

WHY ADYAR WAS CHOSEN

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The Founders of the Theosophical Society did not have a personal agenda. Their critics kept (and keep) saying that they were either spies, cultural saboteurs, frauds and even agents of the devil! But the lives of Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, their legacy, and the uplifting influence they had on many who met them, speak for themselves.

Although the TS was founded in New York in 1875, HSO and HPB sailed to India on 17 December 1878, arriving in Bombay on 16 February 1879, where they eventually established their headquarters at 'Crow's Nest', in Breach Candy. Neither Olcott nor Blavatsky made a secret of being both dedicated to serve those great souls who are referred to as Mahatmas in the East. There is ample independent evidence from that time that at least two Mahatmas occasionally visited and had conversations with both Founders during their life of work for the Society. Sometimes such visits would come at crucial moments, either when HPB was at death's door or when the pressure on Col. Olcott was at breaking point. In such visits the Mahatmas offered healing, guidance, and reassurance to the Founders about their work for the TS, without taking upon themselves the heavy responsibilities the Founders had voluntarily accepted to undertake.

Writing in *The Theosophist*, July 1882, in an editorial comment entitled "Coming Events Foretold", which preceded a statement by a chela of Ramalinga Pillay who, much before the Founders had arrived in India, had preached the principle of Universal Brotherhood and the existence of the Mahatmas, HPB remarked:

When, in answer to a direct challenge, the author of *The Occult World* wrote to the *Bombay Gazette* (April 4, 1882), he began his letter with the following profession of faith: "I was already sure, when I wrote *The Occult World*, that the Theosophical Society was connected, through Madame Blavatsky, with the great Brotherhood of Adepts I described. I now know this to be the case, which much greater amplitude of knowledge." Little did our loyal friend fancy, when he was penning these lines, that his assertion would one day be capable of corroboration by the testimony of thousands. But such is now the state of the case. Skeptics and prejudiced or interested witnesses in general may scoff as they like, the fact cannot be gainsaid. ...

While at Madras [May, 1882], we were told that a well-known Tamil scholar, a Pandit in the Presidency College, desired to have a private conversation with us. The interview occurred in the presence of Mr Singaravelu, President of the Krishna Theosophical Society, and another trustworthy Theosophist, Mr C. Aravamudu Ayangar, a Sanskritist, of Nellore. We are no more at liberty to repeat here all the questions put to us by the interviewer than we are to divulge certain other facts, which would still more strongly corroborate our repeated assertions that (1) our Society was founded at the direct suggestion of Indian and Tibetan Adepts; and (2) that in coming

to this country we but obeyed their wishes. But we shall leave our friends to draw their own inferences from all the facts.

Although the Society quickly expanded with the arrival of the Founders in India, they were searching for a suitable Headquarters. In *Old Diary Leaves* (Second Series), Col. Olcott explains:

In my travels over India and Ceylon I had been observing places, people, and climates, with a view to selecting the best place for a permanent Headquarters for the Society. Liberal offers of houses, free of rent, had been made us in Ceylon, and, certainly, the Island presented a most charming appearance to one seeking an Asian home; but several considerations, such as its isolation from India, the cost of postage ... overweighted its loveliness and led us to choose India in preference. Up to the present time, however, no good property had been offered us, and we had made no definite plans. On 31st May [1882], however, we two were begged by Judge Muttuswamy's sons to go and look at a property that was to be had cheap. We were driven to Adyar, and at the first glance knew that our future home was found.

People glibly speak of Madras as “the Benighted Presidency” and as being insufferably hot. The fact is, however, that as regards climate I prefer it above the others, and as to Sanskrit Literature and Aryan Philosophy, it is the most enlightened of the Indian Presidencies; there are more learned Pandits in the villages, and the educated class, as a whole, have been less spoiled by Western education. In Bengal and Bombay there are more *litterateurs* of the class of Telang and Bhandarkar, but I cannot recall one equal to T. Subba Row, of Madras, in bright genius for grasping the spirit of the Ancient Wisdom. And his being at Madras was one of the causes of our fixing upon that Presidency town for our official residence. Although he is dead and gone, yet we have never regretted our choice, for Adyar is a sort of paradise.

To fully appreciate Col. Olcott's reference to Subba Row it may be helpful to mention the following passages from *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*: “This Subba Row will help you [Sinnett] to learn, though his terms – he being an initiated Brahmin and holding to the *Brahmanical* esoteric teaching – will be different from those of the “Arhat Buddhist” terminology” (Letter 60, chronological). “*Upasika* (Madam B.) and Subba Row, though pupils of the same Master, have not followed the same philosophy – the one is Buddhist and the other an Adwaitaite.” (Letter 120, chronological). The presence of this initiated Chela in Madras was therefore of paramount importance in the Founders' decision to establish the TS Headquarters there. And it also made clear the character of Adyar as a centre for the Masters' work.

