Globalizing “Sacred Knowledge”: South Asians and the Theosophical Society, 1879-1930

by

Maria Moritz

a Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in History

Approved Dissertation Committee

Professor Harald Fischer-Tiné, ETH Zürich
Professor Nicola Spakowski, Universität Freiburg
Professor Hans Kippenberg, Jacobs University Bremen
Professor Sebastian Conrad, Freie Universität Berlin

Date of Defense: 23 March 2012

School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Statutory Declaration  
(on Authorship of a Dissertation)

I, Maria-Sofia Moritz, hereby declare that I have written this PhD thesis independently, unless where clearly stated otherwise. I have used only the sources, the data and the support that I have clearly mentioned. This PhD thesis has not been submitted for conferral of degree elsewhere.

I confirm that no rights of third parties will be infringed by the publication of this thesis.

Berlin, April 27, 2017

Signature _____________________________________________________________
Contents

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. 4
List of Illustrations ............................................................................................................. 5
Abbreviations ..................................................................................................................... 6

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 7
1.1 Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 14
1.2 Research Angles ......................................................................................................... 15
  1.2.1 “Sacred Knowledge” .......................................................................................... 15
  1.2.2 Globalization ...................................................................................................... 17
  1.2.3 Agents ................................................................................................................ 21
1.3 Defining/Limiting/Justifying ..................................................................................... 22
1.4 State of Research ....................................................................................................... 24
1.5 Sources ....................................................................................................................... 30
1.6 Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................................... 32

1 The Theosophical Society and its South Asian Members ............................................... 35
1.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 35
1.2 The Theosophical Society: from New York to Bombay ............................................. 39
1.3 Western Intellectual Crisis and the Discovery of India .............................................. 44
1.4 The Appeal of Theosophy to India’s bi-lingual Intelligentsia .................................... 52
  1.4.1 Privileging Indian Religions ............................................................................... 52
  1.4.2 Anti-Christian Position ...................................................................................... 54
1.5 Beyond Parochialism ................................................................................................. 58
  1.5.1 The Cosmopolitan Thought Zone of Theosophy .............................................. 61
  1.5.2 Colonial Cosmopolitanism .............................................................................. 65
  1.5.3 “Spiritual Cosmopolitanism” .......................................................................... 69
  1.5.4 “Extranational cosmopolitanism” .................................................................... 76
  1.5.5 Indian Critique at Theosophy ......................................................................... 85

2 Traditionalizing the Modern Globalization: B. P. Wadia (1881-1958) ...................... 92
2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 92
2.2 Towards a Universal Brotherhood of Theosophy ...................................................... 97
  2.2.1 Theosophical conceptions of Brotherhood ..................................................... 99
  2.2.2 Universal Brotherhood in the British Commonwealth? ................................. 104
  2.2.3 A Universal Brotherhood of Workers? ............................................................. 107
  2.2.4 Experiencing the Theosophical Brotherhood in the US ................................. 115
2.3 Inventing a Theosophical Tradition ......................................................................... 118
2.3.1 Resignation as continuity ................................................................. 119
2.3.2 The United Lodge of Theosophists in New York ............................... 123
2.3.3 The United Lodge of Theosophists as Brotherhood ............................. 129

Concluding Remarks .................................................................................. 136

3 A “Spiritual Entrepeneur” of Pan-Asian Buddhism: Anagarika Dharmapala
(1864-1933)..................................................................................................... 139
3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 139
3.2 Early Theosophical affiliations with Henry Steel Olcott ............................ 146
3.3 Integrating Local Practices with a Global Superstructure of Buddhism ......... 151
  3.3.1 Representing Buddhism at the World Parliament 1893 ....................... 151
  3.3.2 The Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta .................................................. 159
  3.3.3 Bodh Gaya as the “Buddhist Jerusalem” ........................................... 165
3.4 The “Empire of Righteousness” from Ceylon to Hawaii ............................ 168
  3.4.1 Pan-Asian Buddhism ....................................................................... 168
  3.4.2 Japan: the Buddhist Civilization Role Model ...................................... 175
  3.4.3 Education as the Quintessential “Civilizing Mission” ......................... 179

Concluding Remarks .................................................................................. 189

4 De-Localisation of “Sacred Knowledge”: Krishnamurti (1895-1986) .......... 191
4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 191
4.2 The Messianic Cult in the Order of the Star in the East ............................ 194
  4.2.1 A Venue for the Coming: the Amphitheatre in Sydney ....................... 203
  4.2.2 A Body of Knowledge: Krishnamurti’s Celebrated Body .................... 206
4.3 “By whose authority?” ........................................................................... 213
  4.3.1 Internationalism for a New Era: Krishnamurti and the League of Nations... 213
  4.3.2 A New Education for a New Era ....................................................... 216
  4.3.3 A Culture between the Past and the Future: India ............................. 220
  4.3.4 Preparing for the Future: The International Self-Preparation Groups ...... 222
4.4 De-localizng “Sacred Knowledge” ......................................................... 226
  4.4.1 A Doubting Audience: Youth and Non-Believers ............................. 226
  4.4.2 A Temporary Setting: The Outdoor Camps ....................................... 230
  4.4.3 A Truth at Call: Krishnamurti’s Independent Message to the World .... 235

Concluding Remarks .................................................................................. 241

Conclusion: Alternative Concepts of World Order .......................................... 243

5 Bibliography ............................................................................................. 253
5.1 Primary Sources ...................................................................................... 253
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1</td>
<td>Archives</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2</td>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3</td>
<td>Individual Publications and Articles</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Secondary Sources</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements
Between 2008 and 2011, I had the privilege of being part of the DFG research group “Agents of Cultural Globalization around 1900” based in Berlin. My study on South Asian affiliates of the Theosophical Society is thus part of collective research efforts to delineate the role of historical agents in globalizing processes in different non-European countries such as Brazil or Japan. My first thanks go out to all members of this research collective who supported my work throughout. I particularly want to thank my academic supervisor Harald Fischer-Tiné for always believing in the project and for generously sharing his expertise with me. I am also indebted to Nicola Spakowski and Hans Kippenberg for their advice at just the right moments. I learned a lot from a number of scholars working in Berlin during these years, especially Margrit Pernau and Maritta Schleyer. At Humboldt University I am grateful for the constant assistance and encouragement of Nadja-Christina Schneider, Michael Mann and Melitta Waligora. For their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this work, I have to thank Monika Freier, Devika Sethi and Uffa Jensen. It is impossible to mention all the friends to whom I am grateful for providing their emotional support; I have to thank particularly Astrid von Chamier, Mira Nagel, Sabine Kunig and Christina Peters of the research group who became a true friend.

Since I worked almost exclusively in private archives and libraries my work would have been impossible without the voluntary help of people all over the world. I would particularly like to mention Padmanabhan Krishna (Krishnamurti Foundation, India), Victoria Prinz (United Lodge of Theosophists, Los Angeles), Tom Heggestad (Krishnamurti Foundation, America), Joseph Ross (Joseph Ross Collection, Ojai), Björn-Peter Bernin (United Lodge of Theosophists, Malmö). I want to thank Astrid von Chamier for helping me polish my English.

I am more grateful than words can possibly express to Jeremias for his generous support, inspiring comments and endless discussions at the kitchen table.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents, Birgitt and Matthias Moritz, for taking me to India for the first time, my lovely sisters Meera and Melissa, and my grandparents, Ruth-Esther and Friedrich Moritz, for having inspired my passion for reading and writing.
List of Illustrations

1 Theosophists of the Order of the Rising Sun at Benares, 1911.............................. 200

2 Construction of the Amphitheatre in Sydney Harbour............................................. 205

3 Krishnamurti by Hollywood photographer Albert Witzel........................................ 212

4 Newspaper clipping of a sketch and article by James Montgomery Flagg; the famous recruiting poster by Flagg. ................................................................. 213

5 Star Camp in Ojai/California......................................................................................... 232

6 Food distribution at the Star Camp in Ommen/Netherlands................................... 233
**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JRC</td>
<td>Joseph Ross Collection, Ojai/California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFA</td>
<td>Krishnamurti Foundation, America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFI</td>
<td>Krishnamurti Foundation, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBSC</td>
<td>Maha Bodhi Society, Colombo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RGC</td>
<td>Rajagopal Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino/California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULT/LA</td>
<td>United Lodge of Theosophists, Los Angeles/California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULT/M</td>
<td>United Lodge of Theosophists, Malmö/Sweden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, colonial India emerged as a global center of critique against the West’s materialistic tendencies. The religious reformer Swami Vivekananda who became world famous at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago warned of the West’s obsession with material wealth,¹ M.K. Gandhi claimed that “modern civilization neglected the soul, privileged the body,”² and the nationalist politician- turned- saint Aurobindo Ghose warned that the future destiny of humanity “will depend much more on the spirit which we are than on the machinery we shall use”³ and condemned the “West”as responsible for the First World War catastrophe.⁴ Which prompted Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore to the fierce critique that such a civilization was “man-destroying”⁵ and not fit to decide the future of humanity.

These intellectuals did not stop at criticizing the materialism of the existing world order by emphasizing the spiritual potential of Asia but often initiated active movements towards these utopias. Tagore’s alternative educational project Shantiniketan, Gandhi’s experiments with community living at the Sabarmati Ashram or Aurobindo’s spiritual movement in Auroville, combined spiritual impetus with social reform.


²Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 64.


Intellectuals from numerous colonized countries subscribed to the idea that "civilization was ultimately a spiritual and moral concern" and refused to accept a differentiation between secular and spiritual spheres. While in the prewar period these critiques were marginalized and dismissed by mainstream politicians as the "rantings of gloomy radicals and eccentric mystics," Hindu revivalists and theosophists held that only Indian spirituality and a resurgent “East” could keep the West's disintegrating tendency in check and usher in a new age of global peace and harmony. However, these Indian critics themselves presented the best example that the assumed East/West dichotomy between the poles of spirituality and materialism suggested an artificial break between cultures that were actually deeply entangled. Raised within a British educational system, members of this small but influential Indian elite were appalled by the imbalance between their experience within the colonial situation and their ethical ideas.

Their popularity with audiences beyond colonial boundaries was due to the fact that they expressed their visions of “Indian spirituality” in English. The rising global consciousness of this bi-lingual - and cultural urban elite, particularly in the port cities of Madras, Colombo, Bombay, and Calcutta, met with pre-existing forms of cosmopolitanism. Thus it can be argued that around the turn of the century

---


Indians sported a new self-confidence by asserting that they did in fact belong to universal communities beyond the colonial empire and that they desired the good of the entire world community. This “represented a radical attack on the idea of the British Empire as the sole source of the universal.”

Thus South Asians became involved in a historical process that since the 1980s has been addressed by historians as “globalization”. Modern globalization is generally understood as the cultural, political, and economical integration of the world and the intensification of a new sense of the world as a whole. This is not a new phenomenon, however, and historians following the recent approach have particularly turned to analyzing the period around 1900 as a “take-off” phase in which patterns were initiated which have since then marked our age. So far, historical research has mainly focused on the economic and political dimensions of this process, and institutional, organizational or state activities on a global scale have been examined predominantly from a Eurocentric angle. However, especially the “take-off phase” between 1870 and 1925 initiated the “inclusion of a number of non-European societies in 'international society'” and the “international formalization and attempted implementation of ideas about humanity”.

Until then, globalization was almost equivalent to European expansion which prompted Arif Dirlik to define the phase around 1900 as a “Eurocentric globalization” which slowly and unevenly at the same time merges into a truly, multicentric “global modernity”. Due to the uneven and considerably differing levels of political, economical, and cultural integration, it is difficult to clearly demarcate this shift; I intend to show, however, that with regard to the self-awareness of historical


15 Ibid., 59.


protagonists the tables began to turn at the beginning of the twentieth century when increasing numbers of colonized intellectuals began to envision a world without boundaries with an equal share of influence to all and a positive attitude towards cultural differences.\(^{19}\)

Clearly, this shift in perspective, this rise of a global consciousness and the concern for the world as a whole was based on the historical process of technical and communicative integration of the world. So far, however, global history studies have predominantly focused on economic and political integration and neglected the cultural, sociological, and religious dimensions as the distinguished historians Christopher Bayly and Jürgen Osterhammel deplore. In their recent substantial contributions to the field both scholars highlight the importance of “religion” as an analytical category for understanding globalizing processes in the so-called “take-off” phase between 1870 and the mid 1920s.\(^ {20}\) In retrospect, Bayly emphasizes that the expansion and consolidation of religions after 1815 “is as important as, if not more important than, the theme of the rise of nationalism or liberalism, which has so often dominated studies of this period.”\(^ {21}\) Jürgen Osterhammel is equally enthusiastic in his praise for “religion”\(^ {22}\) Nevertheless, at the European Congress on World and Global History at the London School of Economics in 2011, not a single panel was devoted to either religion or spirituality, which shows that this topic is still underrated.


\(^{20}\) Robertson, Globalization, 59.


But if we consider both homogenization and fragmentation as the central but dialectical dynamics of globalization processes, the almost exclusive focus of both authors on how the seminal world religions “expanded ‘down’ into particular societies by imposing uniformity” and simultaneously “expanded geographically,” fails to address this dialectic. The analysis of “globalization” as a quantifiable historical process of further homogenization on the institutional level neglects the inner differentiation, fragmentation, and pluralization of the field through the emergence of new hybrid spiritualities that challenged organized religions. These groups cannot be adequately grasped in terms of their geographical spread or in numbers of adherents which were often negligible. However, the rise of non-institutionalized forms of spirituality since the nineteenth century has enriched and diversified “religion” which, in the nineteenth century, was pre-eminent as “a source of individual orientation” and “the most important form of creating meaning in peoples everyday life.”

I intend to revise the understanding of “globalization” by examining “religion” as an important dimension of cultural globalization perceived as an increased transfer of spiritual knowledge, images, and concepts. I am thus indebted to the works of Osterhammel and Bayly pointing out the importance of “religion”; I wish to expand their approach, however, by concentrating on the inner diversification and fragmentation of the religious field through non-institutionalized spiritualities. In order to specify this analysis I will focus on a set of historical, non-European protagonists instead of institutions, states or organizations, although an organization will be the gravitational center of the study. Thus, I want to expand “globalization” by constricting it to the perspective of a set of historical protagonists and their formulation of an alternative world vision based on their specific interpretation of “sacred knowledge”.

---


25 „Noch im 19. Jahrhundert war Religion die für das Alltagsleben der Menschen wichtigste Form der Sinnbildung, also das Zentrum aller geistigen Kultur.“ Osterhammel, Die Verwandlung der Welt, 1239, my translation.
Within India, the Theosophical Society (TS) was a suitable point of departure for South Asians who aimed at constructing alternative visions of world order based on Asian spirituality: The structural cosmopolitanism of the TS provided a favorable environment for the integration of South Asians into the global sphere, thinking in transnational terms and envisioning a world society within wider horizons. The central ideal of the TS was to counteract the materialistic Zeitgeist and transcend all social boundaries; it was the foundation of a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity irrespective of race, class, creed or gender” based on the belief in the essentially spiritual nature of human beings. Considering India as the main source of global spirituality, they located the international headquarters of their rapidly and globally expanding Society in India. This nineteenth century “swing to the East” and the revolt against mainstream Western culture based on Christianity was thus a common feature of dissenting Euro-Americans and an influential elite of South Asian society. This was exemplarily addressed by the Theosophical Society which made it both an innovator and indicator of modern religious orientation under global circumstances, since the Society encouraged the ideological paradigmatic shift from a “Eurocentric globalization” to a “global modernity”, in which cultural differences are positively evaluated. Even though the infrastructure (English as the lingua franca), ideology (commonwealth rhetoric) and membership (sense of superiority of Euro-American, sense of inferiority of Asian members) were based on colonial structures, the cosmopolitan appeal, partly unleashed by colonialism, aimed at transcending colonial borders on all three levels.

Although the gravitational center of theosophy was colonial India, the global awareness of Indians and their activities transcended colonial borders, and they cannot appropriately be addressed via the binary perspective of center and periphery. This perspective has long dominated studies on South Asia during this period, while the “diverse universalist aspirations alive in the Indian Ocean world, 

26 The so-called “swing to the East” originally refers to the acquisition of trading routes and bases along India and the Far East by the East India Company in the eighteenth century.

27 Durba Ghosh and Dane K. Kennedy, eds., Decentring Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006).
and the zones of meeting and encounter outside the center-periphery axis have generally been overlooked.”

I want to show how between 1879 and 1930 South Asian affiliates of the Theosophical Society contributed to the pluralization of the global spiritual sphere by envisioning an ideal society; I will demonstrate how their contribution emerged because of, and despite, their colonial entanglements, because of, and despite, fashioning their spiritual messages in Eastern garb. Their fantasies, concerns, and dreams of this ideal society are analyzed as an example for the paradigmatic shift in perspective which is difficult to grasp. Closing up on these non-European historical protagonists I hope to contribute to a non-Eurocentric genealogy of spirituality and to thereby provide a differentiated analysis of spiritual and religious entanglements within a global perspective.

The case studies on three Theosophical Society affiliates around 1900, two Indian and one Ceylonese, will be at the center of the study – B. P. Wadia (1881-1958), Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). All three joined the Theosophical Society at a very early age and became influential members in their own respect. Wadia, for example, was considered Annie Besant’s successor as international president of the TS, while young Krishnamurti was the object of worldwide devotion, and Dharmapala cooperated with the president/founder Henry Steel Olcott in reforming Theravada Buddhism on a global scale. All three of them went beyond the TS by founding their own movements – Wadia became involved in the reformist United Lodge of Theosophists, Dharmapala in the Maha Bodhi Society and Krishnamurti embarked on his independent teaching. They benefitted from their former theosophical affiliation as they formed their independent ideology and network following the paths laid out by the Society. They catered to a global audience and, through their extensive travels, experienced the globe as a whole. Thus, all three embodied “globalization”: They enacted globalization through their extensive travels and transnational biographies, they contributed to cultural globalization through the transfer of “sacred knowledge,” and they reflected on the dynamics of globalization

through the formulation of a world vision. By all standards, they were true agents of cultural globalization.

1.1 Research Questions

The study intends to answer the following research questions:

a. How did the historical protagonists define, legitimize, and disseminate their interpretation of “sacred knowledge” on a global scale? This question points to the dimension of a transnational knowledge transfer, the organization of a group, and it analyzes the entanglement of discourses on spirituality with theology as an already established form of knowledge.

b. How did the historical protagonists formulate alternative visions of world order based on “sacred knowledge”? The concern for the world as a single entity, the envisioning of an alternative world order to the existing one.

c. Why did these specific agents become interested in the transfer of “sacred knowledge” in the first place? How did they manage to assert their vision and how did their engagement define their identity?

To use case studies as an entry point allows to capture the rise of a global consciousness expressed through formulations of alternative world order visions based on “sacred knowledge,” grasp concrete and personal expressions of transnational interaction as opposed to institutional forms and permits to trace the tangible agency of non-Europeans in disseminating “sacred knowledge”.

This study of a threefold minority perspective - non-institutional, non-European, and based on a non-accepted form of “sacred knowledge” is situated at the disciplinary crossroads of Area Studies, Colonial Studies, Global History, and the Sociology of Religion and Esotericism, and it is an ambitious project. How can the earlier outlined questions be applied to the study? I suggest three inextricably linked angles or Sichtachsen in order to address the topic: “sacred knowledge” – Globalization – Agents.
1.2 Research Angles

1.2.1 “Sacred Knowledge”

Admittedly, “sacred knowledge” is a difficult term because it combines seemingly conflicting elements: that which is “sacred” belongs to the realm of faith and thus cannot be rationally known, since “the supernatural is the world of the mysterious, of the unknowable, of the un-understandable.” 29 Émile Durkheim’s functionalist definition of all religions as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden,” 30 pointedly expresses the supernatural quality of the “sacred.” In my study, I am applying this definition of religion to spiritual or mythical phenomena as well.

This iridescent distinction between spirituality and religion can assist in the analysis of a period which is characterized by both the consolidation of “world religions” 31 and the widespread emergence of “spirituality” - a term in use since the 1960s. The term “spirituality” is used to describe an orientation towards a subjective “religious” experience, predominantly interpreted by alternative religiosities that are composed of non-hegemonial occult, mystical, and Eastern traditions unlike organized religion. Individual experience legitimizes a holistic approach that links the different individuals into one whole. 32 Due to the intrinsic anti-institutionalization and individualization, “spirituality” is notoriously difficult to describe.

The term “sacred knowledge” is neither used by the historical protagonists nor is it an established term within historical scholarship. However, I will argue that the general openness of the term is particularly useful for this study. The openness of the term as a “container” or blankspace to be filled differently by the historical protagonists allows an analysis of “sacred knowledge” which was interchangeably


30 Ibid., 47.


termed spirituality, religion, spiritual knowledge, higher knowledge, higher truths, religious knowledge, truth and many more.

Moreover, the term’s contradictory tension allows for an analysis of the iridescent interactions between the known (“knowledge”) and the unknown (“sacred”) which, so far, have only been analyzed separately. As a form of “knowledge” the term is oriented towards sociological knowledge approaches which do not define “knowledge” by differentiating between “rational” and “irrational” but include ideas, philosophies, technology, magic, everyday knowledge or superstition. Such a socio-functional definition of “knowledge” as culture necessarily emphasizes that knowledge production is a process through which human beings construct meaning and thereby create social reality, since “knowledge” only gains meaning in social interactions.

This definition of “sacred knowledge” as socially constructed and constructive will highlight how the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, respectively the legitimacy of, and the access to, “sacred knowledge” defined the character of a “spiritual” movement. In short, “sacred knowledge” is prone to the same negotiations, translations, and limitations of hierarchical orders of knowledge formations like all other forms of “knowledge” in the period under scrutiny. It is thus both a social product and the direct expression of culture and therefore an appropriate focal point of a study on cultural globalization. For example, the emergence of the academic discipline of comparative religious studies prompted spokespersons of “sacred knowledge” such as Anagarika Dharmapala to render his messages in the new idiom in order to be accepted by sophisticated audiences.

As the production, legitimization, and dissemination of “sacred knowledge” is an important dimension in this study, the question of power relations expressed through knowledge hierarchies, most pointedly reflected by Edward Said’s Orientalism will also be addressed.

---


34 Ibid., 71.

1.2.2 Globalization

The second angle aims at expanding the existing scholarship on the history of globalization by integrating not only “religion”, but also “spirituality” as expressions of “sacred knowledge.” Since the 1980s, historians have increasingly turned to the study of the history of globalization understood as the cultural, political, and economical integration of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. Methodologically and thematically, global history aims at transcending national boundaries which are considered ineffective to grapple with the complexities and entanglements of the globalizing world. The so-called “secularization thesis” and a Eurocentric perspective have so far prevented an in-depth historical analysis of “religion” under global circumstances. Based on the decreasing influence and appeal of “world religions,” proponents of the “secularization thesis” claim that “religion” is in full retreat.

However, globalization around 1900 cannot be explained any more via the Sonderweg of the countries dominated by Christianity “in the nineteenth century European story of the 'disenchantment of the world’”, since “the gods and other agents inhabiting practices of so-called 'superstition' have never died anywhere”.

Accordingly, the preeminent historians of global history, Osterhammel and Bayly as well as Margrit Pernau, disprove the “secularization thesis” as a persistent

36 Robertson, Globalization, 8.


38 Hubert Knoblauch, Populäre Religion: Auf dem Weg in eine spirituelle Gesellschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2009), 16.


41 Pernau, Transnationale Geschichte, 117.
reflection of a Eurocentric paradigm by highlighting the prevalent significance of “religion”. However, the focus on the geographical diffusion (e.g. through modern means of travel) and popularization (e.g. through modern means of communication) of the “empires of religion” suggests that globalization was first and foremost a historical process of homogenization while underrating the fragmentation of the global spiritual field reflected by the rise of non-institutionalized spiritualities.

Only in his conclusive remarks on “religion”, Christopher Bayly recognizes that globalization around 1900 did not only accelerate uniformity, but also groups that "toyed with spiritualism, theosophy, Eastern religions, and even devil worship," by which conventional religions were seriously challenged and by which the global religious field was thoroughly pluralized.

For the first time in modern history a multitude of new spiritual movements which more easily adapted to the latest scientific findings than the “world religions” and which offered alternative spiritualities to the dissenting in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity became accepted by a growing number of people. "Spiritualism offered a mix of rationalism, experimentation, and anti-Christian secularism, which turned out to be tremendously attractive to secularist working men. Moreover, it dealt with death and the dead in ways that were far more satisfying than the very dry rationalism of secularist societies."44 45

Today, these new spiritual movements have thoroughly permeated our global culture so much so they have become almost invisible through processes variously described as "detraditionalization", and “individualization” and major parts of


human spirituality have lost their contours. However, distinguished Canadian sociologist Peter Beyer identified both “world religions” and non-institutionalized spiritualities as contemporary expressions of the “sacred” today. Beyer admits that this kind of analysis is only in its very early stages, but, as the accounts of Osterhammel and Bayly illustrate, this fragmentation is not adequately represented in the research on global history. This study aims to fill this gap by examining non-European expressions of “sacred knowledge” that can both denote “religion” and “spirituality” and thereby complement the existing historical approach that has already entered sociological studies of contemporary spirituality.

Moreover, I intend to expand the existing approach to “religion” around 1900 by confining my study to the entry point of alternative world order visions based on forms of “sacred knowledge”.

The alternative visions that the three protagonists developed over time emerged from an opposition to, as well as an appropriation of, the existing Eurocentric world order and, more specifically, from an opposition to, and an appropriation of, established religious systems. The orientation towards Euro-America as both an “exemplar and a controller” as well as a negative “Other” was certainly crucial in the formation of these new orders and has to be considered within a differentiated analysis; however, historical agents from Euro-America and South Asia fashioned their visions of world order explicitly as an alternative.

If the period between the 1880s and the 1930s can be interpreted as an interplay of competing or alternative world visions promoted by four types of “oppositional

48 Bellah, Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World; Beck, Der eigene Gott.
50 Peter Beyer, “Globalisierung und Religion: Eine Auswahl englischesprachiger Literatur,” in Religion im Prozeß der Globalisierung (see note 51), XL.
movements”, their relationship with the existing world order is characteristic for them: NGOs who questioned Western hegemony while their “subversive internationalism”\(^{54}\) operated predominantly from within. In their attempts to overcome its predominance, the various nationalist movements challenged Western hegemony, the same holds true for nascent regionalisms such as pan-Asianism or pan-Slavism who envisioned alternative geo-political units. The last type, “the widespread turn towards traditionalism” was "less an organized movement than a cultural and political trend and mentality" which “posed the antithesis of modern, European civilization allegedly devoid of true and inner meaning.”\(^{55}\)

I intend to refer to and expand this concept of “competing visions of world order” by analyzing distinctly spiritually motivated oppositional movements whose significance is undervalued in this model.\(^{56}\) Especially for South Asian anti-colonialists, however, religion and spirituality profoundly inspired their visions that were in this sense alternative as they emphasized its spiritual roots and did not stop at intellectual enterprises either.\(^{57}\)


\(^{57}\) Although the author emphasizes the importance of non-governmental visions of world order, he avoids spiritually motivated visions: Akira Iriye, Cultural Internationalism and World Order (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); the same avoidance marks his study on the emergence of NGOs: Akira Iriye, Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
1.2.3 Agents

Following the postcolonial studies debates, global historians point to the necessity to avoid Eurocentric paradigms. While acknowledging that colonialism substantially affected and shaped the experiences of both the colonizers and the colonized, they emphasize the complexity of “knowledge transfers” under global conditions that cannot be reduced to the assumption of a one-way transfer along the center/periphery axis. Sensitized by Said’s famous intervention with Orientalism, as well as by the subaltern studies collective, global historians point to the need to focus on the agency of local historical protagonists.

While scholarly research generally acknowledges the contribution of the Theosophical Society towards the independent movement and socio-religious revivalism in India, a comprehensive account of the role of South Asian intellectuals is still missing. A Euro-centric perspective prevails, as can be seen from the numerous studies that acknowledge the contribution of Euro-American members. To make matters worse, only few scholarly accounts of theosophical history mention the involvement of Indians at all. Although I intend to fill this gap by offering a more differentiated account of the South Asian engagement I will not limit myself to a biographical approach.

Due to their bi-lingual and bi-cultural upbringing, South Asian protagonists featured hybrid personalities. However, I do not perceive their identities simply as given, but rather as constructed in intricate ways. Within the context of the study it will therefore be of great importance to carefully address these identities as constructed or referring to the self-perception of the historical protagonists, while I


59 Said, Orientalism.


62 I will discuss this point in the next chapter.
consider it unhelpful to unravel the provenance of their identity formations. Therefore, this study accepts the Indianness or Asianness as identity constructions the historical protagonists chose to play out on the global sphere as a marker of difference, as a superior position in spiritual matters or neglected in order to reflect their transboundary human nature.

All three perspectives are intertwined and make up the title of the study: Globalizing “Sacred Knowledge”: South Asians and the Theosophical Society. As the analysis will show, “globalizing” denotes both the activity of the South Asians, their diffusion of their interpretation of “sacred knowledge” into the world and their shared assumption that it is “sacred knowledge” that can “globalize”, that is integrate, the world. The title has thus a descriptive and normative dimension; it aims at synthesizing globalization as a process and perspective. All three Sichtachsen are intertwined and build the analytical categories through which the whole study is held together. They are all equally addressed in the three case studies and reflect one dimension of the overall problematic.

1.3 Defining/Limiting/Justifying

This innovative approach uses a well established method of qualitative sociological research in order to grapple with the complexities of the project by focusing on three individual actors as exemplary for the pluralization in the religious field\(^\text{63}\) around 1900.

However, these actors have not been chosen as individual cases with interesting biographical data but as representative for three different and contrasting variants of the relationship to “globalization”. The selection of the presented cases has been oriented towards methods of “theoretical sampling” and Max Weber’s methodological concept of “ideal types.”\(^\text{64}\)

Following “theoretical sampling” cases are chosen because of their minimally or maximally contrasting approaches to the research question.\(^\text{65}\) I have chosen

\(^{63}\) „Religious Field“ is a concept created by Pierre Bourdieu.


\(^{65}\) Ibid., 177.
maximally contrasting examples since this allows us to evaluate the spectrum of approaches to “globalization” from within the spiritual field.\footnote{Aglaja Przyborski and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, Qualitative Sozialforschung: Ein Arbeitsbuch, 3rd ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), 178.} The cases thus do not represent “religion” or “spirituality” but patterns of interaction with “globalization” based on “sacred knowledge”. Thus, although all three actors share a similar social and spiritual background and seek answers to the same question they eventually differ considerably in their approaches and answers to this question. They have been selected because they share a similar, non-European background that addresses the appeal of global history approaches to focus on non-European agents and because their perspective can effectively enrich the existing Eurocentric literature on theosophy. Furthermore, they emerged from the new, heterogenic spiritual background of theosophy and can thus impressively illustrate the increasing diversity of the spiritual field in which they acted as spokesmen of spiritual innovation and are thus representative of their followers all over the globe.

Although all three kept the basic theosophical assumption of the spiritual nature of man and “sacred knowledge” as their fundamental commonality, they all defined it differently through their independent approaches to “sacred knowledge.” Combined with “theoretical sampling” Max Weber’s construction of “ideal types” has been a useful tool. Its advantage over both very abstract, general ideas and specific historical examples is its fictional character, as ideological constructs that help to put the chaos of social reality in order.\footnote{Ibid., 331.} The case studies are therefore not representations of empirical reality but one-sidedly increase certain elements.\footnote{Udo Kelle and Susanne Kluge, Vom Einzelfall zum Typus: Fallvergleich und Fallkontrastierung in der qualitativen Sozialforschung, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), 91.}

Therefore, the case studies will be comprehensive in terms of the analysis of key moments but I will refrain from providing an entire biography and discussing the spiritual ideas of the protagonists in detail. B.P. Wadia and Angarika Dharmapala and Jiddu Krishnamurti are studied not for their personal genius but as iconic figures embodying historical and social forces that gave rise to their iconicity and thus open a window unto the shift from a “Eurocentric globalization” to a multicentric “global
modernity” exemplified by the inroad that Asian spiritualities made into the “West” at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The empirical data is only analyzed at the level it nourishes conceptualizations of “sacred knowledge” as the raw material of their world visions. The study will broadly analyze the period between 1879 and 1930. In 1879 the TS founders landed in Bombay and after they transferred their international headquarters to Adyar, a suburb of Madras this became the center of the theosophical network. The study ends in 1930, when Jiddu Krishnamurti, the most popular South Asian theosophist resigned from the TS and formulated his independent approach to “sacred knowledge”. The core period of analysis will be from around 1900 to 1930 since it was then that the three individuals became independent – Wadia in 1922, Dharmapala in 1906 and Krishnamurti between 1927-1930.

1.4 State of Research

Since the literature on the three case studies is very diverse I will present it in the respective chapters. The research literature on the role of the South Asian theosophists is part of the argument in the chapter on South Asian engagement and will be discussed there. At this point I will only present the state of research on the Theosophical Society.

The Theosophical Society was symptomatic for the widespread though subcultural acceptance of spiritualities around 1900. It was only one organization in a flourishing and diverse context reaching from spiritism, mesmerism, and occultism to name only a few. Not only was it global in its outreach and seminal in its influence on decision makers worldwide; the key point is rather the general picture within which these details about individuals gain their significance, a general picture of theosophy as an integral part of the cultural and social context of a globalizing world. Therefore, Kumari Jayawardena rightly argues that it was "Blavatsky’s achievement” “to make the theosophical movement not only an occult society, but a part of "progressive" thought of the late 19th century."69 Only through perceiving the Theosophical Society as an inspirational center and important social network can we account for its

relevance in the analysis of a multitude of innovative and alternative discourses, practices, and topics around 1900 that have been highlighted by historians in the field of alternative education\textsuperscript{70}, modern architecture, and design\textsuperscript{71}, anti-colonial politics esp. in India and Ireland \textsuperscript{72} \textsuperscript{73} \textsuperscript{74}, modern abstract painting \textsuperscript{75}, modern spirituality/esotericism\textsuperscript{76} \textsuperscript{77} \textsuperscript{78} \textsuperscript{79}, globalization, racism,\textsuperscript{80} and many more, but a new global history approach has only been applied on certain aspects of the movement by historian Mark Frost.\textsuperscript{81} The major background for these erstwhile subcultural innovative discourses has been \textit{romanticism} and although the romantic era is over “the themes it introduced have permeated European and North American life and


\textsuperscript{71} Christoph Wagner, ed., \textit{Esoterik am Bauhaus. Eine Revision der Moderne?} (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009).


\textsuperscript{77} Olav Hammer, \textit{Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age} (Leiden [u.a.]: Brill, 2001).


\textsuperscript{79} Wouter J. Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought} (Leiden: Brill, 1985).


remain an enduring part of its cultural fabric today. Lofty German idealist metaphysics and English poetry saturated with sentiment and flowery language are out of fashion, but Romanticism has enjoyed an often concealed 'afterlife' in cinema, music, literature, and eclectic New Age spiritualities. How we think today of creativity, the imagination, the individual, and art, is still deeply informed by this movement.”

While “a general sense of amnesia prevails” in academia regarding the theosophical contributions to the “intellectual sphere” rather uncritical, often descriptive accounts of affiliates or semi-affiliates predominate the analysis of the TS in general. A considerable amount of the existing work on the TS attempts not to focus on an institutional history but tries to contextualize it: for example, Joscelyn Godwin in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*[^84], Bruce F. Campbell *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement*[^85] and Robert Ellwood *Theosophy: Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages*[^86]. Josephine Ransom in: *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*[^87] offers an insider perspective of the institution in a more conventional way. Despite the attempts of Campbell and Godwin to discuss the roots of the TS, the problem remains that the theosophical movement has predominantly been described by insiders such as Josephine Ransom or semi-insiders such as Robert Ellwood and Joscelyn Godwin. For the reconstruction of the historical events, however, Godwin's account was the most useful although rather descriptive account of the movement.


Considering the significance of the Theosophical Society around 1900 its marginalization in discussions on cosmopolitanism or international NGOs is most telling. However, a recent example for a critical evaluation of theosophy’s subcultural but only partially acknowledged influence is Leela Gandhi’s analysis of cosmopolitanism on the basis of friendship in the dissident subcultural milieu of India and Great Britain in the sense Jayawardena has described the movement at the heart of “progressive thought”\(^8^8\). Accordingly, Gandhi argues that theosophy brought “its largely middle-class adherents into intimate commerce with parallel, secular, avant-garde critiques of western civilization, exemplified in the linked projects of dress and sexual reform, and homosexual exceptionalism; dietary politics, antivivisectionism, and vegetarianism; and aestheticism, or the repudiation of bourgeoisie materialism and philinism in the form of class or colonial avarice.”\(^8^9\) In the case of Sri Aurobindo’s French collaborator, Mirra Alfassa (1873-1973), the Mother of the Aurobindo Ashram,\(^9^0\) Gandhi establishes theosophical links through her close friendship with “Max Thèon, a man well-versed in Sanskrit and Hindu spiritualism” who “had collaborated with H.P. Blavatsky in Egypt, and she counted among her closest friend in Paris the Theosophist and orientalist adventurer Madame Alexandra David-Neel.” Gandhi thus argues that "fin-de-siècle spiritualism, even in its wider European and American manifestations, passed almost invariably through the ideological suburbs of either Theosophy or socialism.”\(^9^1\) Even though Gandhi establishes theosophy as the gravitational center of her study and analyzes a wide array of theosophically inspired personalities such as Mohandas Gandhi, E.M. Forster, C.F. Andrews, J.H. Cousins or Anna Kingsford, she fails to discuss their shared ideological background in theosophy. As in the case of J.H. Cousins she discusses in varying degrees the theosophical background while in other cases such as the British

\(^{8^8}\) Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, 117.


\(^{9^0}\) Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, 207.

\(^{9^1}\) Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 123.
theosohist Anna Kingsford, she simply does not mention this influence at all. Especially, in a work that attempts to unravel the complex entanglements in a milieu this irregular, the discussion of theosophy as an intellectual framework seems problematic. However, Gandhi’s account is a stimulating and important example that accounts for the fact that the Theosophical Society was at the heart of a milieu that gave rise to alternative world order visions by effectively criticizing mainstream politics and culture by deliberately combining political and spiritual impulse. Thereby, she delineates how the TS successfully conflated progressive Europeans and South Asians beyond the colonial order.

Three other studies that identify the Theosophical Society as an important factor in international cooperation and the emergence of a global civil society are Robert Holton’s account of the Universal Races Congress, Daniel Laqua’s article on the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation under the League of Nations and Kevin Brehony’s work on the New Education Fellowship that was founded by theosophists and functioned as the center of the transnational movement for progressive education.

An almost “classic” context in which theosophy is discussed is women’s emancipation and feminism for which Joy Dixon’s Divine Feminine, Theosophy and Feminism in England is the standard study explaining the significance of theosophy for a British audience in the so-called crisis of faith. This esoteric aspect once more characterizes the movement as abreast of its time as for the urban cosmopolitan of the “West” the inquiry into occult knowledge offered an opportunity to investigate different worldviews and envision other spiritual identities in a diverse subculture of

---

92 Gandhi, Affective Communities, 104.


95 Brehony, “A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938”.

esotericism, spiritualism, and mesmerism which were marginalized by mainstream Victorian culture. Supernatural phenomena, séances, etc. were a new and fascinating pastime of the Euro-American middle class informed by a long tradition of Western esotericism.

Only relatively recently this undercurrent of European history has become a subject of scientific academic research, still struggling with opposition from established disciplines. Scholars of the history of esotericism generally regard the Theosophical Society a most central institution that emerged from a longstanding and widespread esoteric underground reaching back at least into the seventeenth century and whose numerous offspring were the precursors of the New Age spirituality and new spiritual movements.

Based on the definition of the preeminent historian of the field, Antoine Faivre, the focus is on the history of Western esotericism, which problematically reduces the “Orient” to a mere “symbol of 'true spirituality' and as a repository of exotic terminology.” Indisputably, the Theosophical Society was informed by and produced a wealth of essentialist assumptions about the “East” but the moment the TS established itself in India, invited a considerable amount of South Asians in its ranks and introduced itself as a transnational platform of intellectual exchange to assume that the ideas of South Asians “have not fundamentally changed those of


100 Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 67.


102 Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought, 517.
western recipients”\textsuperscript{103} seems unlikely. A Eurocentric perspective thus generally prevails not only in the literature on the theosophical history, as I will show and discuss in the next chapter, but also in the nascent research on esotericism. Analyzing the hybridity of the movement as a shared intellectual endeavor of Asians and Euro-Americans seems therefore a worthwhile aim to pursue in this study.

### 1.5 Sources

My analysis is based on the reading of a wide array of primary sources largely from private archives and libraries in India, California, Sweden, Germany, and Great Britain of the various branches and lodges of the Theosophical Society and the post-theosophical offshoots I am investigating in this study, namely the United Lodge of Theosophists (Bangalore, Bombay, Los Angeles, Malmö), the Maha Bodhi Society (Kolkata, Sarnath, Colombo) and the Krishnamurti Foundation (Varanasi, Chennai, Ojai/California).

The research design allowed me to mostly stay away from government archives, however, exposing me to confront the difficult task of approaching archives of partly secret societies. Particularly theosophists of the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar were not willing to share their material with me, which is as deplorable as the condition of the material that is neither professionally catalogued nor preserved, as I became aware on my first fieldtrip to Adyar in 2009. The three independent organizations have been much more generous with sharing their archival treasures often for the first time with a scholar. The Huntington Library in San Marino was the major “professional” archive from which I used sources on Krishnamurti, however, even here, the Rajagopal Collection which holds these documents was not thoroughly catalogued. Only by relying on the personal initiative of Joseph Ross, I was able to identify the necessary material. Due to these constraints I was the first “professional” who made use of these invaluable sources.

Since I am handling a theosophical and an independent phase in the development of alternative world concepts of the three main protagonists, the first body of sources I read where their pamphlets and lectures. Especially in the case of Wadia this was

\textsuperscript{103} Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought}, 517.
ground work, while in the case of Krishnamurti I combined already used with unused sources which were abundantly available due to careful preservation of the material by the Krishnamurti Foundations in India and America. I was able to reconstruct Dharmapala’s world vision and definition of Buddhist “sacred knowledge” through his pamphlets and the easily available source edition *Return to Righteousness*.\(^{104}\)

Wherever possible, I tried to contrast the reconstruction of the agent’s notions with accounts of their followers at the receiving end of their communications. Since they were all spiritual authorities in their own right, these sources were often imbued with enthusiasm. However, like hagiographical accounts generally and especially in the case of Krishnamurti they were also helpful for denoting the hopes and fantasies of the audience. Sometimes, as in the case of Wadia, flawed hagiographical accounts were the only possible source of information about their personal background which I read and presented with special care. Nevertheless, the perspective of and on the recipients is certainly underrepresented but the necessary ground work and the handling of the still enormous amount of source material prevented more profound analysis.

But the second major body of sources, newspapers, magazines and reports, helped to secure a more differentiated image: The selective reading of the TS’ major organs *The Theosophist* and *Adyar Bulletin* (international) as well as its country-specific publications *Theosophy in India* (India) and *The Messenger* (USA) were invaluable sources for tracing inner-theosophical often transnational debates. These rich materials offer insight not only into the emergence of modern esotericism but also the transnational interaction on a wide range of progressive discourses such as vegetarianism, women’s emancipation, temperance, liberal politics, Esperanto movement, scientific findings and progressive education. As far as I know, the diversity and comprehensiveness of this material has not yet been thoroughly studied. Although an extensive amount was propagandistic and therefore biased, I was astonished by the relative openness of the magazines to critical voices and the amount of recycling of articles from other publications.

The same holds true for the publications of the post-theosophical organizations – for which I analyzed specific numbers of the *Star Bulletin* or *The Herald of the Order of the Star*, for Krishnamurti’s theosophical phase, issues of the *Maha Bodhi Journal*, for Dharmapala’s independent phase. Since Wadia founded his independent publication *The Aryan Path* only in 1930, I did not include it in my analysis.

Apart from the timeframe set by the study (1879-1930), I particularly investigated whether the magazines covered specific transnational events such as World War I or one of the research angles and focal points such as *Brotherhood*, *Asia*, “Sacred Knowledge”, *Knowledge, Messianism, Traditionalism* and *Civilization*.

### 1.6 Structure of the Thesis

My analysis will start with a *first chapter*, situating the Theosophical Society in the context of colonial India around 1900. I will particularly delineate the fascination of Euro-American theosophists with India, discuss the role of Asian “sacred knowledge” in the theosophical ideology and most importantly detect why a specific group of South Asians was attracted by the TS. This chapter will exemplarily show how the TS integrated local and transnational concerns. Towards the end of this chapter I will also explore possible reasons for South Asians to become disillusioned with the Society and ultimately resign.

The following three case studies present variations of the question how the selected set of agents define, legitimize, and disseminate their interpretation of “sacred knowledge” as the “raw material” of their alternative vision of world order. This implies questions regarding inclusion and exclusion as well as the extent of their visions. Still, their initial alliance with the Theosophical Society secured a global network, a loyal group of followers all over the world and a shared assumption that an ideal global society could only be based on “sacred knowledge”. The three case studies all follow the same pattern and are structured in broadly the same way: The impulse to formulate an alternative vision of a world order was triggered by an initial dissatisfaction with the existing political as well as religious system. The dissent is
exemplified by the interpretation of “global moments”\textsuperscript{105} such as World War I or the Russo-Japanese War in 1907 which highlights how the agents reacted to the existing world system and will give first hints on how they attempted to solve the problematic.

Following this introduction, the first part of the case studies is devoted to the theosophical phase of the agents and discusses to which extent their reactions to the dissatisfactory situation of society was monitored by the Theosophical Society. The different regional and ideological focal points in the definition of “sacred knowledge” were already laid out and ideas of “sacred knowledge” tentatively formulated. Due to the differences in age and position (Krishnamurti was a child, while Dharmapala was already about 30 years old) the extent of influence and guidance through the TS differed considerably.

The ideological bridge between their theosophical and their independent phase was the assumption that the focus on rational and materialistic thinking was the main reason for violence, competition and isolation, in short, the disintegration of the globe. They concluded that only a fair infusion of “sacred knowledge” could effectively counteract these disintegrating tendencies.

The second part of all three case studies analyzes the independent phase of the three actors and how they both independent of, and dependent on, theosophy, independent of, and dependent on, the existing structures of the world system formulated a vision of world society based on their specific definition of “sacred knowledge”.

I will present key moments in the formulation of these visions in a broadly chronological order. Although I intend to outline the genealogy of their ideas, I will not provide comprehensive biographical studies or cover their spiritual messages in detail.

This pattern will start in the second chapter that will scale the focus down unto the level of the first of three case studies. The first case study introduces B. P. Wadia (1881-1958) and his traditionalist vision of a world order that he developed first

within the Theosophical Society and from 1922 onward independently in the United Lodge of Theosophists.

The *third chapter* will analyze how Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) initially supported the TS’s reformulation of Buddhism under the tutelage of its first president Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and independently promoted Buddhist “sacred knowledge” as the spiritual foundation for a new civilization.

The *fourth chapter* will investigate how Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was first introduced as the coming world messiah by the Theosophical Society and later developed his independent vision of world order in unmistakable opposition to spiritual organization, authority and hierarchy.

The *final chapter* will summarize and discuss the findings on different levels. Moreover, I will briefly compare the three case studies and analyze their mutual perception.
1 The Theosophical Society and its South Asian Members

For us Theosophists both Nationalism of the true kind and Internationalism are perfectly possible (...) I have a great privilege and that is, that though each of us has his Fatherland, his Motherland, we have found another land, which is a Brotherland.

We Theosophists, we have started a new Continent, where all the peoples can dwell, the Brotherland of the world.\textsuperscript{106}

1.1 Introduction

In the heyday of British colonialism, a minor although influential group of Indians were fascinated with the Theosophical Society (TS). Not only the most prominent Indian politician of those days M.K. Gandhi\textsuperscript{107} but also the first Prime Minister of independent India Jawaharlal Nehru had their brief but influential liaisons with the Society.\textsuperscript{108} While Nehru openly admitted and valued his early membership, Gandhi kept a distance\textsuperscript{109} but was profoundly inspired by his contact with theosophists in London, South Africa, and India.\textsuperscript{110} However, Gandhi was not alone in his intense critique towards the movement as numerous Indians turned against the Society after a sometimes long period of loyal membership.

The answer to the question why the TS and its formulation of “sacred knowledge” despite the versatile indigenous offers in multi-religious India became attractive for a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] C. Jinarajadasa, in Transactions of the Eighth Congress of the Federation of European National Societies of the Theosophical Society, Vienna, July 21-26 1923, Transcript, KFA.
\end{footnotes}
progressive group of the Indian social stratum will thus also have to include the question of the disillusionment of several members. This approach will firstly characterize the TS as a modern, voluntary platform open to a wide range of people distinguishing it from religious sects who, according to Ernst Troeltsch’s definition, tend to be opposed towards outsiders and often aim at destabilizing the existing social order.111 Secondly, this approach will show the South Asian involvement with theosophy as multidimensional – not simply a question of membership or non-membership, of loyalty or disloyalty. Instead, the chapter focuses on the agency of Indians to freely associate and dissociate from the Society according to their needs, a perspective that has hitherto been neglected in the research literature.

The point on which the chapter aims at conceptualizing a more multi-faceted picture of South Asian involvement with the TS other than suggested by the existing scholarly work is their motivation. I argue that the motivation of Indians to join is only comprehensible through the combination of regional and external debates that were exemplarily intertwined in the TS.

Deploying a global history approach primarily concerned with detecting the nascent global consciousness of this particular group and contrary to most of the existing research literature on South Asian engagement in the TS that focuses on national horizons, I argue that the TS became attractive not only due to its skilful appropriation of regionally or nationally relevant discourses such as Anti-Christianism, Indian Nationalism or Colonialism; theosophy’s cosmopolitan ideology and infrastructure fascinated these Indians also because it matched their own “thinking and feeling beyond the nation”.112 The new concept of “cosmopolitanism” is particularly useful in order to fulfill the declared aim of this chapter and the whole study, to present a more differentiated picture of South Asian theosophists as agents of cultural globalization by both highlighting their role and subvert scholarly representations. Although a very old concept of ancient Greek descent, the nineteenth century version of the concept was based on the enlightenment interpretation with a


112 Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (Minneapolis [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998).
strong Eurocentric tendency and a rather abstract idea of love for humanity in opposition to regional or national particularities as a normative ethical ideal.

More recent interpretations of “cosmopolitanism” by Kwame Appiah\textsuperscript{113} and Scott Malcolmson\textsuperscript{114} challenge its Eurocentrism and try to integrate the local with the global. In what has been termed “new cosmopolitanism” the European descent of the concept is taken into consideration- but the phenomenon itself is considered global. Moreover, theorists no longer regard the similar attachment to local particularities and transregional ideas as contradictory - they consider the phenomenon as rooted in a particular time and space. Though they disagree on an exact definition of cosmopolitanism, theorists of “new cosmopolitanism” agree that it consists of a series of processes and practices of “feeling and thinking beyond the nation”.\textsuperscript{115} Problematically, in this rather open definition almost everyone who is willingly or unwillingly subject to global influences would be included.

