

PANDEMIC AND LOCKDOWN IN THE TS

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has spread across the globe in a short span of a few months, while not as lethal as Ebola (with a fatality rate of 50%) or SARS (15%), is however potentially more contagious than the flu. Because of the ease with which it can be transmitted, particularly given the modern lifestyle, and its high fatality rate, it has become almost impossible to contain this virus and this can have disastrous consequences. Since specific antiviral treatments and vaccines are still under development, it is extremely important that testing, quarantine, and social distancing are practiced extensively to prevent the spread of the virus.

During the week beginning 16 March 2020, the TS management recognized that since the coronavirus spread is a global problem, they must do all they can to minimise and mitigate the threat posed by this pandemic. In order to do their part to limit the transmission of the virus, a number of measures were taken which are listed below:

1. Suspension of all meetings of the TS and allied groups at our campus. Worldwide too, TS Sections, Federations and Lodges have all suspended meetings, conferences and gatherings until further notice.
2. In the TS Adyar Campus, with a large, super-senior population, the vulnerability to secondary, asymptomatic, human-to-human transmission of infection is particularly high. Hence, as a matter of abundant precaution and also in the larger interests of the community, the TS management decided to minimise possible risks by suspending the walking passes and visitors entry for the time being.
3. The Social Welfare Centre (SWC) and the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) were also closed until further notice.
4. Accommodation customarily provided

for visitors to Adyar was also suspended.

5. The two schools operating in our campus, namely, the Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School (OMHSS) and The Adyar Theosophical Academy (ATA), were also closed until further notice.

6. The dispensary on the campus, however, continued to function, monitoring and providing free medical care to the staff and residents on the campus, and

7. All TS employees were instructed to avoid non-essential travel either within or outside Chennai.

However, essential departments like the Security, Maintenance, Housekeeping, Garden, and the Bhojanasala, continued to function under lockdown. While all the TS employees were paid their full salaries during the period of lockdown, irrespective of their attendance, those belonging to the essential services were given extra pay for the days worked during this period.

Special mention should be made here of the Bhojanasala, which gamely rose to the occasion, and carried on with preparing the meals for the residents day after day, for nobody could leave the campus because of the stringent lockdown in force in the city, making shopping for groceries, and other necessities difficult, if not impossible.



The food carriers of the residents await filling at the Bhojanasala

Though greatly hampered by shortage of staff as many of them were not allowed by the police to leave their homes, Veena Ramachandran, Superintendent of the Lead-beater Chambers, and her stalwart team, were somehow able to manage the challenging situation. Thank you all for the love and care with which you ensured that all were fed and comfortable during this trying time.

The work on the Headquarters Hall garden also came to a standstill at this time. There were some anxious moments as the TS management wondered how to ensure that the plants and lawn grass did not dry up in the hot summer. A few residents volunteered to do the watering of the lawn and plants in the morning and evening, and with help from a dedicated gardener who was asked to stay on the campus, the situation was managed satisfactorily. The lawn continued to remain evergreen and the border plants also thrived despite the intense heat of the summer months in Chennai.



The Headquarters Hall lawn

The campus wore a deserted look with no walkers and visitors allowed inside. As very few Sanitation Department workers had reported for work, piles of golden-brown leaves accumulated on the roads, rustling and dancing in the breeze, with gay abandon. These fallen leaves also had their own unique beauty and provided a visual treat to all beholders!



Heaps of dried-up leaves pile up on the roads of the TS estate



The deserted main gate of the campus



Pretty summer blooms, empty roads!

The bougainvillea creepers in the Besant Gardens side of the TS compound, spill over to the pavement outside the campus, along with their bounty of colourful blooms, providing a glorious splash of colour to the unusually deserted Besant Avenue road.

WHITE LOTUS DAY

Every year on 8 May, which is the death anniversary of our Founder, Mme Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB), there is a celebration by theosophists all over the world. In her will, HPB had suggested that her friends might gather together on the anniversary of her death (8 May 1891) and read from Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* and from *The Bhagavad Gita*. Colonel Olcott added readings from *The Voice of the Silence* to the list. And this custom has been diligently followed in theosophical lodges all over the world. White lotuses grew in unusual profusion one year after her passing. Hence, 8 May came to be known as White Lotus Day.

Perhaps for the first time since the passing of HPB, this practice of having a meeting in the campus on the White Lotus Day was not followed at Adyar due to the restrictions in place in the city — no physical gathering for any purpose was allowed. Instead, all the members meditated in their homes,

read passages from the three books and expressed their silent gratitude for the sacrifices made by HPB to bring the light of theosophy to the world.



