

DR ANNIE BESANT'S BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Dr Annie Besant's birthday was celebrated on 1 October 2020 at the international Headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar by an online gathering of the members of the TS worldwide. About 300 delegates from about 30 countries attended the event which was live on Zoom and YouTube.

The programme started with the Universal Prayer followed by a brief welcome speech from Ms Marja Artamaa, the international Secretary of the TS. Mr Tim Boyd, international President, delivered the inaugural address, wherein he spoke about the amazing life and work of Dr Annie Besant.

A song dedicated to Dr Besant was rendered by Ms Jaishree Kannan, Head of the Surendra Narayan Archives of the TS, Adyar. This was followed by three short talks,

covering the various aspects of Dr Besant's life. The first speaker was Ms Nancy Secret, international Treasurer of the Theosophical Society, who spoke on the theme, 'There Is No Other'. The second speaker, Prof. C. A. Shinde, Head of the Adyar Library and Research Centre, spoke on the topic, 'The Embodiment of Impersonality', while the third speaker, Mrs Clemice Petter, Head, Editorial Department, spoke on 'Annie Besant's Great Legacy'.

A short video showing a few pictures of Annie Besant taken at Adyar, along with some inspirational quotes, was screened. Mr Shikhar Agnihotri, Executive Assistant to the General Manager, proposed the vote of thanks. The compering of the programme was done by Mrs Catalina Isaza Cantor Agnihotri.

REMEMBERING RADHAJI — 31 OCTOBER 2020

To commemorate the seventh anniversary of the passing of Dr Radha Burnier, former international President of the TS, a Memorial Public Lecture in her honour was organized by the Indian Section on 31 October 2020 at 10 a.m. The speaker was Bro. Pedro Oliveira, Education Coordinator of the TS, Australian Section, and he spoke on the topic: 'Radhaji: Glimpses of Her Life and Influence'. Based on his long and close association with Radhaji during his stay at Adyar, when he had worked in various capacities, he shared with the audience many interesting and lesser known facets of Radhaji's life, interspersed with humorous anecdotes.

Listening to him brought back nostalgic memories of the time Radhaji had lived at Adyar and the close bond she had with all the plants, trees, animals and people on the estate. The Garden of Remembrance where her ashes are interred remained open

throughout the day for people to pay their respects and was filled with flowers, butterflies and birdsong.



Radhaji's memorial at the Garden of Remembrance

FOUNDATION DAY CELEBRATION AT ADYAR

17 November marks the day when the Theosophical Society was officially founded in New York in the year 1875 and the Founder-president, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott delivered the inaugural address. This day is celebrated throughout the Theosophical world when the thoughts of the members turn to the significance of the Theosophical Society formed by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, W. Q. Judge and several others.

At Adyar, this special day was celebrated online as has now become the new normal due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation. About 220 members from India and other parts of the world logged in. The programme commenced with the reciting of the Universal Invocation and a welcome address by the international Secretary, Ms Marja Artamaa. This was followed by a song rendered by the children of the LEAP Foundation. Greetings from the international Vice-President, Mrs Deepa Padhi and the chairpersons of various international Federations followed.

The international President, Mr Tim Boyd, spoke on 'The Founders and the Foundation' and traced the history of the TS since its inception. The programme came to a close with melodious chanting by Ms Jaishree Kannan. Compering of the event was done by Catalina Isaza Cantor Agnihotri.



The Statues of the Founders

NEWS FROM THE TS SCHOOLS

OLCOTT MEMORIAL HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL (OMHSS)

Bridging the digital divide

In June 1894, when Colonel Henry Steel Olcott first founded the Olcott School at Besant Nagar, his idea was to empower the children from marginalized communities by providing them with free inclusive education.

The OMHSS which is run by the Theosophical Society operates on a completely free model — that is, students are not charged for anything and benefactors from around the world help fund the school through the Olcott Education Society, a registered charitable trust.

