

Episodes of a Living History

Pedro Oliveira



Monument to the Unknow Members at Adyar

The history of a movement is not written only in statistics, reports, balance sheets, accolades, crisis or awards. It is written both in the lives of its protagonists as well as in the members who compose the organization. If the vision behind the organization is not parochial, sectarian, merely intellectual, its history is written in the soul of those who heeded the call coming from the depths of that vision: *satyān nāsti paro dharmah*, ‘there is no religion higher than truth’.

Here are some episodes in the history of the Theosophical Society that seem to indicate that the fledgling Society was on soul journey from its very beginnings.

HSO and the Master’s Turban

During the New York days, when he and HPB lived in the ‘Lamasery’, the headquarters of the TS at that time, Col. Olcott described a remarkable visit:

I was quietly reading, with all my attention centered on my book. Nothing in the evening’s incidents had prepared me for seeing an adept in his astral body; I had not wished for it, tried to conjure it up in my fancy, nor in the least expected it. All at once, as I read with my shoulder a little turned from the door, there came a gleam of something white in the right-hand corner of my eye; I turned my head, dropped my book in astonishment, and saw towering above me in his great stature an Oriental clad in white garments, and wearing a head-cloth or turban of amber-striped fabric, hand-embroidered in yellow floss-silk. Long raven hair hung from under his turban to the shoulders; his black beard, parted vertically on the chin in the Rajput fashion, was twisted up at the ends and carried over the ears; his eyes were alive with soul-fire; eyes which were at once benignant and piercing in glance; the eyes of a mentor and a judge, but softened by the love of a father who gazes on a son needing counsel and guidance.

(Olcott, Henry S., *Old Diary Leaves*, First Series, TPH, Madras, 1974, p. 379.)

HSO meets Master K.H. in Lahore

In November 1883, Col. Olcott was visiting Lahore, then located in India. The following is his description of his unexpected nightly visitor:

I was sleeping in my tent, the night of the 19th, when I rushed back towards external consciousness on feeling a hand laid on me. The camp being on the open plain, and beyond the protection of the Lahore Police, my first animal instinct was to protect myself from a possible religious fanatical assassin, so I clutched the stranger by the upper arms, and asked him in Hindustani who he was and what he wanted. It was all done in an instant, and I held the man tight, as one would who might be attacked the next moment and have to defend his life. But the next instant a kind, sweet voice said: “Do you not know me? Do you not remember me?” It was the voice of the Master K.H. A swift revulsion of feeling came over me, I relaxed my hold on his arms, joined my palms in reverential salutation, and wanted to jump out of bed to show him respect. But his hand and voice stayed me, and after a few sentences had been exchanged, he took my left hand in his, gathered the fingers of his right into the palm, and stood quiet beside my cot, from which I could see his divinely benignant face by the light of the lamp that burned on a packing-case at his back.

(op. cit., Third Series, pp. 37-8)

HPB at her Master’s Residence

These are some of the reminiscences of HPB regarding her stay at her Master’s home in Tibet. She was then being prepared for her future work. She writes to A. P. Sinnett:

“To make it clear: with Master I also used English, which whether bad or good was the same for Him, as He does not speak it but understands every word I say out of my head, and I am made to understand Him — how I could never tell or explain if I were killed but I do. With D.(jwal) K.(ul) I also speak English, he speaking it better even than Mah. K. H.

“Then in my dream still, three months after, as I was made to feel in that vision — I was standing before Mah. K. H., near the old building taken down He was looking at; and as Master was not at home, I took to Him a few sentences I was studying in Senzar in His sister’s room, and asked Him to tell me if I had translated them correctly and gave Him a slip of paper with these sentences written in English.

“He took and read them, and correcting the interpretation read them over, and said: ‘Now your English is becoming better. Try to pick out of my head even the little I know of it’. And He put His hand on my forehead in the region of memory and squeezed His fingers on it (and I felt even the same trifling pain in it as then, and the cold shiver I had experienced); and since that day He did so with my head daily, for about two months.

“Again the scene changes, and I am going away with Master who is sending me off back to Europe. I am bidding good-bye to His sister and her child, and all the chelas. I listen to what the Masters tell me. And then come the parting words of Mah. K. H., laughing at me as He

always did ...” (*The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, Theosophical University Press, Pasadena, California, 1973, p. 147.)

