

THE 145TH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY



The 145th International Convention of the Theosophical Society held during December 2020 was remarkable in many ways. Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, this convention was entirely conducted online. While live-streaming of the event was being done since 2014, it was the first time that the entire programme — involving such great complexity and vastness, and spanning four full days — was successfully conducted online.

Though no strict registration fee was fixed, over 75 per cent of the registrants made donations which more than covered the cost of hosting the convention, unlike in the past, where despite registration fees being charged, the expenses almost always exceeded the income.

It was for the first time that speakers for this Convention did not have to travel to Adyar from their home countries. The same was true for the audiences as well — everyone could watch all the programmes from the comfort of their homes. This was truly a global event — a record number of 2,713 members from 73 countries participated in the Convention (most registrants were from Brazil, followed by India). Many speeches (in English) were translated into 9 languages — 5 European and 4 Indian.

This Convention was also notable for its programming — since the speakers and audiences spanned the globe from Auckland (NZ) in the east to Los Angeles (USA) in the west, the scheduling of the programmes was very important. For this purpose, one day each was allotted to the Indo-Pacific Federation, European & Pan-African Federation and Inter-American Federation so that registrants in the respective time zones could watch live programmes in their regions. The fourth and the last day included the address by the President and the closing of the Convention.

This truly stupendous task was undertaken and successfully carried out due to the untiring efforts and dedication of the Core Committee headed by the President, Mr Tim Boyd, and members from different countries. They were ably supported by a technical team, headed by the international Secretary, Marja Artamaa, that worked at the Adyar Digital Control Centre for the convention.



The Adyar Digital Control Team flash the victory sign on the successful conclusion of the 2020 Convention

To quote the President: “More than 100 members volunteered to make this event possible. In every case there was the feeling of being a part of a global team, a living and working expression of Theosophy in action.”

ADYAR DAY CELEBRATION

17 February is celebrated as Adyar Day in the theosophical world. It commemorates the passing of our first President, Col Henry Steel Olcott, and the birth of Bishop Leadbeater, co-worker of Dr Besant. It is also the day on which Giordano Bruno left his physical body in a chariot of fire. And more recently, it was on February 17 that J. Krishnamurti passed on to the higher planes of consciousness.

It was in 1922 that Madame de Manziarly made 17 February prominent by calling it ADYAR DAY, thus not only remembering the great theosophists but also the Flaming Centre, the beloved Adyar.

So, on the morning of this very special day at Adyar, we witnessed the procession of the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS) students carrying the picture of Colonel Olcott from the portico of the Headquarters Hall to his memorial on the banks of the Adyar River. They then sang songs and offered flowers to his statue.



OMHSS students carry Col Olcott's picture in a procession

And at 7.30 p.m. Indian time, we had an online celebration, where the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, spoke about the significance of this day to theosophists and introduced the speaker for the evening, Mr Michael Gomes, a well-known theosophical historian, who spoke on the topic, "Adyar as Fact and Symbol".

NEW SIGNAGES

Brand new, bright-blue signposts were installed at various points on the estate roads to guide visitors to the campus to the various buildings and shrines on the estate. The first signpost outside the Administrative Building was formally unveiled by the international Secretary, Marja Artaama, and the international Treasurer, Nancy Secret. A long-felt

need was finally fulfilled with the installation of these extremely helpful signages. We are told that more such are on the anvil, including signposts with maps giving the topography of the estate, brief descriptions of places of historical interest like the shrines, trilithons, the great banyan and so on.



Ready, Get Set . . . GO ! The unveiling is done!



Marja Artaama, K. Jaikumar and Nancy Secret pose in front of the new signpost

REPUBLIC DAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE TS SCHOOLS

Due to the continuing threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Republic Day celebrations at the TS schools was a muted affair, with participation only from the senior students.



Hoisting of the national flag at OMHSS
At the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary

School (OMHSS), the national flag was hoisted by Mr K. Jaikumar, General Manager of the TS Estate. He distributed prizes and cheques to the students who had topped in each subject in the 2020 public examination.

At the Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA), the children made a poster paying homage to the army, navy and air force. They also learned to sing the national anthem and other patriotic songs like *hind desh ke niwasi* and *sare jahan se accha*. They listened to stories about the lives of the artists of our nation and the birth of Shantiniketan in West Bengal and were entranced by the lovely poem 'The Champa Flower' by Rabindranath Tagore.

NEWS FROM THE TS SCHOOLS

OLCOTT MEMORIAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL (OMHSS)

After a ten-month hiatus, the students from the senior classes (Classes IX to XII) started attending school from the month of February 2021, following the protocols laid down by the government to safeguard against the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The body temperature of the students was tested with a thermal scanner before they were sent to their respective classrooms.

