

12 T. Subba Row, the “Expert” on “Hinduism”

The textual evidence of Annie Besant’s writings discussed above makes it clear that Indian thought played a pivotal role in the formation of her Theosophy. However, the question that must be asked is through which channels of reception did Besant receive her ideas of “Hinduism”? The “channels of reception” in question are numerous and part of a group of highly diversified discursive fields, one of which was the Indian Middle Class. An important actor in this particular field was T. Subba Row (1856–1890). In the following, Subba Row’s writings on Indian thought are presented chronologically and analyzed with the goal of identifying one specific line of Annie Besant’s uptake of Indian thought.

12.1 Biographical Sketch

Subba Row (Figure 9) was born on July 6, 1856, to a Telugu speaking Brahmin family at Cocanda (today Kakinada). He was educated at the Cocanda Hindu School before passing the entrance exams for admission to the Madras Presidency College, which he attended from 1872 to 1876, when he received his B.A. He then studied for a law degree, which he was awarded no later than 1880. At about the same time, while he was working at the High Court in Bombay, Subba Row came into contact with Theosophy.³²⁴ We know that he corresponded with Blavatsky and Olcott and waited for them “at eleven o’clock in the morning of 23 April 1882 when they arrived by boat from Calcutta.”³²⁵ Two days later he became an official member of the Theosophical Society.³²⁶ After a fiercely fought debate between Blavatsky and Row in the aftermath of his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* (see below), Row withdrew from active membership some time around 1889. The narrative goes that he continued to hold Olcott and Blavatsky in high esteem and that he kept up his habit of reading *The Theosophist* and *Lucifer*.³²⁷ However, there is more to the story than this. Subba Row’s “retirement” is interpreted by Johnson as a reaction to the Hodgson report and as part of the split in the Theosophical Society that led to the secession of a group known as the Advaita Society under the

324 Sven Eek, *Dâmodar: And the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1978), 662.

325 Nallan Chakravartulu Ramanujacharya, *A Lonely Disciple: Monograph on T. Subba Row, 1856–90*, 1st ed. (Adyar, Wheaton Ill. USA: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1993), 12.

326 Ramanujacharya, *A Lonely Disciple*, 12.

327 Eek, *Dâmodar*, 668.



Figure 9: Tallapragada Subba Row (1856–1890). (Photograph by an unknown photographer. 1879, glass plate. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre)

leadership of one “Swami Shankaracharya.”³²⁸ T. Subba Row died in 1890 of a “mysterious cutaneous disease.”³²⁹

12.2 State of the Research

The research on T. Subba Row is thin. There is currently only one monograph on him, a 1993 work by Nallan Chakravartulu Ramanujacharya.³³⁰ Sven Eek, meanwhile, provides a short overview of Subba Row’s life and thought.³³¹ In standard introductions to Theosophy, Subba Row is often only mentioned in connection with Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*. Campbell, for instance, notes that Subba Row had planned to collaborate with Blavatsky but ultimately refused to do

³²⁸ Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*, 51.

³²⁹ Henry S. Olcott, “Death of Subba Row,” *The Theosophist* XI, no. 130 (1890): 577.

³³⁰ Ramanujacharya, *A Lonely Disciple*.

³³¹ Eek, *Dāmodar*, 661–73.

so because “the manuscript was a hopeless jumble.”³³² A little more information is provided by Godwin, who writes that Subba Row was one of Blavatsky’s “known informants” “on esoteric Hindu teachings” and that he was “the one person known to have conversed with Blavatsky as an equal.”³³³ Chajes dedicated a whole sub-chapter to Subba Row. Unfortunately, not much new information is given therein with the exception of some hints at the possible, and highly plausible, uptake of some of Subba Row’s writing by Blavatsky.³³⁴ In the entry on Theosophy in the *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* he is only mentioned for his “challenge to Blavatsky’s interpretation of Theosophy,”³³⁵ which is not further elaborated upon. He is completely absent in the entry on the “Theosophical Society” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*.³³⁶ Despite the lack of research, T. Subba Row is commonly acknowledged to be the “Hindu expert”³³⁷ of the Theosophical Society and that he interpreted “Hinduism” in line with the Advaita Vedānta tradition has not been questioned. Eric Sharpe stands out for not using the term Advaita Vedānta, preferring “Vedantic” instead. This is, as I will explain below, much more accurate. Nevertheless, his account remains superficial when he writes: “When Subba Row goes on to say that this view ‘implies no idea of a personal God’, we may also see a combination of Vedantic and Theosophical-Gnostic ideas – Vedantic because the Real is high above the limitations of Personality and *nāmārūpa*, Theosophical for similar reasons, though with the added polemical edge of a dispute with accepted Judaeo-Christian theology.”³³⁸ This interpretation will be discussed in more detail below.

The narrative of the Advaita Vedānta interpretation of Subba Row’s thought was promoted by Jocelyn Godwin, who based his assessment on a single article, *A Personal and An Impersonal God*, from 1883. Godwin did not examine the development of Row’s ideas any further, paying no attention to his magnum opus on the *Bhagavadgītā*.³³⁹ Bergunder, by contrast, focuses specifically on Row’s interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā*. However, he seems to overlook the non-advaitic dimensions in Row’s interpretation when he writes: “The interpretation of T. Subba Row, a Telugu-Smartā Brahmin, outspokenly follows the Advaita

332 Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 40.

333 Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 351.

334 Chajes (née Hall), *Recycled Lives*, 177–78.

335 Santucci, “Theosophical Society,” 1120.

336 Viswanathan, “Theosophical Society”.

337 In Sharpe’s words, the “Theosophical Society’s Gita expert.” Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā*, 91. Similarly Nethercot. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, 206.

338 Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā*, 92.

339 Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 329.

Vedānta tradition. There is no personal God or any reception of Bhakti.”³⁴⁰ The most detailed account of Subba Row’s *Bhagavadgītā* interpretation is provided by Ronald Neufeldt. Although Neufeldt summarizes Row’s position over just a few pages, he is careful with his statement about the Advaita Vedānta influence on Row’s writings. He notes that Row saw the *Bhagavadgītā* as “essentially practical, designed to give directions to humanity for spiritual guidance in the evolutionary drama in which man realizes more and more his essential immortality.”³⁴¹ He also points to the debate between Blavatsky and Row (on which see below). Neufeldt also notices Row’s tendency in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* to propound an idea of individual progression and a final merging with the Logos without losing one’s own individuality.³⁴² In this respect, Neufeldt’s account is still one of the most accurate, but it is based only on Row’s *Bhagavadgītā* commentary and does not consider his other publications. In addition, the debate between Row and Blavatsky is not discussed any further by Neufeldt, and he also does not look more deeply into Row’s explanations about his theistic concept of *brahman* and his concept of individual divinity and immortality.

The following in-depth analyses of Subba Row’s writings highlight three important dimensions of his work. 1) If one takes Advaita Vedānta to be a strict “nondualism or monism”³⁴³ which understands individuality or “I-ness” as the major obstacle to be overcome,³⁴⁴ then it can be argued that Row based his early writings on Advaita Vedānta but had deviated from this line of thought by the time he wrote his *Bhagavadgītā* commentary, at the latest. As always, the picture is much more complicated because “Advaita Vedānta” is considerably more heterogeneous than the categorization might suggest. For example, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (1540–1647 A.D.)³⁴⁵ combines theistic elements with a *bhakti* tradition

340 “Die Interpretation des Telugu-Smarta-Brahmanen T. Subba Row folgt erklärtermaßen dem Advaita Vedānta und kennt keinen persönlichen Gott oder Bhakti-Vorstellungen.” Bergunder, “Die Bhagavadgita im 19. Jahrhundert,” 203.

341 Ronald W. Neufeldt, “A Lesson in Allegory: Theosophical Interpretations of the Bhagavadgita,” in *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavadgita*, ed. Robert N. Minor, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 13.

342 Neufeldt, “A Lesson in Allegory,” 13–15.

343 Christopher Bartley, “Vedānta: Advaita Vedānta and the Schools of Vedānta,” in Jacobsen et al., *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*.

344 Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 60.

345 As with many Indian philosophers, the dates are much debated. It seems, however, that the above given date has more or less been the consensus since the late 1940s. Sulochana A. Nachane, “The Date of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 30, 3/4 (1949): 326–31.

and a strict non-dualism in his Advaita Vedānta interpretation.³⁴⁶ It seems that Row’s interpretation tended in his later writings towards a theistic and individualized reading of “Advaita Vedānta.”

Bergunder explains that Subba Row’s interpretation was rooted in local Tamil discourse, which drew on a Shiva Siddhanta tradition rather than following a Sanskritist Advaita Vedānta reception.³⁴⁷ This would explain Row’s theistic Advaita Vedānta interpretation. Row’s knowledge of the Sanskrit discourse would have been mediated, if at all, through this local discourse. Therefore, he most likely had no knowledge of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s work.

I argue that although Subba Row was the most important Vedānta expert for the Theosophical Society, he was later silenced and expelled from the discourse on Hindu matters. Nevertheless, his individualized theistic version of “Advaita Vedānta” was vitally important for the later uptake of “Hindu” thought within the Society, and this was especially the case, so I claim, for the development of Annie Besant’s thought.

As mentioned above, Subba Row was among the early Indian informants of the Theosophical founders and contributed many articles to *The Theosophist*. The following discussion is based on several of his articles written between 1882 and 1889, as well as on his lengthy commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* written in 1886. Subba Row’s commentary of the *Bhagavadgītā* was first delivered as a series of speeches during the convention of the Theosophical Society in 1886 and then published in a revised version in *The Theosophist* in 1887.³⁴⁸ However, I refer to the version that appeared in book form in 1888, edited by Tookaram Tatya.

346 For general information on Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, see Karl H. Potter, “Madhusūdana Sarasvatī,” in *A Companion to the Philosophers*, ed. Robert L. Arrington, 1. publ. in paperback, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 16 (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001). For Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s combination of Krishna *bhakti* and Advaita, see, e.g., Lance Nelson, “Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the ‘Hidden Meaning’ of the ‘Bhagavadgītā’: Bhakti for the Advaitin Renunciate,” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23, no. 2 (1988): 73–89. For the Madhusūdana Sarasvatī major work *Advaitasiddhi* and its position in Indian literature, see Gianni Pellegrini, “‘Old Is Gold!’: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Way of Referring to Earlier Textual Tradition,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43, 2/3 (2015): 277–334.

347 Bergunder, “The early turn of the Theosophical Society to ‘Advaita Vedānta’ and ‘Hinduism’ in 1882–1883.”

348 Ramanujacharya, *A Lonely Disciple*, 13–14; Yves Mühlematter, “Theosophische Identität auf Verhandlungsbasis: Westliche Wurzeln theosophischer Bhagavadgītā-Interpretationen bei T. Subba Row und Annie Besant” (Masterarbeit, Philosophische Fakultät, Universität Freiburg, 20. Januar 2016), 25.

12.3 Divided Spheres of Expertise: Blavatsky's "Chaldeo-Tibetan Esoteric Doctrine" and Row's "Ancient Aryan Doctrine"

In 1882, an extract from a letter written by Row to H. P. Blavatsky was printed in *The Theosophist*. In this letter, Row discusses the entities that might appear in a séance. In his view, these phenomena are related to the human constitution, meaning the sevenfold principle of man. Interestingly, he discusses these principles by referring to an article Blavatsky had published in an earlier volume of *The Theosophist*. Blavatsky is represented as the expert on "the Chaldeo-Tibetan esoteric doctrines"³⁴⁹ and Subba Row as the authority on the "ancient Aryan doctrine," which he presents as the basis for all the Indian systems of knowledge. Although these doctrines "are fundamentally identical,"³⁵⁰ Subba Row examines Blavatsky's ideas critically. The "Aryan doctrine" is placed in a faraway past, "long before the Vedas were compiled," and "is attributed to one mysterious personage called Maha [In footnote: The very title of the present chief of the Esoteric Himalayan Brotherhood. – Ed.]."³⁵¹ The seven principles presented by Blavatsky are described in terms of the three concepts of "Prakriti," "Sakti," and "Brahmam," and their combinations.³⁵² Row does not mention the terms "Vedānta" or "Advaita" anywhere in the article. Blavatsky however mentioned them in her Appendix commenting on the letter. The differences in nomenclature for the several bodies or principles of the human condition, which are connected to nuanced concepts of evolution and often also of redemption according to several schools of thought, were negotiated fiercely within the Theosophical Society. As will be seen, this was the major issue in the conflict between Blavatsky and Row.

