Chapter V.

THEOSOPHICAL RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND 
EDUCATIONAL REFORM

A. Annabell

Without any doubt, Mrs. Annie Wood Besant was the most dynamic leader that the Theosophical Society ever had. Her career was so vast that it would be impossible, for want of space, to give more than a bare outline of her activities in the remaining chapters. Well before she joined the Theosophical Society (1889), she enjoyed an international reputation for her diverse intellectual, social and political work in England. She was especially known for her brilliant oratory, the like of which may not have been surpassed by any of her contemporaries. No matter what field of activity she entered, she rose to positions of leadership quickly. A brief purview of Mrs. Besant's speeches gives one the impression that she could convince any English speaking audience of whatever she pleased. Mrs. Besant was born on October 1, 1847, in London, of Anglo-Irish parentage.\footnote{Her father had a scholarly bent of mind thus influencing Annie in her early intellectual development. He died, however, when Annie was still quite young, leaving his wife to look after the family as best she could. As a result of severe financial difficulties, Annie was sent to live with a relative, who seems to have given the child a good education. Her education was particularly well rounded, including the study of foreign language and music. At the age of}
nineteen, Annie Wood married a young English parson, Frank Besant. According to some sources, Mr. and Mrs. Besant were reasonably happy in the first few years of their marriage; and children were born to her—a daughter and a son. Characteristic of Annie Besant's leaps from one situation to another, the marriage soon came into question, as she discovered that she philosophically could no longer play the role of a parson's wife. It seems that an illness of her infant daughter had a profound impact upon Mrs. Besant's religious conceptions. In terms of what she understood of Christianity, with its idea of God's merciful love for all, she could not reconcile the condition of her child and her concept of the Christian God. According to an autobiographical sketch of her early life, Mrs. Besant asked herself, "What has this child of not more than a year done to deserve the horrible suffering she is going through as a result of the attack of diphtheria?"

Taking the obvious innocence of the child into consideration, she decided that the Christian God, if he were just and merciful, could not inflict such suffering in the world. Consequently, she took the first step in what was to become an almost whimsical philosophical journey from one system of thinking to another; she began by questioning Christian theologians, finding that no authorities including the highest bishops could answer her enquiries with convincing logic. These philosophical yearnings, no doubt, embarrassed her husband and eventually led to the divorce of the young couple. Mrs. Besant lost custody of both her children as
she was more or less declared an unfit mother before a court of law, which was unsympathetic to a "heretic" in mid-nineteenth century England. 4

Either out of guilt or a new sense of conviction, Mrs. Besant took a deep interest in the service of others from that time. From Christianity, she moved towards Agnosticism and later Atheism. Mrs. Besant discovered that she was not only a good orator but also a persuasive writer; by publishing articles on subjects such as Atheism and Freethought she was able to support herself. She joined the Fabian Society and became closely associated with George Bernard Shaw and W. L. Stead. Through the work of the Fabian Society, she involved herself with social reforms and helped alleviate the under-privileged of English society.

She came into contact with Charles Bradlaugh, the renowned Atheist and Freethinker. This relation lasted over several years with both of them working energetically for social and political reforms. In 1883, when Mrs. Besant, in a wild philosophical leap, joined the Theosophical Society, Bradlaugh more or less terminated their friendship. 5 During the several years between her divorce and her joining the Theosophical Society, (1870–83), Mrs. Besant became well-known for her educational work, her work for the betterment of labour conditions in England and her controversial philosophical stances, such as the propagation of birth control. 6

In 1883, W. L. Stead, the editor of the "Review of Reviews", a magazine Mrs. Besant had often contributed articles to, asked
her to review Madame Blavatsky's "The Secret Doctrine." Upon reading the work, Mrs. Besant became enraptured by the mysterious subject matter contained therein and sought an interview with Blavatsky; but she first formally became a member of the Theosophical Society. The interview held in 1889, had an overwhelming impact upon Mrs. Besant. She immediately felt that her search for the "Truth" had come to an end and became a devoted pupil of Madame Blavatsky. It seems that Blavatsky was equally enthusiastic about Mrs. Besant's joining the Theosophical Society and had predicted that Besant would some day take over her place in the Society.9 Between the years 1889 and 1893, Mrs. Besant remained in England studying Theosophy and working her way up in the Theosophical hierarchy at the Blavatsky Lodge, London. In 1893, she decided to make her first tour of India, at the invitation of Olcott.8 Mrs. Besant's interest in India pre-dated her joining the Theosophical Society. In 1879, she wrote a pamphlet attacking England's political position in Afghanistan. She asked in the pamphlet "Will England be loyal to her love of truth and her hatred of oppression, or has she begun to tread the path that inevitably leads to national decay?"9 This was the beginning of a long list of books, articles, pamphlets, and speeches concerning Indian affairs that Mrs. Besant was to make over the next fifty-odd years of her life. Strangely enough, her attitude towards the policies of Imperial England remained basically unchanged from the first article to her last writings.
in the early 1880’s. Mrs. Besant never quite understood how England could govern in one fashion at home and in a completely different fashion abroad.

In 1893, Mrs. Besant sailed for Ceylon to make a grand Theosophical tour of the island and afterwards India. She and the Countess Wachtmeister, a Theosophist who took care of Madame Blavatsky in her remaining years, landed at Colombo on November 10th. During the winter season, Mrs. Besant travelled some 18,000 miles by sea and 6,500 miles by land delivering 121 public speeches to an estimated aggregate of 100,000 people. Colonel Olcott accompanied her, introducing Mrs. Besant as “religious fervour and devotion personified, the ideal female devotee who in time evolves into the saint and martyr.” Yet he was troubled about Mrs. Besant’s image within the Society as certain important Theosophists apparently felt threatened by her overpowering personality and feared that she was attempting to “Hinduize” the Theosophical Society. Several reports had been circulated that Mrs. Besant had converted to Hinduism by bathing in the Ganges at Benares and that she had been seen everywhere in Hindu dress. Her behaviour was said to have been outside the constitutional limits of the Society’s policy of neutrality towards all religions. Olcott denied these reports but Dr. Selar and other esteemed members of the Society publicly protested against the Theosophical Society having been made responsible for Mrs. Besant’s Hinduism. Olcott countered the criticisms claiming that he and Madame Blavatsky had
pronounced themselves Buddhists during their first visit to Ceylon in 1880 and that any Theosophist could express interest in whatever religion appealed to him personally.

The Theosophical Society in 1893 was not in very good shape. Madame Blavatsky's death (1891), led to numerous inter-Society conflicts which tended to weaken the effectiveness of the movement in India. Olcott was nearly forced to resign his presidency on several occasions and many felt that the Theosophical movement was slowly dying out. What was needed, most of all was a new image, a new impetus to Theosophical work. It was considered important "to impress forcibly upon the mind of the Indian public in general and particularly upon the press, the fact that H.P.B.'s death has not killed the T.S., not deprived the movement of its vitality and power, future. This is terribly necessary at the present juncture, because the long absence of H.P.B. from the country, the diminished activity and work of the Society here owing to the lack of sufficiently numerous and energetic staff of Adyar; and the death of many leading and earnest members - all tend to foster and strengthen such false impressions." It was hoped that Mrs. Besant would come to India to rejuvenate the ailing Society. An appeal was made in 1892 to the Indian members to donate money for Mrs. Besant's prospective trip. Bertram Keightley, an English Theosophist, said that "one difficulty remains, such a trip is a costly one; and when I state that Annie has given up everything to devote herself entirely to the work of the Society, it will be plain
that she cannot possibly pay her own expenses. Hence, I appeal now to all who love India, to contribute as largely as they can to the fund now being raised for the purpose... Each of us has now a chance of associating himself with an immense karmic force for good - or he may refuse it. But remember: A lost opportunity never returns.  

During the years that Mrs. Besant was active in Secularistic propaganda she was preparing herself for a future religious revelation; Olcott said that Mrs. Besant had been in a state of "Spiritual suspended animation," awaiting the hour of her flowering in the sunlight of "Eastern wisdom." When Mrs. Besant was the Vice-President of the National Secularist Society, in 1882, she had criticized the Theosophical Society. In the Madras "Philosophic Inquirer," a freethought journal edited by P. Kurugan Mudaliar who had joined the Theosophical Society in 1882, Mrs. Besant was quoted from an article she had written for the "National Reformer" as having said that, "The published explanation of the objects and principles (of the Theosophical Society) conveys no very definite idea of the requirements for membership, beyond a dreamy, emotional, scholarly interest in the religio-philosophic fancies of the past." She also observed at that time that those who were most likely to join the Theosophical Society were Indians who had been forced to abandon their "ancient superstitions, but who are not strong enough to rest upon reason alone." In 1882, Mrs. Besant represented the general attitude of the Freethought Movement towards Theosophy; that to belong to the Theosophical
Society was to compromise one's intellectual independence.

