

A Day in the Life of Adyar

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IT is still quite dark. The roaring of the ocean engulfs the space surrounding the Adyar beach. Although it is still dark some fishermen are preparing their catamarans for their daily journey into the sea. Others walk towards the Adyar river. A number of their children study in the Olcott Memorial High School and come from the many 'kuppam' or fishing villages nearby.

As dawn silently unfolds its grace upon the compound many birds begin their daily activities, an important one among them being singing. Crows, kingfishers, mynahs, a variety of wrens, pigeons and many others announce to all and sundry that a new day has come. Much before she has had her breakfast the President is busy, in the early hours of the morning, feeding three dogs, three cats as well as the visiting mongooses and crows. All these animals have adopted her, unceremoniously, and flock around Parsi Quarters.

As dawn gives way to the gentle morning light dozens of walkers pour into

the compound for their daily exercise and delight in the hallowed grounds. They include senior citizens, judges, businessmen and women, teachers and others from many walks of life. Often new applications for walking permits are received.

At seven o'clock begins the working day of a number of workers on the compound, including the sweepers who help in keeping the main road clear and clean. Workers are also active in the vast area of the Coconut Grove and in other parts of Adyar as well. Bhojanasala, our Indian style canteen, is busy supplying Indian breakfast to various homes and to regular boarders. Soon Leadbeater Chambers' staff will be busy preparing lunch for workers and eventual visitors.

When the Founders moved to Adyar, in December 1882, they not only established it as the International Headquarters of the TS, they also started here wide-ranging humanitarian and philanthropic initiatives that continue to this day. The philanthropic work of the TS at Adyar is done through the coordination of the

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Olcott Education Society. It has under its administration the following activities: Olcott Memorial High School, HPB Hostel, Social Welfare Centre and Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary.

The HPB Hostel, located in Besant Gardens, houses twenty-five boys from poor, mostly fisher families, in the age group of 10 to 16 years. They are provided with nutritious food and are given clothes. All of them undergo periodical medical check-ups. Their daily activities include yoga, meditation, exercise, games, prayer and listening to edifying stories. The boys do the gardening work and watering plants around the Hostel building regularly. They go for outings and picnics and also try their hand in painting. They also do social work like beach cleaning periodically. In the Hostel they watch television educational programmes as well as children's films.

The Olcott Memorial High School gives completely free education and is a co-educational school having 550 students. The medium of instruction is Tamil. Students are also given every day nutritious breakfast and the noon meal. Uniforms, notebooks and textbooks are also given. Students come from nearby fishing hamlets and also from the families of daily wage earners, housemaids and unskilled labourers. The school has computer facilities, a well-equipped library, English language learning, an audio visual room, a resource room and a science laboratory. In the craft section students learn tailoring, embroidery, art, screen printing and bookbinding.

In sports, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho and volleyball are played by both girls and boys and football by boys only. Students of the School after passing out of the 10th standard go on to complete two years of pre-university and about 70% go on to complete their graduation. They normally do not have difficulty in getting a job and settle down well in their life. This year the pass rate of 10th standard students at the School has reached an all time high of 87% compared to the state average of 84%. One of the reasons for this year's success is the dedication of teachers in supporting students with their studies through supplemental after school classes. Through the Tamil Nadu Science Projects the students also learn about organic farming, termites, medicinal plants and the ecological effects of introduced tree and plant species.

The Social Welfare Centre reaches out to the poorest sections of the people in the neighbourhood and helps children and womenfolk to grow into healthier and happier human beings. About one hundred children in the age group of 2 to 6 years are assisted on a daily basis at the Centre. A large open space is provided for children to play and spend happy hours under the cool shade of trees and amidst clean, well-cared-for surroundings. Well-ventilated class rooms, clean toilets and a dining hall provide for these children a healthy home away from home.

The Day Care Centre is committed to look after the physical, emotional and psychological needs of the children when

their mothers are at work. It also provides training in vocational skills for adolescent girls and young women on the threshold of their working lives. There are a variety of play activities, including rhymes and songs, art and craft, storytelling and acting. For the older children between the ages of 4 and 5, the kindergarten offers the development of motor skills through use of paper and clay, the nourishment of observation, listening skills and an informal introduction to the wonders of language and number.