The Director of OMHSS, Mrs Sasikala, addressed the parents, highlighting the efforts taken by the school to engage the children via the online platform during the pandemic, and requested them to support their children at home. In addition to uniforms, the school distributed worksheets, nutritional balls, and board games for home learning. To promote the reading habit among the children of the primary school, interesting storybooks were distributed to be read at home and returned after a week.

In December, electronic tablets were dis-

tributed to all the students of class IX to facilitate online learning from their homes. It is a matter of pride for the school, that the teachers themselves were able to unbox the tablets, upload all the necessary apps and make them ready for use by the students.



Mrs Sasikala, OMHSS Director,
distributes e-tablets to the Class IX students

THE ADYAR THEOSOPHICAL ACADEMY (ATA)

At the ATA, the children having by now become very tech-savvy, joyfully attended the online classes which were made very interesting and interactive by the *akkas*. They learnt about and celebrated festivals like Christmas (making Santa masks, decorating their Christmas trees and singing Christmas carols), and Pongal (where they were introduced to the concept of farming and harvest). They sowed fenugreek seeds and harvested the greens, learned to paint Pongal pots and had loads of fun.

But in the midst of all this fun and frolic, their studies were not neglected either. Numeracy, science fests, creative writing and drawing, drama and theatre, learning about the natural world and a host of other

activities were skilfully interwoven into their learning routine, making it a painless and exhilarating experience for the children.



An LKG child learns to prepare food without fire

CHRISTMAS TEA PARTY WITH A TWIST

The Christmas party hosted by Nancy and Marja has become a much looked forward to event at Adyar. This year it posed some special challenges and Nancy writes:

'Lockdowns, masks, social distancing — all have become commonplace around the world over the last year. And when it was time to plan for the fourth annual Christmas tea at Adyar we asked ourselves if it would even be possible to host such an event this year. A quick calculation revealed that the number of party invitees would touch around 200 and under the prevailing lockdown rules there was no way such a large physical gathering could happen.

We looked at several options and decided that if the staff and residents couldn't come to the Christmas tea, we would bring the "Christmas tea" to them!

Marja and I went to Ananda Bhavan, a local restaurant and bakery, to place our order. For the first time in nine months, we actually sat in a restaurant, drinking cups of Indian filter

coffee, while someone from their staff took our order.

On Christmas eve, the little boxes, neatly labelled and grouped, were despatched to each department and residence. A. Muthukumar, from the Treasury office, donned a Santa hat and delivered the parcels, along with Geetha Jaikumar, whose car took the place of Santa's sleigh. So, while there was no actual tea included in the deliveries, everyone still enjoyed our socially distanced "party"!



Muthukumar and Nancy pose before the boxes of goodies

WILDLIFE MENAGERIE AT THE BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD)

It will interest our readers to know that the Theosophical Society campus is now playing host to a number of wild creatures who have been adversely impacted by the forces of development and the accompanying degradation of habitat.

The infrastructure and veterinary expertise available at BMAD have made it a preferred referral facility for the treatment of injured wild animals in and around Chennai, brought in by the Forest Department.

Currently at the BMAD facility, we have four orphaned, spotted deer fawns, with injuries ranging from mild to severe, that are being bottle-fed specially procured goat's milk with supplements, several times during the day and night. They are making good progress and are likely to be returned to the Forest Department in a few weeks' time for release back into the Guindy National Park, a protected forest in the middle of Chennai.



The spotted deer fawns

It is now the Olive Ridley nesting season, when many thousands of these amazing turtles make the long and arduous voyage to swim to the beaches where they were born, to lay their eggs. And in the process, many

of them are grievously injured by fishing nets, boat propellers, attacks by dogs when they come ashore to lay their eggs — to name just a few of the many dangers facing them. BMAD has successfully treated and rehabilitated many injured turtles in the past few years. This time round, an old, badly injured turtle, missing an eye and a flipper, and with severe injuries on the other three, landed up at the facility. Despite painstaking care, much to everyone's sorrow, the turtle succumbed to its injuries.



The Olive Ridley turtle being fed fish by the BMAD staff

Enclosure for disabled monkeys

A special enclosure, spacious and airy, has been erected for disabled monkeys, whose injuries preclude their release into the wild. This currently houses one VVIP occupant named *Kayal* (which means 'beautiful eyes' in Tamil). *Kayal* is a baby monkey with a tragic history. Brought in with severe burns caused by electrocution, she has only one whole limb. Others were sloughed off, leaving her with just stumps. But undaunted, she has bounced back, and with the special enrichments provided in the enclosure — a wonderfully soft bed and little pillow, ropes to swing from, and perches placed high up and made accessible for her, an inviting hammock, an array of delicious foods ranging from grapes,

bananas, groundnuts and what not — she is living the high life like a princess!



