecosystems and

biodiversity at the Olcott Bungalow curated by Joss Brooks and his team.

In the Bharathiyar Day assembly, the students explored Tamil culture through poetry and drama. Other major events included Wonderscape for the Theosophical Convention delegates. Mr Gerard Brennan from Australia, had an insightful and engaging discussion with Grade 7 students while Aamina Simone led a mindfulness session for Grade 6. Pongal celebrations with traditional dances were attended by President Tim and Lily Boyd, Michiel Haas and other guests. The Pre-Primary Sports Day featured drills, obstacle races, and fun games for parents, with a potluck, strengthening the community bond.

Yuvan Aves, an environmentalist, writer, and educator, spoke about ecological consciousness, sharing insights from his book, *Intertidal: A Coast and Marsh Diary*. Students explored campus insects, their amazing behaviour, unique traits and important ecological roles with Hrishu



Mr Gerard Brennan in conversation with Grade 7

Arvind from the Madras Naturalists' Society.

Students engaged in diverse workshops on STEM, robotics, and film studies. Uma Mohan's poetry workshop for Grades 6 and 7 inspired the students to compose their own poems, thus nurturing creativity and critical thinking.



Kindergarten Sports Day

## SOCIAL WELFARE CENTRE (SWC) AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE (VTC)

The SWC is primarily focused on providing free day-care facilities to children aged 2.5 to 5 years, from poor families in and around Adyar, thus allowing their parents to earn a livelihood. The children are provided with a happy and safe place, given nutritious food, educational toys which help in hand-eye coordination, learning colours and shapes, social skills, and communication. Very recently, thanks to the interest and personal initiative taken by Mrs Lily Boyd, Montessori system of education has been started. In addition, the spacious playground has been

equipped with lovely merry-go-rounds, see-saws, jungle gyms, and other outdoor play equipment, greatly enjoyed by the tiny tots.

The VTC conducts free tailoring and embroidery courses for women from under-privileged families, to teach them skills that would help supplement the family's income by working from home. The staff of the VTC made various items like bags, purses, pillow cases and other items, in addition to towels, mats and material woven on the loom at VTC, which were all offered for sale to the delegates at the Convention.



Tiny tots enjoying the outdoor play equipment



Fun learning the Montessori way

## ADYAR ECO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (AED)

The Adyar Eco Development project continued to ramp up its activities as the Convention approached, with Joss and his team working hard to get the Olcott Bungalow Blue-Green Centre ready to showcase the vision and plans of the project to visiting delegates.

The team engaged in extensive planting of native saplings in the spaces beyond the Olcott Bungalow and around the Garden of Meditation, along with the setting up of watering systems in these areas, with a view to improving the biodiversity of the flora on the campus. Clearing out invasive species like *Millingtonia* and *Antigonon*, and tidying up overgrown areas were also done. A medicinal and herb garden was planted near the Bungalow to be part of the educational programme, and ornamental rain lilies, a pebble arrangement, and several new saplings, were introduced in the formal garden in front of the Bungalow.

Two concentric seating circles made of bricks, beautiful granite slabs, with lovely inlaid coloured tiles were constructed by the fig tree (*Ficus virens*) near the Bungalow, as an outdoors teaching area. Several benches have been placed in various parts of the campus inviting a refreshing seat under a tree to engage in quiet conversation.



Art works outside the Garden of Meditation

The Garden of Meditation was infused with new energy as a revamped seed room and botanical office to complement the

Nursery across the road. Seeds from several interesting species are being germinated, and a database being built up of the flora of the TS and the saplings at the Nursery.

The team worked hard to prepare posters and exhibits for showcasing in the beautiful rooms of the newly spruced-up Olcott Bungalow, and around the Garden of Meditation. The Olcott Bungalow Blue-Green Centre was inaugurated at the Convention, with a presentation to the visiting Convention delegates on the vision and activities the Centre hopes to undertake in the coming years. A wonderful short film called 'The Wild Side', that showed glimpses of the precious flora and fauna in the TS Campus, accompanied by some Mozart from one of the restored shellac records from the Garden of Meditation, was screened for the delegates.