Similarly to Appiah, I would define “cosmopolitanism” as a global phenomenon rooted in local forms of global awareness and a reflected attitude towards, and appreciation of, the diversity of the world. Its support of, and appreciation for, the diversity of the world clearly separates cosmopolitanism from the close concept of humanitarianism. Key factors in this interpretation of “cosmopolitanism” are:

1. Appreciation of diversity; tolerance
2. Intellectual liberalism; curiosity for variety
3. Awareness of interdependency/solidarity with others
4. Most importantly individualism as autonomy, dignity, versatility of the individual as against an exclusive attachment to collective identities and authorities

Therefore, it is not a normative ideal like the enlightenment “cosmopolitanism” but a reflected mindset based on every-day practices of social actors around the globe. I

\textsuperscript{113} Kwame A. Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 115).

\textsuperscript{114} Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 116).

\textsuperscript{115} Cheah and Robbins, \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation}. 
would argue for a reflected attitude that can very well evolve from an initially unintended situation (such as labor migration or slavery), but does not necessarily include these people: how can we assume that one who has seen many parts of the world is really curious about its diversity or feels solidarity with people as fellow human beings? One who travels around the world is not necessarily a cosmopolitan and someone who is a cosmopolitan does not necessarily want to travel the world.\footnote{A good example for "local cosmopolitanism": Dilip M. Menon, “A Local Cosmopolitan: 'Kesari' Balakrishna Pillai and the Invention of Europe for a Modern Kerala,” in \textit{Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas}, ed. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra, 131–58 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).}

Although some of the South Asian theosophists never travelled the world they integrated a local and a global consciousness in the context of theosophy in the sense of a “rooted cosmopolitanism” as the chapter will demonstrate.\footnote{Kwame A. Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 115).}

The Theosophical Society effectively encouraged this operation through its cosmopolitan ideology and infrastructure beyond the center/periphery axis which defined it as a “cosmopolitan thought zone.”\footnote{Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra, eds., \textit{Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).} “Cosmopolitan thought zones” is a term introduced by Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra to describe zones of non-colonial encounters in colonial India that emerged from “the aspiration to build conceptual and linguistic bridges, through acts of translation and interpretation, often between highly different and politically unequal social communities in order to work towards a perceived good.”\footnote{Kris Manjapra, “Introduction,” in \textit{Cosmopolitan Thought Zones} (see note 11), 3.} The authors hold that “taking sideways glances towards 'lateral networks' that transgressed the colonial duality is the best way to disrupt the hemispheric myth that the globe was congenitally divided into and East and West.”\footnote{Ibid., 2.}

By way of introducing the Theosophical Society and its fascination with Indians and India, I will firstly outline its “passage to India” in 1879. I will then discuss in more detail how theosophy integrated regional and national debates with transnational discourses that directly affected Indians. The chapter ends with a discussion of South
Asian critique towards the Society. The self-confident dissenting spirit highlights the agency of Indians in this context and prepares the analysis of the case studies on three South Asian theosophists who were nourished by the Society but when they found that it had lost its innovative potential opted for resignation and independent initiatives.

1.2 The Theosophical Society: from New York to Bombay

The Theosophical Society was a pioneering melting pot for the development of alternative visions of world orders. The Theosophical Society emerged in New York where its two founders, Russian immigrant Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) and American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) founded it in 1875. Anti-colonial Euro-Americans and Asians met in this “cosmopolitan thought zone” and produced a major alternative vision of world order based on Asia’s spiritual traditions which were considered the only true heir of the bankrupt Christian tradition. Unlike any other international non-governmental organization of its time, the Theosophical Society institutionalized an alternative world vision by criticizing "Western" modernity and materialism and promoting “Eastern” traditionalism and spirituality.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Theosophical Society was by no means a marginal spiritual organization. Due to its cosmopolitan ideology and its global network of branches, the TS was a truly global player. "Between 1891 and 1935 it established around 45 branches in such widely differing countries as Great Britain, Holland, India, Ireland, the United States, Ceylon, Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia and several countries in Africa and Latin America. (...) For example in 1911, the year of the Foundation of the Order of the Star in the East, Annie Besant’s lectures at the Sorbonne were attracting audiences of over 4,000 people at a time."

---

121 Bose and Manjapra, Cosmopolitan Thought Zones.

122 The Order of the Star in the East was an affiliate organisation of the TS founded 1911 in Benares exclusively to propagate the coming of the world messiah.

Its key project for counteracting the materialistic and imperialistic *Zeitgeist* dominated by the global “West” was an attempt to transcend national boundaries by founding a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity irrespective of race, class, creed or gender”. This utopian and simultaneously global project was based on the founders’ belief in a common origin of all religions and individuals as well as the predominance of the spiritual element in all human activities. For many the Theosophical Society provided a true alternative to the League of Nations therefore its followers called it the “spiritual League of Nations”. Moreover, the Theosophical Society’s internationalism and critique towards Western modernity was not an outcome of the Great War: already in 1885 the Theosophical Society had declared the acceptance of a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity irrespective of race, class, creed or gender” as its key project and a prerequisite for membership. In a world “increasingly influenced by processes of globalization and cultural homogenization, the belief that the different religious traditions share some fundamental message or 'common core' expressed a common *perennialist* theme: the individual religious traditions were partial and incomplete reflections of a hidden, transcendent Truth that no one historical religion could lay claim to exclusively” therefore all “races, classes, creeds and genders” are deeply interconnected.

The three objectives of the TS are based on this assumption, however, appropriated discourses that afflicted modern societies around the turn of the century were only promoted after the TS was introduced in India in 1879/80. The three objects of the TS reacted to the three main threats of globalization to the religious realm: 1. disintegration, 2. competition/comparison, 3. scientific challenge. They aimed at counteracting the disintegrating forces of the increasing integration of the world such as...

---


128 Prothero, “From Spiritualism to Theosophy”: 197.
as economic competition, social isolation in industrial urban areas and at reminding of the common origins of all human beings.

The most important objective with which all members had to agree reflected this perennialist, ahistorical approach to religion:

To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed and colour.

This objective was not groundbreaking especially since it matched the contemporary findings by British colonial Indologist William Jones (1746-1794) regarding the common origin of most European languages.\(^{129}\) This “theological position known as perennialism” which assumedly “runs through the philosophical and religious traditions of the world” was not an exclusive feature of theosophy but was “also a major theme in the works of René Guénon” and “undergirds much of the New Age appropriation of 'Eastern religion.'”\(^{130}\) However, the actually unoriginal objective of a Universal Brotherhood gained new momentum in a period in which the colonial order increasingly lost its legitimacy especially when Europe had lost its moral credibility in the post-war period which confirmed theosophists in their course of global solidarity based on a new awareness of human interconnectedness and interdependency.\(^{131}\) The awareness of the interconnectedness was supported by the modern means of communication and travelling that triggered an intensified exchange of concepts and ideas. Through colonial, economical and missionary activities, details about other religious creeds became increasingly available to distant countries and fostered the rise of comparative religious studies especially in Europe. This new academic discipline allowed for direct comparison (and competition) as well as availability of different belief systems. Moreover, the subsequent rise of the idea of “world religions” threatened each existing religion that


\(^{130}\) King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 162.

was now only one of the many alternatives and forced them to homogenize their appearance as well as universalize their central dogmas.\textsuperscript{132}

The TS reacted to this cosmopolitan situation of the religious field\textsuperscript{133} with its second object. The theosophists located the common source of spirituality in Asia which they believed to represent a fundamentally spiritual culture in which this \textit{perennialist} truth had been best preserved:

\textit{To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions and sciences.}\textsuperscript{134}

This assumption necessarily increased the appeal of Asian culture and made the “turn eastward” a reference point for the entire humanity since \textit{the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures} would help to understand the \textit{perennialist} truth which had become lost in orthodox Christianity prevalent in Euro-America. Christianity, the dominant creed in Euro-America, received another heavy blow by the challenge of science represented by “Darwin’s bombshell” - the theory of organic evolution which he developed in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{135} A literal reading of the Christian doctrines in Genesis became incompatible with these new findings and thus many “Victorians believed that Christianity and science directly opposed one another.”\textsuperscript{136} Moreover, Christianity increasingly came under attack from within its ranks for its morals and rigid dogmas such as atonement and eternal damnation which its critics considered highly superstitious and unscientific. Theosophists shared with spiritualists and liberal Christians “an aversion to ideas of human depravity, predestination, vicarious atonement, and a final judgement” that characterized orthodox Christianity.\textsuperscript{137} The revival of occultism and esoteric circles in Europe and America with TS as one of the most successful institutions was a reaction to this crisis

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{132} Bayly, \textit{The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914}, 333.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{133} Beck, \textit{Der eigene Gott}, 111.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{134}For an in debt discussion of the Aryan debate see: Trautmann, \textit{The Aryan Debate}.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{135} Bevir, “The West turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of Occult Tradition”: 752.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 752.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{137} Godwin, \textit{The Theosophical Enlightenment}, 19.
\end{flushright}
of Christianity. Theosophy followed a decidedly anti-Christian stance combined with an acceptance of scientific findings.

In her first major work *Isis Unveiled* (1877) Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), the mastermind of theosophy, "outlined an occult cosmology which embraced both a geological time scale and an evolutionary view of development,"\(^{138}\) however, "she rejected T. H. Huxley's argument that all life had originated in matter."\(^{139}\) To prove the opposite early theosophists investigated spiritualism (communication with the dead) and mesmerism in the mid-nineteenth century anti-clerical milieu in America, which, according to Joscelyn Godwin, offered a mix of quasi-scientific experimentation, anti-Christian secularism and optimistic progressivism which turned out to be tremendously attractive not only for the social elite but also for the working classes.\(^{140}\) The Society expressed its aspirations to integrate science and religion and thereby extend the field of modern science into yet unknown spheres in its last object:

*A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society, is to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man.*\(^{141}\)

Although Olcott clearly distinguished theosophy from spiritualism already when the Theosophical Society was formally established in New York on 17\(^{th}\) November 1875,\(^{142}\) sensational experiments were widely discussed and polarized the public in the early days of the movement in India. Apart from the publicity effect, the TS earnestly tried to expand modern scientific norms by proving supernatural

\(^{138}\) Bevir, "The West turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of Occult Tradition": 753.

\(^{139}\) Ibid., 754.


\(^{142}\) For more insight into the entanglement of "early theosophy" with and departure from spiritualism see: Prothero, "From Spiritualism to Theosophy".
phenomena with “scientific methods.” \textsuperscript{143} Theosophy thus not only accepted the challenge of science but even tried to benefit from its appeal. The merging of scientific findings (however crude) and religion characterizes the TS as the “primary reference point” of Modern Esoteric traditions which “thrive[d] on the backdrop of a religious culture that was both individualistic and eclectic, and which absorbed nineteenth-century transcendentalism, the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg, the introduction on American soil of Hindu monism.”\textsuperscript{144}

1.3 Western Intellectual Crisis and the Discovery of India

When theosophy drew upon “Eastern” ideas as a supposed antithesis to organised forms of religion prevalent in Europe and North America, especially Christianity,\textsuperscript{145} it appealed to the most progressive sections in Europe and North America. Madame Blavatsky considered Asia the main source of global spirituality “providing the groundwork of each and every religion” and the esoteric space par excellence.\textsuperscript{146} Her turn towards Asia articulated the increasing interest in alternative religious systems and that made theosophy both an indicator and innovator of modern religious orientation. Historian Olav Hammer has convincingly argued that the choice of exotic landscapes - firstly Tibet, then India - as “positive Others” in theosophy is intimately connected with its status as a modern religious system since it reflects the curiosity of Western intellectuals with other, probably better modes of believing as well as their global travels.\textsuperscript{147} Blavatsky’s homogenized and simplified vision of India incorporated many elements of German Romanticism and Counter-Enlightenment


\textsuperscript{144} Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 67.


\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 757.

\textsuperscript{147} Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 90.
and combined them with findings of Orientalist scholars such as William Jones and Max Müller as authoritative sources on Asia.\textsuperscript{148}

The revival of supposedly “ancient traditions” in the late nineteenth century was informed by German romanticism scholarship in particular since it had a long tradition of a fascination with India starting with eighteenth century philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)\textsuperscript{149} and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803).\textsuperscript{150} The relationship of theosophy with academic orientalism, however, was highly problematic as was that of famous orientalists such as Max Müller who “had only disdain or scorn for the work of theosophists”.\textsuperscript{151}

Like the accepted form of academic orientalism, the “popular orientalism”\textsuperscript{152} of theosophists contributed “to the spreading, towards the end of the nineteenth century, of an extravagant imagery of the “East” and of India in particular. They thus reinforced, as perhaps never before, all the stereotypes available on oriental spirituality as opposed to the materialism of the West.”\textsuperscript{153} French historian Denis Vidal argues that critics of Orientalism such as Ronald Inden failed to recognize the popular strand of Orientalism (represented by theosophy) since they are “only taking into account the elitist forms (academic or governmental) of a social and cultural phenomenon, without examining their links with manifestations of more marginal appearance but of no less real influence”.\textsuperscript{154}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{149} Matthias Kossler, Arthur Schopenhauer und die Philosophien Asiens (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 2008).
\textsuperscript{150} Alexa Frank, Sanftes Gefühl und stille Tiefe der Seele: Herders Indien (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009).
\textsuperscript{151} Denis Vidal, “Max Müller and the Theosophists or the Other Half of Victorian Orientalism,” in Orientalism and Anthropology: From Max Müller to Louis Dumont, ed. Jackie Assayag, Roland Lardinois and Denis Vidal, Second (Pondicherry: Institut Francais de Pondicherry, 2001), 25.
\textsuperscript{153} Denis Vidal, “Max Müller and the Theosophists or the Other Half of Victorian Orientalism,” in Orientalism and Anthropology: From Max Müller to Louis Dumont, ed. Jackie Assayag, Roland Lardinois and Denis Vidal, Second (Pondicherry: Institut Francais de Pondicherry, 2001), 22.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 22.
\end{flushleft}
Both forms of Orientalism, however, share the so-called textual bias that located the essence of a culture not in the experiences, lives and actions of living South Asians but rather in the university libraries and archives in Europe more specifically in normative ancient texts that had been translated and edited by Western Orientalists.\(^{155}\) Moreover, “popular Orientalism” overlaps with “academic Orientalism” as it views India as the mirror-opposite of Europe; it continues to postulate cultural ‘essences’ and thus perpetuates the same (or at least similar) cultural stereotypes about the East. ‘Popular, affirmative or romantic Orientalism’s’ “view of the Orient, then, is still a distortion, even if motivated at times by a respect for the Orient.”\(^{156}\) This textualized and essentialized approach did not only homogenize an actually multi-religious and -cultural region but problematically enhanced communal and caste boundaries in India as historian Harald Fischer-Tiné has exemplarily illustrated in history writing projects of the Arya Samaj for which only normative Brahmanical Hindu texts such as the Vedas qualified as textual sources.\(^{157}\) The threefold constraint, i.e. the reference to an idealized past of a minority of Indian society catered via interpretation and translation of Western orientalists characterizes this position as highly schematic vis-à-vis a manifold Indian reality.

Inspired by colorful images of “the sacred space”, Olcott started corresponding with the head of the religious revival movement, the Arya Samaj, which led to a promising partnership between both organizations. Consequently, on May 22, 1878 the small Theosophical Society still based in New York changed its name to the “Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India.”\(^{158}\) The Arya Samaj (Society of the Noble) was founded on 10\(^{th}\) April 1875 in Bombay by Hindu revivalist Dayananda Saraswati

\(^{155}\) King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 150.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 92.


\(^{158}\) Veer, Peter van der, *Imperial Encounters*, 55.
Dayananda’s goal was to “purify” Hinduism from contemporary clutter by strictly adhering to the Vedas as revealed scriptures and a basis for a universal religion. Because of the assumed supremacy of the Vedas they “comprised the yardstick against which all other scriptural texts were judged, as were questions of custom and ritual.”

As a result, in 1879, the two founders, Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, moved their organization to India where they were welcomed by Harishchandra Chintamani, president of the Bombay Arya Samaj. However, the two founders also established close contacts with Buddhist revivalists in Ceylon and in 1880 toured the island and officially declared themselves Buddhists. Although they had made a most promising entry to India, Dayanand Saraswati severed his ties with the theosophists after a meeting in Bombay in 1881 and made doctrinal differences public in a pamphlet entitled *Humbuggery of the Theosophists*. He polemically condemned the founders of fraud and particularly objected to Madame Blavatsky’s occult tricks such as the materialization of cups and letters or the communication with the dead. "Communicating with the spirits of the dead (bhut, pret, jinnat) certainly belongs of Hindu beliefs and practices, but the intermediaries are not highly regarded. In fact, they are seen as impure and inauspicious, tainted by their contact with the dead, and often they are of low caste." In his rational interpretation following Brahmanical normative texts, Dayananda aimed at purifying the Vedic tradition from exactly these “superstitious” elements. The theosophists on the other hand were disillusioned "as soon as they discovered the strength of Dayananda’s Vedic fundamentalism and his hostility to other religions."

160 Ibid., 96.
163 Ibid., 57.
Nevertheless, the two founders, first in Bombay and from 1880 in their still existing international headquarter in Adyar, a suburb of South Indian Madras, attracted a group of dedicated disciples among Indians as well as so-called Anglo-Indians (British colonials) and thus no longer depended on their former ally. The contact of the Society with both groups in colonial India was one of its most significant features.\textsuperscript{165}

The brief collaboration with the Arya Samaj, however, had attuned the “foreign organization” to Indian concerns which allowed historian Kenneth Jones to group it with other South Asian “Socio Religious Reform Movements” who “advocated modifications in social behavior, justified such advocacy by one or another form of religious authority, and then built organizational structure it maintained over time,”\textsuperscript{166} such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission. Thus when the Society shifted its headquarter from New York to Bombay in 1879 and later to Madras, when it coalesced with one of the subcontinent’s most important socio-religious reform movements and later became actively involved in India’s political freedom struggle, the already global player became a factor to be reckoned with in the region.

By going to India, however, the founders did not abandon their connection to the “West”; instead, they reinforced it on another level as they aimed to reanimate spiritual life in the “West” with an infusion of Eastern spirituality. To this end the Society established a variety of esoteric periodicals such as its mouthpiece, The Theosophist in order to communicate their findings and encourage the reception of Eastern esotericism in Euro-American audiences. The theosophists were most influential in popularizing “Asian” religious concepts such as \textit{karma} or \textit{reincarnation} in the “West” through a complex process of dis-embedding and re-embedding.\textsuperscript{167}


\textsuperscript{166} Jones, \textit{Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India}, 2.

\textsuperscript{167} Hammer, \textit{Claiming Knowledge}, 33.
In a similar vein, theosophists were the first to study translations of “Eastern esoteric classics” such as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, thus until today, many of our ideas regarding Asian spirituality are based on theosophy’s pioneering work. The Theosophical Society became the major link between efforts for religious reform in colonial in India and their critiques towards the existing world order and Euro-American self-critical intellectuals as historian Peter van der Veer has convincingly argued. Their alternative visions of world order were predominantly based on Asia’s spiritual resources and catered to a limited though very influential group of innovators in Euro-America and Asia.

Despite the fundamental importance of South Asian inspiration and active participation of South Asians in the Theosophical Society both in colonial India and beyond, the contribution, inspiration and participation of South Asians remains marginalized in the existing literature. Most of the discussion focuses on its Western members and here especially on such colorful characters such as Annie Besant (1847-1933), Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) or the notorious Charles Webster Leadbeater (1847-1934).

Considering the gross misbalance between accounts of South Asian and Euro-American involvement it is invaluable that two scholars focus their studies on the South Asian members of the TS - Alan Trevithick and Gauri Viswanathan.

---


169 Veer, Peter van der, *Imperial encounters*, 74.


Unfortunately, both authors are so eager to “right this wrong” that they draw rather undifferentiated pictures of South Asian members since they exaggerate their post-colonial approach. Trevithick depicts South Asian members as subaltern victims compared to their Euro-American interlocutors. In her micro-study of the interaction between Euro-American and South Asian theosophists in colonial India; Gauri Viswanathan interprets it as a process of disenchantment and routinization in the sense of Weber. Viswanathan defines the Society as a “Western” enterprise whose main purpose is the “professionalization” of occult knowledge understood as the transformation of Eastern spiritual into Western professional knowledge. This is a misleading argument as it suggests that “Western knowledge” is per se rational, whereas “Eastern knowledge” is per se spiritual knowledge. Considering different knowledge categories as culturally determined perpetuates an Orientalist binary, which Viswanathan actually intends to avoid.

Peter van der Veer devotes a whole chapter of his Imperial Encounters to the TS as a link between spiritualism and political radicalism in both metropolis and colony and carefully embeds the Society in the milieu of socio-religious reform movements in colonial India. However, he ignores the South Asian theosophists’ active involvement since he neutralizes them by only claiming that “there was considerable enthusiasm in India for Theosophy.” Furthermore, he only considers “These people” at the receiving end of theosophical instruction since “their exposure to Theosophical lectures helped them in creating a public sphere of voluntary associations, debating clubs, and the like, which was highly critical of both the colonial government and Christianity.” Van der Veer’s treatment of Indians in theosophy eventually culminates in the suggestion that it was not South Asian


178 Ibid., 2–3.

179 Veer, Peter van der, Imperial Encounters.

180 Ibid., 76.

181 Ibid., 76.
theosophists but Vivekananda who was “the first major Indian advocate of a 'Hindu spirituality', largely created by Orientalism and adopted in the anticlerical and anticolonial rhetoric of Theosophy.”\textsuperscript{182} Although van der Veer suggests “that Vivekananda has developed a translation of Hindu traditions in terms remarkably similar to what is cobbled together in Theosophy”\textsuperscript{183} he maintains that there is no influence of theosophy on Vivekananda.\textsuperscript{184} Both Meera Nanda\textsuperscript{185} and William Emilsen,\textsuperscript{186} however, have shown that despite his firm disapproval\textsuperscript{187} Vivekananda was indeed deeply influenced by the TS. “Theosophical ideas show up in the three assumptions that underlie Vivekananda’s evolutionism, namely, the primacy of spirit over matter, involution of the spirit into matter, and karma as the mechanism of progressive evolution.”\textsuperscript{188}

Western theosophists as well as academic Orientalists envisioned India as a fascinating other. Although the popular Orientalism of the theosophists similarly to academic Orientalism essentialized India, however, due to their hope to realize a utopian Universal Brotherhood of Humanity beyond social differences, theosophists at least tried to integrate Indians in their cosmopolitan project and their formulations of “sacred knowledge”. To this end they combined ideas from a vast array of sources such as academic Orientalism and spiritualism. However, they were themselves very successful in disseminating a “popular orientalism” through publications which were circulated worldwide.

\textsuperscript{182} Veer, Peter van der, *Imperial encounters*, 73.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 74.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 75.


\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 213.

1.4 The Appeal of Theosophy to India’s bi-lingual Intelligentsia

If I recollect correctly it was Peter van der Veer’s work that stimulated my questioning of the position of South Asian theosophists in the Theosophical Society. Despite van der Veer’s “interactional history” approach to the field, the interaction of South Asian theosophists with their Euro-American interlocutors but also the wider theosophical context remained blurred. Thus a more differentiated picture of the motives, involvements and initiatives of South Asian members as cultural brokers via the theosophical platform was necessary.

Theosophists “turned to Hinduism in a spirit of self-critique of the dominant traditions of their own societies, namely, Christianity and the mechanistic worldview of modern science. The South Asian appropriation of West’s self-critique in the light of Asian philosophy, however, was sparked by the spirit of self-assertion of national pride and Hindu superiority”⁴ argues Meera Nanda. Most scholars agree that the TS appealed predominantly to this social group for two reasons: firstly, due to its privileging of Indian religious traditions and secondly, through its decided anti-Christian position. We have seen that both elements also characterized the TS in its Euro-American context but resonated differently with the inhabitants of the ‘sacred space’.

1.4.1 Privileging Indian Religions

The dominance of Brahmans in this small section of the Indian social stratum limited the influence of the Society considerably but was, however, a natural outcome of the emphasis the movement placed on “the exposition and furtherance of Brahman culture or what the local branches described as `the study of Sanskrit literature and Aryan Philosophy’”⁵ which refers to the second objective of the society:

*To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions and sciences.*

---


⁵ Oddie, *Hindu and Christian in South - East India*, 197.
This objective was obviously attractive for the privileged section of the Indian society since it accentuated a specific Indian identity. Indians from the professional elite adapted to the newly established British educational institutions and thus "were the ones who bore the brunt of cultural contact, who faced similar tensions and problems within the family or criticism from conservative Hindus as they attempted, in some way, to cope with the challenge of a new order and new ideas and styles of life."

Despite the fundamental religious tolerance of the Society, the privileging of Brahmanism did not only discourage other Indians but also members of other religious creeds of multi-religious India to join the movement. Through their intense advocacy for a Buddhist revival the theosophists attracted Buddhists from Sri Lanka, Japan and South East Asian countries and Parsis from Bombay joined the TS. However, the largest religious minority of India, the Muslims, did not participate in the movement and *The Theosophist* in 1880 even allowed their labelling as foreign invaders: “When the Mohammedans conquered this country, they being our conquerors, cruel and unjust, obliged us to designate ourselves with this odious title.” The increasing resentment towards the Muslims was already present from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards as David Kopf has shown.

The exclusive circle of theosophists was “dominated by Brahmans, and composed very largely of lawyers and public servants” that soon became the backbone of the evolving nationalist movement. Historian R. Suntharalingam closely examined these catalysts of the national movement in the Madras Presidency, the seat of the theosophical headquarter, calling them the “professional elite” in contrast to the “administrative elite” of the colonial administration. Members of the professional elite were typically lawyers or teachers who were “already prominent in local politics by their participation in municipal affairs and the running of district associations and literary societies.” What “surprised many observers was the strong support which the movement enlisted from Western-educated Hindus in South India, be they the

---

192 B.P. Sandhkar, “Hindu or Arya?” *The Theosophist* 1, (April 1880).
politically radical younger elements of the professional elite, or their elder counterparts in the administration. Olcott claimed in December 1885, with some justification, that the Society had in its ranks the “flower of Indian people”, notably the Indian intelligentsia, the same class which he labelled some years ago as “the most denationalised”.195 A journalist of the influential daily Madras Mail critically observes of these lectures that the pictures “which they draw of native lying, disunion, selfishness, and general worthlessness, are such as would convulse Hindu Society with righteous rage, if they were drawn by an English journalist or a Christian missionary.”196

The “denationalized” young generation of Indian intellectuals was educated in the British educational institutions and formed a section of the Indian society that did not only invite theosophical critique but had also become sceptical themselves towards their cultural and religious heritage. Although this collaborating class understood fairly well that the “knowledge of English alone leads to posts of emoluments”197 in the colonial society, their familiarity with the British education also generated to the fear that they would “eventually cease to be Asiatics, and become Europeans” since British education did not stop at teaching “English literature, English mechanics, and Western science” but “judged every man according to the degree in which he has made himself intellectually an Englishman”.198

1.4.2 Anti-Christian Position

Another factor, which also provoked disintegration of identities and was thoroughly addressed by the TS was the aggressive missionary activity, especially in South India, which blamed Hindus for being superstitious idolaters and heathens.199 Following the Evangelical Revival in Europe and America, Christian missionaries from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards increasingly proselytized in South

---

195 R. Suntharalingam, Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891 (Tucson: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1974), 299.
197 A. Mittra, “Should we call ourselves Aryas?” The Theosophist I, (June 1880).
198 Editor, "Our Duty to India," The Theosophist I, (February 1880).
India. Missionaries considered their extremely limited appeal to high caste Indians a failure of their missions and started several missionary schools in Madras and its surroundings to influence the educated elite.\textsuperscript{200} When the “Free Church Mission of Scotland” successfully proselytized three students in 1841 this caused a major breach between high caste Hindus and European missionaries and the subsequent “preoccupation with religious controversies had come to dominate the actions of the articulate sections of the Hindu community in Madras.”\textsuperscript{201} Since “missionary activity had become a highly emotive issue, raising strong passions on all sides”\textsuperscript{202} Certainly there could be little doubt about the theosophists’ anti-Christian attitude. “While in America, Blavatsky shocked Christians with her verbal attacks on the Christian Church” and the Theosophist “included many articles, not only attacking historical Christianity, but highlighting the dangers of Christian missionary activity.”\textsuperscript{203} This caused great enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{204} The anti-Christian stance of the TS appealed to Hindus who felt on the one hand cornered by aggressively proselytizing Christian missionaries\textsuperscript{205} and on the other confronted with the official politics of the colonial project whose nature was decidedly Christian, as religious historian Peter van der Veer argues.\textsuperscript{206}

Moreover, the theosophists successfully constructed Indian spirituality not “as antiscientific or antirational” as was the official rhetoric of both missionaries and some Oriental scholars: “On the contrary, compared to Christianity it was scientific and rational.”\textsuperscript{207} When “colonized Indians encountered Westerners who declared that Hinduism and Buddhism were far superior to Christianity in terms of scientific

\textsuperscript{200} Suntharalingam, \textit{Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891}, 35.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{203} Oddie, \textit{Hindu and Christian in South - East India}, 192–3.

\textsuperscript{204} For more on the Anti-Christian agitation of theosophy and local initiatives see: ibid., 200 ff.

\textsuperscript{205} Oddie, \textit{Imagined Hinduism}, 24.

\textsuperscript{206} Veer, Peter van der, \textit{Imperial Encounters}, 66.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 77–8.
rationality and moral values,"\textsuperscript{208} they were pleased. Missionaries reacted to theosophy’s anti-Christian rhetoric since both targeted the same group of the social stratum. The Madras-based Christian Literature Society, for example, identified “flattery” as the main reason for the success of theosophy:

“Hindus are peculiarly susceptible to flattery. Skilful flatterers can induce them to part with almost anything. It is the expectation of flattery that makes them squander such large sums on marriages. The Theosophists knew the weak point of the Hindus.”\textsuperscript{209}

The fact remains that theosophy was rather successful especially with the sought after group of high caste and bi-lingual Indians and at the annual conference in December 1883, president Olcott counted 85 branches in India and Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{210} Although these local groups concentrated in the Southern provinces, the pan-Indian influence of theosophy reached further north to Bengal (particularly Calcutta) and Bihar.\textsuperscript{211}

Unfortunately, no membership records are available, published data, however, inform "on the number of branches, which grew from 10 in 1881, to 39 in 1882, to 77 by 1883 (85 including Ceylon), and to 85 by the end of 1884, but we know little of the size in membership in the branches. At its 8\textsuperscript{th} anniversary convention, held at Madras in December 1883, the Society claimed an attendance of ‘nearly 500 members and delegates’, and later clarified that 58 of these were delegates. At the subsequent convention a year later there were 99 delegates, 6 of whom were from Europe and America and the rest from 39 Indian branches.”\textsuperscript{212}

In 1912/13 325 branches spread all over South Asia with anything from three members in small town and up to about 100 members in theosophical centers such as

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Veer, Peter van der, \textit{Imperial encounters}, 74–5.
\item \textit{Theosophy exposed: or, Mrs. Besant and her Guru. An appeal to educated Hindus.} (Madras: S.P.C.K. Press, Vepery, 1893), 79.
\item Editor, \textit{The Theosophist V}, Supplement (January 1884): 11.
\end{thebibliography}
Calcutta or Mumbai. Travelling lodge inspectors, such as Lilian Edger or Pandit Bhavani Shanker counted about 5,200 active members.\textsuperscript{213} The ordinary members had to agree to the first objective of theosophy to ‘form the nucleus of universal brotherhood irrespective of race, creed, gender, colour’ and were initiated by the president of the local branch with the bestowal of a certificate issued by the central authorities in Varanasi or Adyar. The local branches actually functioned as Theosophical literature reading circles that met either once a week or on an irregular basis, depending wholly on the enthusiasm of the local members. Some had buildings of their own, but very often they met in the private houses of the president, sometimes local temples or school buildings. As reading, interpreting and translating theosophical literature was the key activity of all local branches they tried to keep a ‘library’ and encourage their members to translate theosophical literature into the local language. The intellectual output was impressive. At the end of 1912, about 30 translations and nine original publications appeared in different vernaculars.\textsuperscript{214} The libraries of the small-town branches actually consisted of only a handful of theosophical texts kept in a box, whereas the metropolitan branches often had proper library buildings. The libraries were important to circulate theosophical ideas but were also intended to be used as a “propaganda tool” for the recruitment of outsiders, as a European member reminded that: “The present is essentially an age of books; a great number of our members have come into the TS solely or principally through the agency of the printed page” and therefore claimed that theosophists “will do well to devote thought to the problem of making as good use as possible of this means of spreading Theosophy in the world.”\textsuperscript{215}

Although membership was quite limited, the key role of its participants in the indigenous society gave them access to cultural and economic resources that turned out to be very useful in the establishment of the Society on the subcontinent. Since the local lodges also appealed to the local intellectual elites beyond actual

\textsuperscript{213} Theosophy in India, No. 11-12, (Nov.-Dec. 1912): 227-228.

\textsuperscript{214} Theosophy in India, No. 11-12, (Nov.-Dec. 1912): 228.

membership the Society’s outreach was disproportionate to the number of its members. However, the Society never lost its elitist character.

“The promise of esoteric wisdom, combined with a flattering narrative of the superiority of Asian religions and doctrines, even when egregiously mischaracterized, was more than sufficient to garner a loyal following”\textsuperscript{216} argues Srinivas Aravamudan. Although this certainly held true for the initial appeal of theosophy as it soothed the feeling of an identity crisis which afflicted portions of the Indian society, the involvement of South Asians with theosophy were much more multilayered than this and many other scholars suggest. Next to the “flattering rhetoric,” theosophy’s appropriation of regional issues such as religious reform and nationalist politics were other major factors for South Asian people’s positive response in the first place. However, I will argue that theosophy also resonated with this group because it provided opportunities for a thinking and acting beyond regional particularities.

\subsection*{1.5 Beyond Parochialism}

As British historian Mark Frost has noted, the Theosophical Society provided a transnational network and cosmopolitan ideology to precisely this group of the Indian social stratum that at the end of the nineteenth century became increasingly aware of global processes fostered by a restructurization of the colonial public sphere; this was facilitated by means of the new communication technologies such as the telegraph, the telephone and the rapid expansion of the English press in the metropoles that made events on the other side of the globe seemingly relevant.\textsuperscript{217} The urban milieu of metropoles such as Calcutta, Bombay, Madras or Colombo of the Empire’s most precious colony was the hotbed for this hybrid new intellectual elite. These were also centers of theosophical activity on the subcontinent. Their engagement in the Theosophical Society was therefore a collaboration project of metropolitan elites from Euro-America and South Asia to bring the wisdom of the “East” to the “West” and to engage in a project of evolving cosmopolitanism on the basis of a spiritually legitimized concern for humanity. Indian intellectuals thus

\textsuperscript{216} Aravamudan, \textit{Guru English}, 110.

appreciated the attempt of theosophy to provide a transnational network of belonging that corresponded with their increasing awareness of the global dimension.

Cosmopolitan aspirations met precisely with the theosophical project which as British historian Christopher Bayly has defined as a distinctly global endeavor since “the Irish, American, Australian, British, and Indian theosophists of the 1880s were adepts of a self-consciously global and intellectual tradition; they were not representatives of an embattled 'little tradition' of the locality” although “theosophists borrowed liberally from Hinduism and Buddhism in their vision of universal human spirituality.”

Not only Euro-American theosophists who entered ‘the sacred space’ embodied, what historian Olav Hammer has called ‘structurally radical globalization’ of esotericism but also Indian theosophists equally employed the global platform for their travels, discursive activities, expression of world vision and interaction with other members all over the globe. In the theosophical ecumene, Indian theosophists like their Euro-American counterparts used the theosophical infrastructure and ideology for a thinking and acting beyond national particularities and to build on preexisting forms of global consciousness of which “rooted cosmopolitanism” is one form.

Neither cosmopolitanism nor globalization are a new trend of the turn of the past century but the increasing possibilities to travel, the expansion of the media sphere and thus the exchange of ideas, concepts and ideas fostered a new perspective of the world and its citizens. Likewise, it encouraged “visions of world order” since the fate of the global society became an issue of great importance for South Asians (as we will see in the three case studies). The “thinking and feeling beyond the nation” and a global consciousness became increasingly possible in a historical moment in which the restricted regional context became transcended, while other forms of identity could be envisioned and translocal discourses penetrated the local public sphere. The cultural context in South Asia provided the evolving middle class with a multitude of

---


219 Hammer, Claiming Knowledge, 198.
discourses to think beyond regional particularities; however, the Theosophical Society with its global infrastructure, universalist agenda and open platform on which the most dominant discourses of its time crossed, interacted and challenged each other opened up a space in which this “global consciousness” was both nurtured and gained new intensity in various concrete projects. Moreover, the Theosophical Society, itself a product of globalizing processes in its colonial bearing and its attempt to overcome Eurocentrism, actively supported the exchange between various people and discourses. Although space forbids an in-depth evaluation, I intend to use the following pages to outline three major approaches with which Indian theosophists became involved in the theosophical project which aspired to transcend national, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic borders. These discourses already belonged in the context of Indian intellectuals but through their involvement with theosophy gained a transnational twist.

The extent to which Indians understood the Theosophical Society as a “cosmopolitan thought zone” due to its “ideological cosmopolitanism” will be outlined in the beginning of this section. Like “modernity” or “nationalism” cosmopolitanism is now conceptualized as plural and particular, both European and Non-European and therefore a multifaceted phenomenon. This plurality of the concept is reflected in three cosmopolitanisms - “Colonial cosmopolitanism”, “spiritual cosmopolitanism” and “extranationalist cosmopolitanism” that are intrinsic elements of the TS and added to the appeal of theosophy for the Indians since it exemplarily combined regional and transnational concerns. By listing these local but at the same time global discourses I do not suggest, however, that they can be easily and neatly separated from each other. In fact, all of them are deeply entangled. Often in an ambivalent way because they included colonial affiliations and anti-colonial endeavors, global thinking and regional attachment, nationalist involvement and transnational visions, religious reform efforts as well as secularizing tendencies. I intend to reveal these entangled discourses in order to detect forms of global consciousness with Indian theosophists.

---

220 Cheah and Robbins, Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation, 1.
1.5.1 The Cosmopolitan Thought Zone of Theosophy

Unlike universalism, the cosmopolitanism of theosophy was in close connection with its strong ethical claims for character building in the “intellectual project” of a Universal Brotherhood. Despite the shared ideology, this encouraged plural identity formations as well as the transcending of the detachment from shared identities such as “race, class, creed or gender”. Instead, the Society fostered voluntary affiliation thus exemplarily embodying the program of cosmopolitanism.221

The Theosophical Society was driven by a universalist aspiration in most of its activities. Most importantly, the TS offered a space in which different identities – of religious superiority, of national standing, of equals in a colonial context – could be tested. Due to its unsectarian agenda, the Society allowed for shifting between different identifications just as its leader, Gandhi’s confidante, the theosophically involved Charles F. Andrews (1871-1940)222 or Annie Besant who chose to identify with the Indian nation and lived for nearly 22 years “among Indians, not as a foreigner but as one of themselves”223 as she herself claimed. “In Britain too, Theosophists adopted transgressive positions, and redrew the lines of solidarity which usually divided Britons from Indians. Virginia Woolf paid an inverted compliment to this in a comment on a lecture by Annie Besant in 1919. Besant, she wrote, 'a massive and sulky featured old lady...pitched into us for our maltreatment of India, she apparently being 'them' and not 'us'."224 Cosmopolitanism as such a deliberately “chosen identification”, circumvented the parochial quality of nationalism since it was not restricted to birth.225

Ceylonese theosophist and later first South Asian president of the TS, C. Jinarajadasa emphasized the asset of an additional cosmopolitan identity with

---

221 Amanda Anderson, “Cosmopolitanism, Universalism and the Divided legacies of Modernity,” in Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (see note 224), 269.

222 Gandhi, Affective Communities, 195.


225 Amartya Sen, “Is Nationalism a Boon or a Curse?,” in Cosmopolitan Thought Zones (see note 228), 23.
theosophists in his lecture at the Jubilee Convention in Adyar 1925/1926: “You have not lost your nationality, your national culture, your national language, your national thoughts, because you have come to this Jubilee Convention. But you are Theosophists, that is to say, you have, in addition to your recognition of the value of national culture and religion, the recognition of a world culture and a World Religion.”

With her chosen identity Annie Besant seemed an embodiment of a multi-faceted leader “who will not call himself European or Asiatic, a Christian or a Hindu or a Buddhist, but a servant of Love, and a devotee of service, a cosmopolitan, whose view of life will cover all men, black or brown, white or yellow” since, as one member put it: “We have had enough of nation builders and empire builders to work on a patch of the globe.” Besant was described by her followers as “a citizen of the world. A real god-mother is she to mankind” and “the high Priestess of a semireligious world organization which not only aimed at bringing the West to drink from the fountain of the lore of Eastern philosophy, but which also aimed, ultimately, to vouchsafe to the world that brotherhood of man in which the ultimate well-being and moral and material prosperity of the world depend.”

During the war Annie Besant’s nationalist rhetoric increasingly gained an internationalist connotation which added to the appeal of Theosophical lodges not only as nationalist meeting points but internationally linked spaces for intellectual debate for a number of cosmopolitan Indians. The ethical and intellectual ideal of

---


227 Irach J. Sorabji, “From the Heart of the East to the Head of the West,” in The Eternal Pilgrim and the Voice Divine and some Hints on the Higher Life: Being a collection of the writings, lectures and discourses of the late Mr. Jehangir Sorabji, Seeker, late General Secretary, Indian Section T.S., ed. I. J. S. Taraporevala, 367–90 (Bombay1922), 369.


“transcending partiality” through knowledge dissemination\textsuperscript{230} was a central feature of the Theosophical Society – and other cosmopolitan projects as Amanda Anderson suggests. As we have already seen, although cosmopolitan envisioning certainly was triggered by the catastrophe of the war, this central ideal was already formulated by the early founder, Helena Blavatsky, who characterized the Theosophical Society as a “Republic of Conscience” in which: “All have an equal right to have the essential features of their religious belief laid before the tribunal of an impartial world.”\textsuperscript{231}

Many Indians readily got involved in this “Republic of Conscience” beyond imperial or national boundaries as the eminent Parsee affiliate from Bombay and one time general secretary of the Indian section Jehangir Sorabji explained: “It is here that the Indian has a world-wide opportunity of disseminating the divine lore of his country through the channel of the Theosophical Society, for on the face of the globe there is hardly a better medium than this, by which his spiritual thoughts will be heard at the farthest end of the earth. Here is the chain which extends from North to South, from East to West.”\textsuperscript{232}

Cosmopolitan attitudes have been described as a predominantly metropolitan and elite phenomenon. Equally, members of the indigenous elite were drawn to theosophy since it resonated with pre-existing forms of cosmopolitanism especially in metropolitan nodal points such as Bombay, Colombo or Calcutta. Another factor which historian Sumit Sarkar’s holds responsible for the emergence of an “awareness of world currents and ideologies”\textsuperscript{233} with this group was their profound Western education. However, theosophists were also eager to secure that at the grassroots level of lodge work the cosmopolitan spirit should be upheld as one British member reminded in 1913:

\begin{quote}
A Lodge should therefore be very careful to avoid becoming, as some of our Lodges are, exclusively partisan to one race, one religion or sect, or one social grade. It should on the other hand aim at keeping its platform as broad as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{230} Amanda Anderson, “Cosmopolitanism, Universalism and the Divided legacies of Modernity,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 224), 274.

\textsuperscript{231} Helena P. Blavatsky, “What are the Theosophists?,” \textit{The Theosophist} 1, no. 1 (October 1879): 4–7.


possible, at being thoroughly cosmopolitan, in the best sense, and at drawing
to itself earnest souls from any and every religious system, race and social
grade. (..) Members and Lodges should further not forget that our Society is a
world-wide organisation; they should avoid becoming so wrapped up in their
own parochial affairs that they lose sight of what the T.S. is doing on other
parts of the globe. It is a good plan for Lodges of any size to appoint members
to keep in touch with Theosophical activities in other countries and to report
on them at intervals at Lodge meetings, so that all the members may be well
informed and may secure a big point of view, embracing Theosophy and the
T.S. as they are as a whole, instead of as they are in one small town or district
only. If possible, also, it is good for members to try and correspond with
members in other Sections; in this way new friendships may be formed and
the spirit of brotherhood between the races the world over may be fostered. 234

This “spirit of brotherhood” was theosophy’s most apparent cosmopolitan project
which the later first Asian president of the TS C. Jinarajadasa at the annual convention
1925/26 in Adyar saw exemplified and anticipated as a global trend since “under
these spreading roots and branches, forty and more Nationalities are for the moment
seated, just as you are all thinking together with me of the larger possibilities of
mankind, so it will be more and more”. 235

The general secretary of the Indian section Bhagavan Das confessed: “My love for
the T. S. is great. For the T. S. represents the only public effort known to history, so far
as I am aware, to bring together all the races and religions on a common platform,
with the deliberate object of making them see the best rather than the worst of each
other.” 236

Jinarajadasa’s brilliant description of the cosmopolitan quality of the Theosophical
Society deserves a full quotation:

There is taking place today in the world a very great adjustment of ideas. You
will not that, in all typically cultured people, there is been added to the
conception of the nation the idea of the world. We are more and more being


Jubilee Convention Lectures delivered at Adyar at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Theosophical Society,

236 Bhagavan Das, “Remarks on Sir Subramania’s view of the situation,” Theosophy in India 9 (1912):
105.
driven by stress of circumstance to go outside the barriers of our national thinking. The economic condition of the world has of late driven each country to organise itself, not merely for its national purposes, but also for international co-operation. The existence of the League of Nations to day is an indication of the dawn of this new era in the relations between the nations. Much is happening in commerce, in industry and in banking, all forcing people to realise that the welfare of a single nation is henceforth dependent upon the welfare of the whole world. Just as in politics and economics, we are being driven more and more to live in the idea of a world rather than of a nation, so is it in culture. The typically cultured man or woman of any nation lives to-day, delighting not only in the growth of his or her own national tradition, but in all the achievements of other cultural traditions also. It is no exaggeration to say that though people still love their national culture, they have found something larger, more exquisite, and that is a world culture.

Indians viewed the Theosophical Society as a “cosmopolitan thought zone” since it allowed for versatile and self-chosen identities that transcended regional particularities and envisioned the world as a whole.

1.5.2 Colonial Cosmopolitanism

At the time when Euro-American theosophists entered the “sacred space”, India was the most valuable colony of the British Empire. Their newly established headquarters, established between the Adyar and the Bay of Bengal, was situated in the wider context of the British Empire. Most of theosophy’s indigenous members belonged to the colonized elite and many of the European members belonged to the administrative elite of the Raj. Thus for theosophists, colonialism was not an abstract discourse but a concrete reality that brought people from different parts of the world together and allowed them to think beyond the borders of their home-country thus expressing something like an “actually existing cosmopolitanism” in the sense of Scott Malcolmson. “Actually existing cosmopolitanism” is not “ethically attractive” such as the Eurocentric enlightenment concept of the freely chosen identity as a liberal world citizen since it is often based on a limited choice in deciding to enter something larger

---

than one’s own immediate culture and very often made under duress. Malcolmson defines immigrant or mercantile cosmopolitanisms as forms of “actually existing cosmopolitanisms”. Even though he does not define colonialism as one of them, I would argue that the colonial enterprise in many parts of the world provided the initial ground for a thinking and feeling beyond the own nation state - both for the colonizers and the colonized.

The power hierarchy, however, simultaneously limited the interaction. When Euro-American theosophists settled in the suburb of Madras at the end of the nineteenth century in the hope to find there the source of global spirituality, Metcalf observed the high degree of dissociation of the colonizers from their subjects. Metcalf suggests that the “imperial encounter” increasingly deepened the gulf between the colonizers and the colonized and had become almost insurmountable, as is artistically described in E.M. Forster’s novel A Passage to India.

When the Theosophical Society, therefore, offered a ground for general openness towards everyone “irrespective of race, class, creed or gender” aiming at confronting the restrictions of a “colonial cosmopolitanism” with a cosmopolitan vision of founding a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” Indians reacted in an overwhelmingly positive manner. Ghanaen British philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has convincingly argued that as in his own father’s case the historical experience of the dangers of racial intolerance and the disrespect of colonial officials, is often an important trigger for the development of a cosmopolitan attitude.

Voices raised by Indian intellectuals in the Society’s main organ, The Theosophist suggest that the Theosophical Society was one of the few opportunities that allowed the colonized Indian elite to approach members of the colonizers not as employers and masters but as sympathetic fellow human beings. One member, for example, suggested:

---

238 Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (see note 116), 238.


It has always occurred to me, (...) that they could do the greatest amount of good to our country if they could but succeed in their professed object of bringing together the rulers and the ruled on the common platform of an united intellectual brotherhood(…) that in convincing the judgement and winning the sympathies of influential Anglo-Indians for us, they were wiser than we. I am assured by certain of my friends that joining the Society they have marked a great change in the attitude of the Anglo-Indian members towards them.241

This transgression of colonial hierarchies had positive effects on the self-image of the Indian middle class and was thought to have generated much of the Society's appeal by the editor of the Madras Mail in 1883:

The old apologetic tone which characterized the utterances of natives regarding everything Indian a short time ago, has given place to a tone of self-affirmation, not quite so pleasant to the ruling class perhaps, but certainly very much more natural and healthy...The old school Hindu considered it his duty to take meekly the rebukes of Europeans, and even to esteem them as precious evil. The new school has no such amiable weakness. (...) If once it should become possible to regard Hindu literature, science, and religion as ahead of the times, nothing would be wanting to enable the Hindu to boast himself not only as the equal, but as the superior of the European. The hour brought forth the man, and the man was Colonel Olcott.242

The colonial government relied on this collaborating class of Indians for running the educational, legal, administrative and military departments; yet, top positions in courts, universities, administrative services, and the army were mainly filled by British nationals. The collaborating class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was of a confusingly mixed character: Educated in the newly founded British educational institutions, they formed an urban elite of predominantly independent professions such as lawyers, teachers, doctors, public inspectors, and journalists. Because of their bi-lingual education and bi-cultural affiliation they made for perfect mediators and interpreters for the colonial government; thus, the interaction with a “colonial milieu”243 was part of their everyday experience.

243 The concept of “colonial milieu” has been created by Jones in: Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 3.
On the other hand, Blavatsky understood the power hierarchy in British India well enough thus her “intense desire was to attract men of position to Theosophy” which meant members of the British elite in colonial India. Members of the British elite in colonial India were particularly attracted by Blavatsky’s public exposition of supernatural phenomena such as producing tea cups out of thin air or letters by the notorious mahatmas that gained excited press coverage. With Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), a retired administrative official and later “father of the Indian National Congress”, and A. P. Sinnett (1840-1921), the editor of the famous Pioneer (Allahabad), the Society recruited two influential although dissenting members of the colonial elite. Already in 1880, these two Brits joined the Society as they were not content with academic exoteric representations of Indian spirituality but sought access to orally transmitted esoteric knowledge on location. In contrast to “armchair Orientalists” and Euro-American theosophists back home they wanted direct contact with indigenous spiritual teachers and were thus “not ashamed to sit at the feet of these enlightened scholars.” Despite this humble attitude, Hume, as the other Euro-American theosophists also belonged to the “ruling race”, which ascribed a supposedly superior spirituality to the “comparatively delicate or feeble organization of Easterns - the result partly of climate, partly of vegetarian diet.” According to this logic, the “more robust animal foodfed organizations of the Westerns” such as Hume and Sinnett themselves inevitably had to turn to Indians as they are the “bearers of an ageless wisdom.” The “effeminate Indian” and the “manly Englishman” were cultural stereotypes in frequent use in colonial India, even as a basis for recruiting or judging.