Annie Besant's mother had always complained that her daughter was "too religious."\(^{20}\) Mrs. Besant claimed that her sole purpose in life was to serve the cause of truth, as she saw it, and to defend her convictions despite any criticisms whether from family, friends or foes. She started out as a devout Christian, then an Agnostic, Atheist, Freethinker, Secularist and eventually wound up as a Theosophist. After she became a Theosophist, many of her critics predicted that she would resolve her philosophic wanderings by joining the Roman Catholic Church.\(^{21}\) This, of course, never occurred as Mrs. Besant died a Theosophist at Adyar in 1933. In whatever movement Mrs. Besant participated, she threw her entire energies. From 1893, when she first arrived in India, she worked doggedly for the uplift of Hinduism. She started dozens of Hindu schools, some of which became famous institutions (Benares Hindu University), many young organizations, which taught Hindu values, several magazines and papers and wrote many books expounding upon the higher truths of Hinduism. She was able to inspire others to devote themselves to numerous causes. All of her work for the uplift of Indian civilization was geared towards creating patriotism and nationalism in the young. Due to Mrs. Besant's joining the Theosophical Society, the movement took on new life and rose to national prominence.
B. Concept of Reform

In discussing religious and social reforming activities in the late nineteenth century, one has to keep in mind that this phenomena affected only a small proportion of the population in India. Kenneth S. Jones, in his book "Arya Dharma," has aptly dubbed the educated class of that time as the "minority of the minority." The numerous associations and societies that developed during this period came about as the result of a general uneasiness among the educated classes. Western-styled education and the propagation of Christianity in India changed the consciousness of Indians. Whether one refers to these Indians as being "marginal men" or "alienated elites," the fact was that they had absorbed enough of Western culture to prevent them from accepting unreservedly many values implicit in their own tradition.

It was an uncomfortable position to be in and it became necessary to do something about it. There is no opportunity here to go into any detail concerning the numerous associations which were formed, but a few of the more important ones may be mentioned. The Brahma Samaj (1888); the Prarthana Samaj (1867); the Arya Samaj (1875); the Theosophical Society (1878); the Ramakrishna Mission (1893); Anjuman-i-Himayat-Islam, i.e. the Society for the Defence of Islam (1888); the Servants of India Society (1905); and the Indian National Congress (1885) played an enormous role in forging new identities among educated Indians. By the first decade of the twentieth century these kinds of associations numbered in the hundreds if not thousands.
The Theosophical Society was just one of these identity forming agencies, but for a period of roughly thirty years (1888-1915), it was among the most important. The ideology of theosophy ran throughout all of their reforming activities. The concept of Ancient Wisdom was utilised in propagating Aryan revivalism as was seen in Chapter III. This was the broad framework in which the Society operated thus drawing thousands of educated Indians into the movement. The reforming activities went in many directions in India but they should all be seen as a reflection of an overall scheme to rehabilitate the East, or to restore confidence, to Indians, in the merits of their own civilisation. To do this, the Society, at first, applied its energies towards religious and social reforms and later included political reforms. The Theosophical Society, in India, became a reference point from which "modernized Indians," (particularly Brahmans), could express a sense of identity. This was done through the ideology of Theosophy, wherein each member of the Society was free to take up whatever religious or social work that appealed to him individually or as a group. With no hardened creed to follow such as existed in the Arya Samaj or the Brahmo Samaj, it left room for a great deal of diversity; even ideologically antagonistic elements could function simultaneously within the Society without disrupting the organization itself. It was this overshadowing sense of "defensive tolerance" within the Society that allowed the most conservative Brahman to view himself as a Theosophist along with the most radical English member.
C. Theosophical Religious Reform

In this section, Theosophical religious reform will be discussed in relation to three major religious systems that particularly interested Theosophists under the leadership of Olcott and Besant. These religions are Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Hinduism. The Theosophists interested themselves in other religions, of course, but during the period under review Islam, Christianity and so forth were emphasized less. Like other reforming associations, the Theosophists tried to modernize religions to the extent that they were intellectually defensible in light of modern scientific knowledge and before the criticisms of Christian missionaries, or in general, by critical comparison with Western culture. In drawing comparisons between the various religious systems, they tried to establish their essential unity. By applying concepts of Eastern Occultism to each of the religious systems, they attempted to "Aryanize" them or to introduce elements of Hinduism into them. At another level, the Theosophists did concrete work in bolstering their respective tenets by establishing organisations which propagated the value systems within each of the religions. For instance, they opened up theological schools, published religious books and attempted to gain the support of orthodox religious leaders. It will be seen that Theosophy often came into conflict with orthodox religious leaders, who in some cases formed associations to counteract Theosophic influence.
1. Zoroastrianism—The Religion of the Parsees of India

Olcott felt that if ever there was an example of an ancient religion that needed rehabilitation it was Zoroastrianism. By the time the Theosophists arrived at Bombay, the Parsees had been practicing their religion for more than ten centuries in India; ever since the early Persian migrants obtained permission to settle in Gujarat from a Hindu Raja, Jadi Rana.23 Olcott took particular interest in the Parsi community at Bombay, as they seemed to express more need of Theosophy than any other community there. The religion of Zoroastrianism had undergone several changes on Indian soil over the centuries and according to some Parsi scholars had lost much of its original character.24 In Olcott's mind, the Orientalists had completely misunderstood the essence of Zoroastrianism, and had done much harm in depicting it as a superstitious ancient faith. The modern orthodox Parsi priests were also seen as guilty of misrepresenting Zoroastrianism because they had lost the keys to the ancient texts. Many of the educated Parsees, among the most Westernized group in India, had turned away from their religion thus alarming Theosophists that Zoroastrianism was in danger of dying out altogether within a generation of two.25 Unveil, a Parsi Theosophist felt that the occult scientific approach towards Zoroastrianism had been "completely kept in the background" by Orientalists.26 He also said that the reason why the scholarship of Orientalists was deficient and incomplete was that "The demon of materialism, which is so rampant in this age of railways and telegraphs, has
not failed to infect the present methods. It was believed by Theosophists that Zoroastrianism, when properly understood, was in agreement with the most recent discoveries in modern science. An interest in reform among Parsees started well before the Theosophical Society was formed. From the early part of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries had launched several attacks on the beliefs and customs of the Parsees. The attacks usually centered around two main issues: one, the missionaries tried to present Zoroastrianism as a "natural religion" in the sense that the elements such as fire, water and light were worshipped, and two, the religion was accused of dualism, which to the missionaries was a "lower" state of belief than monotheism. The Parsees countered the missionary propaganda with R. N. Cama's founding of the "Zarathushtra Din-am Khel Karnani Mandli," or the Society for Furthering Research on Zoroastrianism, in 1864. A rift developed between orthodox and reform Parsees. For one thing, the reformists characterized Parsism as strictly monotheistic with the "Gathas" as the sole frame of reference. The reformists also wanted to restrict ritualistic practices to a minimum and to discard the idea of prayers being given in a language, Avesta, a language which the priests nor they themselves understood. Parsi-Theosophy was different from both orthodox and reformist interpretations. Theosophists wanted Parsees to see that their rituals were rich in symbolic importance and essential to a truly scientific explanation of their religion. Olcott felt that Zoroastrianism and
Vagianism were "the chief source both of esoteric Judaism and of esoteric Christianity." He also claimed that the Orientalists relied upon European sources, which were essentially based upon Jewish and Christian sources that were based against Zoroastrianism. Further, Olcott maintained that the Zoroastrian religion was once a highly spiritual faith before it had shrunk into a purely esoteric creed full of ritualistic practices not understood. He said that "The defilements by touch of various objects that you are warned against, are not visible defilements, like that of a person by contact with filth but psychic defilements, through the influence of their bad magnetic aura - a subtle influence proceeding from certain living organisms and inert substances - which is antipathetic to development as an Adept." This idea, the Theosophists also applied to Hinduism and Buddhism. Olcott believed that there were many important secrets to be extracted from ancient M.S.S. in Armenia and proposed that the Parsi community sponsor a scholarly expedition; with the help of Madame Blavatsky. It seems that one of Madame Blavatsky's friends was an important political personage in Armenia. No member of the Parsi community took up Olcott's suggestion of investigating the ancient M.S.S. alleged to be in Armenia despite Olcott's efforts. Earlier, in 1893, Olcott had recommended that the Parsi Panchayat should adopt "a formal Resolution declaring that, henceforth, the promotion of the interests of the Zoroastrian religion shall be one of its recognised duties, that its sympathy and help may be counted on by
every scholar, society, explorer or other person who, in any part of the world may be engaged in collection of Parsi documents, antiquarian relics, publication of books, maps, drawings upon Zoroastrian religion. He also recommended that the Government of India and the Home Government should be petitioned by the Panchayat that "all British Ministers and Consuls be requested and encouraged to help in the promotion of this laudable work."