For our present investigation, it is important to see that Subba Row associates "seven *occult* powers with the seven principles."³⁵³ These "occult powers"

349 Tallapragada S. Row, "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man," 3, no. 4 (1882): 93.

350 Row, "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man," 93.

351 The footnote given in brackets is an addition by the editor, as is indicated by the "Ed." In this case, this means that it was added by either Henry Olcott or Helena Blavatsky. It seems much more likely that Blavatsky was responsible for the addition. Row, "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man," 93.

352 Row, "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man," 95. For a discussion and comparison to Blavatsky's, and others', ideas of the Theosophical constitution of man, see Harlass, "Die orientalische Wende der Theosophischen Gesellschaft," 188–96.

353 Row, "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man," 96.

are connected to stages of consciousness. Noting that “the mental and spiritual consciousness of the individual becomes the general consciousness of *Brahmam*³⁵⁴ when the barrier of individuality is wholly removed,”³⁵⁵ a clear goal for human progress is set. This view is similar to the claims made by Dvivedi and Besant. Comparing his “ancient Aryan doctrine” to Blavatsky’s “Chaldeo-Tibetan esoteric doctrine,” he explains:

The successive incarnations of Buddha, in fact, mean the successive transfer of this mysterious power³⁵⁶ or the impressions thereon. The transfer is only possible when the *Ma-hatma* [In footnote: The highest adept – Ed.] who transfers it, has completely identified himself with his seventh principle, has annihilated his *Ahankāram*³⁵⁷ and reduced it to ashes in CHIDAGNIKUNDUM³⁵⁸ and has succeeded in making his thoughts correspond with the eternal laws of nature and in becoming a co-worker, with nature.³⁵⁹

354 In his later writings, especially on the *Bhagavadgītā*, *brahman* is replaced by “the Logos” and the total removal of individuality is denied.

355 Row, “The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man,” 96.

356 “Sakti.” Row entered into a technical discussion in his letter, in which he constantly refers to Blavatsky and several concepts of Indian philosophy. Although seemingly presented systematically, many of his explanations remained unclear because he often refers to “occult powers” or “mysterious powers,” or simply states “the entity in question.” The mysterious power referred to here was most likely what he later called “the Logos” or, more correctly, “the ray of the Logos” (see below). The term does not appear in this article, in which he uses “sakti” instead. He does not use the term “sakti” in his later writings.

357 The *ahaṃkāra* is the idea of individuality, sometimes translated as “self-consciousness.” It is the second principle evolving from prakṛti in the Śāṃkhya philosophy (see Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta*, 111–12). In Advaita Vedānta, the *ahaṃkāra* is identified as the individualizing principle which must be overcome. For the meaning of *ahaṃkāra* in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, see Bartley, “Vedānta”.

358 “*Cidagnikuṇḍa*” is a term found in the *Saundaryalaharī*, which is usually attributed to Śaṅkara (see W. Norman Brown, *The Saundaryalaharī or Flood of Beauty: Traditionally Ascribed to Śaṅkārācārya*, Harvard Oriental Series 43 (Cambridge, Mass., 1958)). It can be translated as “fireplace of knowing.” The fireplace usually refers to the place where the holy fire was kindled in which the sacrifices were transformed to become accessible to the gods. Row interprets this here as the fireplace in one’s consciousness in which one’s own thoughts are sacrificed. Row certainly knew the *Saundaryalaharī* because he also refers to it in his *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita* (Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 54–55). The text was later translated by Subrahmanya Sastri and published by the Theosophical Publishing House (Śaṅkara, T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar and S. Subrahmanya Sastri, *Saundarya-Laharī (The Ocean of Beauty) Of Śrī Saṅkara-Bhagavat-Pāda* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1937)). Brown explains that he does not know of any early translations of the *Saundaryalaharī* into English. He names a translation into French from 1841 by A. Troyer. For his study, Brown used the Theosophical version. There was also an earlier partial translation by John Woodroff from 1917. Brown, *The Saundaryalaharī or Flood of Beauty*, vi.

359 Row, “The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man,” 96–97.

In the quotation above, it becomes palpable that Row is attempting to mediate between the idea of the total annihilation of the individual once *avidyā* is overcome and a notion of individuality in which the essential nature of the individual is maintained. Although the *ahaṃkāra*, which is identified as a false impression, must be annihilated, Row maintains that “the mysterious power” is transferred from one life to another. This differentiation between the *ahaṃkāra* and the transfer of power can be read as a reference to the difference between the monad and the individual physical body in Theosophical thought. The monad is the principle of reincarnation, which is eternal and therefore does not cease to be when it becomes aware of its nature. The realization of this nature leads, according to Row, to the realization of the laws of nature and therefore to “becoming a co-worker, with nature.” This is very close to the idea of the following of the “divine will” in Besant’s writings (see Chapter 8.2). The transfer of one’s consciousness to the seventh principle, or, in Row’s words, the identification with the seventh principle, is the characteristic of a Mahatma, a view that is also close to Besant’s ideas regarding the gaining of full consciousness on the highest planes of being. In this respect, the word “cit” in *cidagnikuṇḍa* is of great importance. It shows that the term “consciousness” was gradually identified with “cit,” with this term becoming a standard translation of “cit” within the Theosophical Society (see also Chapter 11.5).

In this letter, which was not originally intended for publication, Row formulates a theory of evolution that is connected to karmic necessity and human progress. Two motifs can be highlighted. 1) “Becoming a co-worker” with the “laws of nature” was set as the goal of this evolution. This is close to one of the main principles of human progress formulated by Besant in her description of the “Quickening of Evolution.” 2) The “gradually increasing velocity” of becoming an adept, which also refers to a concept of acceleration and quickening. The *ahaṃkāra*, referred to by Row as “*Ahankāram*,”³⁶⁰ is the main object of concern in Advaita Vedānta.³⁶¹

This article is an instructive example of how T. Subba Row claimed expertise on “Hindu” thought by relationizing it to Blavatsky’s Theosophy in an equalizing move. The article also provides an instance of an interaction in the field of encounters in the Indian Middle Class. The critique of Blavatsky’s views is remarkable. It is a) another instance of the early engagement with “Hinduism” in the Theosophical Society, in which every piece of information was welcomed and expertise in Hindu thought was accepted as being completely in the hands of the

360 Row, “The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man,” 95–96.

361 Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 60–61.

early Indian informants (see also Chapter 10). It is also b) indicative of Row’s agency in this shared discursive field. By following Row’s writings chronologically, it will be possible to map out diversified connections in the global colonial discursive continuum. This approach will also illustrate how Row gradually gained more and more influence, and ultimately attained a hegemonic position on all “Hindu” matters in the Theosophical Society. However, as will be seen, challenging Blavatsky’s position in an attempt to gain hegemony over all “occult” matters eventually led to the decline of Row’s influence in the Society.

12.4 Claiming Hegemony on “Hindu” Matters: Relationalization Between Swami Paramahansa and T. Subba Row

The next volume of *The Theosophist* included an article by Swami Paramahansa.³⁶² The Swami argued that the Bible should be interpreted allegorically and that a commentary should be added to it.³⁶³ He explained that the Bible, meaning the Old and the New Testament, should be studied successively, because the New Testament contains a more developed doctrine which should only be approached “after going through the routine of the Old Testament.”³⁶⁴ The article is of paramount interest because a) the Swami suggested that certain Advaita concepts should be adopted as an eighth principle of the human constitution, against which Subba Row argued fiercely, and b) the Swami also suggested that William Oxley, who had written a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* which was debated critically in *The Theosophist*,³⁶⁵ should write the proposed occult commentary to the Bible.

362 The Swami Paramahansa was referred to as “a Swami” in an earlier article and in the later articles he was simply called “The Swami of Almora.” He died on the 31st of December 1883 (K. C. Mookerji, “Death of the Swami of Almora,” *The Theosophist* 5, no. 5 (1884): 123). It is further reported that the Theosophists opened a fund for the late Swami (Kumud C. Mukerjee, “Fund in Honour of the Late Swami of Almora,” *The Theosophist* 5, no. 6 (1884): 49). This is interesting because of the fiercely fought argument between the Swami, Subba Row, and Blavatsky (see below). It seems that he was still held in great respect. The name “Paramahansa” can be translated as “highest swan,” and is a title for distinguished spiritual teachers. It is also a title that is included in the stages of initiation by Annie Besant.

363 Swami Paramahansa and Tallapragada S. Row, “Adwaita Philosophy,” *The Theosophist* 4, no. 5 (1883): 118.

364 Paramahansa and Row, “Adwaita Philosophy,” 118.

365 For more information on this debate, see Bergunder, “Die Bhagavadgita im 19. Jahrhundert,” 199–201.

Subba Row responded to the Swami’s suggestion, in a commentary printed directly below the article, not by rejecting the idea that Oxley should write such a commentary but by pointing to commentaries that were already provided in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Perfect Way*. More importantly, he asks, “why should the learned Swami of Almora insist upon the esoteric interpretation of the Bible alone without any concern for the Vedas, the *Tripitakas* and the *Upanishads*, all three far more important.”³⁶⁶ We can see both that Row takes the stance here of the expert on all things “Hindu,” and that he decidedly attributes a higher status to the Hindu scriptures than to the Bible. This hierarchical relationizing can be read as part of a strategy of relationalization. Row notes: “The statement [of the Swami] is not quite in accordance with the doctrines of Advaita philosophy.”³⁶⁷ In doing so, he declares himself to be an authority on Advaita Vedānta not just for a European audience but also in an interaction with an Indian Swami. This is the first instance in which Row claims a hegemonic position within the discourse. However, this position was based on the authority of Helena Blavatsky, because it was she who had first suggested that there was something inaccurate in Swami Paramahansa’s article and she who had told Row to investigate it and to comment on it. Blavatsky wrote:

As the subjoined letter, comes from such a learned source, we do not feel justified in commenting upon it editorially, our personal knowledge of the Advaita doctrine being unquestionably very meagre when contrasted with that of a Paramahansa. Yet we felt a strong suspicion that; whether owing to a mistranslation or an ‘original misconception’ there was an error with regard to Tadpada, called herein the 8th principle.³⁶⁸

This fits well with the early Theosophical engagement with “Hinduism” mentioned above, in which European Theosophists initially based their knowledge of “Hinduism” on their Indian fellows instead of claiming expertise for themselves in such matter (see also Chapter 10). It is also noteworthy that Blavatsky indicates her respect towards the Swami by referring to him as a “Paramahansa,” this being the title of the second to last stage of initiation in the Theosophical Society.

The Swami reacted to Subba Row’s article by criticizing him on several points in two articles that were published in 1883.³⁶⁹ Blavatsky’s reaction in the

366 Paramahansa and Row, “Advaita Philosophy,” 118.

367 Paramahansa and Row, “Advaita Philosophy,” 118.

368 Paramahansa and Row, “Advaita Philosophy,” 118.

369 The Swami of Almora, “In Re Advaita Philosophy,” *The Theosophist* 4, no. 6 (1883): 128–30; The Swami of Almora, “The Swami of Almora to His Opponents,” 4, no. 10 (1883): 246–48.

editorial notes³⁷⁰ was harsh. She wrote concerning some details regarding the nomenclature of Brahma, Parabrahma, and Maha Iswara, that “we are sorry to say to the learned Paramahansa [!] that he does not know what he is talking about. He is *no Esoteric Adwaitee* and – we close the discussion as becoming quite useless.”³⁷¹ She further asked:

Shall we believe every exponent of the Vedas, the Shastree of every sect, only because he may be an authority to those who belong to the same denomination with him, or shall we make a judicious selection, following but the dictates of our reason, which tells us that he is most right and nearer to truth, who diverges the less from logic and – Science?³⁷²

The article provides a striking example of a discursive dynamic that was common in the Orientalist engagement with “Hindu” thought, at least in the 19th century. It is also structurally analogous to the dynamics identified in 10.3.2. In the first phase, the colonialists were dependent on local informants and translators and they accepted the native intelligentsia as teachers. In the second phase, however, the local teachers were gradually expelled from the discourse³⁷³ because they were denied both access to universities and, most importantly, institutional markers of distinction such as professorships. However, this process was much more nuanced than a clean division into two phases might suggest, and there are instances in which Indians were also successful in European or American academic institutions. This is true, for example – at least to a certain extent – for Kashinath Trimbak Telang (see Chapter 10.6.3), Rajendralal Mitra (see Chapter 10.5), and for Manilal Dvivedi (see Chapter 11).

