

Krishnamurti: Ninety Years of Theosophical Ripples

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

Be what he may, once that a student abandons the old and trodden highway of routine, and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought — Godward — he is a Theosophist; an original thinker, a seeker after the eternal truth with “an inspiration of his own” to solve the universal problems. (H. P. Blavatsky, “What Are Theosophists?”, *The Theosophist*, October 1879)

We seek, inquire, reject nothing without cause, accept nothing without proof: we are students, not teachers.

(H. S. Olcott, Inaugural Address, 17 November 1875)



The young Krishnamurti, 1910, age 14

WHEN he was fourteen years old, the young Krishnamurti came to live in a

house adjoining the Theosophical Society (TS) compound at Adyar, together with his father, Narayanaiah, and his brother Nityananda. Once, while playing at the Adyar beach with other boys, Krishnamurti was noticed by C. W. Leadbeater (CWL), a well-known member of the TS and a trained clairvoyant, residing at Adyar. This was around April 1909. He told Ernest Wood, his secretary at that time, that he had seen a boy on the beach with an extraordinary aura, without a particle of selfishness in it. CWL then said that the boy would become a great teacher and orator. Wood asked him: “As great as Annie Besant?” CWL reply: “Much greater.”

When Mrs Besant came back from her world tour that year she met the boys

Mr Pedro Oliveira is a former Education Coordinator of the TS in Australia. He served at Adyar in the early 1990s as international Secretary, and later as Head of the Editorial Office.

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and confirmed that the young Krishnamurti would become the vehicle of the World Teacher, the Bodhisattva Maitreya. Then followed a period of preparation, which included physical exercise, studies, proper diet, and so on. As a preparation for his first initiation, Krishnamurti memorized the lessons given to him by his Master at night. They were later published as the book *At the Feet of the Master*, which has run into many editions in many languages. It has helped thousands of people around the world to understand the nature of the spiritual path and how to begin to tread it.

Thanks to Besant, Krishnamurti and his brother Nitya, were educated in England and became an inspiration to many members of the TS as well as others. She established the “Order of the Star in the East” in January 1911 as an international organization to prepare the world for the arrival of the World Teacher. Krishnamurti eventually grew into an independent young man and started to reassess his perceived role as the vehicle to the World Teacher. On 3 August 1929, he dissolved the Order in Ommen, the Netherlands. That decision of his sent ripples across the theosophical world.

In one of her many conversations with Radha Burnier, former President of the TS, she mentioned the circumstances surrounding Krishnamurti’s departure from Adyar. Dr Besant had a flat built for him on top of the Russak Wing, adjoining the Headquarters Building at Adyar. It was her wish that he would live in that flat for life. Afterwards, at every

International Convention of the TS, besides visiting Besant’s room and the Museum and Archives, delegates also have been visiting Krishnaji’s flat. It has a wonderful view of the Adyar River flowing towards the sea.

Once after returning from a trip, possibly in India, Krishnaji went to his flat only to find the door locked, and two suitcases containing his clothes outside, plus a note instructing him to leave Adyar. This incident may have happened sometime after Krishnaji’s last visit to Besant in May 1933 (she would pass away on 20 September) and 29 December 1933, when Krishnaji was invited to come to Adyar by the Vice-President of the TS, A. P. Warrington, and give a series of talks. He was associated with Adyar since 1909, when his father, G. Narayanaiah, brought him and his brother Nityananda to live in a nearby house. Krishnaji’s forced departure from Adyar represented one of the numerous fault lines between him and some theosophists.

[repetition from 2 paras above]

It is unnecessary to go into the details of the historical event of the dissolution of the Order of the Star as they have been the subject of numerous books, essays and articles. A number of them carry an ideological bias in favour of Krishnamurti, while showing a clear bias against the TS. What seems to be necessary is to dwell on the reactions by well-known theosophists to what happened in Ommen in August 1929, for they helped to create ideological fault lines contributing towards a quasi-orthodox mindset which

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still exists today.

In 2008 I had the opportunity of interviewing the late Rt Rev. Christopher Bannister, a former Regionary Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in Australia. When he was a teenager in Sydney he used to visit The Manor, in Mosman, and came to know Bishop Leadbeater and the other members of the household, including Dora van Gelder, later on Dora Kunz. He told me that after Krishnamurti dissolved the Order and left the TS, many members in Australia also left the organization. As a result, between 1929 and 1931 the Society lost around 15,000 members worldwide. Its membership at the end of 1928 was 45,000. This is what Bannister said:

I remember, clearly, that they built the Star Amphitheatre at Balmoral, in Sydney, and I was there for the laying of the foundation stone, which Bishop Leadbeater did. Afterwards Krishnamurti, when he was in Sydney, gave a series of afternoon talks there. I went to one of them, and I remember distinctly thinking at the end of the talk, “I wonder if you are the World Teacher”, because what he said didn’t appeal to me on that level at all. With a lot of things, you know, I was the same, I still am. But a lot of people had pinned all their hopes on this clairvoyant revelation and when it was proven to be wrong, they said, “Well, probably everything else that was said is wrong too”, and off they went.