---


247 Ibid., 45.

248 Hammer, 2001, p. 120

non-official context illustrates not only the close entanglement of both spheres but also how these discourses were equally used to paternalize, insult or privilege the South Asians.

However, South Asians were potentially awarded the prestigious position not only as interlocutors in an interreligious dialogue, as mediators between different cultures or as “brothers” in the utopian project, but as teachers of European members. The Theosophical Society thus provided them with the promising opportunity to affirm their authority and challenge, even invert, the colonial order. However, the examples have shown that this was not all that easy.

1.5.3 “Spiritual Cosmopolitanism”

As we have already seen, the discourse on Religious Reform in India around the turn of the century has been as multifaceted as multi-religious. Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims in the mid-eighteenth century began to reinterpret their religious traditions by reshaping, reforming, “modernizing” or purifying them. German historian Jürgen Osterhammel reminds us, however, that this trend for religious reform and reorientation was global and can only partly be explained by the stereotypical challenge of Western hegemonic modernity.

The TS was inspired by, and inspired these Socio-Religious Reform Movements and even got as close as collaborating with one of them – the Arya Samaj. Comparative religious studies and specifically Indology or Oriental studies formed a major source of information for both religious reformers and the theosophists. By the end of the nineteenth century, this academic discipline with its eminent scholars such as German Indologist Friedrich Max Müller or Pali scholar William Rhys-Davis in Oxford, had clearly become the authoritative source of knowledge on “Oriental

250 Veer, Peter van der, *Imperial encounters*, 95.

251 Viswanathan, "The Ordinary Business of Occultism": 3.

252 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*.

253 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1268.

culture”. Comparative religious studies initially evolved out of a curiosity for different religious practices and a diversity of beliefs and thus fostered an awareness of other than the own religion. But even though this academic discipline recognized religious and cultural plurality, it inherited a methodological essentialism.

The theosophist’s own ideas about India were, however, partly informed by academic Orientalism and equally lacked differentiation. For example, the godmother of theosophy Helena Blavatsky drew on Victorian Orientalism to argue for India’s supposed superiority but similarly distinguished Theosophy from academic orientalists since she considered them unable to grasp the esoteric depth of Indian Vedic teachings.255

On the other hand, “Orientalists had only disdain or scorn for the work of theosophists” who “had at least as much influence and success as those of the scholars”.256 However, theosophy deliberately infringed academic principles as they aimed at a more holistic and popular version of orientalism. French social scientist Denis Vidal argues that the “other side of Victorian orientalism” has not only been opposed by contemporary academic orientalists but also ignored in the critical evaluation of “Orientalism” by Ronald Inden.257 However, the theosophical Orientalism at least tackled the central failure of “Orientalism”’s one-sidedness: it invited the contributions of indigenous experts. Being disqualified by contemporary erudites of orientalism, theosophy identified with indigenous experts whose knowledge according to the analysis of Edward Said is considered “irrational, illogical, unscientific, unrealistic, and subjective.258 It was thus the declared goal of theosophy to contest the established academic Orientalism with an alternative, supposedly “authentic” interpretation of Asian religions with the help of native “pundits and priests”, as Olcott puts it in one of his first Indian lectures in May 1879:


257 Ibid., 22.

“The Oxford and Cambridge, and German and other Western Sanskrit scholars, pride themselves upon having mastered the entire meaning of Vedic and Buddhistic literature. Some of them boast that they know all about those things, and the Eastern Pundits and priests know nothing! Well, we Theosophists believe just the contrary.”

Olcott continued that theosophists did not only target academic Orientalist representations of India, but were themselves prepared to learn from native scholars as “they are the only capable teachers of their own sacred books.” In 1886, Olcott initiated the erection of an Oriental library at the headquarters in Adyar as a new centre of alternative orientalist research beyond colonial and Western academic standards. Although theosophical research was initially dominated by the interest of Westerners in occultism and esotericism, the theosophists still promoted the expertise of the Indians and challenged the predominant assumption that “it was the western libraries that provided privileged access to knowledge.”

Olcott invited indigenous experts, religious specialists and Sanskrit scholars to join the free and open platform of Theosophy and thus establish an alternative, indigenous source of authority on Indian religion and culture, pointedly expressed in the second of its three grand objects: “To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern Literatures, religions and sciences”.

This dimension of the Society was especially attractive for Indian intellectuals who felt invited into the theosophical realm as partners in the enterprise to challenge the established discipline and communicate their interpretation of Indian spirituality to the world through the theosophical network. To this end the Theosophical Society established its main organ The Theosophist to contribute to the popularization of Indian spirituality through “a channel by which to reach European and American students of Occultism, such as was never imagined, not to say seen, before” as Madame Blavatsky enthusiastically introduced the magazine in 1879. She explicitly invited indigenous contributions: “Western Science must inevitably be enriched by

---


260 Ibid., 10.

the contributions of the Indian, Sinhalese, and other mystics.”262 The Theosophist was instrumental not only in the textualization, but also the popularization of Asian spirituality, thus making it accessible to a global audience. The transcultural forum of The Theosophist featured debates between European academic Orientalists such as Max Müller, archeologists, religious scholars, linguists and Euro-American as well as Asian members of the Society; in short, the magazine published a variety of people who felt entitled to interpret the South Asian culture. In addition to its indisputable esoteric side, the Society was also a philanthropic endeavor to overcome national or cultural boundaries by the spread of knowledge about alien cultures. The emphasis, however, was not on writing about South Asian culture and religion but on joining forces with indigenous experts themselves.

Theosophy thus became popular with the professional elite as it challenged the Orientalist discourse on India and simultaneously provided a platform on which they could affirm their own cultural legacy which they felt was particularly offended by Christian missionaries and academic orientalists. The pages of The Theosophist reveal that Indian members indeed use this forum in which they could directly discuss South Asian religion and history. The member T. Subba Row (1856-1890), a lawyer from Madras and close collaborator of Helena Blavatsky, in writing her Opus Magnum The Secret Doctrine, for example, criticized the famous British archeologist Sir Alexander Cunningham263 for ignoring the “Three different methods of calculation” that “were in use in India at the time when Buddha lived” but instead “made the calculation on the same basis on which an English gentleman of the 19th century would calculate time according to his own calendar”.264 He argues for a re-embedding of sources into their spatial and historical context and against a Eurocentric interpretation.

While this context of debate allowed for further differentiation and challenge of essentialized representations of the Indian culture, history and religion, theosophy’s main opposition against academic scholarship in particular and Western culture in

263 Sir Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893), British army officer, archeologist, founder of the Archeological Survey of India.
general, was indeed equally essentializing. Blavatsky was the first in popular Orientalism and esotericism who “argued that India had practical, as well as spiritual knowledge that the West sorely needed.”

The stereotypical binary of Eastern spiritual and Western rationalistic properties, however, was a concept theosophy shared with many Indian religious reformers who aspired to “re-spiritualise” the world. Richard King therefore argues that “this emphasis upon the spirituality of India and the material superiority of the “West” allowed Hindus to turn colonial discourses to their own advantage” while the “West may have material prosperity and power, but it lacks the inner spiritual life that is present in Indian culture.”

For many Indian intellectuals of the time such as Tagore, Vivekananda or Gandhi, India’s supposed superior spirituality was a common credo. Most successful in the endeavor to proclaim India’s superior spirituality in opposition to a rationalistic “West” was Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) with his allegorical interpretation of Hinduism that gained prominence as the first global representation of Hinduism as a tolerant, non-proselytizing and universally applicable world religion on the World Parliament of Religions 1893 in Chicago.

The Parliament was an important event in the history of the idea of world-religions and the interreligious dialogue as has been thoroughly discussed by Tomoko Masuzawa, Dorothea Lüddeckens and Hugh Seagers. Like few other events it marked the interest of Euro-America in the Eastern wisdom and the rise of “world

---


266 King, Orientalism and Religion, 142.


268 Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions, or, how European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).


religions” which challenged, influenced, and transformed even the multitude of spiritual practices outside its direct realm.\textsuperscript{271}

The TS was not only present at the World Parliament of Religions but also held a separate session in which Gyanendranath Chakravarti, a Brahmin professor of mathematics at the Allahabad University communicated an authentic version of Indian spirituality as an ambassador from the “East”. Religious historian Eric Sharpe has remarked that the Parliament was more a highlight for a sensationalist popular audience than for academic comparativism, marked by the absence of all the noted European Orientalists. It was thus more an event for simple people than a meeting of academic specialists and the tension between a popular interest in religious pluralism and a scientific comparativism was an intrinsic part of the event.\textsuperscript{272} Given the popular orientation of the theosophists’ representation the event provided a successful entry for Indian theosophists such as Chakravarti, but also Anagarika Dharmapala and the Jain V.R. Gandhi (1864-1901) for representing “their” version of Indian spirituality. Asian universalism was communicated by Chakravarti through the interpretation of Indian spiritual knowledge as fundamentally esoteric, allegorical spiritual and universalistic which only needs to be stripped of the outer exoteric superstition and ritualism. This identification fulfilled an important strategic move and gave him the opportunity to challenge the ‘scientific’ and that means exoteric interpretation of Indian religions by European orientalists:

“Max Müller, as my brother Dharmapala has told you, denies that in the East there is an esotericism. No greater mistake, no more preposterous, no more disgraceful injustice to the sacred literature of the East can be perpetrated than by the assertion that there is no esoteric side to the teachings of the East.”\textsuperscript{273}

The stress on the esoteric side of the Indian spirituality gave Chakravarti the opportunity to resist other parties that felt entitled to judge Indian religions: European Orientalists, Christian missionaries and the British colonial state. Chakravarti found esotericism to be the link between theosophy and Hinduism and

\textsuperscript{271} Bayly, \textit{The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914}, 332.

\textsuperscript{272} Masuzawa, \textit{The Invention of World Religions, or, how European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism}, 272.

\textsuperscript{273} Chakravarti, \textit{Parliament of Religion}, 182
throughout his lectures he tried to prove the allegoric nature of Indian sacred texts and interprets Hinduism as a religious ideology that can be easily universalized and strikingly resembled the famous lecture of Swami Vivekananda on the same platform. While the ideological (though mainly unacknowledged) link between Theosophy and neo-Hinduism has been acknowledged by scholars such as Peter van der Veer or Richard King. Meera Nanda goes as far as claiming that the “the entire repertoire of intellectual arguments used to dress up traditional Hindu cosmology in the scientific costume of progressive evolutionism was created and popularized originally by Mme Blavatsky and her fellow theosophists. Hindu reformers of the so-called Indian Renaissance of the 19th century used the template provided by the Theosophists to trim and refashion traditional Hindu doctrines to meet the challenge of the modern world.”

The emphasis on the binary of the spiritual “East” and the material “West” is another important similarity with Vivekananda as it marks a shift from the former “West” and the rest to the East/West dichotomy. As both portrayed the “West” as materially advanced but spiritually degraded while praising the spiritual ‘East’ as materially underdeveloped, they arrive at a new division of labor-the “East” should spiritually enlighten the world, whereas the “West” should continue to progress in the field of science, technology and economy. This reinterpretation and even more so the claim to the spiritual hegemony of the “East” over the “West” Chakravarti shared with South Asian intellectuals such as Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, Ramakrishnam and Vivekananda.

Chakravarti therefore told his American audience that it wants “what the East can give you - the light of spiritual truths, and when you have that, it will prove to be like

274 Veer, Peter van der, Imperial Encounters, 55.

275 King, Orientalism and Religion, 106.


the philosopher’s stone, which, whatever it touches, it turns into gold.” These communications thus suggest a fissure between cultures that are in reality deeply entangled and therefore not in the least as monolithic.

Together with the theosophists, religious reformers Swami Vivekananda and Rammohun Roy equally made inroads on the “West” by fostering the internationally focused and decontextualized spirituality of the Vedanta philosophy which became the predominant interpretation of Hinduism in the nineteenth century. The fact remains that Theosophy “has had tremendous impact on the development of popular Orientalism in the west.” Despite its ideological orientation towards the Asian spiritual traditions, the TS was a hybrid spiritual organization that made no exclusive claim to any particular religion but tried to tolerate all, based on the assumption that no religion can possibly represent the full “sacred knowledge”. Accordingly, Indians did not properly convert to theosophy but added another identity. In this sense, the TS represented a “spiritual cosmopolitanism” that like other forms of “actually existing cosmopolitanisms” rarely enters scholarly discussions.

1.5.4 “Extranational cosmopolitanism”

As we have seen through its encouragement of a “spiritual cosmopolitanism” theosophy allowed Indians to transform their disturbing colonial experiences into the feeling of belonging to a wider context. However, theosophy was by far not the only or the first movement that employed reformed religious ideas for ideological dissent with British cultural and political supremacy. However, when theosophists entered Indian politics especially after the turn of the century they used their India-wide

---


279 King, Orientalism and Religion, 141.


281 Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (see note 116), 238.
network for the integration of various local political activities and their ideology of a
united Indian nation with a specific agenda in the integrating world.

At the end of the nineteenth century, indigenous elites became increasingly
dissatisfied with their insecure position in the imperial society. Educated in British
institutions both in India and often in the metropolis, London, they began to evaluate
the British colonial reign by its own standards. The contemporary eminent Bengali
freedom fighter, Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), for example, explained that the
“message of freedom and humanism drawn from the French Illumination which the
ey early generation of our British rulers and teachers, who have shaped and moulded
the course of English education and British administration in this country, brought
with them to us” “revived the ancient spirit of Bengal into new activity”, however, he
insisted that the “present freedom movement is not exotic. It is no foreign
importation” but “native to the soil”.282

Like Pal, many Indian nationalists found the British system lacking towards their
own class that collaborated with the British government in general respect and
regarding opportunities to actively shape the structure of the government via
influential posts. Moreover, English “education has made them realise that they are
the intellectual equals of Englishmen, and that even if they were not, they have
exactly the same right to govern their own country as the Englishmen have to govern
theirs.”283

In short, the nascent national movement initially did not strive for revolution or
complete independence from the Raj but for a more adequate representation of their
class in the government. Although bi-lingual Indians were only a “‘microscopic
minority’, as the British never tired of pointing out”, “this emerging social group
enjoyed an importance far in excess of its size” since their linguistic flexibility allowed
them to establish India-wide contacts and mediate between the indigenous


population and British officials.\textsuperscript{284} In "Weberian terms this class became the 'carrier' of reform movements."\textsuperscript{285}

As we have already seen, the TS became a meeting point for exactly this group of the Indian social stratum and it was thus more and more drawn into national politics. Initially, the TS claimed to be apolitical and only focused on a religious revival, however, especially after the turn of the century under its second president Annie Besant, the Society actively promoted the Indian national independence. As part of the wider milieu of religious revivalism, the TS, like other reform movements, inspired Indian nationalists by legitimizing their ideology, infusing confidence and provided them with its experience of organization as well as its pan-Indian network.\textsuperscript{286} In that respect, the TS differed decidedly from other religious reform movements such as the Arya Samaj or the Brahmo Samaj whose influence was regionally specific and spiritually exclusive. Historian Kenneth Jones has therefore mapped the various religious reform movements and carefully contextualized them.\textsuperscript{287} Although the epicenter of theosophy was certainly the Madras presidency as has been outlined by both Kenneth Jones and R. Suntharalingam, the TS successfully transcended regional particularities and religious affiliations by attracting Parsees, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists and bringing them into contact with liberal British citizens.\textsuperscript{288} According to the TS the British official government on the other hand was seen as the main corrupting influence on India in terms of economy

\textsuperscript{284} Sarkar, \textit{Modern India 1885-1947}, 66.


\textsuperscript{287} Jones, \textit{Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India}.

(drain of wealth), education (clerk-education), religion (converting missionaries) and politics (preventing self-government).\textsuperscript{289}

Alongside other religious reformist movements did not “just question the self-justification of British rule, it also promoted, with respect to India, those doctrines we regard as characteristic of nationalist movements wherever they arise- the glories of the native culture, a golden age some time in the past, and, of course, a bewailing of the disruptive effects of foreign rule.”\textsuperscript{290} The resource for ideological elements of national self-formation stemmed from Theosophy’s spiritual ideas about “India as a unity with a common heritage, facing a common set of problems, requiring an all-India solution.”\textsuperscript{291} The TS was particularly successful in practically establishing this ideology due to its non-sectarian agenda.

The foundation in 1885 of the Indian National Congress (INC), one of the first independence movements in the colonial world, was partly an outcome of the coordinated efforts of theosophical elite circles from Bombay, Madras and Calcutta and the dissenting British liberal theosophist, Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912) who met in the Theosophical Society and used theosophy to further political nationalism on an all-India level.

The integrative force of the Theosophical Society brought Indian nationalists from Bombay such as the Parsees Pherozesha Mehta and Dadabhai Naoroji, from Calcutta Surendranath Banerjea together with Indian theosophists from Madras such as B.M. Malabari or Ragunatha Rao (1831-1912) the former diwan of Indore, high court judge S. Subramania Iyer (1842-1924) and K. Telang who joined forces with the eminent Bengali theosophist Narendranath Sen, editor of the influential newspaper \textit{Indian Mirror} in order to advance a more radical agenda for an all-India organization.\textsuperscript{292} The ardent theosophist and high Indian Civil Service official Allan Octavian Hume as a confidante of Viceroy Lord Ripon initially tried to convince him of


\textsuperscript{290} Ibid., 168.


\textsuperscript{292} Ibid., 15.
an administration reform that would integrate Indians more closely. Unfortunately, this initiative was unsuccessful. Thus Hume mediated between various regional political groups in Madras, Poona, Bombay and Calcutta to help to establish eventually in December 1885 an all-India organization that gave “voice to the concerns and aspirations of the Indians themselves.” 293 Hume became the so-called ‘Father of the Indian National Congress’ by relying on networks generated within the Theosophical Society and a discursive context that emphasized a common past, present and future of India.

One highly influential member from Allahabad explained accordingly that the “Theosophical Society discarding all notions of sham patriotism, is trying hard to build a solid foundation for the Indians to stand upon as a Nation worthy of respect and admiration in some future time” and admits that it “was chiefly through a patriotic motive that I first joined the Society.”294

The Indian National Congress, however, only convened once a year in rotating places to decide on petitions and had no permanent working base during the year. When Britain was at war the time seemed right for a countrywide initiative of permanent campaigning for Indian self-government. To this end Annie Besant, the Society’s second president, and Lokmanya Tilak “divided the country between them and established complimentary Home Rule Leagues”295 in 1916. The two leagues “were critical factors in the political scene” and their “significance lay not just in the new doctrines they were spreading, but in the range of people whom they were attracting. By the end of 1917 their joint membership numbered about 60,000.”296

Although the Home Rule campaign forcefully promoted an Indian national self-government it became an embodiment of the international aspirations of the TS since it transcended the national focus as it strived for integrating India in the wider construction of the empire.

296 Ibid., 27.
The limited space here does not allow to fully discuss the Home Rule agitation in detail but I intend to roughly outline how the Home Rule League promoted a qualified internationalism. A more detailed account of this engagement will be presented in the chapter on B.P. Wadia.

In Bombay, Annie Besant relied on the Dwarkadas brothers as well as the young and wealthy Parsee B.P. Wadia in a campaign that conceived of the empire as an imperial brotherhood in which India should find its rightful place. Jamnadas Dwarkadas explained this agenda in his *Political Memoirs*:

Mrs. Besant’s objective was complete self-government for India within the Commonwealth and not outside it, not because she wanted any dependence on Britain, but because she was strongly of opinion that in the future that lay before the world, a state of isolation, however magnificent it might sound, would be an anachronism. She foresaw more than any other person that the world would soon shrink owing to the conquest of distance that would inevitably take place as a result of the progress of science and aviation. It must not be forgotten that, primarily she was a champion of universal brotherhood and in her advocacy of India’s independence within the Commonwealth was contained the seed for the fructification of that great tree of brotherhood which would give shelter to the whole world. Besides, she considered it essential that India should be a member of a world organization and have the opportunity of making her own contribution to the building up of a new civilization.  

The Home Rule propaganda was informed by theosophy's global vision and far from advocating full independence it promoted a strengthening of bonds between India and the Empire. In *India: A Nation* issued in London and addressed to the interested audience in Great Britain, Annie Besant therefore argued that India “wants to remain part of the Empire; but an equal part, a Self-Governing Community standing on a level with the Self-Governing Dominions.” She concluded: “England and India hand-in-hand. Yes, that is our hope for the world’s sake.”  

To this end the Society issued three newspapers *The Commonweal*, *New India* and *Young India* all propagating the theosophical internationalist ideology that Indians would soon “have the privilege of

---


having an honoured place among the nations of the world,” as one enthused member wrote. Another Home ruler confessed: "I am an absolute Internationalist and would like to promote better relationship not only between the different parts of the British Empire but in the whole world.” The Home Rulers believed that complete national independence would separate India from the world and were therefore “totally opposed to Gandhi’s movement of civil disobedience and his cry for total independence as against continuing to be a member of the British Commonwealth.”

Historian Gauri Viswanathan critically remarks that Besant’s “cry for freedom without separation” meant that “the moment of decolonization for India is also the moment of its emergence into a federation of nations still held together by Britain at its center.”

Or, more positively, as Kris Manjapra has put it: "If nationalism was the main political project of resistance in the anticolonial era, cosmopolitanism was the main ethical project- and both of these operate together.” However, the involvement of Indians in the theosophical platform encouraged the notion that cosmopolitanism and patriotism are sentiments rather than proper ideologies and can very well go together.

The critique towards “exTRANATIONAL cosmopolitanism”, however, was also a contemporary one. Overseas Indian nationalists like Madame Cama and Shyamji Krishnavarma, who issued the “Monthly Organ of Indian Independence, The Bande Materam, in Geneva were highly suspicious that Besant might after all be an imperial agent due to her advocacy of imperialism:

(...it is certain at present she has fallen in with the plans of the caste that governs India, (...) She is entrusted with the delicate mission of controlling the Hindu religious system from within. The government cannot touch our


300 Kanji Dwarkadas, India’s Fight for Freedom, 1913-1937: An Eyewitness Story (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), 263.

301 Kanji Dwarkadas, Gandhiji through my Diary Leaves, 1915-1948 (Bombay, 1950), 29.

302 Viswanathan, Outside the Fold, 205.


304 Kwame A. Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (see note 115), 92.
Mrs. Annie Besant and her fellow-workers in Benares like Dr. Richadson (sic.) and Mr. Arundel [sic.] are British Imperialists working with a view of obtaining control of Hindu religious life. They are like wolves in sheep’s clothing and are more to be feared and condemned than such blunt and rude enemies of India as Lord Salisbury or the Times. (...) She has now devoted her energy to the Imperialist propagande (sic.) of Great Britain.305

In a way Besant’s internment in 1917 silenced these voices. Together with her closest allies, B.P. Wadia and George Arundale, the principal of the Central Hindu College in Benares, were interned at Ootacamund in the Nilgiri Hills for her ’violent speeches‘ on 16th June 1917.306 For many “it was Annie Besant’s internment that first opened their (my) eyes” “to the importance of the political struggle that India had begun”, Bhagavan Das, one of Besant’s closest allies admitted that he “was immersed in educational work and theosophical (including Sanskrit) studies, and had felt no keen interest in current politics”307 before. Historian Judith Brown argues moreover, that “Annie Besant's internment was the first 'wrong' Gandhi took up which had India-wide appeal to the political nation.”308 Although Gandhi was first agitated by Annie Besant’s internment and had been informed by the theosophical “affirmative orientalism” which he described in his memoirs for as early as 1889 in London and later in South Africa,309 he arose as a rival of Besant and from 1918 onwards took over with radical political methods to completely end the British domination over India. The rivalry between Gandhi and Besant had significant implications for some of the Indian supporters such as Jamnadas Dwarkadas who reported that Gandhi took away the “control of the Home Rule League of which we were office-bearers by changing the name, objects and the constitution of the Home Rule League. Instead of Home Rule within the British Commonwealth, he brought in Purna Swaraj and in


308 Brown, Gandhi’s Rise to Power. Indian Politics 1915-1922, 141.

place of constitutional agitation, he submitted non-violent agitation of any type. The name of the Home Rule League was changed to Swaraj Sabha. In this way, all opposition to Gandhi was killed and those who differed from him were deprived of public platform.”

Dwarkadas further on immersed in labor, social, and humanitarian work, e.g., the Vigilance Association, the Children’s Aid Society, the Infant Welfare Society, the Baby Week Committee and the All-India Trade Union Congress since “active politics was not possible for” him anymore. This did not only apply to Jamnadas Dwarkadas but also to Annie Besant herself and a number of her supporters as well who either turned to Gandhi or dissociated their political agitation from theosophy such as Besant’s former adoptee V.K. Krishna Menon with his Commonwealth of India League. With preeminent nationalists such as Gandhi or Nehru, the theosophical connection, however, played out as they were the native heirs to what Ronald Inden (without mentioning the TS as the most important non-academic institution) has called the "loyal opposition“ that considered the human as being predominantly characterized by its spirituality. Historian Mark Bevir’s conclusion remains true that:

Not only were individual theosophists, such as Hume, Besant and the Dwarkadas brothers key figures in the development of nationalist thought and organization; nor is it just a matter of many of the leading activists of the freedom struggle, including Gandhi and Nehru, having been influenced by theosophy; the key point is rather the general picture within which these details about individuals gain their significance, a general picture of theosophy as an integral part of the cultural and social context out of which the nationalist movement arose.

However, before Gandhi’s rise to power, the TS informed the Indian political discourse with global fantasies. Nonetheless, with Gandhi’s entry into the political


311 Ibid., 30.

312 Owen, The British Left and India, 203.

313 Inden, Imagining India, 73.

arena the nationalist politics were democratized and Gandhi put an end to the theosophical visions of India within the Commonwealth. The critique against Gandhi’s political radicalism as a threat to cosmopolitanism was continued by Rabindranath Tagore throughout the 1920s.

Held together by the “cosmopolitan thought zone” of theosophy, three “actually existing” cosmopolitanisms – “colonial cosmopolitanism”, “spiritual cosmopolitanism” and “extranational cosmopolitanism” were embodied through concrete, regional discourses which South Asians in the TS aimed at conveying into wider, transnational contexts. Like Indian theosophists themselves, these discourses were riddled with puzzling contradictions spanning between colonialism and anti-colonialism, spirituality and secularism, local and global discourses.

1.5.5 Indian Critique at Theosophy

The involvement of Indians with the Theosophical Society was very multifaceted, combining internal and external factors and was thus not a one-dimensional phenomenon as most of the existing research literature suggests. As a modern voluntary and hybrid platform, the TS faced a lot of fluctuation from its members. The highly critical attitude that a number of noted and long term members such as Upendranath Basu (general secretary of the Indian branch and member for 18 years) or a prominent South Asian theosophist such as the general secretary of the Indian branch and eminent Sanskrit scholar Bhagavan Das who freely exercised his right to resign most prominently.

In a multidimensional approach, Indian theosophists’ criticism and resignations have to be taken into consideration since they are a direct outcome of the individual freedom of choice and thereby the most important expression of agency.316 In the same manner in which the focus on ideas and concepts under global circumstances does not allow a thought process in national or cultural boundaries, the focus on actors who freely moved between affiliations cannot stop at their transgression of institutional boundaries either. Although the “gravitational center” of theosophy was

315 Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation (see note 116), 238.

316 Giddens, Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft, 60.
viewed by historical actors as an entry to a range of cosmopolitan discourses, their interests were far more varied, more differentiated and richer than the simple either-or logic would account for.

Clearly, a “spiritual joint venture” such as the TS despite its harmonic and egalitarian official agenda provoked a lot of conflicts in the negotiation of authority and power. Its general openness towards versatile people characterized the Society as an institution of the evolving civil society in which both membership and resignation depended on the individual’s free choice. Despite the fact that theosophy clearly privileged certain religious traditions, members did not have to convert but stayed with their own religious affiliation. However, as we have seen, because of the privileging of firstly Buddhist and later Hindu traditions, Indian Muslims did not feel drawn to theosophy. The decided anti-Christian attitude moreover discouraged Indian Christians to join in considerable numbers, but drew many dissenting Euro-American Christians. The openness of theosophy was clearly limited. Scholars like the otherwise brilliant Mark Frost stay on the programmatic level in their analysis and regard only the general openness and cosmopolitanism of the theosophical enterprise. Since theosophy has generated a wealth of yet unexplored publications, theosophical principles and ideologies are reflected while the practice remains by and large untouched.

The fact that many once enthusiastic South Asian adherents resigned is mentioned here and there, but their reasons are not scrutinized. The prevalent representation in the existing literature of South Asians is predominantly that of uncritical, loyal followers of theosophy. 317 318 This description does not only underrate the critical agency of the South Asians in their involvement with theosophy but moreover ignores ways in which theosophy became a resource of ideas and networks for some time but when it had served a certain purpose it became unappealing to some. With regard to the Indian individuals it has not been asked why many of them (and this is not a development of the later period, but it had already started with Dayanand Saraswati of the Arya Samaj) became disillusioned with the TS. It is not asked how

317 Aravamudan, Guru English, 110.

the supposedly open and liberal Society limited the opportunities for engagement or became unacceptable for some individuals over the course of time.

The general dissent with the course of the TS culminated especially after the turn of the century when prominent Indians like Gandhi openly criticized the TS. Gandhi specifically abhorred of the "society’s 'secret side - its occultism" and thus he admitted: “It has never appealed to me. I long to belong to the masses. Any secrecy hinders real democracy.” Critique also came from other religious reform movements such as the Madras Social Reform Association which criticized Besant “for her uncritical praise of Hindu society.” Clearly, Besant followed Olcott’s and Blavatsky’s flattering rhetoric but after the turn of the century the self-reflective as well as critical faculties of the Indian intelligentsia had been developed through the politicizing of an ever growing number of people and their participation in an evolving public sphere all complete with an accelerated increase of publications and popular debates especially concerning religious issues.

In the light of the indubitable and multifaceted contribution of theosophy to education, politics, and culture of South Asia around the turn of the century and the initial enthusiasm for the movement, the changing attitude of the South Asians towards theosophy is often ignored. However, the magic of the initial contact before the turn of the century and the mesmerizing of South Asians by the founders cannot be regarded as the sole approach of South Asians to the movement. It is necessary to consider the TS as a resource that served a certain purpose for some time for many but from 1918 onwards no longer fit the changed needs of many Indians.

Already from the very beginning, even before the founders had set foot on Indian soil, the disagreement of South Asians had set in with the prominent leader of the religious reformist movement Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati. Then Helena Blavatsky’s closest collaborator in composing her Secret Doctrine, T. Subba Row, left

---


320 Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 175.

the movement shortly before his early death in 1890, followed by Annie Besant’s part-time personal guru and orator on the stage of the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti. The intense critique against the new leadership of Annie Besant and her support of Jiddu Krishnamurti as the coming world messiah did not only provoke the well documented and momentous critique from the leader of the German section, Rudolf Steiner, who subsequently established the Anthroposophical Society but also the harsh critique and eventual resignation of Upendranath Basu in 1908 and Bhagavan Das in 1913, both former general secretaries of the Indian section. Especially the latter’s official critique in the sectional organ *Theosophy in India* in 1913 was shared by one of the Society’s most persistent indigenous critics, the Madras based *The Hindu*, one of the largest and most influential newspapers which claimed that Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater “can no longer play on the credulity of their docile disciples” since: “The bulk of the intelligent public in this country have long ago got over any illusions as to the nature of Mrs. Besant’s theosophical activities and propaganda. That even the small number of her devoted disciples who have stood by her through thick and thin, are losing faith in her pretensions, is now becoming clear and is a welcome sign of the times.”

In order to emphasize this departure of Indians from theosophy, *The Hindu* “began what appeared to be a campaign against the two Theosophical leaders.

---


326 For his protest against Besant and eventual resignation, consult for example: Bhagavan Das, “Protest by councillors of the Indian Section, T.S.,” *Theosophy in India* (1912).

327 Charles Webster Leadbeater was Besant’s closest ally. He was accused of paedophilia which caused tremendous trouble. For details, see: Tillett, *The Elder Brother. A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater*, 140 f.


329 Ibid., 4.
Representatives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrism and Islam wrote to the paper condemning theosophy, and noting that while in theory members of any religion could join the TS and continue practice their faiths, in fact they were obliged to adopt a collection of doctrines and ideas which was inconsistent with any of them.”

We can see that Krishnamurti’s famous resignation speech “Truth is a pathless land” in 1929 which will be a discussed in detail in the later chapter on Jiddu Krishnamurti only represented a terminus in a long line of South Asian critics of the TS. As we have seen, the TS founded its deliberately “global tradition” on a vision of universal human spirituality which it linked especially with the spiritual tradition of South Asia. However, by the early 1920s, the TS had lost its innovative potential and failed to inspire Indian national politics with “appropriate philosophical principles and consequential policies, economic, domestic, religious, social, communal, and, above all else, international, whereby the heart of all nations might be brought nearer to each other,” criticized Das. Similarly, it failed to influence the international political body of the day, The League of Nations:

The Theosophical Society is the seed and root of the true Spiritual League of All the Nations. It has spread thousands of rootlets in over fifty countries of the earth. Without its inspiration the merely political League of (some) Nations can never succeed in achieving its purpose. The two are halves of one whole, as the part of the tree below and the part above the surface of the earth. (...) It is a matter for deep regret and apprehension that, for various reasons, the T.S. has not been able to develop properly this most important aspect of its being in such a way as to establish the natural connection between the two halves. (...) It shall not profit the League of Nations anything if it spread voluminous official correspondence over all the earth, and succeed not in inspiring its Member - Nations with the theosophical spirit of Universal Brotherhood.

Das felt that although the TS had been a global player long before the League of Nations had failed to keep pace with the internationalization of politics in the interwar period and the spreading concern with global issues. In retrospect, Das concluded that theosophy predominantly failed because it “remains confined to easy-

---


331 Das, Annie Besant and the Changing World, 37, italics are mine.

332 Ibid., 17.
going study or even strenuous preaching of theory and doctrine. It had to be infused into all departments of the people’s life; not only into Education, but also into Politics, in order to transform it from its present avaricious and murderous sordidness into spiritual Raja Dharma.”

Historian Peter van der Veer has identified a pattern according to which “Theosophy typically played a crucial role in initiating change but was then left behind as soon as the enterprise gained momentum.” This pattern applies not only to the national political movement or the Central Hindu College but also to international politics and a global vision of world order. A crucial and critical theosophist like Das understood that the TS had lost its role as a trendsetter especially when not adequately addressing the changes in the global society any longer.

The three protagonists of the case studies – B.P. Wadia, Anagarika Dharmapala and Jiddu Krishnamurti – equally understood this pattern since all of them abandoned the TS and opted for other ways of expressing their spiritual ideas in a global context.

All three transgressed the frame of the Theosophical Society but developed their visions of world order based on its ideological resources and infrastructure. These visions, however, were not limited to the religious field but applied the impetus of “socio-religious reform movements” to a global scale. Their global “socio-religious reform movements” – the United Lodge of Theosophists, the Maha Bodhi Society and the independent teaching of Krishnamurti – started on the individual level but aspired community formation.

B.P. Wadia developed a reformed version of theosophy based on utopian socialism and traditionalism which rejected modern optimism from 1922 onwards in the form of a universal brotherhood. Anagarika Dharmapala initially allied with Henry Steel Olcott to develop global and modern Buddhism as the basis for a new global civilization from 1892 independently and Jiddu Krishnamurti dismissed the theosophical world teacher project to become one of the first globally operating independent gurus from the “East” in 1929. It will become clear that the distinctions

333 Das, Annie Besant and the Changing World, 28.

334 Veer, Peter van der, Imperial encounters, 76.
made today between spiritualism and secularism are not of much help in understanding the world embracing moves of these agents of cultural globalization.
2 Traditionalizing the Modern Globalization: B. P. Wadia (1881-1958)

2.1 Introduction

Following the First World War devastation, the hope to overcome national rivalries was institutionalized in numerous new international, non-governmental organizations. Historian Akira Iriye has convincingly argued that this upsurge added to the versatility \(^{335}\) of global interaction since international organizations offered an alternative to national state politics by assuming “that there is yet another world, one that is produced by forces that cut across national frontiers. These forces create new networks of shared interests and concerns.”\(^{336}\) From its inception in 1919, the League of Nations became a focus of such hopes as it was concerned not only with security matters but also labor, health, cultural and other issues for which it established a number of affiliate organizations.\(^{337}\)

The protagonist of this chapter, the ardent theosophist B.P. Wadia (1881-1958) and many of his contemporaries criticized the League as an outcome of the Versailles Peace Treaties in 1919 which directly linked it with the outburst of conflicting European nationalisms in the First World War. Despite the global hopes generated by the “Wilsonian Moment”\(^{338}\) the vision of world order and global peace was based on Europe’s traumatic past. Although Wadia was positive about the League of Nations in the first place since “The International State cannot function without an international organisation,” he supported Rabindranath Tagore’s critique that the League of Nations perpetuated the colonial order since the colonizing nations, called a band of “robbers” by Tagore, dominated the enterprise and thus: “As a matter of fact it is not a true International Organisation. It is a League of some Nations; nay, it is a League of some representatives of some nations; nay, it is a League of some representatives of

---

\(^{335}\) Iriye, *Global Community*, 8.

\(^{336}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{337}\) Ibid., 21.

doubtful status of some Nations. It has rightly been called ‘a League of States’; Dr. Rabindranath Tagore has given its other phase by naming it ‘a League of Robbers’.” However, the “old-world leaders actuated by old-world ideas and motives” in the “deformed” and “inadequate vehicle” of the League of Nations which was “blind to the spiritual signs in the heavens of today,” suggested Wadia. Nevertheless, Wadia considered the lack of spiritual impetus as an inspiration for an alternative vision of world order worse than the perpetuation of the colonial ‘old-world ideas’ in the “League of Robbers”.

The timing for this position was just right: For critical observers all over the globe, the moral bankruptcy of Europe after the Great War was a “global turning point” since it gave new credibility to “critiques and alternative visions” of the world order which formerly “were largely marginalized, dismissed by mainstream politicians and the educated public as the rantings of gloomy radicals and eccentric mystics.” The moment that the attempts of the Europeans to order the world failed alternative visions flourished. Especially luminaries of British India such as politician M.K. Gandhi, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore or political activist-turned-saint Sri Aurobindo agreed on a critique towards the state of a West-dominated world with an assumed loss of spiritual impetus due to the exclusive focus on material progress.

For many the Theosophical Society provided a true alternative to nationalism and materialism - an organization whose followers called the “spiritual League of Nations”. Contrary to the League of Nations, the Theosophical Society’s internationalism was not an outcome of the Great War as already in 1885 the Theosophical Society made the acceptance of a “Universal Brotherhood of men irrespective of race, class, creed or gender” the requirement for membership and the


343 Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Lecture on the League of Nations, April 12, 1925*, 1, Transcript, KFA.
central ideal. The “global community”, to borrow Iriye’s term, from the theosophical perspective could not be based on materialism which fostered separation and competition. The theosophists believed that only spirituality/religion could effectively transgress the differences of “race, class, creed or gender” based on the common spiritual identity of all human beings. The main task of the TS was therefore to remind people of this basic principle of human society by founding the utopian project of the Universal Brotherhood. For Wadia it was precisely the spiritual element that he considered lacking in the League of Nation but appropriately expressed in the Theosophical Movement as a global intellectual elite’s critique against the predominance of materialism, which was considered a “European” principle. The pessimistic attitude towards a post-war “modern European world” in crisis informed an orientalistic turn since this discourse privileged the mystic “East” as the assumed repository of an unbroken spiritual tradition of “sacred knowledge” and thus a model for world solidarity on the basis of spirituality.

Like other international non-governmental organizations, the Theosophical Society significantly contributed to and articulated the intellectual atmosphere of postwar internationalism. The free and “voluntary nature” actually qualifies it for Akira Iriye’s study on the evolving “Global Community” of which non-governmental organizations were an intrinsic but hitherto underrated part. However, society's spiritual impetus disqualifies it for Iriye’s study on non-state, nonreligious and nonmilitary association, as he only includes “secular” activities of religious organizations such as humanitarian relief or cultural exchange. Although he admits that “the distinction is a tenuous one,” Iriye deliberately limits his analysis on secular activities, while I argue that considering the spiritual and religious motivation is essential for a clearer understanding of the social changes induced by globalization. Religious scientist Hans Kippenberg has argued convincingly that the social change of globalization led to the diffusion of economic logic into the social life and the withdrawal of the state, gave rise to the emergence of new religious communities with the aim to effectively

344 Bevir, “The West turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of Occult Tradition”.

345 Iriye, Global Community, 2.

346 Ibid., 2.
complement the state engagement in the social sector.\textsuperscript{347} To this end, religious NGOs drew on the sociability of "brotherhood". Although he analyzed the present situation, a historical perspective on this phenomenon which will be pursued in this chapter, shows an exemplary evolvement of such a new religious community built as an assumed role model for a new, spiritually inspired world order.

The four types of \textit{Competing Visions of World Order},\textsuperscript{348} to a certain extent both opposed and operated within the existing world order. Thus the political and economical predominance of the global "West" until after the Second World War was decisive for the kind of alternatives that other global actors were able to pose within the critical "period of global movements" between the 1880s and the 1930s.\textsuperscript{349} One of the types proposed by Conrad and Sachsenmaier is "the widespread turn towards traditionalism" that is a shared product of critique of non-western and Western elites "that frequently verged on cultural fundamentalism". The authors observed that traditionalism was "less an organized movement than a cultural and political trend and mentality" which "in a broad (and not party-political) sense posed the antithesis of modern, European civilization allegedly devoid of true and inner meaning and a fuller, less alienated form of communal life to be found in the golden past, or outside the modern West."\textsuperscript{350}

B.P. Wadia (1881-1958) rose as a representative of this opposition to the "West" through the traditionalist discourse that was equally centered in the Theosophical Society and became the framework for his independent formulation of a world order vision. Unlike any other international non-governmental organization of its time, the Theosophical Society (TS) institutionalized an alternative world vision by criticizing "Western" modernity and materialism and promoting "Eastern" traditionalism and spirituality. Their key project for counteracting the materialistic and imperialistic


\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 12.
Zeitgeist dominated by the global “West” was an attempt to transcend national boundaries by founding a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity irrespective of race, class, creed or gender.

Against this backdrop, the chapter analyzes how Bahman Pestonji Wadia understood the idea and legitimized, experienced, organized, and realized the “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” as a reality through the means of spirituality. As a representative of “the widespread turn towards traditionalism” Wadia’s definition of a Universal Brotherhood was necessarily antithetical to the “West” whose disintegrating character he hoped to check. This chapter is almost exclusively based on primary sources from archives of the United Lodge of Theosophists in Los Angeles and Malmö. Despite his interesting biography and role as a forerunner in the International Labor Movement and Indian nationalist politics, Wadia has not found a biographer yet, let alone drawn scholarly attention. To my knowledge this is the first attempt to recover a traditionalist vision of world order in contrast to more optimistic visions that has hitherto gone unnoticed and is embedded in the intellectual context of traditionalist thinkers such as René Guénon or Ananda Coomaraswamy.

Accounts that helped to reconstruct his development are unpublished and unverified. Wadia’s self-proclaimed ideal of impersonality makes it even more difficult to trace him. However, I have worked predominantly with primary sources such as letters, pamphlets, magazine articles from leading theosophical publications such as The Theosophist, Theosophy in India or The Adyar Bulletin until 1922. Still I understand that this approach poses problems since most sources are taken from the literature produced by Wadia himself; this makes it difficult to determine the effect of, and reaction to, his visions.

I have structured the chapter broadly chronologically and arranged it in four parts which follow the genesis of Wadia’s independent vision of world order.

After a short biographical introduction of the study’s most unknown protagonist, the first section will look at how Wadia developed “Brotherhood” as a loyal member,

---

closely related with the Theosophical utopian ideal of a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity”. During his membership (1907-1922), Wadia’s thinking was deeply influenced by Annie Besant. In the first two chapters, I will therefore evaluate how Wadia’s ideas regarding the “Brotherhood” corresponded with Besant’s.

Still within the boundaries of the Theosophical Society and under the tutelage of its president Annie Besant, the second part studies how Wadia aimed to apply this “spiritual program” of global solidarity or “Universal Brotherhood” in international and national politics as well as economics – the context of the International Labor Movement since the forces of industrialization furthered global social disintegration. Due to Wadia’s relatively marginal status and his own “politics of impersonality” (from 1922 he only published anonymously) the third sub-chapter is an admittedly rather descriptive attempt to illustrate how on his first visit to the United States in 1919-1920, Wadia practically experienced the “Universal Brotherhood” of theosophy and how American theosophists perceived him. In this excurse I hope to show Wadia’s command over people and his tight international network of supporters both of which became fundamental resources for his individual endeavors.

The last subchapter analyzes Wadia’s independent approach to “sacred knowledge” as the basis for a “Universal Brotherhood” of theosophists with the Theosophical reformist movement, the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT) in New York. It allows us to observe the construction of a traditionalist “world vision” in the making. Thus Wadia’s attempts to legitimize his independent organization by linking it to the authority of science and tradition will be at the heart of the analysis. The study ends with Wadia’s return from New York to Bombay in 1929 to bring ULT theosophy back - exactly 50 years after Helena Blavatsky took exactly the same route to bring modern theosophy to India.

2.2 Towards a Universal Brotherhood of Theosophy

Bahman Pestonji Wadia was born in 1881 to an affluent and well-known Parsi family of Bombay. As most of the Parsi community, the Wadias acquired their wealth through their close collaboration with early colonial powers such as the Dutch, Portuguese and British in the ship-building business near Surat and migrated to Bombay when the city gained more significance as a trade harbor under British
authority. When Wadia was born, the family had turned to textile business. Even in his youth Wadia is said to have displayed a fervent sense of morality as he refused to lie while he was being trained in a British textile business; but the most momentous event of his upbringing must have been the early death of his father when he had not even turned 19. As the eldest son without formal college education or much training he took over the responsibility for his mother, sisters and younger brother by leading the inherited textile business. Wadia’s skillful management led to great financial success but in 1904 he decided to sell the business in order to free himself from further business responsibilities for a more active engagement in his new field of interest: Theosophy. Wadia’s lack of formal education effectively excluded him from highly intellectual groups and almost determined him to become a popularizer and propagandist instead of philosopher and scientist. Therefore, the Theosophical Society suited his needs and provided him with an easily accessible theory as a basis for active agitation.

Through the invitation of the family friend J.D. Mahaluxmiwala he became familiar with theosophy and joined the Bombay branch in 1903. The Bombay lodge boasted of being the eldest in India since it was here where the founders landed in 1875. The lodge was dominated by reformist members of the Parsi community who were inspired to its most prominent reform movement Ilm-e-Kshnoom by theosophy. Wadia edited the sectional organ The Theosophical Gleaner thus acquiring invaluable skills such as writing, editing, and publishing that he put to good use later. The rather sober business attitude together with his fervent sense of morality and responsibility formed his principled character that marked his mature life.

Twice, in 1904 and in 1907, Wadia offered his services to Theosophical leaders in Adyar and the president Annie Besant accepted in 1907. At the beginning of February 1908 Wadia sailed from Bombay to Adyar to capitalize on his editorial and business

---


353 This information is based on unverified sources which were available from the ULT: Jean-Louis Siemons, B. P. Wadia (1881-1958) and the Theosophical Movement, this author was a close friend of Wadia, however, his data is equally unverified: Dallas Tenbroeck, “B. P. Wadia - A Life of Service to Mankind.”

354 Walthert, Reflexive Gemeinschaft, 69.
expertise. At the international headquarters in Adyar, a suburb of Madras, Wadia edited *The Adyar Bulletin* that chiefly informed members about the inner-theosophical work, he co-edited the main sectional organ *The Theosophist* and became the manager of the Theosophical Publishing House in Madras. As a key figure of knowledge production, distribution, and control, Wadia actively shaped theosophical ideas and helped to define this central asset of the society. As Annie Besant’s right hand, Wadia became a loyal representative of theosophy to the theosophical world. Through his columns “Headquarter Notes” in *Theosophy in India* and the *Adyar Bulletin* Wadia updated the theosophical world about Besant’s worldwide activities, her strenuous work for the theosophical cause and gave summaries of her various public lectures.

### 2.2.1 Theosophical conceptions of Brotherhood

In his theosophical phase, Wadia came to define and legitimize a specific interpretation of brotherhood that even in theosophical circles was not unchallenged as a controversy in 1912-1913 with the General Secretary of the Indian branch of the TS, Bhagavan Das shows. 1910 marks the rise of the personality cult in the Central Hindu College in Varanasi around the young Jiddu Krishnamurti, who was proclaimed the coming world teacher. The hysteric atmosphere and secretiveness, the increasing intolerance towards non-believers in the new cult, prompted Das to a fierce critique of the “personal cult” around Annie Besant and young Krishnamurti which “can never be the basis of Universal Brotherhood.”

Das referred to the inclusive and cosmopolitan dimension of the concept when he argued that the Theosophical Society initially aimed at universalizing “sacred knowledge” while the personality cult personalized, thus limiting the Universal Brotherhood to a small circle of insiders. Despite his 27 years of membership and 15 years of close collaboration with Annie Besant in the Central Hindu College, Das

---

355 Under Annie Besant’s and Bhagavan Das’s joint tutelage, the college promoted a holistic education based on “Hindu principles” similar to other reformist educational projects of that time such as the Gurukul Kangri run by the Arya Samaj or Shantiniketan initiated by Tagore.

resigned from his official position. In 1912 in the main sectional organ of the Indian section *Theosophy in India*, Das insisted on a critical, individualistic perspective claiming that "that that which I hold most dear and precious came to me a couple of years before Mrs. Besant had even turned her thought to the T. S. and Theosophy in this incarnation."\(^{357}\)

Although Wadia considered this attitude very "sane and healthy" he argued that "Bhagavan Das, is fundamentally and totally wrong in the light of spiritual tradition and lore of the past and spiritual knowledge and experience of the present," since he could "very easily fill pages and pages" if he would "quote from book after book and scripture after scripture, to show that belief in the guru, and following of the guru, and service of the guru, are recommended and insisted on."\(^{358}\) Wadia considered the transmission in an exclusive teacher-student relationship not only the core of "spiritual tradition" but also a *blueprint* for any acquisition of "sacred knowledge" as he argued:

\[I,\text{ unlike my brother Bhagavan Das, look upon A.B. as my teacher and guide, and refer to rely upon her besides relying on my own Self because that Self has taught me the wisdom and utter necessity of following a greater and grander Light, that Self has shown me that her power is mightier than the power within me, that her wisdom is deeper than the wisdom within me, that her self-sacrifice is supreme than the spirit of sacrifice within me, that Self within me has spoken in its small voice, 'Be thou not an arrogant fool like an intoxicated buffoon pride thyself on thy own prattle and ignorance.'\]^\(^{359}\)

According to Wadia the submission of the individual self to an enlightened authority legitimized "sacred knowledge" in an exclusive, necessarily hierarchical social formation—the teacher-student relationship. Das’s warning that the "substitution"(...) of a 'mightier will' or a vaster intelligence, even though it be (...) our honoured President’s, for a member’s own natural will and intelligence is not Theosophy,"\(^{360}\) was ignored by Wadia as an individualistic and therefore ineffective approach to the

---


\(^{358}\) Ibid., 76.