This discursive dynamic presents itself in a particular way in the Theosophical Society. The founders claimed a complete openness towards all religious belief systems and presented Theosophy as non-dogmatic “philosophy.” Nonetheless, they had very specific ideas about “the truth.” In the Society, the idea of this total openness stood against dogmatic claims that were directed against any “sectarian” views (see also Chapter 10.6.2). These claims can be interpreted as attempts to close the discourse in order to secure the orthodoxy of the Theosophical teachings, and the label of “sectarianism” can be understood as a relationizing. What is especially interesting here is the role played by Indian Theosophists in this discourse. It is instructive to note that Row’s reaction was even harsher than that of Blavatsky. By referring to several Indian scriptures, albeit without quoting them

370 The notes are simply signed “Ed.” It is most likely that they were added by Blavatsky, but some of the replies indicate that Subba Row is reacting directly to the Swami’s critique.

371 Swami of Almora, “The Swami of Almora to His Opponents,” 248.

372 Swami of Almora, “The Swami of Almora to His Opponents,” 248.

373 See, e.g., Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture*, 41–61.

directly, he accused the Swami of misunderstanding Indian philosophy. The main bone of contention was whether *mūlaprakṛti*³⁷⁴ is dissolved in a *pralaya*³⁷⁵ or whether it is eternal. Row claimed that *mūlaprakṛti* is eternal because there is no difference between Spirit and matter. Turning directly to the Swami, Subba Row writes that “if this Mulaprakriti that I have attempted to describe is not noticed in Brahman according to the ‘practical experience of hermits,’ all that I can say is that their experience is different from the experience of Sankaracharya, Vyasa, Goudapada and several other Rishis.”³⁷⁶ Subba Row claims here to be able to reexperience what Śaṅkara had experienced. This is an interesting claim, not only for the history of Theosophy but also in the light of the history of Religious Studies. Phenomenological scholars of Religious Studies have also claimed that it is possible to “reexperience” (religious) experiences as a means of understanding and comparing (foreign or ancient) religions. In addition, he holds that Advaita Vedānta is the only source of authority for him because he thinks that,

it is unnecessary for me to say any thing about the Swamy’s views regarding Other systems of philosophy. I am only concerned with the esoteric Arhat philosophy and the Advaita philosophy as taught by Sankaracharya. The remaining quotations from the works of various authors, contained in the Swamy’s article are, in my humble opinion, irrelevant.³⁷⁷

374 Row uses both terms, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*. For *prakṛti* he often writes *mūlaprakṛti*. By insisting on the eternal being of both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, Row is in line with the Śāṃkhya understanding of these categories. It is likely that Row draws his knowledge about *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* from Monier-Williams, because Monier-Williams also includes the different renderings for *prakṛti*, “*Mūla-prakṛiti*” and “*A-vyakta*” that were also used by Row. Monier-Williams further claims that the Śāṃkhya-system propounds a “doctrine of evolution.” Monier Monier-Williams, *Indian Wisdom: Or, Examples of the Religious, Philosophical, and Ethical Doctrines of the Hindus*, 2nd ed. (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1875), With a Brief History of the Sanskrit Literature and some Account of the Past and Present Condition of India, Moral and Intellectual, 89–93. The term *Prakṛti* is composed of three parts: the root *vkṛ*, the prefix *pra-*, and the suffix *-ktin*. The word has many different meanings and is found as a technical term, as well as commonly meaning “first,” “original,” etc. In Śāṃkhya-philosophy it is used to talk about the “ultimate material principle” in opposition to *puruṣa*, “the principle of consciousness.” “In Śāṃkhya-Yoga for the ultimate material principle as well as the eight material causal principles” (Knut A. Jacobsen, “Prakṛti,” in Jacobsen et al., *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*).

375 “*Pralaya*” means a disintegration of the world after “*kalpa*.” The idea of cyclic creation and disintegration is a distinctive feature of Indian concepts of time and ages. In a *mahāpralaya*, the whole universe is disintegrated. For a comprehensive overview, see Michaels, *Der Hinduismus*, 330–35; Erich Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie: Die Philosophie des Veda und des Epos. Der Buddha und der Jina. Das Samkhya und das klassische Yoga-System* 1 (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1953), 363–64.

376 Tallapragada S. Row, “Prakṛiti and Puruṣa,” *The Theosophist* 4, no. 10 (1883): 249.

377 Row, “Prakṛiti and Puruṣa,” 250.

By a process of hierarchically evaluative relationizing, Row excludes most of the Swami’s claims from the discourse. Despite the Theosophist’s claim to be open to any religion or philosophy, the Swami is essentially silenced for holding views that do not conform to Theosophical orthodoxies.

This exchange provides an interesting piece of evidence for the growing hegemonic position within the Theosophical Society during the early 1880s of Subba Row’s interpretation of Advaita Vedānta. It seems that Row had by this time become the expert on Advaita Vedānta matters, which were equated with “Hinduism” as a whole, especially when the “real doctrine” had to be defended.

12.5 Contesting the Divided Spheres by Equalizing Relationizing: The Letter by H.X.

That Row was gaining the status of “expert in Hinduism” in the Theosophical Society is illustrated further by two articles in *The Theosophist* from the February and March 1883 issues. In the first, Row reacts to a letter by “H.X.,” a pen name of A. O. Hume,³⁷⁸ that was published in the December 1882 issue of *The Theosophist*. The question he deals with is the being of God, that is, the question of whether there is a personal god, an impersonal god, or no God at all. It seems that the Theosophists felt the need to position themselves with regard to this question, as Subba Row points out.

The generality of the public (at least in this country [India]) are accustomed to associate every religious and social movement with some particular belief regarding the subject under consideration [meaning the question of the being of God]. [. . .] An association, like the Theosophical Society, composed of various religionists and established for the purposes of religious and scientific enquiry, is a novelty to them. Consequently, enquiries are constantly being made regarding the views of the founders of the Theosophical Society and our great Teachers of the Himavat about the questions under consideration.³⁷⁹

The Secret Doctrine would not be published for another five years and *Isis Unveiled* was more concerned with rejecting Christianity than formulating a concise doctrine. In addition, the Theosophists had not yet written exhaustively on Indian religion, although, as the answer to the Swami’s letters discussed above shows, there was already a distinct idea of what an “esoteric” understanding amounted to and what was to be excluded. Against this background, the stance

³⁷⁸ For a discussion of the letter by H.X., see Harlass, “Die orientalische Wende der Theosophischen Gesellschaft,” 144–48.

³⁷⁹ Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 104.

of the Theosophical Society towards the questions identified by Row was yet to be negotiated.

The founders of the Theosophical Society insisted that Theosophy was not a doctrinal system of thought, and, as such, they understood tolerance and heterodoxy to be essential. As a result, this idea of total openness was maintained, and, indeed, some might say that it is still alive in the Society today. Although Theosophical teachings were formulated in *Isis Unveiled* (1877), *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and works such as Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) or *The Perfect Way* (1881) by Maitland and Kingsford, those formulating these teachings were always presented as voices in a discourse. Similarly, in his article, Row attempts to "state the general principles of the Adwaita and the Arhat doctrines on the subject under consideration and leave it to my readers to decide whether they indicate a belief in a *personal* or an *impersonal* God, or whether they amount to Atheism." Theosophy was thus presented as an offshoot of "Arhat doctrines" (Blavatsky) and "Adwaita" (Subba Row). The distinction here has shifted from "the Chaldeo-Tibetan esoteric doctrines" (Blavatsky) and "ancient Aryan doctrine" (Subba Row) in 1882 to "Arhat doctrines" (Blavatsky) and "Adwaita" (Subba Row) in 1883. But, in the end, Row leaves "it to my readers to decide whether they indicate a belief in a *personal* or an *impersonal* God, or whether they amount to Atheism."³⁸⁰

Row presents his ideas as being open to negotiation, a common topos for maintaining the notion of total openness mentioned above. His use of this topos can also be read as a strategy aimed at equalizing relationizing, since it was possible, against this background, for Row to present "Hindu" thought as being just as important to Theosophy as Blavatsky's presentation of Tibetan-Buddhist ideas. The notion of "Arhat" was generally understood in Theosophical parlance to be one who has almost attained Buddhahood³⁸¹ and who could perceive and access "Nirvana while yet on earth."³⁸² The name "Arhat," and the attributes associated with it, later came to be attributed to the adepts of the Theosophical Society. Row's presentation of "the general principles of the Adwaita and the Arhat doctrines" can be interpreted as an attempt to undermine Blavatsky's authority. The

³⁸⁰ Row, "A Personal and an Impersonal God," 104.

³⁸¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 291; Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Trübner & Co., 1883), 1–17; For the use of the term "Arhat" in later developments of scales of initiation, especially in Leadbeater's Theosophy, see French, "The Theosophical Masters," 192–193; 286–294.

³⁸² Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* Vol. II – Theology (New York, London: J.W. Bouton; Bernard Quaritch, 1877), 320.

article provides an example of the discursive dynamics prevalent in the Theosophical Society and shows how the Indian Theosophists could claim their positions of authority in this field. The narrative of complete tolerance towards all religions connected numerous discursive fields of (seemingly) egalitarian power relations. This claim was an intrinsic part of the Theosophical narrative, but the openness was de facto much narrower than the narrative would have us believe. Nevertheless, this claim opened up the possibility of mutual interaction between followers of different religions and philosophies and triggered multifaceted processes of hybridization which had the effect of laying the ground for the post-Blavatskyan development of Theosophy. “Hinduism” was to become synonymous with Advaita Vedānta.

12.6 Recontextualizing Mill by Translating *Parabrahman* and Relationizing it to (Un)Consciousness

Row begins the thematic part of his article, *A Personal and an Impersonal God*, by referring to John Stuart Mill. In the Victorian age, Mill stood as the epitome of Liberalism and the idea of progress. However, his importance for Theosophical thought ran deeper, as in various of his works he had argued that progress is based on successive stages of evolution.³⁸³ Row’s inclusion of Mill served as a marker of the compatibility of Hindu and European philosophy. Here “Mill’s philosophy” can be read in this instance as “Western” philosophy *in toto* and it is as such that it is recontextualized in Row’s Advaita Vedānta. Row explains that Mill “came to the conclusion that matter or the so called external phenomena are but the creation of our mind”³⁸⁴ and that “the very idea of a mind existing separately as an entity distinct from the states of consciousness which are supposed to inhere in it, is in his opinion illusory.”³⁸⁵ Although Mill claimed these “truths,” which were, Row maintains, in line with Advaita philosophy, he also confessed, again according Row, “that psychological analysis did not go any further, the mysterious link which connects together the train of our states of consciousness and gives rise to our Ahankaram in this condition of existence, still remains an incomprehensible mystery to Western psychologists.”³⁸⁶

³⁸³ Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 18. See also Chapter 8.2.

³⁸⁴ Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 104.

³⁸⁵ Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 104.

³⁸⁶ Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 104.

This recontextualization is followed immediately by hierarchical relationizing. The “great Adwaiter philosophers of ancient Aryavarta,”³⁸⁷ in contrast to Mill as a token for European philosophy *in toto*, had already examined these problems more deeply, Row claims. Mill, as a metonym for “Western” philosophy, is recontextualized in the context of Row’s Advaitism, and is then relationized hierarchically, pushing “Western” philosophy down the epistemological scale and likewise positioning Advaita Vedānta at the top. This move is then followed by another process of hybridization that involved translating “(un)consciousness” with “*parabrahman*,” and vice versa. Human beings, or rather liberated beings, Row continues, are able to perceive reality on seven different planes of consciousness, of which the highest is rather “a condition of perfect Unconsciousness.”³⁸⁸ These stages of consciousness and the unconscious condition are, Row explains, part of the human evolutionary cycle.

