

Great Esotericists of the Past

Tallapragada Subba Row

Tallapragada Subba Row was born on July 6, 1856 into a family of Brahmins at Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh State, India. (His name is sometimes spelled Rao, and probably that was the original form of the family name.) His grandfather was an administrator in the district court, and his maternal uncle was a high government official in the service of the Raja of Pithapuram. When he was six months old his father died, and the young Tallapragada was raised by the uncle.

On a visit to Benares with his mother, fourteen-year-old Tallapragada met a yogi who initiated him into Brahma vidya, a form of yoga based on the Upanishads. For the rest of his life Subba Row performed the prescribed daily prayers and meditations.

T. Subba Row showed no particular talents in high school, but he soon blossomed academically. He rose to the top of his class at Madras Presidency College, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1876. After passing the Bachelor of Law examination Subba Row joined a respected law firm and practiced for ten years. He could probably have become a prominent attorney or politician had he not developed “an irresistible attraction” to philosophy.¹

Helena Blavatsky, along with Henry Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society, arrived in India in 1878, initially settling in Bombay. Subba Row corresponded with Blavatsky early in 1882 and persuaded the group to move the Society’s headquarters to Adyar, near Madras, on the southeast coast of India. He became the Society’s secretary, served on the General Council, and also served for a while as editor of *The Theosophist*. Olcott commented on Subba Row’s personal style:

As a conversationalist he was most brilliant and interesting; an afternoon’s sitting with him was as edifying as the reading of a sol-

id book. But this mystical side of his character he showed only to kindred souls. What may seem strange to some is the fact that, while he was obedient as a child to his mother in worldly affairs, he was strangely reticent to her, as he was to all his relatives and ordinary acquaintances, about spiritual matters.²

Esoteric Teachings

T. Subba Row seemed to have an innate knowledge of the ancient scriptures of India. That knowledge and his deep understanding of Vedantic philosophy helped Blavatsky make the transition from her western esoteric orientation, evident in *Isis Unveiled*, to the strong eastern orientation that took shape in her monumental work *The Secret Doctrine*. Subba Row told his mother that Blavatsky was a “great Yogi, and that he had seen many strange phenomena in her presence.”³ For her part, Blavatsky considered him to have greater occult knowledge than herself.

A rift developed after Blavatsky asked Subba Row to review her manuscript of *The Secret Doctrine*. He found the work “diffuse and chaotic” and did not feel able to evaluate it. But he also questioned the wisdom of revealing so much occult knowledge to the masses. Blavatsky left Adyar in March 1885 and completed *The Secret Doctrine* in Europe; it was published three years later. She died in May 1891.⁴ Despite their differences, Blavatsky never wavered in her respect for Subba Row’s work. She commented: “We know of no better authority in India in anything concerning the esotericism of the Advaita Philosophy.”

T. Subba Row contributed articles to *The Theosophist* and gave lectures to the expanding group of Theosophists at Adyar. Copies of his articles, transcripts of the lectures, and some unpublished material were collected into his *Esoteric Writings*. The unpublished material,

based on notes taken by students, came from private instruction he gave to a select group of Theosophists, which included Charles Leadbeater and Alfred Cooper-Oakley.

Much of Subba Row's work concerned Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, he contrasted notions of the septenary constitution of man, discussed by Arthur P. Sinnett and which became the standard Theosophical model, with the four-body model discussed in Taraka Raja Yoga. While he showed that Sinnett's description was consistent with Vedantic thought, he considered the fourfold description "the best and the simplest."⁵ Interestingly, western esoteric systems, like Rosicrucianism, also favor a fourfold model of the human constitution.

Leadbeater, an influential member of the Theosophical Society, and Annie Besant, the society's second president, cited a comment on the skin color of the human root races, probably made during the private instructional sessions: "T. Subba Rao [sic] distinguished the Lemurians as blue-black, the Atlanteans as red-yellow, and the Aryans as brown-white."⁶

T. Subba Row demonstrated considerable knowledge of western esotericism. He was familiar with Egyptian and Greek mythology and the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. In one article he discussed the claims made concerning the goddess Isis:

Isis is the mother of the Logos manifested in the Cosmos, as the soul is the Virgin mother of the regenerate spirit; Isis is the mother of Adonais, while the incarnated soul is the mother of Christ; but the former alone is entitled to be called the Cosmic Virgin. . . . [I]n the discourse of the Cosmic Virgin to her divine son, we find a general account of cosmic evolution.⁷

Subba Row was familiar with the work of Anna Kingsford and her colleague Edward Maitland, whose work was grounded in the western traditions of Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism. For a short time, Kingsford was president of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

A dispute ensued with Sinnett on a number of issues, including the reliability of Blavatsky's sources. She left the Society and, with Maitland, founded the Hermetic Society, a forerunner of the Order of the Golden Dawn.