The Theosophists were mainly concerned with the eclectic and orthodox Parsi communities. They believed that the ideals of Zoroastrianism were not restricted to the Avesta alone, but that many ideas were preserved in Greek as well as in the Arabic and Persian philosophical works. Beyond this, the Hindu elements which had crept into Parsian over the centuries were not all considered undesirable. Seclusion of women within the Parsi community was, of course, a negative accretion, but the concept of reincarnation, which eclectic or Theosophical Parsians accepted, was seen as belonging to Zoroastrianism from ancient times. It was believed that the great doctrine of Karma and Reincarnation were at the very root of the Mazdahian religion. Part of the problem facing Parsians was that many portions of their religious texts were lost over the centuries due to their migrant life styles and the conquering of Persia by Islamic armies. Olcott felt that it was possible that the learned Moulvies, attached to the Mohammedan armies, might have taken home with them books
and manuscripts from conquered countries. He advised that scholars start looking in other Mohammedan countries for the fragments, at least the ones in Arabic translations. The Parsees, in 1867, had subscribed some fifteen lacs for public charities in India, but "the subject of archeological research for their own divine faith has not yet found a place in the category of Public Charities." It was always irritating to Olcott that perhaps the wealthiest community in India, had so little regard or interest in spending money to save their "national" religion. The materialism of the modern Parsees was often contrasted with the devout Parsi of the time when he first met with hospitable reception "on the blessed shores of India."

The Theosophical Society attracted only a portion of the Parsi community. Most of the Parsees, who worked for Zoroastrian reforms along Theosophical lines came from the "Blavatsky Lodge" at Bombay. Parsi Oriental scholars of repute such as K.K. Camji and J.J. Wody were attracted towards Olcott and Blavatsky's ideas. Dinsah Servan Irani was a well-known Parsi Theosophist, who arranged for numerous lectures and the printing and reprinting of pamphlets and leaflets on Zoroastrian subjects in light of Theosophy. Western Theosophists, such as Olcott, Daram, Arthur Richardson and Miss Lilian Edgar took keen interest in the welfare of the Zoroastrian religion. In 1910, several delegates were sent from Blavatsky Lodge, Bombay, to attend the Zoroastrian Conference. Leading Parsi politicians joined the Theosophical
Society. Jannadas Dvarkadas and Kanji Dvarkadas, B.P. Wadia, Narottam Koranj, Framros J. Jinwala were significant politicians and/or social reformers in the Bombay area and Theosophists. N.F. Bilimoria seems to have been the most prolific Theosophical writer on subjects relating Zoroastrianism to Theosophy. Apparently the greatest role that the Parsi Theosophists played was to instigate new thinking about Zoroastrianism. Dr. Nanakji Nusserwanji Dhesia, a famous orthodox leader of a large segment of the Parsi community, though anti-Theosophist, felt that Parsi Theosophists rendered valuable service towards revitalizing Zoroastrianism. He said that "in the early eighties of the last century, the Parsi members of the Theosophical Society entered the arena of religious controversy and gave new zest to it."  

Dr. Dhesia, who was an orthodox "Dastur," also believed that "they were a potent factor in shaping the religious beliefs of a section of the community." The Theosophical Society, however, was not able to gain a dominant role in re-shaping Zoroastrian doctrines. They basically attempted to introduce numerous concepts, which were largely Hindu, into Zoroastrianism. This undoubtedly made Zoroastrianism appear to be much more broadly based and in unity with the other great faiths of India. In the late 1920's, with the rising spirit of nationalism and the need for more and more consensus as to religious, social and political reforms, Theosophy offered a certain unifying principle of "occult rationalism," and brotherhood. Thus Parsi-Theosophists could, with little difficulty
communicate with Hindus, Jains and Buddhist-Theosophists on issues such as Karma, Reincarnation, the mystic meanings of symbols, concepts of purification rites and the essential unity of all religions.

2. Working for the Uplift of Buddhism

On May 17, 1880, both Olcott and Blavatsky arrived at Galle, Ceylon, and openly avowed themselves as Buddhists.\(^{48}\) From this point onwards, some Western Theosophists began to concern themselves with the state of Buddhism as they found it in Ceylon and elsewhere. The first thing that they noticed was that the process of Christianisation had been much more intense there than in India. The majority of schools in Ceylon were those set up by the missionaries and the effects of Westernisation had become very extensive.\(^{49}\) Buddhism, the national religion of Ceylon, was seriously waning and it seemed only a matter of time to Olcott before Ceylon would become a Christian country. The first task of the Theosophists was to inaugurate an educational movement, which could present an alternative to the Christian schools. Olcott, with the help of C.W. Leadbeater, started a Buddhist-English High School, which years later was fashioned into the Ananda College of Colombo.\(^{50}\) Branch after branch of the Theosophical Society opened as European Theosophists moved to Ceylon to open schools and ward off missionary influences. As Buddhism was divided between the Northern and
Southern schools, one of the first things that Olcott wanted to do was to organize a Buddhist Catechism, one in which would be acceptable to all Buddhists. Olcott published a Catechism of Buddhism in 1881, which outlined the basic teachings and principles of Buddha. This Catechism was widely accepted by the priests of Ceylon and Burma and was eventually translated into twenty different languages. This also laid the groundwork for Olcott's plan to unify the various Buddhist sects in Ceylon, Burma and later Japan, which he achieved several years later (1892). The Buddhists, according to Olcott had fallen into a state of apathy and done nothing concrete to counter the activities of the missionaries. By 1883, Christian Protestant missionaries completely dominated the island. That year serious rioting broke out when Christians attacked a Buddhist procession in Colombo. Olcott immediately took up the cause of the Buddhists. By 1884 he interviewed the then Governor of Ceylon, Sir Arthur Gordon, who was apparently sympathetic towards Buddhism. The Governor promised that he would have the sacred holiday of the birth of Buddha declared a Government holiday, thus insuring Olcott that no harm would come to the Buddhists. Olcott carried his mission further by representing the concerns of the Buddhists before the Colonial Secretary in London, thus ensuring that Buddhists would gain national recognition by the Government.

Olcott became more or less a spokesman for the Buddhists
of Ceylon. The principal High Priests of Ceylon honoured Olcott by authorising him to admit converts into Buddhism in 1884. This was a privilege only given to Buddhist monks, but an exception was made in Olcott's case because of his dedication to the revival of Buddhism. In 1897, the Prince of Siam, Prince Chommuang, who had become a Buddhist monk, arranged for his father, the King of Siam, to make a tour of Ceylon with the hope that the Buddhist community there would unite under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of his father, who was the only reigning Buddhist sovereign in the world. It was further agreed that a deputation of learned and virtuous Siamese monks should be sent to Ceylon to "reform the Sangha, give a new ordination to such as might wish it, and co-operate with the most respected Buddhist monks to draw the Buddhists of Burma into a tripartite religious reliance with those of Ceylon and Siam." This would give the three Buddhist nations a common recognised religious chief and heal many of the differences existing between the religious practices of the three countries. Olcott was responsible for instigating the Prince Priest to draft a petition to His Majesty, the King of Siam. The King made a visit to Ceylon in the Spring of 1897, but not without some difficulties. He was refused an opportunity to touch the sacred relic of Buddha's tooth thus causing a diplomatic stir. A special conference was held on May 9, 1897, to pass a resolution begging the King's pardon and disciplining the priest who had refused the King's request to touch the relic. In 1899, Olcott returned to Japan with his
famous "Fourteen Point Document" that he hoped would establish a common platform for all Buddhists. Burmese and Ceylonese Buddhist authorities had already agreed to the document. 59 This document was signed thus unifying, on certain aspects of Buddhism, the Northerners (Hinayana or "Smaller Vehicle") with the Southerners (Mahayana or "Large Vehicle"). The result of Olcott's efforts was that Buddhists of China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Siam, Burma, Ceylon, Mongolia, etc. all came together, submerging their sectarian interests, to present a reasonable Buddhist unity in order to ensure that the religion survived the impact of Westernization and the assault of the world wide Christian missionary movement.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Olcott's work for the uplift of Buddhism was his attempt to assist a potential 5,000,000 "Pariahs" (Achyaparivas) to be re-converted to Buddhism. Respectable members of the "Pariah" community, led by Pandit Dr. Iyotha Bose, who was a medical Practitioner in Madras, put forth a fantastic proposition to Colonel Olcott. It was claimed that the "Pariahs" were once all Buddhists; "that they had been conquered in war and reduced to slavery; that they had never been able to recover their former social condition; and that their conquerors had destroyed their temples, slaughtered their priests and extirpated their religion from Southern India." 60 According to the deputation that met Olcott, there existed evidence for these claims in Tamil literature.
Dr. Ross found in an ancient palmleaf manuscript, ascribed to the renowned Buddhist philosopher and poet Aravinda Bodhisattva, the supposed proofs of the history of his race and showed them to Olcott. 61 Olcott had hesitated to propagate Buddhism over the years because he did not wish to give the impression that the President of the Theosophical Society was trying to influence its members towards accepting Buddhism. But an opportunity to influence the religious and social position for a possible $,000,000 people was too tempting for Olcott to pass up. A meeting was held at Royapettah, on June 8, 1892 in order to prepare a petition to sound the leading Ceylon priests as to the possibility of converting all members of the Panchama caste who wished to become Buddhists. 62 Olcott was to deliver the petition personally and to use whatever influence possible. The petition was sent to the venerable Sri M. Samangala Maha Nayaka, the Buddhist High Priest of Ceylon and friend of Olcott. The High Priest concurred and suggested in a return letter that the Committee of the Panchama Community secure a convenient piece of land with a habitable bungalow on it, in which priests sent from Ceylon could reside. From that vantage point, the High Priest felt that missionary activity could commence throughout the Madras Presidency. 63 As the historical evidence for the claim of the Panchama Committee was weak it appears that the movement did not gain much momentum. Olcott also treaded lightly in the matter as he claimed that it was up to the "Pariahs" themselves to make the movement a success.
3. Hinduism - India's National Religion