HPB, in a letter to her aunt Nadyezhda A. de Fadeyev (published in *The Path*, September 1895), described the beautiful quiet that is one of the enduring aspects of Adyar as a spiritual centre:

It is simply delightful. What air we have here; what nights! And what marvellous quiet! No more city noises and street yells. I am sitting quietly writing, and now and then gaze over the ocean sparkling all over as if a living thing – really. I am often under the impression that the sea breathes, or that it is angry, roaring and hurling itself about in wrath... But when it is quiet and

caressing, there can be nothing in the world as fascinating as its beauty, especially on a moonlight night. The moon here against the deep dark-blue sky seems twice as big and ten times brighter than your European little mother-of-pearl ball.

Such were the momentous beginnings of Adyar as the home of the Theosophical Society. It was not only the home of the Founders; it was, and it remains the heart of the worldwide theosophical work which was spearheaded by them. During Annie Besant's presidency the state was expanded into the beautiful campus it is today. Many generations of devoted workers have served there and their dedication, devotion and profound altruistic commitment to Theosophy has contributed to making Adyar the 'Flaming Centre' it is.

The beauty of Adyar is indeed incomparable and it exerts a profound influence on the consciousness of those who visit or stay there, sometimes even of those who just visit for a very short while. While working there the writer had the occasion of meeting rather briefly an overseas businessman on a short visit to Madras. He came to Adyar and his experience there led him to say: "It is a pity I that I have to go away so soon. This is a remarkable place. There is something sacred here." This was, of course, the experience of many, many others. Perhaps it is not difficult to understand that 121 years of continuous theosophical work for the spiritual regeneration of humanity have created at Adyar a very special and profound atmosphere. Annie Besant expressed this realization beautifully when she wrote: "Work for Adyar, the Masters' Home". In this way Adyar *is* the very heart of the Theosophical Society, radiating those powerful and uplifting influences on every theosophical centre in the world as well as to the entire planet.

Therefore, those who, from time to time, say or imply that the International Headquarters of the TS should be elsewhere do not have, obviously, an informed opinion about the subject. Sometimes one of the reasons given for such a change is the perceived lack of security and efficiency in India. Let us examine this point. The attacks on New York on 11 September 2001 have made clear that absolute security is a myth, for if terrorists could strike at the heart of the nation with the mightiest military power on earth, as they did, they could do so anywhere else in the world. Also, the Theosophical Society is not a business corporation seeking to dominate any given market. It is not, and it has never been, guided by worldly values or sagacity. The peace, quiet, harmony and indescribable beauty of Adyar are, *in themselves*, an enormous contribution to the world, for through them the Great Ones pour out constantly their regenerating blessings. As for efficiency, the example at Adyar is given by our International President herself, for she works seven days a week, travels incessantly to visit and speak to centres of the TS worldwide, deals with an inhumane amount of correspondence and is responsible for the overall activities at that Centre. Also, Adyar has kept pace with the new technologies and all the major offices are provided with electronic communications, the Centre has an informative website, and the Theosophical Publishing House has an online catalogue, and its books are in constant demand.

For the individual member who has the unique privilege of working and serving at Adyar, there is a very special opportunity. Unlike many in the world today believe, a real spiritual centre is not meant for people to have 'a good time', receive 'messages from gurus', develop 'powers',

nor any of the like. The power of a true spiritual centre, when one is sincere, helps to accelerate in the individual the process of self-confrontation, bringing to the surface of the conscious mind every hitherto hidden content, tendencies, deceptions, and vices, as well as spiritual aspiration, goodness and any other moral quality which were lying dormant within him or her. This results in a very efficient and lasting educational process, helping the person to lay strong foundations on the path of self-knowledge, for unless one is self-aware one cannot really help the forces of wisdom and compassion in their work to liberate human consciousness from the illusion of separateness.

It is a very great privilege and honour to have Adyar as the head and the heart of the Theosophical Society. And the fact that many, many members, all over the world, remember Adyar and support it in every way they can is an eloquent testimony of Adyar's living and strong spiritual heritage. May Adyar grow always stronger and may those TS members who are ready offer themselves to go there and devote the best years of their lives to what Adyar stands for: the spiritual regeneration of humanity.