The Seven Rays

Of particular interest is Subba Row's involvement in early teachings on the seven rays.⁸ Leadbeater studied under Subba Row from the time he arrived in Adyar in 1884.

He described an incident when the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul appeared to him, Cooper-Oakley, and "a Hindu brother" at the Theosophical Society headquarters in Adyar.⁹ The Hindu brother is believed to have been Subba Row. During the visitation, the Tibetan gave them a table of the seven rays, which, decades later, found its way into books by Leadbeater and his secretary Ernest Wood. That table is believed to have been the first definitive information on the rays revealed to humanity in modern times.

T. Subba Row gave a series of lectures at Adyar in 1886 to his select group of Theosophists. The lectures wove references to the seven rays into many aspects of traditional Hindu and Buddhist thought. He spoke as if the rays and their qualities required no particular explanation. We do not know how much those in the audience understood, but perhaps the information provided by the Tibetan had already been discussed among them.

Subba Row declared that the seven rays "represent the outflowing energy from the seven centers of force in the Logos."¹⁰ He discussed

The First Ray, according to Subba Row, sees God as a king, demanding worship; he linked it with Brahmanism and the Vedas. The Second Ray sees God as a teacher and is linked with Buddhism. He also declared: "There is a Ray specially adapted to women; it is sometimes called the "body of love." Its Logos is rather a female than a male.

the characteristics expressed by logoi and adepts as a result of their rays; and he stressed that “Every Initiate must find his own Ray.”¹¹ He singled out the first two rays as being of special importance: “[I]t is only the first two Rays that have ever given rise to universal religions.” He added: “In the case of the other five Rays, a man is merely concerned with his own particular Ray, but in the case of these first two every Adept will have to come under the influence of every other Ray.”¹²

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Subba Row did not cite specific sources to support his comments on the rays, and his characteristic response to questions was that he “dared not reveal any of the secrets revealed to him by his Guru.” But he did indicate that some knowledge of the rays came from antiquity: “Ideas connected with the First Ray seem to have crept into Chinese Buddhism before the time of Gautama.”¹⁵

Legacy

Tallapragada Subba Row succumbed to a mysterious illness and passed away, shortly before his thirty-fourth birthday, on June 24, 1890. Blavatsky outlived him by nine months. Shortly before his death Subba Row asked his wife to adopt a son, since their marriage had not produced offspring. Olcott eulogized him as a “brilliant young Indian mystical philosopher... an intellectual phenomenon.”¹⁶ Subba Row is remembered as one of the greatest of the early Theosophists and a key figure in the development of the Society. Despite his reticence in sharing esoteric knowledge, he contributed much to the dissemination of traditional Hindu teachings to a western audience.

The Subba Row Medal was established in 1883 as an annual award for the best essay

written by a fellow of the Theosophical Society. The criteria were revised in 1891 to honor anyone who made the most valuable contribution of the year to Theosophical Literature. The first award under the new rules was made to Besant four years later. Later recipients included Rudolf Steiner, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ernest Wood, and Geoffrey Hodson.

¹ Source: Theosophical Society, Adyar, India. Online: <http://www.ts-adyar.org/content/t-subba-row-1856-1890>. (Accessed June 12, 2012.)

² Henry S. Olcott, “Death” *The Theosophist*, July 1890, 578.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society: 1875–1937* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), 222.

⁵ T. Subba Row, “Buddhism and Ancient Wisdom-Religion,” *Esoteric Writings* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1895), 58–59. Subba Row was referring to the ancient system of Taraka Raja Yoga, not to modern systems of the same name.

⁶ Annie W. Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Man: Whence, How and Wither* (Adyar India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1913/1971), 114.

⁷ T. Subba Row, “The Virgin of the World,” *Esoteric Writings*, 230.

⁸ John F. Nash, “The Seven Rays: A Case Study in the Dissemination of Esoteric Knowledge,” *The Esoteric Quarterly*, Winter 2007, 33–50.

⁹ Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925/1953), 263.

¹⁰ T. Subba Row, “Occultism of Southern India,” *Esoteric Writings* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1895), 108.

¹¹ T. Subba Row, “Incarnation and Religions,” *Esoteric Writings*, 537.

¹² T. Subba Row, “First Ray in Buddhism,” *Esoteric Writings*, 527.

¹³ Subba Row, “Incarnation and Religions,” 536.

¹⁴ T. Subba Row, “Women Adepts,” *Esoteric Writings*, 568.