From the year 1893, when Mrs. Besant came to India, the emphasis within the Theosophical Society slowly shifted from a broad eclectic approach towards the religions of India to a more particular interest in Hinduism. Though a great deal of concern had been shown for the welfare of Hinduism by both Blavatsky and Olcott, they were personally more inclined towards Buddhism. Mrs. Besant, having declared herself a Hindu, took up the work of Hindu revivalism and dedicated herself to "purifying" Hinduism along Theosophic lines. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many Theosophists did not appreciate the fact that as powerful a leader as Mrs. Besant stressed the cause of reviving Hinduism to so great an extent. She did not ignore other religions in her Theosophic work; but there is no doubt that Mrs. Besant gave the Society, over the years, a distinctly Hindu if not Brahmanical flavour which continues to the present time. Like Olcott, Blavatsky and other Theosophists, Mrs. Besant felt a great sense of well being when she first arrived in India. She recorded her feelings in December of 1893, by saying that, "when I landed here for the first time I knew what love of country meant. For then the whole life came out into flower and taught me the fragrance of the land that is your own, the love of a crowd merely because they are fellow countrymen, and the feeling that at last you have come to the place you have loved and tried even blindly to serve, before yet you had trodden on its soil." Mrs. Besant
travelled over the length and breadth of India numerous times preaching to Hindus that their religion was the elder sister of the living world religions. She defended teachings in Hindu books such as "the divisibility of the atom, the homogeneous basis and the five substances of matter, the correlation of the forces, etc. She illustrated and explained in her inimitable way, a large part of the allegory and symbology contained in the puranas, such as the Bull of Kandadeva, the Garuda of Vishnu, the lotus of creation, etc." 65

Like Olcott and Blavatsky, Mrs. Besant was anti-Christian in the Theosophic sense. As a former member of the National Secular Society, she had written many articles criticizing the organised churches in the west. She claimed to have been born a Hindu in one of her past incarnations, but perhaps the most interesting reincarnation claimed was that Mrs. Besant possessed the Soul of Hypatia, the daughter of Theon, the Greek mathematician. Hypatia was said to have taught the Ancient Wisdom Religion and to have been an obstacle to the spread of Christianity in the latter part of the fourth century, in Greece. Though a brilliant philosopher and a teacher of the highest morals, she was brutally butchered by Christian fanatics. Her life was likened to that of Annie Besant, the martyr of truth, in Theosophic writings. 66 Mrs. Besant's guiding Master was a Hindu, Agastiya, who on several occasions directed her activities with regard to Hindu revivalism. Mrs. Besant envisioned that the true Hindu religion
was in harmony with the most recent scientific discoveries. She felt that the modern pandits had lost touch with the essence of Hindu teachings and therefore had fallen into an exoteric interpretations of their religion. They were more interested in sectarian bickering than understanding the higher truths. She complained that "too large a section of the present day pandits who fight over quibbles in the river-side rest-houses of Southern India act and talk as if Brahma, Vishnu and Kudre are in the Akas and capable of being propitiated by offers of a few coconuts to eat and betel leaves nuts to chew." Mrs. Besant thought that there was hope of India's traditions and legends being put on a rational basis. In her view, the great national religion of the Hindus had been converted into a set of fetishes, thus leaving the Anglicised Hindu no other alternative but to lean towards Western learning and Materialism. She also regretted that the pandits were too prejudiced to cooperate with scientific bodies such as the Theosophical Society. Mrs. Besant satisfied herself that the work of uplifting Buddhism and Zoroastrianism had been largely accomplished by Olcott and therefore took up the task of rejuvenating Hinduism, which was after all the "national religion" of India. In fact, she regretted that many orthodox section of the Hindu community were under the impression that Theosophy was more or less a covert form of Buddhism. This Mrs. Besant explained was the reason that Hindus remained aloof from the Society. She quoted Blavatsky as having seen
India as the fountain from which all the great religions sprang.
Blavatsky had said that "India, my India which I love so deeply,
my true motherland and that of my master ... is she not also a
nation, are not her people a chosen people? Chosen, yes? but
for what? Chosen to lead the world to spirituality, chosen to
emphasise always the higher, the nobler, the less material aspect
of life."

Mrs. Besant wanted to re-spiritualize India, so that "the
nation as a whole with her spiritual faculties, her intellectual
powers, her ideally perfect social organisation, would stand forth
in the eyes of the world as the priest-people of Humanity." She
likened India before the advent of theosophy to the pagan
world on the eve of the advent of Christianity. The priests
were seen as trapped in empty ceremonial rituals stifling life
out of the true religion. Mrs. Besant pleaded that what India
needed most was to return to the "pure waters of the early
scriptures, to expound their symbology and mysticism and to
demonstrate how much Aryan thought was in harmony with modern
scientific discoveries." The main problem according to Mrs.
Besant was that foreign conquests over the centuries had nearly
ruined Hinduism. The work of the missionaries was relatively
easy because English schoolmasters with the help of material-
listic science had destroyed their students' faith in Hinduism.
She defended the use of idols in Hindu worship saying that within
the Christian religion it was only for the past three and a half
centuries that a small minority of Christians, a section of Protestants, have discarded the use of images. There had to be some fact in nature at the root of idol worship and it was to be understood and purified, not destroyed. The nature of God, to Mrs. Besant was beyond the comprehension of the average man and therefore "in every case the particular Being is worshipped as a manifestation of the Supreme." Further she claimed that in meditation, an idol forms a point on which the mind can be concentrated; a magnetic center from which "a highly evolved person can draw down on an image, some of the magnetism of the Being it represents." In the Central Hindu College magazine for Hindu Boys, Mrs. Besant took great pains to defend each and every aspect of Hindu religious practices. This magazine was open to subscription from students all over India and undoubtedly had a large affect upon young Hindus minds. She claimed that the "Trimurti" or the Hindu trinity was a concept common to the world's great religions with the exception of Islam. She compared the lives of Christ and Sri Krishna and concluded that they had much in common. Though both were "Divine teachers," from the East, Christ was sent especially to aid the Western nations, and not the East because they already had an abundance of Divine Teachers. The girls who surrounded Krishna were said to have been symbolic for receiving the love of God, and not asssists to a profligate diety as the missionaries had charged. The Gopis became naked because "followers of Krishna must give
up everything for sake of God." To Mrs. Besant, Hinduism was
a "Gold Mine" of moral values and spiritual truths. She met the
basic criticisms of the missionaries and added an almost Chris-
tian proselytising element to her writings and speeches. She
supplied rational answers to many of Hinduism's formerly in-
defensible ideals. Actually she met the attacks against the
practices and beliefs of Hinduism with the idioms of western
scientific thinking and Christian jargon. In discussing the
nature of God, Mrs. Besant said, "After all, when we worship
God, or meditate in Him, we form a mental conception of Him;
we think of Him as Creator, Ruler, Father, Guardian, Justice,
Power, Lover." But this means forming a mental picture of Him,
a mental idol. These explanations did more to stop mission-
ary criticisms than anything else. It also caused Christian
leaders to re-assess their own ideas about Hinduism. Most of
them, no doubt, decided that it was a result of Christianising
work in India that had spread the message of Christ, albeit in
an indirect manner. For example, J.N. Farquhar felt that the
spirit of Christ could be detected in the new defences of

D. The Theosophical Society and Social Reform

The ideology of Theosophy had nothing specific to say
regarding social reform. Individual leaders within the Society
attempted to influence their fellow Theosophists by encouraging
various social attitudes, but the members were never less free
to accept or reject their ideas. The problem with discussing social reform work within the Theosophical Society is that their religious, social and political activities were all blended into an amorphous whole. Theosophical leaders, themselves, found it difficult to separate or to divide their work into one category or another. The Society had attracted many of its members just on the basis of its having extolled the virtues of Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. It claimed to have been able to demonstrate that the practices and observances of these religions were congruous with modern science and equal if not better than the tenets found within Christianity. Social work, to the Society, often meant inspiring its members to emulate the ancient forefathers, according to the Aryan myth that was current in Theosophical thinking. Social activity, in this sense, amounted to rejuvenating the intellectual spirit, creating national pride, and the encouragement of the work ethic, which was seen as lacking in contemporary India, thus creating a stumbling block to the country's progress along modern lines.

The Theosophists proudly claimed that their organization, more than any other in India, brought together the Bengali and the Madrasi or the Punjabi and the Maharatti. This social phenomenon of bringing members from all over India together substantiated the Society's first object which was to foster Brotherhood. At the same time, it also limited the Society's effectiveness in consolidating social opinion. It brought
together men of various castes and of divergent religious and cultural patterns, but this did not imply that beyond the limits of religious concerns that these men could reach any consensus in other matters.