The newly erected monkey enclosure



Kayal happily swings on a rope in her enclosure



With her cheek pouches bulging with food, Kayal is spoilt for choice!

LEAVES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Tablet to the ‘Unknown Members’ of the Theosophical Society

There stands in the Adyar grounds, a little to the east of the Headquarters building, a small commemorative tablet, well known to all the residents, though perhaps not noticed by the casual visitor. It bears the following inscription, on a semi-circular white stone, embedded in a low red stone column:

‘To those unknown members of the Theosophical Society throughout the world whose silent loyalty and sacrifice ensures to it the Masters’ constant blessing.’

It was erected by Dr G. S. Arundale when he was President as a gesture of appreciation to unknown Theosophical members throughout the world ‘who,’ he said, ‘are its veritable

strength and steadfastness.’ The unveiling took place on White Lotus Day, 8 May 1939, by Mr G. Soobiah Chetty.



Tablet commemorating unknown TS members

PASSED TO PEACE

Mr V. M. V. Narasimhan, who served the TS since January 2019 with dedication and sincerity as the Consultant and Superintendent of the Maintenance Department, passed to peace on 18 November 2020. He supervised the execution of major building projects in the TS such as the restoration of the Blavatsky Bungalow, the reconstruction of the Adyar Theosophical Academy building, renovating buildings to house the Theosophical Publishing House, transforming a portion of the Adyar Library building to locate the Surendra Narayan Archives, the



remodelling and renovation of the iconic Leadbeater Chambers (still ongoing) and many other construction projects. His expertise in civil engineering matters, including renovation of old buildings, was invaluable. He will be sorely missed by the entire Maintenance Department, as well as by the entire TS Adyar community.

DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (Rs 10,000 AND ABOVE)

22 November 2020 to 28 February 2021

	<u>Rs.</u>		<u>Rs.</u>
CONVENTION		BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY	
Dr Sarla V. Maroo, Nairobi Lodge	50,000	Anahita Ravindran, Chennai	10,000
ADYAR RENOVATION		Preetha Manmohan, United States	17,250
Leticia Lim, Philippines	10,000	Rekha Balakrishnan, Chennai	1,00,000
Peggy Anne Heubel, United States	23,000	Neelima Bajaj Swamy, Mumbai	50,000
Tang Kwok Choon, Singapore	28,000	Anya Gupta, Mohali	15,000
Thrity Dalal, Mumbai	100,000	Seetha Lakshmi Gokulamani, Singapore	20,000
LEADBEATER CHAMBERS		HEADQUARTERS HALL GARDEN PROJECT	
Zenobia Khodaji Mumbai	3,50,000	Dr N. Gautam, Bangalore	7,00,000
CONVENTION, CULTURAL AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS		GARDEN DEVELOPMENT FUND	
Antonio Girardi, Italy	27,500	S. V. Sankaran, Chennai	12,500
Berendina W. Lammers, The Netherlands	10,000	THEOSOPHICAL EDUCATION	
Esteban Raul Langlois, Argentina	20,000	D. A. S. Campert-Schrok, The Netherlands	10,000
Jean Lim, Philippines	10,000	THE ADYAR ESTATE	
Tang Kwok Choon, Singapore	39,000	Esteban R. Langlois, Argentina	10,000
GENERAL FUND		ADYAR THEOSOPHICAL ACADEMY	
Maria Teresa Dubois Moreira, Brazil	36,905	Deepa Padhi, India	1,00,000
Vicente Hao Chin Jr, Philippines	14,698	Kishorebhai J. Shah	1,00,000
		The Vasanta Theosophical CHS Ltd.	15,00,000

DONATIONS TO THE OLCOTT EDUCATION SOCIETY (Rs 10,000 AND ABOVE)

13 November 2020 to 28 February 2021

	<u>Rs.</u>		<u>Rs.</u>
INDIAN DONATIONS		M/s. EXL Service (I) Pvt. Ltd., Uttar Pradesh	55,000
J. Ramakrishnan, Chennai	10,000	FCRA DONATIONS	
Lalitha Sankaran, Chennai	12,500	TOS, USA	94,654
M/s. KPMG Assurance and Consulting Services LLP, Mumbai	2,15,960	Sociedad Teosofica Espanola, Spain	73,341

Cover Picture: R. R. Chari

The **Indian Silverbill** or **White-throated Munia** (*Euodice malabarica*) is a small passerine bird found in the Indian subcontinent and adjoining regions. Commonly seen foraging on the ground in large flocks, they feed mainly on seeds, but also take insects and nectar.

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