The current pandemic scenario has seen

a great imbalance in the quest for education. There is a huge digital barrier impacting students from under-privileged backgrounds as they are unable to afford smartphones, gadgets and access to the internet, while it has been a smooth transition for students from the privileged class to online learning platforms.

The OMHSS students had to be empowered with technology — but this had to be done in a way where there was no financial burden on the students to purchase phones and internet connections. A group of techies created a digital education model named *vidamuyarchi* — which in Tamil means

'perseverance' — as they felt strongly that students should not be deprived of the right to education due to digital barriers. The model envisaged consisted of a tablet enabled with a SIM card which would remove these hurdles while facilitating continuous learning.

The school then reached out to philanthropic donors for possible funding and received immediate support from several organizations and charitable groups like Asha for Education (based in the United States) among others. Rotary Club of Chennai, Mitra, came forward to donate new laptops and also helped to refurbish laptops that would help the teachers with their preparation and daily sessions. Several individuals from across the globe too made donations to support the cause.

Within a few weeks, the school was able to procure the tablets, and the SIM cards from network operators, and prepare the devices. The technical volunteers also trained the teachers and ensured ample IT monitor-

ing while introducing restrictions to prevent possible misuse of the devices.

Students of Class X, XI and XII were provided with the devices free of charge. The plan is to rotate the devices to the next batch on the completion of the academic year with the only recurring cost being the regular top-up for mobile data.

The school is in the process of extending the programme to classes VIII and IX in order that they too are brought under the digital learning umbrella.

Great work OMHSS team!



E-Tablet being given to the OMHSS students

ADYAR THEOSOPHICAL ACADEMY (ATA)

After a short break the ATA resumed online classes at the beginning of September. The children are now very comfortable with using the online platform for their daily lessons and fun activities. Like before, each class had a set syllabus to be covered with emphasis on learning through observation, understanding, and hands-on experience.

Every day the classes began with a morning song. The pre-schoolers and kindergarten children learned about numbers, shapes and colours, wild animals, sensory organs, different festivals, preparing simple *kolams*, experimenting with cooking without fire, puppet theatre and a host of other interesting activities. The first-graders made a bug hotel from biodegradable material to be placed

in the midst of Nature for insects to live in! They also made a simple hand sanitizer and learnt about the importance of hygiene to keep Corona at bay. Mindfulness, breathing techniques and music also formed part of the eclectic curriculum.



ATA children proudly show off their creations!

BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY (BMAD)

On an upward trajectory (possibly aimed at the stars?) BMAD has been taking giant strides in its attempt to modernize and upgrade its veterinary facility and animal shelter. The latest in a long series has been the unveiling of an X-ray unit on 16 October by the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, via video call. Having an in-house X-ray unit is a

great plus for the dispensary as it will facilitate quick diagnosis and speedy treatment which is crucial in saving lives, especially in emergencies. The BMAD lab is now equipped with an X-ray machine, computerized radiography and a blood analyzer, all of which are now available free for providing quality treatment for street animals.



Operating the newly installed X-ray machine



BMAD vets reading the computerised X-ray results

CYCLONE NIVAR

A severe cyclonic storm named Nivar which developed over the Bay of Bengal caused extremely heavy rainfall in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu. Accompanied by gusty winds, it made landfall between Puducherry and Chennai on 26 November 2020. However, during the course of its travel it lost much of its force and hence the damage caused was nowhere on the scale caused by the 2016 Vardah cyclone which had laid waste to huge areas. On the TS estate a few trees were uprooted and though the ground was littered with fallen branches and torn off leaves, the damage was far less than initially feared. The water from the Adyar River had risen up considerably but it did not flood the estate as it did during the floods in 2015. It took a few days to clear the estate roads of the fallen trees and branches which was done by the estate

workers themselves. More difficult to tackle were the huge piles of debris (thermocool, bottles, plastic waste) which the surging waters of the Adyar river dumped onto the river path of the TS, despoiling its scenic beauty.