Babu Narendra Nath Sen, Editor of the "Indian Mirror", Calcutta, and a leading Theosophist from Bengal, felt that the Society had already achieved an enormous social task as early as 1883. In his speech before the Theosophical Convention at Bombay, he paid rich tribute to the Founders for having unified Indians in a manner previously unknown in India. He said that "if through the Theosophical movement, the varied classes composing the Indian population are brought into brotherly union with each other, why -- the T.S. will then have solved one of the greatest Indian difficulties, and removed one of the strongest barriers to social progress." At the 1883 Convention, Olcott suggested that the Theosophical Society would be the best organization in India to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. He said that "there is a bitter hatred between the orthodox believers of Islam and the orthodox Hindus of all sects. Yet what can come nearer to our highest Indian philosophy than the Mohammedanism of the Sufis -- of which class we now have a number of the most intelligent in our Society." The unity of all the religions was stressed by the Theosophists with the underlying concept that religious unity would lead to social unity.
lerg to social reform. These categories were: 1) Those who had entirely merged the particular aims and objects of the Theosophical Society in their general reformatory efforts and devoted most of their time to reform activity; 2) Those who combined Theosophical work with practical social reform; 3) Those who took no interest in general social questions at all, believing that reform must begin with the individual; and 4) Those who actively opposed all attempts in the direction of betterment of social conditions. The fourth group of Theosophists represented quite a large number of members which, no doubt, was the reason why the Society was often associated in the public mind with an attitude of "stubborn and unyielding orthodoxy and conservatism in regard to all progressive movements." These Theosophists also used the Society in whatever way possible as a prop for orthodoxy. For example, though the concept of brotherhood was foremost among the Society's three basic objectives, these orthodox members would refuse to inter-line at Annual conventions and rigidly adhered to their caste distinctions. The third category of Theosophists mentioned, the ones who expressed no interest in social reforms, were members who joined the Society for individual religious purposes and felt that the everyday activities of the mundane world were not as important as cultivating spirituality. This group tended to concentrate on occult teachings found within Theosophical literature. The
first two categories may be referred to as the liberal members of
the Society and their influence for social reform was not especia-
lly widespread, though some were members of the Annual Social
Conventions following the meeting of the National Congress and
others started various social reform activities within the
Theosophical Society itself. If reform meant starting schools
based upon ancient Aryan ideals of education, many Theosophists
enthusiastically participated. But, if reform meant disrupting
the relations between the sexes or the improvement of the social
and educational status of "untouchables," support became pretty
thin.

Between the years 1886 and 1893, the Theosophical Society's
popularity waned significantly. The Coulomb Scandal that drove
Blavatsky out of India; numerous personality rivalries within
the Society; the split between Olcott and Blavatsky as to whether
or not the Masters were going to play a dominant role in the
Society (1888); the death of Blavatsky in 1891; the ideological
conflicts between American Theosophists and Adyar; and the
increasing preoccupation with the Indian National Congress and
political activities, by educated Hindus, left the Theosophical
Society nearly dormant. In fact no Annual Convention was held
in 1889, as there was practically nothing of interest to report
to the members. It appeared as if the Society were doomed to
failure in India as Olcott struggled to maintain his position
as President against enormous pressures to resign. Around 1890,
the principal leaders of the Society at Adyar such as Olcott,
Keightley, C. Subrasaniam Ayyar, Karendra Nath Sen, Tooraram
Tatya and others began to look to the West for help. They all
pinned their hopes on the possibility that Annie Besant would
pay a visit to India and utilize her great gifts of speech and
organisational capacity to revitalise the Society. Olcott com-
plained at the Sixteenth Annual Convention that "The Hindus are
almost like children as regards the management of public affairs,
for they have never been trained for co-operative public work.
Look at the workers in England and America. They are always
forward in action. We have to labor constantly to keep the
Hindus actively interested in even religious work." 66 He also
insisted that many of the wealthy members of the Theosophical
Society were not even willing to pay the paltry Annual subs-
scription of one rupee. Worse than this was the disappointment
to Olcott when some 25,000 rupees promised by the Maharaja of
Durbungha in 1886 as a donation to the Society had yet to be
appreciated as late as 1892. 89 This dreary picture of the state
of the Theosophical Society immediately began to improve in
1893 with Mrs. Besant's tour of Ceylon and India. New members
joined in large numbers and the Indian press gave Mrs. Besant
encouraging and wide coverage. Over the next seven years,
Mrs. Besant lectured throughout India working for the revival
of Hinduism. During these years, she defended Hindu religious
and social practices thus arousing the ire of Christian mission-
aries once again. The Madras missionaries had viewed Thesomopy
as a spent force in India once they had disgraced Blavatsky and discredited the Society in 1884-85; but Mrs. Besant brought new zest into the Theosophical Movement.

The attitude of the Theosophists towards social reform was largely conditioned by the European leadership within the Society. For example, Olcott and Blavatsky were quite critical of contemporary social conditions in India. Rather than accepting the Brahminical values of many of the Indian members, they attempted to instigate changes in social thinking. When Mrs. Besant came to India, she tended to accept the social conditions prevailing at that time. With regard to the caste system, Mrs. Besant supported the rigid social and religious structure. In 1896, Mrs. Besant defended her earlier opinions concerning the caste system by stating the reasons why that institution appeared to her to be a valuable one, "one that it would be unwise to throw away." She said that "caste is conducive to the best evolutionary development. Will you cut down the tree because the parasites are round it."90 Sydney V. Edge and Walter Old, two English Theosophists from the Blavatsky Lodge in London, criticised Mrs. Besant sharply suggesting that "she had again been carried away by her new knowledge and natural enthusiasm, and to prove their charges quoted from certain newspapers such as the Bihar Herald, stating that she had bathed daily in the sacred ganges at Allahabad, had dressed in Hindu Female attire, shoeless, lotus in hand."91 They wanted to stem the trend of conservatism
and orthodoxy within the society and to make Theosophists
realize that a blind veneration of the past was no more than
a cloak to hide their own orthodoxy. Early in the twentieth
century, Mrs. Besant came to realize that the Caste system,
"which on her first conversion to Hinduism she had so jealously
defended, was a harmful institution that should be destroyed
not merely reformed, and she began to advocate and practice
inter-caste and inter-race association, and dining even."92

She delivered a series of lectures at the 26th Anniversary
Convention, which more or less called upon Theosophists to try
to reach the "Ancient Indian Ideal" by applying the high ideals
to contemporary India.93 She spoke of the "decreasing stature
of Hindus, in localities where to early marriages prevail, and
reprimanded their ignorance of, and indifference to physiological
laws."94 She criticized the appalling degradation "which is now
manifest in the conduct of many of the Hindu Temples."95 In her
third lecture on the "Caste System" she said that "changes in
the social systems must be made with great foresight, and that
we should carefully distinguish between essentials and non-
essentials."96 Though she still recognized the four classes,
as the "four stages in the paths of the evolution along which
humanity travels," she attacked the indifference of the higher
castes in disregarding the interests of those beneath them and
thus inspiring the development of so many sub-castes, which was
the result of selfishness. She said that "outcasting was
practiced to preserve the purity of the caste, but who are now
fit to be the proper judges in these cases. One may outrage every principle of morality yet not be outcasted, if he keeps up the outer forms; yet if a young man travels abroad to get an education, he may at once be outcasted." 97 She also complained that outside all castes there were millions of human beings who were utterly neglected and looked down upon. Mrs. Besant warned the Hindus that their religion would sink lower and lower in the eyes of the world if they did not devise some means of treating the outcastes in a different manner. The Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society coincided with the Congress meeting at Madras in 1903. Mrs. Besant's lectures had become so popular that the Society had arranged for an alternative to her regular convention lectures in order to accommodate enormous crowds of Theosophists as well as non-Theosophists. Some 5,000 people flocked to Adyar to hear her speak on "The Value of Theosophy in the Raising of India." 98

In 1883, Olcott started the "Aryan League of Honour" for young boys between the ages of 10 and 21. The League was to upgrade the moral tone of the rising generation by stressing the values of Chastity, Honesty and Truthfulness. Though the League was formed independently of the Theosophical Society it was under its "fatherly care and protection." 99 The boys were to guard the honour of Aryavarta and to encourage religious reform as a duty. The same year Olcott sponsored another youth organisation called "Our Aryan Forefathers Association," which
was to popularize reform by giving a "wider circulation to the current thought and render it as much as possible, accessible to the masses ... by giving a stimulus to the language of the people." Considering the difficulties entailed in the way of ladies joining a public society, Mrs. Gordon, a prominent Anglo-Indian Theosophist took the lead in establishing the "Ladies Theosophical Society" in 1883. O'Gillott addressed the lady Theosophists advising them to take up the work of regenerating India. He criticized the ladies by saying that "The waste of time for which many of you are responsible is grievous. Days, weeks, months, nay, almost the entire lives of not a few, pass in idleness or in occupations and amusements so useless and frivolous as to deserve no better name than idleness disguised." The Western Theosophists believed that India could not advance along the path to nationhood until the womenfolk were intellectually activated. Many of the Theosophists who were hesitant to bring their wives into the movement directly had promised to educate them in the homes. The Ladies branch of the Society at Madras was followed up by a similar branch being formed at Calcutta. They met monthly and mainly concerned themselves with the study of Hindu philosophy with particular reference to the scientific rationale of so-called superstitions. These small beginnings eventually led to larger associations for the advancement of Indian women. In 1917, Mrs. Dorothy Jina-rajadase and Mrs. Besant inaugurated the "Women's Indian Association." Within the first year of its existence 33 branches
were formed in as many towns. The following year a magazine was started called "Sri Dharma." In 1918, Mme. Besant was in the midst of the fight for home rule and decided that Indian women could become a crucial factor in the battle. The association worked for the rights of women to be elected as members of all Municipal and Legislative Councils and of course, the right to vote in elections. In other areas, they worked for the raising the age for the marriage of girls; raising the age of consent for married and unmarried girls; reforms in laws and customs relating to property and inheritance for Hindu women, higher education for girls as well as boys; improvement in the conditions of working in factories such as maternity benefits and the abolition of child labor.  