Thus we have 6 states of consciousness, either objective or subjective for the time being as the case may be, and a state of perfect unconsciousness which is the beginning and the end of all conceivable states of consciousness, corresponding to the states of differentiated matter and its original undifferentiated basis which is the beginning and the end of all Cosmic evolutions.³⁸⁹

Considering Mill’s argument about objective and subjective reality, Row claims that “the various conditions of the Ego and the Non-Ego were but the appearances of one and the same entity – the ultimate state of unconsciousness.”³⁹⁰ In “the fact that this grand universe is in reality but a huge aggregation of various states of consciousness, they will not be surprised to find that the ultimate state of unconsciousness is considered as Parabrahmam by the Adwaites.”³⁹¹ Translation precedes another movement of relationizing. (Un)consciousness was already “considered” by the “Adwaites,” and this can be read as identifying a second stage of epistemological relationizing. This first part of *A Personal and an Impersonal God* provides a valuable illustration of the idea of meshing advanced in 11.9.

387 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 105.

388 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 105.

389 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 105.

390 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 105.

391 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 104–5.

12.7 Translating “Adwaitism” and Relationizing it to Blavatsky’s “Arhat Doctrine”

Row begins the second part of his article by saying that “in the opinion of *Adwaites*, the *Upanishads* and the *Brahmasūtras* fully support their views on the subject.”³⁹² He thus establishes the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras* as primary authorities for Advaita Vedānta. This is of course what one would expect, as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtras* are among the most frequently cited works in the Advaita tradition, but it is striking that the *Bhagavadgītā* is not mentioned by Row in this article, given its later importance. The problem Row discusses in the first part of the article is elaborated upon in the second. He explains:

the Aryan psychologists have traced this current of mental states to its source – the eternal *Chinmatra*³⁹³ existing everywhere. When the time for evolution comes this germ of *Pragna*³⁹⁴ unfolds itself and results ultimately as *Cosmic ideation*.³⁹⁵ Cosmic ideas are the

392 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 138.

393 Monier-Williams names two passages which include the term “Chinmatra,” or rather “cinmātra.” One is the *Vedānta Sārā*, which is, as its name says, a text from the Vedānta tradition. The other text mentioned by Monier-Williams is the *Kaivalyopanishad*, which is received by the Shaiva tradition. He does not give any further information about, nor a translation of, the term. The *Vedānta Sārā* was first translated by E. Röer in 1845 (Eduard H. H. Röer, “Védānta-Sāra: Or Essence of the Védānta, an Introduction into Védānta Philosophy by Sadānanda Parivrajakāchārya,” *The Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* XIV, Part I (1845); Translated from the Original Sanscrit by E. Roer, Librarian to the Asiatic Society of Bengal). It seems plausible to suppose that Row takes the word from the *Vedānta Sārā* because his presentation of “Hindu” thought follows the Vedānta rather than Shaiva tradition. In addition, it seems that the text was well known within the Theosophical Society. William Ward’s translation was included in an anthology edited by Tookaram Tatya in 1888. William Ward, “Vedānt Sāra of Sadānda Swāmi,” in Tatya, *A Compendium of the Raja Yoga Philosophy*, 83–161.

394 *Pragna* – *prāṇa* can be translated as “life breath” or “respiration” (Monier-Williams and Leumann, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 705). In the Theosophical translation, it was used to convey the similar idea of the “appropriated life,” also known as the *jīva* in the body. Besant, *The Seven Principles of Man*, 16. It was sometimes counted as the second or the third principle of the human constitution. Julie Chajes (née Hall), “The Saptaparna: The Meaning and Origins of the Theosophical Septenary Constitution of Man,” *Theosophical History* XIII, no. 4 (2007): 14.

395 This idea of “cosmic ideation” fits perfectly into Monier-Williams interpretation of Plato. Monier-Williams wrote: “Plato does not always state his theory of ideas very intelligibly, and probably modified them in his later works. He seems, however, to have insisted on the doctrine that mind preceded, and gave rise to matter, or, in other words, that the whole material world proceeded from or was actually produced by the Creator according to the idea or pattern of a world existing eternally and for ever the same in his own mind. [. . .] Similarly, Plato seems to have held that the human mind has existing within it certain abstract ideas or ideal forms which precede and are visibly manifested in the actual concrete forms around us.”

conceptions of all the conditions of existence in the Cosmos existing in what may be called the universal mind (the demiurgic mind of the Western Kabalists).³⁹⁶

Evolution is understood as the unfolding of a germ according to “Cosmic ideation.” Which is the

real source of the states of consciousness in every individual. Cosmic ideation exists everywhere; but when placed under restrictions by a material *Upadhi*³⁹⁷ it results as the consciousness of the individual inhering in such *Upadhi*. Strictly speaking, an *Adwaitee* will not admit the objective existence of this material *Upadhi*. From his stand-point it is *Maya* or illusion which exists as a *necessary condition of pragna*.³⁹⁸

These *Upadhis* form the human bodies in which the “Universal mind” is encompassed. Hence the

Universal mind or Cosmic ideation becomes more and more limited and modified by the various *Upadhis* of which a human being is composed; and when the action or influence of these various *Upadhis* is successively controlled, the mind of the individual human being is placed *en rapport* with the Universal mind and his ideation is lost in cosmic ideation.³⁹⁹

Row’s comments here can be read as advice for practical body and mind control. As we have seen, Besant elaborated a similar system of techniques as a preliminary stage of initiation, and in doing so she developed ideas first formulated by Row. This passage is also one of the first instances in which terms such as “Upadhi” and “pragna,” which were to become an integral part of the Theosophical tradition, were translated into Theosophy. Row further assures the reader that “the eternal Principle is precisely the same in both the systems and they agree in

(Monier-Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, 113.) This quotation is an interesting instance of the early Indologist attitude towards India. All concepts could be compared with Greek and or Christian concepts. This idea of universalism was not uncommon in early Indologist writings (see also Chapter 9 and 10). Monier-Williams’ Plato reception is likely to have also been part of the model for Annie Besant’s concept of “physics” and the evolution of matter (see, e.g., Besant, *Reincarnation*, 30–31). A thorough analysis of these (possible) interdependencies remains a research desideratum.

396 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 138.

397 *Upādhi* was understood in the Theosophical tradition as a body belonging to the seven principles of men (Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 186). Deussen explains that the “Upādhi” is “sūkshmam cañram, – in short, the whole psychological apparatus” (Deussen, *Outlines of Indian philosophy*, 59–60). Wilson holds that it refers to the “disguises of the spirit.” Cited in Monier-Williams and Leumann, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 213.

398 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 138.

399 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 138.

denying the existence of an extra-Cosmic God.”⁴⁰⁰ “Both systems” here refers to Subba Row’s “Adwaita” and Blavatsky’s “Arhat doctrines.” We can see, then, that the second part of the article can also be read as meshing. In a first step, Row translates several terms into Theosophy and he then goes on to equalize his “Advaita” with Blavatsky’s “Arhat doctrine.”

12.8 Row’s *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*: An Accelerated Way to *Mokṣa*

The *Discourses* are a verbatim record of a series of lectures given at the annual convention of the Theosophical Society in 1886. The lectures were first published in 1887 in *The Theosophist* and then republished the following year by Tookaram Tatya.⁴⁰¹ Row frequently drew directly on the *Bhagavadgītā* in his talks, quoting a total of 48 verses from Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 15, as well as making general reference to Chapters 10 and 11. With fifteen direct quotes taken from it, Chapter 8 is the most prolifically cited chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* in Row’s lectures. In addition to quoting the *Bhagavadgītā*, Row also refers to the *Manusmṛti*, the *Purāṇas*, to Śaṅkara’s *Soundaryalahari*, and to Vedānta, Śāṃkhya, and Buddhist scriptures in general. He also includes references to *Light on the Path* and *Esoteric Buddhism*, to the *Idyll of the White Lotus*, and to the forthcoming *The Secret Doctrine*.

As Sharpe observes, Subba Row understood the *Bhagavadgītā* as a book of initiation.⁴⁰² Row explains that “the position of Arjuna is intended to typify that of a chela, who is called upon to face the Dweller on the Threshold. As the guru

400 Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 139.

401 Mühlematter, “Theosophische Identität auf Verhandlungsbasis”. I presented a description of the content of Row’s work in my MA thesis, to which the reader can refer for further references. However, since this work was completed more than five years ago, it seems necessary to give another description here, as many aspects were overlooked by me at the time. In the paragraph presented here, I will focus less on the *Bhagavadgītā* and more on Subba Row’s ideas about evolution and individual progress as they are connected to initiation. Subba Row interprets the *Bhagavadgītā* as a guide for chelas. Many of the main ideas presented in my MA thesis, especially the “Kritik an Blavatsky,” Chapter 12, seem to remain valid. It will be necessary to discuss some other points in more depth, especially Row’s relation to the Advaita Vedānta philosophy.

402 Sharpe notes that “During the 1880s, then, we have been able to observe among Theosophists a growing interest in the Gita as a ‘book of initiations’ and a quarry of Gnostic doctrine, which needed to be interpreted not historically but allegorically if its secrets were to be unlocked.” Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā*, 93.

prepares his chela for the trials of initiation by philosophical teaching, so at this critical point Krishna proceeds to instruct Arjuna.”⁴⁰³ The reference to Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* is obvious here. The expression “the Dweller on the Threshold” was well-known among Theosophists and the reference here would surely have been familiar to Row's audience.⁴⁰⁴ In Row's presentation, this reference has a double-sided effect. On the one hand, it recontextualizes the *Bhagavadgītā* within the wider context of books on initiation, and in doing so connects it to occultist discursive fields of the time. On the other hand, Row translates well-known characters from the *Mahābhārata*, such as Arjuna and Krishna, into the context of Lytton's *Zanoni*, and recontextualizes both Arjuna (the chela) and Krishna (the “Dweller on the Threshold”) in a *guruparamparā* (“the guru prepares his chela”).⁴⁰⁵ These two steps relate the idea of the *guruparamparā* to the Theosophical master narrative. Here we see *expressis verbis* how Subba Row relationized “Hinduism” to “Theosophy” and how both currents became hybridized in this process of meshing.

12.8.1 Guru/Chela-Relations as a Precondition for Human Progress

The relationship between gurus and chelas had already been an issue in Row's writings in 1883, as can be seen in a comment on a letter in *The Statesman*. Here Row identifies the acceptance of a chela by his teacher as the prime prerequisite for making “abnormal progress spiritually and morally,”⁴⁰⁶ which is one of the key elements in Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*, as well as in the writings of Besant and Dvivedi (see Chapters 8, 9, and 11). Row explained: “Since the Chela wants to make abnormal progress spiritually and morally, he has naturally to submit to abnormal tests. He has to become victor and trample under foot every temptation, to show himself worthy of taking his rank among the gods of true science.”⁴⁰⁷ This idea is connected to the chela's total submission to the guru.

⁴⁰³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, III.

⁴⁰⁴ See Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Zanoni*, Novels of Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton – Library Edition XXV (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862), Vol. II, 5–98. For more information on Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, see Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 115–30. Godwin explains that the formulation of the “Dweller on the Threshold” first appears in Lytton's *Zanoni*, but the underlying idea was already common in “occultism” at the time.

⁴⁰⁵ *Guruparamparā* means a successive tradition of teachers who teach their knowledge to their pupils. This became a characteristic of an Advaita Vedānta tradition which emerged sometime between the 7th and 13th centuries A.D. in a Tamil-speaking context. Malinar, *Hinduism*, 71.

⁴⁰⁶ Tallapragada S. Row, “Gurus and Chelas,” *Supplement to the Theosophist* 4, no. 11 (1883): 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Row, “Gurus and Chelas,” 2.

“There is no limit, we say, as to how far the Guru can go. He can do *anything* with his Chela, and the latter has to submit, or give up the SCIENCE for ever. A Guru is regarded as God. And he who has placed himself under His care had better submit, or take the consequences.”⁴⁰⁸ The first step in this process of initiation is, Row maintains, to “kill out all our passions and desires, not that they are all necessarily evil in themselves, but that their influence must be annihilated before we can establish ourselves on the higher planes.”⁴⁰⁹ This must be done under the guidance of a guru who “prepares his chela for the trials of initiation by philosophical teaching.”⁴¹⁰ This idea of the guru/chela relationship was identified by Row as the main moral teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā*.⁴¹¹

12.8.2 The Three Theosophical Principles in the Light of Subba Row’s Interpretation of the *Bhagavadgītā*

As we saw in Chapter 7, above, the teacher/student relation was a fundamental principle in the Theosophical Society, with the idea being repeated throughout the Theosophical hierarchy. As we have seen, the equation between guru and God is an important topic for Row. In his *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, he describes Krishna as an adept who taught Arjuna. In this light, Row identifies the *Bhagavadgītā* as “essentially practical in its character and teachings, like the discourses of all religious teachers who have appeared on the scene of the world to give a few practical directions to mankind for their spiritual guidance.”⁴¹² He claims that there is a philosophy behind the practical teachings, which must be examined and understood before the practical teachings can be applied in one’s life. This philosophy is a

system of practical instruction for spiritual guidance [it] will have to be judged, first, with reference to the nature and condition of man and the capabilities that are locked up in him; secondly, with reference to the cosmos and the forces to which man is subject and the circumstances under which he has to progress.⁴¹³

The ideas in this quotation bear some resemblance to the last of the three objectives given for the Theosophical Society. The final objective wants “to investigate

⁴⁰⁸ Row, “Gurus and Chelas,” 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, III.

