



Tallapragada Subba Row Garu

It's crucial for everyone from the Telugu region to be aware of a remarkable individual like Tallapragada Subba Row. He was a person of great significance.

Tallapragada Subba Row Garu (July 6, 1856 - June 24, 1890) was a brilliant Advaita Vedantist who became an early Theosophist.

His surname was also spelled Subba Rao, and his first name is also Tiruvalum. A strict Brahman, he was trained as a Vakil (Pleader) within the Indian justice system, a highly profitable profession. He practiced law at Madras.

In 1882, after corresponding with **H. P. Blavatsky**, **Colonel H. S. Olcott** and **Damodar K. Mavalankar**, he became a member of the Theosophical Society.

Subba Row resigned from the Society in 1886 when an appeal was made to HPB by forty-five prominent members of the American Section to publish **The Secret Doctrine without delay, which he considered to be premature.**

Early years

Subba Row was born at Kakinada in Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh to a distinguished Brahmin family of civil servants and officials.

He grew up in the household of his uncle after his father passed away.

During a pilgrimage to Benares (now Varanasi) in 1869, the young man met a yogi who initiated him into Brahma Vidyâ.

From that time onwards he performed the prescribed daily prayers and meditation.

He was educated at the Hindu school in Kakinada, and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at **Madras Presidency College in 1876**. His legal career started in the latter part of the same year with an appointment as **Registrar of the High Court in the state of Baroda**.

After a year he returned to Madras (now Chennai) where he continued his studies and passed the Bachelor of Law examination.

He joined the legal firm of Grant and Laing and was enrolled as a Pleader of the High Court in the latter part of 1880.

He practised law for ten years, appearing in important cases, and was held in high esteem both by the Bench and by the Bar.

Theosophical work in Adyar

Subba Row became aware of The Theosophist published by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott.

He began corresponding with the two Founders and contributed some valuable articles on Hindu religion and philosophy to their magazine. Later he became an editor.

In 1882, Subba Row invited Blavatsky and Olcott to Madras (now Chennai). **His presence there was an important factor in the purchase of the Adyar property that became the permanent headquarters for the Theosophical Society.**

Upon his meeting them on April 23 of that year 1882, Subba Row became able to recite whatever passage was so requested of him from the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and many other sacred texts of India.

He had, apparently, never studied these things prior to the fateful meeting, and it is stated that when meeting Blavatsky and Damodar K. Mavalankar, all knowledge from his previous lives came flooding back. (This incident partially coincide with Master C.V.V's Biography)

Prior to this meeting, however, Subba Row was not known for any esoteric or mystical knowledge, even by his closest friends and parents.

It was only after meeting the pair that he began to expound on metaphysics, astounding most of those who knew him.

[T. Subba Row gave no early signs of possessing mystical knowledge: . . . I particularly questioned his mother on this point, and she told me that her son first talked metaphysics after forming a connection with the Founders of the Theosophical Society: . . .

It was as though a storehouse of occult experience, long forgotten, had been suddenly opened to him; recollections of his last preceding birth came in upon him: he recognized his Guru, and

thenceforward held intercourse with him and other Mahatmas; with some, personally at our Headquarters, with others elsewhere and by correspondence.

He told his mother that H.P.B. was a great Yogi, and that he had seen many strange phenomena in her presence. His stored up knowledge of Sanskrit literature came back to him, and his brother-in-law told me that if you would recite any verse of Gita, Brahma-Sutras or Upanishads, he could at once tell you whence it was taken and in what connection employed -- **Henry Steel Olcott**(one of the founder of theosophical society)]

Instruction of Westerners

Subba Row had initial problems with instructing non-Hindus. It was his distinct belief at the time that Hindu knowledge should remain with India, and not be extended to foreigners.

In fact, even after passing over this hurdle, he was still especially private regarding his spiritual life, even to his mother and close friends. Unless the person he was speaking to had a deep understanding of mysticism, it was a closed topic for him.

Charles Webster Leadbeater regarded Mr. Subba Row as his "principal teacher on the physical plane" and wrote that "he never showed the slightest sign of distrust in his relations with me, but treated me always with the utmost kindness and real friendliness, and was most patient and painstaking in his instructions." He continued:

[The afternoons and evenings which he spent with us upon the roof here at the Headquarters at Adyar were always times of vivid interest - times to which we looked forward with eager anticipation.

We questioned him upon all sorts of subjects - all the many aspects of occultism - and he never hesitated a moment either for a word or an idea, but poured forth upon us a steady stream of the most valuable information.

His erudition was never at fault, and hardly less marvellous than the vast extent of his knowledge was his extraordinary faculty of incisive expression.

He could weave a romantic atmosphere round the most abstract of questions, and present them as living, clear-cut, real.

His writings show his varied learning, but they give no impression of the brilliancy of his style and his remarkable fluency in oral instruction. -- C.W. Leadbeater]

The Secret Doctrine

For several crucial years, Subba Row was instrumental in establishing Theosophy in India. Mme. Blavatsky sent him the first draft of The Secret Doctrine, hoping that he would be a co-editor of it and add his knowledge of Hinduism.

At that time in 1884, it was intended to become a new version of Isis Unveiled with Subba Row writing most of the commentaries and the explanations.

However, in January 1885, a new plan for The Secret Doctrine was formulated. HPB went to work on it and sent portions of the first draft to Subba Row for his opinion and corrections.

He, however, refused to edit it or help with the writing as he found the text **both diffuse and chaotic**.

Nevertheless, so great was HPB's respect for her uncompromising critic that **she started the whole work over again from the beginning**. This no doubt contributed to the eventual success of her magnum opus.