\(^{359}\) Ibid., 83.

essence of “sacred knowledge” which he located in the exclusive transmission. The intrinsic hierarchy of the theosophical concept of “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” at the beginning of the twentieth century was inextricably connected with Wadia’s “chief”, Annie Besant, the main exponent of the theosophical position around the turn of the century. According to her views the “universal brotherhood” was hierarchical because she found that “the European theory of rights provides a poor basis for society since it is not true: people are born neither free nor equal, but rather absolutely dependent on others and with widely differing capacities.”

Instead, Besant assumed a concept of brotherhood with an intrinsic hierarchy that was by no means equivalent to democracy or egalitarianism. Therefore, "Besant rejected Christianity for fostering an unhealthy individualism. (...) A recognition of the 'immanence of God', she now explained, has as its 'inevitable corollary' acceptance of a 'Solidarity' based on 'universal brotherhood'. As theosophy taught, and as Hindus recognised, all beings are manifestations of the one divine form and so linked with one another. (...) Hinduism puts the individual in a proper relationship to the social whole: it recognises that the good of the individual is bound inextricably to that of society."

In short: Besant considered a hierarchical Hindu caste-structured society an alternative model for a global community because she held that an essentialized Hindu society of the so-called Golden Age was fundamentally based on spirituality. With this end in view, theosophists considered the “West” “disintegrating/isolating” and the “East” “socializing/connecting”. However, the transnational appeal of a hierarchically structured “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” based on an exclusive concept of “sacred knowledge” was very limited indeed. But this was intended by Wadia as he defined the Theosophical Society as the exclusive realm of insiders, a

---


"spiritual body founded on principles and for purposes about which the outside world knew nothing."\textsuperscript{364}

Wadia touched the fundamental paradox of the major world religions that despite their ideological and structural egalitarianism predominantly distinguish between insiders and outsiders and thus create new boundaries in the name of transcending all boundaries. The basis for the boundary between “insiders” and “outsiders” according to Wadia was the exclusive access to “sacred knowledge” and thus the “privilege” to belong to an exclusive community that recognizes “that we occupy a place in the front rank of humanity and are one of the builders, however humble, of the coming civilisation,”\textsuperscript{365} in short a spiritual elite. In what sense then should this spiritual elite be international? Wadia held that the exclusive brotherhood of theosophy should be international in the sense that it should attract an international membership as a nucleus of brotherhood and therefore "men and women of all faiths and creeds, of all schools of thought, of all countries of the globe are wanted within the Society."\textsuperscript{366} The quality of this movement should be international but the appeal not necessarily far reaching. Wadia abhorred the modern obsession with numbers and statistics and consequently favored a small, enlightened elite\textsuperscript{367} that is destined to show the path to global unity. Unfortunately, Wadia found that mutual tolerance and consciousness of the elite status is lacking even among the spiritual elite of theosophists, he deplored 1915 in the Adyar Bulletin:

I had thought that at least a good sized portion of our members not only believed in Brotherhood, but had realized it. I was dreaming that to a Theosophist born and bred in England or Germany, nothing mattered save to proceed to work Theosophically, i.e., helping the forces of progress- in the heart of dark Africa. I had a vision of some godly American Theosophist sowing potatoes without murmuring on the Emerald Isle, because a new species had to be brought into existence. I begin to see that the rising above all caste, colour, and creed distinctions is not so universal as I thought. The


\textsuperscript{366} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{367} René Guénon, Die Krisis der Neuzeit (Köln, 1950), 159.
Hindu Theosophist is often more a Hindu than Theosophist, and the White Theosophist is often readier to express his 'Whiteness' than his Theosophy.\textsuperscript{368}

Theosophical membership should be the dominant marker of identity and “bring about the harmony” which is the ultimate goal of the “organisation.”\textsuperscript{369} Although Wadia was well aware that the public “looked down upon us as idle prattlers, glibly talking of rounds and races, and planetary chains, and lunar pitrs, while coldly unmindful of the needs of humankind,”\textsuperscript{370} in short as idealists, he insisted: "It is not our work, truly noble as it is, to heal the physical wounds of humanity, but rather to deal with their causes."\textsuperscript{371} He agreed with the critics, however, that “helping our race in its onward evolution only on spiritual and intellectual lines” is not the task of the TS either. Instead, the TS “as an association intended to usher in reforms in the prevalent modes of religious, social, philosophical, political, artistic, and scientific thought, thereby preparing ground for its real work, that of building up the next race,”\textsuperscript{372} should aim at synthesizing all human endeavors. Wadia, as a lifelong exponent of theosophy, summarizes the program of his life: "We are to be pioneers in everything"\textsuperscript{373} by spiritualizing all spheres of human existence.

To sum up, Wadia's conception of “brotherhood” as a chosen elite of theosophists had more in common with secret, Masonic conceptualizations\textsuperscript{374} than with his theosophical colleague Bhagavan Das to whom “brotherhood” had to be first and foremost inclusive and egalitarian. For Wadia and Besant, however, the concept of


\textsuperscript{369} Wadia, “Our Work within the Society”: 107.

\textsuperscript{370} Wadia, “Our Public Work”: 165.

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 166–8.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 167.

\textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 166–8.

\textsuperscript{374} For a detailed discussion of Freemasonry and British Imperialism, see: Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, \textit{Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British imperialism, 1717-1927} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 204.
“brotherhood” lost whatever connotations of egalitarianism and fraternity it might have had and instead became authoritarian and hierarchical.375

2.2.2 Universal Brotherhood in the British Commonwealth?

By the 1840s, the world had become dominated by British colonialism through the spread of its military and economic presence, its promotion of the commercial, political and cultural integration of its widespread colonies and its deep entanglement with the larger global economical and political system.376 Historian Uday Singh Mehta has discussed how the liberal ideology of the British Empire was in contrast with its concrete manifestation in the colonies.377 This gap between theory and practice became particularly obvious in the course of World War I Wadia reflected that while the British Raj “claimed to be the champion fighter in the cause of Liberty” Wadia asked “What kind of moral forces will emerge out of a fight for freeing Poland, Serbia, Belgium, when Great Britain keeps India unfree?”378 As the Raj did not fulfill its assumed moral authority, Wadia believed that “as a Theosophist and as an Indian, there is no recourse left for me but to make common cause with Home Rulers and claim for India the right to govern herself.”379

The Home Rule League was a body founded in 1916 by Annie Besant and the Indian political leader Lokmania Tilak380 in order to run countrywide campaigns for the Indian self-government. The Home Rulers did not encourage full independence as they believed that the institution of the Empire was an ideal means to realize the ideal of Universal Brotherhood and integrate India in the imperial family. Annie Besant was the spiritus rector of a conception of the empire as an imperial

375 Viswanathan, Outside the fold, 196.


378 B. P. Wadia, The Sceptre of a World Empire: Two Articles on ‘The King’s Birthday’ and ‘A World Empire’ with a Foreword (Madras, Adyar: The Commonweal Office, 1917), Foreword.

379 Ibid.

brotherhood that rationalized “colonialism as an agent of cultural unity-as distinct from cultural transformation- even as her philosophical position remained fundamentally opposed to British appropriation of foreign territories and peoples.”

In a small booklet published in 1917 called *The Sceptre of a World Empire* with the reproduction of articles *A World-Empire* and *The King’s Birthday*, Wadia accordingly argued that the emperor George V integrated diverse countries such as India and Australia not by brute force but through “Imperial sympathies” and “love” and thus on the “continents where his Union Jack flies the Sovereign is loved as one whose Imperial sympathies with his peoples of diverse races is bringing forth a unity without differentiation. What binds us to Australia or New Zealand? The equal love the Emperor bears to all his children,” in the trans-cultural and trans-racial site of the British Empire. Wadia’s and Besant’s “spiritual revision” of the empire echoed a contemporary discourse in Britain embodied by conservative British imperialist John Buchan (1875-1940) and his concept of *imperial citizens*. John Buchan was foremost in defining *imperial citizenship* not in practical terms but as a “world-wide brotherhood in the background of a common race or creed, consecrated in the service of peace,” based on a well-defined common morality. Due to his failure to practically define his “moral imperialism”, Gorman argues that it was “largely spiritual.”

Similarly, Wadia defined the “the Maoris of New Zealand, the Negroes of Africa, the Aborigines of Australia or the Settlers in Canada” as “*imperial citizens*” with whom direct British subjects such as “the Irish and the Scot and the English stand with hands extended in fellowship and goodwill.”

Despite his own experiences of British hegemony and his anti-colonial agitation, Wadia made no reference to the actual colonial situation often stabilized by sheer

---

381 Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, 190.


383 Ibid., 106.

military force, oppression and racist jurisdiction but de-historicized and de-spatialized the implications of the empire. Instead, he characterized the British Commonwealth as a moral enterprise assuming an Imperial Universal Brotherhood based on the spiritual function of both the rulers and the ruled. Annie Besant made equally explicit statements about the positive outcomes of imperialism by maintaining that the “genius of the Empire is to make every nation that you conquer feel that you bring them into the Imperial family, that they and you from that time forward are brothers.” Wadia felt that “true Imperialism” necessarily triggered the development of a transnational consciousness in a passage that deserves to be fully quoted:

(...)we Indians must never lose hold of the supreme fact that we are learning to day to expand our consciousness, to include the consciousness of peoples of distant climes and alien civilisations. Our National Congress made the provincial expand into National consciousness; our common struggles and aspirations, our common sufferings and hopes have brought into being the Indian Nation. The war of today and the Imperial problems touch us, and these are still expanding our souls to include in our thoughts and feelings the joys and sorrows of peoples who follow other religions, and who live on other soils. Thus the Indian Nation is learning the grand lesson of true Imperialism.

This passage illustrates how Wadia considered the building of an imperial community a moral and spiritual enterprise instead of a political one. The same holds true for nationalist politics in general in which he became immersed for a short while. Like other “religious politicians” such as Gandhi, Wadia considered the national movement a spiritual movement and accordingly employed the predominantly ethical interpretation of the key-concepts of the Indian national struggle svaraj and svadesh. According to Gandhi, svaraj “presupposed self-discipline, self-restraint, a sense of mutual responsibility, the disposition neither to dominate nor be dominated

385 Annie Besant quoted in: Viswanathan, Outside the Fold, 195.

386 B. P. Wadia, “The King’s Birthday,” in The Sceptre of a World Empire (see note 389), 4.

387 Despite their moderate policy Annie Besant, B.P. Wadia and George Arundale were interned in 1917. This internment prompted countrywide protest and encouraged the political agitation of M.K. Gandhi.
by others.” Although this term targeted political independence or self-rule as well, Wadia followed Gandhi’s assumption that freedom is an ethical category resulting from individual transformation:

> What is wanted is Brotherhood in life. This can only be done on a spiritual basis. Democracy is bound to fail when it endeavours to establish itself on the principle of human equality. The manifested universe is founded on the Law of Differentiation. [...] Humans can never be equals-economically or intellectually or morally. Therefore, we should try and rear our coming Democratic civilisation on some plan which does not go counter to Nature and her fixed laws. Brotherhood can be, nay must be realised because Brotherhood is a fact in Nature.

Thus for Wadia, the idea of brotherhood was an entirely ethical concept, deeply rooted in a universal human nature. He therefore understood the political situation of colonized India not as a hindrance but a chance to establish this brotherhood. According to Wadia’s concept, the empire had the potential to link people across national boundaries; but as the next subchapter will explore further, the ethical impulse could also reach beyond class divisions.

### 2.2.3 A Universal Brotherhood of Workers?

When industrialization transformed the economic and social landscape around the turn of the century it gave rise to the creation of working class solidarity as a counterweight to division and competition in the capitalist society. The power of the new counterweight to capital rested on trans-boundary solidarity and aimed at some form of working-class internationalism which, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, taught “by precept, example and practice, the equality of peoples and the brotherhood of man – and woman.”

Colonial connections and its economical underpinnings linked India with Great Britain where labor unrest since the mid nineteenth century was particularly forceful.

---

388 Parekh, Gandhi, 76.


390 Osterhammel, Die Verwandlung der Welt, 993.

Four years prior to joining the Theosophical Society in 1889, Annie Besant supported the vibrant milieu of new socialism in London and actively participated in socialist groups such as the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation in London, published in socialist organs such as Justice or the Reformer, issued her pamphlet Why I am a Socialist (1886) and organized protest marches. She was personally acquainted with socialist activists such as Charles Bradlaugh, George Bernhard Shaw, Eleanor Marx, the daughter of Karl Marx, Edward Carpenter and many more.392 As for John Trevor (1855-1930), the founder of the Labor church movement,393 to Besant “socialism was not a negative philosophy concerned to end exploitation, but rather a moral ideal, an ethical positivism. Socialism had grown out of 'a profound moral impulse' of 'unselfish brotherhood'. It represented a new religion of man. Socialists aimed to serve the cause of humanity.”394 These “ethical socialists” were more concerned about the role of workers beyond material determination than about class conflicts or the concrete struggles for labor rights and privileges. John Trevor’s Labor church movement was the most radical expression of a wide array of “ethical socialist” organizations that wished to imagine a world were human activity could be conceptualized beyond economic determinism and the emphasis would be on the holistic creative self-realization of the human being. Besant applied this approach to the trade union movement that ultimately aimed at a Universal Brotherhood before she “let it be superseded, though not completely replaced, by a new philosophy which to her searching mind held out even stronger hopes of attaining the brotherhood of man.”395 When Besant migrated to India in 1893 she imported these ideas to the colony and profoundly inspired, even guided Wadia’s engagement in labor unrest in Madras and beyond between 1918 and 1921.

In this subsection I will show how Wadia followed Besant in searching the field of labor unrest in India for opportunities to realize a Universal Brotherhood of men on

392 For a detailed account of her socialist activities, see: Nethercot, The First Five Lives of Annie Besant, 223 ff.
the basis of individual moral transformation. World War I had a profound “economic impact on the subcontinent” since it “forced up prices, caused economic dislocation and precipitated government control on trade and prices.”396 397 This situation gave new momentum to labor unrest all over India and allowed for a formerly peripheral political figure such as M.K. Gandhi to step into the political limelight398 via his engagement in local disputes of workers, farmers and peasants from 1917 onwards.399 His deep involvement with India’s practical problems reinforced Gandhi’s general view that “modern civilization neglected the soul, privileged the body, misunderstood the nature and limits of reason.”400 On this basis he “criticised large-scale industrialization” as an outcome of modern civilization “because it disrupted cosmic harmony, took a crudely instrumental view of non-human creation, prized bodily pleasures, was propelled by greed, weakened self-discipline, involved an exploitation of fellow-men both at home and abroad, and destroyed morally self-sustaining local communities.”401 In his conceptualization of a Universal Brotherhood of workers Wadia drew on these two sources: on Besant’s “ethical socialism” and Gandhi’s holistic and ethical approach to “practical issues”. 

In 1918, while serving Annie Besant and the Home Rule League as an editor of New India, Wadia was approached by Madras textile workers who asked him to represent them in their disputes with their British employers of the P. Symonds of Messrs. Binny & Co. textile mills. After an in depth survey of the situation of the workers and forearmed with the insider knowledge from his family business in the textile industry, Wadia held regular protest meetings, composed letters of complaint and organized a fund for needy workmen who faced lock-outs. Wadia frequently informed the workers about the progress of Gandhi’s simultaneous campaign in Kaira

396 Brown, Gandhi’s Rise to Power. Indian Politics 1915-1922, 123.
398 Brown, Gandhi’s Rise to Power. Indian Politics 1915-1922, 73.
399 Ibid., 52.
400 Parekh, Gandhi, 64.
401 Bhikhu C. Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition, and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse, Rev. ed. (New Delhi :: Sage Publications, 1999), 84.
(Gujarat) praising them as a “great and noble example.” On December 10th 1918 Gandhi’s right hand, Charles F. Andrews (1871-1940) addressed the Madras Labour Union and Wadia, as its president, asked him not only to deliver the message to “Mahatma Gandhi” that “we will do here in this place in his absence as much as we possibly can to carry out his programme, his principles, his views of soul-force and of life” but also that “he should come to our help and our aid.” The connection with the international labor movement, however, was again provided by Besant who secured the support of labor luminaries from Great Britain such as Labor Party politician and trade unionist John Scurr. She also attended protest meetings of the newly established Trade Union in Madras and founded her magazine New India to propagate the cause.

In April 1918, under Besant’s tutelage, Wadia founded the Madras Labour Union. “India’s first trade union” was principally an organization of textile workers and the “first systematic attempt at trade union organisation, with regular membership dues and a relief fund.” On April 13th 1918 Wadia addressed laborers of three textile mills on their first meeting. As a representative of theosophy, Wadia instantly introduced the theosophical concept of a spiritual brotherhood by appealing that “all of us are brothers,” but a “brotherhood of souls not only a brotherhood of bodies.” As a theosophist, Wadia grounded the “brotherhood of souls” on the immanent belief that “all human beings, men and women, are divine. There is God within each one of you and that God is your only helper, the only person who will

403 Ibid., 84.
404 Ibid., 85.
405 Ibid., 150.
406 Sharma, Labour movement in India its past and present, 77.
407 Wadia, Labour in Madras, 2.
408 Ibid., 5.
bless you, instruct you, inspire you, show the way out of darkness unto light. You are all Gods, you are all divine.”

Despite his predominantly ethical concern, he also formulated concrete claims such as a salary pay rise that would give workers a legitimate share of the war profits and asked for a one-hour lunch break in a 12-hour working day from A.P. Symonds of Messrs. Binny & Co. Due to the lack of independent political power and a sound intellectual tradition of labor philosophy in India it was necessary for the nascent labor movement to be linked with the international labor movement and it depended on the main jurisdiction on Indian issues of British colonial power that rested with the House of Parliament in London.

Through his successful “collective bargaining” and widely received public talks to laborers on 28th November 1918 he gathered 5,000 attendants Wadia was asked by the Indian Government to submit a detailed statement on the situation of Indian labor to the Joint Committee of the two Houses of Parliament, presided by Lord Selbourne. Theosophists in India reckoned that Wadia “will be among the most effective members of the deputations India is sending over to Europe” as “his evident grasp of his subjects, combined with an incisive manner, being qualities a British audience appreciates.” However, Wadia not only sailed to London as an official delegate but also intended to strengthen the ties with British labor union activists through the mediation of Annie Besant. The early involvement of Indian laborers with international institutions and their search for international support was considerably fostered by Wadia’s mission not only to Great Britain but even more so to the First International Labor Conference under the League of Nations from November to December 1919 in Washington. He served as a technical advisor to the Indian delegation and publicized the demands of Indian workers. The International Labor

409 Labour in Madras, 2.

410 Ibid., 26–7.

411 Sharma, Labour movement in India its past and present, 42.

412 B. P. Wadia, Statement submitted to the Joint Committee on Indian Reforms (London, 1919).

413 Editorial, “From the Editor,” Adyar Bulletin 12, no. 5 (May, 1919): 131.

414 Sharma, Labour movement in India its past and present, 43.

In Great Britain, Wadia firstly mediated between Indian and British workers by asking the latter for solidarity in order to overcome the competitive division: “Both you and we suffer because we are divided. The cause of labour is one. Give us your help!” Wadia hoped to secure the “solidarity of Labour internationally” since Indian workers “were not sufficiently organised; they were not educated in the modern methods of political struggle.”

However, Wadia did not only assume to strengthen the position of Indian laborers in the “long and weary fight between capital and labour, between landlordism and peasantry” but hoped “that Indian Labour and its problems might well be utilised as a short cut to forcing the claim of Indian Nationalism itself to the attention of liberal politicians all over the world.” For Wadia personally, the “practical application of the Brotherhood of Theosophy in raising the status and labor conditions of the textile workers in the great mills in India, (...), brought in its train a worldwide acquaintance with statesmen, economists, labor leaders, and governmental officials in Europe and America,” thus strengthening his network and distinguishing him from the Theosophical circles.

His business attitude and “incisive manner” not only persuaded non-theosophists but also left him without any illusion regarding the public image of the spiritual approach to labor issues, since “the consideration of divine interference as a factor of practical politics, the consultation of divine schemes and plans as an aid to his everyday work, would be an fantastic notion indeed; any legislator who dared to talk,

---

415 Wadia, Labour in Madras, 176.
416 B. P. Wadia, Aims of the Labour Movement in India (Madras: Vasanta Press, 1919); reprinted from 'Shama’a’ for October, 1920, 9.
417 Ibid., 8–9.
418 Ibid.
even vaguely, along such lines, would be shown the way to the nearest lunatic asylum.”\textsuperscript{420} However, Wadia and theosophists in general could not only feel entitled to their holistic approach to labor issues by backing India’s most famous politician, who argued that workers are “given little opportunity or encouragement to develop their intellectual and moral potential”\textsuperscript{421} but also by Karl Marx’s famous concept of “alienation”\textsuperscript{422} \textsuperscript{423} which evaluated the devastating effect of industrial production on the workers’s physical and mental state and the social network to which they belonged.\textsuperscript{424} Wadia’s analysis of “industry and commerce” “as materialistic” and “soul-corroding, beauty-destroying, mind-enslaving instruments of the Devil,”\textsuperscript{425} reflected both discourses as he pointed out:

\begin{quote}
My only excuse in referring to the subtle psychology of the labourer’s mind and heart is to emphasise the fact that the labourer is more than a mere hand. Unless and until it is recognised that the work of his hand affects, and is affected by a head and a heart, you will never be able to understand fully. The labourer and his labour must be taken as one. To-day labour is purchased as a commodity and is separated from the labourer. Thus the dignity of the labourer, and the joy of the work, the inherent interest of creation and production and handling of goods, disappear.\textsuperscript{426}
\end{quote}

Wadia reflected the discourse on “alienation” haunted by the experience of the degraded mode of life that resulted from a society exclusively driven by economic concerns such as the British. Within a global perspective, he and many luminaries of Indian politics such as Gandhi or Aurobindo argued that only Indian spirituality could counterbalance the evil effects of excessive materialism and nourish an ethical socialist society. Aurobindo, for example, was skeptical that “socialism alone could

\textsuperscript{420} B. P. Wadia, \textit{Problems of National and International Politics} (Madras: Vasanta Press, 1919), 5.

\textsuperscript{421} Parekh, \textit{Gandhi}, 66.


\textsuperscript{423} Amy E. Wendling, \textit{Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation} (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

\textsuperscript{424} Ollman, \textit{Alienation. Marx’s Conception of Man in Capitalist Society}, 131.

\textsuperscript{425} Wadia, \textit{Will the Soul of Europe return?}, 37–8.

\textsuperscript{426} Wadia, \textit{Aims of the Labour Movement in India}, 10–1.
not bring about the process of regeneration that humanity needed to escape the kali yuga or age of decline and destruction in which it was ensnared. Only Indian spiritualism and a ‘resurgent Asia’ could check the tendency of socialism to increase the ‘mechanical burden of humanity’ and usher in a new age of international peace and social harmony.”

Wadia therefore ended up supporting a similar division as he and other Indian thinkers such as Vivekananda in other contexts – the “West” was responsible for material, the “East” for spiritual development. And European industrialization was the most extreme expression of Europe’s predominant materialism which Indian laborers could help to check with their “contribution of something fundamentally Indian”:

The aim of the Indian Labour Movement?- I see the vision of a spiritualised host of toilers saving themselves by the powers of their collective Soul- and not only themselves but also the warring classes of the West, by a contribution of something fundamentally Indian. We have learnt many a lesson from the Trade Unionist of Britain, the farm-labourer of America, the metal worker of Italy, the Socialist of Germany, the Communist of Russia; the reformer of Georgia; and we wish to make an adequate return. I believe that the Indian Labour Movement unspoilt by Western materialism is capable of fulfilling the mission of India, the spiritual Mother of the Aryan Race. It can kindle in the heart of the Labour Movement the world over, the light of the Spirit which shines steadily in the midst of strife, and brings Power and Peace, which mere increase of wages or decrease of workhours is incapable of bestowing. (...) I believe, or should I say I like to believe, that India will be the source, from which the Soul of the movement will spring.

In that sense, Wadia, like Annie Besant, characterized “the Labour movement as a spiritual movement,” and therewith almost literally repeated one of the Labor

---


430 Ibid., 10.
church’s basic principles which according to its mouthpiece *The Labour Prophet* in 1892 was: “the Labour Movement is a religious movement.”431

His engagement in labor struggles was of immense significance for Wadia’s career: By championing labor struggles in Madras he practically applied his formerly theoretical ideas on brotherhood, he became a leading figure of national and international standing and for the first time he practically experienced the global arena of negotiation.

One can observe how Wadia combined Indian, theosophical and British discourses on “ethical socialism” in his approach to labor issues in which socialism was understood as a moral ideal of brotherhood and social change, dependent on ethical transformation of the individual. As such, Wadia’s vision of the Universal Brotherhood of workers was thoroughly embedded in the general theosophical understanding of contemporary society as oriented towards materialism and bereft of spiritual orientation. This abstraction extracted the specific circumstances from the analysis of both the Indian and British labor unrest since it transcended its concrete manifestations and complex entanglements. However, the previous pages illustrated Wadia’s vision of a Universal Brotherhood of workers based on a common spirituality as another variant of his search for global solidarity in brotherhood.

2.2.4 Experiencing the Theosophical Brotherhood in the US

In January 1920 Wadia reported to the *Adyar Bulletin* in his exclusive column *On Service* that on the 16th October 1919 he took the “Cunard liner” from Liverpool to the United States, to “represent Indian labourers in the International Labour Conference at Washington;” but added that “a Theosophical tour is being planned” as well. The organ of the American section, *The Messenger*, widely advertised the visit of the “prominent Indian Theosophist”, “cultured Parsee” and “distinguished guest” and informed the American audience of his prestigious positions as co-editor of *The Theosopist* and *Adyar Bulletin*, as well as Manager of the Theosophical Publishing House.432


For Wadia New York was not just the mythical harbor of the New World to which millions over the globe attached their hopes, especially since President Woodrow Wilson had gained the status of a political messiah though only briefly, but also the mythical birth place of the Theosophical Society. At reaching the “tall sky-scrappers of distant New York” Wadia reported that his thoughts “naturally flew to the old days of H.P.B. and Col. Olcott.” He assumed closeness with the ‘theosophical twins’ as he felt that his “own impressions must have been those of the two mighty founders of the T.S. way back in 1875”. Within the theosophical tradition New York was an important nodal point in the global network of meaning which was held together and carefully stabilized by an elaborate and supportive social network of likeminded people embracing the visitor at every step.

Hans Kippenberg following political scientist Robert Putnam has argued that the core resource of religious communities is the “social capital” which entails networks, norms and trust that help intensify and stabilize social interaction and unlike money grows when distributed generously. Being a stranger in the “land of the free”, Wadia experienced for the first time the power of “social capital” generated within the TS. When he arrived in New York Wadia was received at the port by the general secretary of the American section, A.P. Warrington which prompted Wadia to enthusiastically report on the trans-boundary solidarity: “What a joy it is to find Theosophists when you are a stranger in a strange land! You are no more a stranger, and the land becomes in some mysterious way familiar and friendly.” In Minneapolis he emphasizes this feeling as he claims that “it is a wonderful family, and I want no other.”

---


In his first American public lecture held in a Community House in Washington, Wadia delivered “India's message to Democracy”\textsuperscript{438} – the message of India to the democratic “land of the free” Lecturing in front of an American audience brought him face to face with technical innovations such as “speaking in front of footlights” which “puzzled” him more than his subject of “Life after Death” “puzzled” his audience.\textsuperscript{439} His tour throughout the United States was escorted and reported on by A.P. Warrington of The Messenger, the organ of the American Theosophical section, who praised Wadia’s leadership qualities as he had met the expectations of the American public:

> American people are eager for guidance, not alone in matters religious, but in the ‘practical’ affairs of life. (...) Never was there a time when true leadership was so much needed, and never were people so willing to be led by the right person. The ready and almost eager hearing given to Mr. Wadia by all classes has been very gratifying, and is an earnest of the readiness of the public mind to accept later the spiritual guidance of teachers from the Orient. This augurs well for the day when, it may be, an Oriental of age-long leadership may emerge from the land of the shining star and give to the world the all-around leadership it critically needs, for I can now see he will be given a hearing without prejudice against either his color or race.\textsuperscript{440}

He even predicted that Wadia’s success was a lucky sign and that another “Oriental of age-long leadership may emerge from the land of the shining star and give to the world the all-around leadership it critically needs” – the theosophical world messiah to come, Krishnamurti.

Wadia’s strenuous American tour in 29 cities from November 28\textsuperscript{th} 1919 until 10\textsuperscript{th} May 1920 in which he gave more than thirty lectures\textsuperscript{441} required stamina but even more importantly the audience was impressed by this “publicity meteor’s”\textsuperscript{442} “genial disposition coupled with a marked sense of humor and his direct and open action.”

After his strenuous tour through American locations where he first experienced


\textsuperscript{440} From the National President, “B.P. Wadia’s Tour Continued,” The Messenger (Feb 1920): 264-265.

\textsuperscript{441} Annual Report of the National Publicity Department, The Messenger (July 1920): 469.

\textsuperscript{442} From the Publicity Director, “Mr. Wadia’s Publicity Record,” The Messenger (March 1920): 305.
snow, Wadia finally reached Krotona\textsuperscript{443} near Los Angeles (Joseph Ross on Krotona) which reminded him more of “Benares than Adyar” and admitted that “there is no other place on God’s beautiful earth like Adyar.”\textsuperscript{444}

He was well received as an “Indian brother” of the Theosophical family and soon became involved with Krotona Theosophists as a representative of Annie Besant, a fact which gave additional credit to his presence. As a representative of Annie Besant and in his own right, one member is convinced that “our brother is bringing a new life into our midst, and everything is taking on another aspect.” As The Messenger reported, some members felt that Wadia “is becoming so much a part of Krotona consciousness- or is it truer to say that we are all being taken into his consciousness- that when he goes, he will yet be here for a long time to come.”\textsuperscript{445}

Wadia prolonged his first visit to the United States and went back to India for a short period of about one year, only to be back in 1922. His first visit had given him important practical information: it had given him the direct experience of the power of “social capital” and confirmed his independent leadership qualities.

\section*{2.3 Inventing a Theosophical Tradition}

Wadia’s engagement in “religious nationalism” and “ethical socialism” has exemplified how he aimed at “spiritualizing” “all human activities” based on the conviction that spirituality is the only means to counteract human singularity and isolation in modern times. Although the idea of Brotherhood appears to be a powerful mobilizing ideology for all kinds of social or political movements it lost both its concrete appeal and any sense of egalitarianism in Wadia’s entirely ethical conception.

His experiences in the United States, however, had convinced him that the existing TS had departed from its original foundations and that he had attracted sufficient members to organize a more appropriate body for the foundation of a “Universal

\textsuperscript{443} For a detailed account of the history of Krotona predominantly from Archival sources, see this and the other volumes: Joseph E. Ross, \textit{Krotona of Old Hollywood 1914-1920, Vol. II} (Montecito: Montecito Oaks Press, 2004).


Brotherhood”. In short, under Besant theosophy had become modified and adapted to the modern needs. For Wadia this meant a distortion since he believed theosophical foundations to reveal “sacred knowledge” incompatible with interpretation. Wadia not only intended to reclaim a theosophical “tradition” starting with Helena Blavatsky but also actively created it by composing an historical account of the theosophical movement, republishing long out of print unabridged theosophical classics by Blavatsky that were and codifying these classics as the revealed texts of theosophy. To this end Wadia began to approach theosophy independent from the Society but stayed indebted to its basic ideas, in fact, intensified and limited it to a very narrow aspect: the study of Blavatsky’s texts.

2.3.1 Resignation as continuity

When he officially resigned from the Theosophical Society on the 18th July 1922, after 18 years of ardent membership, he made his decision known to all Fellow Theosophists and Members of the Theosophical Society through translations into Spanish, Swedish and French. With the widespread circulation of the reasons for his resignation Wadia targeted the disappointed in theosophical ranks only to win them over to his own independent organization in the same manner Rudolf Steiner had taken most of the dissenting German members into the Anthroposophical Society in 1913. Wadia’s new project was the United Lodge of Theosophists (ULT) with which he associated himself when he visited Los Angeles in 1919. This “small band of students who have gathered round the old flag” rejected the so called “Neo-Theosophy” of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater and asked for a revival of theosophy “pure and simple” as had been promoted by H.P. Blavatsky.

The United Lodge of Theosophists was founded in Los Angeles in 1909 by the American theosophist Robert Crosbie (1849-1919) and focused exclusively on the texts of the three theosophical founders Helena Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge without considering the later “distorted” theosophical doctrines by Besant and the like. Particularly the study of Blavatsky’s and Judge’s texts in small

446 Zander, Anthroposophie in Deutschland, 151.

447 B. P. Wadia, To all fellow Theosophists and Members of the Theosophical Society. A Statement (Los Angeles, 1922, July), 14–5.
reading circles in order to realize the self and to achieve universal brotherhood is the sole purpose of this theosophical offshoot with neither a constitution, By-Laws nor Officers.\textsuperscript{448} When Wadia approached the ULT by chance, Robert Crosbie had only recently died and left behind a small, disoriented group of students or associates as they called themselves. Wadia recognized the potential of the platform of the ULT as “the only one upon which a true nucleus of universal brotherhood can be developed in the world of men.”\textsuperscript{449}

According to historian of modern esotericism, Olav Hammer, “founders of modern Esoteric movements are embedded in a modern context” and thus while the “prophets of an earlier age could perhaps have relied on their charisma, on having been chosen by god, or on their inner certainty [...] spokespersons of Modern Esoteric Tradition, however, live in an epoch permeated with Enlightenment values”\textsuperscript{450} such as rationality. As an evolving spokesperson for a specific esoteric tradition, Wadia was aware of the difficulty of the “paradoxical task of combining seemingly rational arguments with claims of possessing ancient, revealed wisdom.”\textsuperscript{451}

In the pamphlet, which was at the same time a resignation and a founding document, Wadia was thus careful in establishing a sound basis for his argumentation. The pamphlet was issued in Los Angeles, Wadia’s new place of activity and empirically grounded by an “intimate knowledge” of the international theosophical headquarters in Adyar and a “fair knowledge” of 12 theosophical sections in America, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Holland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden and Switzerland. The main line of argument condemned the personality cult around Annie Besant and the ‘distortion’ of the original theosophical impulse. Wadia was well aware of the sharp contradiction between his own devotion towards Besant’s authority in spiritual matters and his new damnation of “notions of devotion and allegiance, unverified acceptance of statements, belief in false doctrines

\textsuperscript{448} Campbell, \textit{Ancient Wisdom Revived}, 143.

\textsuperscript{449} Letter Wadia to Mr. Hotchener, August 31, 1922, ULT/LA, 3.

\textsuperscript{450} Hammer, \textit{Claiming Knowledge}, 497.

\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., 497.
and worship of personalities.” However, he explained this change of mind with a “persistent demand for adequate knowledge, through years of observation and reflection” and the “conclusive, definite and unbreakable evidence which brought the logical conviction that those tendencies were untheosophical.” Wadia consistently kept the rational rendering when explaining why and how Blavatsky’s original texts should replace the embodied spiritual authority of Annie Besant. In “comparing with studious care and impartial exactitude the H.P.B. teachings” such as her opus magnum The Secret Doctrine “with the contents of the latter day books” Wadia “found them different,” Wadia argued for a theosophical revival “Back to Blavatsky” He stressed that he had left "the Theosophical Society in the interests of Theosophy" and thereby interpreted the break with the Theosophical Society as a continuity with ‘real, authentic, pure, original’ theosophy culminating in the statement: “The T.S. as it exists today is disloyal to Theosophy and its Holy Cause, and I regard that those who remain loyal to Theosophy cannot be loyal to the T.S.” Wadia’s extreme position polarized and offended many long term members and spokespersons of the TS.

His most prominent critic was theosophy’s transnational celebrity, Jiddu Krishnamurti, who had also made California his main centre of activity in the meanwhile. In an official response he accused Wadia of the inconsistency of assuming to destroy “the dogmas, the bigotries, the blind extravagances” in the TS while coming “forward triumphantly with your own priestress, shaped by your own imagination, in a church-like, dogmatic society of your own fabrication.” Worse than the perpetuation of personality cult according to Krishnamurti, however, was the fact that Wadia did not consider theosophy an “evolving system of thought.” On the contrary, the “entire system of thought is contained in the works and the teachings of

452 Wadia, To all fellow Theosophists and Members of the Theosophical Society. A Statement, 6.

453 To all fellow Theosophists and Members of the Theosophical Society. A Statement, 10–1.

454 Ibid., 12.

455 Ibid., 11–2.

456 Ibid., 3.

457 Ibid., 1–2.

Madame Blavatsky, standing in no need of further amplification, expansion or
detailed development.” In short: he deplored Wadia’s attempt to canonize
Blavatsky’s doctrines.

However, Wadia’s position appealed to many who were disappointed in the
Theosophical Society. Wadia did not aim to secure a continuity with theosophy only
through his supposed return to theosophical roots but also through its membership
since the TS was the main recruiting ground for the ULT.

The following examples from Wadia’s correspondence with a multitude of
theosophical members all over the world in 1922 were available in the Los Angeles
section of the ULT. According to these records Wadia corresponded with
disappointed members from about 21 different places around the globe, including
Brussels and Helsinki, Turin and Havana, Chennai and Toronto. Wadia had met some
of these correspondents personally during his theosophical tours and many wrote to
express their agreement with the critique he had raised in his 1922 publication.
These letters illustrate how Wadia gathered disappointed members and activated the
‘social capital’ of the Theosophical Society – an important element in the formation of
new religious communities.

Moreover, this correspondence reveals the authority Wadia commanded in society
and how through personal contacts he built his network; he asked Pekka Ervast of the
Finnish section for example: “it is high time that in every country of the world a
sincere attempt ought to be made along the lines implied in what I have said above.
Will you do it in Finland?”; similarly, he encourages Miss Winifred A. Parley “to
prosecute the study of H.P.B. Theosophy” since “in England something should be done
along these lines”. On December 11th 1922; Wadia suggests to S.R. Krishnan in
Conjeevram, South India: “Go to the study of the real teachings by the light of the

459 Jiddu Krishnamurti and Nityananda, An open letter to Mr. Wadia, 5.

460 Hans G. Kippenberg, “Religiöse Gemeinschaftlichkeit im Zeitalter der Globalisierung,” in
Weltordnungen: [Salzburger Hochschulwochen 2009], ed. Gregor M. Hoff, 193–221 (Salzburg: Tyrolia,
2009), 203–4.

461 Letter Wadia to Pekka Ervast, November 23, 1922, ULT/LA, 4-5.

462 Letter Wadia to Miss Winifred A. Parley, November 27, 1922, ULT/LA, 1.
modern interpretation of the Ancient Wisdom brought by H.P.B." He suggests to Walter Rosenthal from Tallinn “to come together and form a United Lodge of Theosophists in Estonia” while he would often think of him in “that part of the world were tragedy follows tragedy and where great events of the world are taking place”. Mrs. Robison in Mullumbimby, New South Wales, who after canceling her TS membership feels “cut away” from “the only people” in the world she is in sympathy with, Wadia even insists that it is her “duty ”, her “privilege as well as responsibility” to form a local United Lodge of Theosophists. In a long letter to Mr. Hanchett of the American section Wadia urges “The ties which you have made, the friendships which you have formed must be made adequate use of. Write to all your friends by all means, but do not hesitate to speak to them of the real truths in the same spirit in which I am doing now to you. It is necessary for them to learn the truths and the first truth that they ought to learn is that they do not know much of Theosophy, that the teachings of Theosophy and Neo-Theosophy are different.” In his rejection of personal authority Wadia now started to promote a text-based spirituality, based on the ‘original’ teachings of Blavatsky.

### 2.3.2 The United Lodge of Theosophists in New York

Is it a coincidence that Wadia dissociated himself from the Theosophical Society only one year after the French author René Guénon (1886-1951) had published his detailed and harsh critique in *Le Théosophisme: Histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (1921)? We do not know. Guénon wrote his critique in French (which Wadia could read) as an intimate connoisseur of Theosophical circles in fin de siècle Paris, having freely moved about theosophy and Freemasonry. Wadia had visited Paris as early as in 1920 but made no direct references to Guénon and was certainly not of the opinion

---


466 Letter Wadia to Mr. Honchett, December 9, 1922, ULT/LA, 4.

that Blavatsky was an insincere impostor.\textsuperscript{468} His independent vision, however, has to be viewed in the intellectual context of Guénon’s Traditionalism.\textsuperscript{469}

Historian Mark Sedgwick recently identified the school of Traditionalism as one of the most curious but no less successful cultural phenomena of our age\textsuperscript{470} spearheaded by Guénon (1866-1951), whose criticism of the modern world informed books such as \textit{Die Krisis der Neuzeit} (1927).\textsuperscript{471} More than the popular \textit{Der Untergang des Abendlandes} (1918) by German philosopher Oswald Spengler but in the same spirit, the mastermind of Traditionalism came up with a new concept of “Tradition.” This new description of Tradition was informed by “a facet of self-doubt that came over the “West” during and after the Great War” and is distinctly modern “for while a concept of tradition exists in each traditional culture, the new version is based upon a broad view, encompassing all of these, which would not have been possible prior to modern means of travel and communication.”\textsuperscript{472} While this new concept of Tradition includes elements that are usually associated with the concept such as handing down or focusing on collectivities rather than individualism its core argument described “traditional” cultures as “founded on an understanding of the spiritual nature of man and the world” while its counterpart “modern’ described cultures that have forgotten many truths of the spirit” and were therefore “antitraditional”.\textsuperscript{473}

Spokespersons of Traditionalism argued that the “East” was such a predominantly spiritual and therefore traditional society in which the chain of spiritual succession has been unbroken. Therefore Guénon characterized the “East” as “open to transmission” in opposition to the “hostile to transmission” culture of the modern


\textsuperscript{469} I am capitalizing Traditionalism here to distinguish this very specific definition from the more general concept of traditionalism.


\textsuperscript{471} Guenon, \textit{Die Krisis der Neuzeit}.


\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 266.
“West” with its celebration of authenticity and innovation.\textsuperscript{474} According to Guénon, the break with spiritual tradition was an outcome of the focus on an unhealthy individualism\textsuperscript{475} which he considered the prime reason for the crisis of the modern West. Therefore and true to the original meaning of the Latin verb \textit{tradere}, the handing down of “sacred knowledge” from generation to generation was considered the core technique to counteract Western modernity’s individualism and materialism, to legitimize its claim to authority and to define exclusive alternative organizations.

Although Mark Sedgwick traces the roots of Traditionalism to Martinism and Theosophy, he argues that the total lack of “evolutionary optimism” “distinguished it from both sources.”\textsuperscript{476} I would argue, however, that the Theosophical Society influenced the Traditionalist movement on a much greater level than described by Sedgwick and others. It was not only Guénon who was deeply influenced by theosophy but also the other main exponent of Traditionalism, Ceylonese Anananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1944). Coomaraswamy is known today for his groundbreaking work on Asian art as the curator of the Boston museum from 1917 onwards.\textsuperscript{477} His biographer and editor of his collected writings, Roger Lipsey, establishes his personal acquaintance with theosophical luminaries such as Besant and Bhagavan Das, and art historians Stella Kramrisch\textsuperscript{478} and Walter Andrae\textsuperscript{479}. However, Lipsey fails to recognize that Coomaraswamy was not only moving within the Theosophical Society and using its infrastructure\textsuperscript{480} but also became a member of the London Lodge on the 20th January 1907 sponsored by Annie Besant and W.A. English during his stay in England 1907-1908. Although the two had never met in person they corresponded, Coomaraswamy translated Guénon and they mutually commented on their articles in \textit{Études traditionelles}, the main organ for the


\textsuperscript{475} Sedgwick, \textit{Against the Modern World}, 21.

\textsuperscript{476} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{477} Lipsey, \textit{Coomaraswamy}.

\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., 216.

\textsuperscript{479} Ibid., 214–5.

\textsuperscript{480} Ibid., 87–8.
dissemination of Tradition. Even though he recognizes their ideological similarities, Michael Adas equally fails to recognize theosophy as an invisible but strong link between Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Vivekananda.\footnote{Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology”: 49.}

Coomaraswamy subscribed to the new conception of Tradition and for him as for Guénon India was the “epitome of traditional civilization”\footnote{Lipsey, Coomaraswamy, 268.} whose duty they thought was to keep with Tradition.\footnote{Wilhelm Halbfass, Indien und Europa: Perspektiven ihrer geistigen Begegnung (Basel: Schwabe & Coag, 1981), 288.} Like Guénon, Wadia criticized the recent developments in the TS as a false modernization of its spiritual essence thus emphasizing the need for the recurrence of tradition. Based on the conviction that the revival of spiritual Tradition was the only means to counteract human singularity and individual isolation which were the basis for the multitude of divisions such as nationality or classes, Wadia had tried to infuse spheres as different as labor issues and nationalism with this spiritual Tradition – namely theosophy, which is “not an evolving science, it is not a progressing philosophy, (...) it is not an advancing system of ethics, but (...) Theosophy is a body of teachings ‘as old as man’, ‘the last possible word of human knowledge’, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away.”\footnote{Letter Wadia to Mr. Martyn, July 7, 1922, ULT/LA, 3-4.} Eric Hobsbawm in his classic study on The Invention of Tradition had particularly identified invariance as both the main object and characteristic of tradition\footnote{Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in The Invention of Tradition, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, 1–14 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.} which Wadia employed to attack the modern obsession with original genius, innovation and change.

The radically focused approach to “sacred knowledge” via “real Theosophy, Theosophy as taught by H.P.B. and by the Masters through her” as “an uninterrupted record, covering thousands of generations of seers,”\footnote{Letter Wadia to Mr. Martyn, July 7, 1922, ULT/LA, 3-4.} limited the appeal of the United Lodge of Theosophists vis-à-vis the general ideological openness of the
Theosophical platform. According to Wadia “the traditions of old” are transmitted “by
the independent visions of the Adept; that is to say men who have developed and
perfected their physical, mental, psychic, and spiritual organizations, to the utmost
possible degree.” The core technique of the transmission of “sacred knowledge”,
the master-disciple relationship, secures this transmission but with a difference.
Although the relationship is hierarchically structured, Wadia, like Traditionalists,
argued for impersonality since the master is only the vehicle of the impersonal truth,
a truth which according to René Guénon can never be new since it is not the product
of the human mind but independent from it. Humans can only hope to realize this
impersonal perennial truth.

Wadia accordingly claimed “there is an ancient and immemorial” “Truth” that “has
to be found out, it has to be studied, irrespective of our prejudices, preconceptions
and predilections. To begin with we must try to know what there is to be known.”
This definition outlined the coordinates for the ULT ideology and core practice of text
exegesis. This focus on text exegesis was central to Traditionalism which in “in the
1920s was not yet a religious movement” “but rather was a philosophical movement
though a philosophy with a difference: the conviction that ‘if everyone understood
what the modern world really is, it would immediately cease to exist.’ One member of
the small circle of Traditionalists at this time was Jean Reyor [...] Reyor later recalled
that the general view was that the objective was to achieve understanding- wisdom,
perhaps- through the study of texts, whether original sources such as the Vedas or
the writings of Guénon, and to distance oneself from the modern world.”

Wadia’s expertise in the production and distribution of publications as the former
editor and manager of the international Theosophical Publishing House came in
handy, when he embarked on the major project of his “American phase”, the reprint
of theosophical classics such as *Isis Unveiled* and the *Secret Doctrine* by Helena
Blavatsky but also the American co-founder of the TS, William Quan Judge. He

---

487 Letter Wadia to Mr. Martyn, July 7, 1922, ULT/LA, 3-4.
thereby secured that the reading material of ULT study classes was unabridged and undistorted – pure and original.

From November 1922 onwards, Wadia first in New York and already in 1923 at various East Coast locations, 1925 in London and 1928 in Paris, organized collaborative study classes in which careful and objective text exegesis of the ‘spiritual fundamentals’ are the central technique to gather “sacred knowledge”. In fact, according to the leaflet *For the guidance of platform workers* the “student of theosophy” should “Under no circumstances” “guess or speculate, or voice his own personal views, beliefs or opinions.”

Since ”The audience comes to hear what Theosophy has to offer, not what this or that individual may feel, or think or believe.” Impersonality of both the student and the teacher should secure the preeminence of text exegesis. However, Wadia defended the ULT’s focus on Blavatsky. Even though he was aware that “Human nature being what it is, people are apt to run to personalities” he reassured his American correspondent Mason Allan in November 1922:

To me, H.P.B. as a Messenger, was one of a long line of Messengers. She is there, the latest of the links in an ever-lengthening chain. To me, she is acceptable because of the other links in the chain before her (...) But then, in the second instance, there is to be said, if human nature must run to personalities and if some of our United Lodge of Theosophists show the tendency, in spite of our effort to check them, I would rather that they ran to the personalities of H.P.B., Mr. Judge and Damodar than to the personalities of C.W. Leadbeater and Jinarajadasa and Mrs. Besant.

By defining Blavatsky not as a human being but a mere “Messenger” or vehicle Wadia paradoxically aimed to secure impersonality. This central asset did not only apply to the levels of practice, ideology and organization of the ULT but also to its identity as the “nucleus” of Universal brotherhood. Wadia adhered to the impersonality principle by making it general policy of *Theosophy*, the central organ of the ULT, to only publish anonymously. This causes major problems for historians trying to investigate the movement. Wadia himself published either anonymously or under the pseudonym

491 “For the Guidance of Platform Workers,” ULT/LA, 1.

492 “For the Guidance of Platform Workers,” ULT/LA, 1.

Shravaka, which means “the Listener” in Sanskrit. In addition to evoking one of India’s traditional “sacred languages,” Wadia not only hid his identity but also suggested that he was not an active interpreter but only a passive recipient of “sacred knowledge”. For Wadia, impersonality secured some sort of egalitarianism in the Lodge since no member dominated (not even himself) and instead all were dominated by the doctrine of theosophy.

2.3.3 The United Lodge of Theosophists as Brotherhood

In the opening speech of the newly founded New York branch of the ULT in November 1922, Wadia defined brotherhood not as a flat belief in equality but as a recognition of differences:

Theosophy brings self-realization, and hence proclaims the message of brotherhood; not that it says all men are equal in the material way, but it says men are different; some are rich and others poor, some foolish and others wise, some saintly and others barbaric, but they are all spiritual in their innermost nature and therefore they are brothers. It means that each individual, each nation, each race brings its own wonderful contribution to the making up of the human kingdom. Theosophy believes in the real League of Nations, made up of all nations small and great alike, recognizing them on the one sound basis of the message which each brings.\(^4^9^4\)

In his vision of global order, Wadia maintained that global solidarity is based on the “reverence for the divine in each and every human being” and “leads to the attitude, all the world is my country, all mankind are my countrymen.\(^4^9^5\) This understanding according to Wadia is based on the “preparatory work” for the realization of a universal brotherhood:

(...) in our time may be seen (...) in invention, discovery, trade, the means and methods of transportation, manufacture, and utilization of all the raw materials in Nature - all making one way and another for inter-dependence, inter-communication, inter-respect in the great human family, and the consequent breaking down of the barriers of Nature, of human insularity and seperateness: a harrowing of the soil whether by the means of war or peace,


\(^4^9^5\) B. P. Wadia, Lecture, probably at New York, entitled “Masters”, November 19, 1922, ULT/M, 12–3.
as a necessary prelude for once more sows in that soil the seeds of Brotherhood.496

However, Wadia made clear that the structural increase of the technical and economical integration of the world was only “preparatory work” since brotherhood is fundamentally based on the “reverence for the divine in each and every human being” and as such not an innovation of the modern era or an achievement of the technological progress around 1900 but a “fact in nature”, the fundamental underlying principle of humanity:

“That brings to us this: the foundation of nature is brotherhood. We sometimes think that we have to build up the brotherhood of human race. This is one of the great illusions of our civilization. Brotherhood exists; if we would leave nature alone to work out her devices, the perfect law of brotherhood would work.” 497

According to Wadia the ideal of brotherhood, however, was not confined to the relationship of human beings, religions or human beings but also applied to “our world of knowledge” which is the “predominant guiding principle of the present civilization”:498

If you think of what a great curse it is, this particular era of specialists; specialists are, from the point of view of the law of brotherhood, the defect of our civilization. Why? Because they divide knowledge into watertight compartments, geology and astronomy, astronomy and embryology are different sciences, while nature is one. (...) Our present mode and method of obtaining and giving knowledge is contrary to the law of brotherhood. We do not bring knowledge together.499

His engagement in various fields such as economic or social work, religious revivalism and politics testifies to Wadia’s attempt to “bring” different forms of knowledge, in other words different approaches to reality together. A major implication of the division of knowledge into watertight compartments in the “era of specialists” was its concern with the effects but not the causes of problems, as Wadia called it.


