

## T. SUBBA ROW GARU

### Josephine Ransom

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One of the most brilliant figures who passed across the early stage of The Theosophical Society was T. Subba Row Garu, B.A., B.L. He was born on 6 July 1856 and died on 24 June 1890. He belonged to the strict Smarta Brahman caste. His early years showed no exceptional talents, but in 1872 he began a brilliant college career. A little later he passed his law examinations with ease, and by 1880 had a lucrative law practice. He was married but had no children. Later on he suffered from some “mysterious cutaneous disease”, said Colonel Olcott, who endeavoured to help him by means of his own great powers of healing and mesmerism, but to no avail. Early on the day of his death, Subba Row said his Guru called him and he did not wish to be disturbed; without further word or sign to those about him he died. “A great star fell from the firmament of contemporary thought.”

Subba Row’s connection with the Founders of The Theosophical Society began with a correspondence between himself, H.P.B. and Damodar. Then in 1882 these three with Colonel Olcott formed a close personal friendship. It was not thought that he possessed any special occult knowledge, but upon meeting H.P.B. his hidden store of such knowledge suddenly opened out. He recognized his Guru and “thenceforward held intercourse with him and other Mahātmās; with some personally at our Headquarters, with others elsewhere and by correspondence”. He was most reticent about this occult side of his nature. When importuned for occult instruction, he replied that he “dared not reveal any of the secrets entrusted to him by his Guru”. But seemingly with those who “knew” he opened out, and showed himself not only a brilliant conversationalist upon metaphysical subjects but also a very competent instructor in Occultism — as was seen with C. W. Leadbeater, whose occult powers he helped to train.

Indian philosophy was Subba Row’s main interest and in that he was deeply versed, especially in its occult implications. He studied Western philosophy also. “He was an intellectual phenomenon,” wrote Colonel Olcott of him, and others regarded him as “one of the highest Occultists of Southern India”. H.P.B. considered him her equal in Occultism.

Because he believed the world, and especially the Western world, was in no way prepared for the open acceptance of occult doctrines, he joined issue with H.P.B. whose frankness in giving out all she could of her own occult knowledge made him very uneasy. She was entrusted with acquainting the world in general with the idea and ideals held throughout the ages by esotericists. Knowledge of the laws and powers in Nature has always been held as dangerous if acquired by anyone not properly prepared to use it for the benefit of others and not for the aggrandizement of the individual. So Subba Row was reticent where H.P.B. was open. It was well known that he declined to have anything to do with *The Secret Doctrine* in which H.P.B. set out to instruct the world, and not only the selected few, in Occultism.

Part of H.P.B.’s work was to explain the full complement of the “principles” which go to make the total of the human constitution, a subject upon which the Western world was entirely ignorant. She argued cogently for the sevenfold set of principles; Subba Row for a fourfold classification. From different angles both were of course right. What matters most to us in these days is that their controversy left us a rare rich legacy of occult information about the

constitution of man. It must be remembered that Subba Row's views were published in *The Theosophist* and therefore widely disseminated and studied, and helped to shape thought in those early days. It is important to note what the Masters seemed to wish to impart (guardedly) about man's full constitution and the exact relation of the parts of his small human cosmos to the great cosmos. For of such knowledge is Occultism. The "forces" inherent in the great cosmos are one and all with utmost precision repeated in man, and they act and react upon one another with exactness.

Understanding all this and being exceedingly well versed in the ancient scriptures, both those which are "Aryan" in origin and development from the Vedas and Upanishads onwards, and those which came from Atlantis and are called Tantras and Āgamas, Subba Row said that only the "Initiate" can understand the inner meaning of all the occult information to be gained from both sources. Part of true Occultism is an intimate knowledge of the human constitution, its origin and its use. It is helpful when considering Subba Row's point of view to keep before us the diagram overleaf and so be clear about what he and H.P.B. had in their minds and why they differed.<sup>1</sup>

The first column under Esoteric Buddhism shows how Mr Sinnett understood from the Masters letters what is the arrangement of manas principles. Upon this Subba Row commented that it meant "the Tibetan form of Esoteric Buddhism is in closer connection at the present with the Esoteric Doctrine than any other popular religion, on account of the presence of the great Himalayan Brotherhood in Tibet and Their constant guidance, care and supervision".

#### THE SEPTENARY DIVISION IN DIFFERENT INDIAN SYSTEMS

Esoteric Buddhism	Vedānta	Tāraka Rāja Yoga
1. Sthūla Sharira	Annamayakosha	}
2. Prāna	}	}Sthulopādhi
	}Prānamayakosha	}
3. The Vehicle of Prāna	}	}
4. Kāma Rupa	}	}
	}Mānomayakosha	}
{ a) Volitions and	}	}Sūkshmpādhi
{ feelings, etc.	}	}
5. Mind {-----	-----	}
{ b) Vijnānam	Vijnānamayakosha	}
6. Spiritual Soul	Ānandamayakosha	Kāranopādhi
7. Ātmā	Ātmā	Ātmā

H.P.B. defended the sevenfold classification, which is the basis of Vedāntic teaching and of our present usage in the Society. But the fourfold classification of the third column, Subba Row contended, was of a greater antiquity. For, said he, "though there are seven Principles in man, there are but three distinct Upādhis in each of which his Ātmā may work independently of the rest". The word Upādhi means "sheath or seat of the different states of existence". Much of

<sup>1</sup> This diagram is printed on p. 212 of *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I. Adyar edition.

this controversy passed into our Theosophic thought, for H.P.B. was asked questions about it and her answers have been embodied in *The Secret Doctrine*, especially in the fifth volume.<sup>2</sup>

At the request of many members, Subba Row gave, at the Convention of 1886, a series of “Lectures on the Study of the Bhagavadgītā”. In these lectures he uses the term Daiviprakriti, the “Light of the Logos”, which is known to students of *The Secret Doctrine* as “Fohat”, and as Kundalini when operating in the human body. He based his talks on a fourfold classification of the principles in man, the solar system, the solar cosmos, and the “whole cosmos”. In enumerating these basic principles he explained them “in the order of evolution”.