In 1908, Mme. Besant inaugurated the "T.S. Order of Service." The purpose of this organization was to supply Theosophical principles in the various departments of human activity. Another movement started in the same year was the "Sons of India Order." This organization, for young was geared to redirect the energies of school students from politics and mischievous activities, "dangerous alike to themselves and to the State" towards what Mme. Besant considered to be "useful and healthy channels." This was followed up with the "Daughters of India Order." In 1908, The "order of the Service" had been divided into twelve areas of work in India. There was the League for the Education on National lines;
League for Girl’s education; the League for the promotion of foreign travel; the League for spreading of knowledge of sanitary laws; the League for translation and publication of works on the Wisdom of Islam; the League for moral instruction; the League for Prevention of Child Parthenage; and the League for Temperance and non-flesh eating. These leagues were formed in various branches throughout the country. Through the Society’s efforts to promote temperance it was claimed that “nearly 80,000 people forming big castes like those of Khatri weavers, oil-mongers, rice-beaters, shoemakers, tailors, coolies, have formed resolutions to abstain from the use of intoxicants of all sorts and have promised to make a vigorous effort to give up animal food.” The Sons of India was formed with the intent of training men and women into “noble citizenship, and of building up the coming generation in true piety and patriotism.” Each chapter had a councillor, who was assisted by his younger helpers who were known as Knights. Following the customs of European nobility during the Middle Ages, each Knight pledged his loyalty to the Warden or Councillor by taking an Oath. The Pledge of the Order was as follows: “I promise to treat as brothers Indians of every religion and every province. To make Service the dominant ideal of my life and therefore to seek the public good before personal advantage. To protect the helpless, defend the oppressed, teach the ignorant, raise the down-trodden. To choose some definite line of public usefulness and to labor thereon. To perform every day at least one act of Service. To pursue our ideals by law abiding methods only.”
To be a good citizen of my municipality or district, my province, the Netherlands, and the empire. The Daughters took up a similar pledge and the Order published an organ, "The Viceroy of India." The Viceroy of India was immensely pleased with the new association and praised Mrs. Hasnat. Lord Minto said that the "history of the coming years must depend to some extent on the direction in which the rising generation can be steered."110

On Christmas Day, 1912, the "Order of the Theosophical Sannyasins" was founded at the Adyar Headquarter's Shrine Room. Six men and one woman renounced all caste distinctions and restrictions, all property and the family life, and gave themselves to study, to meditation, and to the service of all through the Theosophical Society. In 1912, the "Grand Temple for India of the Bosy Cross" was formed in which 33 men and women were admitted as Knights Templars. The "Imperial Service League of Modern Thought" was also started in 1912 which was open only to servants of the Crown. The League was made up of Army Officers, Naval Officers and members of the Indian Civil, Educational and Consular services. This league attempted to interest Anglo-Indian and high ranking public officials in identifying themselves with India's national development. Its central office was at Adyar, with Major Peacock as its General Secretary.111

One of Annie Besant's most ambitious schemes for the
revitalization of Indian youth was the establishment of the "Young Men's Indian Association." Modeled after the "Young Men's Christian Association," the purpose was to instill in young men devotion to the Motherland by training them to put into practice the high ideals of their respective religions. The establishment of the Y.M.I.A. in 1914, also had political overtones as the young men were trained in the techniques of democratic government. The "Madras Parliament," which met over the years of Sokholo Hall, proved to be a valuable institution from which many of India's politicians were schooled.

A restaurant and hostel for students was included in her scheme. Among other activities of the Theosophists was the development of the "Depressed Classes Mission" at Mangalore in 1908. The mission did much pioneering work in offering social services of all sorts to the Untouchables of that area of former Mysore State.

Throughout all the years of the Society's history in India, the members had engaged in social work. Each of the Branches were encouraged to help at the practical level in regenerating India. This work amounted more to social services with dispensaries being opened; village handicrafts being encouraged; famine relief funds collected; schools being opened for the study of Sanskrit; journals and other religious publications being established; and the spreading of modern currents of thought throughout the mofussil areas.
On larger social issues such as widow-remarriage, child-marriage and "Untouchability," Theosophists had varying views. Blavatsky, Olcott and Mrs. Besant (in later years) all voiced their opinions concerning these issues and generally were critical of many of the prevailing social customs. Olcott criticised, in his earliest speeches in India, the caste consciousness of many of the Theosophists and was terribly offended at One Theosophical Convention meeting when he accidentally approached some Brahman members, who were eating (apart from the others) and was made to understand that he had polluted their food. Olcott also worked hard for the uplift of the "Pariahs" of the Madras Presidency and rebuked the Indian members who refused to take part in the new social work. Madame Blavatsky felt that Hindu society had been adversely affected by unscrupulous and selfish priests who encouraged various practices such as Suttee, the burning of widows upon their husband's death, child-marriages and the degradation of widows, for personal benefit. She believed that the great Rishis or Founders of Hindu ethics and laws were incapable of consenting to the "idiotic cruelty" of some of the prevailing social practices and therefore decided that these ideas were latter perversions of the original smruti. Blavatsky said in 1884, that, "To marry a child, without her knowledge or consent to enter the married state, and then to doom her to the awful, because unnatural, fate of enforced celibacy if the boy child to whom she was
betrothed should (and one half of the human race do die before coming of age), is something actually brutal, devilish.\textsuperscript{114}

The Indian Theosophists, in general, avoided entering into controversy over social reform. Many of them contented themselves with investigating the occult significance of religious practices and observances. Cynandra S. Chakravarti, one of the more active writers for Theosophic journals, tried his best to substantiate that Hindu social customs, even the prohibition of widow-marriage, were defensible from the scientific point of view. He also attacked the basis of several Western social institutions, claiming that they were inferior to their counterparts in India.\textsuperscript{115} In the 1880s, Chakravarti's views were not out of line with the thinking of many of the high-caste members of the Society, but there were plenty of exceptions also.

S.C. Basu, a leading Theosophist from Bengal, had completely different ideas concerning the position of women. Though the Hindu caste system prohibited the remarriage of widows among the higher castes, he pointed out that there were no such stringent restrictions for women of the lower castes. Basu believed that it was one's duty to educate and to create public opinion on social issues. If widow remarriage were repugnant to Hindu society, he felt it advisable to change public thinking.\textsuperscript{116} In the 1890's, Theosophists such as Raghunath Rao and Justice Telang were active members of the Indian National Social Conferences that followed each of the political meetings
of the Indian National Congress. Sir. Fan worked hard for the 
reform of the Wives-Marriage Act of 1856. There were several 
Indian Theosophists who were sympathetic towards the great social 
reform issues of the late nineteenth century. E ven Cokhale, 
who started the "Servant's of India Society," was a Theosophist. 
Sir G. Subramania Iyer, Manji Dwarkadas and B.P. Wadia were a 
few important members, who were actively interested in guiding 
social reform.