498 Ibid., 4–5.

499 Ibid., 5.
He distanced himself from his former engagement in non-governmental organizations as "The one way, which is being applied by the ordinary cultured people of the world to-day, deals with the effects: 'There is famine in the land; therefore supply food.' [...] it may, I grant, prolong for a while the evil effects of the famine, but we must also remember while there are many societies, many organisations of philanthropists, who are dealing with effects, there are not many Theosophical Societies, not many spiritual people capable of dealing with the cause of things." As illustrated in the previous sections, Wadia had variously tried to "spiritualise the activities of the world" and rhetorically asked: "What does that mean? [...] You cannot spiritualise the work of the world if your method is of the same kind as that employed by other people in the world. Take for instance, social service work in the slums of big cities. Of course that is a very noble work; but what is the difference in that work when performed by a Theosophist, if his methods are exactly the same as those of an efficient social server?"

Wadia appealed to a wider public by employing inclusive rhetoric, but at the same time he limited the potential audience by claiming an exclusive access to "sacred knowledge" that was not only dismissed by mainstream culture but also deliberately distanced itself as the exclusive approach of a theosophical elite:

Who is to give to the young world, which is now being born, the necessary culture it will require in economic, political, artistic, religious and philosophic spheres? The world has to be educated- the International world. Not a narrow world of a few thousands, but a wide world of millions upon millions. 'What is the use of a few cultural units?' people might exclaim. It is the little leaven which leaveneth the whole lump. From five loaves and two fishes the Christ fed a whole multitude. A few Theosophists may function as the leaven.

Traditionalism generally appealed only to very restricted circles and Wadia’s ULT was no exception. Its characterization as a "Lodge" inevitably connotes Masonic secret societies. He warned, however, to “not judge the success of our Theosophical service in a crude material way. (...) It is not the number of members, but the quality that matters. Proselytism from without gives you quantity; inner conversion gives

501 Ibid., 4.
502 Wadia, Will the Soul of Europe return?, 42–3, italics are mine.
you quality.” Guênnon, in *Die Krisis der Neuzeit* deliberately used the term “elite” for a small but powerful elite as leaders of the masses. Wadia equally maintained that only a small “intellectual elite” is needed to uplift the “masses”. This dogmatic definition of Tradition “soon became a rigid means of parting the Cursed from the Blessed” as it created “the vision of a modern world with little or no true spirituality, torn by vast wars, living under a reign of quantity, provoked a powerful reaction in those who believed that they knew of something better that once existed and now is lost.” While spiritual movements such as theosophy were “highly successful mass organizations whose popularity derived partly from their all-inclusiveness, Traditionalism was never all-inclusive and never aspired to a mass following, though it was to attempt to influence the masses.”

Although Wadia did not refer to traditionalism, his ideas regarding the ULT philosophy disqualified positivistic ideas about progress of the modern world. His invention of tradition, however, was entangled with, and informed by, modern assumptions and practices. This will be particularly addressed in the final section of this chapter. Historian Olav Hammer has argued that the “founders of modern Esoteric movements are embedded in a modern context” and while “prophets of an earlier age could perhaps have relied on their charisma, on having been chosen by god, or on their inner certainty. [...] Spokespersons of Modern Esoteric Tradition, however, live in an epoch permeated with Enlightenment values.” Therefore, Wadia, like other spokespersons of new esoteric cults had to attempt “the paradoxical task of combining seemingly rational arguments with claims of possessing ancient, revealed wisdom.” We have already seen how Wadia struggled with this problematic throughout - from his resignation pamphlet to the rendering of the ‘ULT program’ but

505 Ibid., 159.
508 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 50, italics are mine.
the production of a historical narrative of *The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1925* by an anonymous collective of ULT members spearheaded by Wadia in 1925 exemplarily embarked on this “paradoxical”, if not contradictory project.

By addressing the study “to all sincere students and to all earnest inquirers,” the authors did not only try to overcome intellectual isolation by targeting an audience beyond theosophical affiliation but also fashioned it as an earnest “accessible record of facts, as accurate a survey of their significance and bearing on the present and on the future as possible.” The authors did not limit theosophy to an institutional history of the TS but presented it as an all-embracing movement. According to the authors this movement “is the path of progress, individually and collectively. Wherever thought has struggled to be free, wherever spiritual ideas, as opposed to forms and dogmatism, have been promulgated, there the great Movement is to be discerned. (...)Luther’s Reformation must be counted as a part of the Theosophical Movement. (...)The formation of the American Republic with its noble Declaration of Independence, its equality of all men before law, its ideals of brotherhood and freedom from sectarian religious partialities must be accounted a great forward step in the Theosophical Movement. And with the abolition of human slavery in all the great Western nations (...).”

We are confronted with an “invented tradition” which historian of esotericism, Olav Hammer, defines as a popular strategy of modern esotericists to “counteract the rootlessness or homelessness of the modern condition.” He reminds us, however, that “such traditionalist discourse is a product of modernity itself, and the construction of an antidote to modernity takes place on the very preconditions of modernity.” The project of writing the history of the Theosophical Movement was itself distinctly modern. The nineteenth century saw the rise of history writing as the main technique

---

510 *The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925*, ix.

511 Ibid.

512 Ibid., 1.


514 Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 35.
for identity formation and the dominant academic discipline for explaining and making sense of the world. This was particularly true for writing the history of the evolving nation states for which the definition of a common past became central to visions of a common national future. As German historian Harald Fischer-Tiné has exemplarily discussed, history writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became vital for collective identity formations. Annie Besant, Wadia’s former chief, had fought on this ideological battlefield with history writings such as *India: A Nation* (1915) or *A Bird’s Eye View of India’s Past as the Foundation of the Future.* (1930) In short, Wadia was well aware of the crucial importance of history writing for the identity formation of a collective. Wouter Hanegraaff has argued that modern esoteric movements, despite their origin within the Enlightenment, often eschewed critical rationalism as its core value. In a similar fashion, the authors of the ULT history claimed to present verifiable facts but in the end argued for a predetermined narrative based on the authority of Blavatsky’s canonical writings:

> If the recurrent impulse of the race in the direction of the psychic and the truly Spiritual is to be aided by true guidance and direction on the part of Theosophists, it must of necessity come about through a return and adherence to the program of the Masters of the Wisdom-Religion. That *can be ascertained only by consulting the writings of H.P. Blavatsky*, the Letters which came through her from those Masters, and those who were true to her and her great Cause. *There is no doubt about that program.*

The underlying ignorance of empirical knowledge led to the assumption that Traditionalists “are not serious. They ignore history, and they ignore anything that does not fit their theories” or in the words of Antoine Faivre, the most eminent historian of modern esoteric movements from the Sorbonne: “Traditionalism ’de-historicizes and de-spatializes its ontological predicates(...)Its propensity to search everywhere for similarities in the hope of finally finding a hypothetical Unity is

---


516 Besant, *India: A Nation*.


519 *The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925*, 704, italics are mine.
evidently prejudical to historico-critical research, that is to say empirical research, which is more interested in revealing the genesis, the course, the changes, and the migrations of the phenomena that it studies.”520 The de-spatialization and de-historization as well as the search for similarities and connections led Wadia to argue for the correspondence between the micro- and the macrocosm - “man is a photograph of the universe”521 and for an understanding of life as a constant cycle of time, birth and death etc. He believed firmly that “We ourselves are the makers of cycles.”522 Based on the classical Hindu concept of cyclic time,523 Wadia, like Guénon524 called the modern world the Kali Yuga, the last and most degenerate of four yugas (eras)525 in which dharma (right ritual and conduct; since the nineteenth century often considered to equal ‘religion’) is at its lowest ebb and the society morally degenerated due to its lack of spiritual impulse. Wadia felt not only confirmed by the spiritus rector of Traditionalism but also the culture which he considered most spiritually inclined – the Asian. Wadia believed that the “great tide of interest in Oriental religions and philosophies” account for a worldwide trend of reintegration and restoration. While studies on the “Far East” were hitherto pursued in the domain of specialists such as “the conquerer, the merchant, the missionary and the philologist,” “the work of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky” popularized this interest through the Theosophical Society.526 Therefore, it was only logical that Wadia returned to India in 1929 with a band of loyal supporters and Sofia Camacho, the Colombian whom he had married in London in 1928, in order to bring the United Lodge of Theosophists to India. Exactly 50 years after the founder of modern theosophy, Helena Blavatsky travelled from New York to Bombay in 1879, in 1929

520 Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, 271.
524 Guénon, Die Krisis der Neuzeit, 21.
525 Michaels, Der Hinduismus, 332.
526 The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925, 3.
Wadia brought from New York ‘original theosophy’ to Bombay thus connecting spaces and times and becoming a “maker of cycles” 527 himself.

**Concluding Remarks**

Wadia’s radical “revolt against the modern world”528 was ideally expressed by the Theosophical Society. He turned out to be one of its most accomplished members and consequently rendered his vision of an alternative world order in theosophical terms - as a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” based on “sacred knowledge”. Like theosophists in general, Wadia considered antinomies presumably introduced by rational and materialistic thinking the core reason for worldwide violence, isolation, and competition which could only effectively be counteracted by the integrative force of “sacred knowledge”. As an ardent member, he believed this “sacred knowledge” to circulate exclusively within theosophical ranks and be transmitted in an exclusive teacher-student relationship that assumed the preeminent authority of Annie Besant.

Especially the analysis of Wadia’s theosophical phase has shown that his attempt to “spiritualize” all human activities produced problematic results: He rationalized even a most coercive political system such as imperialism or the outbreak of the First World War as necessary preconditions of a new, more spiritual world order. Similarly, Wadia’s downplaying of the entanglement with the colonial order did not prevent ideological correlations with a staunch imperialist such as John Buchan.529

In his refusal to differentiate between secular and spiritual engagement, Wadia drew from Indian - namely Gandhian -, theosophical - namely Besantine -, and British discourses on “ethical socialism”, and conceived of socialism as a moral brotherhood.530 531 532 The common roots and personal overlaps between theosophy and the new concept of Tradition predominantly embodied by Anananda

---


528 Sedgwick, Against the Modern World.

529 Gorman, Imperial Citizenship, 106.

530 Wadia, Aims of the Labour Movement in India, 10.

531 Gandhi, Affective Communities, 121.

532 Veer, Peter van der, Imperial encounters, 65.
Coomaraswamy who was both a member of the TS and one of the most frequent contributors to traditinalism’s main organ *Études traditionelles* in the 1930s\textsuperscript{533} provided the intellectual background for Wadia’s independent notions. Traditionalism assumed that the lost coherence in modern globalization would only be restored through a reinvigoration of “sacred knowledge’s” unbroken Tradition. Thus the main project of traditionalists was the reestablishment of this assumed spiritual Tradition.

In his independent phase, Wadia applied the traditionalist worldview on the theosophical revivalist movement of the United Lodge of Theosophists by creating a theosophical tradition, canonizing a body of texts and composing a history book for collective identity formation. I have shown, however, that Wadia’s assumption of Tradition was informed by distinctly modern discourses on identity formation and the appeal of scientific legitimization, for instance, which thoroughly intertwined Tradition with distinctly nineteenth century paradigms. Thus Wadia’s claim to only reinvigorate an eternal spiritual Tradition downplayed the influence of modern culture as it had downplayed the links with colonial order. In truth, the unbroken Tradition was more an “invented tradition”\textsuperscript{534} than a reflection of actual continuity of theosophy.

Wadia’s more and more exclusive definition of the access, legitimacy and transmission of “sacred knowledge” necessarily created a small and, supposedly, enlightened elite which reminds more of other exclusive organizations such as freemasonry\textsuperscript{535} or tendentially fundamentalist groups that radically oppose modern globalization than an assumed integrative “Universal Brotherhood” would suggest. Although Wadia’s concept of world vision against the backdrop of traditionalism appears reactionary and is based on an elitist idea of brotherhood, it still reflects the

\textsuperscript{533} Lipsey, Coomaraswamy, 170.

\textsuperscript{534} Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition* (see note 490), 1.

\textsuperscript{535} Vahid Fozdar, “Imperial Brothers, Imperial Partners: Indian Freemasons, Race, Kinship and Networking in the British Empire and Beyond,” in *Decentring Empire* (see note 541).
tendency of traditionalism to "cultural" and even religious fundamentalism. What differentiates Wadia’s ULT from outright fundamentalism, however, was the deliberately open form without ranks, memberships or hierarchies in the ULT that still attracts a young, middle-class group of South Asians in Bangalore and Mumbai.

---

3 A “Spiritual Entrepreneur” of Pan-Asian Buddhism: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933)

3.1 Introduction

The title of historian Mark Frost’s brilliant essay ‘That Great Ocean of Idealism’: Calcutta, the Tagore Circle, and the Idea of Asia, 1900-1920 refers to Buddhism as the "primary means by which past cultural exchange and common ideals had generated a regional unity."537 “That Great Ocean of Idealism” was coined by Japanese pan-Asianist art critic Okakura Tenshin in his The Ideals of the East (1904)538; his close friendship with eminent Bengali author Rabindranath Tagore was a starting point for Frost to examine Asianist ideas generated by the “Tagore circle”, people like Japanese Tenshin and Ceylonese art critic Ananda Coomaraswamy. Despite an acknowledgment of Buddhism’s integrating function in the Asian region and Frost’s frequent quotations from The Maha Bodhi Journal or The Indian Mirror, the author barely mentions the person behind both publications and the broader initiative to revive Buddhism not just in the region but also far beyond. The Ceylonese Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) was as concerned with developing a pan-Asianist vision as Tagore, Tenshin and Coomaraswamy. Moreover, he combined the endeavors of the three since he developed his Asianist ideas in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Calcutta like Tagore, he worked at the dominant relationship within the region- between India and Japan, like Okakura Tenshin and forged lasting links with influential American publishers, philosophers and academics in the United States like Boston-based art critic Ananda Coomaraswamy. He was the first Buddhist in modern times to disseminate Buddhist teachings in three continents: Asia, Europe and America. American religious anthropologist Steven Kemper reminds us that Dharmapala’s influence on the Buddhist revival in Ceylon539 and his conception of


Sinhala ethnic chauvinism,⁵⁴⁰ his "foreign involvements" comprise the majority of his life as "he spent most of the years from 1891 to 1933 living abroad - which is to say, most of his adult life- while traveling five times around the world and periodically turning back to Sri Lanka."⁵⁴¹ Thus it is Dharmapala’s overseas engagement that gives an impressive example of the mobility of both ideas and people in the global era.

This early phase of the global era was dominated by Euro-American political, cultural and economic hegemony which historian Arif Dirlik has therefore called a “Euro-America focused globalization as distinct from contemporary global modernity.⁵⁴² The global dominance of Euro-America was due to an elaborated imperial system that held the majority of the globe subject. The British Empire was the largest colonizing state that legitimated and rationalized his dominance through a ‘civilizing mission’ which was claimed to be the famous “white man’s burden”.⁵⁴³ However, around the turn of the century the global “West” with the British Empire at its heart arrived at a legitimacy crisis whose climax was the disaster of the First World War as Michael Adas has convincingly argued.⁵⁴⁴ In Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology, Adas illustrates the debates of Afro-Asian intellectuals who in an increasingly anti-imperialist attitude envisioned alternatives to the "European conceit that discovery

---


⁵⁴² Arif Dirlik, "Globalisierung heute und gestern: Widersprüchliche Implikationen eines Paradigmas," in Globalgeschichte (see note 17), 163.


and invention were necessarily progressive and beneficial to humanity."\textsuperscript{545} The moral bankruptcy of Europe after the Great War gave new credibility to “critiques and alternative visions” of the world order which formerly “were largely marginalized, dismissed by mainstream politicians and the educated public as the rantings of gloomy radicals and eccentric mystics.”\textsuperscript{546}

The Theosophical Society propagated freedom from authority, religious tolerance, emancipation and free thinking.\textsuperscript{547} Despite the harsh critique at the inspiration of the so called “enlightenment project” for the imperial “civilizing missions” this anti-imperialist strand had the recognition of the dignity of the “Other” at its centre.\textsuperscript{548} At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Theosophical Society was by no means a marginal spiritual organization and its astonishing success was largely due to its bold claim that a reformed spiritual field would inspire a new civilization. The close relationship or almost equivalence of the concept of civilization to religion has been widely discussed. Sociologist Johann Arnason for example argues that “Even a writer as concerned with material realities as Fernand Braudel remarks in passing that religion is the civilizational phenomenon par excellence.”\textsuperscript{549} In short, after the catastrophe of the First World War it became increasingly accepted that “there were multiple civilizations and that civilization was ultimately a spiritual and moral concern.”\textsuperscript{550}

The “civilizing mission” of Euro-American nations came under criticism as the Christian world view was increasingly attacked by the major scientific discoveries and the comparability of different religious systems on the basis of globalizing

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{545} Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology”: 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{546} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{547} Godwin, \textit{The Theosophical Enlightenment}.
  \item \textsuperscript{548} Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds., \textit{The Faces of Buddhism in America} (Univ. of California Press, 1998).
  \item \textsuperscript{549} Johann P. Arnason, \textit{Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions} (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 232.
  \item \textsuperscript{550} Duara, “The Discourse on Civilization and Decolonization”: 3.
\end{itemize}
processes. The Theosophical Society harshly criticized the Christian dogmas and propagated Asian religious systems as the foundation of a new civilization.

Similarly to the other two main figures in this study, Jiddu Krishnamurti and B. P. Wadia, Anagarika Dharmapala was socialized in the Theosophical Society which he joined in Ceylon when he was only 17. His development as one of the foremost propagators of modern Buddhism was encouraged and monitored by the Society’s American founder Henry Steel Olcott, one of the most influential figures in Buddhist revivalism. Together with the major inspiration of the movement, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Olcott, The White Buddhist, had a deep personal interest in the revival of Buddhism although he propagated the basic equality of all religious systems as only different paths to the same religious truth. Although Dharmapala initially supported this claim, he later increasingly focused on the propagation of Buddhism as the one religious resource of an alternative civilization.

Dharmapala’s propagation of modern Buddhism as the foundation of an alternative civilization will be the main focal point of the chapter. In order to disseminate Buddhism in Asia and beyond, Dharmapala followed a ‘spiritualizing mission’ that took the shape of a civilizing mission. Not only Dharmapala attempted to disseminate a “double message of spiritual and social upliftment”, the same patterns have been detected within the transnational activity of the Salvation Army. Although Dharmapala was crucial in reforming Buddhism as a this-worldly set of practices instead of a religious ritual through introducing reformist Buddhism into the global public sphere and influencing the transformation of Buddhist missionary practice, I will primarily focus on seminal events in Dharmapala’s “spiritualizing mission” as a “civilizing mission” and will argue, that Dharmapala’s Buddhist missions included much more than just conversion as they were an intrinsic part of a much larger project - forming an alternative civilization originating from Asia. Similarly to pan-


Islam or other pan-movements of his time Dharmapala’s pan-Asianism was primarily a regional network based on, but not limited to, religious concerns. On the contrary, I would argue that Dharmapala propagated Buddhism primarily because he believed in its civilizing potential.

Like the imperial “civilizing missions,” Dharmapala’s “civilizing mission” gained inspiration from the European Enlightenment thought that equated civilizational progress with progress of knowledge. Dharmapala believed in the civilizing power of knowledge and, therefore, he did not attempt to convert but “make Buddhism present in the world, 'bringing knowledge' of the Dhamma.”

From the mid-nineteenth century the two enlightenment movements – the eighteenth century ‘Age of Enlightenment’ propagated by European philosophers and the Buddhist discovery of truth, were linked by nineteenth century preeminent Indologist, Max Müller. In the German language the difference between both is clearly marked: the religious enlightenment is Erleuchtung, while the eighteenth century movement in the Kantian definition of enlightenment as intellectual liberation is Aufklärung. But Müller combined both based on his “philosophical faith” in Immanuel Kant and the assumption that Buddha was an eminently important figure for world religion.

I intend to show that Dharmapala, who was well acquainted with Müller’s seminal works on Buddhism, perceived his dissemination of a reworked Buddhism that has been called “protestant”, “modern” or “reformed” as an act of enlightenment - liberating, developing, promoting progress and social reform and thus as a “civilizing mission”.

In this sense Dharmapala was pivotal in reconstructing Buddhism as this-worldly, as scientific, as more a philosophy than a religion. Though social reform is not a


556 Richard S. Cohen, Beyond Enlightenment: Buddhism, religion, modernity, 7.

traditional Buddhist goal Dharmapala conceived of the “sacred knowledge” of Buddhism has having profound “liberating potential.” Dharmapala’s reinterpreted “civilizing mission” or as Jana Tschurenev recently called it, his “non-governmental civilizing mission,” however, included the “classical repertoire” of imperial “civilizing mission” since it addressed "Issues of 'Moral Progress': Education, Character Building, and the Fight Against 'Social Evils'" as well as "Issues of 'Material Progress': Technology, Public Health and Economic Development."

This chapter is based on primary sources from archives of Maha Bodhi Societies in Calcutta, Colombo and Sarnath. I have worked predominantly with primary sources such as pamphlets and magazine articles from leading Buddhist and theosophical publications such as The Theosophist, Theosophy in India or The Maha Bodhi Journal and the United Buddhist World, the preeminent organ of the Maha Bodhi Society.

Ananda Guruge’s edited volume of Dharmapala’s remains seminal for anyone interested in Dharmapala since it offers a wide array of lectures, pamphlets, speeches and letters by Dharmapala himself. Despite his interesting biography and role as a forerunner of the international Buddhist revival and national Ceylonese politics, Dharmapala has not had an academic biographer yet, although the brief biographical account in Guruge’s volume provided the necessary biographical data.

I have structured the chapter in four broadly chronological parts. Dharmapala’s project combined regeneration on the basis of Buddhist principles and propagation of Buddhism abroad.

---


561 Ibid., 13.

562 Dharmapala, Return to Righteousness.
The first section will analyze how, from within the Theosophical Society as the pioneering institution of the discourse on an alternative Asian civilization, Dharmapala defined “sacred knowledge” in Buddhism claiming its global significance and authority. Dharmapala’s early interaction with eminent Theosophical propagators of Buddhism such as Henry Steel Olcott significantly influenced his conception of Buddhism as a means to an alternative civilization. Moreover, his acquaintances with theosophical luminaries helped him to build a global Buddhist network on which he capitalized later on.

The second part studies how Dharmapala practically aimed to apply this “spiritual program” by integrating the particular Theravada Buddhist tradition with the global interest in Buddhism. I therefore distinguish Dharmapala’s “external civilizing mission” and his “internal civilizing mission” – a pattern which is equally detectable with the Salvation Army. He worked primarily on his external “civilizing mission” when he represented Buddhism on the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and aspired to popularize it as the spiritual foundation of an alternative global civilization. Dharmapala followed his internal civilizing mission with the foundation of the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta in 1891 in order to revive Buddhism in predominantly Hindu colonial India and restore North Indian Bodh Gaya as the religious pilgrim center of the global Buddhist ecumene. In Calcutta, the Indian base for his project, Dharmapala came into close contact with Asianist thinkers and developed a pan-Asian vision based on Buddhism.

The last subchapter analyzes a combination of the “external” and the “internal civilizing” missions as Dharmapala developed various intraregional projects designed to foster collaboration and integration in Asia based on a shared Buddhist identity especially focusing on Japan. Thereby the study emphasizes that Euro-America was not the only or predominant point of reference for Dharmapala’s modern Buddhism, especially, since pan-Asian Buddhist networks predated political and cultural colonial hegemony and as such Buddhism had already been successfully “missionized” in

---

many Asian countries. In Asia, the globalization of Buddhism took place a long time ago.

Moreover, this chapter sheds light on Dharmapala’s “moral improvement” politics which included education, economical development and temperance. I will focus on his educational and charity programs based on generous donations of his most important benefactress, Mary Foster of Honolulu. By linking his Buddhist missions with one of the most influential and widespread discourses of its time (civilization) as well as a specific contemporary phenomenon (pan-movements), Dharmapala emphasized the legitimacy of his spiritualizing mission as a civilizing mission.

### 3.2 Early Theosophical affiliations with Henry Steel Olcott

Dharmapala’s self-fashioning as a Buddhist reformer and his vision of an alternative Asian Buddhist civilization was informed by his early membership in the Theosophical Society firstly in Ceylon, later in India and beyond. The Theosophical Society (TS) provided a meeting point of non-European intellectual elites such as Dharmapala with romanticists from Euro-America who looked to Asia as a source of alternative, spiritual civilization.

Historian Michael Adas considers the TS a pioneer organization which openly criticized “the directions that European civilization was leading the rest of humanity”. But this late nineteenth century critique “was confined largely to literary and artistic circles, particularly to those, such as the theosophists, that were organized around efforts to acquire and propagate ancient Indian philosophies.” In short, from its introduction into British colonial India in 1879, the TS functioned as a bridge between religious reformers in Asia and self-critical Westerners who collaboratively

---


shaped "the content of the discourse on the Asian civilization's alternative nature to the West" though not generally rejected "Western modernity." 566

Anagarika Dharmapala’s close collaboration with the founder and president of the Theosophical Society, Henry Steel Olcott reflected the two different but overlapping agendas of Euro-American and Asian members which have been interpreted as a transformation of meaning of theosophy in different cultural contexts. 567 While Henry Steel Olcott as the majority of Euro-American members grounded his theosophical interest in Buddhism on the legitimacy crises of colonialism and a 'victorian crisis of faith,' Anagarika Dharmapala emerged from the Sinhalese Buddhist revitalization movement. 568 The success of the Theosophical Society with both Asians and Euro-Americans was due to its claim to have found a solution for both agendas by harmonizing them in its utopian project of founding a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity irrespective of race, class, creed or gender. This “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” was the theosophical formulation of a "new discourse of civilization, however derivative from the old" that “carried with it a redemptive and egalitarian utopianism.” 569

The preferred means of the TS for promoting unity was inspired by eighteenth century enlightenment ideals in which the increase of knowledge was synonymous with a development of civilization. The Society’s identity as an institution gathering and disseminating knowledge between “East” and “West” was reflected by its numerous publications, opening of libraries, schools and reading circles, its monitoring of translations and general encouragement of discursive activities by travels of its members within the global network of branches. In all the new public spaces which the Theosophical Society opened up – in its libraries, its lodges and its


568 McMahan, _The Making of Buddhist Modernism_, 90–1.

periodicals – we can discern the workings of what anthropologist Richard Fox has called “affirmative orientalism.”

When Anagarika Dharmapala appeared as a delegate of Theravada Buddhism on the 1893 World Parliament of Religion in Chicago he had not even turned 30 and already become a global figure. As a global figure he came from a wealthy elite colonial but dissenting background and exemplified the various influences on the popularizers of modern Buddhism.

Dharmapala, whose original Christian name was Don David Hewavitarane, was the son of an affluent Sinhalese furniture trader in Colombo. Dharmapala was educated in both Catholic and Protestant missionary schools while he described his parental home as entirely Buddhist. After finishing school, he worked briefly in the educational department but gave up his job as a white-collar worker in colonial service to actively participate in the "the second awakening which the Buddhists had received through the theosophical founders Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky in May 1880. The two theosophical founders had declared themselves “Buddhists long before, in America, both privately and publicly” but took pansil when they visited the island for the first time. It is perfectly logic that young Dharmapala (16 years of age) considered the TS a tool for “Buddhist propaganda” in the West. He remembered:

“My father did not approve of the interminable hours I spent in the library. I was in a worldly sense doing nothing- just reading and studying the Theosophists, whom I regarded as the exponents of Buddhism to the western world.”

The impression that theosophy was primarily “Buddhist propaganda” is particularly understandable when considering that Olcott and Blavatsky considered

---


571 Dharmapala, Return to Righteousness, 700.


573 Ibid., 167.

their Ceylonese conversion only a “formal confirmation”\(^{575}\) of their former conversion. Olcott’s interpretation of the “Buddhist baptism” in Ceylon as a mere confirmation of their former conversion to Buddhism is also expressed in Olcott’s general attitude towards Sinhalese Buddhists whom he considered ignorant about Buddhism. Prothero states that Olcott’s “determination that the island’s Buddhists did not know their Buddhism was an odd sort of judgement for a recent convert who had purportedly come to Asia not to teach but to learn.” However, Prothero argues that Olcott’s uncritical appropriation of pioneering Buddhologists such as William Rhys Davids was responsible for “the rather absurd conclusion that Ceylon’s Buddhists knew little, if anything, about ‘real’ Buddhism.”\(^{576}\)

Historian Richard King reminds us, however, that the “real” Buddhism of Buddhologists and theosophists alike was textual Buddhism as the “literary expression of an elite.” Since neither “Sanskrit nor Pali are vernacular languages” “they cannot reflect the religious opinions of the non-literate masses in anything other than an indirect manner.” Therefore, "in a village context even the majority of religious specialists (the monks or bikkhus) do not understand their own scriptures in the original, but rather rely on translation"\(^{577}\) and their daily religious practices diverge significantly from the texts. However, to “argue that 'textual Buddhism', for instance, bears no relation to actual Buddhist religious belief and practice is to overstep the mark wildly.”\(^{578}\) The tendency to level differences and claim unity without diversity led Olcott to perceive Buddhism as a textual metaphysic philosophy:

“(…) if Buddhism contained a single dogma that we were compelled to accept, we would not have taken the pansil nor remained Buddhists ten minutes. Our Buddhism was that of the Master-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan Upanishads, and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed.”\(^{579}\)

\(^{575}\) Olcott, Old Diary Leaves. The History of the Theosophical Society, 167–8.


\(^{577}\) King, Orientalism and Religion, 66.

\(^{578}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{579}\) Olcott, Old Diary Leaves. The History of the Theosophical Society, 168–9.
The tendency of theosophists with the leading European Orientalists and Buddhologists to privilege the textual, philosophical creed over religious practices on location also influenced Dharmapala who was firstly encouraged by theosophical leaders to study the “most authoritative account” in Pali writings:

"At that time the Pali writings, which contain the most authoritative account of the Buddha and his doctrines, were little known in comparison with the Sanskrit Buddhist sources. (...) In 1884, when Madame Blavatsky urged me to study this literature, it was not printed but was accessible only in the original palm-leaf writings."

Despite the ardent protest of his parents and the Buddhist high priest Sumangala, Dharmapala joined the theosophical founders on their way back to the theosophical headquarters in Adyar in 1884 and stayed with the society for about 20 years, receiving both the structural and ideological foundations for his future work in reforming Buddhism. Dharmapala accompanied and translated for Olcott not only in Ceylon but also in his first visit to Japan and Burma and thus witnessed Olcott’s rise as the leading agitator of the Buddhist revival as the basis for a pan-Asian community as well as a propagator of a reformed Buddhism in the West, particularly the United States.

True to the Theosophical Enlightenment project which he considered primarily a Buddhistic enlightenment, Dharmapala turned excessively to Buddhologist and Orientalist sources and their textualized and essentialized interpretation of Buddhism to lend substance to his argumentation as can be seen examplarily in his first ever independent lecture on 25 October 1891 at the Albert Hall in Calcutta. In the chair was Babu Narendranath Sen, the editor of the Indian Mirror, who was the president of the Theosophical Society in Calcutta, supporter of Hindu-Buddhist unity and an influential link with the press. Although Dharmapala tried to win over the Calcutta bhadralok to support a Buddhist revival within India, he strikingly claimed the emergence of Buddhism as a global event since "for the first time in the history of

---

580 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Memoirs of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 582), 687.

the world”582 “the law of Truth for the attainment of beatitude (sic.) by liberating the human being from his own acts” was discovered.

Dharmapala portrayed the emergence of Buddhism in India as a paradigmatic shift in human consciousness which “opened a new era in the history of man and thought.” Following the theosophical logic according to which an intellectual exchange is the basis for tolerance and ultimate unity, Dharmapala considered contemporary “spreading” of education and the “the expansion of the intellect” the reason for the prevailing “spirit of tolerance”.583 With the backing of the theosophical founders Dharmapala claimed the potential of Buddhism to fulfill the central utopian project of theosophy: the Universal Brotherhood of Men irrespective of race, class, creed or gender as a truly utopian project:

“With the progress of education and development of intellect, the barriers raised by priestcraft and selfishness, between man and man, will be removed; and a man breathing a purer air of love, will see that it is far better that a spirit of brotherliness should be fostered for the elevation of humanity. Then and then alone will Buddhism be appreciated.”584

As early as 1891, Dharmapala formulated the basic tenets of his program underlying a civilizing mission as a spiritualizing mission for which he collaborated primarily with members of the Theosophical Society all over the globe. Supporters of his later independent organization, the Maha Bodhi Society, were Narendranath Sen (Calcutta), Mary Foster (Honolulu), Paul Carus and William James (US), D.T. Suzuki (Japan), Sir Edwin Arnold and Carolyn and William Rhys Davids (GB).

3.3 Integrating Local Practices with a Global Superstructure of Buddhism

3.3.1 Representing Buddhism at the World Parliament 1893

The fact that Dharmapala and other Buddhist representatives from Asia such as Shaku Soen from Japan claimed global significance for Buddhism as an ethical and spiritual resource for an alternative civilization was in no small part due to its

582 Dharmapala, Return to Righteousness, 351.

583 Ibid., 352.

584 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Buddhism in its Relationship to Hinduism,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 566), 355.
construction as a world religion around the turn of the century and therefore relevant to the transformation of the concept of civilization generally, as Prasenjit Duara has argued.\footnote{Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism”: 101–2.}

Refashioning Buddhism as a world religion with less resemblance to ordinary practised cults and more as an abstract and rationalized body of teachings appropriate to build the core of another civilization was publicly presented and produced for the first time at the World Parliament of Religions that took place in Chicago in 1893.\footnote{Ibid., 102.} The 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago was a seminal event for the globalization of modern Buddhism through Anagarika Dharmapala. For representatives from Asia the parliament provided a sought after platform for the promotion of their faiths as world religions equal to Christianity. Euro-American participants (mainly Christian) experienced a wealth of alien religious often for the first time.\footnote{Seager, The World’s Parliament of Religions.} Non-Europeans, especially Indian religious reformers, however, already came from a multireligious society were the negotiation of tensions between Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jains and many more was a central aspect of their daily business. The organizing committee of the World Parliament of Religions under its head John Barrows in Chicago came to know Dharmapala’s young initiative through its journal \textit{The Mahabodhi Journal} and invited him to represent the “Southern Buddhist Church.”\footnote{Anagarika Dharmapala, “Our Twenty Years’ Work,” in \textit{Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of the Anagarika Dharmapala}, ed. Ananda Guruge, 743–50 (1965), 743.} Like no other single event the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago is famed by scholars to have successfully promoted the idea of religious tolerance.\footnote{Lüddeckens, \textit{Das Weltparlament der Religionen von 1893}.}\footnote{Seager, The World’s Parliament of Religions.} Since the Parliament accompanied the World Fair celebrating the Columbian exhibition it gained wide publicity and newspaper coverage. To Dharmapala it provided the invaluable possibility to promulgate his interpretation of Buddhism on an internationally recognizable platform but also the
opportunity to strengthen personal bonds with other Asian Buddhists such as Japanese Buddhist monk Shaku Soen (1860-1919) who had visited Ceylon before in order to study Southern Buddhism, as Theravada Buddhism was popularly called, and to win over influential non-Asians such as Paul Carus (1852-1919) of The Open Court magazine and publishing house or the originally Swiss New Yorker businessman C.T. Strauss whom Dharmapala “baptized” in a public ceremony and who later became the Swiss representative of the Maha Bodhi Society.591

I will primarily analyze the lectures he gave on this occasion as they exemplify how Dharmapala depicted Buddhism for an American and global audience and claimed its universal significance as a resource for an alternative civilization.

For the construction of Buddhism in the category of “world religions” its textualization is a necessary prerequisite as only the decontextualized text-based category allowed for global circulation at the cost of marginalizing localized religious forms. Dharmapala had inherited this textualist bias which underlay his lecture from his theosophical foster parents as well as eminent European Buddhologists.592 However, Richard King reminds us "that such texts can never be totally divorced from the historical reality in which they were produced" thus to “argue that 'textual Buddhism', for instance, bears no relation to actual Buddhist religious belief and practice is to overstep the mark wildly." 593

In his brief opening, Dharmapala claimed to represent "four hundred and seventy-five million of Buddhists" and a “system which has prevailed so many centuries in Asia, which had made Asia mild, and which is today, in its twenty-fourth century of existence, the prevailing religion of those countries."594 As a spokesperson for Buddhism and Buddhist Asia, Dharmapala claimed that the World Parliament of Religions “was simply the re-echo of a great consummation which the Indian


592 King, Orientalism and Religion, 66.

593 Ibid., 71.

Buddhists accomplished twenty-four centuries ago” in the Golden Age of Buddhism led by mythical Buddhist king Asoka:

“At that time Asoka, the great emperor, held a council in the city of Patna, of thousand (sic) scholars, which was in session for seven months. [...] and the influence of that congress, held twenty one centuries ago, is today a living power, for you everywhere see mildness in Asia.”

From 1837 onwards, the “cult of Asoka”596, the mythical Buddhist king (304-232 B.C.) became a highly popular integrative figure in India. The rise of Asoka was so successful that even the lion capital, the national emblem of the independent state was inspired by Asoka’s Buddhist vision symbolizing the commitment of the independent state to supposedly basic Buddhist values such as religious tolerance. Accordingly, Dharmapala’s designation of Dr. John Henry Barrows as "the American Asoka"597 paid both highest respect to the organizer of the parliament and emphasized that as Asoka was not just another Indian king, Buddhism was not just another religion but "the result of a widespread movement towards change which affected many aspects of life from personal beliefs to social ideas"598 and formed an early predominantly Buddhist civilization in ancient India. Despite the strictly religious platform and rhetoric, Dharmapala promoted Buddhism as just one (though the most important) element in the much wider project of constructing a valid civilizational alternative to the global West:

"For the first time in the history of civilization the brotherhood of Humanity is recognised, different nations accept one living truth, virtue is enthroned. It was a proud achievement, unprecedented in history since the dawn of civilization.”599

The message is clear: Not Europe but Asia was and will be the center of the world. The comparison of Asoka’s Buddhist missions to Asia with the contemporary


598 Thapar, “Asoka and Buddhism”: 44.

situation was intended to prove the civilizational potential of Buddhism. According to his presentation, Asoka civilized the conquered nations not just morally through spreading Buddhism but also materially by constructing public roads, providing medicine and banning the killing of animals.\textsuperscript{600} This depiction of Asoka’s reign although certainly exaggerated is also reflected by historian of ancient India Romila Thapar who claimed that the "sixth century B.C. in India may be described as a century of questioning"\textsuperscript{601} the privileged position of priests and the necessity of complex rituals for achieving enlightenment.\textsuperscript{602} Instead Asoka emphasized the principles of tolerance and non-violence.\textsuperscript{603} Archeological excavations verify that Asoka’s "policy of Dhamma also included measures which today would be described as 'social welfare',"\textsuperscript{604} such as the development of the public infrastructure. Following on the footsteps of Asoka’s supposedly non-military interventions, Dharmapala avoided the aggressive rhetoric of missionaries by claiming that he had not come to the "West" to convert Westerners to Buddhism, but to bring some knowledge of a religion, that for more than two thousand years, has quickened the peoples of Asia to higher achievements in ethics, industry and art."\textsuperscript{605}

In his main lecture on 18 September 1893 called \textit{The World’s Debt to Buddha}, Dharmapala directly referred to "Ancient India, twenty-five centuries ago, was the scene of a religious revolution, the greatest the world has ever seen."\textsuperscript{606} Thus he pointed out the international significance of a worldwide significant event taking place in India, but now, he claimed "History is repeating itself"\textsuperscript{607} as another “religious revolution” sweeping the world.

\textsuperscript{600} Anagarika Dharmapala, "The Parliament of Religions", 16
\textsuperscript{601} Thapar, “Asoka and Buddhism”: 46.
\textsuperscript{602} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{603} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{604} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{605} Anagarika Dharmapala, “Memoirs of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World,” in \textit{Return to Righteousness} (see note 582), 681.
\textsuperscript{606} Anagarika Dharmapala, "The World’s Debt to Buddha," in \textit{Return to Righteousness} (see note 609), 3.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid., 5.
Similarly, he based reformed Buddhism on the figure of its founder and claimed his global significance as the "enlightened Messiah of the World." The basis for his claims about the global significance of Buddhism was not only its construction as a world religion based on the textualist bias but "creating Buddhist responses to the dominant problems and questions of modernity, such as epistemic uncertainty, religious pluralism, the threat of nihilism, conflicts between science and religion, war, and environmental destruction," in short, representing Buddhism as the solution to basic challenges of modernity.

One of the most important challenges to religious systems in modern times was their reconciliation with the latest scientific findings and religious scholar David McMahan argues that "perhaps no major tradition has attempted to ally itself with scientific discourse more boldly than Buddhism." Dharmapala at the World Parliament portrayed Buddhism in full harmony with modern science, even as a kind of science. The most elaborate and up-to-date scientific finding were provided by Darwin's revolutionary theory. In the paragraph *Evolution as Taught by Buddha* Dharmapala reclaimed the formulation of the law of cause and effect for Buddhism thus presenting its compliance with current scientific worldviews.

Dharmapala affirmed that the underlying self-relying “spirit of scientific inquiry” was the central approach of Buddhism as "a scientific religion, in as much as it earnestly enjoins that nothing whatever be accepted on faith.” On the contrary, Dharmapala argued that the “Buddha has said that nothing should be believed merely because it is said. Buddhism is tantamount to a knowledge of other sciences.” The individual, non-mediated access to knowledge in general and religious knowledge in particular is a central feature of what sociologist Robert Bellah has called “modern religion”. Although Bellah extracted the central features of modern religions from Protestantism and was thus skeptical about the applicability of his model on other

---

610 Ibid., 90.
religious traditions, H.L. Seneviratne has argued that modern Buddhism that has variously been called “Protestant Buddhism” because of its reaction to the missionary practice and appropriation of organizational methods, fits into the scheme. Bellah argued:

On the other hand the old elite notion that religion involves a personal quest for meaning, that it must express the deepest dimension of the self and in no way violate individual conscience, has been generalized as the dominant conception of religion in modern society. Enormous expansion in our historical and comparative knowledge of religion and of its social and psychological dimensions has made a naive literalism impossible among larger numbers of people.

Dharmapala’s conception of modern Buddhism indeed seems to confirm the assumption in his description of its individualistic, non-dogmatic, democratic and rational character:

(...) each person must master himself and work out his own salvation, the Buddhist faith is amazingly tolerant. [...] The teachers of all other religions say dogmatically, 'Believe because I say you should believe,' but the Buddha taught that one could arrive at the truth only through freedom of investigation. Buddhism is, above all the religion of analysis. It is a democratic religion in that it has spiritualized the mind of the masses. In the Buddhist world the priest is not expected either to think for the people nor to tell them what they must believe.

The rationalization, textualization and individualization of Buddhism from its original social context by promoting the practice of meditation that functioned irrespective of religious authority, the reconstruction of the role of monks as social workers instead of mere renunciators and the strengthening of the laity without forcing the renunciation from the world but only prescribing devotion to the eight Buddhist precepts were Dharmapala’s modernizing attempts.


616 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Memoirs of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 582), 690.
Underlying the assumption regarding the civilizing power of Buddhism, Dharmapala asked a similar question to the one inspiring Max Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1904/1905): “To what degree has each religion helped the historic evolution of the Race?” and answered: “When Buddhism flourished in India, the arts, sciences and civilization reached their zenith, as witnessed in the edicts and monuments of Asoka’s reign. Hospitals were first founded for man and beast. Missionaries sent to all parts of the world. Literature encouraged. Wherever Buddhism has gone, the nations have imbibed its spirit, and the people have become gentler and milder. The slaughter of animals and drunkenness ceased, and wars were almost abolished.”

Dharmapala suggested Buddhism as a suitable universal religion, as the core of a new civilization since Buddhist ethics would not only morally and materially help to develop the world but, as “Buddhist countries” exemplified, would help to check the world’s greatest potential for conflict: global capitalism. Labor and capital conflicts that transcend national boundaries: “the conflicts of labour and capital and other problems which confront Europe are not to be met with in Buddhistic countries.” Still a member of the Theosophical Society in 1893, Dharmapala resumed the potential of Buddhism to build the spiritual core of a new civilization, in theosophical terms a “brotherhood of man” “ignorant of any race, nation or creed”:

“I left that gathering truly uplifted, with exalted hopes for the brotherhood of man and for a Utopian period, not too far distant, when Christian and Jew, Mahommedan, Brahman and Buddhist would associate in joyous understanding, purged of the prejudices and hateful passions that an intensity of religious belief invariably inspires in the narrow-minded and ignorant of any race, nation or creed.”

At the World Parliament of Religions, Dharmapala conceptualized Buddhist “sacred knowledge” as a suitable basis for an alternative civilization that would surpass the existing world order. He legitimized this assumption with two arguments: the

---


618 Ibid., 20.

619 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Memoirs of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World,” in *Return to Righteousness* (see note 582), 690.
successful example of the Buddhist civilization under King Asoka’s reign and the exemplary adjustment of Buddhism to modern scientism and individualism.

3.3.2 The Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta

When considering the global dimension of Dharmapala’s Buddhist endeavors scholarly attention usually focuses on the relationship between South Asia and the United States. However, Dharmapala’s inner-Asian agitations are equally important for his construction of a Buddhist civilization since they illustrate not only his struggles on the ground but also explain contexts in which he developed his vision and even more importantly were a testing ground for his ideas.

We will start with India whose religious-plural society forced him to practically apply the basic tenets of Buddhism, he had formulated in Chicago in 1893: cosmopolitanism, enlightenment, tolerance, individuality, scientific orientation and intellectuality. Two contexts will illustrate how his “external” and his “internal civilizing mission” interacted with each other and contradicted themselves. In both cases, Dharmapala dealt with particularities on the ground which jeopardized his universalizing attempts. Firstly, the establishment of the Mahabodhi Society in Calcutta was Dharmapala’s foremost instrument for propagating his vision of a “united Buddhist world” and for rescuing the sacred site at Bodh Gaya near Benares as the centre of the “united Buddhist world”. In May 1891 shortly before he appeared on the World Parliament of Religions, Dharmapala established the Maha Bodhi Society as an officially independent body with the comprehensive support of his theosophical allies. Henry Steel Olcott acted as its director and chief advisor, while Norendranath Sen became Dharmapala’s closest co-worker in Calcutta, the organizational headquarters. Moreover, most of the early members of the Maha Bodhi Society were theosophists. The internal civilizing mission as a spiritualizing mission was the “reconversion” of predominantly Hindu India to Buddhism.

620 McMahan, The Making of Buddhist Modernism.


622 Amunugama, “A Sinhala Buddhist ‘Babu’: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the Bengal connection”: 561.
Dharmapala initiated from Calcutta a Buddhist revival, supported by recent discoveries of archeological sites and ancient Pali texts by Buddhologists such as William and Caroline Rhys Davids. The credibility of Buddhism as an intellectual endeavor was furthered by Dharmapala's reference to (mostly) European Buddhologists such as William Rhys Davids, R. L. Mitter, Edwin Arnold and Basil Hall Chamberlain but also famed local academics such as Tibetan scholar Sarat Chandra Das. Buddhology was a relatively recent offspring of Indology, Sinology and classical philology supplemented by the discovery of concerted efforts of archeologists who explored historical Buddhist sites.623

The society focused on the revival of Buddhism in India and the restoring of its sacred sites such as North Indian Bodh Gaya, where the historical Buddha was believed to have found enlightenment. For this endeavor, the Maha Bodhi Society (MBS) sought financial and organizational support from other “Buddhist countries” such as Japan or Siam and the Hindu majority on location. The dialogue among Buddhist countries was secured by the monthly journal The Maha Bodhi Society and the United Buddhist World, “the flagship of pan-Buddhist magazine organ across India, Burma, and Ceylon”624 which Dharmapala established in Calcutta in 1892. On each front cover the magazine printed first the Buddhist date, thus boldly advertising its non-Eurocentric perspective. Whenever Dharmapala was abroad, it was managed by Sarat Chandra Das, a pioneering scholar of Tibetan Buddhism and Neel Comal Mookerji, a member of the large Tagore family.625 The Maha Bodhi Journal was involved in achieving high literacy rate and knowledge of English as well as an impressively fluctuation of English language journals in the most “enlightened city” in India.626 Calcutta established itself "as one of the most cosmopolitan centres of knowledge in the Indian Ocean world" and "became home and inspiration to some of

623 King, Orientalism and Religion, 144.


625 Amunugama, “A Sinhala Buddhist ‘Babu’: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the Bengal connection”: 557.

the more definite expressions of pan-Asianism and an influential discourse of Asian civilisation." 627 As one could observe from Bengali religious reformist Vivekananda, with whom Dharmapala shared the limelight in Chicago, the discourse of an alternative spiritual civilization in India had its home in Calcutta.

Religious reformists such as Swami Vivekananda, Keshub Chunder Sen, and Bhudev Mukhopadev towards the end of the nineteenth century evolved the Hindu-based idea that Asian civilization was historically the basis of superior spirituality and would redeem and supplement Euro-American materialism.628 However, the Tagore circle "presumed that Asian civilization derived from the key elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and, to a lesser extent, Confucianism" while "Buddhism took pride of place and was crowned as 'that great ocean of idealism'-the primary means by which past cultural exchange and common ideals had generated a regional unity."629

Which other place in colonial India could be better suited for the Buddhism revival movement as the key element of a new Asian civilization than Calcutta with its legendary intellectual culture and cosmopolitan character?

Olcott accordingly praised the "brightness and flexibility of that Bengalee intellect which goes so far towards moulding contemporary Hindu opinion."630 Olcott and Dharmapala considered the Bengali elite intellectually equipped for pioneering a Buddhist revival in India: "The spread of education naturally liberalizes the mind of man and, as a matter of fact we see the results. The seed of Buddhism takes root only on the healthy soil of a freed intellect. Buddhism is for the thoughtful alone."631

Ras Bihari Mukherjee, member of the Bengali bhadralok and translator of French philosopher Ernest Renan’s collected works into English, responded positively to this appeal as he claimed: "If education and culture are signs of advancing humanity, surely Buddhism, which is pre-eminently the religion of the educated, the thoughtful,


628 Ibid., 254.

629 Ibid., 267.

630 Henry S. Olcott, "The Kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism," in, 368–86, 368.

631 Dharmapala, Return to Righteousness, 357.
and the intellectual, stands head and shoulders above all other faiths.”

Dharmapala catered to the Bengali bhadralok, an urban-based, bi-lingual wealthy class closely associated with the Hindu reform movement, the Brahmo Samaj, the oldest of such movements that was founded in Calcutta by Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833). The majority of affiliates were westernized Bengali intellectuals who aimed at purifying Hinduism from rituals and idol worship. Brahma leader Roy represented Hinduism as a rationalistic belief free of priestly mediation. The appeal to the Calcutta bhadralok by Dharmapala and his theosophical supporters drew on the intellectual credentials of the Bengali intellectual elite.