His views probably reflected the attitude of many of those who left the TS at that time, but also some of those

who stayed and became critical of Krishnamurti.

Geoffrey Hodson

One of Krishnamurti’s critics was Geoffrey Hodson (1886-1983), a well-known author, clairvoyant and lecturer on Theosophy for many decades. He wrote a number of popular books, including *The Kingdom of Gods*, *The Pathway to Perfection*, *The Miracle of Birth*, *Basic Theosophy*, among many others. N. Sri Ram, the fifth President of the TS, invited Hodson to conduct the School of the Wisdom at Adyar a number of times, and his talks there were included in two volumes: *Lecture Notes of the School of the Wisdom*, volumes *I* and *II*, published by TPH Adyar. A number of posthumous books by him were also published including his personal diary, *The Light from the Sanctuary*, compiled by his wife Sandra Hodson, in which, among other things, he declares his occult status on the Path. He also wrote a small book entitled *Krishnamurti and the Search for the Light*, published by St Alban Press, Sydney, in 1935. This book was and still is accepted by many of Hodson’s admirers as containing the most reliable view of the relationship between Krishnamurti and the TS. In the introduction to his book Hodson establishes the ground for his personal — and strong — criticism of Krishnamurti:

Krishnamurti is the personification of simple-mindedness. He is sincerity incarnate, and is clearly inspired with a selfless desire to lead humanity to its own light. He con-

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centrates on individual self-knowledge, individual perfection and enlightenment. Upto now he has seemed to ignore, even to deny, the value of the path of action, of deliberate self-training, study and ministration to the world.

Unfortunately, he proclaims his to be the only way and the equally certain and most glorious path of selfless service an illusion, a way of cowardice, of escape from reality. In him, singleness of purpose has developed into intolerance. Unique individuality has become a fetish, worship of which produces narrow-mindedness and causes him to display distinct signs of intellectual arrogance. He alone is right. Everyone else, from the Lord Buddha down to the latest teacher of the Law, is wrong, criminally wrong.

Krishnamurti's utterances are an extraordinary blend of rare flashes of transcendental wisdom, penetrating intelligence, incomprehensibility, prejudice, intolerance and vituperation. In these chapters I offer some thoughts upon his various teachings. I am moved to do so partly because after arrival in Australia I became aware of the influence of the teachings of Krishnamurti upon the membership of the Theosophical Society. One Lodge had just sustained severe losses in the resignation of some of its most talented and promising students.

Interested to know more about Mr Hodson's annoyance at Krishnamurti and his teaching, I asked, a number of years ago, one of the stalwarts of the Australian Section of the TS at that time, the late Shirley Macpherson, about her views on

the subject. She, who had joined the TS in 1936, smiled and said that Geoffrey Hodson lived in Auckland, New Zealand, and used to lecture throughout Australia in practically all its Lodges on a regular basis. He was a charismatic speaker and as a result of his talks a number of people would join the Society.

However, Miss Macpherson said, in the intervening years Krishnamurti would also visit Australia and give talks in different places. During his talks Krishnamurti would say: "Question everything!" As a result, a number of those who had joined the TS would resign or allow their membership to lapse. She said that it was this which infuriated Hodson.

In this regard, it is interesting to note what C. W. Leadbeater (CWL), highly regarded by Hodson as a true theosophical teacher, had to say about Krishnamurti. This was included in CWL's book review of Sir Cyril Scott's *The Initiate in the Dark Cycle by His Pupil*, published in *The Australian Theosophist*, August 1933, p. 123, entitled "Has Krishnaji Failed?":

The point which is arousing some controversy is that he has a good deal to say about Krishnaji also, with much of which I cannot agree, though there is some truth in it. He seems to think that Krishnaji has failed in his mission, has been largely left to himself, and will soon be superseded by a female teacher, who is to draw the whole world into her train. I do not know anything about this lady, but I do not consider that Krishnaji is a failure. I admit that some of his statements have been inaccurate, a little fanatical, and not always tactfully put; but

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he is doing a difficult and important piece of work to the best of his ability.

Geoffrey Farthing

Geoffrey Farthing (1909-2004) was a distinguished member of the Theosophical Society in England and its one-time General Secretary. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the European Federation for a number of years. Mr Farthing was also a director of the European School of Theosophy. He co-founded, in 1974, with Christmas Humphreys and Graham Nicholas, the Blavatsky Trust. He was awarded the Theosophical Society's highest award, "The Subba Row Medal" in 1996 for his outstanding contribution to theosophical literature. His books include *Deity, Cosmos, and Man; Exploring the Great Beyond; Theosophy — What it is All About; When We Die; Life, Death, and Dreams; Theosophy, the Wisdom Religion; After Death Consciousness and Processes*; among others.