The Theosophical Society occupied an ambiguous position in 
relation to social reform. It was attacked periodically by 
religious authorities, as being a threat to orthodox religious 
and social practices. In 1910, for instance the Mamigal of 
the Shringeri Mutt in Madras Presidency, who had a large follow-
ing, discredited Theosophy in his public speeches. He especially 
criticized the concept of the "Wasters as being false and considered 
the influence of the society to be dangerous. In 1915, a 
small booklet was published attacking social reformers and 
particularly Mrs. Besant. The issue which brought on the attack 
was the Post-Puberty Marriage Bill which "New India," a political 
reform newspaper started by Mrs. Besant in 1914, had staunchly 
supported. C.P. Subbaratna Iyer, the author of the booklet 
etitled "An Appeal from the Orthodox Brahman Community to the 
Almighty Rules of the Universe and all true lovers of India and 
her Ancient Vaidika Dharma and Acharas," asked "What are the 
qualifications of Mrs. Besant and other Theosophists and Social
Reformers to teach, and even legislate upon Religion for the Chathur varnyas? Can a more horrible subversion of the Ancient Ideals be thought of?" The principle objection stated was that "The orthodox Brahmins feel extremely annoyed at the introduction into the Madras Legislative Council, of the Post-Puberty Marriage Bill, which if passed into law, will endanger their Religion." 120

According to Narharot, in his "The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant, the Bharat Bhoomi Mahamandir, an orthodox body representing some of the strictest members of the Hindu community, objected to students at Central Hindu College being indoctrinated by Theosophic concepts. Mrs. Besant was forced to give in to their wishes and to see that the moral and religious training was in strict accordance with the Hindu Shastras. In 1913, "Theosophy In India," the journal of the Indian Section of the Theosophical Society, noted that the Society had engendered a good deal of criticism from several quarters in India. An article suggested that the campaign against Theosophy had its humorous side in that it brought the most divergent elements together in a common platform against the work of the Society. The orthodox Hindu objected to the advent of the "World Teacher," proclaimed by Theosophists. The Persi, who felt that the introduction of the heretical doctrine of Reincarnation and Karma into Zoroastrianism by Theosophists was dangerous, belittled the Society. The political reformer,
who saw Religion and mysticism as obstacles to national progress attacked the Society. The Theistic members of the Brahma and the Prarthana Samajas, who were unsympathetic to the Society's interest in occultism and mysticism, discredited Theosophy. The materialistic social reformer, who objected to the Society's strong bias for spiritual development as part of reform, disliked the character of Theosophy. The Protestant and Catholic Christian leaders, who traditionally disliked Theosophy in India, continued their abuse of the Society. But even more damaging to the Society was the campaign of hatred initiated by Dr. T.M. Kair, who serving the interests of the non-Brahman movement, launched a bitter campaign of abuse against the Theosophical Society, representing it as a Brahman organization, and dangerous in its influence upon the social and political life in the Madras Presidency. As the Theosophical Society moved towards politics it came into conflict with political moderates, extremists and reactionaries.

E. Education

1. The Background of English Education in India.

The first Educational Institution established in India by the British was the Madras, or Muhammadan College in the Bengal Presidency. Warren Hastings established the college at Calcutta in 1781. The East India Company set aside an annual sum of 10,000 Lbs. to be spent on education in 1813, the same
year as the missionaries won the right to proselytize the Christian faith in India. In 1816 the Hindu College, Calcutta was established. This was followed in 1821 with the founding out the Poona College in Western India. In 1823, The Governor General in Council established a General Committee of Public Instruction, for ascertaining the state of Public Education.

Sir Thomas Monro established a similar Board of Public Instruction in Madras in 1826. Bengal followed suit in 1835 and Bombay in 1840. Prior to these moves higher education, however limited, was in the hands of the orientalists. All students of modern Indian history are familiar with Macaulay's scathing minute criticizing traditional instruction and his advocacy of introducing "English-education in India." 125

William Bentinck the mid-nineteenth century Viceroy of India, issued an order giving English-styled education top priority by suggesting that all funds of Government should be utilized for "promotion of European literature and science among the natives." 126

In 1820, the number of pupils in schools and colleges aided or maintained by Government of British India was 305,504; by 1870, the number increased to 1,096,026, leading to a grand total of 1,333,798, in 1880, including 22,274 girls. 127 These included lower grade and secondary schools which were instructed in the vernacular languages. The colleges processed anglicised Indians who could function effectively in the ruler's interest. 128
The 1881 Census estimated the population of India to be approximately 180 million; thus roughly one per cent of the entire population was under Public Instruction. At Government Colleges, a liberal English education was imparted to young Indian Students by English Teachers. At the universities of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, pains were taken in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to create the rationalistic outlook in students. This was, no doubt, over-stressed as the philosophy of education was to reduce, to the extent possible, what Western instructors considered to be the superstitious beliefs prevalent in Indian Society. The Christian mission schools added spiritual content to their scholastic curriculums, but they also in many cases taught similar subjects such as were part and parcel of Government institutions. How widely spread this phenomenon was is hard to say, but apparently it shocked other English educated Indians, who were less influenced by the spirit of skepticism, to react. Thus by the 1880's, a partial rejection of Western education, with its emphasis upon instruction calculated to foster the spirit of skepticism emerged. In the Madras Presidency the Theosophical Society and other agencies such as the Hindu Tract Society aided that process by substantially discrediting both Christian institutions and Government colleges. The result was an over-reaction against Government and Missionary schools by many of India's educated elites. Religious revivalism, which
resulted, was more or less a disguised form of religious nationalism. With the new tendency to dismiss western materialistic values in education, revivalist groups began to attack the basis of western education, with its importation of western cultural values, in India. In search of a new or different model, educated elites developed rather elaborate "myths" based upon the suspected achievements of their ancient forefathers in an attempt to resurrect alternative educational models. The Theosophical Society, as was seen in the chapter on "Aryan Revivalism," offered an acceptable interpretation of India's past to many educated Indians. Olcott attempted to ward off the influence of materialistic western values by encouraging students to emulate their Aryan forefathers and not their university professors. He made no secret of his contempt for Westernized Indians, who spied everything that emanated from outside India. However, Olcott did not formulate precisely an educational scheme which could effectively replace the system then in practice. The great work of formulating an alternative educational system was accomplished by Mrs. Annie Besant and her fellow-Theosophists. The new approach towards education in India took into consideration Theosophical principles plus a veneration of India's traditional values.

2. Mrs. Besant's Educational Scheme.

Mrs. Besant felt that the education of both sexes was the most important question before the nation; it was the early
training of the country's future citizens which would determine the quality of national development. Particularly she concerned herself with the cultivation of spiritual and moral culture in her educational scheme to avoid the nation's becoming materialistic in the Western sense. Education was viewed as necessary "to give us spiritual, intellectual, moral, wisely progressive Hindu men and women; to form teachers, statesmen, merchants, producers, fathers, mothers, worthy to make part of a great Indian nation." Though Mrs. Besant wished to "Aryanize" education to the extent possible, she readily admitted that it was still necessary for boys of the upper classes to receive an English education; "without this, they cannot gain a livelihood, and it is idle to kick against facts we cannot change." Though English education was taken for granted by Mrs. Besant, she felt that a reform in the books studied could lead to better results. For example, no books were to be included in the school curriculum that treated the Hindu Religion and gods with contempt. English language books were to be used which were secular in nature and prepared by Hindus themselves, if possible. Stories from classical Indian literature such as the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana were to be translated for presentation to the students. Science was to be more broadly based (recognition of Occult Principles) and not calculated to foster the spirit of scepticism, but to be integrated with religious principles. No experiments on living animals were
to be permitted as she felt that such acts "brutalize the heart and generally mislead the intellect." Morals education was emphasized: "Daily in every class, a brief portion of some sacred book should be read and explained, and its moral lessons enforced by illustrations." Sanskrit was a compulsory subject in every school, as Latin was in European schools. Mrs. Besant hoped that Sanskrit would eventually form a national bond and offer the basis of a common language. She encouraged the establishment of Hindu boarding houses for students that were run along religious lines. The homely atmosphere could be maintained if the students could live in an atmosphere of common religious values.

Mrs. Besant was especially interested in furthering the cause of female education, but not of the Western type. Female education was conceived as a way in which girls could best prepare themselves for duties in the home, not for competing with men as bread-winners. It was thought to be unnecessary for women to study for Matriculation Examination. Because the school-life of the average Indian girl was brief, Mrs. Besant felt that girls should be trained thoroughly in the "Science of common life." This educational scheme was applicable to the girls on masses, but for girls of the higher classes a different curriculum was envisioned. Sanskrit was to be taught along with classical music and needle-work.
Mrs. Besant looked forward to a time when every child would receive an education in literature, scientific and artistic technical training and would learn to appreciate the highest values in civilization. She maintained the Theosophical ideal that each child should receive an education suited to develop his particular faculties, and also such an education as will make him useful in his future life to his community and to his country. In 1913, Mrs. Besant established the Theosophical Educational Trust, in order to consolidated the various schools under Theosophical guidance. Though Mrs. Besant envisioned a time when children could be educated up to the age of 21, she realized that it was impossible. In all of the schools for the time being, under Theosophical control, physical-culture was stressed. Her educational scheme included the training of the emotions in the sense that self-control was an ideal state to be achieved by every student. For this training students were to read biographies of famous historical figures whether saints, heroes, martyrs, politicians, artists or philosophers. Mrs. Besant expressed her philosophy of education eloquently in her book, "Indies: Bond or Free?" She said, "What after all is the object of Education? To train the body in health, vigour and grace, so that it may express the emotions to love all that is noble and beautiful; to sympathize with the joys and sorrows of others; to inspire to service ever widening in its area, until we love our elders as
our parents, our equals as our brothers and sisters, our
younger as our children, and seek to serve them all; to find
joy in sacrifice for great causes and for the helpless; to
feel reverence for all who are worthy of it, and compassion
for the outcast and the criminal. To evolve and discipline
the mind in right thinking, right discrimination, right judgement,
right memory. To subdue body, emotion, and mind to
Spirit, the inner Ruler Immortal, making the mind the mirror
of the ego, the emotions the mirror of the intuition, the
body the expression of the will."143

