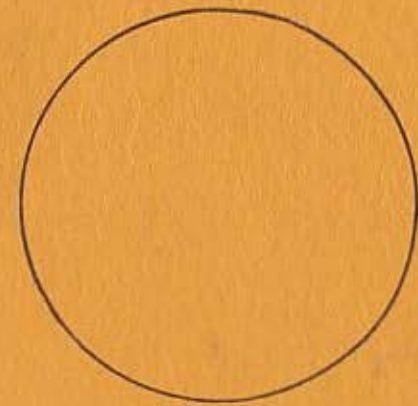


“ We are at the end of a cycle—geological and other—and at the beginning of another, cataclysm is to follow cataclysm. The pent-up forces are bursting out in many quarters; and not only will men be swallowed up or slain by thousands, ‘ new ’ land appear and ‘ old ’ subside, volcanic eruptions and tidal waves appal; but secrets of an unsuspected Past will be uncovered to the dismay of Western theorists, and the humiliation of an imperious science. This drifting ship, if watched, may be seen to ground upon the upheaved vestiges of ancient civilizations, and fall to pieces. We are not emulous of the prophet’s honours; but still, let this stand as a prophecy.”

T. Subba Row Guru, 1856-1890

The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac



by T. Subba Row

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The Commentaries appended to the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac have been furnished by the editor of the Theosophist.

THE TWELVE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

BY T. SUBBA ROW, B.A., B.L.

The division of the Zodiac into different signs dates from immemorial antiquity. It has acquired a world-wide celebrity and is to be found in the astrological systems of several nations. The invention of the Zodiac and its signs has been assigned to different nations by different antiquarians. It is stated by some that, at first, there were only ten signs, that one of these signs was subsequently split up into two separate signs, and that a new sign was added to the number to render the esoteric significance of the division more profound and at the same time to conceal it more perfectly from the uninitiated public. It is very probable that the real philosophical conception of the division owes its origin to some particular nation, and the names given to the various signs might have been translated into the languages of other nations. The principal object of this article, however, is not to decide which nation had the honour of inventing the signs in question, but to indicate *to some extent* the real philosophical meaning involved therein and the way to discover the rest of the meaning which yet remains undisclosed. But from what is herein stated, an inference may fairly be drawn that, like so many other philosophical myths and allegories, the invention of the Zodiac and its signs owes its origin to ancient India.

What then is the real origin of these signs, the philosophical conception which the Zodiac and its signs are intended to represent? Do the various signs merely represent the shape or configuration of the different constellations included in the divisions,

or, are they simply masks designed to veil some hidden meaning? The former supposition is altogether untenable for two reasons, viz:—

I. The Hindoos were acquainted with the precession of equinoxes as may be easily seen from their works on Astronomy and from the almanacs published by Hindu astronomers. Consequently they were fully aware of the fact that the constellations in the various Zodiacal divisions were not fixed. They could not, therefore, have assigned particular shapes to these shifting groups of fixed stars with reference to the divisions of the Zodiac. But the names indicating the Zodiacal signs have been allowed to remain unaltered. It is to be inferred, therefore, that the names given to the various signs have no connection whatever with the configurations of the constellations included in them.

II. The names assigned to these signs by the ancient Sanskrit writers and their exoteric or literal meanings are as follows:—

The names of the signs.	Their exoteric or literal meanings.
1 Másham.....	Ram or <i>Aries</i> .
2 Rishabham.....	Bull or <i>Taurus</i> .
3 Mithunam.....	Twins or <i>Gemini</i> (male and female).
4 Karkátacam.....	Cancer or Crab.
5 Simham.....	Lion or <i>Leo</i> .
6 Kanya.....	<i>Virgo</i> * or Virgin.
7 Thula.....	<i>Libra</i> , or Balance.
8 Vrischikam.....	Scorpion.
9 Thanus.....	Sagittarius or Archer.
10 Makaram.....	Capricornus, or Crocodile.

* *Virgo-Scorpio*, when none but the initiates knew there were 12 signs. *Virgo-Scorpio* was then followed (for the profane) by *Sagittarius*. At the middle or junction-point where now stands *Libra* and at the sign now called which follows *Virgo*, two mystical signs were inserted which remained unintelligible to the profane. — ED. TILLOS.

11 Kumbham..... Aquarius or Water-bearer.

12 Meenam..... Pisces or Fish.

The figures of the constellations included in the signs at the time the division was first made do not at all resemble the shapes of the animals, reptiles and other objects denoted by the names given them. The truth of this assertion can be ascertained by examining the configurations of the various constellations. Unless the shape of the crocodile* or the crab is called up by the observer's imagination, there is very little chance of the stars themselves suggesting to his idea that figure, upon the blue canopy of the starry firmament.