⁴¹⁰ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, III.

⁴¹¹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, III–V.

⁴¹² Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 2.

⁴¹³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 3.

unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man" (see below). The Theosophical objectives will be discussed in this excursus, and in particular the idea of investigating the "occult" powers of humans, which seems to be a later addition.

It is unclear when these principles were formulated for the first time and when they were reworded. Paradigmatically, Lubelsky dates the initial written formulation of the three principles to 1878, seeing them as emerging in reaction to the quarrels with the Arya Samaj.⁴¹⁴ Based on Olcott's account in *Old Diary Leaves*, Lubelsky identifies the following three objectives:

1. The study of occult science;
2. The formation of a nucleus of universal brotherhood; and
3. The revival of Oriental literature and philosophy.

Olcott's account was written in 1895.⁴¹⁵ It is thus not clear whether these principles had already been formulated in 1878 or whether they were retrospectively dated back to 1878 by Olcott.

Julie Chajes also refers to the three principles, but she does not give any reference for them. She writes:

In 1896, these were reformulated to what they remain today:

- [1] to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour;
- [2] to encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science; and
- [3] to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.⁴¹⁶

The earliest formulation of these principles is found in the appendix to Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy*, 1889. There one reads:

The simplest expression of the objects of the Society is the following: –

First. – To form the nucleus of a Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

Second. – To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences.

Third. – A third object – pursued by a portion only of the members of the Society – is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.⁴¹⁷

414 Similarly, Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, 78.

415 Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society*, 3 vols. 1 (New York, London, Madras: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd; The Proprietors of the "Theosophist," 1895), 401.

416 Chajes (née Hall), *Recycled Lives*, 24.

417 Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 308.

One of the earliest formulation by Besant of these principles is included in the first issue of the *Theosophical Manuals* published in 1892. In its annex we read:

FIRST. – To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour. SECOND. – To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences, and demonstrate the importance of that study. THIRD. – To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychic powers latent in man. [. . .] The acceptance of the Second and Third objects of the Society is optional with those desiring to enter, the First – Universal Brotherhood – being the only one to which it is expected all applicants will subscribe.⁴¹⁸

It is interesting that Besant only declares the first of the three to be a necessary condition for becoming a member of the Theosophical Society. A conclusive investigation of when, and to what purpose, the three Theosophical principles were formulated and written down remains a research desideratum, but Row’s lecture on the *Bhagavadgītā* suggests that these principles, in at least an unwritten form, were circulating in Theosophical circles by 1886.

12.8.3 Practical Advice and Human Progress: The Fourfold Human Constitution in Correspondence to Cosmology

I argue that Row was primarily concerned with the last of the three objectives of the Theosophical Society, which aims at the improvement of humanity on a practical level. In this vein, he explains that,

unless there is a definite aim or a goal to reach, [. . .] it will be almost impossible to say whether any particular instruction is likely to conduce to the welfare of mankind or not. Now I say these instructions can only be understood by examining [. . .] the goal towards which all evolutionary progress is tending.⁴¹⁹

In the quotation above, Row uses the phrase “evolutionary progress,” which did not appear in his earlier articles, and he attributes a distinctive goal to this progress. In addition, he combines “evolution” and the “goal” of that evolution with the idea of “instruction” which aims at the improvement of human beings. In consequence, this instruction aims at the acceleration of evolution. As we have seen, self-improvement as a means for the acceleration of evolution is of pivotal importance for Besant’s concept of the “Quickening of Evolution” (see Chapter 8). According to Row’s reading of the *Bhagavadgītā*, this “instruction” is based on a four-fold classification of the human constitution. These four

⁴¹⁸ Besant, *The Seven Principles of Man*, 83–84.

⁴¹⁹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 4.

principles are those that are “capable of having separate existences, and [. . .] are associated with four *upadhis* which are further associated in their turn with four distinct states of consciousness.”⁴²⁰ The idea of consciousness is central to the notion of human progress in Row's understanding of the matter. We have seen above that this idea also played a pivotal role not only in Besant's notion of initiation but also in those of Blavatsky and Dvivedi. The term “consciousness” as it was recontextualized in the Theosophical Society came to be repeated in the Theosophical tradition. It is a culmination of the connection of several contemporary discursive fields. This was illustrated above (see Chapter 11) and will be highlighted further below.

12.8.4 The Fourfold Human Constitution and the Correspondence to Cosmology

The four principles in Row's *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita* are defined as:

- 1) “The physical body”
- 2) “The sukushma sarira”
- 3) “Karana sarira”
- 4) “The light of the Logos”⁴²¹

Row explains that these principles only become intelligible when related to cosmology. Following the logic of analogy,⁴²² he identifies four cosmic principles, each of which relates to the human *upadhis*. These are:

- 1) “Parabrahmam”
- 2) “Mulaprakriti”
- 3) “The Logos”
- 4) “Daivaprakriti”⁴²³

As he explains: “*Parabrahmam* [. . .] is not ego, it is not non-ego, nor is it consciousness.”⁴²⁴ Following a traditional approach, Row “defines” Parabrahmam

⁴²⁰ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 5.

⁴²¹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 18–19.

⁴²² This again reminds us of Faivre (Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 12–13). Although I would argue, drawing on my idea of tradition, that these claims are not the same, but rather part of multifaceted hybridization processes and only retrospectively homogenized – or better, relationized.

⁴²³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 13–14.

⁴²⁴ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 7.

only ex nihilo, showing that it is devoid of any attributes.⁴²⁵ Parabrahmam is unknowable and therefore is not a suitable basis for a guide concerned with practical advice. It is not philosophical speculation that Row is interested in here, but practical advice, and this is why he dismisses Parabrahman as a subject of investigation.

The second principle, the Logos, is “the [first] ego in the cosmos, and every other ego and every other self [. . .] is but its reflection it is not unknowable as Parabrahmam [. . .] It is the one great mystery in the cosmos, with reference to which all the initiations and all the systems of philosophy have been devised.”⁴²⁶ The Logos is the “first ego,” and this is connected to an idea of differentiation, in contrast to *brahman*’s undifferentiated nature. This is why “all the initiations”⁴²⁷ can only refer to the Logos, because the Logos can be known. Row’s aim is to understand the relation of the Logos to the individual, and it is the investigation and understanding of this relation that Row understands as initiation. For this reason, he endeavors to describe the Logos in more detail. He insists that:

It [the centre of spiritual energy – the Logos] is not material or physical in its constitution, and it is not objective; it is not different in substance, as it were, or in essence, from *Parabrahmam*, and yet at the same time it is different from it in having an individualized existence. [. . .] It is often described in our books as *satchidanandam*, and by this epithet you must understand that it is *sat*, and that it is *chit* and *anandam*.⁴²⁸

Row attributes *saccidānanda* to the Logos here. This is an unusual step, as these concepts are normally associated with *brahman*, albeit only as an attitude towards *brahman*, since *brahman* itself is understood as devoid of any attributes.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ This reminds us of the *neti neti* – and many of Row’s readers and listeners probably understood the reference – of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. *Neti neti* (not this, not this) stands for the impossibility of knowing *brahman* (Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 65), for knowing *brahman* would mean that *brahman* is not the knower and therefore not the underlying principle of everything. That which can be known in the Advaita tradition must be *māyā*; only the knower is *vidyā*. Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 55–60.

⁴²⁶ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 8.

⁴²⁷ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 8.

⁴²⁸ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 9.

⁴²⁹ Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1973), 9–10.

12.8.5 Excursus: Satchidanandam Instead of Saccidānanda

It is interesting to note that Row writes *satchidanandam* instead of *saccidānanda*, as the rules of sandhis would suggest.⁴³⁰ In Devanagari, *saccidānanda* is written as सच्चिदानन्द. In most examples of early Indologist publications, it is transliterated in a way that differs from that of Row, for example “Sa’c-cid-ānanda”⁴³¹ or “Sach chid ānandam.”⁴³² Wilson’s rendering might explain the transliteration of “ch” instead of “c,” which are distinguished from one another in the Devanagari script (छ for “ch” and च for “c”), although the difference is only the aspiration in their pronunciation. In addition, two further points must be remembered. 1) Sanskrit can be written in a number of different scripts, and in the case of T. Subba Row it is plausible that he used a Bengali, Telugu or Tamil edition of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The later would explain the “m” at the end of *satchidanandam*. 2) The conventions for transliteration were not as fixed as they are today, so it was not unusual to find several different renderings of the same word in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century publications on Indian thought. Max Müller, for instance, suggested in his 1866 *A Sanskrit Grammar for Beginners* that च and छ should be transliterated as “ch” and “chh,” respectively.⁴³³ In a later edition of his *A Sanskrit Grammar*, he suggested transliterating the same letters as “k” and “kh.”⁴³⁴ Monier-Williams discussed the system of transliteration in his Sanskrit dictionary. His comments were directed against, among others, the transliteration adopted by Müller in *The Sacred Books of the East*.⁴³⁵ In 1890, Monier-Williams suggested a system of transliteration that was very close to

⁴³⁰ See §26, §27, and §39 in Adolf Friedrich Stenzler et al., *Elementarbuch der Sanskrit-Sprache: Grammatik, Texte, Wörterbuch*, 19th rev. enl. ed., De-Gruyter-Lehrbuch (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), Fortgeführt von Richard Pischel. Umgearbeitet von Karl F. Geldner. 19., durchgesehene und verbesserte Auflage von Albrecht Wezler, 9, 12.

⁴³¹ Monier-Williams, *Hinduism*, 52, 195, 204.

⁴³² Horace Hayman Wilson, *Vishṇu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, Works by the Late Horace Hayman Wilson Vol. II (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), Translated From the Original Sanskrit, and Illustrated by Notes Derived Chiefly From Other Puraṇas, 90.

⁴³³ Friedrich Max Müller, *A Sanskrit Grammar for Beginners: In Devanāgarī and Roman Letters Throughout*, Handbooks for the Study of Sanskrit IV (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866), 2.

⁴³⁴ Friedrich Max Müller, *A Sanskrit Grammar for Beginners: New and Abridged Edition Accented and Transliterated Throughout with a Chapter on Syntax and an Appendix on Classical Metres* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 4.

⁴³⁵ Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, xxii–xxxii.

the system which is often used nowadays in scholarly publications.⁴³⁶ The modern standard was introduced at the Tenth International Congress of Orientalists, held in Geneva in 1895,⁴³⁷ although this certainly does not mean that the system was adopted globally and immediately, especially in India, where there was a long tradition of transliteration into several alphabets.

Nevertheless, Row’s rendering is remarkable for our present purposes because it can be found in several Theosophical publications, and this makes it highly plausible that Row took Dvivedi as his model. This particular usage – devoid the “m” at the end – can be found, for example, in Dvivedi’s *Rāja-Yoga*,⁴³⁸ with the rendering later appearing in Besant’s works as well,⁴³⁹ and also in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*,⁴⁴⁰ which will be the main concern of the next chapter. I suggest that the line of reception of this rendering of *satchidananda* can be traced from Dvivedi to Row and from Row onwards to the post-Blavatskian era of the Theosophical Society.