In his manifesto to the General Council of the TS (1996), Mr Farthing stated, among other things, "The Society has its own special message to promulgate. This message only exists in the writings of HPB [H. P. Blavatsky] and in the Mahatma Letters. This message in its completeness (as far as it was given out) is unique." He further said:

The eradication of the "make-believe" Leadbeater influence — in all departments including literature, and severance from the Society of all other organizations, i.e., the Liberal Catholic Church and Co-Masonry.

[The TS was never officially or corporately connected with any of these two organizations, although some of its members were under the policy of Freedom of Thought. — PO].

A thorough examination of all literature purporting to be "theosophical", and a brave declaration, and no further promotion, of any which is not wholly consonant with the original teachings.

This is no proscription but all books purporting to be theosophical which strictly are not should be clearly labelled or marked that they are the author's views on the subject and not necessarily authentic. Members are, of course, free to read what they like but they can be warned, if not guided. In any Theosophical Society library or bookstore the "authentic" classics (HPB/the Masters) and works properly consonant with them should be clearly distinguished, i.e. separately displayed, from "personalized" views, expositions and/or explanations, clearly marked and given prominence in displays, on book lists and in catalogues.

The following was the official response of the General Council of the Theosophical Society to Mr Farthing, at its meeting in December 1996:

The consensus was that freedom of thought necessarily implies a wide horizon of thought and perception. Belief that the writings of HPB and the Mahatma Letters constitute the only source of the message the TS should promulgate cannot be imposed on members, as such limitation goes against the grain of that freedom of thought. Each one must have the freedom to decide what best helps understanding of oneself

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and provides inspiration to work for the ideal of human progression and perfection.

In his manifesto, Mr Farthing makes a number of statements about Krishnamurti, his discovery and upbringing. We include some of them below with my brief responses between brackets.

Those who had his upbringing and education in hand, notably CWL and Dick Balfour-Clarke, were very much second-generation theosophists. Krishnaji therefore probably never knew anything of the H.P.B./Masters teachings.

[Krishnamurti himself has said that he was not fed Theosophy. The only book Annie Besant asked him to read was the King James Version of the Bible in order to improve his English. He underwent physical training under C. W. Leadbeater, including exercises and diet, but he, by his own admission, was never indoctrinated.]

It is also very doubtful whether Krishnaji himself ever had a first-hand “Master” experience although he did describe once having seen three Masters in a vision. Had he had a real experience, however, he could neither have forgotten it nor thereafter have doubted their existence and later have repudiated them.

[As Radha Burnier, who knew him well, said (see page 16 in this article) he was in contact with the Masters throughout his life. He even said that they had told him when he was going to die. But Krishnamurti repudiated the ideology created around the Masters’ names, including of individuals who were claiming, publicly, successive “initiations”. He called that a “circus”. There are descriptions of lofty states of awareness in his Notebook, which sometimes he refers to as “Benediction” or the “Sacred”.]

Furthermore, as Krishnaji’s teachings of freedom, self-reliance, non-dependence on authority and institutions and so on, are all virtually in proper accord with the “Master” Theosophy, there would not have been any reason for him to repudiate it, nor his connection with the Society.

[Again, he repudiated the ideology created around the Masters’ names, not their essential sacredness.]

His loss was that he never became acquainted with the sea of theosophical knowledge which would to a large extent not only have justified his views but provided him with relevant data for use in his teaching, e.g. the difference between the personality and the individuality, the essential idea of Unity, and had he been interested, the proper nature of the Self, the total cosmic structure and processes.

[Those who studied his teachings without prejudice have said that there are real theosophical depths in what he says. He spoke about the need to see conditioning for what it is; the sacred unity of all life; Nature as a vast self-regenerating process; about the complete ending of thought and a boundless field of sacred silence.]

The second coming of the Christ was at that time (1920s) being regarded as imminent whereas, according to the Masters and theosophical teaching, such a “second coming”, i.e. the advent of an Avatar, was not expected for millennia. In any case the severance of the Society from the Masters made such a “coming” into it extraordinarily unlikely.

[A highly respected Tibetan Buddhist lama, the Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche, once told me,

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in Sydney, in 2001, that according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, Maitreya Buddha will manifest in a million years from now. But, he said, between now and a million years there would be partial manifestations. When put the question, “Was Krishnamurti a partial manifestation?”, his answer was “Yes.”]

In any case in the nature of Karma his upbringing and earthly surroundings would have all been in proper accord without the interference of CWL.