If, then, the constellations have nothing to do with the origin of the names by which the Zodiacal divisions are indicated, we have to seek for some other source which might have given rise to these appellations. It becomes my object to unravel a portion of the mystery connected with these Zodiacal signs, as also to disclose a portion of the sublime conception of the ancient Hindu philosophy which gave rise to them. The signs of the Zodiac have more than one meaning. From one point of view they represent the different stages of creation up to the time the present material universe with the five elements came into phenomenal existence. As the author of "Isis Unveiled" has stated in the second volume of her admirable work, "the key should be turned *Seven times*" to understand the whole philosophy underlying these signs. But I shall wind it only once and give the contents of the *first Chapter* of the History of Creation. It is very fortunate that the Sanskrit names assigned to the various divisions by the Aryan philosophers contain within themselves the key to the solution of the problem. Those of my readers who have studied to some extent the ancient "Mantra" and the "Tantra Sastras" of India, would have seen that very often Sanskrit words are made to convey a certain hidden meaning by means of certain

* This constellation was never called Crocodile by the Western ancient astronomers who described it as a horned goat and called it so—*Capricornus*. — ED. TILLOS.

well-known pre-arranged methods and a tacit convention, while their literal significance is something quite different from the implied meaning. The following are some of the rules which may help an enquirer in ferreting out the deep significance of the ancient Sanskrit nomenclature used in the old Aryan myths and allegories:—

1. Find out the synonyms of the word used which have other meanings.
2. Find out the numerical value of the letters composing the word according to the methods given in ancient Tantrik works.
3. Examine the ancient myths or allegories, if there are any, which have any special connection with the word in question.
4. Permute the different syllables composing the word and examine the new combinations that will thus be formed and their meanings. &c. &c.

I shall now apply some of the above given rules to the names of the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

I. *Māsham*. One of the synonyms of this word is *Aja*. Now, *Aja* literally means that which has no birth and is applied to the Eternal Brahman in certain portions of the Upanishads. So, the first sign is intended to represent *Parabrahman*, the self-existent, eternal, self-sufficient cause of creation.

II. *Rishabham*. This word is used in several places in the Upanishads and the Veda to mean *Pranava* (Aum). Sankaracharya has so interpreted it in several portions of his commentary. Example "*Rishabhasya—Chandasam Rishabhasya Pradhanasya Pranavasya.*"

III. *Mithunam*. As the word plainly indicates, this sign is intended to represent the first androgyne, the *Arthanáreeswara*, the bisexual Sephira-Adam Kadmon.

IV. *Karkátacam*. When the syllables are converted into the corresponding numbers according to the general mode of transmutation so often alluded to in Mantra Shastra, the word

in question will be represented by *////*. This sign then is evidently intended to represent the sacred *Tetragram*; the *Parabrahmantháracam*; the *Pranava* resolved into four separate entities corresponding to its *four Matras*; the *four Avasthas* indicated by *Jágrath* (waking) *Avastha*, *Swapna* (Dreamy) *Avastha*, *Shushupti* (deep sleep) *Avastha*, and *Thureea* (the last stage, *i.e.*, *Nirvána*) *Avastha*, (as yet in potentiality); the *four states of Brahman* called *Vyswánara*, *Thyjasa* (or *Hiranyagarbha*), *Pragna*, and *Eswara* and represented by *Brahma*, *Vishná*, *Maháswara*, and *Sadasiva*; the *four aspects of Parabrahman* as *Stoolam*, *Sookshmam*, *Beejam* and *Sakshi*; the *four stages or conditions of the Sacred wood* named *Para*, *Pasyanti*, *Mathyama* and *Vykhari*; *Nadam*, *Bindu*, *Sakti* and *Kala*. This sign completes the first quaternary.

V. *Simham*. This word contains a world of occult meaning within itself; and it may not be prudent on my part to disclose the whole of its meaning in this article. It will be sufficient for the purpose of this article to give a general indication of its significance.