12.8.6 The Question of the Individuality of the Logos: Theistic Advaita Vedānta as Theosophical “Hinduism”

The question of the dissolution of individuality seems to be an important issue for Row. As Neufeldt observes, Row developed a concept of individual *mokṣa*, liberation from reincarnation through the achieving of unity with *brahman* while still maintaining one’s own individuality.⁴⁴¹ This position marks a shift in Row’s conception of Advaita Vedānta. In his early writings, the individual, equated with *ahaṁkāra*, perished when it became united with the higher principle.⁴⁴² In his later writings, the individual remains an individual while attaining divinity.⁴⁴³ The

436 Monier Monier-Williams, “The Duty of English-Speaking Orientalists in Regard to United Action in Adhering Generally to Sir William Jones’s Principles of Transliteration, Especially in the Case of Indian Languages; with a Proposal for Promoting a Uniform International Method of Transliteration so Far at Least as May Be Applicable to Proper Names,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* Jul. (1890): 607–29.

437 Barbier de Meynard et al., “Tenth International Congress of Orientalists, Held at Geneva: Report of the Transliteration Committee,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* Oct. (1895): 879–92.

438 “*Satchidānanda*,” Dvivedi, *Rāja-Yoga*, second part, 9.

439 E.g., Besant, *Evolution of Life and Form*, 17–18.

440 E.g., Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 72.

441 Neufeldt, “A Lesson in Allegory,” 15.

442 Row, “The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tennets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man,” 96–97.

443 Neufeldt, “A Lesson in Allegory,” 15.

attributes ascribed by Row to the Logos point to an entity which, although “not different in [. . .] essence,”⁴⁴⁴ is differentiated from *Parabrahmam*.⁴⁴⁵ If this is correct, this would indicate a specific understanding of “Hinduism” as theistic Advaita Vedānta. That this was indeed Row’s view is further suggested by his argument that the Logos is a “personal God”⁴⁴⁶ and that there exist almost innumerable Logoi in *Parabrahmam*, an argument that points to the individualistic dimension of his conception of Advaita Vedānta. Row maintains that the Logos “has consciousness and an individuality of its own. I may as well say that it is the only *personal* God [. . .] There are innumerable others. Their number is almost infinite.”⁴⁴⁷ The connection between Row’s individualizing tendency and the theistic emphasis seems to undermine the claim of non-duality.⁴⁴⁸ As mentioned above, these individual logoi are Parabrahmam in essence but have their own individuality which they maintain even in a *mahapralaya*, and this means that they are different from the mere manifestations of Parabrahmam.

Row explains that the third manifestation of Parabrahmam is “the light of the logos,” which is the principle that is in every human being. “*Parabrahmam*, after having appeared [Row explains] on the one hand as the ego, and on the other as *Mulaprakṛiti*, acts as the one energy through the *Logos*.”⁴⁴⁹ This “energy” or “Light from the Logos”⁴⁵⁰ is responsible for the consciousness within man and is the driving force of evolution working on *mūlaprakṛti*. This force works through all the kingdoms (mineral, plant, and animal) and becomes more and more differentiated. In working through the three kingdoms, consciousness evolves and “by the time we reach man, this light becomes differentiated and forms that centre or ego that gives rise to all the mental and physical progress that we see in the process of cosmic evolution.”⁴⁵¹ In man, “this one light becomes differentiated into certain monads, and hence individuality is fixed.”⁴⁵² In this process the four

⁴⁴⁴ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 9.

⁴⁴⁵ Parabrahman refers here to the notion used by Row, instead of to *brahman* in general.

⁴⁴⁶ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 34.

⁴⁴⁷ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 9.

⁴⁴⁸ “Advaita” means “not-two.” It is important to understand that it distinctively means “not-two” and not “one.” “One” would suggest that there might be something else or that “one” is some kind of beginning, but there is no such thing in the view of Advaita Vedānta. For Advaita Vedānta, *brahman* is all there is and is, therefore, the only “reality.” Everything apart from that is mere illusion. Arvind Sharma, *Advaita Vedānta: An Introduction* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 3–13.

⁴⁴⁹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 10.

⁴⁵⁰ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 11.

⁴⁵¹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 17.

⁴⁵² Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 17.

principles or bodies are formed. When instantiated in these bodies, the consciousness assumes itself to be an individual, an independent entity, but, Row claims, this is merely “delusive [. . .] because the real self is the *Logos* itself, and what is generally considered as the ego is but its reflection.”⁴⁵³ The reflections in the bodies only assume that they are independent entities. The goal, described by Row, is to transfer the consciousness upwards through the bodies in order to realize the delusive nature of bodily individuality. In other words, the goal is to expand one’s own consciousness so that it becomes co-extensive with the consciousness of the *Logos*. On first sight, this might seem to indicate the dissolution of individuality. However, as I will argue below, in Row’s conception no ultimate dissolution takes place.

12.8.7 The Karana Sarira

Row explains that there are several planes connected to the bodies of man. Row maintains that, among the human bodies, “the *karana sarira* is the most important. It is so because it is in that that the higher individuality of man exists. Birth after birth a new physical body comes into existence, and perishes when earthly life is over.”⁴⁵⁴ The *karana sarira* on the other hand is the permanent principle, which is “like so many beads strung on a thread, successive personalities are strung on this *karana sarira*, as the individual passes through incarnation after incarnation.”⁴⁵⁵ It is the place where experiences can be accumulated and thus the principle that makes progress possible. It follows from this that it is the main body that has to be developed in order for one to merge into the *Logos*.⁴⁵⁶ As noted above, this idea was also advanced by Cooper-Oakley and is a pivotal point in Besant’s concept of evolution.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 20.

⁴⁵⁴ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 25.

⁴⁵⁵ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 25.

⁴⁵⁶ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 12–26.

⁴⁵⁷ E.g., Besant, *Man and His Bodies*, 63–64. Here she explains that the “causal body” is the body in which all experiences are stored. These experiences are then processed in *devachan* in order that they might be evolved into new faculties when one reincarnates. See also Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 170–71.

12.8.8 Voluntary Actions as *Karma*: *Bhakti* and the Purpose of Evolution

When the stage of humanity is reached in the process of evolution, Row postulates, it becomes possible for individuals to act deliberately. This is the key to any further evolution.

When once that plane of consciousness is reached in the path of progress that includes the voluntary actions of man, it will be seen that those voluntary actions not only preserve the individuality of the *karana sarīra* but render it more and more definite, [. . .] So in one sense the *karana sarīra* is the result of karmic impulses. It is the child, of *Karma* as it were.⁴⁵⁸

“Voluntary actions”⁴⁵⁹ – also called *karma* in Row’s writings – can influence evolution. Row maintains that there were “special rules [which] can be prescribed for his guidance that are likely to render his evolutionary progress more rapid than it would otherwise be.”⁴⁶⁰ Man should thus

wholly devote his attention and worship to the one true *Logos* accepted by every true and great religion in the world, as that alone can lead a man safely along the true moral path, and enable him to rise higher and higher, until he lives in it as an immortal being, as the manifested *Eswara* of the cosmos, and as the source, if necessary, of spiritual enlightenment to generations to come.⁴⁶¹

Row connects his theistic Advaita Vedānta to *bhakti*⁴⁶² – “devote his attention and worship” – and rules of conduct – “the true moral path.” This process culminates in one becoming “an immortal being”, an “*Eswara*,” who can be a source of help for humanity as a whole. Row maintains that “it is towards this end, which may be hastened in certain cases, that all evolution is tending.”⁴⁶³ All of these motifs relating to voluntary action were to reappear in Besant’s discussions of her similar concept of the “Quickening of Evolution.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁸ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 27.

⁴⁵⁹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 27.

⁴⁶⁰ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 27.

⁴⁶¹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 31.

⁴⁶² *Bhakti* is often simply translated as “devotion.” As in every manifestation of Hindu religiosity, there are many different expressions of *bhakti* and the ritual and practices connected to it. See Narayanan, “*Bhakti*”. There are also writings which include *bhakti* practices in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, most famously the writings of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. For information on Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s concept of *bhakti*, see Lance Nelson, “The Ontology of ‘*Bhakti*’: Devotion as ‘Paramapuruṣārtha’ in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2004): 361–88.

⁴⁶³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 31.

⁴⁶⁴ In Besant’s concept, however, becoming an Īśvara is of less importance, but the motif of self-development in order to help others is ubiquitous. See, e.g., Besant, “General Presentation

12.8.9 The Way Back to the Logos: Acceleration of Evolution and Initiation

Row argues that the *Logos* is present in human beings as light that had been emanated by it. This light tries to return to the Logos during the process of evolution. It is in this process that the *Upadhis* are perfected. Row maintains that,

all the initiations that man ever invented were invented for the purpose of giving men a clear idea of the *Logos*, to point out the goal, and to lay down rules by which it is possible to facilitate the approach to the end towards which nature is constantly working. These are the premises from which Krishna starts. Whether by express statements, or by necessary implications, all these propositions are present in this book [the *Bhagavadgītā*], and, taking his stand on these fundamental propositions, Krishna proceeds to construct his practical theory of life.⁴⁶⁵

The goal of evolution for Row is for the individual to “perceive and recognise his *Logos*,”⁴⁶⁶ and initiation is introduced as the way to reach that goal. The next step after the introduction of initiation was to attain unity with the *Logos* and become a *mukta*. As Row explains, for “every man who becomes a *Mukta* there is a union with the *Logos*. [. . .] In the generality of cases, this association of the soul with the *Logos* is only completed after death.”⁴⁶⁷

12.8.10 Union with the Logos as the Goal of Evolution: The Becoming of an Individual *Eswara*

In his third lecture, Subba Row examines the relation between Parabrahmam, Logos, and the individual in connection to the union with the Logos and the possibilities of rebirth after this union. Row elaborates his individualistic position here, claiming the eternal individuality of the Logoi residing in Parabrahma. Krishna, we read,

is a manifestation of *Parabrahmam*, as every *Logos* is. [. . .] This statement is at the bottom of all Adwaiti philosophy, but is very often misunderstood when Adwaitis say ‘*Aham*

of Theosophy to the Parliament,” 162; Annie Besant, “Theosophy and Its Practical Application,” *Lucifer* Vol. XII, no. 70 (1893): 313; Besant, *The Birth and Evolution of the Soul*, 54; Besant, *Man and His Bodies*, 34–35; Besant, *Man and His Bodies*, 106; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 47; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 188; Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 10; Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 48; Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 36. These passages are just a few of the many relevant examples.

⁴⁶⁵ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 32.

⁴⁶⁶ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 32.

⁴⁶⁷ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 34.

eva Parabrahmam,' they do not mean to say that this *ahañkaram* (egotism) is *Parabrahmam*, but that the only true *self* in the cosmos which is the *Logos* or *Pratyagatma*,⁴⁶⁸ is a manifestation of *Parabrahmam*.⁴⁶⁹

We can see here how Row demarcates the individual from *brahman*: The individual is a manifestation of *brahman* but is still separated from it.

The *Logos* is the main object of Row's investigation because the *Logos*, or rather the "Light" coming from the *Logos*, manifests itself in human beings. According to Row, union with the *Logos* is the goal of human evolution. However, union with the *Logos* is not union with *Parabrahmam*; *Parabrahmam* is reached through the *Logos*, but there can be no union with it. This is the key concept in Row's world view. Union with the *Logos* is the purpose of life, according to Row, and it benefits all of humanity, because "whenever any particular individual reaches the highest state of spiritual culture [. . .] there is as it were, a sort of reaction emanating from that *Logos* for the good of humanity."⁴⁷⁰ This notion is closely linked to the Theosophical idea of the Mahatmas and the work they do for the good of humanity.⁴⁷¹

So, in the case of a human being who has developed an unselfish love for humanity in himself. He unites his highest qualities with the *Logos*, and, when the time of the final union comes, generates in it an impulse to incarnate for the good of humanity. Even when it does not actually incarnate, it sends down its influence for the good of mankind. [. . .] Every Mahatma who joins his soul with the *Logos* is thus a source of immense power for the good of humanity in after generations.⁴⁷²

468 Monier-Williams translates this term as "concerning the personal soul or self" and gives the *Rāmāyaṇa* as reference (Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 675). It is a compound of *prati* + *vañc* + *ātma*. Here it could be translated as "that which concerns the true self." It is, however, unclear what exactly Row means by this and why he uses the term here. In Row's text it would make much more sense to write *pratyagātman*, which could then be translated as "the individual soul," or simply as "the individual" (Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 675). Monier-Williams, gives among others, the *Vedantasara* and the *Kathopanisad* as references for the occurrence of *pratyagātman*. Both works are likely to be sources for Row's idea of the *pratyagātman*.

469 Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 40.

470 Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 47.