The Statues of the Founders

BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD) NEWS

BMAD which has in its care, over a hundred dogs and a dozen or so cats, not to talk of large animals ranging from the iconic camel, Naachi, to rescued horses, sheep, goats, cows and calves, can **never** be shut down **completely**, no matter that a strict lockdown is in force, or energy levels nosedive in the searing heat of Chennai's hot and scorching summer months, or even if there are torrential monsoon showers when the city's roads are inundated and reaching BMAD requires aquatic skills!

So, despite the lockdown, BMAD has been functioning, though its outpatient clinic was closed except for emergency cases. The resident animals needed medical treatment and had to be fed and cared for. But since most of the caregivers are resident in the

campus, it became much easier to do so. The others, including the BMAD Coordinator, Shравan Krishnan, continued to come in from outside the campus, after securing passes to travel from the Chennai Corporation.

BMAD's Fundraising Initiative

In pursuance of their dream to provide services on par with a private clinic for stray animals, BMAD partnered with a crowdfunding group, *Ketto*, to raise much needed funds for modernising the hospital and shelter, set up an in-house lab for testing blood samples etc., and to put up better structures for the animals which are resident at the shelter. The video which was shot on location was a runaway success and went viral on social media. Donations came pouring in and by

May end they had collected around rupees one crore and seventeen lakhs in donations. The campaign which is still running, continues to attract donations from people all over the world who are contributing to this worthy cause.



BMAD's fundraising campaign

Spanish volunteers at BMAD

Just a month before the coronavirus outbreak, two volunteers from Spain, Debora and Carlos, landed up at BMAD. Though their original plan was to work for about a month, due to the entire country getting locked down and the cancellation of all flights, domestic and international, they ended up spending more time at BMAD than originally planned. But during their stay here at the TS campus, they did some amazing work at BMAD where they helped in looking after the cats and dogs with enormous love and compassion. They did not mind getting their hands dirty and took on all the work assigned

to them cheerfully and enthusiastically. Finally, at the end of two months, they managed to return to Spain through the good offices of the Spanish embassy which arranged a special flight for stranded Spanish nationals to leave India. Thank you Debora and Carlos! We enjoyed having you here and hope to see you again very soon.



Working with the animals at the Shelter



Hasta mañana, Debora and Carlos!

NATURE NOTES (TS) DURING THE LOCKDOWN

All over the city due to the lockdown and the consequent reduction in human footfall and traffic, there have been a number of reports on the sighting of more wildlife. The estate of the Theosophical Society, has a lot of wooded area and is a protected zone where due to the limited movement of people on the roads even during normal times, the negative impact on wildlife and vegetation is minimal. While the lockdown has therefore not made

a significant difference to the presence of wildlife — birds, mammals, insects, butterflies — on the estate, here are a few observations made which are recorded here:

- ◆ On the riverside there is a big colony of large Ghost Crabs which are normally extremely shy and scuttle into their holes when they hear footfalls. As there are no walkers on this path now, they are very visible and considerably less wary.

◆ The woodland migrants like the Forest Wagtails, Indian Pitta, and a few Flycatchers are still to be spotted here. They should have left by now with the fierce heat of the summer in full blast, but yet they remain, perhaps waiting for some secret signal to leave. This may not have anything to do with the lockdown though!

◆ The large colony of fruit bats (Flying Foxes) are taking off in search of food much later these days. This could be due to the delay in the onset of dusk in the summer months.

◆ A pack of jackals have been spotted in the campus after a gap of nearly two years when the resident jackal population was wiped out by canine distemper transmitted by feral dogs. This is wonderful news as the jackal is the top predator in the TS ecosystem, and its prolonged absence would definitely have caused an ecological imbalance.

◆ Black-rumped Flamebacks, Magpie

Robins, Coppersmith Barbets, Hoopoes and Greater Coucals, have been seen in larger numbers than in earlier years and nesting activity is in full swing. Because of zero human disturbance maybe?



LEAVES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Space permitting, it is proposed to have a small section in every issue, to cover some of the extremely interesting historical aspects relating to the TS estate under the heading, 'Leaves from the Archives'. A Dutch theosophist, A. J. Hamerster, who resided at Adyar and worked here during the early 1900s, wrote in *The Theosophist* and other journals under this title. And we are borrowing this title for the purpose of writing and acquainting our readers with snippets of the absolutely fascinating incidents that happened in the TS estate in the bygone era!