Two of its synonymous terms are *Panchásyam* and *Hari*, and its number in the order of the Zodiacal divisions (being the fifth sign) points clearly to the former synonym. This synonym—*Panchásyam*—shows that the sign is intended to represent the *five Brahmas*, *viz.*—*Esánam*, *Aghoram*, *Tatpurusham*, *Vámadávam*, and *Sadyojátam*:—the *five Buddhas*:—The second synonym shows it to be *Náráyana*, the *Jeevátma* or *Pratyagátma*. (The *Sukarahasy Upanishad* will show that the ancient Aryan philosophers looked upon *Náráyana* as the *Jeevátma*.* The *Vyshnavites* may not admit it. But as an *Advyti*, I look upon *Jeevátma* as identical with *Paramátma* in its real essence when stripped of its fictitious attributes created by *Agnánam* or *Avidya*—ignorance). The *Jeevátma* is correctly placed in the fifth sign counting from *Māsham*, as the fifth sign is the *putrasthanam* or the son's house according to the rules of Hindu Astrology. The

* In its lowest or most material state, as the life-principle which animates the material bodies of the animal and vegetable worlds, &c.—ED. THOS.

sign in question represents Jeevátma—the son of Paramátma as it were. (I may also add that it represents the real Christ, the anointed pure spirit, though the missionaries may frown at this interpretation)*. I will only add here that unless the nature of this sign is fully comprehended it will be impossible to understand the real order of the next three signs and their full significance. The elements or entities that have merely a potential existence in this sign become distinct, separate entities in the next three signs. Their union into a single entity leads to the destruction of the phenomenal universe, and the recognition of the pure spirit and their separation has the contrary effect. It leads to material earth-bound existence and brings into view the picture gallery of *Avidya* (Ignorance) or *Maya* (Illusion). If the real orthography of the name by which the sign in question is indicated is properly understood it will readily be seen that the next three signs are not what they ought to be. *Kanya* or *Virgo* and *Vrischikam* or *Scorpio* should form one single sign, and *Thula* must follow the said sign if it is at all necessary to have a separate sign of that name. But a separation between *Kanya* and *Vrischikam* was effected by interposing the sign *Thula* between the two. The object of this separation will be understood on examining the meaning of the three signs.

VI. *Kanyá*.—Means a virgin and represents *Sakti* or *Mahámáya*. The sign in question is the 6th *Rási* or division and indicates that there are six primary forces in nature. These forces have different sets of names in Sanskrit philosophy. According to one system of nomenclature they are called by the following names:—(1) *Parāsakti*; (2) *Gnānasakti*; (3) *Itchāsakti* (will-power); (4) *Kriyāsakti*; (5) *Kundalinisakti*; and (6) *Mathru-*

* Nevertheless it is a true one. The *Jiv-átma* in the *Microcosm* (man) is the same spiritual essence which animates the *Macrocosm* (universe), the differentiation, or specific difference between the two *Jivatas* presenting itself but in the two states or conditions of the same and one Force. Hence, "this son of Paramatma" is an eternal correlation of the Father-Cause, *Parusha* manifesting himself as *Brahma* of the "golden egg" and becoming *Viradji*—the universe. We are "all born of Aditi from the water" (hymns of the *Maruts* X.63.2) and "Being was born from not-being" (*Rig-Veda* Mandala I. Sukta 166).—Eri. Tinos.

kāsakti.* The six forces are in their unity represented by the *Astral light*.*

VII. *Thula*.—When represented by numbers according to the method above alluded to, this word will be converted into 36. This sign, therefore, is evidently intended to represent the 36 *Tatwams*. (The number of *Tatwams* is different according to the views of different philosophers; but by *Saktáyās* generally and by several of the ancient *Rishis* such as *Agasthya*, *Thoorwāsa* and *Parasurāma* &c., the number of *Tatwams* has been stated to be 36). *Jeevátma* differs from *Paramátma*, or to state the same

* *Parāsakti*:—Literally the great or supreme force or power. It means and includes the powers of light and heat.

Gnānasakti:—Literally the power of intellect or the power of real wisdom or knowledge. It has two aspects.

I. The following are some of its manifestations when placed under the influence or control of material conditions.

(a) The power of the mind in interpreting our sensations. (b) Its power in recalling past ideas (memory) and raising future expectations. (c) Its power as exhibited in what are called by modern psychologists "the laws of association" which enables it to form persisting connections between various groups of sensations and possibilities of sensations and thus generate the notion or idea of an external object. (d) Its power in connecting our ideas together by the mysterious link of memory and thus generating the notion of self or individuality.

II. The following are some of its manifestations when liberated from the bonds of matter:—

(a) Clairvoyance. (b) Psychometry.

Itchāsakti:—Literally the power of the will. Its most ordinary manifestation is the generation of certain nerve currents which set in motion such muscles as are required for the accomplishment of the desired object.

Kriyāsakti:—The mysterious power of thought which enables it to produce external, perceptible, phenomenal results by its own inherent energy. The ancients held that any idea will manifest itself externally if one's attention is deeply concentrated upon it. Similarly an intense volition will be followed by the desired result. A *Yogi* generally performs his wonders by means of *Itchāsakti* and *Kriyāsakti*.