CWL discovers Krishnamurti

Ernest Wood described the encounter that happened on the Adyar beach, sometime after 22nd April 1909, when Annie Besant left for a world tour as President of the TS. At the beach he saw some boys playing:

One evening, Mr Leadbeater, on our return to his room after our swim, told me that one of the boys had a remarkable aura. I asked which one, and he said it was the boy named Krishnamurti. I was surprised, for I already knew the boys, as they had been coming to me and to Subramanyam in the evenings to help in connection with their school home work, and it was evident that Krishnamurti was not one of the bright students. Then Mr Leadbeater told me that Krishnamurti would become a great spiritual teacher and a great speaker. I asked, ‘How great? As great as Mrs Besant?’ He replied, ‘Much greater.’ And shortly after that he said that Krishnamurti would be the vehicle for the Lord Maitreya, the coming Teacher, who inspired Jesus. He was directed to help in training the boy for that purpose, which would be fulfilled, he told me, ‘unless something goes wrong’. This I want to emphasize, in justice to Mr Leadbeater.

(From *Clairvoyant Investigations* by C. W. Leadbeater and *The Lives of Alcyone* (J. Krishnamurti) Some Facts Described by Ernest Wood with Notes by C. Jinarajadasa, TPH Adyar, 1947)

Annie Besant writes the Invocation to Unity

In the book *A Short History of the Theosophical Society* (TPH Adyar, 1938, p. 460), Josephine Ransom describes how Dr Besant wrote the Invocation to Unity:

The English Section inaugurated a Brotherhood Campaign [1923], and most Sections followed suit. An Indian member asked Dr. Besant to write a theme for it for daily repetition. She composed the following:

O Hidden Life, vibrant in every atom;
O Hidden Light, shining in every creature;
O Hidden Love, embracing all in Oneness;
May each who feels himself as one with Thee,
Know he is therefore One with every other.

Describing this meditation, she said: “It sends forth successive waves of colour, pulsing outwards from the speaker, if rhythmically intoned or chanted, whether by the outer or the inner voice, and if some thousands would send these out over successive areas, we might create a very powerful effect on the mental atmosphere.”

[*The Theosophist*, June 1923, p. 243.]

George Arundale: helping the Fallen in the War

During the horrors of World War II, George Arundale, the fourth President of the TS – the War President – gathered some TS members around the world who had the capacity to work consciously during sleep and set out to help the thousands of victims of sudden and harrowing death during the war. He recorded his experiences in the little book *The Night Bell* (TPH Adyar, 1940), of which some excerpts are included below:

The battle rages, and as the mind-creations of man wreak the horrors created in them by human will, innumerable human beings are literally exploded over the frontiers of death! Fine young men, or maybe oldish men – British, French, Belgians, Germans – grim, tense, obscure in solid, driving embodiments of cold, relentless purpose.

At last sleep stirs into the new wakefulness. Another lightning stab of life, and that which had been broken into pieces on the Wheel of Eternal Adjustment, broken into pieces on this side of those Gates of Change which we call Death, streams through the Gates opened for its passage, slowly becoming whole again on the other side, but with a wholeness not yet released from the impress of the horrors endured but a brief while ago.

From C. Jinarajadasa's Inaugural Address

C. Jinarajadasa assumed office as the fourth President of the TS on 17 February 1946. In his Inaugural Address at Adyar he expressed his inspiring vision of the unity beyond differences that the Society aims at in its global work:

Suppose in addition, every Theosophist in every Theosophical Lodge were to say softly to himself as he meets friend or stranger, "THAT art thou, the Vision of God that I seek, the goal of Mukti which I long for, art *thou*." All out Theosophical studies then are a mere accompaniment, an elaboration in harmonies, of the glorious chant of unity which rings throughout the universe linking angel and man, beast and plant, in one joyous embrace.

N. Sri Ram's Visitor

The following is Radha Burnier's description of an incident that took place at Adyar, in 1956, which suggests a connection between Sri Ram and the inner Founders of the Theosophical Society. We need to bear in mind that never once did Sri Ram claim anything about his own spiritual status, but many members, and even non-members, felt that the spiritual nature was awake within him:

In 1968 my father had a major abdominal operation in Chicago and became quite frail after that. He had just arrived in the US for a lecture tour and had to fly from New York to Chicago on the advice of a doctor-member to have surgery immediately. My younger brother Vajra, who was practising as a surgeon, made all the arrangements and looked after him in Chicago and Wheaton.

It was in 1956, after a strenuous tour in Latin America that he arrived in Wheaton very ill. Sidney Cook [the then National President of the TS in America] tried to persuade him to stay and convalesce in Olcott [the National Headquarters of the American Section], but my father

would not listen. He had made some engagements on the way back, as far as I remember in Regensburg in Germany, and would not cancel it, nor did he agree to Sidney Cook's offer to go there instead of him, probably because he wanted to come back home.

After arrival in Adyar his condition became progressively worse and he had difficulty in walking from Vasantalaya [his residence at Adyar] to the office. Then he could not walk even in the house and was completely laid up in bed with a severe bronchial condition which affected his heart. As week after week passed with no improvement we thought that he would pass off any night.