The Story of how Electricity and Water came to Adyar

Electricity for lighting and power is taken for granted at Adyar now, but it was not always so. Until the birth of the Engineering Department (called then 'The Power House' and the name still lingers) in 1910, lighting at Adyar consisted only of candles, paraffin lamps and lanterns carried around by the residents. It is hard now to imagine that HPB and the Colonel did their writing and proof-reading by candle or lamp light when working into the small hours of the morning. (HPB

left her four silver candlesticks to special friends in her will of 1885).

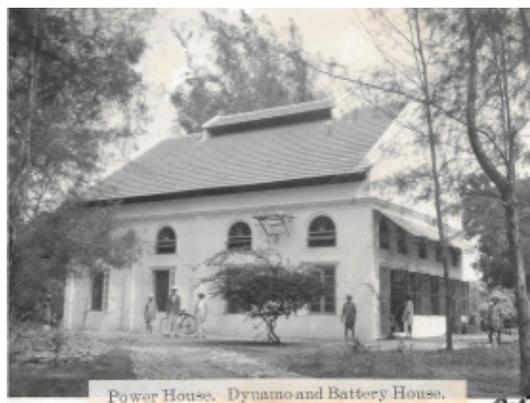
When Dr Annie Besant came to Adyar she immediately interested herself in the idea of electricity and by 1910 the first generating plant was installed by Siemens Engineering and Manufacturing Co., of Madras, with the assistance of Mr R. Balfour Clarke, who was residing at Adyar. This was a suction gas engine with its anthracite gas-producing plant directly coupled to a D.C. dynamo, which supplied electrical power for pumps and for charging batteries for lighting purposes.

A further advance was made when the Madras City electric supply came near enough to give bulk A.C. supply to the Adyar estate. The expansion then reached the point where a larger transformer was installed to deal with a new 11,000 volt supply which the Madras Electric system had run to our sub-station, replacing the old 5,000 volt supply line. The result of this was greatly appreciated especially at Convention time when the load was always considerably more. At other times too power was now available to meet the more general demand for electric fans, sewing machines, refrigerators and such domestic appliances, and also for the greater power needs of the Press and Engineering Departments.

Then came the erection of a large water-tank on a steel tower to provide piped water by gravity flow for domestic and other purposes in the place of water previously drawn from wells and distributed by watermen.

(To put things in perspective, electricity generation in Tamil Nadu, until about 1908, was confined to a few tiny plants in Tea Estates which were run on hydroelectricity. So Annie Besant's pioneering initiative in bringing it

to the Adyar estate in 1910 displayed yet once again her extraordinary foresight and acumen in keeping abreast of technological and other advances).



The old Power House

Editor's note: The source for all the information appearing under this title (in this and future issues) is the Adyar Archives. We are grateful to the President, Mr Tim Boyd, for permitting access to the precious archival material and allowing us to share the glory of Adyar and its leaders with everyone. Thanks also to the Head of Archives, Ms Jaishree Kannan, for providing all the material so willingly and enthusiastically.

LIST OF DONATIONS: Rs 10,000 AND ABOVE DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (TS)

1 January to 31 May 2020

	<u>Rs.</u>		<u>Rs.</u>
GENERAL DONATIONS		Mr Sridhar Subramanian	
Ms Nikitina Anna, Russia	26072	and Mrs Gayathri Sridhar, India	50000
Mr Felino L. Ampil, Phillipines	13934	Ms G. Subbalakshmi, USA	14209
ADYAR DAY CONTRIBUTIONS		Ketto Crowdfunding, India/Foreign	10728748
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M/s Organisation for Rare Diseases	40000	Mrs V. Kamala Viswanathan	10000
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M/s Dharma Paripalana Sabha Annadhanam and Charitable Trust	104000	Government (D.E.O) Office	10000
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M/s Inner Wheel Club	10000	FCRA DONATIONS	
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M/s KPMG	372609	The Theosophical Society Library and Bookshop, Australia	69900

ADYAR NEWSLETTER

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I, S. Harihara Raghavan, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated : 29.03.2020

S. Harihara Raghavan
Publisher

Cover Picture: A.Chandrasekaran

The Spotted Owllet (*Athene brama*) is a small owl which is a common resident of open habitats and has adapted to living in cities. They roost in small groups in the hollows of trees or in cavities in rocks. They are common on the TS estate where they breed and are resident all the year round.

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