He postulated that Parabrahman exists before all things and is the one essence from which starts into existence a centre of conscious energy, the Logos (of which there may be a countless number) — the first “Ego” to appear in a cosmos, the one source of all energy, the abstract Logos, “the beginning of all creation and the end of all evolution”. This first Logos, unborn and eternal, exists in a latent condition in the bosom of Parabrahman and starts as a centre of conscious energy at the time of cosmic activity, and when it does, from its “objective standpoint”, Parabrahman appears to it as a “veil”, as Mulaprakti (the root of matter). Even by this first Logos (or Ishvara) Parabrahman cannot be seen as It is but only “with a veil thrown over It, and that veil is the mighty expanse of cosmic matter”. This Ishvara emanates a conscious energy which is its power and light.

Thus we have four characteristics which are the bases of all things in our universe. They are: 1. Parabrahman; 2. Mulaprakti — not Parabrahman itself, but its appearance; 3. Ishvara or Logos, the “one Ego”; 4. The Light of this Logos, Daiviprakti, or Fohat. This Light is the “intellectual” energy of Ishvara, the “One existing representative of the Power and Wisdom of Parabrahman. Matter acquires all its attributes and all its powers by the action of this Light that emanates from the Logos upon Mulaprakti”. It is the link between objective matter and the subjective thought of Ishvara, the one instrument with which Ishvara works.<sup>3</sup> These eternal four principles are worked out with care and expressed in noble language in the Proem in the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine*.

Then Subba Row asks that we conceive of the manifested universe again in a fourfold way. This time as corresponding to the four basic human forms or *Shariras*.

1. The manifested total solar system with all its principles is the *Sthula Sharira*, the physical body of the cosmos;
2. The Light that emanates from the Logos is the *Linga Sharira* (the subtle body) of the cosmos;
3. This Logos is the one germ from which the whole cosmos springs — which contains the “image” of the universe — the *Kāraṇa Sharira* (causal body) existing as it does before the cosmos comes into existence;

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<sup>2</sup> HPB wrote that “between the three Upādhis of the Rāja Yoga and its Ātmā, and our three Upādhis, Ātmā and the additional three divisions, there is in reality but very little difference . . . A Rāja Yogi must . . . accept the Tāraka Rāja classification in principle and theory, whatever classification he resorts to for practical and occult purposes”. See *The Secret Doctrine* I.213.

<sup>3</sup>*The Secret Doctrine* describes this action of Fohat as the “bridge” by which the Ideas existing in Divine Thought are impressed on Cosmic Substance as the “Laws of Nature”; Fohat is the dynamic energy of Cosmic Ideation.

4. Parabrahman, which bears the same relation to the Logos as our Ātmā does to the human *Kāraṇa Sharīra*.

This fourfold nature of the “infinite universe” is repeated in the nature of the solar system. For a further description of this solar system the word Vāch (Sound, Voice, Word) is used. This Sacred Word, or Verbum, or Pranava, has four states which correspond to the four principles of the solar cosmos. These four are:

1. *Vaikhāri Vāch* — audible utterance; this represents the whole cosmos in its objective form;
2. *Madhyamā Vāch* — middle sound, inaudible: the “Light of the Logos”;
3. *Pashyanti Vāch* — the sound of the Logos itself;
4. *Parā Vāch* — Supreme Sound or Word, which is Parabrahman.

*The Secret Doctrine* explains how these four operations of cosmic Sound are repeated in the human body as it courses through certain chakras. By concentrating on uttered sound one can move, in *reverse* as it were, from Vaikhāri Vāch to Para where the one full sound of the *Voice of the Silence*, the cosmic consciousness, is experienced.

Another correspondence of great interest is that which shows how the fourfold set of cosmic principles is the basis of the four in man:

1. Vishvānara (entire, universal) — the one physical basis from which the whole objective world started into existence;
2. *Hiranyagarbha* (golden womb) — or auric cosmic envelope;
3. *Ishvara*, the “Kingly One” — the Logos; the cosmic thread upon which universes are strung;
4. *Parabrahman* — the Supreme Being; the One in which all inheres.

It must be left to interested students to work out these correspondences for themselves, for to do so here would make this article far too lengthy.

Subba Row regarded Shri Krishna as an incarnation of the Logos itself descending “to the plane of humanity for some great thing that had to be done in the world”, so that every utterance of Sri Krishna was momentous. His teachings, as embodied in the Bhagavadgītā, were expounded in these lectures by Subba Row with extraordinary insight, and his ideas about them seem to have in them something of the quality of “revelation”. Studying these illuminating ideas (as well as other writings of his) enables us to understand why H.P.B. desired to have him collaborate with her in the composition of her wonderful book, *The Secret Doctrine*.

So great was Colonel Olcott’s admiration for Subba Row that in 1883 he instituted in his honour the Subba Row Medal. It was awarded for the best essay in esoteric science and philosophy — Aryan, Buddhist, Chaldean, Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian. In 1888 special subjects were prescribed; but since 1891, the Medal has been awarded to the author of a valuable contribution to Theosophy. It was awarded to H.P.B. herself in 1888.

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