471 Similarly, Sharpe: "The Gita, then, is 'the book of the philosophy of the *Logos*'. Krishna actually is the *Logos*, descending to the plane of the soul in order to accomplish some great purpose. And spiritual development and progress actually entitled one to a union with the *Logos*, and then 'there is, as it were, a sort of reaction emanating from the *Logos* for the good of humanity' – though this does not appear to be central, when compared with personal spiritual culture." Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā*, 92. What can be seen, however is that Sharpe does not make a connection to the Theosophical Mahatmas.

472 Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 50.

The ideal of helping humanity by constant self-improvement with the goal of uniting oneself with the Logos is here said again to be the summum bonum for all humans, a status that is connected to the idea of love for humanity. This union is not annihilation, Row affirms. The main point of objection for Row is the loss of individuality, since in his view individuality is pivotal to achieving a right understanding of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Union is attained by focusing on “the light of the Logos” which is “the Holy Ghost that seems to form the flesh and blood of the divine Christ.”⁴⁷³ When this union is established, the individuality of men is not lost but is, rather, enriched by the Logos and the Logos is likewise enriched by the individual with which it is united.

Row compares the union with the Logos to what he describes as the merging of several individuals of successive incarnations into the *Karana Sarira*. He admits that after being united with the Logos, the “original” individual is lost, in the sense that the former individual incorporates all the experiences of the Logos and similarly passes on its gathered experiences to the Logos. This is why, when a human being is close to union, the Logos will take a personal interest in the development of that individual. For the individual, this union feels like another combination of experiences, similar to the combination of experiences that take place between two reincarnations. “A man who is absorbed into it [the Logos] becomes an immortal, spiritual being, a real *Eswara* in the cosmos, never to be reborn, and never again to be subject to the pains and pleasure of human life.”⁴⁷⁴ In this way, Row explains, the prior individual will never incarnate again but will send out its Light and therefore be reborn within new individuals. This aspect of the process was of considerable importance to Row, because it establishes that a Logos will never perish, not even in a cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). This means that all human beings who are absorbed into the Logos become Logoi themselves while still retaining their individuality. Although a Logos may “sleep in the bosom of *Pararahmam*”⁴⁷⁵ for a time, when it wakes again evolution starts anew.

12.8.11 Concluding Remarks and Relationizings

Turning to address his audience directly, Row concludes:

Our Society stands upon an altogether unsectarian basis; we sympathize with every religion, but not with every abuse that exists under the guise of religion; and while sympathizing

⁴⁷³ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 54.

⁴⁷⁴ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 58.

⁴⁷⁵ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 62.

with every religion and making the best efforts we can for the purpose of recovering the common foundations that underlie all religious beliefs, it ought to be the duty of every one of us to try to enlighten our own countrymen on the philosophy of religion, and endeavour to lead them back to a purer faith – a faith which, no doubt, did exist in former times, but which now lives but in name or in the pages of forgotten books.⁴⁷⁶

Row here claims the authority to speak for the Theosophical Society as a whole, for “our Society.” The identification of the Society’s “unsectarian basis” is another instance in which a claimed tolerance, based on the view that “common foundations [. . .] underlie all religious beliefs,” is presented as foundational for the Theosophical world view. Simultaneously, Row’s theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta is presented as “a purer faith,” which can be read as a reference to the ancient wisdom religion. By making these points, Row relationizes his Advaita Vedānta hierarchically in relation to Theosophy and claims its superiority. This positioning also fits well with Chatterji’s classicist argument (see Chapter 5) and likewise has a nationalistic undertone connected to the colonialist topos of a civilizing mission (“enlighten our own countrymen”).

12.9 The Aftermath of Row's *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*: Relationalization contra Row and his Resignation from the Theosophical Society

In 1887, following the publication of Row’s lectures on the *Bhagavadgītā*, a flood of articles, short notes, and comments appeared in *The Theosophist*. The protagonists in this debate, who fought fiercely against one another, were Blavatsky and Subba Row. Blavatsky criticized Row for having abandoned the sevenfold constitution of man. In two articles published during this period, Row reacted directly to Blavatsky’s critique. He writes:

Madame H. P. Blavatsky which appeared in the last issue of this Journal under the heading of ‘Classification of Principles.’ This reply was apparently intended to explain away the remarks which fell from my lips and justify the classification hitherto advocated. I feel extremely thankful to the writer for the friendly tone of criticism which she has adopted. I cannot however fail to see that the line of argument which she has followed is likely to create a wrong impression in the minds of her readers regarding my real attitude in this matter without a few words of explanation on my part.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*.

⁴⁷⁷ Tallapragada S. Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” *The Theosophist* VIII, no. 92 (1887): 504.

Row does not accept Blavatsky’s criticism and “clarification” here. Instead, he has it that “the difference of opinion between us is not merely apparent but real. Such being the case I am fully prepared to justify my assertions.”⁴⁷⁸ He continues by referring again to Blavatsky’s article, in which she claimed the correctness of the “original teaching.” Row remarks: “Any further discussion of the subject will of course be out of the question if it is asserted that I am not at liberty to question the correctness of the so-called ‘original teachings’.”⁴⁷⁹

In his first article, Row examines with great care the different Theosophical writings on the seven-fold constitution of man, with a special focus on the *Fragments of Occult Truth*, a series of articles published in *The Theosophist* between 1881 and 1883. These articles were probably the first attempt, other than Blavatsky’s in *Isis Unveiled*, to formulate a coherent teaching for the Theosophical Society. The first of these articles was written by W. H. Terry, “our esteemed Australian Brother Theosophist.”⁴⁸⁰ In this article we find one of the first tables explaining the sevenfold constitution of man, which is contrasted with the anthropological views of the “spiritists.” Row also refers to Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* and *Man: Fragments of Forgotten History* by two *Chelas* from 1885. Since this book does not focus on the differences between the various ideas of the human constitution put forward by Theosophists, I will not discuss Row’s argumentation in greater depth. Nevertheless, this debate is an interesting instance of the discursive dynamics within the Theosophical Society (see also Chapter 10). The subject of the human constitution seems to have been one of the pillars of Theosophical teaching, and around this topic questions of heterodoxy and orthodoxy crystallized.

Row writes that Blavatsky claimed “that they must either adopt the seven-fold classification or give up their adherence ‘to the old School of Aryan and Arhat adepts.’ I am indeed very sorry that she has thought it proper to assume this uncompromising attitude.”⁴⁸¹ He argues polemically that in his “humble opinion it would be highly dangerous for the future well-being and prosperity of the Theosophical Society, if it were to evolve, so early in its career, an orthodox creed.”⁴⁸² The term “orthodox” can be read here as a discursive strategy that seeks to marginalize the other position as unnecessarily dogmatic, aligning it with the rigidly doctrinaire “Christian orthodoxy” that was often identified as one of the main opponents of Theosophy. To put it another way, application of

⁴⁷⁸ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 505.

⁴⁷⁹ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 505.

⁴⁸⁰ W. H. Terry, “Fragments of Occult Truth,” *The Theosophist* 3, no. 1 (1881): 17.

⁴⁸¹ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 505.

⁴⁸² Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 505–6.

the term “orthodox” aims at an epistemological hierarchizing of Blavatsky’s position, because the “right” position is the heterodoxy that accepts all religions as true on account of their genealogical foundation in the ancient wisdom religion.

Row’s attacks on Blavatsky become rougher in tone throughout the article. For example, he replies to Blavatsky’s argument that the understanding of the seven-fold constitution was at times misled by European materialism, by arguing that, if

the classification has misled no less a person than its original exponent herself, and made her change her conceptions about the nature of the various principles from time to time, it is pretty nearly certain that the classification itself must be held responsible for all the confusion it has created.⁴⁸³

He further declares that he is “not in the least afraid that by doing so [criticizing the seven-fold constitution of man] I shall forfeit my right to follow the teachings of ‘the old school of Aryan and Arhat adepts.’”⁴⁸⁴

In his second article, Row declares that Blavatsky’s seven-fold classification “is not the real esoteric classification.”⁴⁸⁵ However, he admits that the “real” classification is indeed sevenfold, but in accordance with the sevenfold division of the Logos, the “seven main branches of the ancient Wisdom-religion.”⁴⁸⁶ He explains that the “real” concept must be “allied to seven states of matter, and to seven forms of force. These principles are harmoniously arranged between two poles, which define the limits of *human* consciousness. It is abundantly clear [. . .] that the classification we have adopted [in the Theosophical Society up to this point] does not possess these requisites.”⁴⁸⁷

He concludes his article with the following words:

It will be a mere waste of time at present to explain the real seven-fold classification. There is not the slightest chance of my being heard. Time will show whether I was justified in my criticism or not. Personally I am not in the least interested whether the members of the Theosophical Society adhere to or reject the seven-fold classification. I have no desire of having a following of my own in the Society, or starting a separate branch for enforcing my own Views on the matter.⁴⁸⁸

The debate continued within the pages of *The Theosophist*, but it seems that Row did not write another word on the controversy, or if he did it was not printed in *The Theosophist* in any case. As we have seen above, Blavatsky refers

⁴⁸³ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 506.

⁴⁸⁴ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 506.

⁴⁸⁵ Tallapragada S. Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” *The Theosophist* VIII, no. 95 (1887): 705.

⁴⁸⁶ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 702.

⁴⁸⁷ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 706.

⁴⁸⁸ Row, “The Constitution of the Microcosm,” 706.

to Subba Row in her *The Secret Doctrine*. Nonetheless, it seems that this debate marked the end of the close collaboration between the pair, and it might even be the reason why Subba Row withdrew his offer of assistance with regard to the correcting and editing of *The Secret Doctrine*.⁴⁸⁹

One additional article ascribed to Subba Row appeared in *The Theosophist* several years later, in 1889. At the end of the piece, we read that “the foregoing is a summary of a discussion with Mr. T. Subba Row, B. A., B. L., at the Adyar Library, on the 1st December 1888.”⁴⁹⁰ It is therefore unclear to what extent the content of the article actually represents Row’s thought. In this article, the author discusses the hierarchy of the adepts. It is claimed here that there are seven classes of adepts distinguished in accordance with the seven rays of the Logos. The two highest classes of adepts are very rarely present on earth: “Perhaps one or two adepts of these mysterious orders appear every two or three thousand years. It is probable that Buddha and Sankarâchârya come under this category.”⁴⁹¹ Members of the five lower classes are believed to dwell on earth. The article also mentions two locations, the Himalayas and Southern India, where these adepts are said to reside. The geographical locations identified here refer to the two main sources of wisdom that were mentioned throughout Row’s writings: the Arhat adepts and the Aryan adepts. He writes that, “All five classes are represented in the Himâlâyan school. At present, it is unlikely that all five are represented in Southern India.”⁴⁹² Next, the author turns to the idea of avatars, writing that when one of the highest adepts reincarnates through a medium on earth, this medium becomes their avatar. Avatars of those who have already achieved the highest levels of adepthood are contrasted with those who go through the evolutionary cycles to become higher adepts themselves.

It is probable that Sankarâchârya was such an incarnation [an avatar]. He was already a great adept when he was sixteen years old; at which time he wrote his great philosophical works. It seems that Gautama Buddha was not such an incarnation, as we see in him the actual life struggle of man striving to perfection, and not the fruition of a great soul who had already reached its goal. But in Sankarâcharya we see no such struggle; this is why we say he is a divine incarnation.⁴⁹³

Again, the two schools are contrasted to each other and it seems that the Aryan school is presented as the lesser of the two, as Śaṅkara is “only” an avatar.

⁴⁸⁹ Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 329.

⁴⁹⁰ Tallapragada S. Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” *The Theosophist* X, no. 112 (1889): 232.

⁴⁹¹ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 228.

⁴⁹² Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 228.

⁴⁹³ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 228.

After laying out the different levels of adepts and their manifestations, the paths by which these states can be reached are discussed. The author begins by identifying nine states of consciousness (Figure 10).

<i>Jagrat.</i>	{	<i>Jagrat.</i> —Waking consciousness.
	{	<i>Swapna.</i> —Dreaming.
	{	<i>Sushupti.</i> —Dreamless sleep.
<i>Swapna.</i>	{	<i>Jagrat.</i> —Waking clairvoyance.
	{	<i>Swapna.</i> —Somnambule clairvoyance.
	{	<i>Sushupti.</i> —Kama Loka.
<i>Sushupti.</i>	{	<i>Jagrat.</i> —Devachan.
	{	<i>Swapna.</i> —Between planets.
	{	<i>Sushupti.</i> —Between Rounds.