¹⁵ Subba Row, “First Ray in Buddhism,” 526. That comment raises eyebrows. Gautama is customarily viewed as the founder of Buddhism, which only later spread from India to China.

¹⁶ Olcott, *The Theosophist*, 576.

Contributed by John F. Nash

Modern Science and Its Connection with Ancient Spiritual Traditions

David C. Galloway

Abstract

Modern science, heavily influenced by the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm, considers matter to be inert and to lack an animating force. This model collapses at the subatomic level where quantum behavior comes into play. Quantum events are characterized in terms of probabilities. The indeterminate nature of quantum theory has substantial theological and philosophical implications. Mechanistic and materialistic science fails to account for a number of well-documented phenomena. Spiritual evolution has occurred with varying proportions of spirit and matter at each state of development.

Challenges to Traditional Science

Newtonian-Cartesian science held sway in the West for three centuries. Newton considered the Universe to be mechanistic in nature with matter composed of immutable particles known as atoms. René Descartes, the French philosopher considered that the Universe was in the form perceived objectively by the human observer. Its existence was separate from the process of observation.

The creation of the Universe by the Big Bang was seen as a purely random mechanical event without the guidance of a creative intelligence. Similarly, life began from a series of chemical reactions that occurred by chance. Cellular organization and Darwinian evolution by genetic mutations and natural selection was thought to take place by the same process. At a certain, indefinable stage of the development of the brain, consciousness appeared and the organism became self-aware. Thus it became a product of matter. Religion, considered to be a

primitive superstition or evidence of intellectual and emotional immaturity, simply has no place in the reductionist world-view of materialistic science. Classical science is limited in its scope and therefore hindered the growth of human knowledge.

Classical science is also limited in its ability to explain natural phenomena on the subatomic level. Developments in physics over the last ninety years, especially in the area of particle physics, have demonstrated that the original model is flawed. Subatomic particles can exhibit either wave particles or particle properties depending on the set-up of the experiment. According to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, the position and momentum of an electron cannot be measured simultaneously due to the observer's influence on the measurement.

Thomas S. Kuhn explains the scientific discovery process in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996).¹ A new discovery creates a new paradigm, opening up a vast area for scientists to explore. Those scientists who do not adopt the new paradigm will be ignored and marginalized, and their view will eventually disappear.

As part of the new paradigm, quantum theory now incorporates concepts previously associated with mysticism and spiritual science.

About the Author

David C. Galloway is currently enrolled in the Esoteric Philosophy Teaching Program at Sancta Sophia Seminary near Tahlequah, OK. Before coming to Sancta Sophia Seminary he spent many years as a chemist working both in industry and in government. He has also taught chemistry courses at the college level.

Stanislav Grof, editor of *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science* (1984), compares and contrasts Western science and technology with the perennial spiritual philosophies of the East.² The chasm that exists between these two world-views reflects the emphasis that science places on material existence and concrete observations and the importance Eastern religions place on consciousness and creative intelligence. The latter view of existence is both transcendent and immanent.

The quantum state of a particle can influence that of another particle located a considerable distance away. Thus the particles illustrate a kind of superluminal connectiveness. Modern scientists such as Fritjof Capra (*The Tao of Physics*) and David Bohm, postulate that factors such as intelligence and consciousness, rather than being a trivial part of matter, are in fact, overwhelmingly important parts of existence.

Even at scales where classical science is still applicable, the concept of determinism has come under attack. Complexity theory has shown that certain phenomena are unpredictable, except in the very short term, even if the current and past states are known in minute detail. Moreover, systems can become self-organizing. Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine and colleagues in Austin, TX and Brussels, Belgium have demonstrated in their studies of oscillating chemical reactions that entropy can decrease locally because of the transfer of energy from the environment. A decrease of entropy would seem to contradict the Second Law of Thermodynamics, but that is not in fact the case because the chemical reactions do not occur in a closed system.

Science and Consciousness

Rupert Sheldrake, in his well-known theory of morphogenetic fields, shows that mechanistic science does not account for the

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form and behavior of organisms. In the 1970s Lawrence Blair and Lyall Watson drew attention to the “hundredth monkey phenomenon.” Reportedly, when a young female Japanese monkey learned a new behavior, namely washing sweet potatoes free of grit in the sea, all other monkeys in her species immediately adopted that behavior on that island as well as on nearby islands. Evidently, if enough individuals of a particular species acquire a certain behavior, then all members of that species will exhibit that behavior.

Research by noted neurosurgeon Karl Pribram indicates that the brain performs parallel calculations based on holographic principles.