[Krishnamurti told a number of people over the years that if CWL had not discovered him he would be dead. While in school, prior to April 1909, he was being whacked on the head with a cane by his teacher every day. He was also malnourished and had lice in his hair.]

The “finding” of Krishnaji, his upbringing and then adoption as a vehicle for the Lord Maitreya was virtually the culmination of the “split” from “Master” Theosophy.

[Many students who consider HPB’s teachings, together with the Mahatma Letters, as the only authentic sources of real Theosophy, have declared that the departure of HPB from Adyar, in March 1885, represented the end of the Masters’ influence in the TS with Headquarters at Adyar. However, Col. Olcott, whose loyalty to the Masters and their work cannot be questioned, recorded this in his diary for 1892 (*Old Diary Leaves*, Fourth Series 1887-1892, The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1975, p. 442):

“Just before daybreak, on the 10th of February [1892], I received clairaudiently a very important message from my Guru [Mahatma M.]: its impressiveness was enhanced by the fact that he told me things

which were quite contrary to my own belief, and hence it could not be explained away as a case of auto-suggestion. He told me: (a) That a messenger from him would be coming, and I must hold myself ready to go and meet him; (b) That the relationship between himself, HPB, and myself was unbreakable; (c) That I must be ready for a change of body, as my present one had nearly served its purpose; (d) That I had not done well in trying to resign prematurely: I was still wanted at my post, and must be contented to remain indefinitely until he gave me permission to abandon it; (e) That the time was not ripe for carrying out my scheme of a great International Buddhist League, and that the Mahā-Bodhi Society, which I had intended to use as the nucleus of the scheme, would be a failure; (f) That all stories about his having cast me off and withdrawn his protection were false, for he kept constant watch over me, and would never desert me.”]

Ommen Star Camp, August 1925

The following passages are taken from *The Herald of the Star*, Vol. XIV, No. 9, September 1925. This magazine was the organ of the Order of the Star in the East of which J. Krishnamurti was the Head and Annie Besant was the Protector. The statements took place during the August 1925 camp of the Order in Ommen, The Netherlands. They are reproduced without any comments. It is not difficult to understand why they may have played a crucial part in Krishnaji’s future decision of dissolving the Order as most of them reveal a form of belief-centred attitude regarding the work before

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the Order and the TS. Another extraordinary feature in some of the statements is that some of the speakers seem to be speaking on behalf of the Order, of the Masters, and superior Adepts, and even of Krishnaji himself, who was not there but in Ojai, California, nursing his brother, J. Nityananda, who was suffering from tuberculosis and who would eventually die in November that year, when Krishnaji was on his way to Adyar.

From Dr Besant's address:

Then He will choose, as before, his twelve Apostles — a significant number, “the twelve” — and their chief, the Lord himself. He has already chosen them, but I have only the command to mention seven who have reached the stage of Arhatship, which seems to be the occult status for the small circle of his immediate disciples and messengers to the world. The first two, my brother Charles Leadbeater and myself, passed that great Initiation at the same time, together because of our future work together, at the time that I became President of the TS. Our younger brothers here, who were living through the stages, as it were, of discipleship, at certain points have passed the four great Initiations, and others were welcomed a little later by the King as among his Arhats, and one will be a few days later. They are, first: one whom you know, I think, well, that disciple of beautiful character and beautiful language, C. Jinarajadasa, who must be known to very many of you, and to know him is to love him. My brother Leadbeater and myself were of course present at this Initiation, and also at that of Krishnaji and welcomed the new addi-

tions to our band. Then my brother, George Arundale, whose consecration as Bishop was necessary, as the last step of his preparation for the great fourth step of Initiation; and my brother, Oscar Kollerstrom, not so well known, perhaps, to you, but beloved for his character and his wisdom by all who know him well, as I am thankful to say I do; and then one whom I have called my daughter Rukmini Arundale, this Indian girl of a glorious past, will be one in a few days, who, hearing the call of her Master very, very early in life, will be the Rishi Agasthya's messenger to the women and young ones in India, taking up a large part of the work there I have been carrying on for years. Young in body, yet she is old in wisdom and in willpower; “child of the indomitable will” is her welcome in the higher worlds.

Now, it is entirely a new thing that the names of people should be announced in this fashion, but there can be no hesitation to those who are his servants in carrying out the will of the Lord; it is not for them to judge, it is for them to obey. As He said, it may cause to us a certain amount of trouble and ridicule, but we are accustomed to that, and what matter? It matters nothing at all. The only thing that matters is the will of the King, and the doing service to his great Messenger, the Bodhisattva.

I left out one and must leave out another. Naturally, our Krishnaji was one, but he is to be the vehicle of the Lord. And the other is one who is very dear to all of us, as to the whole Brotherhood: Bishop James Wedgwood. He had borne his crucifixion before the seal of Arhatship was set upon him by his King. (pp. 307, 308)