7. Theosophical Schools.

By 1913, the year that the Theosophical Educational
Trust was established, the population in British India was
roughly 250 millions. At that time there were approximately
1,011,000 boys in secondary schools and 1,017,000 girls in
primary and secondary schools, and altogether approximately
7 millions of pupils in all of the schools and colleges put
together.144. The greatest need in India was to educate its
children for the future, according to Mrs. Besant. The objects
for which the Trust was established were to establish, schools
and colleges which were to be opened to all students of every
faith and in which religious instruction was an integral part
of education, and to do all such things as were incidental or
conducive to the carrying out of the above objects.145 Annie
Besant, A. Schwarz, Earnest Wood, Sir S. Subramania Aiyar and
other distinguished members of the Theosophical Society com-
prised the Governing Body. The trust was officially incorpo-
rated under the act of 1860, giving to it a recognized legal
status. The schools and colleges were divided into three basic
categories. There were boy's schools, girl's schools and the
Ranches Schools, which were for elementary students of both
sexes. The most prestigious schools started by Theosophists
which eventually became colleges were the Central Hindu College
at Ramnagar, the Madanapalle College in Andhra and the Ananda
College at Colombo.

The establishment of the Theosophical Educational Trust
was the outcome over thirty years of dedicated work along
educational lines by Theosophists. By 1914, there were some
twenty-four institutions under its control. All of the Theoso-
phical Branches from an early a date as 1873 had been encourag-
to establish schools in an effort to regenerate education in
India along Theosophical lines. These Branches started all
sorts of schools which were calculated to revive interest in
the study of Sanskrit. Both Western and Indian Theosophists
co-operated in the management of the schools. Mr. W.U. More
was the principal of the Madanapalle Theosophical College in
1916. Miss Kate Browning became the principal of the
Theosophical Girls College and High School at Ramnagar. George
Armadale was the principal of the Central Hindu College for
many years. Miss Mary Forster was in charge of the Theosophical
Girl's school at Jorahat, Ass. C.B. Noble was principal of the Marana Cowper Theosophical Girls' School at Coimbatore and Miss. C. Kofel was the Superintendent of the Olcott Panchama Free School in the Madras City Area. In conjunction with these educators were several Indian Theosophists. B.S. Subrahmanya Mastri was Headmaster at the Proddutur National High School in the Cuddapah District, Dr. P.K. Telang was Headmaster at the Renarew Theosophical Collegiate Boys' High School. M.L. Mehta was Headmaster of the Sanatana Dharma High School at Bhavnagar, and Pandit N. Shima Sastruji was in charge of the Sanmarga Free Sanskrit School at Bellary. 147

These schools were accompanied by dozens of other Theosophical Schools which in many cases were not of a high enough caliber to be incorporated into the Theosophical Educational Trust. In each of the schools belonging to the Trust the school opened with a very brief religious service, a prayer, a reading and the singing of stotras by the pupils. On a few occasions during each week boys and girls of each religion assembled for a lesson in their own religion, taught if possible by a teacher of their own faith. 148 This was part of Mrs. Besant's scheme for re-introducing the old system whereby the Guru and his pupil could assemble together in order to re-establish a close and cordial relationship, unlike the often cold and impersonal relationship that existed between teacher and students at Government Schools. 149
Girl's school at Gorakhpur, Miss. E.B. Noble was principal of the Marana Gownder Theosophical Girls' School at Coimbatore and Miss. C. Kofel was the Superintendent of the Olcott Panchama Free School in the Madras City Area. In conjunction with these educators were several Indian Theosophists. B.S. Subrahmanya Chastri was Headmaster at the Proddatur National High School in the Cuddapah District, Mr. P.K. Telang was Headmaster at the Benares Theosophical Collegiate Boys' High School. H.L. Mehta was Headmaster of the Sanatana Dharma High School at Bhavnagar, and Pandit N. Bhima Sastrulu was in charge of the Sansarga Free Sanskrit School at Bellary. 147

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In 1885, Mr. A. Sivaramara Pandya, the Theosophist who started the Hindu Tract Society, established the Hindu Theological High School. This was in response to an attempt to convert a Hindu youth to Christianity by a Professor at Madras Christian College. The incident caused something like a national protest and "threatened for a time to deal a death-blow to missionary institutions in India." Pandya established the Theological High School to present an alternative school to the Christian missionary schools in which, "Moral and religious truths should be so carefully inculcated into the minds of our youth as to make them love this world, their homes and to do their duty in a cheerful and reverent manner towards their country, their kings and their religion."

The greatest educational undertaking by Mrs. Besant was the establishment of the Central Hindu College at Benares in 1887. The Central Hindu College was the seed of Mrs. Besant's plan for a national and later, international university in which the ideals of Theosophy would dominate. The college became an enormous success thus attracting the interest of other national educationists such as Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who managed to wrestle the Central Hindu College away from the Theosophists in 1912. Mrs. Besant and other Theosophical educators like George Arundale and P.K. Telang were cleverly eased out of the college as Malaviya intended to develop the Central Hindu College into a great national university himself. This
caused the Theosophists to establish the Theosophical Educational Trust in order to prevent other envious nationalists from taking away their educational institutions, once they reached a certain quality.

A very interesting and important aspect of Theosophical educational work was the starting of a number of schools for the "Parishis" of the Madras Presidency. Colonel Olcott, in 1894, with less than Rupees 250 built a mud-walled, palmree thatched school house; purchased materials and erected a new brick building in which 55 male and female "Untouchable" children received formal education.154

By 1917, there were five Panchama Free Schools operating in the Madras City Area. These schools were the Olcott Free School, Adyar (1894), the H.P.B. Free School, Kodambakkam (1898); the Damodar Free School, Teynampet (1901); the Tiruvalluvar Free School (1901) Mylapore and the Annie Besant Free School, Krishnampet (1901).155 G. Kafel, an American educator who Olcott invited to come to India took charge of the development of these schools. The Panchama Schools were essentially supported by Western Theosophists as the upper-castes Indian Theosophists were on the whole not prepared to engage in the Educational experiment. By 1917, there were a total of 219 girls and 594 boys studying from Kindergarten up to standard IV.156 Though the development of the schools was enormously difficult financially, they proved to be workable and in later
years were absorbed by the Government and turned into normal schools. Miss Sarah Palmer, an American Theosophist who assisted Olcott in the establishment of the Fanchesina Schools introduced a new method of Kindergarten instruction, which became an example for Madras City Caste-schools to emulate. The students learned the most basic subjects such as cooking, sewing, simple maths, sanitary habits and here and there more advanced areas of learning according to individual abilities. These schools found it necessary in the early years to feed and clothe the desperately poor children who otherwise would not have been able to attend school.

0. Adyar Oriental Library

The most lasting memorial of Olcott is the Adyar Oriental Library at the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society. At the Convention of 1888, Olcott presented a scheme for the development of a great oriental library in which scholars from every land would cooperate in the investigation of the literary remains of the ancients. At the Theosophical Convention of 1886, he explained the purpose of the library - "We wish to make it a monument of ancestral learning, but of the kind that is of most practical use for the world." Olcott believed that many excellent secrets of chemistry, metallurgy, medicine, industrial arts, meteorology, agriculture, animal breeding and training, architecture, engineering, botany,
mineralogy could be recovered from the literary remains of the Ancients. In December of 1886, the library was formally opened with a grand celebration in which Pandits, Priests and other religious heads participated. The Theosophists had associated themselves with numerous movements for the revival of Sanskrit. Olcott appealed to all members of the Society and other interested parties to contribute generously to the new undertaking. The first task was to collect as many sources as possible from various places around India and abroad. It was a recognised problem that many valuable MSS. were going to waste all over the country in the homes of Brahmins and within the temples. It was necessary to collect as much as possible before all traces of the ancient manuscripts rotted away with age in the ill-kept repositories. Olcott especially wished to create a center for the training of Pandits so they could refine their knowledge of religious texts and therefore be in a better position to influence educated Indians, who had dismissed them as being ignorant. Beyond this, Olcott hoped that a scholarly study of the old manuscripts would re-establish the dignity of the true Pandit. The second object of the Theosophical Society was to "promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences." Olcott envisioned that scholars from both the West and the East would come together in a brotherly spirit to discover much more of the secret doctrine, which would prove further that all religions,
sciences and philosophies came from one basic source - the "Ancient Wisdom."

By 1889, the library contained 1,245 volumes of Sanskrit works and an additional 272 volumes in other Asiatic languages, thus giving a total of 1,517 volumes. Literary contributions came from dozens of countries thus making the Adyar Oriental Library one of the most distinguished centers for Oriental research in the world. By 1900, the library had accumulated 2,703 MSS. and in addition there were 9,000 printed books. Olcott dreamed of making the Adyar Library the Alexandria of the East.