Figure 10: Nine states of consciousness according to T. Subba Row (Row 1889, 229).

These are only the “normal” states of consciousness, however. “Above these nine stages, come the true mystical states of consciousness, to which the adepts have access.”⁴⁹⁴ According to the author, one of the main aims of becoming an adept is the expansion of consciousness beyond any regular consciousness, something that takes place when the Individuality (or the *âtma* which is used as a synonym in this article) merges into the Logos. As in Row’s *Bhagavadgītā* commentary, this merging is not described as an annihilation of the individual but as “an almost infinite extension of individuality.”⁴⁹⁵ However, it is not possible to properly conceive of this merging as it is beyond the grasp of those who have not attained it. Only “after the last initiation, the adept thoroughly comprehends the relation of *âtma* with the *logos*, by which he obtains immortality: [. . .] it may take him several incarnations after the last initiation before he can merge in the *logos*”⁴⁹⁶ It is claimed that there are two different paths towards this goal.

The one is the steady natural path of progress through moral effort, and practise of the virtues. A natural, coherent, and sure growth of the soul is the result, a position of firm equilibrium is reached and maintained, which cannot be overthrown or shaken by any unexpected assault. It is the normal method followed by the vast mass of humanity, and this is the course Sankarâchârya recommended to all his Sannyasis and successors. The other road is the precipitous path of occultism, through a series of initiations. Only a few specially organised and peculiar natures are fit for this path.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 229.

⁴⁹⁵ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 230.

⁴⁹⁶ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 231.

⁴⁹⁷ Row, “The Occultism of Southern India,” 231.

The article can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it might be assumed that it was written by Subba Row, which would mean that he was willing to admit that the Aryan teacher taught a method for the masses and that there was another tradition which taught the “real” occult truth to the few. This other tradition would then be that of the adepts in the Himalayas. However, I suggest that the article should rather be read in the light of the debate outlined above. On this account, the article would represent an attempt by Olcott – Blavatsky cannot be the one who talked with Subba Row at the Adyar Library in 1888, because she had left for Europe in the aftermath of the Hodgson Report years earlier – to bring together the different positions of Row and Blavatsky. That this is the case is strongly suggested by the usage of certain specific terms, especially “âtma,” which was rarely used by Row to refer to the individual. The article can therefore be read as an instance of “Western” Theosophists attempting to speak for an Indian member of the Society. It also, on this reading, hints towards the narrative that was later reproduced within scholarship on the Theosophical Society, the story that the society championed Buddhism and rather neglected Hindu traditions. As is often the case, the “truth” is likely to be somewhere in between.

12.10 Epilogue: Death and Obituary

Subba Row died in 1890 at the age of 34 after the rapid onset of an unidentified illness. Olcott wrote an obituary in the July issue of *The Theosophist* of the same year in which he referred to Row as a close friend who had been instrumental in the settling of the founders of the Theosophical Society at Adyar. He also briefly mentioned the controversy discussed above.

A dispute – due in a measure to third parties – which widened into a breach, arose between H. P. B. and himself about certain philosophical questions, but to the last he spoke of her, to us and to his family, in the old friendly way. [. . .] His interest in our movement was unabated to the last, he read the *Theosophist* regularly and was a subscriber to H. P. B.’s *Lucifer*.⁴⁹⁸

Olcott discussed Row’s “mystical knowledge,” which he showed only “after forming a connection with the Founders of the Theosophical Society”⁴⁹⁹ He described a change undergone by Row, after which he had access to a vast fund of knowledge.

⁴⁹⁸ Olcott, “Death of Subba Row,” 576.

⁴⁹⁹ Olcott, “Death of Subba Row,” 577.

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 Head-quarters [!], 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.⁵⁰⁰

This passage gives a lucid depiction of Subba Row's position within the Theosophical Society. He was irrefutably the Society's expert on Hindu thought, but the text here also frames his rediscovery of his ancient knowledge in the context of his activities as a Theosophist. However, if one reads through Subba Row's articles in their order of publication a somewhat different story emerges. It seems, rather, that Row gradually learned more and more about Hindu religion and occultism by reading contemporary literature, including the works of the early Orientalists mentioned in his article on the date of Śaṅkara's birth⁵⁰¹ and the Theosophical literature mentioned in his articles on the constitution of man.

The debate involving Row, the Swami of Almoora, and Blavatsky illustrates how the Theosophical world view was negotiated, and provides another background against which Besant's works must be read. In particular, the idea that the evolution of humans, individually and collectively, leads to their union with the Logos and an expansion of consciousness is of pivotal interest when seeking to understand Besant's concept of initiation as the key to the "Quickening of Evolution." As discussed above, Subba Row shaped an understanding of the *Bhagavadgītā* as a practical guide, which, when followed, leads to swifter progress in human evolution. The *Bhagavadgītā* played a key role in Row's later writings. However, in his earlier writings he did not refer to the *Gītā*, but laid stress, rather, on the interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* as his main source. Row's particular interpretation of "Hinduism" as individualized theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta became one of the models for what was understood as "Hinduism" in the Theosophical Society. The resultant meshing of hybridization processes is instructive with regard to further developments in the Theosophical Society, especially the uptake by Annie Besant of the "Hinduism" that had been shaped in this way, which, as will be discussed below, served as the foundation for her implementation of religious education in the Central Hindu College.

⁵⁰⁰ Olcott, "Death of Subba Row," 577–78.

⁵⁰¹ Tallapragada S. Row, "Sri Sankaracharya's Date and Doctrine: Question VIII," 4, no. 12 (1883).

12.11 Preliminary Conclusion: T. Subba Row, Blavatsky and “Ausseralltäglichkeit”; Relationalization, Power Asymmetries, and Claiming Charismatic Authority

Subba Row’s early articles (12.3.1–12.3.7) point towards multiple processes of hybridization. A translation of Hindu concepts imported his Advaita Vedānta into the center of Theosophical thought where they were then recontextualized. For example, translating “Parabrahmam” as “(un)consciousness” related it to both Theosophy and European philosophy alike. In the succeeding relationalization, Row claimed the superiority of his Advaita Vedānta over both. The claims of the superiority of his philosophy over Theosophy initiated a decline in his status as an expert on “Hinduism” in the Society (see 12.5). Blavatsky’s attempt to close off the discourse proved to be more effective than Row’s claim of hegemony, regardless of the validity of the arguments on either side. This outcome points to the power asymmetry in the colonial discourse. Nevertheless, Row’s theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta was still received in the Theosophical Society, a result that is indicative of the irreversibility of hybridization processes. However, while these processes cannot be reversed, the “already hybrids” can be rehybridized in ways that forge new and altered relations.

It is necessary to discuss the question of the power asymmetry between T. Subba Row and Blavatsky because – as was the case with Dvivedi’s absence from the Theosophical narrative and the shift from “Indian experts” to “Westerners” speaking for “Hinduism” – the subtleties of the argument between the two show that the analytical tool developed so far is not sensitive enough to include these dimensions. Several of the issues already discussed above may help to sharpen the analytical tool in this respect. First, the idea of relationizing helps us to understand that the relationizings establish hierarchies or try to eliminate differences by homogenization. However, this does not explain why Blavatsky was able to maintain her position against Subba Row. Krech’s discussion of Weber’s notion of charismatic leadership gives a hint to Blavatsky’s position here. Blavatsky successfully demonstrated “Ausseralltäglichkeit” in several instances and could therefore claim charismatic authority on this basis. One of these instances was the cup and saucers incidence at Shimla (see Chapter 5). Another claim of “Ausseralltäglichkeit” was the demonstration of the *siddhis* not only by Blavatsky herself but also by Besant, Leadbeater, and many other Theosophists.

Two different epistemological strategies prevailed in the Theosophical Society. The first was a philological or educational approach, while the second was a clairvoyant or evolutionary approach. The master narrative and the “Quickening of Evolution” provide the connection between the two. Through education, morality,

and the practice of (*rāja*)*yoga* – as well as other bodily practices, such as following special diets, etc. – one can quicken the process of evolution and develop higher faculties of perception (see Chapters 7 and 8).

The possession of yogic powers was important within the Theosophical Society and was connected to what Weber called charismatic leadership. Demonstrating the *siddhis* was a way of ensuring the “Ausseralltäglichkeit”⁵⁰² of the leader and imbuing him or her with authority. The prominence given to these abilities also provides an example of how “occult” expertise and expertise on “Hinduism” merged some time around 1890.

A second point that helps to explain why Blavatsky was able to maintain her hegemonic position towards Row can be described in terms of what Foucault calls the institutions of the discourse. What is meant by this is that the power of a discourse cannot be exercised only in utterances, but is based, rather, on its institutionalization.⁵⁰³ In the Theosophical Society, for example, Blavatsky, with the support of Olcott, also based her authority on these institutions and on her (and Olcott’s) office, drawing on what Weber describes as official authority.⁵⁰⁴ This points to one of the weaknesses in Bhabha’s concept of hybridization. Bhabha’s idea of hybridization seems to operate in a power vacuum, in the sense that hybridization appears to be a process of negotiation between equals. The reason for this is that Bhabha’s focus lies on the level of discourse. Bhabha explains that,

Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the ‘authoritative’, even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal.⁵⁰⁵

This explains not only the disruption of power asymmetry in processes of hybridization but also indicates the fragility of that power. This disruption disturbs the discourse and opens up the possibility of recontextualizing the minority position in the hegemonic discourse. This is a result that is based on the submission of the minority to this discourse which, at the same time, also enables them to resist

⁵⁰² Weber, Max and 1864–1920, *Grundriss der Sozialökonomie III. Abteilung*, 140–43.

⁵⁰³ Keller, *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse*, 127; Foucault, *Überwachen und Strafen*.

⁵⁰⁴ Weber, Max and 1864–1920, *Grundriss der Sozialökonomie III. Abteilung*, 128. Similar claims have repeatedly been made in the research on Theosophy – the role of the *siddhis* has, however, so far been mostly neglected. See, e.g., Wessinger Lowman, “The Second Generation Leaders of the Theosophical Society (Adyar)”; Tim Rudbøg, “Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s Esoteric Tradition,” in *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher, Aries Book Series (2010); Viswanathan, “Theosophical Society”.

⁵⁰⁵ Bhabha, “Culture’s In-Between,” 58.

it. Bhabha calls this “the power of tradition,”⁵⁰⁶ and the same idea was recognized by Althusser who described it using the term “interpellation,” which likewise demands submission to the discourse but establishes the subject in this discourse and therefore allows it its agency.⁵⁰⁷ Bhabha’s concern is not “power,” but its fragility. The realization of this fragility on the part of the colonizer leads to an “anxiety” which is intrinsic to strategies of power, such as the deployment of stereotypes within the hegemonic discourse, because these strategies cannot be totalized.⁵⁰⁸ This leads to the constant “anxiety” that the hegemonic discourse might collapse. The colonial discourse thus oscillates between the attempt to homogenize the other and make it one’s own, on the one hand, and being constantly menaced by the possibility that this attempt might be a success and might, thus, destroy the difference between “self” and “other.”⁵⁰⁹ In the case of relationalization, this menace is particularly striking because the “other” deploys the strategies of the hegemonic discourse based on the “power of tradition” while claiming its own hegemony in this discourse. In the case of Row, he deployed such a strategy towards Blavatsky in a way that menaced her position. However, the power asymmetry derived from her authority enabled her to defend her hegemonic position. Understood from this perspective, Row’s strategy was successful because it disturbed the discourse in such a way that Blavatsky was herself forced to deploy a strategy of relationalization in order to secure her position. The relationizings on the textual level refer to the power asymmetry whereas the relations that are established through this process of hybridization are to be conceptualized as part of the discursive structure. These two levels must be distinguished from one another if we are to avoid falling into the trap of understanding hybridization as being devoid of power relations.

In the last chapter, these power asymmetries and the meshing of multifaceted processes of hybridization will be discussed in the context of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. A final theoretical consideration will be provided at the end of Chapter 13 (see Chapter 4.6).

506 Bhabha, “Introduction,” 3.

507 Louis Althusser, *Ideologie und Ideologische Staatsapparate: Aufsätze zur marxistischen Theorie*, Positionen (Hamburg, Westberlin: VSA, 1977), 142.

508 Homi K. Bhabha, “Sly Civility,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 143.

509 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 131.