Joss Brooks addresses the Convention delegates

Nature walks were conducted by the team for the Convention delegates as well as volunteering activities that involved planting and landscaping. Two Nature educators joined the team in January, quickly diving into research and planning for upcoming programmes to engage with the children.

The team also started nature walks for the students from the TS schools. And most exciting of all, Olcott School is to have its very own Blue Green Centre, work on which is proceeding at a great pace! The Centre is



expected to be operational sometime in the middle of March.

The team has also started work on



A view of the refurbished interior at Olcott Bungalow

restoring the Beach Cottages near the Olcott Bungalow with repairs to the sanitation system beginning in January.



The new Blue-Green Centre at OMHSS

## BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD)

Thanks to a CSR initiative of the Radiance Group, BMAD was able to construct a beautiful refuge for abused and injured cats, which were previously housed in an enclosed room. Aptly named Purrington Manor, the new space is large and roomy, well-ventilated, and open to the sky light, provided with interesting enrichment, and surrounded by trees and bird song, so that the special residents have lots to observe and whet their curiosity, from the safety of their enclosure. The new enclosure was

inaugurated by Mr K. Jaikumar, General Manager of the Theosophical Society.

The BMAD team's grit and effort often pulls off the seemingly impossible. A classic case is that of Chocolate, an abandoned German Shepherd, that was found in a pitiable condition on the roads of Chennai. Lovingly helped back to full recovery and health, he has been miraculously transformed both in appearance and spirit. Wishing the BMAD team all the very best in pulling off many more such hat tricks!



Inauguration of Purrington Manor by Mr K. Jaikumar



Chocolate's magical transformation

## LEAVES FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Great Banyan at Adyar

Our banyan had led centuries of quiet anonymous existence until Annie Besant's presidency in 1907 when she expanded the estate and acquired Blavatsky Gardens from the Mohammedan Prince of Arcot in 1908. The bungalow on the property had been vacant

for a long period of time and the jungle had encroached on the garden. Therefore, it was only after a considerable amount of clearing was done that the existence of the now famous banyan tree was revealed, although it stood within a few yards of the house.

The Great Banyan is believed to be over four hundred and fifty years old. Supported by hundreds of prop-roots, its sprawling branches covered 40,000 sq. ft. of space and were once held up by a 40-foot tall, 30-tonne trunk under whose shade several thousand people at a time have sat and listened to discourses. But it is not the antiquity of the tree alone that has made it immortal. It has been a silent spectator to many significant and important events in theosophical and national history.

After coming into the fold of the Adyar estate, it soon became the nucleus of T.S. activities. Talks and lectures, spiritual and temporal, receptions and parties, dances and concerts under its leafy canopy, became the order of the day. The annual conventions of the TS came to be held under it. Those days there was no fencing around it and the entire ground was large enough to seat some three thousand people. It was swept clean and decorative flowerpots encircled the tree and its prop-roots. It is said that the tree was a silent witness when the idea of forming the Indian National Congress was mooted at a meeting of freedom fighters who passed an unofficial resolution to that effect. After the official formation also, the Indian National Congress held many meetings under the tree and it was from here that Annie Besant launched her Home Rule movement. To rebut Baden-Powell who thought that Indian boys were unfit for scouting, Annie Besant organised her own Indian Scout movement and held its first ever jamboree under the tree. Later, the story goes, a chastened Baden-Powell made amends by trekking to the tree for the investiture of Dr Besant with the 'Silver Wolf' of the scout order. Anyone lending his ears to the lullaby of the dancing leaves can hear the heroic tales of the ups and downs of the Indian freedom struggle and that of the Theosophical Society.

In 1909 Dr Besant gave her famous 'Twilight Talks' under the tree that began to appear in *The Theosophist* (April 1909). The tree was also the elegant host of many discourses given by eminent persons like Tagore, Gandhiji, Dr S. Radhakrishnan, Dr Rajendra Prasad, and many others besides. Under its ambience, theosophical leaders like Dr Besant, Dr Arundale, C. Jinarajadasa, and others, shared the ancient wisdom teachings with a receptive audience. Men of God like the Dalai Lama and the pontiff of Kanchi made their pilgrimage to see it. Mme Montessori who stayed in the campus for a number of years, delivered many lectures under the tree.