A qualified doctor is in attendance every day for an hour. Children are taken on outings to picnics, sightseeing tours, the zoo and the children's park. Nutritious food is given in the morning and noon and also multivitamin tablets as well as some fruit, buttermilk or juice and occasional sweets. Educational and vocational training is given for women and girls who drop out from school. They are trained in tailoring, embroidery and weaving, and paid for the work they do.

Although animal welfare activities have been part of the work at Adyar for more than a century, the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary, located in Besant Gardens, was inaugurated in July 2000. It has three veterinarians and treats an average of thirty-five animals per day, including dogs, cats, a variety of birds including parrots, pigeons, poultry, but also cattle and buffaloes. On rare occasions the Dispensary has treated a camel, an elephant and a pony. Approximately 2,000 minor surgeries are done every year, which include animal birth

control ones. Animals are also vaccinated against rabies. Approximately 10,000 animals are treated every year.

The Dispensary also conducts an important Outreach Programme to treat many different animals in distant villages, in a radius of one hundred kilometres from Chennai, which have no access to regular veterinary help. Two veterinarians with their two attendants normally leave at 5.30 a.m. and reach the village concerned at around 7.30 am. They usually ask the villagers to get their animals to a common place, usually a courtyard or the vicinity of a temple or church where they are treated. They also vaccinate cattle and sheep against Foot and Mouth Disease. Around 12,000 animals have been treated by the Outreach Programme since its inception. The Dispensary needs to instal X-ray and ultra-sound machines and, in the near future, to replace its road-weary van.

The Adyar Library and Research Centre, founded in 1886 by Col. Olcott, is a haven of quiet, erudition and scholarship. Besides its large collection of books and manuscripts, its spacious reading room displays a number of periodicals dealing with Indological studies as well as publications devoted to different religious traditions like Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and its different schools of thought, amongst others. It also includes Theosophical journals and magazines from around the world. The next issue of the Library's Bulletin, *Brahmavidyā*, is under preparation. The Library also has a distinguished

catalogue in the field of Indology and Sanskrit studies, and recently brought out two reprints: *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* of Ksemarāja and *Studies on Some Concepts of Alamkāra Śāstra*.

The Theosophical Publishing House continues to help in the dissemination of Theosophical teachings far and wide and in attracting the attention of more publishers, both in India and abroad. Its recent reprints include *Gāyatri* by I. K. Taimni, *Viveka-chudāmani* translated by Mohini M. Chatterji and *The Astral Body* by Arthur E. Powell. The Editorial Department is finalizing the text of a new book, *The World around Us*, containing the editorial notes by Mrs Radha Burnier in *The Theosophist* for the period of 1980 to 2007. Also in preparation is *The Science of Peace* by Bhagavan Das.

The School of the Wisdom, which was started by Mr C. Jinarājadāsa in November 1949, will be completing sixty years of continuous activity with a special programme next November: a silent retreat with the Buddhist teacher Venerable Ajahn Sumedho. It will be followed by a course with Dr Satish Inamdar on 'Brain, Consciousness and Transformation' and one with Prof. C. A. Shinde on 'Human Evolution and Spirituality'. The second session of the School starts after the International Convention, in January 2010, with a course by Mr Colin Price on 'Theosophy and its Practical Implications'. The School usually attracts a number of students from different parts of the world and many from India for they realize the

special opportunity of delving deeper into the perennial Wisdom Teachings in the beautiful and uplifting atmosphere that reigns at Adyar.

Many visitors, both from abroad as well as from India, come to the compound every day. Their perambulations take them to the Banyan tree and its stately dignity, the different shrines, including the Buddhist temple which together with the bodhi tree creates a unique atmosphere which is conducive to silence and deep introspection. Some also stop on their way back at the Headquarters Hall and gaze at the many symbols of religious traditions, both living ones as well as those from the hoary past.

In the late afternoon the several offices close, workers go home and a new wave of walkers comes into the estate. Some of them walk right through the compound and, proceeding by the river path, reach the beach gate and are welcomed by the boundlessness of the sea and sky. The animal life at Adyar, following the movement of Nature, also begins to retire and a vast spirit of quiet and peace descends on the whole compound. Walking alone through the coconut grove or on the main road one can feel engulfed by curtains of blessedness. When the night falls all is quiet. The gentle breeze that blows is like a sweet chant that speaks of profound harmony and oneness, the certainty that 'the Soul of things is sweet'. Another day at Adyar has come to an end while the compound is pervaded by unending blessedness for all. ✧