After about two and a half months of this anxiety an incident took place. It happened one morning when my aunt Dr. Sivakamu had left to refresh herself and I was alone with my father. By that time I was extremely tired after many weeks of looking after the patient during daytime. My aunt took over at night. I was thinking of nothing and feeling that there was no hope of recovery, when the change in the atmosphere became tangible all of a sudden and I knew without words who was there.

In another two weeks the Convention delegates were able to greet the President from outside the house as he stood on the balcony. [Condensed from the book *N. Sri Ram – A Life of Beneficence and Wisdom*, TPH Adyar, 2009, chapter 4, The Presidential Years.]

John Coats accompanies James Perkins to Hospital

James Perkins, a former Vice-President of the TS and also former National President of its American Section, wrote the following in his tribute to John Coats, the sixth President of the Society:

The inauguration of the sixth President of the Theosophical Society took place on Founder's Day, 1973. I remember vividly that lovely November morning at Adyar when a large gathering of members was assembled in the Headquarters Hall to attend the event. That the new President was a 'heart and intuition' person who could create atmospheres, was amply demonstrated during the programme that morning, and particularly when John spoke. He created an extraordinary atmosphere of unifying friendliness.

I had witnessed on other occasions John's gifts in this direction and had once myself been the sole recipient of its beneficence in London some years before. I was there for lecture engagements and suddenly one night was awakened in such a state of acute pain and illness that I had to be taken by ambulance to a hospital some distance away. John learned of my plight and came at once, following the ambulance in his car, and even accompanying me to the emergency room, and very firmly holding my hand during the agonizing wait for medical attention. It was then that I experienced personally John's wonderful ability to charge one with sympathetic healing forces and to radiate a brotherly love that certainly were a blessing to me that night. (James Perkins, 'He Opened Roads Ahead', *The Theosophist*, April 1980, p. 318)

Radha Burnier and Krishnamurti's visit to Adyar

After she offered him some orange juice and they talked for a while in her house, Krishnaji left in the car with Radhaji accompanying him. When the car was about to reach the main gate he asked her: 'What are you going to do now?' Radhaji said: 'I will walk back', to which

Krishnaji said: ‘No, we will drive you back.’ When the car started off from the main gate area Krishnaji asked her: ‘Radhaji, do you believe in the Masters?’ Radhaji replied: ‘Yes.’ Krishnaji said, with emphasis: ‘What do you mean by saying ‘yes’? Do you know that Annie Besant’s life was entirely different because of it?’ There was silence for some time after which Krishnaji again asked: ‘So Radhaji, do you believe in the Masters?’ Radhaji replied: ‘Yes, Krishnaji, I do believe in the Masters.’ ‘Good’, he said.

(From ‘Conversations with Radha Burnier’, *The Theosophist*, January 2014.)

Tim Boyd: Challenges and Opportunities

Every President, without fail, has to go through tests and tribulations during his or her term of office. He or she becomes like a lightning rod for the Karma of the TS. It was not going to be different with Tim Boyd who took office, for the first time, in April 2014. He was re-elected unopposed in 2021.

He brought to the office a style of his own, a blend of enlightened pragmatism and profound commitment to Theosophy. In his many travels around the world, Mr Boyd presented Theosophy in the language of the times, practically jargon-free, but always expounding core principles and essential teachings. He spearheaded necessary renovations of historical buildings at the International Headquarters, namely, Blavatsky Bungalow and Leadbeater Chambers.

Some disgruntled individuals complained to a Department of the Tamil Nadu Government about the length of his term of office, but the Tamil Nadu Government upheld a Presidential term of office of seven years. The Government Order was published in the November 2018 issue of *The Theosophist*.

Tim Boyd was the first President to present his annual Presidential Address at the International Convention not by reading it, but in video format. Another milestone achieved by him was the conducting the International Convention in a virtual format, which allowed for TS members who never participated in it to be part of the proceedings.

A History that Keeps Unfolding

Since its foundation in 1875, through many vicissitudes and triumphs, the TS touched many individuals at a very deep level. We have had members, in different parts of the world, that devoted more than seventy years of their lives to the Society and what it stands for. In the last few years, the TS had been attracting a new generation of younger members who are now exploring the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom.

The history of the TS is still alive, still unfolding in the lives of so many around the world. In a profound way all the leaders and dedicated members of the past are still with us, for they gave their very soul to this Society which is Theosophy. The life of the TS is enriched by every individual member that rises beyond self-interest and self-importance. And that life responds to them with waves of inspiration and many opportunities of service. There can hardly be a more rewarding experience.