At the Jubilee Convention held in 1925, Annie Besant writes in the *Adyar Bulletin* that while the Headquarters Hall was used for lectures and entertainment of all sorts, the Banyan Tree was their Cathedral for public lectures, and for other lectures meant only for the members. One new feature introduced into the lectures under the Banyan Tree was the use of 'Loud speakers' for the first time in India, and they proved to be a great success.

In 1975, the TS Garden Department erected a fence around the tree to protect it from those athletic persons who used to swing on its aerial roots and also from others who carved their initials on the trunk and prop-roots. The banyan responded to this kindness by putting forth a great many shoots which soon rooted themselves in the soil.

Saturday, 17 June 1989, was a sad day for the TS. Towards evening, thunderclouds gathered, the rains poured and gusty winds blew that brought down the main trunk of our beloved Banyan tree that had weathered so many killer cyclones over the centuries.

Spontaneous help flowed from every quarter. With the help of a huge crane it was quickly positioned vertically with six steel guy wires affixed to stout 8-foot long rails anchored in concrete beds. The whole

operation took ninety minutes. A truly stupendous job by men and machines.

Though the tree appeared to revive briefly, the mother trunk started getting into a comatose condition and a little less than

a year later, the leaves from the branches slowly withered and fell. But though the mother trunk is no more, she continues to live on through her children who have formed a protective circle around the spot

## WISDOM FOR LIVING AND LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITIES LECTURES

The two Lecture series had interesting programmes. Wisdom for Living: January, Dr S. Diana on 'Health, Well-being and Safety'; February: Dr Vishwanath M. Pai on: 'Obesity Problems and How to Tackle it'. Libraries as Communities: January, 'Sangitam — The Classical Music of India' by Jaishree Kannan.

### INDIAN DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

(Above Rs. 25,000)

	Rs.		Rs.
<b>BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY</b>		M. Chitra	27,250
Urjitha Rajagopalan	1,00,000	Rashmi Devaprasath	27,000
Vinodhini Gnanasambandam	75,000	Sundar Raj	26,200
A. K. Siva	75,000	Hari Varma	25,005
Gaurav Palle	50,000	L. Vasudev Rao	25,000
Vaikunth Kannan	48,000	Neelima Bajaj Swamy	1,80,000
M. R. Gayathri	48,000	Arvind Venkataraman	1,28,000
Rajni Soundararajan	45,750	Radiance Realty Developers India	5,00,000
Vikram Surana	45,000	Success Gyan India LLP	1,00,000
Sasimithran Muthurajan	30,000	K. Sridhar	2,00,000
Tejaswi Damaraju	30,000	<b>ATA KIRBY GARDENS</b>	
Umamaheswari Venkateswaran	28,900	L & T Technology Services	30,77,507

### INDIAN DONATIONS TO THE OLCOTT EDUCATION SOCIETY

1 December 2024 to 28 February 2025

	Rs.		Rs.
KPMG Assurance and Consulting Services LLP	10089	Dhirendra Nath Padhi	20,000
Dharma Paripalana Sabha & Annadhanam Charitable Trust	45,000	St. Patrick's Anglo Indian Higher Secondary School	20,000
J. Lalitha	13,000	Rajeswari Ramachandran	60,000
Jayanthi Vyas	15,000	Beat Crossfit	75,000
President, TOS Mahabharat Group	2,00,000	Theosophical Order of Service in India	10,000
		The Theosophical Education Society	50,000

**Cover Picture:** Geetha Jaikumar. Intriguingly, and very appropriately, the Great Banyan has woven for itself, an infinity symbol ( $\infty$ ) with its prop-roots! The banyan tree, scientifically known as *Ficus benghalensis*, is often associated with 'eternal life' due to its unique growth pattern, long lifespan, and cultural significance, particularly in Hinduism, where it is seen as a symbol of the world tree representing the cycle of life and death.

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