The widespread acceptance of Buddhism among Oriental scholars is evident in eminent British scholar Max Müller’s claim that the Buddhist ‘moral code’ was “one of the most perfect the world has ever known.” Dharmapala, however, did not only refer to distinguished scholars but through the mediation of his theosophical mentor he also corresponded directly with William Rhys Davids and Edwin Arnold. Thus he built up a network of supporters of the Maha Bodhi Society whom he successfully integrated into the worldwide Buddhism network. For example, Edwin Arnold became the director of the British branch of the Maha Bodhi Society and the correspondence with William Rhys Davids and his wife Caroline lasted for his whole life. His overseas support of Buddhology was supplemented by Dharmapala’s enthusiasm for the inner-Indian scientific study of Buddhism at a chair for Pali studies at the University of Calcutta; he also supported the foundation in 1892 of the Buddhist Text Society (BTS) of his close ally Sarat Chandra Das who was one of the first who travelled to Tibet and was a legend in Calcutta.

Argumentatively, Dharmapala appealed to the “Indianness” of Buddhism and in a theosophical manner constructed common elements between Hinduism and


634 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Buddhism in its Relationship to Hinduism,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 566), 354.

635 Amunugama, “A Sinhala Buddhist ‘Babu’: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the Bengal connection”: 575–6.
Buddhism. However, the rhetoric of progress and civilization was applied with regard to the entire country. Dharmapala argued that "The best historians and the most impartial writers of India have admitted that at no time was India more in her glory than when the Buddhistic system was prevailing." His journalistic ally the Indian Mirror supports this notion by claiming that the Buddha's "doctrines of brotherhood and universal compassion were eagerly accepted by the Hindus, who were anxious to be relieved from Brahmanical tyranny." Like contemporary religious reformers, Buddha is depicted as the reformer of Brahanical Hinduism and thus Buddhism is constructed as just a reformed Hinduism. Richard King has argued that this was a popular pattern for explaining similarities between Hinduism and Buddhism not only from the Buddhist side but also as "brahmanical pundits in India" tended to, "represent Buddhism as little more than a branch of the vast Hindu banyan tree." Dharmapala's bhadralok co-worker Norendranath Sen suggested that the "subsequent degradation of the Hindus is due chiefly" to the disappearance of "the merciful religion of Buddha" from India. However, the Buddhist revival evolved in direct competition with and inspired by the so called Hindu Renaissance in Bengal. Here the Theosophical Society again had a nourishing function for most of them. Historian Sarath Amunugama even argues that "Dharmapala, Saraswati Dayananda and Vivekananda all came, as it were, from the Theosophical 'stable'. They all adopted a critical posture towards Christian missionaries, their schools and their attempts at converting native people. Their modus operandi-preaching tours, debates, issuing of challenges to missionaries, enunciating of a textual religion, downgrading of rituals and setting up of sabhas of laymen to promote their efforts - was common to all. So was their attempt to take a more ecumenical approach to each other's religion while, of course, asserting the primacy of their own." 

636 Anagarika Dharmapala, "Buddhism in its Relationship to Hinduism," in Return to Righteousness (see note 566), 352.


638 King, Orientalism and Religion, 144.

639 Amunugama, "A Sinhala Buddhist 'Babu': Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the Bengal connection": 577.
By claiming that “because Buddhism had ceased to exist as the prevailing religion”, “the Brahmo Samaj was brought into being in Bengal, for educated Hindus wanted something better and purer to hold and follow as an ideal than the grotesque rites and doctrines which came to be substituted for the pure Hinduism of ancient times.”640 The conflicts between different denominations were considered to have been solved by the revival of Buddhism which would absorb all local traditions.

Both Dharmapala and Olcott therefore tried to convince the bhadralok that the “pure Hinduism of ancient times” is but a variation of Buddhism. This interpretation641 had been the argumentative basis for Olcott and Blavatsky’s conversion to Buddhism in 1880 as we have seen earlier and now was meant to convince the skeptical Hindu audience to support the Buddhist revival not just within India but far beyond. Considering the fact that Olcott knew very well how to persuade his audience, his argumentation deserves to be quoted in full as it is very telling of the audience’s preferences:

(...)

(...) the Hindu ideas we have been considering are being carried throughout the world by the Theosophical Society, as the agent, and through Buddhism as its vehicle. It is universally conceded that Hinduism is a national, not a cosmopolitan religion, although its transcendental philosophy discusses man as a human being and not merely as a Hindu. Hinduism entirely lacks the missionary character; in fact, there is scarcely any possibility of a non-Hindu being admitted into Hindu orthodoxy. But under the form of Buddhism, one of its most attractive and philosophical differentiations, it becomes as free as air to circulate throughout the world, and carry the blessed doctrines of Karma and Nirvana to all sorrowing hearts and minds.642

To be “as free as the air to circulate throughout the world” was a feature in modern Buddhism that Bengal’s intellectual elite most likely appreciated as it suited a tolerant and mobile cosmopolitan lifestyle as much as the acceptance of the academia and the prospect of an international intellectual network. Being constructed as a sign of quality and suitability for present times, Dharmapala and Olcott constantly

640 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Colonel Olcott on 'The Kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism',' Indian Mirror, October 27, 1892.


emphasized that Buddhism was a “cosmopolitan religion” based on liberal thinking and individual responsibility and therefore appealing to the port-citizens of Calcutta and their most famous role model the cosmopolitan luminary Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Amunugama even suggests that the "international membership of the MBS, publication of news of Buddhist activities in Europe, USA and the Far East, the visits of Americans and Europeans to Calcutta to support the MBS and Dharmapala’s own international stature, all created a sense of global interest in Buddhism which was envied by Bengali revivalists like Vivekananda and later copied by them."643 An editorial in the Maha Bodhi Journal of 1893 aptly makes the point as it claimed: "If there is a Hindu revival in India, there is a Buddhist revival in the world.""644 This Buddhist cosmopolitanism, however, was as much based on a strained unity between Hinduism and Buddhism that disregarded local particularities of both beliefs, as on the alienation from Islam. Dharmapala stressed the Indian origins of Buddhism and argued for a revival in its native place while at the same time blaming the “foreign Muslim invasions” for expelling Buddhism from India thus contributing to its degeneration as well as the alienation from its indigenous faith.

3.3.3 Bodh Gaya as the “Buddhist Jerusalem”

The politics around Bodh Gaya, the assumed place of the Buddha’s enlightenment near Varanasi, provide another striking example of how Dharmapala attempted to construct Buddhist Universalism against the backdrop of local particularities in India. His long lasting but eventually unsuccessful attempts to restore the place for the Buddhist sangha are aptly analyzed by historians Alan Trevithick645 and Jacob Kinnard.646

643 Amunugama, “A Sinhala Buddhist ‘Babu’: Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the Bengal connection”: 574.

644 Quoted in: Ibid., 574.


Inspired by the famous popularizer of Buddhism, Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) and his widely circulated and highly popular book *The Light of Asia* which portrayed Buddhism as the hagiographic account of its founder’s life, Dharmapala visited Bodh Gaya in 1891. Like Arnold a couple of years earlier, Dharmapala was devastated by the condition of the site that is “sacred to the Buddhists from eternity to eternity” as was believed that the Buddha achieved enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. In addition to the lack of shelter for Buddhist pilgrims and the overall devastation, Dharmapala was furious that a Hindu religious authority was in charge of the property and Hindu pilgrims worshipped the Buddha as an *avatara* (incarnation) of Visnu. The religious diversity of the site infuriated Dharmapala’s "nostalgia for origins" which he shared with the majority of Europeans interested in Buddhism already in the eighteenth century. Thus when “Friedrich Schlegel proclaimed that 'everything, yes, everything without exception had its origin in India', he was reiterating a prevalent theme in nineteenth-century Romantic and Orientalist representations of India as the primeval 'cradle of civilization'.

Dharmapala and his close Japanese ally Shaku Kozen (1849-1924), who had studied Theravada Buddhism for about seven years in both Ceylon and India, immediately founded the Maha Bodhi Society with the central purpose of restoring the place and trying to secure it for its “legitimate” owners – the Buddhist sangha. Kozen’s significant impact on the project has been given little attention in recent works analyzing Dharmapala’s efforts to revive Bodh Gaya as a pilgrim centre.

Dharmapala’s following campaign and fundraising with “co-religionists” from Japan, Burma, Siam, India and Ceylon was his first attempt to create a transnational Buddhist ecumene based on a common place of worship. However, as the unity of Hindus and Buddhists was build on the disregard for Muslims in India, the aspired transnational Buddhist unity was constructed by inventing “an ancient 'pure'

---


648 Kinnard, “When is the Buddha not the Buddha? The Hindu/Buddhist Battle over Bodhgaya and its Buddha Image”.


Buddhist past and denuding places like Nalanda, Bodhgaya and Paharpur of their multiple religious and historical strands.”

Despite his former cosmopolitan politics, tolerance was increasingly compromised by Dharmapala as he constructed more rigid and exclusive Buddhist identities that were opposed to the multi-religious society of India. While Dharmapala considered religious tolerance a key feature of Buddhism, the Bodh Gaya case clearly shows how local particularity and transnational cosmopolitanism opposed each other. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Dharmapala attempted to represent Buddhism as a world religion following the pattern of its establishment by a religious founder, centered around pilgrim places and legitimized by an authoritative text. The study of Pali sources provided some textual legitimation and the depiction of the Buddha as a heroic revolutionary served as the legend of its religious founder but Dharmapala took initiatives for the reconstruction of Bodh Gaya by claiming “what Mecca is to Muhammedans, what Jerusalem is to the Christians and Jews that Buddha-gaya is to the Buddhists of the world.”

Similarly to academic Orientalists and missionaries of his time, Dharmapala constructed Brahmanical Hinduism as an idolatrous faith in opposition to his construction of an overly rational, abstract Buddhist belief. It was on this ground, however, that Dharmapala faced criticism from his American supporters from The Open Court whose editor Paul Carus was the president of the American branch of the Maha Bodhi Society. The June 1896 article The Buddha Gaya Case saw the universalism, fluidity and individuality of Buddhist belief compromised in Dharmapala’s “endeavor to create a center of Buddhism in Buddha Gaya, that would be what Rome is to the Roman Catholics, Benares to Hindus, and Mecca to the Mahommedans.” Moreover, it was stressed: “Religion does not consist in keeping sacred certain days, or places, or relics, or in making pilgrimage to holy shrines" because “civilized mankind has outgrown the idea that there is any religious merit in

---


especially the latter argument which denounces pilgrimages as not “civilized” threatened the carefully constructed image of a civilized and civilizing Buddhism.

3.4 *The “Empire of Righteousness” from Ceylon to Hawaii*

3.4.1 *Pan-Asian Buddhism*

Pan-movements are a significant aspect of globalizing processes around 1900 as they imagined and constructed transnational communities beyond national boundaries. Pan-movements such as pan-Africanism, pan-Asianism, pan-Islam and pan-Slavism claimed an inner unity based on clearly defined characteristics and ideologies and within a definite geographical space. To a certain extent most pan-movements derived their unifying power from their inherent anti-Westernism. When the European civilizational dominance was questioned around the turn of the century, pan-movements as germ cells for new civilizational concepts constructed and promoted the universality of different religious traditions since “the older spiritual and religious ideals incorporated in a new conception of civilization continued to be a (n even more) potent source of moral authority.”

As one variety of such regionalisms, pan-Asianism and the concept of Asia provided the central pattern on which Anagarika Dharmapala moulded his Buddhist vision which he based on “older spiritual and religious ideals” as a “potent source of moral authority” namely the traditional connections within Asia based on Buddhist ideals. Though by far not the only initiative, Dharmapala’s pan-Asian Buddhist activities were instrumental in restructuring the “old Theravada Buddhist world”. Two measures were central to this project. On the one hand he built on and intensified the network of Buddhist pilgrimage and cultural exchange within the region. On the other hand, he initiated the widespread circulation of Buddhist publications and translations of seminal texts in order to encourage discursive activity and collaboration within Asia.

---


However, these pan-Asian activities were always closely associated with Dharmapala’s external “civilizing mission” in Europe and America for which he outstretched the “classical heartland of Theravada Buddhism” – Rangoon, Mandalay and Colombo to Calcutta, to Burma and Madras. His missions took him to India, Burma, Siam, Singapore, China, Japan, Hawaii, US, Britain, Germany. For the success of his latter missions Dharmapala was “relying on an influential current of romantic and pessimistic critiques of Western civilization in European and the United States, some representatives of which looked to Asia as a potential source of alternative civilization,”656 namely the Theosophical Society. As we have seen earlier, it was the quintessential meeting point for self-reflective and self-critical Westerners with anti-imperialist Asianists even before the turn of the century. Dharmapala’s acquaintance with the TS generally and particularly with its American founder Henry Steel Olcott informed him about the romanticist admiration for Asia’s supposed spiritual superiority and allowed him to ally with influential Western romanticists such as Sir Edwin Arnold.

At the World Parliament Dharmapala promulgated Asia’s supposed spiritual superiority in collaboration with other Asians whom he met personally for the first time and introduced him to Japanese and other versions of Asianist visions. His appearance at the parliament impressed further influential collaborators such as eminent publisher Paul Carus or Zen popularizer D. T. Suzuki.

In Calcutta, one of India’s most cosmopolitan port cities, Dharmapala mingled with the intellectual elite of the Bengali bhadralok and got acquainted with nationalist and cosmopolitan versions of Asianism through the Tagore and Hindu reformist circles.657 In the context of, and in competition with, Hindu religious revival movements such as the Brahmo Samaj or the Ramakrishna Mission, Dharmapala created an interest in the intellectual, cosmopolitan and scientific credentials of Buddhism in Bengal.

Indian visions of "'Asian civilization' as a spiritual 'Anti-Europe' and world redeemer, so widely spread in Hindu reformist circles, had very limited export

---


657 Rustom Bharucha, Another Asia, Oxford India paperbacks (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).
qualities.” Dharmapala, however, increased the “export qualities” of his Asianist vision considerably by founding it on modern Buddhism which he claimed to be universally applicable and immensely tolerant and peaceful. It would thus surpass the civilizing mission of the British Empire ailing from the paradox of the liberal promise of moral and material uplift that contradicts the violence and oppression employed by the empire in order to enforce these values.

Therefore, Dharmapala’s Asian civilization, although focusing on the unification of Asia under the banner of Buddhism and the revival of Buddhism in its “homeland” India, was indeed outlined as a universalizing entity. Duara argues that this universalizing tendency of civilization differentiates civilizational concepts from the other main “imagined community” evolving in the nineteenth century, the nation state, since "the gap between the territorial nation and civilization is not only territorial, but principled. Because the spiritual impulse of a civilization tends to be universalizing, national boundaries are ultimately artificial and limiting." His most important tool for integrating the different Asian nations under the umbrella of Buddhism was the Maha Bodhi Society as a “spiritual chain that will bind the Buddhist nations together” and “will make them members of one spiritual family.” While Dharmapala constructed the Maha Bodhi Society as the central institution for regional integration, he envisioned Bodhgaya as the “central head-quarters of four millions of Buddhists” and rhetorically asked: “If the Ministry of England from their Downing Street Foreign Office could govern nearly three hundred millions of people politically, why is it not possible for the Buddhists to have a central office at the spot so sacred to them?”


Dharmapala intended to foster discursive activity and enlightenment on modern Buddhism through the circulation of publications within the region. He therefore attempted to "start an International Record and Intelligence under the name of Maha Bodhi Patrika which would serve as the vehicle of communication between the central society and its branches all over the Buddhist world" so that the Maha Bodhi Society "would become the centre of the mightiest Buddhist Propaganda." As far as I could see, this magazine was never published but Dharmapala's *Maha Bodhi Journal* as well as publications such as *The Buddhist* had a far reaching circulation.

Apart from the circulation of Buddhist publications, the other means to encourage collaboration and integration within the Asian region had its historic predecessor in the inner-Asian pilgrimages of Buddhist monks. In order to revive and intensify these traditional networks Dharmapala initiated various opportunities for personal encounters such as a "pan-Buddhist Congress". In his most successful publication *The Maha Bodhi Journal* in October 1910 Dharmapala reminded his Asian co-religionists of the historical and spiritual unity of Buddhist Asia since “the whole of the Asiatic peoples” had for "full seventeen hundred years” worshipped “the Buddha's name.” When visiting Thailand he encouraged the Buddhist pilgrimage to the Indian Buddhist sites as well as an inner-Asian missionizing between Burma and India:

"To the devoted disciple of Buddha there is a rich field in India to sow the seeds of Buddha’s doctrine. Prince Damrong only the other day remarked that he understands and admires Buddhism better since he visit to India and he thought that every true Buddhist priest should visit that Holy Land of the Buddhists."

However, an assumed common religion of many Asian countries could not hide the fact that different Asian countries followed very different Buddhist traditions. Against the differing variations of Buddhism, Dharmapala stressed the universal character and adaptability of Buddhism by referring to the findings of the historian J.N. Farquhar according to whom Buddhism inculcates a "'world-embracing code of

---

663 Anagarika Dharmapala, "Burma," 827–8
664 Ibid., 824–5
ethics” which makes it particularly suitable “for a heterogenous people, there is no religion better than the divine teachings of the Tathagato. The humanitarianism of Buddhism appeals to the cultured intellect; its fundamental teachings are based on common-sense. Its adaptability is unique. Its teachings suit the nomadic tribes of Mongolia as well as the most advanced scientific men of Europe and America.”667 The phenomenal “adaptability” of Buddhism according to Dharmapala not only integrates wide-spread geographical areas but also appeals to educated and uneducated people alike. Dharmapala emphasized this “adaptability” when visiting Burma. He approached Burmese Buddhists by both flattering and linking them with Japan which "was converted to Buddhism about 1800 years ago, and as Japan got her civilization from Buddhism, Burma too had hers from the same noble source,”668 Dharmapala claimed. He explained that when Buddhism entered Burma it did not eradicate existing cults but integrated them:

"Burma had her nat worship before the advent of Buddhism, which in some modified form, is still kept up. The one peculiarity of Buddhism is its adaptability to other innocent forms of worship. Nat worship was innocent,"669

Nats are indigenous Burmese spirit deities which according to Historian Robert DeCaroli predated the expansion of Buddhism to Burma but survived in a refigured form in predominantly Buddhist present and shape the specificity of Burmese Buddhism.670 The same rhetoric applied to Japan. In 1908, E.R. Gooneratne, member of the international Pali Text Society quoted Lafcadio Hearn's treatise Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation (1904) claiming that "the religion of the Buddha brought to Japan another and a wider humanising influence - a new gospel of tenderness together with a multitude of new beliefs that were able to accommodate themselves to the old, in spite of fundamental dissimilarity. In the highest meaning of the term, it


669 Ibid., 637.

was a civilising power.” Here again, the “adaptability” of Buddhism to “accommodate” “new gospel” and old beliefs “in spite of fundamental dissimilarity” is emphasized as a central element of the “new gospel”.

For Dharmapala, the successful integration of pre-Buddhist practices with an assumed Buddhist superstructure in a first wave of Buddhist expansion to Southeast Asia prove the suitability of Buddhism to successfully master its reiterated transformation at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century phase of globalization. Dharmapala accordingly claimed that “Buddha appeared as the Saviour not only of India, but of the world. The teachings of their Avatars are territorial, not eclectic. Buddha alone opened wide the doors of immortality, and admitted the Aryans and non-Aryans alike.” The interpretation of modern Buddhism "that transcended any and all tradition-specific religions was an initial and crucial move in the entrance of Buddhism into discourses of modernity" but similarly “it also sets up a field of tensions between universality and particularity that persists today.”

The “peculiarity” of Buddhism, namely its phenomenal “adaptability” to not only pre-existing forms but also its ability to anticipate the latest developments makes it for Dharmapala “the religion of the future.” With the words of cosmopolitan author and Japan specialist Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) Dharmapala rhetorically asked: ”’Is not the tendency of all modern philosophy towards the acceptance of the ancient Indian teaching that the visible is but an emanation of the invisible? What are the heavens of all Christian fancies after all, but Nirvana? Finally, the efforts of Romances and Darwin and Vignole convince us of the inter-relation-the brotherhood of animals and of men anticipated by Gautama.’”

In short, he considered Buddhism universally adaptable and “portrayed Buddhism as a religion perfectly suited to the challenges of the modern age, combating the...”


672 Anagarika Dharmapala, “India and Japan,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 680), 651.

673 McMahan, The Making of Buddhist Modernism, 71.

674 Anagarika Dharmapala, “India and Japan,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 680), 653.
impressions of Buddhism as nihilistic, pessimistic, passive, ritualistic, and superstitious and promoting it as activist, optimistic and scientific.”

Dharmapala therefore claimed that "there is no other religion which offers at the same time a philosophy, religion and psychology as Buddhism." In short, Dharmapala considered that Buddhism entailed not only religious doctrines but "Wherever Buddhism went it created a civilization." Although based on, and inspired by, Buddhism, this civilization included much more than just the universal religion. As his contemporary, social scientist Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949) of the University of Calcutta in Secular and Social Strata in Buddhist Thought. The Secular Aspects of Pali Texts argued in a publication of the Maha Bodhi Pamphlet Series "the category, 'sacred books', has served to isolate both the Vedic and the Buddhist texts from contacts with the profane, i.e., secular, materialistic, economic and political studies. The one-sided approach or rather the segregation, has hindered the proper evaluation of Buddhist as of Vedic literature as an expression of culture." As an “expression of culture” or civilization Buddhism could on the contrary inspire all different spheres of life by centering “on the individual and his or her own salvation as well as altruistic social service.”

Dharmapala accordingly initiated projects concerned with issues of material progress such as technology, public health and economic development as well as issues of moral progress like education, women’s emancipation and fight against “social evils” such as alcohol during his temperance activities in Ceylon which were reflected in the Maha Bodhi Journal. Instead Dharmapala promoted charity and social welfare within this Buddhist Asianist ecumene. The perfect example for

675 McMahan, The Making of Buddhist Modernism, 95.

676 Anagarika Dharmapala, “The Spread of Buddhism,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 679), 329.

677 “A Pan Buddhistic Congress”: 413.

679 Sarkar, Secular and Social Strata in Buddhist Thought.

679 Ibid., 2.


Dharmapala (and many contemporaries) in achieving such a Buddhist civilization was Japan. For Dharmapala, Japan had mastered the difficult task of being true to traditional values and pragmatically adopt any technology, scientific development or exploration that would help.

3.4.2 Japan: the Buddhist Civilization Role Model

For Dharmapala, as for contemporaries from the Ottoman Empire or Egypt, Japan was the ideal example to illustrate his thesis of material and moral improvement through Buddhism and he referred to academic authorities in the field of Japan studies such as Lafcadios Hearn (1850-1904) or Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) to prove his thesis.

Although these articles were most certainly not authored by Dharmapala, they appeared in the Maha Bodhi Journal and thus reflect Dharmapala’s views. The article *What Buddhism has done for Japan* quoted Hearn’s late publication *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (1904). The article explained that “the Japanese, one of the foremost nations of the present day, owe their success chiefly to Buddhism.” The same author added a phenomenally specific list of Japanese civilizational benefits from Buddhism:

"Architecture, painting, sculpture, engraving, printing, gardening- these and various other arts and industries developed in Japan under Buddhist teaching. Buddhism also introduced drama, poetical composition, fiction and philosophy."

Although the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 contradicted the claim to an inherent quality of “tenderness”, the event aroused significantly Asianist sentiments since an Asian power had for the first time defeated a European state. Dharmapala’s most reliable collaborator in Calcutta, theosophist Norendranath Sen reflected the impact of the Japanese war:

---


684 Ibid., 182.

The attention of the West was forcibly drawn to Buddhism when Japan gave a crushing blow to Russia. Buddhism is the foundation of Japan's rise as a world power, and her national strength and her great vitality may be distinctly traced to that source. (...) Their devotion, self-sacrifice and patriotism extorted the admiration of the whole world. Well, gentlemen, it is Buddhism, the early religion of Japanese, that has moulded the strong national character of the race. If we examine minutely the secret springs of Japan's rapid rise, we will find that it is Buddhism on which the foundation of her early civilisation was laid. 686

Like other contemporaries, Dharmapala travelled several times to Japan in order to unravel the secrets for Japan's success 687 and to develop close bonds with Japanese Buddhists. In 1889, even before founding the Maha Bodhi Society, he accompanied Henry Steel Olcott to the island for the first time where they spent more than three months. In 1893, on his way back from the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Dharmapala stopped in Japan for a short lecture tour. His third visit in 1903 en route to the United States was a very brief one. But in 1913 he made an extended visit to Japan where he was under intensive surveillance by the Japanese Government at the instruction of the British Government. 688 The British ambassador to Japan, Sir Claude Macdonald, described Dharmapala as a "mischief making rascal" and "pestilential." 689 Dharmapala missed out on Otani Kozui (1875-1948), the head of the Nishi Honganji sect, in Kobe, whom he had met on the 10th January 1913 at the Japanese consulate in Calcutta to discuss future Buddhist propaganda. On that occasion "Count Otani" had made "it very clear that the Japanese Buddhists have no idea of Indian Buddhism, and there is very little hope of the Japanese ever helping the Indian propaganda. The first thing to be done is to educate the Japanese Buddhists about India, for the majority of them believe that India is in heaven." 690


689 Ibid., 196.

In 1913, Dharmapala intensified the bonds with Japanese Buddhist scholars such as Takakusu Junjiro (1866-1945), an eminent Buddhologist who had studied Indology under Max Müller, and Nanjo Fumio (1848-1927) who had similarly studied with Max Müller and Buddhist clerics such as Shaku Soen (1859-1919) a Rinzai priest he had met at the World Parliament of Religions, Shaku Kozen (1849-1924), a Shingon priest, co-founder of the Maha Bodhi Society, who knew Sanskrit, and Tachibana Shundo (1877-1955) who had studied Pali and Sanskrit in Ceylon for five years. Dharmapala was often called by newspaper reporters in 1913. Through his relationship with the popular Asianist thinker Okawa Shumei (1886-1957) he published various articles in the latter's journal *Michi* on Indian nationalism and a critique of "white supremacist" ideology that denied the equality of non-white races.

When Dharmapala visited Japan in 1913 he could rely on a well-established exchange of both personnel and ideas between Ceylon and Japan initiated by Japanese Buddhist monks such as Shaku Soen, Shaku Kozen or Tachibana Shundo who had come to Ceylon and India in order to study “pure” Buddhism at the source. In his frequent subsequent visits from 1889 onwards, Henry Steel Olcott was accompanied by Dharmapala. However, Buddhism in nineteenth century Ceylon was undergoing radical transformation due to a context of Christian missionary activity, British colonial domination and an attempt by Ceylonese reformers such as Dharmapala or his close associate high priest Hikkaduve Sumangala (1826-1911) with whom Soen was in close contact.

Still their early travels to Buddhist sites in India and Ceylon in the 1880s and 1890s “increased awareness of other forms of Asian Buddhism and marked the start of growing Buddhist cooperation within the region.” Moreover, the pioneering travels and intense interactions of these Japanese Buddhist clerics with their South Asian counterparts helped to reconfigure modern Japanese Buddhism. Prasenjit Duara

---


694 Ibid., 68.
acknowledges the outstanding contribution of "Sri Lankans and Japanese Buddhist thinkers" that "have remained in the forefront of contributions to contemporary Buddhist thought." While Japan provided the perfect example for the "civilizing influence" of Buddhism, Dharmapala found India the perfect example of its failure: "A thousand years with Buddhism, Japan has become one of the greatest world-powers. A thousand years with Brahmanism and without Buddhism, India is in the lowest condition of degeneracy."

This sharp contrast between the "civilizational status" of India and Japan led Dharmapala to assume that hitherto "not from the monasteries of Nalanda, Buddha Gaya, Benares, not from the Himalyan ashrams, but from the land of the Rising Sun should Buddhism disseminate into the world." Although Dharmapala supported the recognition of Buddhist roots in India, he considered Japan the modern center of Buddhism which demonstrated the successful synthesis of intelligently selected useful aspects of Western civilization such as industrial development and the firm rootedness in religious heritage.

While the secret of Japanese progress was commonly attributed to an ensemble of favorable political, industrial and educational developments Dharmapala's allies from The Indian Mirror in Calcutta and particularly Norendranath Sen, president of the Bengal theosophical lodge, emphasized its educational system which should immediately be imported to India as the central source of the Japanese success. Dharmapala primarily called on the Japanese to perform their duty through both educational collaboration and the raising of funds in order to fulfill his "ardent desire to get one or two experts from Japan to teach the children" on behalf of their historical debt towards India. He warned:

The Buddhists of Asia have a duty to perform to the suffering people of India. The noble ancestors of the present degenerate people of India gave to the


696 Anagarika Dharmapala, “India and Japan,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 680), 652.

697 Ibid., 653.


ancestors of the modern Buddhists the religion of the Tathagata. Should not the present Buddhists show their gratitude to the people of India by showing them the path of progress? We sincerely hope that the Buddhists of Japan will organise a movement to give the children of India the blessings of education that have made Japan great. The glorious doctrine of activity, the foundation of Buddhism, is to be seen in its perfect form in Japan.  

3.4.3 Education as the Quintessential “Civilizing Mission”

Jana Tschurenev argued recently that educational activities in early nineteenth century India had become a central aspect of a “non-governmental civilizing mission” pursued by a range of “voluntary associations, or, as they would be called now, non-governmental organizations.” Education was considered a “pillar of the national efficiency movement” which included a wide range of educational projects in colonial India such as the Gurukul Kangri or the Benares Hindu University. Dharmapala’s nomination of education as the central means of his civilizing mission which he equally expressed in the objects of the Maha Bodhi Society arose in this context at the beginning of the twentieth century. Out of 8 objects of The Maha Bodhi Society, the “Premier International Buddhist Association”, five address educational matters:

“To educate the illiterate people by opening schools in villages”
“To found the nucleus of a Buddhist University of Sarnath Isipatana”
“To introduce Pali scholarships and to send students to Buddhist countries and to Europe and America”
“To found a Buddhist International Library and Museum with a fully equipped Press to print Texts and pamphlets and to start journals”

Similarly, the Maha Bodhi Society’s main object is “to make known to all nations the sublime teachings of the Arya Dharma of the BUDDHA SAKYA MUNI”.

As in other spheres, Japanese education became a role model for his educational enterprises. In 1903-1904, Dharmapala inspected modern educational “trade schools,  

---


the commercial schools, the technological schools, the orphanages where orphans are taught different arts and crafts” in Japan and the United States and after his return to Calcutta in 1904 he was reported to have been enthusiastic about what he had seen:

"He gave a delightfully charming picture of the cheerfully joyous people and children of Japan, where men, women and children live such sober, cleanly, artistic, refined, polite life, of their daily activity and progressive ways, of the schools where children from five years of age are taught to be patriotic, useful, cleanly, active and fearless." 

He was impressed not only by Japan’s progressive system of formal education but also by the “moral training imparted to the children by their mothers” since every “child was taught from the fourth year of its life never to fear any body, never to be angry, never to be impatient.” In reflecting the values of the nationalistic civilizing mission, Dharmapala considered this the reason “why they dared to fight Russia, why they had been showing so much strength and courage in face of the great crisis.” 

Japan’s victory in its fight against Russia in the Russo-Japanese war led to a rise in pan-Asianist feelings only a year later in 1905 and promoted the image of Japan as some sort of a wonderland in which people "never spent a minute in sleeping" and children are “all taught to take great care of physical culture, and to pay proper attention to manly exercises and body-building.” Therefore Japanese are “all hardy and strong, and to a Japanese it was nothing to walk 40 miles a day.” At the beginning of the twentieth century the discourse on physical training for national recreation was very widespread including both metropole and colony. In short, Japanese were

703 Reprint from The Indian Mirror, “A Short Resume of Mr. Dharmapala’s Lecture in Calcutta,” The Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World (March, April, 1904): 121.

704 Ibid., 121.


706 Ibid., 2.

707 Ibid., 2.

portrayed as perfectly civilized and especially the Japanese educational system not only for Dharmapala became a role model for educational efforts in colonial India. Following the inner logic of his civilizing mission, Dharmapala ascribed this success to Buddhism as the "religion of the country is Buddhism, and the activity of the people is due to Buddhism, which went from India." His intensified propaganda for educational collaboration and fundraising within Asia was unsuccessful since: "No Sinhalese Buddhist came forward to help me in my single-handed efforts. No Burmese, no Siamese, no Japanese, no Chinese, no Tibetan came forward to co-operate with me," complained Dharmapala. On the contrary Dharmapala’s fundraising efforts revealed the wide range of differing agendas in the region and his failure to centralize them. Therefore, he complained that "Japanese Buddhists were suspicious", the "Siamese said that charity begins at home" and though the "Burmese Buddhists started well" and also the "late illustrious King of Siam was quite sympathetic with the aspirations of the Maha Bodhi Society" all of them eventually declined. “But from distant Honolulu help came from Mrs. Mary Foster.”

Dharmapala met Mrs. Foster from Honolulu on the 18th October 1893 on his way back from the World Parliament of Religions on board of the S.S. Oceanic at Honolulu harbor. She was so impressed with young Dharmapala that she from then on regularly donated small sums to the movement and kept herself updated by subscribing to the Maha Bodhi Journal. Without Foster’s generous financial aid Dharmapala’s mission would have come to an end in the first decade of the 21st century. She donated generously not only for the agricultural school at Benares but

710 Reprint from The Indian Mirror, "A Short Resume of Mr. Dharmapala's Lecture in Calcutta": 121.
714 Ibid., 1.
also for various buildings of the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta and London as well as the Foster Memorial Hospital in Colombo. It was therefore not exaggerated when Dharmapala in an editorial in March 1922 in the *Maha Bodhi Journal* wrote: "When the future historian begins to write about the revival of Buddhism in India he will record the name of Mrs. Foster as the principal benefactress who helped the movement by her wonderful beneficence."\(^{715}\)

Dharmapala activated this long existing though loose bond primarily for his educational projects in Los Angeles in August 1902, when he thought to “found a movement to help the illiterate children of the neglected people of Northern India, and to found and agricultural school at Sarnath, Benares.” Therefore, he wrote to Mary T. Foster about the project and in reply “got a letter from her dated October 16, 1902, enclosing a cheque for 500 dollars. The Foster Industrial School Fund was forthwith started.”\(^{716}\)

Who was Mary T. Foster (1844-1930) and why did she donate to the MBS? Once more, Dharmapala’s theosophical connection allowed him to approach an eminently important figure for his movement as Mary Foster was one of the most distinguished members of the theosophical movement on the island. Her inheritance from her father and husband allowed her to make generous donations. Theosophy appealed to Mary Foster who was herself of British and Hawaiian descent as it helped to mediate between Asian, Pacific and Western influences. Conflicts between indigenous culture and the fear of Asian or European immigration were reflected in her own family but made her particularly open to the eclecticism of theosophy which particularly strengthened the self-respect of the large Asian community. Especially the large Japanese Buddhist immigrant community benefitted from Henry Steel Olcott’s visit in February 1901 at which he lectured at the Buddhist Honpa Hongwanji Temple to 400 Japanese and others.\(^{717}\) Reformed Buddhism as propagated by theosophists

\(^{715}\) Editorial, "Mrs. T. Foster of Honolulu": 108.


encouraged that "elite members of Hawaii’s hierarchy met and fraternized with Japanese immigrants in Honolulu’s first Buddhist temple. Without the right to vote or become citizens, denied a religious charter by the government, and subject to numerous other humiliating restrictions, the Japanese community began the new century with an alternative vision: honor, respect, and encouragement for their religion and culture.”

Moreover, the shared interest in Buddhism not only helped (at least for a short period) to harmonize the situation on location but also became a means for Japanese immigrants to both link with the Japanese homeland as well as share a Buddhist identity with others in the Buddhist Pan-Asian ecumene. Mary Foster became one of the first white Buddhists of Hawaii and did not only support the Buddhist revival in Ceylon and India but also in Hawaii through her fundraising for the first ever Japanese Buddhist temple in Hawaii in 1899, the Jodo Shinshu temple and her constant support to the Honpa Hongwanji Mission on the island which served as a locus for the Buddhist Jodo Shinshu sect an outcome of economical globalizing processes as it was exclusively shaped for Japanese immigrants working on sugar plantations on Hawaii. Like scriptures in the Buddhist Ajanta and Ellora caves in India, The Maha Bodhi Journal gave detailed report of Foster’s donations to the movement and thus figured the spiritual merits gained:

The work of the society would have come to an end but for the help of this gracious lady. She contributed over Rs. 60,000 to build the Sri Dharma rajika vihara; paid Rs. 15,000 to purchase the property which is now the office of the Maha Bodhi Society, located at Baniakpur Lane, Calcutta, and the crowning work that she did for the maintenance of the Maha Bodhi Society was to present U.S.A. Victory Bonds worth 50,000 American Dollars. The future of the Maha Bodhi work in India is thereby assured.

He also wrote: “We received not a penny from Japan or Siam or Burma for the building of the Dharmarajika Vihara. My late brother Dr. C. A. Hewavitarne and his

---

718 Frank J. Karpiel, ”Theosophy, Culture, and Politics in Honolulu, 1890-1920”, 188–9.


720 Ibid., 242.

721 Editorial, “Mrs. T. Foster of Honolulu”: 112.
friend Mr. N.D.S. Silva sent a handsome donation of four thousand rupees for the building Fund. The Maharaja of Baroda and Mr. G.D. Birla contributed Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 5,000 respectively and Mrs. Mary Foster contributed Rs. 63,123 and the beautiful Dharmarajika Chaitya Vihara was the result.” 722 G.D. Birla, one of the most prominent Indian industrialists, was also one of the main financial supporters of M.K. Gandhi’s political work in India.

Equipped with sufficient financial means and the conviction that there “are two countries on this earth that look to the interests of children- Japan and the United States” and “one country on this earth that neglects her children- India,”723 Dharmapala toured the United States and Japan to study reformist educational institutions on location inspiring him to “uplift” the “neglected” Indian children.

In 1903/1904 he extensively toured the United States thinking “how much could be done for humanity by giving Sudra boys and girls, children of the masses, the sort of industrial, non-sectarian training received by pupils at your Tuskegee and Carlisle Schools.” 724 While Tuskegee was the foremost educational initiative for black Americans initiated by the former slave Booker T. Washington (186-1915), Carlisle was the most distinguished educational institute for Native Americans. However, the fortunes of Carlisle and Tuskegee were closely linked with Hampton institute which was founded in 1868 by Samuel Chapman Armstrong since it was the alma mater of Booker T. Washington “who popularized the educational philosophy he learnt at Hampton.” 725 Thus both institutions “developed a pattern of schooling rooted in a general view of what was needed to convert” 726 Indians and Black Americans into


726 Ibid., 327.
American citizens. The founder of the Carlisle institute for Indians “adopted as the Carlisle slogan, 'To civilize the Indian, place him in the midst of civilization; to keep him civilized make him stay,' and worked against everything that marked out the Indian as different or separate.”

Carlisle was a pioneer of the new manual and industrial training which was an eminent aspect of the education of Indians. Dharmapala adopted this dual strategy for his Indo-American Industrial Propaganda since he considered manual training in practical skills such as "clay modelling, weaving of carpets, cooking, physical culture, proper breathing, gardening, drawing, carpentry, forging and other arts and crafts" part of his vision of how to enable Indian low caste children to become financially independent. Moreover, manual training would help the backward Indian children to become civilized like American and Japanese citizens.

Dharmapala visited not only Carlisle and Tuskegee but also the Bahai Greenacre School in Boston, Tuskegee, however, impressed him most as he reported:

To give a pen-picture of the magnificent educational institutions that I have seen in San Francisco, Healdsburg, Chicago, Tuskegee, and other places is simply impossible. To see these institutions is a blessing. The more I see them the more I am convinced of our backward condition. Just think of the philanthropic nature of these good American people, that they have given Booker Washington, the Negro educationalist, over a million dollars for his school. (...) Booker Washington, born in slavery, is to-day showing his marvelous power of individuality by the phenomenal work he has done.

In his correspondence with Booker T. Washington, Dharmapala showed his familiarity with the rival positions of Washington and the other popular figure in the Black American emancipation movement, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) when referring to The Soul of Black Folk (1903) that appeared in the year of Dharmapala’s visit: "I am going to have my first experience with you people. I hope it will be pleasant. I see Prof Du Bois in his Souls of the Black People takes a different view

---


729 Reprint from The Indian Mirror, “A Short Resume of Mr. Dharmapala’s Lecture in Calcutta”: 122.

729 Reprint from Boston Daily Advertisement, “Industrial Training for India’s Million Children”: 61.

from yours. On the whole it is healthy that two parties are at work on two different lines; and there is no energy lost." 731 After an experience he "shall never forget" 732 at Tuskegee, Dharmapala even invited Washington "in the name of 50 millions of neglected children of illiterate, destitute and starving parents to visit India, if possible next year and bring them the joyful message that there is hope through a life of education and training in the arts and crafts." 733 Washington, however, declined. Dharmapala compared Indian illiterate and poor children with Native and Black American children, and also compared Indian Brahmins with white landowners in the American South:

The Southern States of America are inhabited by an idle race of white people who made the slave to worked, and they remained inactive. They were the white Babus who skinned the nigger, and the saying is 'the white man skinned the nigger and the nigger skinned the land.' The whites of the Black Belt are like the Brahmins of India, treating the blacks as the latter treat the so-called low-caste people in South India. 734

While in Boston in summer 1903 Dharmapala stayed with the political activist Edward Atkinson (1827-1905), a founder of the Anti-Imperialist League, and a "friend of the American Negro" 735 who after he had "learnt about the life of Buddha from the Anagarika expressed his sympathy with the Buddhist view of life declaring at the same time that he had remained so long a Buddhist without knowing it." 736 Accordingly, Dharmapala was reported by the Boston Daily Advertisement: "'I am still doing the work of Buddha,' he explained by way of introduction. 'He taught evolution and emphasized the importance of rising above our fathers. But it is the law of Confucius and Brahma that a son should never leave the path of his father. That law


733 Ibid.

734 Dharmapala, "Our American Letter": 86.


736 Ibid., 16.
prevails in India and is responsible for her starving millions.” 737 By blaming “caste distinctions” as “an element of conservatism which checks all progress, even intellectual,” for India’s738 supposedly low civilizational status, Dharmapala emphasized his belief in a factual relation between religious denomination and civilizational status. He thus confirmed his belief in a civilizing mission as a spiritualizing mission. However, as he had argued, he did not intend to “convert” “but to bring some knowledge of a religion that for more than two thousand years, has quickened the peoples of Asia to higher achievements in ethics, industry and art.”739 Modern Buddhism merged into the global mainstream and an episode of Dharmapala’s visit in Boston in 1903 reflects the position of modern Buddhism at the intersection of philosophy, psychology, science and religion:

When I was in Boston in December, 1903, I visited William James's class at Harvard University. I tried unobtrusively to reach the back of the lecture-hall, to hear the great teacher of psychology, but it is difficult for a man in a yellow robe to be inconspicuous in America. Professor James saw me and motioned for me to come to the front of the hall. He said: 'Take my chair, and I shall sit with my students. You are better equipped to lecture on psychology than I am.' After I had outlined to his advanced class some elements of Buddhist doctrine, he turned to his students and said, 'This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now.'740

How did Dharmapala happen to attend the university class of the eminent American psychologist and philosopher? Was there a common ground on which they could meet at Boston?

Both Dharmapala and William James741 were members of the same globally operating network of utopians that successfully brought people such as Alexandra David-Neel, Paul Carus, D.T. Suzuki, Mary Foster, Henry Steel Olcott and Anagarika Dharmapala together in an effort to modernize Buddhism. Studies on modern

737 Reprint from Boston Daily Advertisement, “Industrial Training for India's Million Children”: 61.

738 Ibid., 62.

739 Anagarika Dharmapala, “Memoirs of an Interpreter of Buddhism to the Present-Day World,” in Return to Righteousness (see note 582), 681.

740 Ibid.

741 William James (1842-1910) is registered as a member of the American Theosophical Society, June 25th 1891.
Buddhism tend to marginalize the theosophical connection of all these thinkers and the recent studies on William James would have benefitted from recognizing his connection with the TS as they would help to understand his thinking and particularly his analysis of religious feelings most prominently analyzed in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) that appeared only briefly before Dharmapala visited him at Harvard.742

Inspired by his American and Japanese travels, Dharmapala returned to India in 1904 having “purchased the necessary agricultural implements from Montgomery Ward & Co., Chicago, and had them dispatched to Calcutta” were the “agricultural school was established at Sarnath in June 1904 under the guidance of an American agricultural instructor selected by the Boston Committee.”743 The *The Maha Bodhi Journal* as well as the pages of *The Indian Mirror* are filled with appeals to support the Manual and Agricultural Training school whose syllabus included “teaching arts and crafts, modern agriculture, dayring, fruit-canning, cattle breeding, bee-keeping, weaving, illuminating, wood-carving, cabinet-making, metal work, electro plating, enameling, printing, soap-making, umbrella-making, shoe-making, clay-modeling, practical use of electricity, agricultural chemistry” and for which Dharmapala had “secured the services of a young Englishman- Mr. C.H. Viggars-who will teach agriculture” and expected “to secure competent teachers from Germany, Denmark, Italy, America and Japan for the other departments.”744

On location in Benares his former theosophical allies and most prominently the notorious Annie Besant, president of the Theosophical Society, competed with him since Besant education was the "chosen means of achieving a brotherhood" 745 which

742 Neither Christoph Seibert, „Religion im Denken von William James: eine Interpretation seiner Philosophie“ (2009), nor Francesca Bordogna in "William James at the Boundaries. Philosophy, Science, and the Geography of Knowledge", recognize James theosophical affiliation as a source of inspiration and personal contacts. Bordogna, however, discusses his presidentship of the Society for Psychical Research as an important inspiration for his interdisciplinary approach to knowledge production.


she applied most prominently in the Central Hindu College at Benares. Dharmapala complained that the “school met with a lot of opposition from the orthodox Theosophists of Benares” but though the “technical side of the school collapsed” he made sure that “the vernacular branch kept up, and it is still going on, and there is every hope that a College will be started shortly.”

**Concluding Remarks**

Next to a group of Asianists such as Okakura Tenshin or Rabindranath Tagore, Anagarika Dharmapala promoted an Asian regionalism in opposition to the existing world order. Although Dharmapala’s vision of world order shared the same anti-colonial horizon as well as aspiration to surpass “Eurocentric globalization” with these apologists, his assumption of a spiritual fundament set him apart from these rather political visions.

As a member of the Theosophical Society under the tutelage of its first president Henry Steel Olcott, Dharmapala already promoted a reformed Buddhism as the spiritual basis for a new civilization. “Civilization” became the key concept for Dharmapala to emphasize the value of Buddhism which had a twofold advantage over the existing world order: Contrary to the colonial system, it would not be based on violence and, in opposition to Christianity, Buddhism was not opposed to the latest scientific findings.

Dharmapala, like many contemporaries, eulogized Japan as an example for the successful integration of selected elements of modern scientific and technological findings with a lively Buddhist heritage. Especially in India, Dharmapala contrasted the high civilizational status of Japan with the deplorable condition of the Indian civilization – and attributed it to the loss of Buddhism in India. In order to contrast the present condition of India with a Golden past and emphasize the potential of a Buddhist civilization, Dharmapala evoked the reign of the Buddhist King Asoka.

---


By adopting the “civilizing mission ideology”, the core legitimizing discourse of colonial states, Dharmapala aimed to compete with “Eurocentric globalization” and orthodox Christianity on equal terms, or rather surpass them through a combined “internal” civilizing mission targeting Asian Buddhists with an “external” civilizing mission catering to a Euro-American audience.

The analysis of Dharmapala's appearance at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago as a the president of his newly found Maha Bodhi Society, his debates with cosmopolitan intellectuals of Bengal and his relentless fight for the creation of Bodh Gaya as the “Buddhist Jerusalem” has demonstrated how Dharmapala aimed at integrating particular elements of Buddhist tradition with a superstructure of a Buddhist “world religion”. Accordingly, Dharmapala rendered “sacred knowledge” an individualized, rationalized, tolerant, and abstract interpretation of Buddhism. This interpretation was as much indebted to Steel Olcott’s revivalist efforts, variously described as “protestant Buddhism” as it relied on a global network of Buddhist theosophists such as Mary Foster of Honolulu, Alexandra David-Neel, or D. T. Suzuki. I concluded that Dharmapala’s engagement combined the rise of “Eastern spiritualities” and the consolidation of “world religions” as two major trends in the global religious field around 1900.

Although Dharmapala’s vision of an alternative Buddhist world order was not fulfilled, he was preeminent in introducing “new Buddhism” to Euro-America and initiating a Buddhist revival in the Asian region that produced lasting, though often problematic, effects on the self-perception of Buddhists.

748 Prothero, “Henry Steel Olcott and "Protestant Buddhism"”.


751 Dharmapala is often considered responsible for the rise of Sinhalese chauvinism on the island, see for example: Rösel, Die Gestalt und Entstehung des Singhalesischen Nationalismus, 279.
4 De-Localization of “Sacred Knowledge”: Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

4.1 Introduction

Around 1900 the world became a point of reference and a space of negotiation. Elite circles in particular began to perceive the globe as one interdependent system and increasingly searched for possibilities to evaluate the implications of this paradigmatic shift not only in economic or political but also in religious terms.

With the Order of the Star in the East, a body founded in 1912 exclusively to propagate the expected coming of the messiah of the age, the Theosophical Society produced a global organization that encompassed and intensified its original concern to deal with the spiritual implications of an integrating world. It combined first a messianic cult based on a fatalistic perspective of contemporary society with second the search for worldwide solidarity based on a tolerant spiritual concept and comparative religious studies and finally, the attempt to harness the increased competition between different religious systems as well as nations through sympathetic comparison. The Theosophical Society was seeking a way that would allow people to deal with the confusing reality of a growing interconnectivity and similarly to express their quest for spiritual meaning. In other words, the Theosophical Society was looking for a global religion and thought it had found it in the unifying figure of a global world teacher by reinvigorating the traditional messianic concept of semitic creeds such as Islam or Christianity. The German historian Jürgen Osterhammel considers the almost simultaneous appearance of messianic cults such as the latter-day-saints or Mormons of the United States, the Mahdi-movement in Sudan (1881-1890) or the Bab movement in Iran under Mirza Husain Ali Nuri which ultimately formed the modern Bahai-Religion as part of a wider global attempt for reformation of the religious field.752 British historian Christopher Bayly considers the “self-consciously global” “idea of the 'coming teacher’” a “clearly post-Christian” “vision of universal human spirituality.” 753

752 Osterhammel, Die Verwandlung der Welt, 1270–1.

The Theosophical Society will only be analyzed in as much as it provided him with an internationally renowned platform. If we understand the term platform in a broader sense, this also includes the public persona of Krishnamurti himself, who was the charismatic centre of the new cult (in the Weberian sense). His dissolution of the Order of the Star in the East consequently led to a dramatic decline of membership. By focusing on Krishnamurti, however, I do not intend to write another affirmative biography such as the numerous accounts of Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti’s close associate and authorized biographer.\textsuperscript{754} Her accounts are primarily based on her mother, Emily Lutyens as well as on Krishnamurti’s lifelong correspondence. The most useful biography for my study was Roland Vernon’s \textit{Star in the East: The Invention of a Messiah} since he also focuses on Krishnamurti’s early phase and uses correspondence as his main source.\textsuperscript{755} Other than that, Krishnamurti has not been analyzed as a historically important character yet.