Parapsychological investigators such as Joseph B. Rhine, Russell Targ, and Harold Putoff have conducted detailed scientific studies that suggest that phenomena such as telepathy, remote viewing, and psychokinesis are real. Transpersonal experiences resulting from the ingestion of psychedelic substances as well as from certain kinds of psychotherapies also indicate that the mechanistic model of science is deficient. Near-death experiences cannot be explained by conventional mechanistic science. People who have been declared clinically dead have come back to life and accurately reported conversations that took place in the emergency room.

Ravi Ravindra, editor of *Science and Spirit*³ (1991) and author of *Science and the Sacred*, (2002), covers much of the same ground as Grof’s book.⁴ Ravindra contends, as does Grof, that traditional science regards matter as essentially inert and lacking consciousness and an animating force. Ravindra goes on to state that the Newtonian-Cartesian model sees nature as indifferent and even hostile. In human beings the body is the domain of nature and the mind the realm of the soul or consciousness.

Ravindra next seeks common ground for science which is the province of reason and religion which is the domain of faith. Albert Einstein and Max Planck both believed that scien-

tific work of the highest caliber promoted religious feelings and an appreciation of cosmic order. Science for them was a type of spiritual path. For many other scientists, however, motivating factors have more to do with self-seeking and recognition and less to do with religious or spiritual feelings. For Ravindra the true reconciliation of science and religion in enlightened individuals takes place in the mind, heart, and body. He feels that the serious seeker needs to ponder the fusion of science and religion into a comprehensible whole.

Conclusion

The Newtonian-Cartesian scientific model, prevalent in the West, holds that matter is without consciousness or an activating principle. Eastern religions, on the other hand, place great emphasis on consciousness and creative intelligence. The latest developments in the hard sciences as well as in parapsychology and consciousness research point to a model of the Universe and of human nature that is congruent with the model postulated by ancient and Eastern spiritual philosophies such as Zen

Buddhism, Taoism, Kabbalah, Christian mysticism, Gnosticism, and various forms of yoga. Examination of the experiences of outstanding scientists performing work of the highest order shows that religious feelings were quite common. Both Albert Einstein and Max Planck reported that their work imbued them with a sense of awe and mystery. Science may then be considered a kind of spiritual path for men of this type. Ravindra feels that the true fusion of science and religion in enlightened individuals occurs in the mind, heart, and body. The amounts of spirit and matter have varied over time at each stage of development.

¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

² Stanislaw Grof, Editor, *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984).

³ Ravi Ravindra, Editor, *Science and Spirit* (New York, NY: Paragon House, 1991).

⁴ Ravi Ravindra, *Science and the Sacred* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2002).

Book Reviews

Essence of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Guide to Yoga, Meditation and Indian Philosophy, by Eknath Easwaran. Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 2012. ISBN 978-1-58638-068-7.

Eknath Easwaran, founder of the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, is the author of many books on spiritual topics such as meditation, Gandhi, the Dhammapada and the Upanishads. He has written other books on the Bhagavad Gita, notably *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living* in which he interprets each verse and illustrates how its message can be applied to our daily lives.

This recent book, published posthumously (the author died in 1999), was compiled by his students according to Easwaran's instructions from the transcripts of his many talks on the subject of the Bhagavad Gita and its continued relevance to living a spiritual life in modern times.

The modern spiritual seeker's dilemma is no less challenging than it was for seekers of an earlier age. In the past gaining spiritual knowledge took persistence, passion and a long quest in search of hard-to-find wisdom. Today, the modern seeker has easy access to a confusing array of spiritual ideas, but the question is how do we see the trees for the forest? And once we choose a particular path, how do we transform the learning of the head into the wisdom of the heart? How do we use this information practically to make wise decisions and live a more spiritually attuned life? As the author of this book points out, the Gita is not a set of commandments or rules telling us what to do; we have to learn through experience how to make the right choices in life in order to reach the enlightenment we seek.

The author is well equipped to help us learn and gain this experience. Easwaran studied the Gita all his life and actively looked for ways to apply the truths revealed therein to his own life. Thus he has a wealth of experience to share with us. To begin, he says, requires three preliminary steps: hearing (or reading), reflection and medi-

tation. In this book he shares with us what he learned in his own attempts to live out the truths he found in the passages of the Gita. He deciphers the message of each passage and shows us why the passage matters using examples from his own life.

The main message of the Gita, as is well known, is the battle between the personality and the Soul and the duality of life. So the author begins by discussing those opposing forces felt within ourselves and the split in our consciousness between the higher Self and lower self and their opposing goals. This leads to a discussion of the nature of reality, the limitation of our five senses, and the need to meditate in order to withdraw from the distractions the senses impose in order to discover a higher reality.