Palm trees in the coconut grove buffeted by strong winds

LEAVES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Colonel Olcott and the Heraldic Crest

Not many may be aware that the Colonel had created a heraldic crest by combining the family crests of his ancestors and that of Madame Blavatsky which he had placed in the Headquarters Hall as a bas-relief, positioned above the carved doorway leading to the old Archives, in a direct line from the Founders' Statues. First, there is a bas-relief of Minerva, the Roman Goddess of Wisdom with her attendants in human and *devic* form. The life size figures in terracotta to the left and right of the door are copies from ancient statuary, executed by the Madras School of Arts.

Above this, again in bas-relief, is the design by Colonel Olcott, weaving together the cocks that were part of the crests of his family and that of Madame Blavatsky. To quote from *Old Diary Leaves*, VI, pp. 380–1:

By a strange coincidence, the heraldic crests of the family of HPB and of my own are identical, viz., a cock. Her family name is Hahn (cock) and mine is not at all what it is as now written but Alcocke, and dates from very ancient Saxon days of England. One of my ancestors, Bishop Alcocke, who was a great favourite with King Henry VII, and governor of his troublesome and

luxurious son, Henry VIII, founded Jesus College, Cambridge, and his Coat of Arms, to be seen over the entrance gate of Jesus College, has three cocks' heads, combined with other symbols. So, I conceived the idea of putting up this humble memorial to the two families, placing the standing bird of the Hahns in the centre and the three cocks' heads of my family around it in the form of the mystical triangle.

It is an interesting coincidence, when one thinks of it, that we two predestined joint workers in Theosophy should be thus heraldically related.



Combined crest created by HSO above the carved doors in the HQ Hall



HPB's family crest



HSO's family crest

Editor's note:



Jesus College Crest

1. The Jesus College crest shows three cockerels with a border of red, with episcopal coronets added to further acknowledge Alcocke's position of Bishop of Ely and his role in founding the College.
2. Incidentally, The Blavatsky Museum at Adyar has on display, two crests painted on wood, of the families of HPB and HSO.

TS RESUMES WORK AFTER LOCKDOWN

After a government-mandated lockdown lasting nearly six months during which period only essential departments like Security, Housekeeping and Bhojanasala functioned, the TS Management took the decision to reopen all the Departments on 7 September 2020. However, the campus remained closed to the outside visitors / walkers as a safety measure given the number of cases of Covid-19 still raging in the city. All workers and staff coming into the campus for the first time were asked to get themselves Covid-tested and they had to show a negative test result, before they were allowed entry. Thereafter, every day, all the staff coming in for work had to wear a face mask (mandatory) and their body temperature was checked through an infrared,

remote-sensing thermometer at the gate.

At the time of going to press, the TS management has decided to start the renewal process of walkers' passes from 15 November 2020 onwards and also allow walkers to resume their walking in the campus shortly thereafter. Unlike in earlier years, the pass renewal was done remotely — that is, the walkers had to drop off their passes in a box kept for the purpose at the two gates. After scrutiny in the General Manager's office and if found in order, the renewed passes were returned to the gates for collection by the walkers. A letter setting out the dos and don'ts while walking in the campus was given to the walkers who had come to get their passes renewed.

PASSED TO PEACE



It is with great sorrow that we record the passing of Dr Mahadeva Srinivasan (Srini to all who knew him well) on 31 August 2020 after a brief illness. Dr Srinivasan was born into a theosophical family and grew up on the TS Adyar estate. Later, higher academic pursuits and his work with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) took him away from Chennai. In his career, Dr Srinivasan rose to become the Head of the Department of Neutron Physics and was the Associate Director of BARC. He was famous for the

Trombay Criticality Formula created by his team.

After retirement Dr Srinivasan returned to Chennai and settled very near his childhood home. He cherished his links with the TS and was deeply involved in many of its activities — he was several times the President of the Adyar Lodge, a leading member of the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS), in addition to helping with the Theosophy-Science Centre. Extremely interested in environmental issues, he galvanized a group of walkers into starting a beach-cleaning initiative where they undertook the arduous task of clearing the enormous amounts of debris which washes onto the riverside path on the northern side of the TS estate and the beach during high tide.