This chapter is based on a wide array of primary sources collected in the Krishnamurti Foundation in Ojai/California, from the private Joseph Ross collection in Ojai and from the Rajagopal Collection at the Huntington Library in San Marino/Los Angeles. It is a first attempt to analyze Krishnamurti from a historical perspective. Moreover, I used Krishnamurti’s published works which appeared in numerous journals such as the \textit{International Star Bulletin}, \textit{The Herald of the Star} or \textit{The Star}. Only through the encouragement of his close friend Aldous Huxley did Krishnamurti turn to writing in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{756} Prior to this all his speeches, lectures, and interviews were typewritten by short-hand stenographers and later rendered into print.\textsuperscript{757} Most of these transcripts have been scanned by the KFA. Although all of them have exact numbers and dates they unfortunately do not bear the original page numbers. Sometimes these scanned transcripts are early versions of volumes that were published later on but more often than not, these oral messages

\textsuperscript{754} Mary Lutyens, \textit{The Life and Death of Krishnamurti} (London: Murray, 1990), Mary Lutyens, \textit{Krishnamurti: The years of awakening}, 1st Shambala ed. (Boston Mass.: Shambhala Publications, 1997).


\textsuperscript{756} Ibid., 207.

\textsuperscript{757} Ibid., 176.
remained manuscripts especially since they are of a period (between 1913-1930) in which neither the KFA nor the TS considered those contributions relevant to their respective ideology. I have structured the chapter broadly chronologically and arranged it into three parts:

The first section *The Messianic Cult in the OSE* will primarily analyze the claims to global significance and authority made from within the Theosophical milieu. Therefore, visual and textual manifestations of sacred knowledge both modern, such as the celebrity cult, and traditional, such as asceticism, are studied. “sacred knowledge” was not only visibly displayed in the OSE through Krishnamurti’s body and prestigious architecture but also expressed in a knowledge formation surrounding an exclusive cult. The integrative element was thus located within an organisation, based on a specific knowledge formation and a charismatic figure.

The second part studies Krishnamurti’s increasingly independent engagement during the interwar period. He claimed authority as a world teacher by reflecting on the global concern for further integration in a pedagogical mode thus making knowledge transmission the explicit centre of his activities in the Order of the Star, diplomatic interventions, reformist education and the handling of both the container of nationalism (in his case India) and the new ideal of internationalism. The integrative is an enlightenment belief in the perfectibility of human beings both in the small structure of education and on the large scale of the nation state.

The third sub-chapter is organized around Krishnamurti’s famous speech in 1929 in which he declared his dissociation from the Order of the Star in the East. It analyzes his approach to “sacred knowledge” beyond binaries such as higher/lower, inside/outside, sacred/profane knowledge by questioning his own authority. The integrative forces are located in the annual open-air camps of the OSE as “heterotopias”758 and “sacred knowledge” is not transmitted in the pedagogical mode of a classical master-disciple relationship but in a dialogical form which requires clear individual positioning.

---

4.2 The Messianic Cult in the Order of the Star in the East

The Order of the Star in the East was founded in 1911 in Benares by George Arundale (1878-1945) in the context of the Central Hindu College (later the Benares Hindu University) exclusively to propagate the expected coming of the messiah. With this order the Theosophical Society produced a global organization that intensified its original goal to deal with the spiritual implications of an integrating world: a messianic cult based on a defeatist perspective of contemporary society, the search for worldwide solidarity based on a tolerant spiritual concept as well as comparative religious studies and finally the attempt to harness the increased competition between different religious systems as well as nations. The efforts of both Annie Besant and her closest associate, the notorious Charles W. Leadbeater (1847-1934) to publicize the coming world teacher were linked to a traditional messianic belief that is part of many religious traditions as Professor Pavri in his propaganda pamphlet *The Coming World Teacher in Question and Answer* put it:

Hinduism prophesies the coming of Lord Maitreya; Buddhism foretells the advent of the "Teacher of gods and men", the Bodhisattva Maitreya; Zoroastrians look for the coming of Him whom they call the Soshyiant, while the Jews expect the Messiah, and the Christians the Christ. The Javanese wait for "Sri Tunjung Seta" or the "Holy White Lotus," and the Muhammandans speak of the coming of another prophet of God- Imam Mahdi-while even the Red Indians in South America are anxiously looking for "Quetzal-coatl", the Great White Teacher, who shall come from over the sea. Thus truly is He the "Desire of all nations" that are longing for His Presence and anxiously awaiting His Coming down again to the earth that needs.

Connecting the coming world teacher with an old and widespread tradition of spiritual teachers targeted the largest possible audience: all spiritually inclined people in the world. It was the most important legitimization of this lofty claim. Since the credibility of the Theosophical elite, namely Besant’s and Leadbeater’s was ailing, however, the enterprise became a matter of vivid public debate from the outset. Thus the Theosophical elite searched for other, more objective signs that would buttress their claims and resorted to the theme of a historic turning point emerging from a

---

759 Renold, A Hindu Education.

desperate situation, in which people realize the “need” for a world savior. Annie Besant invoked this age-old hope when characterizing the new messiah:

> When I see the misery around I believe there will be a Helper. When I see the discord, the helplessness and the despair of the world, I think it is a sign of the coming of the Appointed Helper, the Messenger of Peace to this troubled world. However sad the outlook, to me there is the Light Beyond. However miserable the state of man I know that the Friend of all Men will soon be amongst us. There may be men, and women, and children dying in agony: He will come to make such suffering impossible in the future.\(^\text{761}\)

Thus theosophists integrated another important element of the traditional messianic belief: the historical turning point, the devastation that is believed to precede “the (second) Coming”. In this context the global catastrophe of World War I was taken as the most obvious sign for the pending arrival of a world-savior and similarly interpreted as a necessary preparatory step:

> What was the reason for the last Great War and why should it have occurred just before His coming? (...) The last Great War was one of the recurring conflicts between the Powers of Good and Evil that always take place before the arising of some great world-crisis like a new age, a new race or a new sub-race. (...) Hence this terrible war which convulsed the world was only part of the world-preparation for the coming of the World-Teacher and an inevitable forerunner of that coming. (...) Moreover, though war is an awful thing, it has done enormous good to individuals, as it lifted thousands of people out of selfishness into the loftiest altruism and has, at one stroke, raised them more than a score of lives under ordinary circumstances would have done. (...) Though the so-called Great War has now ended, there are still wars going on between Capital and Labour, between men and women, between the coloured and the white peoples. Sore and bitter is the travail of the world ere the New Age can be born, but into a new changed world, war-worn and exhausted, weary but purified with the war-lust purged from the nations, the Lord shall come, bringing new Life and Light to the darkened earth. All civilisation is being shaken in order to make men’s consciousness acutely sensitive, so that when the Prince of Peace comes to the world to put all civilisation and all men on a true foundation, they will listen to His teaching of Brotherhood and Co-operation, and there will then be war no longer.\(^\text{762}\)

\(^\text{761}\) Annie Besant, ed., *Why we believe in the Coming of a World-Teacher* (Adyar, 1924), 22.

Not only the “many earthquakes there have been lately”\textsuperscript{763} but also the supposed appearance of a new human type, the ”American type” that according to Annie Besant has been identified by American anthropologists by “composite photography”\textsuperscript{764} were interpreted as signs for “His” coming. Modern scientific disciplines and practices such as anthropology or photography were utilized to identify the historic moment in the typical Theosophical combination of modern science and technology with traditional belief concepts.

Modern technical inventions were not only believed to help in the identification of “signs” but would “this time” also make the coming a truly cosmopolitan event since “Last time when He came, it was to a small land, and His message had to wait several centuries for its dissemination. But this time when He comes, the great change will be that He will find a whole world listening to Him, a whole world which has been prepared to listen to Him by the work of science. For time and space have been abolished by the marvels of modern science, and the whole world is so united today, as never before, by railway and steamship, by post and telegraph, that an important speech uttered by a great man in one continent is before the nightfall the property of the humblest reader of a newspaper in another hemisphere.”\textsuperscript{765} Theosophy used these modern channels of communication in “preparing the wider public” for “The Coming”, thus reaching out for an audience far beyond the Theosophical Society. The newspaper extensively covered the sensational events (especially in the English speaking countries) making “The Coming” a media event of global importance. Reuters Telegraphic Service led by Sir Roderick Jones, for example, covered the annual outdoor camp of the OSE 1928 in Holland which was organized every year in order to promote Krishnamurti’s message, and delivered the news to its English speaking audience.\textsuperscript{766} After World War I, radio stations transmitted Krishnamurti’s amplified speeches to Radio stations in Great Britain, Holland and France. The Radio channel 2 GB (the abbreviation for Giordano Bruno, the supposed former incarnation

\textsuperscript{763} Besant, \textit{Why we believe in the Coming of a World-Teacher}, 19.

\textsuperscript{764} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{765} Pavri, \textit{The Coming World-Teacher in Questions and Answers}, 150–1.

\textsuperscript{766} Vernon, \textit{Star in the East}, 177.
of Annie Besant) was an attempt by Sydney's theosophists on "Monday, August 23, 1926, at 8 p.m., at Adyar Hall, Sydney, Australia, the Theosophical Broadcasting Station, the first of its kind in the world"\textsuperscript{767} to overcome their relative isolation through "one of the most powerful stations in the world, able to contact most countries of the world, and entirely up-to-date."\textsuperscript{768} Today 2 GB is Sydney area's most successful radio channel (though few listeners know of its Theosophical history) and has been the second most popular station in the whole of Australia.

Theosophists considered technological progress an appropriate means not only for disseminating the message of the modern messiah but also for the transnational circulation of ideas as the \textit{Zeitgeist} which the new messiah would naturally address. The British theosophist C.W. Scott-Moncrieff in 1917 even compares the integrating forces of "modern civilization", most prominently, the "improved means of communication" with:

\begin{quote}
What the Roman Empire, two thousand years ago, had done for the peoples and religions surrounding the Mediterranean, that, and more, modern civilisation, with its rapid communications, with its increasing circulation of ideas, with its growing curiosity concerning the world we live in, with its impact of West on East and East on West, is doing, ever more fully, for the world as a whole. It is drawing it into one, as if in preparation for a mighty and universal message. [...]Never can the world be more separated than it is now; never can any part of it again be isolated. Always it must grow smaller; always be drawn more and more into one.\textsuperscript{769}
\end{quote}

According to the same author, the "rapid communications" did not only accelerate the circulation of ideas but produced "planetary patriots" who "are beginning to think, to care, to plan, for the world as a unit, as one city, one state, one family. [...]And, if we consider the matter frankly, we must see that, as the world inevitably becomes unified-by improved communications, by commerce, by study, by all kinds of international movements, such as the Labour movement, the women's movement, the Esperanto movement, and by science itself, which knows nothing of racial or


\textsuperscript{768} Ibid.

religious barriers - this "planetary patriotism" becomes the only possible attitude for a sane man."\textsuperscript{770}

Against assumptions that the Theosophical Society within the wider cultic milieu\textsuperscript{771} was a "Flight from Reason" as suggested most prominently by British historian James Webb \textsuperscript{772} or a mere escapism from a world in turmoil, the engagement in innovative projects such as 2 GB, one of the first Australian radio stations, as well as in issues such as progressive education or women's emancipation, indicates that this milieu promoted the most innovative activities of its time or, as historian Kumari Jayawardena suggests, "Blavatsky's achievement was to make the theosophical movement not only an occult society, but a part of "progressive" thought of the late nineteenth century."\textsuperscript{773} Instead of spreading pessimism, the Theosophical Society actively engaged in shaping a positive future through both fierce critique against, and affirmation of, technical and scientific modernity.

The invocation of the messiah - concept has exemplified that the Theosophical Society was enthusiastic about the progress of modern technology. At the same time, though, it was reviving highly traditional assumptions regarding the authority, social formation and structure of "sacred knowledge".

The small volume \textit{At the Feet of the Master} (1910) was considered the authoritative text of the Order of the Star in the East. A short but close analysis reveals its claim to both legitimacy and authority in its conception of "sacred knowledge". The book was released in 1910 and attributed to then 14-year old Jiddu Krishnamurti, whom theosophists called Alcyone as his supposed name in an earlier incarnation. Since then, and due to the popularity of the text, it has been reprinted numerous times and in various languages though, until today, its authorship remains open to debate.\textsuperscript{774} The title itself is already an indication of both the medium of inspiration and the


\textsuperscript{771} Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, eds., \textit{The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization} (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002).


\textsuperscript{773} Jayawardena, \textit{The White Woman's Other Burden}, 117.

\textsuperscript{774} Vernon, \textit{Star in the East}, 61.
hierarchical understanding of knowledge transfer in which the “Masters” (the theosophical masters) hold the superior position as they embody truth and hold the key to enlightenment. By reviving the old master-disciple system for the transmission of “sacred knowledge”, becoming an obedient disciple of the masters was considered the vital core of the cult. Qualifications for discipleship, for example, were “discrimination, desirelessness, good conduct and love” thus outlining standards of behavior and making attempts to enforce moral purity on members on their way to "sacred knowledge“. These rather vague ideals were supplemented with highly concrete appeals to self-cultivation such as: "Your thought about others must be true; you must not think of them what you do not know. Do not suppose that they are always thinking of you.” The constant usage of the modal verb “must” or “must not” marks the appellative and disciplining character of the text. While access to “sacred knowledge” was internally limited, the OSE created additional boundaries from the outer world on the basis of an exclusive conception of knowledge:

In all the world there are only two kinds of people- those who know, and those who don’t know; and this knowledge is the thing that matters. What religion a man holds, to what race he belongs-these things are not important; the really important thing is this knowledge- the knowledge of God’s plan for men. For God has a plan and that is evolution. So, because he knows, he is on God’s side, standing for good and resisting evil, working for evolution and not for selfishness. If he is on God’s side, he is one of us, (...) Those who are on His side know why they are here and what they should do, and they are trying to do it; all others do not yet know what they should do, and so they often act foolishly, and try to invent ways for themselves which they think will be pleasant for themselves;

Though this passage suggests a cosmopolitan outlook by dismissing “religion” or “race” as markers of difference, the exclusive conception of “sacred knowledge” or “truth” create new boundaries and hierarchies between insiders and outsiders. Theosophical exclusivism became obvious. A little silver star was the emblem that could be found on printed material as well as numerous signs such as badges,


777 Ibid., 6–8.
ribbons, needles or membership brooches that allowed for an immediate differentiation of members from non-members. The range of items varied according to the various stages of discipleship and thus expressed inner hierarchy as well as a difference towards the outside: ordinary members wore silver stars, disciples on probation purple stars and only the few initiates such as Annie Besant or Krishnamurti himself were allowed to wear golden stars.

1 Theosophists of the Order of the Rising Sun at Benares, 1911.778

The emergence of institutionalization in scope and hierarchy led to numerous sub-organizations such as the Brothers of the Star or the International Self-Preparation Group with internal hierarchies of national secretaries, national representatives, the protector (Annie Besant) and the Head (Krishnamurti). Likewise, the magazines published under the umbrella of the OSE called the International Star Bulletin, The Herald of the Star and The Star according to the annual report summary of 1926 available in the business folders of the Rajagopal Collection at Huntington Library, San Marino, consisted of a total of 28 periodicals in the respective local languages. The same report claims 38,748 members in 42 countries of which 70 % were also TS-members. These were organized in 601 centers worldwide. The inner core of the Self-Preparation Group counted 5,447 members.779

778 Between 1910 and 1911 the Order of the Rising Sun was the predecessor to the Order of the Star in the East.

Neither the OSE nor the Theosophical Society had a mass following but the role of its ideology for the modernizing global elite was nonetheless significant as it merged into the fabric of modern spirituality still vibrant today. As mentioned earlier, although Jürgen Osterhammel does not include the Order of the Star in the East (OSE) in this scheme, he considers the appearance of messianic movements all over the world as part of a more general trend to reform religious traditions or to create new ones. A well studied example is the modern Bahai-movement in Iran.\textsuperscript{780}

Modern media spread around the globe not only sensational stories about the new Christ but also the extensive dissent with this exclusivist cult. The cult provoked critique, but it also stimulated the emergence of counter projects such as the initiative by followers of the Aga Khan who tried to establish him as an Islamic alternative\textsuperscript{781} or the British magician Aleister Crowley. A publicity genius, Crowley instantly understood the potential of the messiah cult and thus set up a campaign to expose Krishnamurti and to replace him as an alternative world teacher.\textsuperscript{782} This was certainly the most spectacular alternative project especially since Crowley in his usual provocative style called Krishnamurti a “nigger”.\textsuperscript{783}

For the Theosophical Society, however, the most severe threats came from within with massive criticism and a wave of resignations that started as early as 1913. The most prominent renegade was certainly Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) who opposed Krishnamurti being revered as a reincarnation of Christ whose incarnation he considered a singular event in human history.\textsuperscript{784} As Helmut Zander has persuasively shown, Steiner had always looked for an opportunity to convey his message independently and thus took advantage of the tensions that arose and incorporated

\begin{footnotes}
\item[782] I am grateful to Marco Pasi for sharing this information about the connection between Krishnamurti and Crowley with me.
\item[784] Zander, \textit{Anthroposophie in Deutschland}, 147.
\end{footnotes}
most of the German section into the newly founded Anthroposophical Society in 1913.\textsuperscript{785} Another lesser known but for our case study even more important strand of critique was voiced by Bhagavan Das (1869-1958), who in 1913 was the general secretary of the Indian section with its headquarters in Varanasi and the famous Central Hindu College, later Benares Hindu University, as its most prestigious educational institution. It was within the Central Hindu College under the leadership of the British theosophist and later president George Arundale (1878-1945) that the Order of the Star in the East was founded. In the beginning its ranks were primarily manned by students and teachers of the CHC. Das had been a member of the Theosophical Society for 27 years and a close associate of its president Annie Besant; in 1913 he used his prestigious position to sternly criticize the new cult and eventually even resigned from the society. Das criticized that “'the Coming Christ’ was ‘advertised like a stage play, in the most perverted and gushing language, on the principle of selling the skin before killing the bear.’”\textsuperscript{786}

In order to understand the modes of knowledge formation employed by the OSE – its claim to present the coming world teacher- it is not necessary to analyze the complete machinery of propaganda but it suffices to concentrate on two of its key aspects that refer to the platform from which this central claim spread to the world: One is the erection of an open-air amphitheatre at the Bay of Balmoral near Sydney a most explicit claim to global significance, beautifully capturing the different levels of interaction of the new cult with the public. The other “platform” was the world teacher himself as a “vessel” for “sacred knowledge”. Krishnamurti’s body was presented as a perfected “vessel” which could similarly represent and gain “sacred knowledge”. As the media were constitutive for the production of visible transnational significance and authority, media coverage will be particularly highlighted as both a medium for, and an expression of, this modern messiah story.

\textsuperscript{785} Zander, Anthroposophie in Deutschland, 151.

4.2.1 A Venue for the Coming: the Amphitheatre in Sydney

"On the shores of the Bay of Balmoral, Sydney, Australia, a great stone amphitheatre has been hewn out of the rock, where it faces a gleaming marble portico that stands above the edge of the water. This is the first of seven preaching places that are to be established all around the world in anticipation of the Messiah."787 Reporter Catherine McCormick of The World Magazine like many other international journalists reported on the classic amphitheatre as a venue for the supposed coming widespread press coverage. But also the local press, such as The Argus, The Age or The Daily Guardian wrote about the “Theosophical Temple” or “Greek Amphitheatre” not only as an architectural link with the classic Greek or Roman architecture but also as a theosophical endeavor to "revive the spirit of truth and spirituality, and evolve the mystery plays of the Middle Ages."788 A local reporter observed that "The public appetite has been whetted by the details of the enterprise."789

As the International Star Bulletin suggested, this was intended by OSE members, as the “greatest piece of Star propaganda that has ever been attempted.”790 On the 20th December 1922, progressive educationalist and physician Mary E. Rocke (she died in 1927), the principal organizer, asked for Krishnamurti’s permission to erect a “Greek Amphitheatre” at the Bay of Balmoral which would be a meeting place for 1.500 to 4.000 people and was at the time being used as a popular picnic spot by local people. She advertised the suitability of the spot: “Sydney Ferries Company is just opening a second wharf to deal with the crowds” which ranged from 4000 occasionally reaching 10.000.791 She thus suggested that the picnic crowds could be attracted to spiritual endeavors thus hinting to what a local reporter had interpreted as the combination of the “commercial with the religious, designed for the second coming” and thus the amphitheater would likewise “be used for anything decent in entertainment.”792

788 Information and Press Coverage of Amphitheatre in Sydney, 1923, RGC.
789 Ibid.
791 Letter Mary Rocke to Krishnamurti, December 20, 1922, RGC, 1.
792 Information and Press Coverage of Amphitheatre in Sydney, RGC.
structure boasted a restaurant pavilion, library, chapel, and a cinema projection room. A 1923 advertizing pamphlet for the amphitheater stated: "Our present-day civilization will furnish Him with facilities for a world-wide dissemination of His teaching, besides enabling Him to visit all countries. Rapid travelling by land, sea and air, cable and wireless telegraphy, with the additional aid of broadcasting, will make it easy for people of every country and of every clime to receive His direct teaching." In a similar vein, it considered "buildings specially erected for His reception and service, in some of the principal cities of the world" spaces that would disseminate the message and create a worldwide chain of similar buildings. Accordingly, the structure in Sydney was prepared "to install a wireless set, enabling the organization to keep in touch with the outside world," as a reporter of the *Northern Standard* in Darwin on the other side of the fifth continent wrote.

The propaganda machinery around the amphitheater was so successful in producing significance that Nitya, Krishnamurti’s brother, at the end of 1923 complained to Mary Rocke that "all the material on the Sydney amphitheatre always appears in local periodicals first, so that the Herald never has a scoop" and asked Mary Rocke to “send all spicy details to the Herald first.” The fact that the amphitheater was meant more as a symbol than a building with practical functions became obvious when at the beginning of 1929 the activist Koos van der Leeuw complained to Mary Rocke that "It is very difficult to use the amphitheatre for the purpose it was built. Thus our last three meetings were spoilt by sun, too great heat, rain, too wet and storm, too cold! In Calif. one is always sure of the weather, here never. This was the warning raised by so many of us before the plan was carried out." Having explained that the natural surroundings were not suitable, however, Koos warned Mary Rocke that it is "not enough to say now that it has done its work in


794 Information and Press Coverage of Amphitheatre in Sydney, RGC.

795 Ibid.


797 Nityananda, Letter to Dr. Rocke, November 29, 1923, KFA, 2.

798 Koos van der Leeuw to Mary Rocke, January 9, 1929, RGC, 2.
propaganda and radiates force (...); the appeal to members throughout the world was made on different grounds and should be adhered too."  

2 Construction of the Amphitheatre in Sydney Harbour.

Without wanting to over-interpret the logic of this venue for the appearance of the messiah, the classicist form of these buildings hints at the reference points and traditions which the Theosophical Society invoked besides using innovative infrastructure. Thus the combination of “commercial and religious” elements or the sacred and the profane was complemented by the combination of dated with modern techniques. The hayday of the classistic revival occurred in the early nineteenth century and by the early twentieth century it had already been superimposed by the functional Neue Sachlichkeit and Bauhaus architecture. The extravagant usage of white marble, the luxurious and prestigious material of ancient architecture represented by temples, palaces and theatres as well as monumental official buildings in contemporary times embodied traditional roots as well as longevity and stability. The main function of these buildings was more often than not a triumphant display of wealth and power. Temples were embodiments of devotion but the world’s most famous amphitheater, the Collosseum in Rome, though not of marble, is the best

799 Koos van der Leeuw to Mary Rocke, January 9, 1929, RGC, 2.
indication that these spaces were equally open to host celebrations of art, entertainment and devotion.

4.2.2 A Body of Knowledge: Krishnamurti’s Celebrated Body

As Roland Vernon has admirably shown in his *Star in the East*\(^{800}\) the perfecting of Krishnamurti as the coming messiah took place in the years 1912-1922. In this period Krishnamurti and his brother Nityananda were mainly based in Great Britain since “the World Teacher could not be exclusively Hindu. It was his role to present the most sacred elements of oriental wisdom on an occidental platform, thereby bridging east and west, Hindu and Christian.”\(^{801}\)

What has only partly been addressed, however, is the extent to which Krishnamurti’s body was seen as the central platform from which the “sacred knowledge” should emanate into the world. Correspondence among the theosophical elite members, propaganda material for recruiting new members and newspaper articles during this period referred to Krishnamurti’s body almost exclusively as the “vessel”, “vehicle” or site of reincarnation for the “sacred knowledge” of higher spiritual entities of Buddha or Christ. These discourses on Krishnamurti’s body not only represented but actually *created* a body of internalized knowledge through which the idea of spiritual perfection was to be fulfilled. All sources similarly stressed the “purity of the selected one” who “was chosen for the stainlessness of his spirit, and for the purity of a body that has never been nourished with meat or inflamed with wine.”\(^{802}\) Equally important was the constant reference to his chastity and unwillingness to marry referring to traditional concepts of the ascetic body as both a platform and an instrument for transformation and perfection.\(^{803}\) This rather classic discourse on the ascetic body and its body practices for becoming a perfect vessel for

\(^{800}\) Vernon, *Star in the East*.

\(^{801}\) Ibid., 58.

\(^{802}\) McCormick, “Hail the Coming of a New Messiah”, 5.

“sacred knowledge” became intertwined with the highly influential modern discourse on hygiene with its focus on the perfectibility of the body.\textsuperscript{804}

The extent to which his educators and later himself applied this belief will be seen in the following pages as his body was trained, perfected and groomed to become an object of worship, the symbol of a perfected human being that would convince the transnational community of followers. Thus the modern hygienic discourse intersects with the old ascetic techniques focused on the denial of bodily desires as a necessary prerequisite for the acquisition of “sacred knowledge.”

As this particular body was dark-skinned and belonged to the stereotype of a wider cultural milieu, theosophists tried to eradicate these clear markers of difference in order to produce an appropriate object of projection for the world’s fantasies of crisis and redemption. The grooming process considered the behavioral element as well as targeting the body which Annie Besant considered a “valuable animal” that must be perfected the same way the mind must be perfected.\textsuperscript{805} The preparation included the obliteration of the link to the country of Krishnamurti’s birth and the perfecting of his body and manners. The inner circle of theosophists such as C.W. Leadbeater (1847-1934) and George Arundale (1878-1945) supervised the grooming which included all the latest trends in clothing, physical culture, hygiene, and education thus linking the project closely with concerns of wider social significance such as the rise of modern hygiene or bodybuilding. C.W. Leadbeater prescribed the minutest details of preparation, while George Arundale, mostly on location in Great Britain, supervised the process and reported back to him. An enduring frame for Krishnamurti’s grooming was also provided by the colonial context in which the “denial of masculinity of the colonized was a central theme” and “Indians were seen as effeminate and weak in character.”\textsuperscript{806} Following the assumptions of the colonial frame, Leadbeater reminded Arundale in one of his descriptions to be extra-careful in transforming Krishnamurti from an “effeminate Hindu” into a “muscular Man.”\textsuperscript{807}

\textsuperscript{804} Philipp Sarasin, \textit{Reizbare Maschinen. Eine Geschichte des Körpers 1765-1914} (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 19.

\textsuperscript{805} Annie Besant, \textit{On the Care of the Body: A letter from the O. H. E.S. T.} (Privately Printed, 1905), 4.

\textsuperscript{806} Veer, Peter van der, \textit{Imperial Encounters}, 95.

\textsuperscript{807} The classic about this topic is: Sinha, \textit{Colonial Masculinity}. 

207
Therefore, the “silly feminine disfigurement of great holes in the ears” “are to be filled up.” The “great holes” in Krishnamurti’s ears though could not be removed completely as he was already 16 years old at that point and though his earlobe piercings were stitched under great pains Krishnamurti was left with scars as can be seen from photos of his old age. Since the preparation was otherwise meticulously planned the indifference of theosophists towards Krishnamurti’s mother tongue Telugu might be interpreted as another Indian link that was obliterated. Accordingly, Leadbeater insisted that “he should be able to speak English fluently and well- not babu English, but the genuine article, without the slightest trace of his Indian origin” thus English - the imperial and increasingly global language - should replace his Indian mother tongue. The “commonwealth character” and high hopes of the theosophists are captured in Leadbeater’s reminder that "he should familiarize himself with the personal appearance of His Majesty the King; therefore it will be well to be in the park sometimes when he drives through, or to see him start for some of the functions which he is always performing. They (Krishnamurti and his brother Nityananda) also ought to see the Coronation procession."

The would-be-messiah was strictly trained in modern hygiene practices which also ought to set him apart from the supposedly “filthy” Indians, thus emphasizing the importance of an immaculate appearance and a strong, healthy body. Therefore, Leadbeater reminded Arundale to insist on the regular training with the Sandow device – a rubber band construction patented by the founder of modern bodybuilding, Eugene Sandow:

> Then there is the physical development side of the business. He has taken with him a Sandow developer, but please see that he really uses it, at least twice a day-perhaps more if convenient. He has not the cartilage machine with him, but you can get nearly the same result from a horizontal bar, or anything from which he can hang his hands- as for instance in climbing a rope. That is to increase height, for it is desirable that he should be tall. Another <i>most</i> important thing is that he should be upright-flat back and full deep chest. (...) The old habit of squatting on the floor like a frog hast left pernicious effect

---


809 Ibid., 31.

810 Ibid., 34.
in rounded shoulders—just as it has done for our dear President; therefore the Masters does not wish him to do it, unless with something behind him to lean against. All stretching is good, and we must make special efforts to develop strength in the muscles.\textsuperscript{811}

Here again the preparation of Krishnamurti’s body was an attempt to set him apart from his old “Indian” habit of “squatting on the floor like a frog” which should be substituted by modern bodybuilding that would promote height, a “full deep chest” and “strength in the muscles”.

Eugene Sandow (1867-1925) was the founder of modern bodybuilding which emerged in the context of an expanding commercial leisure and physical culture in the late nineteenth century and \textit{embodied} the widespread belief in the perfectibility of the human body especially the male physique.\textsuperscript{812} For the man in the making Sandow offered rubber band constructions, dumbbells and chest expanders which he promoted through \textit{Sandows Magazine}—another innovation in the media market.\textsuperscript{813} Physical culturalists such as Sandow were part of a wider international health and life reform movement that advocated dietary reform, vegetarianism, sun- and air-bathing, dress reform, personal cleanliness and temperance and formed a highly influential though very heterogenous movement. These attempts to transcend the commercial element and to combat the evils of the hectic urban lifestyle particularly targeted urbanized middle class people.\textsuperscript{814} In Krishnamurti’s case, however, the perfection did not aim at undoing civilisational defects but at civilising a supposedly savage, uncivilised body.

Although the physical culture movement subscribed to “loftier ideals” by insisting on the integrity of body and mind, the celebration of a perfected male physique was at the centre of the new body cult. Similarly, although the Theosophical Society insisted on the close bond between body and mind, the image of a perfect body was a most influential element in the world teacher project. This argument is underlined by

\textsuperscript{811} Joseph E. Ross, \textit{Krishnamurti. The Taormina Seclusion 1912}, 32.


\textsuperscript{813} Ibid., 600.

\textsuperscript{814} Ibid., 598.
the theosophist’s concern with his teeth. Krishnamurti reported to Leadbeater, that they “motor up to London twice a week to see the dentist who is getting my teeth into correct position. It hurts rather much & makes me speak indistinctly. They are certainly getting more into position, especially the top one.”

Orthodontic care today is a common dental health practice in the West but at the beginning of the twentieth century this was rather unusual. The correction of Krishnamurti’s teeth was purely a matter of aesthetics proving the importance of his appearance.

The global press was most receptive for the presentation of this image and body language. Newspaper articles that increasingly circulated after 1925 stressed Krishnamurti’s looks and athletic hobbies thus designated him as “A New Messiah in Tennis Flannels”, “The Tea Hound Messiah” or the “Playboy of the Eastern Star”.

The references to Krishnamurti’s body in the press pointed to the theosophical belief in reincarnation as they claimed that “the body used as a vehicle will this time be the thin, nervous body of Krishnamurti”, or the exotic looks of his body since the new ‘Messiah’ is a frail Indian lad somewhere between 28 and 30 years old. He is described as being darker than the usual East Indian and having mid-night hair. His body is frail, thin and nervous. Although Krishnamurti belongs to an old school of religious belief he is thoroughly modern in dress and habits. He has not neglected the physical side of life and is reputed to be an excellent golfer and tennis player despite the scarcely more than one hundred pounds of weight he carries. It is only at ceremonials that young Krishnamurti wears his native Indian dress in all its finery. At other times he dresses like an English gentleman.

This oscillation between “Oriental and Occidental Garb” as well as the spiritual and physical sphere was a matter of constant debate in the news as he circumvented the classical stereotype of the ‘mystic from the East’ as one reporter found, that Krishnamurti “is a handsome, dark-eyed young man with Valentino side-burns and

---

815 Krishnamurti, Letter to Leadbeater, December 5, 1912; see also: Letter of October 31, 1912, KFI.


817 Herald Tribune, New York, “Movement has hold on Britain: Mrs. Besant claims that she will scientifically prove the Powers of her Protege,”, 1926, 3.

818 Robert T. Small, “‘New Messiah’ to be Teacher; no miracles: Krishnamurti to arrive in New York Wednesday,” Oklahoma City Times, August 26, 1926, 1.
matinee features. Instead of wearing the flowing robes of the East, he chooses to array himself in smart London suits and to embellish his costume with Bond Street neckwear. His hair, which once hung over his shoulders, knows the frequent desecration of the barber shop. He plays tennis and is skilled as an oarsman. He takes none of the poses of the Oriental mystic, even though he knows that thousands are hailing him as the chosen instrument of the Messiah." News reporters were puzzled that followers accepted their “future Messiah” to "use the telephone, ride in taxicabs, eat, lounge and play tennis" and conclude that “A man who can live for years against the prosaic background of Western civilization and still keep the reverence of his close associates must be a remarkable personality. If he had chosen to isolate himself in a cave on the upper slopes of the Himalayas, the faith of his followers would be easier to understand." One news reporter from New York pointedly remarked the blurred public image of Krishnamurti since "A returning golf champion, a returning channel swimmer, a visiting prince of the realm, or a new 'Messiah' are all the same to New York. This city rushes to see the 'passing show' then rushes away again.” The big capitals of the West and their media reporters more often than not treated the coming of a modern messiah not differently from any other celebrity.

Krishnamurti was not only considered a religious superstar but was also presented as a celebrity in his own right thus reflecting the increasing entanglement of modern spirituality with celebrity culture in modern times. Based on the classic assumptions of Max Weber on charisma in religious milieus and Èmile Durkheim’s prediction of the decline of organized religion with a similar increase of de-institutionalized spirituality, Chris Rojek in the Celebrity Culture Reader interprets this entanglement as the supposed starting point of celebrity culture though he maintains that "Celebrity culture is no substitute for religion. Rather, it is the milieu in which

819 McCormick, “Hail the Coming of a New Messiah”, 2.

820 Ibid.

821 Robert T. Small, “'New Messiah' to be Teacher; no miracles: Krishnamurti to arrive in New York Wednesday,” Oklahoma City Times, August 26, 1926, 2.

religious recognition and belonging are now enacted.”

Journalists, the mediators as well as the creators of celebrities’ public personas sensitively recognized this merging in Krishnamurti and consequentially compared him, the supposed new Christ, with Rudolph Valentino, Hollywood’s first Latin lover, for his good, exotic looks.

Not only was Krishnamurti’s American headquarter in Ojai just miles away from the evolving film industry in Hollywood but his acquaintance with Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and many others from the new cultural industry who even offered him a film role are all facts that testify to this process. Like film celebrities, Krishnamurti was constantly photographed usually in celebrity style by Albert Witzel, who had also photographed silent era stars Lilian Gish and Carole Lombard.

3 Krishnamurti by Hollywood photographer Albert Witzel.

Another visual evidence linking religious with American pop culture was the sketch of the youthful messiah by James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960), who was not only the best paid newspaper illustrator and cartoonist of his time but also the creator of the prominent recruitment propaganda poster for World War I depicting Uncle Sam pointing at the observer with the lines “I want you for the U.S. army!” The poster was so successful that it was revived for the recruitment in WW II.

---


824 Lutyens, Krishnamurti, 237.
The Theosophical Society itself also “enacted” this celebrity cult as close associate and progressive educationalist J. J. van der Leeuw observed that Krishnamurti was almost “mobbed” by at least fifty to a hundred people, who all wanted his signature on a bit of paper. And I thought to myself: if they could see themselves, as it were, in a historical perspective, how pathetic it would look. A Teacher comes to humanity and is available for those who want to ask him something, to meet him, and the best thing they can do is to get his signature on a piece of paper. This urgent desire to have something to get hold of, something that is written by the Teacher, something that belonged to the Teacher— that is fetishism.”

4.3 “By whose authority?”

4.3.1 Internationalism for a New Era: Krishnamurti and the League of Nations

The First World War led to two almost diametrically opposing developments on the basis of the understanding that Europe had lost its credibility as a moral authority.

---

825 J. J. van der Leeuw, "Why the Coming of the World-Teacher is Disappointing: Some extracts from a lecture by Dr. J. J. van der Leeuw given at the 1928 Ojai Camp on: Why the coming of the World-Teacher is disappointing to some who have expected Him.,” *International Star Bulletin* (September-October, 1928): 36.

826 Krishnamurti was also asked to provide his hair to be “buried in these Star lands so as to give them wonderful magnetism.”: Jiddu Krishnamurti, “Krishnaji and Star Lands,” *International Star Bulletin* (December, 1927): 12.
The first development was the increasing focus on non-European regions and resources such as Latin America or Asia. The other trend was to enforce international cooperation in order to harness the powers of the nation state or the attempt to overcome the focus on this entity. The War had certainly increased the critique at the concept of the nation state that seemed an inappropriate category in an ever more integrating world.

Krishnamurti, as the supposed world teacher, felt compelled to use his authority for an intervention on behalf of internationalism, which he regarded as "the keynote of this New Age". Diplomacy was considered an appropriate means to enforce global harmony among the nations and prevent future wars and, therefore, internationalism seemed to be a natural outcome of the war. Particularly the League of Nations embodied this pacifying attempt and Krishnamurti “reflected this spirit of the time” when he began to stress OSE’s contribution to world cooperation. He started to envision himself at the centre of a spiritual-political alliance of peoples across the globe. In the summer of 1924, he visited Geneva and was able to form his personal opinion of the League of Nations. With the 50th Anniversary theosophical Convention in Adyar he subsequently used a most exposed event to criticize the League:

You can have the League of Nations, you can have other organizations, but they will fail so long as there is an element of selfishness in the governing body, so long as there are governments which try to protect their own nation, their own country and try to exploit their neighbour. And as long as there is that spirit of intolerance, that spirit of poaching, as it were, under the name of nationalism and patriotism, you will find that there will be eternal trouble, that there will be constant war. And the only solution that the world is gradually coming to is friendship.

Krishnamurti interpreted this “constricted patriotism” as the “cause of jealousies, of oppression and of wars.” As long as the organizing principle of international relations remained that of domination and oppression, diplomatic efforts were bound


828 Vernon, Star in the East, 100.

829 Krishnamurti, Lecture on League of Nations, April 12, 1925, Transcript, KFA, 1.

to fail. Moreover, Krishnamurti interpreted the focus on the container of the nation state as a reflection of individual selfishness or “spirit of intolerance”. According to Krishnamurti, wars were merely the symptoms of an underlying “spirit of intolerance” that could only be thwarted by “religious tolerance” with which the Theosophical Society as the prototype of an international organization “was fulfilling what the League of Nations was trying to do.”

The Theosophical Society was conceived of as a non-governmental alternative to official state politics serving the same purpose of internationalism. Therefore, Krishnamurti stressed that only “through divine understanding, through an unprejudiced mind, that whether he is brown, black or white all are human beings, having the same infernal troubles, the same worries, the same jealousies and the same petty quarrels” transnational identity within the biggest conceivable collective might be possible. While diplomatic politics could only produce a superficial alliance of nation states, the theosophical principle is based on the principle of spiritual oneness. Although he concerned himself with concrete subjects such as the League of Nations, Krishnamurti questioned not only the boundaries between the nation states but ultimately the meaning of all boundaries such as the boundaries between nation states, religions, races, genders but also between the rational and spiritual, different knowledge formations, body and mind, spirit and matter. Thus he holds that a most distinctive feature among people worldwide is not nationality but race. Krishnamurti thus wrote to his fellow OSE members in 1921: "Let us rid ourselves of national prejudices and be ready to accept the greater unity, not only in religion, but, what to the majority is far harder, in the matter of race."

In a likewise appellative message to his Star brethren, he integrates his own future role in what he saw as the truly internationalist movement:

---

831 Krishnamurti, Lecture on League of Nations, April 12, 1925, Transcript, KFA, 1.

832 Iriye, Global Community.

833 Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch and Christiane Sibille, Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources (Springer Verlag, 2011).

834 Krishnamurti, Lecture on League of Nations, April 12, 1925, Transcript, KFA, 2.

We must constantly bear in mind that when the Super-Man, the Bodhisattva, the World Teacher comes, he will not be for this or for that idea only, for this or for that race alone: he will be a World-Lover. We who intend to follow Him must in some degree train ourselves to possess the germ of this fundamental principle; we must be above nationality, above class distinction, and forget entirely that barrier which, at the present moment divides the world into two camps—the coloured and the non-coloured.\footnote{Krishnamurti, “Editorial Notes,” 21.}

Krishnamurti’s stress on race as the central factor of differentiation was closely linked to his personal experiences in Great Britain on the one hand and his direct involvement with India’s independence movement through Annie Besant, B.P. Wadia and George Arundale on the other hand. He identified himself with the exploited races and thus criticized contemporary colonial relationships:

You cannot push me aside and say: You are not civilised. You cannot push me aside and say: I am now going to civilise you in a particular fashion whether you like it or not. Why should I, possessing my own opportunities, my own particular development, tendencies, aspirations, why should I destroy all those and adopt the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies and ambitions and economic theories of another nation? And yet that is exactly what is taking place in every country. You do not want the colour of the mosaic to be any different from that of the special little corner that you have preserved for yourselves.\footnote{Jiddu Krishnamurti, “Peace and War. An Address given by Krishnaji on the last morning of the Congress”, July 28, 1926, Transcript, KFA, 1.}

### 4.3.2 A New Education for a New Era

Krishnamurti considered education to be another avenue to creating transnational identity by addressing the future generation in an internationalist spirit. Krishnamurti had been associated with reformist pedagogical projects from the outset of his international career on the basis of his 1912 teachers’ manual *Education as Service*. Education was an almost classical concern of theosophists particularly in British India where the society had founded numerous alternative educational institutions as theosophists held that the new era required a new education, with the New Education Fellowship providing the most influential worldwide platform for
reformist educationists in the interwar period. Within colonial India, however, the Central Hindu College (later Benares Hindu University) was the most prominent example for the theosophical involvement in education. Based on the enlightenment ideal of universalism, Krishnamurti suggested that international schools "must also teach history in the schools so as to promote admiration for the good points of other Nations, and their special characteristics" against the contemporary knowledge of history as "a record of wars, in which one Nation beats the other, and there is always the superior race dominating and the inferior race suffering." Thus he claimed that:

Educating, I think, should be left always in the hands of internationalists and not in the hands of merely nationalists. If you open any history-book the first thing you perceive is the God with the special flag and great importance of your own nation; it does not matter what history it is, it is always the same. If you really desire to bring up your children to be real citizens of the world and not of your particular little village, then it should be your chief interest to found schools and organisations where the true spirit of internationalism reigns.

As a practical means to bringing about the "true spirit of internationalism" he suggested "the establishment of colleges all over the world, which would exchange students with the National schools and colleges of other countries, and thus create international relations between the young." In 1923 Krishnamurti took up this point again:

Now what we desire is that some of the teachers and some of the students should come to England, to Letchworth, to spend some time, a year or less, to study and to acquire a large and open mind which is hard to get if kept always in one particular school. We should not only have an international fund for


839 Renold, A Hindu Education.


that purpose but should keep the idea before us of exchanging students and professors all over the world to bring about the real spirit of internationalism.\textsuperscript{843}

His reference to Letchworth points to the pedagogical endeavors of the broader theosophical milieu. Letchworth, the first ever garden city, was based on the ideas of theosophist Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) and provided the setting for the first non-Indian theosophical reformist school, the St. Christopher School, in 1915 based on the Theosophical Education Trust that was founded in Letchworth in 1914.\textsuperscript{844}

According to Krishnamurti, this initiative of a progressive child-centered school seemed the appropriate training ground for both professors and students. As theosophists in general, Krishnamurti did not favor “Western education” as it only “produced superficially good manners, and a covering of literary and artistic expression” and thus “forbids the realisation of any real spirit of Internationalism” as “It makes for limitation and narrowness of outlook, and does not sufficiently cultivate the imagination.”\textsuperscript{845} In the “average Indian student”, on the other hand, Krishnamurti criticized that he only appeared to be “gentle, modest and obedient in the presence of his elders. When an older man speaks, the student listens and accepts unquestioningly. The spirit of the young Indian has been so long suppressed by his elders and by the ruling race, that his self-respect has been submerged almost to the point of disappearance.[...] In India we need to cultivate the spirit of adventure, and to show many strength and courage, while retaining our tradition of courtesy and gentleness.”\textsuperscript{846}

It is striking that these quotes, though criticizing the thinking in national containers, still accept the overarching categorization into “West” and “East”. The most grandiose scheme to overcome this particularization through gathering knowledge was the theosophical World University which Krishnamurti announced in

\textsuperscript{843} Jiddu Krishnamurti, Education, July 21, 1923, Transcript, KFA, 114.

\textsuperscript{844} Kevin J. Brehony, ‘A Dedicated Spiritual Movement’: Theosophists and Education 1875-1939 (National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 3rd-6th 1997).


\textsuperscript{846} Ibid., 68–9.
1923. Important clues for understanding this project can be found in the jubilee lectures of high theosophists in Adyar in 1925 were he argued that education “is not the mere study of books as most of us think. It consists in the training of the mind to observe, to experience, to think intelligently, to feel greatly and nobly, and to act divinely.”\textsuperscript{847} Thus his pedagogical ideal was profoundly holistic as it integrated both body and mind, but “How many schools in India care for the real wellbeing of the physical body?”\textsuperscript{848} Krishnamurti was obviously informed by the ongoing debate in India regarding the "physical training" of students – a mirror of the discourse in Great Britain as Harald Fischer-Tiné has argued and the reason why many reformist educational projects such as the Theosophical Central Hindu College in Benares\textsuperscript{849} or the Gurukul Kangri of the Arya Samaj in Hardwar placed particular emphasis on the development of a ‘manful character’ through physical exercises. \textsuperscript{850} \textsuperscript{851}

However, Krishnamurti was quick to reassure that moral training had to be an intrinsic element of a holistic education in which the spirit of competitiveness should be discouraged. Instead, the values of solidarity and tolerance should be the guiding principles of an education as “the first training ground of true friendship, of true love and of true comradeship. They are the main things in life worth striving for and living for, and not mere book knowledge or the mere study of stupid things. If we follow the new principles of education, we shall live to conquer the world.”\textsuperscript{852} In a similar vein, Krishnamurti dismissed violence, “brutality” and “cruelty” against children and suggested that schools should become spheres of comfort for the child, in contrast to


\textsuperscript{848} Ibid., 41–2.

\textsuperscript{849} Renold, \textit{A Hindu Education}.

\textsuperscript{850} Fischer-Tiné, \textit{Handeln und Verhandeln}, 197 ff.


his own violent treatment at school.\textsuperscript{853} Although Krishnamurti advertised the project which so neatly fit into his self-perception and role, a year later in 1926 he announced that it was impossible to “create a World University today or tomorrow” and thus the project at the moment existed only on the “mental plane.”\textsuperscript{854}

4.3.3 A Culture between the Past and the Future: India

As in educational matters generally in the interwar period, Krishnamurti (in the context of the Theosophical milieu) aspired to construct a position for the Indian nation within an international context and similarly define its specific function in an international community of nations. This became particularly apparent in interviews, talks and lectures that appeared in \textit{New India. India’s International Weekly} in the late 20s and early 30s with which his benefactress Annie Besant campaigned for Indian Home Rule.\textsuperscript{855}

Although he questioned the concept of national “containers” he ambivalently adhered to these categories as will be seen in the following example. His relationship with India was complicated inasmuch as it was in some respects a foreign country to him. He and his brother had left India in 1911 only to come back about 10 years later in 1921 when he was accused of being denationalized. Even though Krishnamurti dismissed national and religious boundaries, he still reproduced the old theosophical stereotypes of India’s inherently spiritual character as he reminded his fellow theosophists that "Through India we ought to send out spiritual force to the whole world, because India always has been and always will be the spiritual centre of the world."\textsuperscript{856} By locating “sacred knowledge” within a certain, though only vaguely defined, geographical space, Krishnamurti operated within an established nationalistic discourse, thus Indianizing “sacred knowledge”. As India was considered the traditional repository overflowing with spirituality Krishnamurti reminded his Indian audience:

\textsuperscript{853} Vernon, \textit{Star in the East}, 41.

\textsuperscript{854} Jiddu Krishnamurti, “The Second Meeting of the Star Council”, July 26, 1926, Transcript, KFA, 3.


\textsuperscript{856} Jiddu Krishnamurti, \textit{Temple Talks 1925-1926}, 4.
"The greatest and most difficult problem that confronts us at the present stage is the idea that in translating religion into ordinary physical things, we shall materialise it too much. We think religion can only act on the spiritual plane."\textsuperscript{857}

Following this dichotomic logic, the "West" is the seat of rationality and scientific knowledge, and, therefore, in the series of lectures which became known as Temple Talks and that Krishnamurti gave between 1925 and 1926 on theosophical premises in Adyar, he evaluated the colonial presence positively:

"We have had a tremendous privilege in having the Western nations at our door. They have brought us the scientific knowledge of matter, precision, exact observation, together with tidiness on the physical plane, cleanliness, sanitation."\textsuperscript{858}

The assumed failure of contemporary India to integrate itself into a world system is thus primarily considered a matter of 'underdevelopment'. Following the important intervention of historians Johannes Paulmann and Martin H. Geyer, proponents of internationalism were often missionaries of civilization.\textsuperscript{859} The manner in which British-educated Indians such as Krishnamurti "'reassembled' and 'internalized' elements of the colonial civilizing mission to carry out what we call 'self-civilizing' initiatives\textsuperscript{860} is convincingly described by Carey Watt.

Accordingly, Krishnamurti employed a patronizing rhetoric while criticizing the state of Indian civilization as a stronghold of traditions such as "our customs of untidiness, our habits of slovenliness, of slothfulness" and deplored that "We are the same old Hindus living in the old fashion, even though there is a new Dawn coming, even though there are new doors being opened everywhere in the world."\textsuperscript{861} The underlying assumption that India is unable to integrate itself into the modern world was considered primarily a matter of inertia and backwardness that could be overcome by strict training.