Other chapters discuss themes such as the various sub-personalities and their opposing desires, the illusion of separateness and gaining wisdom through meditation. The chapters on yoga as a skill in daily living and healing the unconscious are particularly rich with insights and practical techniques.

Then Easwaran takes the long view with chapters on death, reincarnation, the journey of evolution. In his final chapter he encourages us to go into battle mode armed with the wisdom gained from applying the truths and techniques of the Gita to our lives. We begin to see that nothing external can satisfy us for long, and the intense desire to know who we really are fuels us through this long battle with the lower self. The Gita, Easwaran says, when applied to our daily lives becomes practical, compassionate psychology.

Included, in the book are selections from the Bhagavad Gita, suggestions for further reading, and a glossary of Sanskrit terms. In addition to this current volume, *Essence of the Upanishads* has just been published, and *Essence of the Dhammapada* and *Essence of Yoga* are forthcoming.

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Evolutionary Enlightenment: A New Path to Spiritual Awakening, by Andrew Cohen with Forward by Deepak Chopra. SelectBooks, Inc., New York, NY, 2011, 213 pages.

Cohen's new publication, *Evolutionary Enlightenment*, is a must-read for those who are seeking enlightenment and spiritual truth, who are looking for their purpose in life, or who see the selfishness and greed that disrupt the beauty and peace of our earth and would like to help create a more equitable, loving society. This highly acclaimed book presents a strikingly new approach to spirituality in an engrossing, clear, and convincing manner. Ken Wilber, author of *The Integral Vision*, calls it "Truly one of the most significant books on spirituality written in the postmodern world."

Cohen begins by redefining God as the *evolutionary impulse*, the creative energy that initiated the Big Bang, and that has overseen and guided the development of our world from nothingness to a beautiful planet populated with complex life forms, the most highly evolved being ourselves. He asserts that, as residents of this planet the evolutionary/creative impulse is a part of us, expressed by our impulse to procreate and our feeling of exhilaration when we are in the creative flow. At the highest level, the evolutionary impulse expresses as our desire to evolve, to find truth and enlightenment – to become more fully conscious. In Cohen's words:

The energy and intelligence that initiated the big bang is compelling *you*, as its own creation, to evolve. Why? Because to whatever degree you evolve, that very energy and intelligence evolves also. If that impulse is what God is, in the manifest realm, then *God evolves through you* – through each and every one of us, *as* we evolve. When you really get this, there's only one thing left to do: you have to get on with it. You have to evolve, you have to develop, you have to *become*. This is when God's purpose becomes your purpose. (p. 47)

God's purpose, our purpose, is that of evolving in consciousness, i.e., reaching enlightenment. For this purpose to be realized, we must over-

come our ego, the "enemy within," the part of ourselves that keeps us invested in our lower selves, our own personal "fears" and "issues," our small world of insignificant events. God asks us to align with the Absolute Self, the higher part of ourselves, so that we can reach our higher potential and experience our own Evolutionary Enlightenment.

To help us reach this goal, Cohen presents 5 very helpful tenets, along with detailed explanations and supportive comments:

1) Clarity of Intention. Our intention to evolve must become the most important thing in the world to us, and we must, under no circumstances, allow inertia, selfishness, or anything else to obstruct it.

2) Power of Volition. We must take responsibility for the consequences of our past, even if it was very difficult and has left plenty of scars. If we can move beyond the past, we will be freed-up to take on greater responsibility in the future.

3) Face Everything and Avoid Nothing. This tenet concerns the psychological self-protective habit of avoidance. Our ego has developed an image of ourselves, and we automatically filter-out everything that doesn't fit. But we must face *everything*, our best and our worse, as well as the best and worst in humanity.

4) The Process Perspective. Realize that life is not a personal drama, but that we're merely a small part of a cosmic process. This realization is liberating because it helps us take an impersonal view of events.

5) Cosmic Consciousness. When the first 4 tenets have been achieved, we will be aligned with our Authentic Self and our initial self-centered goal to evolve our own consciousness will become that of evolving consciousness itself, of evolving humanity as a "whole." Without the binding effects of ego, we will achieve our full potential and creative abilities. Using our talents, we will work with others in a state of egolessness in order to change the world "from the inside out," to co-create the future.

Evolutionary Enlightenment presents a unique synthesis of eastern spirituality, science, and the transdisciplinary perspective of integral thought. It is at once visionary, inspiring, accessible yet profound, and contains gems for thought on

every page. For those who are open to its powerful message, it could have a life-changing impact.

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