Colonel Olcott wrote of this incident, "when I reported [Subba Row's criticism] to H.P.B. she was greatly distressed, and set to work and went over the MS. most carefully, correcting many errors due to slipshod literary methods, and with the help of European friends making the book what it is now. -- **Colonel Olcott**."

Mahatma Letters

At the request of Madame Blavatsky, and with the concurrence of Mahatma Morya Mr. Subba Row considered instructing A. P. Sinnett in occult matters.

Several letters related to this matter were collected in The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett. Mahatma Letter No. 58 (number 130 in the Barker system) was mailed on May 7, 1882 from Madras where Subba Row was editing **The Theosophist(monthly journal)** in HPB's absence.

In it he introduced himself to A. P. Sinnett, stated conditions under which instruction could take place, and asked whether Sinnett was familiar with Sanskrit.

Joy Mills states, "We know that Sinnett answered Subba Row's letter, although we do not know precisely how he replied.

Subba Row sent the reply on to M [Morya], perhaps with a cover letter similar to the one addressed to HPB, extracts of which KH [Koot Hoomi] sent to Sinnett.

It is clear that KH also read Sinnett's response to Subba Row." Subba Row's guru, Mahatma Morya, told Sinnett to "have patience with Subba Row. Give him time.

He is now at his tapas and will not be disturbed. I will tell him not to neglect you but **he is very jealous and regards teaching an Englishman as a sacrilege.(misuse of what is regarded as secret)"**

Koot Hoomi reinforced that message, although he seems to have regarded the prospect of Sinnett receiving instruction from Subba Row with skepticism. He knew that Subba Row -

a lawyer as well as an initiate - could not ignore "the unpassable Chinese wall of rules and Law" that Sinnett had insufficient capacity to respect.

Sinnett's response must not have been satisfactory, because in his June 26, 1882 letter, Mahatma Letter No. 64 (Barker no. 131), **Subba Row firmly declined to convey practical occult teachings to Sinnett:**

[The qualified assent which you were pleased to give to the conditions laid down by me necessitated a reference to the Brothers for their opinion and orders.

And now **I am sorry to inform you that anything like practical instruction in the ritual of Occult Science is impossible under the conditions you propose.**

So far as my knowledge goes, no student of **Occult Philosophy has ever succeeded in developing his psychic powers without leading the life prescribed for such students; and it is not within the power of the teacher to make an exception** in the case of any student.

The rules laid down by the ancient teachers of Occult Science are inflexible; and it is not left to the discretion of any teacher either to enforce them or not to enforce them according to the nature of the existing circumstances.

If you find it impracticable to change the present mode of your life, you cannot but wait for practical instruction until you are in a position to make such sacrifices as Occult Science demands; and for the present you must be satisfied with such theoretical instruction as it may be possible to give you. — Sri T. Subba Row]

In 1884, Master Koot Hoomi wrote to Subba Row advising him how to work with a Jewish member, Abraham D. Ezekiel. The message was published as Letter 79 in Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom Second Series.

Controversy with H. P. Blavatsky

As a representative of the Shriṅgeri Maṭh, an Advaita monastery, Subba Row adhered to Hindu orthodoxy, and that led him into certain disagreements with Madame Blavatsky.

In December 1885 Subba Row delivered a lecture on the Bhagavad Gita at the Convention of the Theosophical Society held in Adyar, Madras. The lecture, entitled "Introductory," was published in the February 1886 issue of The Theosophist.

In this lecture **Subba Row criticized the Theosophical concept about the septenary constitution(primacy of number seven in the manifested cosmos) of the universe and human beings.**

(In all the old Sanskrit works — Vedic and Tantrik — you find the number 6 mentioned more often than the 7 -- Master Koot Hoomi)

The philosophical controversy began in April, 1887, when H. P. Blavatsky published in the same journal the article "Classification of Principles."

This resulted in a number of remarkable articles between the two occultists discussing the subject as presented in the teachings of the trans-Himalayan School and those of Târaka Râja Yoga.

"Their respective followers did their best, as followers always do, to magnify a difference into a quarrel;

but we have Colonel Olcott's testimony that even to the day of his death **Subba Rao always spoke kindly of our great Founder.**

Charles J. Ryan has written that Subba Row had several causes of disaffection from the Society.

A. O. Hume and A. P. Sinnett had tried to get him to reveal practical means of producing psychic effects, and Subba Row was included in the Hodgson charges that Blavatsky was a Russian spy.

[In December 1884 Hodgson arrived in Adyar. He eventually concluded that the evidence supported Emma Coulomb, and that various inconsistencies, misrepresentations, and provable falsehoods in sworn statements by certain Theosophical Society members destroyed their credibility.

Hodgson wrote a 200-page report, in which Blavatsky was described "as one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting impostors in history." Later in 1986 this report lost its credibility]

Furthermore, "as a Brahman, he strongly disapproved of H.P.B.'s revelation of some of the inner meanings of the Hindu scriptures, hitherto concealed in the secrecy of the temples and utterly unsuspected by outside scholars."

Resignation and Death

Subba Row, as an orthodox Brahmin, was critical of Blavatsky's disclosure of certain hitherto esoteric teachings.

In 1888, he resigned from the Theosophical Society along with J. N. Cook.

Thereafter he fell gravely ill when he contracted a cutaneous disease, a sickness which manifested itself in an outbreak of boils in 1890 during his last visit to the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Madras.

Despite the healing treatment by Henry S. Olcott **he eventually died on June 24, 1890**, saying that his guru had called him, and that it was time for his departure.

He was cremated the morning after as per Hindu tradition.

Although he was a member for only about four years, he influenced significantly the Society and left an important legacy of esoteric teachings.