\textsuperscript{857} Jiddu Krishnamurti, Temple Talks 1925-1926, 9.

\textsuperscript{858} Ibid., 9.


\textsuperscript{861} Krishnamurti, Temple Talks 1925-1926, 9.
Nothing exemplifies this “civilizing mission” better than his focus on the discourse on hygiene which Philipp Sarasin, the author of Reizbare Maschinen has called a Zauberwort of modernity.\(^{862}\) Krishnamurti provided very concrete instructions on personal hygiene including washing the body and tips on eating and sleeping as means through which the body can be transformed into a civilizing force. As mentioned earlier, the modern belief in the perfectibility of the body lies at the heart of the modern hygiene discourse.\(^{863}\) Krishnamurti’s initiative was linked with his own experiences as he had gone through the same process when he first warned his Indian audience: "I want to instill into you a horror of untidiness"\(^{864}\) and a couple of sentences later remembered that: "I have a horror of dirty things instilled into me by Bishop Leadbeater, who is very particular. I had to wash my hands a dozen times a day and now if I see a dirty thing, I can’t eat, I can’t sleep, it is painful."\(^{865}\) It is most telling that Krishnamurti distanced himself from the other Indian celebrity of his time, M.K. Gandhi, on the grounds of the latter’s approach to cleanliness as he recalled a conversation with a friend:

A friend of mine the other day remarked with rather a humorous smile that the World-Teacher, if India is to accept Him, must appear in a set costume, i.e., loin cloth and ashes; (...)and travel third class. I have no quarrel with my opponents (...) but I am one of those who believe that cleanliness is one on the first essentials if you wish to be spiritual, and no teacher in the proper sense of the word is going to be unclean.(...) since the advent of Mr. Gandhi has encouraged the idea that we ought all to travel third class, but I am against that. I should like on the contrary to abolish third class carriages and have only first class for everybody.\(^{866}\)

4.3.4 Preparing for the Future: The International Self-Preparation Groups

One of the projects within the realm of the Order of the Star in the East that embodied Krishnamurti’s belief in international cooperation and spiritual elevation but likewise


863 Ibid., 19.

864 Jiddu Krishnamurti, “Personal Hygiene”, February 18, 1926, Transcript, KFA.

865 Ibid., 4.

866 Krishnamurti, Editorial Notes, 70–1.
made its contradictions apparent were the International Self-Preparation Groups. This inner core of particularly ardent members of the Order of the Star in the East was founded in 1921 during the European Theosophical Congress in Paris and was once called by Krishnamurti “the backbone of the Order”. It was limited to exceptionally eager followers and had the declared object of intensively preparing for the coming of the world teacher. The methodology of this preparation was laid down by Krishnamurti or Krishnaji as he became increasingly known in the regular *Messages from Krishnaji* which circulated within the group only and should be “kept strictly private and not shown to anyone not belonging to the group” as stressed by D. Rajagopal, Krishnamurti’s chief organizer, or manager, as one would have it today. The International Self-Preparation Groups transmitted their supposedly secret knowledge strictly within the ranks of the inner core.

Despite the initially independent motivation the reference to *At the Feet of the Master* secured continuity with the theosophical knowledge formation – its exclusiveness and its articulation of the most concrete instructions for spiritual advancement. The guru-shishya-sambandha or master-disciple relationship as an educational mode of transmitting spiritual insight lies at the heart of the International Self-Preparation Group and constitutes a bond of mutual dependence since "the Master is not perfect if He has not a pupil, and the pupil is not perfect if there is not a Master; so that it is natural that the Master should exist; and it is equally natural that there should be a pupil,"\(^{867}\) as Krishnamurti explained in 1924 in one of his *Messages from Krishnaji*.

Krishnamurti appealed for a morally “right” conduct and reminded members of the Self-Preparation Group in a circular from the beginning of 1926: "If you are the embodiment, the essence of discrimination, you need have no other quality in the world, because in that all is included."\(^{868}\) Therefore, "Some people are attracted by the right thing, by beauty of form or colour, by a beautiful view (...) Another person's attraction will be attracted by something else, and the beauty disappears and he sees

---


only one small ugly thing. *It is all a matter of training.*” 869 Thereby he reveals that he believed in the acquisition of “sacred knowledge” through a certain technique that can further perfect the ardent follower:

You should be striding from mountain top to mountain top, not keeping at the same level, but always climbing higher and higher and never slipping back. When you are walking up a mountain, if you slip it means that you have to make a greater effort to gain the level which you had reached before. If you want to get to the top, you must continue, you must not rest, you must not relax your efforts. (…)Take the case of a musician; for many years he practises in private before he dares to come out before the public. It is the same with those who are treading the Path; they must have training, and show meticulous care in the choice of things which are set before them; 870

Krishnamurti was informed by the late Victorian obsession with acquiring healthy habits important for a fit and healthy British nation that did not only circulate within the British Empire871 but also inspired many Indian reformers particularly in the field of education.872 The thus acquired ability to distinguish between “right” and “wrong” will according to Krishnamurti eventually distinguish between “those who know and those who do not know, those who doubt and those who believe. When the Teacher comes, as He has come, and when He speaks, certain people will understand at once and others will not, some will misjudge and others will recognise the Truth.” 873 In a pedagogical mode of knowledge transmission, he elevated himself to the position of a spiritual authority and defined the path to “sacred knowledge” as “training”.

The above insight into Krishnamurti’s interwar period writings is perplexing since those are highly ambivalent and seemingly inconsistent with his initial motivation of transcending boundaries of nation states, religions and races. The examples have shown that Krishnamurti’s interwar agenda created new boundaries instead through a pedagogical knowledge transmission that claimed authority and located “sacred

869 Ibid., 2., italics are mine.

870 Ibid., 4.


knowledge” within a certain knowledge formation (theosophical), geographical location (India), notions (messianic hope), techniques (acquiring habits) and organizations (OSE, Self-Preparation Group) while being highly intolerant towards the ‘outer world’. On the 25th July 1927, however, Rajagopal officially dissolved the Self-Preparation Group with the following circular:

For sixteen years the Order of the Star in the East has been preparing for the Coming of the World-Teacher, and the Self-Preparation Group was an intensification of that preparation. But the days of waiting are now over, for the Teacher is here. We know that the message of Krishnaji is for the world and not only the select few. Those of us who for some years past have received the special teachings of Krishnaji will now follow his example and turn to the world. We shall realize our link with him in a larger and far more beautiful way by realizing our link with all. We shall be, as was intended, the heart of the Order, but round that heart there must be no barriers.

By claiming that the “days of waiting are over”, Rajagopal followed Annie Besant’s official announcement of the final appearance of the world teacher to the Associated Press on 14th February 1927. Up to then, Krishnamurti had officially been only a messiah in the making, a potential prophet waiting for his turn but now his status was officially approved.

From then on and with even greater authority, Krishnamurti would propagate his message independently. Rajagopal stressed that this message, however, was addressed to “the world” instead of a “select few”. At the same time, he prepared the members that the teaching would not only change once but “the form in which His message is delivered may change from year to year. We must be prepared for constant and rapid changes in ourselves and in the Order” thus offering a glimpse of the years to come.


875 Vernon, Star in the East, 166.

876 Rajagopal, Dissolution of Self-Preparation Group, 1.
4.4 De-localizing “Sacred Knowledge”

Concentrating on the dissolution of the Order of the Star in the East (OSE) in 1929, this last sub-chapter analyzes the extent to which Krishnamurti articulated a modern vision of “sacred knowledge” that was indeed global. To disseminate this message Krishnamurti used the global theosophical network as before but made his distinctive marks as he formulated his vision increasingly separately from the Theosophical Society. This applied to the message itself, the audience and the ways of transmission.

4.4.1 A Doubting Audience: Youth and Non-Believers

Even though the Theosophical Society ostentatiously displayed a most tolerant and cosmopolitan attitude, the foundation of the Order of the Star in the East (OSE) and the focus on the personality of Krishnamurti created an esoteric sect which not only encountered the disapproval of external critics but also alienated members of the society and increasingly even Krishnamurti himself. By the end of the 1920s, Krishnamurti subsequently questioned the politics of the OSE. This critique culminated in the famous dissociation speech of 1929 that forms the key source for this section. One of the most important indications for this process was the change of audience. Although Krishnamurti’s resignation in 1929 seriously decreased the membership of the Theosophical Society which according to the annual report of 1926 overlapped that of the OSE by 70%, membership had already started to decline in 1928 before his official resignation, although his audience continued to increase.877 How can these drastic developments be explained?

Krishnamurti attracted more and more people who were not affiliated with any religious organization including the OSE. Thus, on the 15th May 1928 in the famous Hollywood Bowl, a venue founded in 1922 by theosophist Christine Stevenson,878 open to all kinds of cultural events and today one of the most prominent spaces for concerts, theatre plays and cultural activities, he attracted a large crowd. Krishnamurti opened his message with:

877 Annual Reports - Summary 1926. Order of the Star in the East, July 16,1927, RGC.

Whatever I am going to say this evening, I should like you to give your intelligent cooperation and examine critically those things which I am going to say. For I want to show to you that life, bound by traditions, by narrow limitations and sets of beliefs, are not freedom, and hence there is confusion and misery. And to have that freedom you must not be bound by the narrowness of morality, by traditions, by dogmas, by creeds, and even by religion. And I want to show that the freedom comes from the individual effort, and the individual is the sole authority, the sole guide, and the individual purified becomes God.\textsuperscript{879}

Krishnamurti did not only address a crowd of supposed non-believers, critics or at least skeptics but by inviting his audience to doubt his message as well as any other religious message, he tried to transform the public into critics. This included questioning any outer authority as the “individual is the sole authority”. By identifying the doubting, critical individual as the main authority of religious truth Krishnamurti popularized an individualized religious belief. Although individualized belief has always been an option and a privilege of a small community of mystics in almost all religious systems, American sociologist Robert Bellah reminds us that in a globalized world individualized religion has become the key element of spirituality.\textsuperscript{880} Individualized religion required a modification of the ultimate purpose of spiritual search. Not truth, but freedom including criticism and doubt, freeing from external “narrowness of morality”, “dogmas”, “creeds” or “religion”, became the key function of the new cult.

A day after Krishnamurti’s lecture at the Hollywood Bowl the \textit{Los Angeles Times} reported an attendance of “almost 15,000” people. The success of this event is critical in the process of reaching out to new audiences since most of his earlier lectures were limited to members. The lecture was broadcast by amplifiers and the International Star Bulletin of June proudly announced that this was the “largest audience he had so far. This is a new avenue by which to reach the public (…).” Moreover, the “Movie-tone taken of him (a combination of cinema picture and voice recording) no doubt will bring him before the notice of a new and a very large public”


\textsuperscript{880} Bellah, \textit{Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World}, 227.
decided the *International Star Bulletin*. The Star Publishing Trust which disseminated Krishnamurti publications, however, warned against too much enthusiasm for new media opportunities: "What of those who will never see his face, never hear his voice? He comes to the whole world, not alone to the few" and concludes that his every word in interviews, talks or informal conversations typewritten by a team of professional stenographers will reach the “multitudes outside our own ranks.”

Besides questioning the boundaries between believers and non-believers, the spiritual and the mundane sphere, Krishnamurti also began to question his own authority to give lectures. He thus began to experiment with new forms of spiritual search such as Q&A sessions, interviews and dialogues. Additionally, in his talks he increasingly tried to integrate the audience by addressing it directly, by questioning its motivation because he holds that “doubt is essential for the discovering and understanding of the truth. If you merely accept without the invitation of doubt and its cruelty of examination, that what you have is not real.” Some sample questions from various Q&A sessions between 1927 and 1929 in Europe, India and the United States demonstrate not only the range but also the blurring between spiritual concerns and everyday problems which is a major element of modern spirituality.

Before every session Krishnamurti reassured the audience that he did not try to “evade” questions but had to choose from a multitude.

On the 29th April 1928 in Ojai he was e.g. asked: What are your views regarding adulterers? Was it necessary to prepare for the coming of the World Teacher? What is this liberation that you say humanity is to gain?

At the first Star Camp in Benares on the 5th February 1928 he was asked: Do cleanliness and up-to-date fashion go hand-in-hand or should cleanliness be scrupulously observed and not fashion? How do you feel happy when the majority in

---


883 Jiddu Krishnamurti, Lecture, July 20, 1928, Transcript, KFA.

the world is suffering and unhappy? What is the message of the World Teacher about political freedom in India?

At the Winter School in Benares at the 17th December 1928: What is a man apart from life? You are impatient if we do not understand; but many of us have been shut up in one place and have not wandered the face of the earth, thus lacking variety of experience for the sake of work. What are we to do?

At the same platform about 10 days later on 28th December the audience asked Krishnamurti: What are your views about birth control for married couples? You hold strong views about pacifism. Do you think one can or should be absolutely non-violent? Can we organize peace initiatives?

Krishnamurti’s audience seemed to have been concerned with the state of the world and spiritual search which was not confined to a particularly spiritual space thus transcending the sacred, spiritual or religious and other spheres of human existence such as politics, social life or psychology.

Krishnamurti had already showed an interest in the young generation earlier in his educational efforts and by the end of 1920s he intensified his efforts to reach the youth - the new generation of the new era. He identified the youth as the embodiment of his message and simultaneously identified himself with it - its rebellious character, its belief in the future and its dislike for authority and tradition. These communications echoed the drastic rise of youth movements in the early twentieth century which constructed “youth” as a distinct category in human life885 but also as the specific search for coherence in the fin de siècle-era.886 Krishnamurti even considered the new generation more cosmopolitan as “in the new era the knowledge is not acquired so much from books as from intuition"887 and thus any barriers become increasingly unimportant.

Krishnamurti articulated his new message at the intersection of youth movements and transitory spaces. Nothing symbolizes this new approach to “sacred knowledge”


better than the organizations of outdoor camps which soon became the principal means through which Krishnamurti conveyed his message. The outdoor camps or Star camps as they were initially called also symbolize continuity in a phase of discontinuity as they linked Krishnamurti’s theosophical with his independent phase.

4.4.2 A Temporary Setting: The Outdoor Camps

The open-air camps in Holland/Eerde, India/Benares and Adyar, and the United States/Ojai near Los Angeles are the transient continuity of Krishnamurti’s independent phase with his theosophical one. By adopting the "signally modern and deeply nostalgic institutions" of youth camps, Krishnamurti relied on a powerful and widespread movement that since the 1880s promised the “authenticity” of a natural environment to a growing number of youths. The camps started in 1924 in Eerde on the compound of the adjacent castle which Baron Philipp van Pallandt (1889-1979) had donated to the OSE. In the outdoor camps Krishnamurti could freely interact with his followers and simultaneously render his message with a human touch. While the first camps had only about 500 participants from around the globe and were not particularly well organized, the infrastructure was considerably improved and thus successfully merged the attraction of active outdoor camping with spiritual search for the about 3,000 attendants. This blurring of the sacred and the profane was exemplified by a “youth who attended this, his first, Star Camp, more as a pleasant way of spending a holiday than with any serious anticipation” and was later reported to being particularly satisfied “he had not been wasting his time in pleasure alone.”

The donation of castle Eerde- the “Mecca” of the OSE - was one of the most spectacular events in the history of the OSE and the international press wrote about the "young, blonde Hollander, Baron Phillipp van Pallandt, who is locally known as


the organizer of an independent group of Boy Scouts." Van Pallandt was a close friend of the Boy Scout Movement founder Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941) and one of the first scoutmasters in the Netherlands. By the mid 1920s, the Scout Movement that particularly addressed the global youth had already become a worldwide success within the broader context of the pedagogical reform movement and Baden-Powell’s 1908 book, Scouting for Boys, had become an international bestseller. The scouting ground is indicated on the handout map as adjacent to the Star camp in Eerde. It was not only the locations and personnel of the star camps that reflected this proximity but also the techniques that were adapted from the scout movement. The outdoor camping itself, the daily social service or the nightly bonfire by which Krishnamurti gave his evening lectures during the camp week are similar to the scout jamboree practices. Although the camps reflected the contemporary fascination with a natural, organic living as a cure from the defects of modern urbanization and industrialization, they were by no means spartanic; on the contrary, the international press was impressed by their modern setup:

> The preparations for the coming of the Lord were thoroughly modern. At one side of the campfire was a bank, a branch office of the American Express Company, a lost and found office, a shop to sell photographs of Krishnaji and inspired books of occultism, all housed in little green wooden sheds. Beyond was a canteen tent, and beside that a telephone exchange. The rustic campfire was fitted with loudspeakers, and all the exercises were further broadcast by Radion throughout Holland. An airplane flew overhead, taking photographs. Everything Krishnaji says was recorded by shorthand reporters for the future guidance of followers.

Additionally, the camps had tents for women, men and families, a nursery, hot and cold showers. A “brick power plant” provided electric light and the “vegetarian diet” was transported by “a tiny railway” that “ran to the two huge dining tents, and little

---

891 Herald Tribune, New York, "Movement has hold on Britain".


894 Herald Tribune, New York, "Movement has hold on Britain", 5.
flatcars laden with pots rumbled back and forth.” The technical equipment of the camp was crowned by a lecture tent “of circus dimensions; at one service it held 1,600 persons” reported a journalist from his visit in Ommen in 1926.

5 Star Camp in Ojai/California.

Impressive though it might have been for the public, the elaborate equipment required skilful planning and was an economical nightmare for the chief organizers of the Camp in Ojai, George Hall and Louis Zalk, to the point that the former asks whether they planned a "camp or a high class hotel” and warns that “If we have to furnish Biltmore comforts I foresee the necessity of interesting several millionaires in our project” and claims “the inappropriateness of such heavy investments as we are contemplating for such temporary use, and for an enterprise of this nature, and outdoor CAMP." The visiting reporter observed that although "Each diner washed his own plate and spoon at a long trough" after the meals, "The horde of pilgrims in this camp looked, most of them like a crowd which might be seen around a suburban golf club. (...)This was no ragged, illiterate band of pilgrims who had given away their scanty all and come to follow their master. It is in the correspondent’s opinion a distinctly upper class movement. Its greatest appeal is to persons of leisure, possibly too much leisure. Women mostly predominated. The men were all either of college

895 Herald Tribune, New York, “Movement has hold on Britain”, 5.

age or older." The volunteer service of older, distinguished members in the various departments – e.g. the kitchen, the medical, or the leisure department- and the infrastructure such as the “electrical food trolley” were a curiosity even for the attendants themselves thus the souvenir postcards with these motifs were highly popular and often sold out.

6 Food distribution at the Star Camp in Ommen/Netherlands.

For the short period of their existence the camps captured the imagination of the attendants and functioned as a social microcosm of an alternative, progressive stratum of society into which The Book of Experience of Ojai from 19 to 28 May 1928 offers an insight. It based its suggested improvements on a detailed report of the camp in 1928 listing for instance how many accidents (39) or osteopathic treatments (18) were reported in the medical department. It was not only the medical department that reported on the alternative and progressive orientation of the attendants. Suggestions for the food department included the distribution of "raw sugar", since “many people do not use white sugar at all” and asked: "Notwithstanding that they are no longer in style, what about toothpicks?" The coordination of the volunteer service seems to have been particularly difficult. As the


898 The Ojai Camp Book of Experience 1928, Book of Experience from former camps with suggestions for improvement for next, RGC, Huntington Library.

899 Ibid.
report mentions that "Business and professional women resent being made to wear the cap of a waitress - even during camp week," there must have been numerous progressive female attendants.
Contemporaries such as Lady Emily Lutyens, Krishnamurti’s long-time companion, had already discussed the meaning of the camp as an "environment best suited for the delivery" of his message. In a 1928 article in The Star, she interpreted that “a Camp is essentially a symbol of something transitory, mutable, formless. A Camp suggests an army on the march, a migration, a pilgrimage. It offers only a temporary halting-place, a transitory refuge, a slender shelter against storm and cold. A Camp symbolizes progress, search, a momentary halt on a long journey, a looking forward, an effort to reach a distant goal.” With the annual outdoor camps in Holland, India and California Krishnamurti created spaces that adequately transported and symbolized his spiritual message of simultaneity and transition. Such a camp is a “space at call”, an in-between space that is integrated but also separate from its environment, mundane and spiritual, open but also closed. Michel Foucault has described such amorphous places as “heterotopias” or “enacted utopias”:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.

Since some heterotopias such as “vacation villages” or Krishnamurti’s camps for that matter are “not oriented toward the eternal,” Foucault called them ‘temporal

---

900 The Ojai Camp Book of Experience 1928, Book of Experience from former camps with suggestions for improvement for next, RGC, Huntington Library, 2.
902 Ibid.
904 Ibid., 26.
heterotopias” thus emphasizing an important characteristic of the camps. Emily Lutyens maintained that "The founders of all religions have ever been nomads, wanderers, homeless ones." This suited Krishnamurti’s self-description as he explained on a women’s meeting in India "I am neither an Indian nor a westerner. I am just a traveller on the path looking, observing things that pass me by." On one level, travelling the world was simply the description of Krishnamurti’s life, a privilege of which he was very well aware and attributed to modern technical achievements and the generosity of his benefactors. He embodied this experience. On another level, it was also a mode that did not allow for any national, spatial affiliation but only for constant circulation. However, it also functions as a metaphor for the spiritual search of the human being – both in the past but even more so in an integrating world.

4.4.3 A Truth at Call: Krishnamurti’s Independent Message to the World

Historian Leela Gandhi has recently characterized the ideology of the American religious philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910), a near contemporary of Krishnamurti, as being a most ample clarification “of his fellow spiritualists in their effort to bring the experience of mystical and metaphysical selfpluralization to bear upon the reformation of relationality in a hierarchical and imperial world.” In the core passages Gandhi argues that the divine “draws the timorous believer-disciple into the necessary temptations of contingency” and in the words of William James: “I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which will be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own 'level best'. I offer you a chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger...Will

905 I am indebted to Harald Fischer-Tiné for pointing to Foucault’s concept of heterotopias.


908 Gandhi, Affective Communities, 131.
you join the procession?” Krishnamurti’s independent spiritual career offers a historical exemplification of William James hypothesis of an adventurous and contingent spirituality in the modern era.

Therefore, Krishnamurti first began to question his own authority. Reflecting his upbringing, the personality cult around him and the projections of followers on a silent but authoritative “picture” Krishnamurti reflected in his communications Who brings the Truth? at the annual camp in Eerde in 1927, already two years before he finally abandoned the OSE:

For sixteen years you have worshipped the picture which has not spoken, which you have interpreted as you pleased, which has inspired you, given you tranquility, given you inspiration in moments of depression. You were able to hold to that picture because that picture did not speak, it was not alive, there was nothing to be kept alive; but now that the picture, which you have worshipped, which you have created for yourselves, which has inspired you becomes alive and speaks, you say: Can that picture, which I worshipped be right? Can it speak? Has it any authority?

In the same communication Krishnamurti felt himself at the height of modern spirituality by questioning an authoritative position:

You will never be able to force people, whatever authority, whatever dread, whatever threats of damnation you may use. That age is past; this is an age of revolution and of turmoil; there is a desire to know everything for oneself; and because you have not that desire inside you, you are being kept in the world of limitation. You think you have found, but you have not found. Because you have been made certain in your little uncertainties, you think you can convert the world. When the Eiffel Tower was built, it thought itself the most beautiful, the most wonderful, the highest thing in the world, till a small aeroplane came flying over it.

By using the utterly modern images of Eiffel Tower and an aeroplane, Krishnamurti addressed the modern condition of knowing “everything for oneself”. “Sacred knowledge” was thus not a fixed system that could be disseminated or hidden but the sacred in the modern era was strictly individualistic and as such a “truth at call”. The monopoly on “sacred knowledge” is not fixed to any nation, culture, organization or

---

909 Gandhi, Affective Communities, 135.


911 Jiddu Krishnamurti, Who brings the truth? 15.
technique but a free floating, ever changing, insecure and highly individual phenomenon. This fluid phenomenon, Krishnamurti maintained, does not need any corrective “mediators”, “translators” or “interpreters” called Gurus or priests or clerics.

Krishnamurti was 34 on 3 August 1929 when he dissociated himself from the Order of the Star in the East and the Theosophical Society as he re-defined “sacred knowledge” in his iconic lecture as *Truth is a pathless land*:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organised; nor should any organisation be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path.

With regard to his own position Krishnamurti defined the connection of the individual with the truth or “sacred knowledge” as that of freedom from all boundaries:

„I want to do a certain thing in the world and I am going to do it with unwavering concentration. I am concerning myself with only one essential thing: to set man free. I desire to free him from all cages, from all fears, and not to found religions, new sects, nor to establish new theories and new philosophies.‟

As he claimed that “organisations cannot make you free” he likewise maintained that the “key to the Kingdom of Happiness” lies within “your own self” and thus is not monopolized by any outer hierarchy as “No one holds it. No one has the authority to hold that key.” However, American sociologist Robert Bellah argues that “the decline of the external control system of religion and the decline of traditional religious belief” has not affected “religion, as that symbolic form through which man comes to terms with the antinomies of his being, (...)”, indeed cannot decline unless...

---

912 Jiddu Krishnamurti, Lecture, December 8, 1928, Transcript, KFA.


914 Ibid., 6.

915 *The Dissolution of the Order of the Star*, 12.

916 Ibid.
man’s nature ceases to be problematic to him” and although modern times brought crucial changes in the manner in which people observed reality and reflected this change in the various spheres of life, the religious element was more persistent than secularization theorists suggest.

One of the spheres to which Krishnamurti saw a parallel in more than ten messages between 1926 and 1929 in various places around the world was modern abstract art:

When I was in Paris sometime past, I went to see rather a friend of mine, who is a famous artist, a modern artist. He took me to show one is his very ultra modern paintings in which there is no form, as we understand, in which there is no line, in which the eyes are in one place, the arm in another, out of proportion, disjointed without any meaning. I told him when I saw it that I did not like it. I took liberty with him because he was a friend of mine. So I was carried away by my old idea of beauty, held by the established order of what is perfect and what is imperfect, what is supposed to be art and what is not supposed to be art. But when I told him that I did not like it, my friend said, ‘Don’t judge, this is something new. I am trying to create a new thing out of the old order. I am trying to find out a new understanding of art, so I am experimenting.’ And he said to me, ‘Take that picture with you, keep it for a while and you will see.’ I took it and gradually form, shape, light, understanding came out of that picture. So likewise, if you would understand truth, if you would have that truth in its entirety with its profundity and in its nakedness, - because truth is always cruel at the beginning, because we are complicated - you must have a mind that is willing to alter, willing to change, willing to understand and set aside its old tradition, its old point of view in order to establish what each one desires. Such a mind is essential especially at the modern period, when there is so much demand, intellectual demand, which necessitates that we should keep a balanced mind, when there is so much social chaos, economical trouble and political upheaval.918

During the time under scrutiny, abstract art – its production, its utter modernity, its connection with the spiritual, its challenge to traditional viewing patterns, its questioning of form and authority as well as its reliance on the individuality of both the artist and the observer- seems to incorporate for Krishnamurti all that he wanted to articulate in his spiritual message to the world. The connection between art and religion through art patronage of organized beliefs had traditionally been very strong. The independence of the art profession from the religious umbrella in modern times


secured a more individualistic, free but also insecure production context for the modern artist.

The immediate link between radical non-representational positions in modern art by artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee or Piet Mondrian with the Theosophical Society is a well established fact not only among art historians but also historians in general; even British historian Christopher Bayly mentions it in his substantial volume about the emergence of modern globalization.\textsuperscript{919} Bayly, however, reduces the connection between theosophy and abstract art to a mere influence without considering that the manifesto of abstract art and according to curator Maurice Tuchman “most influential doctrine by an artist of the twentieth century”\textsuperscript{920} abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky’s famous \textit{Über das Geistige in der Kunst} (1911) was not only influenced by theosophy but shared the same spiritual horizon. Kandinsky’s contemporary Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) even suggested that theosophy and modern painting are both aspects of the same spiritual movement.\textsuperscript{921} In his description of the increasingly uniform art market and the rise of art as an independent commodity, Bayly claims that although spiritual search has traditionally been an important impulse for both producing and consuming art in almost all cultures, the Weberian “disenchantment” of the world has likewise affected art production and consumption in modern times.\textsuperscript{922} Based on the assumption of a “disenchantment” of art he claims that the artistic avant-garde, its most radical reformers and most abstract artists where mainly organized in socio-political movements and much less concerned with the search for the supernatural.\textsuperscript{923} Next to Joyce in literature and Picasso in painting, Bayly names Walter Gropius the exemplary modernist who changed the conventions of architecture in the twentieth

\textsuperscript{919} Bayly, \textit{The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914}, 479.


\textsuperscript{921} Sixten Ringbom, “Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers,” in \textit{The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985} (see note 77), 137.

\textsuperscript{922} Bayly, \textit{The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914}, 371.

\textsuperscript{923} Ibid., 373.
Walter Gropius (1883-1969), one of the founders of modern architecture, however, himself considered the groundbreaking German Bauhaus which he founded in 1919 not only a socio-political experiment in alternative community living but, influenced by the theosophy and through companions such as Johannes Itten (1888-1967), aimed not only at creating new artists but also an altogether new human being. Curator Christoph Wagner in his Esoterik am Bauhaus just recently revealed how Gropius merged his progressive architectural visions with an esoteric ideological context. The place that has long been acclaimed as the birthplace of modern architecture, a resource for sober and most functional design - an experiment in modern spirituality? The subtitle of Wagner's study indicates this: Eine Revision der Moderne? (A revision of modernity?)

To quote the American sociologist Robert Bellah again, it becomes clear that "not only has any obligation of doctrinal orthodoxy been abandoned by the leading edge of modern culture, but every fixed position has become open to question in the process of making sense out of man and his situation." Therefore, an analysis of modern man "as secular, materialistic, dehumanized, and in the deepest sense areligious", however, seems to be “fundamentally misguided, for such a judgement is based on standards that cannot adequately gauge the modern temper," warns Bellah. On the contrary, "it will be increasingly realized that answers to religious questions can validly be sought in various spheres of 'secular' art and thought." This finding also means that for a profound understanding of the “modern temper” it is most important to take the inspiration of the theosophy as a contemporary resource for the “leading edge of modern culture” seriously.

As I hoped to show, modern agents of spirituality such as Krishnamurti blurred the boundaries between everyday life and religious spheres. Not only political, economical or technical but also spiritual innovations contributed to accelerated

---


925 Wagner, Esoterik am Bauhaus. Eine Revision der Moderne?, 11.

926 Bellah, Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World, 42.

927 Ibid., 40.

928 Ibid., 43–4.
integration of the world around 1900. As has been highlighted, socio-political projects such as reformist education, international politics or alternative medicine and even abstract painting were very often undergirded by a search for spiritual unity. Krishnamurti appropriated these issues and attempted to transcend national and various other boundaries as an expression of his global experience. The either-or logic was succeeded by the logic of globalization - the as-well-as logic. Applied to the spiritual sphere according to Krishnamurti meant that the globalized person was not a believer or non-believer but found his only certainty and solidarity in doubt.

**Concluding Remarks**

Krishnamurti was undoubtedly, even in his resignation, the most successful “creation” of the Theosophical Society.

I have shown how the Theosophical Society with the Order of the Star in the East (OSE) initiated a personality cult by applying the well established and widely accepted concept of “messianism”. Accordingly, the OSE through numerous publications and among an international, constantly increasing group of followers, promoted the hope of an integrative “world teacher” that would save the devastated world. This propaganda was particularly successful in the immediate post-war period in which the political messiah Woodrow Wilson attracted a worldwide following. Krishnamurti’s British upbringing, his physical training and gentlemanly attire puzzled newspaper reporters more than his followers for whom he embodied the perfect symbiosis of the best of the “East” and “West”. His appreciation of modern technical innovations, frequent travels and appropriation of distinctly modern techniques such as boy scouting secured a strong link with the “modern world.”

However, in his independent phase, Krishnamurti radically rejected this personality cult with its ramifications of organization, authority, and hierarchical structures. In contrast, he defined “sacred knowledge” as a truth at call, a fluid, ever-changing and highly individual approach. Krishnamurti stressed the individual, situational quality of “sacred knowledge” in his “spiritual internationalism”, a form of internationalism which allows for no organized attempts towards attaining “sacred knowledge” any more and is highly suspicious of religious and political institutions and their claims to authority. Krishnamurti can thus be interpreted as a precursor of
a new non-institutionalized spirituality and the New Age that through processes of “individualization”\(^929\) and “detraditionalization”\(^930\) has become almost invisible.\(^931\)

---

\(^929\) Beck, Der eigene Gott, 43.

\(^930\) Heelas, Lash and Morris, Detraditionalization.

\(^931\) Knoblauch, “Das Unsichtbare Zeitalter”, Knoblauch, Populäre Religion.
Conclusion: Alternative Concepts of World Order

Having started my analysis with the initial encounter between Euro-American theosophists and South Asian members of the new urban middle class of cities such as Bombay, Madras, Calcutta or Colombo, I have illustrated how the Theosophical Society evolved as a “spiritual joint venture” of self-critical Euro-Americans and anti-colonialist South Asians.

While Euro-American theosophists entered the “sacred space” in the romantic hope to find a less alienated form of communal living, South Asian theosophists appreciated the Society’s praise of their religion and its decided anti-Christian position. This half-philanthropic, half-esoteric organization did not ask for conversion and did not threaten their heritage. On the contrary, it encouraged the religious revival and supported political articulation.

However, I have argued that the TS was not only successful because of its skilful adaptation to regional, national, and colonial circumstances, but because it provided an open platform that stimulated thinking beyond these restrictions. The attempt to transcend these boundaries and to invite everyone “irrespective of race, class, creed or gender” into the utopian project of founding a “Universal Brotherhood of Humanity” was informed by the “ideological cosmopolitanism” of theosophy, based on the belief in the common and spiritual origins of all human beings and an impressive worldwide network of branches. The TS can thus be termed a “cosmopolitan thought zone” – a zone of non-governmental encounter “between highly different and politically unequal social communities in order to work towards a perceived good.”

Due to their thorough British education, the overwhelming majority of South Asian theosophists functioned as bi-lingual and cultural mediators between the indigenous and British colonial society, and thus were confronted with the “colonial milieu” on a daily basis. I have shown how their British education, the urban environment, frequent travels and transnational intellectual communication triggered the

---


933 Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 3.
development of a global consciousness in which events on the other side of the globe appeared seemingly important. I have argued that the fascination of South Asians with theosophy cannot adequately be explained solely through the analysis of the regional, national or colonial framework; therefore, I have introduced the concept of “actually existing cosmopolitanisms”\textsuperscript{934} held together by the “cosmopolitan thought zone”\textsuperscript{935} of theosophy. The TS promised to transcend particularistic issues through a “colonial cosmopolitanism” by providing a platform for intellectual exchange and mutual understanding between the colonizers and the colonized; furthermore, it offered a “spiritual cosmopolitanism”\textsuperscript{936} by promoting South Asia’s indigenous religious cultures, Buddhism and Hinduism, as “world religions” on the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago and, finally, it promoted an “extranational cosmopolitanism”\textsuperscript{937} by which South Asians were enabled to marry national politics and transnational ideology to engage in pioneering political bodies such as the Home Rule League.

Looking at three tangible projects, I have exemplarily illustrated the “colorful”\textsuperscript{938} imagination of South Asians riddled with puzzling contradictions spanning between colonialism and anti-colonialism, spirituality and secularism, local and global discourses that emerged within the theosophical framework around 1900. After having differentiated the image of South Asian engagement with theosophy by adding a discussion of their cosmopolitan imagination and engagement, I further expanded this image by interpreting the critique of and the eventual resignation from the Society as a direct outcome of the individual freedom of choice and thereby the most

\textsuperscript{934} Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 116), 238.

\textsuperscript{935} Kris Manjapra, “Introduction,” in \textit{Cosmopolitan Thought Zones} (see note 11), 3.

\textsuperscript{936} Scott L. Malcolmson, “The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience,” in \textit{Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation} (see note 116), 238.

\textsuperscript{937} Ibid.

important expression of agency. More enthusiastic accounts of theosophical political or philanthropic engagement tend to underrate this aspect.

It is my conclusion that, especially after the turn of the century, the TS lost its innovative role by narrowing its erstwhile multifaceted approach to religion, by discouraging critical intellectual exchange, and by becoming “confined to easy-going study.”

Still, I have illustrated the extent to which the TS’s ideology was understood and its infrastructure was deployed as a transnational, transcultural and transreligious space by zooming in on three tangible case studies: Here, we find expressed variations of alternative “visions of world order” by three affiliates of the Society who were therefore thoroughly informed by its ideology and infrastructure. All three protagonists shared an integrative vision of religion and spirituality and considered it the only means to effectively counteract global disintegration; however, their visions differed considerably.

B. P. Wadia’s traditionalist vision of world order rests on a decisive opposition to the course of “Eurocentric globalization” and on a critique of the moral bankruptcy of Europe after the Great War as a “global turning point.” In the nascent League of Nations, the institutionalized vision of an alternative world order in the postwar

939 Giddens, Die Konstitution der Gesellschaft, 60.


944 Das, Annie Besant and the Changing World, 28.


period, Wadia particularly deplored the lack of spiritual inspiration. Therefore, the theosophical project of founding a “Universal Brotherhood” based on “sacred knowledge” became the main focus of Wadia’s concept of world order and initiated his attempts to “spiritualize” all human activities. Through his refusal to differentiate between secular and spiritual engagement, Wadia rationalized the British commonwealth as a possible point of departure for a Universal Brotherhood and by drawing from Indian - namely Gandhian -, theosophical - namely Besantine -, and British discourses on “ethical socialism”, Wadia conceived of socialism as a moral brotherhood.\textsuperscript{947} Closely interwoven with theosophy through its main exponents, René Guénon and Ananda Coomaraswamy, Traditionalism provided the intellectual background for Wadia’s world vision, assuming that the lost coherence in modern globalization would only be restored through the reinvigoration of the unbroken Tradition of the “sacred knowledge”.

With the United Lodge of Theosophists Wadia created a theosophical tradition, canonized a body of texts and composed a history book for the collective identity formation in order to restore this Tradition. In fact, the unbroken Tradition suggested by him was rather an “invented tradition”, instead of a reflection of actual continuity, since Wadia downplayed the influence of modern culture in the same way he had earlier downplayed the links with colonial order. Wadia’s concept of world vision appears reactionary, as it is based on an elitist notion of brotherhood, eulogizes the past and radically opposes modern globalization. However, Wadia thus reflects a strand of reaction towards “Eurocentric globalization” with an intrinsic tendency to “cultural”\textsuperscript{948} and even religious fundamentalism\textsuperscript{949} – an attitude, which is often underrated, although it was highly influential and widespread, and whose successors we still observe today.\textsuperscript{950}

\textsuperscript{947} Wadia, \textit{Aims of the Labour Movement in India}, 10.

\textsuperscript{948} Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Introduction: Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s,” in \textit{Competing Visions of World Order} (see note 18), 12.


\textsuperscript{950} Knoblauch, \textit{Populäre Religion}, 82.
Anagarika Dharmapala used to be the closest collaborator of founding president Henry Steel Olcott in the revival of Buddhism in Asia and beyond. Already in 1892 from the platform of the Maha Bodhi Society, Dharmapala began to propagate a reformed Buddhism as the spiritual basis of a new civilization. In congruence with contemporary debates, “civilization” became the key term for Dharmapala in order to insist on the value of Buddhism that had a twofold advantage over the existing world order: Contrary to the colonial system it would not be based on violence and, in opposition to Christianity, Buddhism was not opposed to the latest scientific findings. To prove his thesis, Dharmapala (like many contemporaries) eulogized Japan as a distinctly Buddhist civilization that successfully integrated selected elements of technological and scientific findings with its spiritual heritage. Dharmapala evoked Japan’s success especially as a role model for other Asian and colonized countries. On a more general level, he quoted the Buddhist Empire of King Asoka as a successful, past example for a worldwide Buddhist civilization. I have illustrated how Dharmapala adopted the “civilizing mission ideology” as the core strategy of colonial states in order to compete with “Eurocentric globalization” and orthodox Christianity on equal terms, and how he combined an “internal” civilizing mission targeting Asian Buddhists and an “external” civilizing mission catering to a Euro-American audience.

By analyzing Dharmapala’s appearance on the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, his communications towards the cosmopolitan intellectual elite of Bengal India and his relentless fight for the creation of Bodh Gaya as the “Buddhist Jerusalem”, I demonstrated how Dharmapala combined regional issues with the superstructure of Buddhism as a “world religion”. Accordingly, Dharmapala rendered the Buddhist “sacred knowledge” as an individualized, rationalized, tolerant, and abstract interpretation of Buddhism, which was not only ideologically indebted to the romantic interpretation of theosophists, but also relied on a global network of supporters like Mary Foster of Honolulu, Alexandra David-Neel, William Rhys-Davis or D.T. Suzuki.

---

I concluded that Dharmapala combined the two major trends in the global religious field - the rise of “Eastern spiritualities” and the consolidation of “world religions”. Moreover, Dharmapala’s reformation of Buddhism on a global scale has exemplarily shown that globalization is not only a matter of East/West transfer, but of regional dynamics within regions such as Asia.

Krishnamurti expressed his vision of an alternative world order, in his independent phase through a “spiritual internationalism”. I have demonstrated how the TS initiated a personality cult around Krishnamurti by applying the established and widely accepted concept of “messianism”- the hope for an integrative figure and savior of the world from turmoil. Its claim to “sacred knowledge” was legitimated on multiple levels – a personality cult around a charismatic leader, the construction of a hierarchical organization, the building of a prestigious place for worship and an exclusive dogma. This multifaceted claim to “sacred knowledge” was mediated through the latest technological and communicative innovations such as radio, amplifiers, newspaper reports, and frequent travels which allowed for an intense, direct interaction between the messiah and his followers. I have argued that Krishnamurti opposed authority, organization, and hierarchy as insufficient means for a future world order. Instead, he defined “sacred knowledge” as individualistic and fluid, legitimized only by individual authority.

I concluded that although Krishnamurti had tried to participate in grandiose schemes of the League of Nations and the World Teacher project in the interwar period, he scaled down efforts to achieve “sacred knowledge” for an individual’s struggle to free himself from restricting traditions. Krishnamurti thereby reflected the emergence of modern spiritualities and the New Age with its “detraditionalized” and “individualized” concepts of spirituality that have since permeated our global culture. According to Roland Robertson, religious fundamentalism, the proliferation of organized religions, and the extensive development of new religious movements are three key strands of the worldwide

---

952 Heelas, Lash and Morris, Detraditionalization.

953 Beck, Der eigene Gott; Bellah, Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World.

Although Krishnamurti argued for a complete break with religious authority and traditional organization, and although Dharmapala branded his interpretation of Buddhism as a mere reform, and Wadia maintained that his vision was legitimized by an ancient Tradition, I have argued that they were all very \textit{modern}: They were new in the sense that they emerged around 1900, addressed the tensions of globalization and were deeply informed by the intellectual atmosphere of the period, the historical context, “global events” such as the Russo-Japanese or the First World War and, most notably, British colonialism. The theosophical “cosmopolitan thought zone” was a suitable point of departure for all three variants, as it encouraged the transformation from a “Eurocentric globalization” around 1900 towards a multicentred “global modernity”. Furthermore, since all three protagonists were well aware of each other, it seems worthwhile to briefly highlight some key moments in their mutual perception.

Between 1920 and 1929, both Krishnamurti and Wadia had made California – or, more particularly, the area around Los Angeles - their chosen home. Wadia’s resignation in 1922 was preceded by Krishnamurti’s intense efforts to persuade him to refrain from this step. In the light of Krishnamurti’s own resignation in 1929, it is highly interesting to note that Wadia in “nearly an hour” of time that they spoke in Los Angeles maintained that Krishnamurti “one day” “will come to the same conclusions as mighty Wadia himself” \footnote{Jiddu Krishnamurti, Letter to Besant, September 16, 1922, KFI, 2.} Towards Annie Besant, Krishnamurti fiercely distanced himself from “Wadia & his friends” who had an “idea that we are on their sides.”\footnote{Jiddu Krishnamurti, Letter to Besant, September 2, 1922, KFI, 2.}

Dharmapala’s scattered notes on the world teacher cult and Krishnamurti in particular are embedded in his increasingly bitter reflections towards the end of his life. His personal diaries reveal a certain envy over the “impostors who have followers; but the Lord of Righteousness who preached Renunciation is not listened
to.” As if reporting to a friend, Dharmapala wrote: “Look at Mrs. Besant, 80 years old and she is working in collusion with the youngman Krishnamurti, bamboozling thousands of credulous people to believe foolish things and cheating people in the name of the two adepts, K.H. & Morya. Her last performance is to create a breeding ground of human stallions at Ojai, California, to create the nucleus of a "new race". (...)The impostors are all gathering around her.”

Between 1922 and 1925, Dharmapala and Wadia exchanged not only news about, and shared reminiscences of, the TS, but also tried to benefit from their shared experiences. Dharmapala agreed with Wadia’s overall scheme to revive "the forgotten spirit prevalent in the time of H.P.B." since this was the period, when the TS was closest to Buddhism (both Steel Olcott and Blavatsky officially declared themselves to be Buddhists). In 1923, he particularly asked Wadia to recruit “a few workers of the Prince Siddhartha type to come over to India to elevate the down trodden,” since “such workers could not be found in India. In Bengal especially every young man is a father, and to expect a Bengalee to work unselfishly is to expect oil to be squeezed out of sand.”

It now remains to summarize the core findings of the thesis in more general terms and link them with discussions among historians of global, religious, and esoteric history.

The first point concerns the emergence of a global consciousness in colonial India. The transition from a “Eurocentric globalization” around 1900 expressed through colonial domination towards a multicentric “global modernity” was not a unilineal process. By mediating between dissenting members of Euro-American Societies and anti-colonial South Asians, the Theosophical Society was among the first institutionalized efforts to challenge, negotiate, and reform the “image” of South Asians on a global scale. The three case studies at the breakage between the two global world orders have illustrated that the responses of non-European agents of

---

957 Anagarika Dharmapala, Diary Entry, July 5, 1927, MBSC, 1.
958 Anagarika Dharmapala, Letter to Wadia, September 18, 1923, ULT/LA, 2.
959 Ibid.
960 Ibid., 1.
cultural globalization were as diverse as their originators themselves and cannot be grasped through stereotypical descriptions, since the spectrum of these heterogenic world visions reached from "traditionalism" to "regionalism" and a form of "spiritual internationalism" with varying degrees of rejection and imitation of the West as both an exemplar and a controller of modernity."\textsuperscript{961} Thus, the concept of "competing visions of world order" can both be affirmed and expanded through introducing "religion" and "spiritual" motivations.

Secondly and closely intertwined with this finding, "religion" turned out to be an important category that both expressed and furthered processes of cultural globalization. Especially non-European actors envisaged their visions of alternative world order in spiritual terms: They did not accept a differentiation between secular and sacred\textsuperscript{962}, reaching from traditionalist hopes of a new, thoroughly spiritual world order to the consolidation and reformation of a "world religion" and, finally, to the rise of non-organized spiritualities. Although the transformation of Buddhism has illustrated that attempts for homogenization in the spiritual sphere were certainly a core dynamic of globalization, a further important dimension was the rise of non-organized spiritualities that challenged organized religious beliefs and became a more and more acceptable, highly eclectic alternative, which since then has enriched our global spiritual culture through the emergence of numerous gurus, concepts such as "reincarnation" or "karma" and textual sources such as the \textit{Tibetan Book of the Dead}.

Therefore, it is problematic to describe the emergence of modern esotericism and the Theosophical Society in particular as its most fundamental institution in modern times as an expression of "Western Esotericism," which is what Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff have suggested.\textsuperscript{963 964}

\textsuperscript{961} Bayly, \textit{The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914}, 12.


\textsuperscript{963} Faivre and Voss, "Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion": 50.

\textsuperscript{964} Hanegraaff, \textit{New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought}, 517.
Rather, as I have demonstrated, the rise of the TS was embedded within the context of globalization around 1900, shaped by its move to colonial India only four years after its inception in 1879, and profoundly inspired by its mingling with South Asians which had lasting effects on all sides. South Asians were neither at the receiving end of theosophical instruction nor did Euro-American theosophists\textsuperscript{965} remain untouched by their encounter with South Asian theosophists and spiritual gurus. The theosophical “cosmopolitan thought zone” - the “Republic of Conscience” - thus emerged as a product of complex interferences between colonial patterns and local struggles against the backdrop of globalizing forces, between secular paradigms and spiritual visions negotiated on a global scale.

\textsuperscript{965} Hanegraaff, New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought, 517.
5 Bibliography

5.1 Primary Sources

5.1.1 Archives

Booker T. Washington Papers at The University of Illinois Press
Joseph Ross Collection, Ojai/California
Krishnamurti Foundation, America
Krishnamurti Foundation, India
Maha Bodhi Society, Colombo
Rajagopal Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino/California
United Lodge of Theosophists, Los Angeles/California
United Lodge of Theosophists, Malmö/Sweden

5.1.2 Journals

The Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World and The Maha Bodhi Journal, 1896-1922 (Calcutta)
The International Star Bulletin, 1922-1929 (Eerde)
The Theosophist, 1879-1910 (Adyar)
Theosophy in India, 1908-1913 (Benares)
The Adyar Bulletin, 1908-1920 (Adyar)
The Messenger, 1920 (New York)

5.1.3 Individual Publications and Articles

———, Ed. Why we believe in the Coming of a World-Teacher. Adyar, 1924.
“The Buddha Gaya Case.” The Open Court (June 11th 1896): 4957–4958.


Dharmapala, Anagarika. “Colonel Olcott on ‘The Kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism’.” Indian Mirror, October 27, 1892.


Olcott, Henry S. “The Kinship between Hinduism and Buddhism.”


Small, Robert T. “‘New Messiah’ to be Teacher; no miracles: Krishnamurti to arrive in New York Wednesday.” Oklahoma City Times, August 26, 1926.

Sorabji, Irach J. “From the Heart of the East to the Head of the West.” In The Eternal Pilgrim and the Voice Divine and some Hints on the Higher Life: Being a collection of the writings, lectures and discourses of the late Mr. Jehangir Sorabji, Seeker, late General Secretary, Indian Section T.S. Edited by I. J. S. Taraporevala, 367–90. Bombay 1922.


———. The Eternal Pilgrim and the Voice Divine and some Hints on the Higher Life: Being a collection of the writings, lectures and discourses of the late Mr. Jehangir Sorabji, Seeker, late General Secretary, Indian Section T.S. Edited by I. J. S. Taraporevala. Bombay, 1922.


5.2 Secondary Sources


Cheah, Pheng and Bruce Robbins, eds. Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation. Minneapolis [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1998.


Herren, Madeleine, Martin Rüesch, and Christiane Sibille. Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources. Springer Verlag, 2011.


Masuzawa, Tomoko. The Invention of World Religions, or, how European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005.


Siemons, Jean-Louis. *B. P. Wadia (1881-1958) and the Theosophical Movement*. 


Suntharalingam, R. *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891*. Tucson: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1974.


Tenbroeck, Dallas. “B. P. Wadia - A Life of Service to Mankind.”


———. “‘No Showy Muscles’: the Boy Scouts and the Global Dimensions of Physical Culture and Bodily Health in Britain and Colonial India.” In *Scouting*