In February 2018, he almost single-handedly organized a two-day Naturalists' Conclave where he invited the top environmental NGOs to make a presentation of their work to bring about greater cooperation and

coordination among them and strengthen the environmental movement. Just before his passing, he was passionately working for setting up a Butterfly Conservatory in the Besant Gardens side of the campus. His closest friends were those who used to walk with him every day on the estate and who supported him in starting the 'Friends of

Adyar' and the 'Adyar Nature and Environment Centre' (ANEC) in the TS.

Recognizing his valuable contribution to the TS, the international President, Mr Tim Boyd, made a YouTube presentation, 'Sri Thoughts', which can be viewed on the link <https://youtu.be/RxhDPApUeuo>

Rest in peace, Dr Srinii!

DONATIONS TO THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (TS)

18 August 2020 to 21 November 2020

	<u>Rs.</u>		<u>Rs.</u>
BESANT MEMORIAL ANIMAL DISPENSARY		Ms Aanchal Saxena, Ghaziabad	5,000
Pillas Purpose, India/ Foreign	6,258	Ms Shantha Sheela, Chennai	5,000
Ms S. Vinodini, Chennai	20,000		
Ms Indira Kumar, Chennai	5,000	HEADQUARTERS HALL GARDEN PROJECT	
Dr Divleen Jeji, Punjab	5,000	Dr N. Gautam, Bangalore	5,00,000

DONATIONS TO THE OLCOTT EDUCATION SOCIETY

17 August to 12 November 2020

	<u>Rs.</u>		<u>Rs.</u>
INDIAN DONATIONS		Verizon Data Services India Pvt. Ltd., Chennai	29,86,463
Mrs C. N. Kanchana, Chennai	10,000	Mr Ravi Baskar, Thiruchi	5,00,000
Mr Dilip Shankar, Bengaluru	20,000	Mr C. S. Murugan, Chennai	2,000
Ms Subhashini Vasudevan, Chennai	5,000	Ms P. V. Vimala Kumari, Telangana	2,000
Mr Srinivasan Ravi, Chennai	22,000	Mr T. Sreekanth Karapakkam, Chennai	5,000
Radha & Sri Venkatanarayanan Memorial Trust, Chennai	1,10,000	TOS Adyar, Chennai	50,000
Mr V. Balakrishnan, Chennai	11,000	Mr K. S. Rama Rao, Chennai	20,000
Mr Seshasayee, Chennai	33,000	Mr Durairaj Sethu, Chennai	10,500
Dr P. Thirumalai, Chennai	26,000	TOS England	37,228
Mr Madhusudan Rajagopalan, Chennai	1,10,000	Mr V. Natarajan, Chennai	11,000
Mr Eswarkumar, Chennai	11,000	Mr Durairaj Sethu, Chennai	2,500
Mr R. Sivaramakrishnan, Chennai	3,001	Mrs Neeta Tolani, Chennai	60,000
M/S. Oriental Charitable Trust, Chennai	10,000		
Mr Arunachalam Suresh, Bengaluru	22,000	FCRA DONATIONS	
ECS	21,250	Asha For Education	26,58,000
Mr Karthik Srinivasan, Bengaluru	5,000	TOS Austalia	1,00,581

Cover Picture: A. Chandrasekaran

The Indian stone-curlew or Indian thick-knee (*Burhinus indicus*) is a large bird with streaky brown plumage and piercing yellow eyes. Most active at dusk or at night, it hides under bushes by day. Favouring dry areas and scrub forest, its cryptic colouring helps it to blend with the surroundings, making it difficult to spot.

Edited by Dr Geetha Jaikumar, published by Mr S. Harihara Raghavan and printed by Mr V. Gopalan
at The Vasanta Press, The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Chennai 600 020, India

ISSN 09720-1878

Regd. No. R.N. 5627/1960