Kundalinisakti:—Literally the power or force which moves in a serpentine or curved path. It is the universal life-principle which everywhere manifests itself in nature. This force includes in itself the two great forces of attraction and repulsion. Electricity and magnetism are but manifestations of it. This is the power or force which brings about that "continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations" which is the essence of life according to *Herbert Spencer* and that "continuous adjustment of external relations to internal relations" which is the basis of transmigration of souls or *punarjanmam* (re-birth) according to the doctrines of the ancient *Hindu* philosophers.

A *Yogi* must thoroughly subjugate this power or force before he can attain *moksham*. This force is, in fact, the great serpent of the Bible.

Mathrukasakti:—Literally the force or power of letters or speech or music. The whole of the ancient *Mantra* *Shastra* has this force or power in all its manifestations for its subject-matter. The power of The Word which *Jesus Christ* speaks of is a manifestation of this *Sakti*. The influence of music is one of its ordinary manifestations. The power of the mystic ineffable name is the crown of this *Sakti*.

Modern science has but partly investigated the first, second and fifth of the forces or powers abovenamed, but it is altogether in the dark as regards the remaining power.

* Even the very name of *Kanya* (*Virgin*) shows how all the ancient esoteric systems agreed in all their fundamental doctrines. The *Kabalists* and the *Hermetic* philosophers call the *Astral Light* the "heavenly or celestial *Virgin*". The *Astral Light* in its unity is the 7th. Hence the seven principles diffused in every unity or the 6 and one—two triangles and a crown.—Eri. Tinos.

thing in other words, "Baddha" differs from "Mukta"* in being encased as it were within these 36 Tatwams, while the other is free. This sign prepares the way to earthly Adam, to Nara. As the emblem of Nara it is properly placed as the seventh sign.

VIII. *Vrischikam*.—It is stated by ancient philosophers that the sun when located in this Rāsi or division is called by the name of *Vishnu* (see the 12th Skandha of Bhāgavata). This sign is intended to represent Vishnu. Vishnu literally means *that which is expanded*—expanded as *Viswam* or *Universe*. Properly speaking, *Viswam* itself is Vishnu (see Sankarācharya's commentary on Vishnusahasranamam). I have already intimated that Vishnu represents the *Swapnāvastha* or the *Dreamy State*. The sign in question properly signifies the Universe in thought or the universe in the divine conception.

It is properly placed as the sign opposite to Rishabham or Pranava. Analysis from Pranava downwards leads to the Universe of Thought, and synthesis from the latter upwards leads to Pranava (Aum). We have now arrived at the ideal state of the universe previous to its coming into material existence. The expansion of the Beejam or primitive germ into the universe is only possible when the 36 "Tatwams"† are interposed between the Māya and Jeevātma. The dreamy state is induced through the instrumentality of these "Tatwams". It is the existence of these Tatwams that brings *Hamsa* into existence. The elimination of these Tatwams marks the beginning of the synthesis towards Pranava and Brahman and converts *Hamsa* into *Sōham*. As it is intended to represent the different stages of creation from Brahman downwards to the material universe the three signs Kanya, Thula, and Vrischikam are placed in the order in which they now stand as three separate signs.

IX. Thanus (Sagittarius). When represented in numbers the name is equivalent to 9, and the division in question is the

* As the Infinite differs from the Finite and the Unconditioned from the conditioned.—Ed. THOS.

† 36 is three times 12, or 9 Tetrads, the most sacred numbers in the Kabalistic and Pythagorean numerals.—Ed. THOS.

9th division counting from Māsham. The sign, therefore, clearly indicates the 9 *Brahmas*—the 9 Parajāpatis who assisted the Demiurgus in constructing the material universe.

X. *Makaram*.—There is some difficulty in interpreting this word; nevertheless it contains within itself the clue to its correct interpretation. The letter *Ma* is equivalent to number 5 and *Kara* means hand. Now in Sanskrit *Thribhujam* means a triangle, *bhujam* or *karam* (both are synonymous) being understood to mean a side. So, *Makaram* or *Panchakaram* means a *Pentagon*.*

Now, *Makaram* is the tenth sign and the term "Thasathisa" is generally used by Sanskrit writers to denote the faces or sides of the universe. The sign in question is intended to represent the faces of the universe and indicates that the figure of the universe is bounded by *Pentagons*. If we take the pentagons as regular pentagons (on the presumption or supposition that the universe is symmetrically constructed) the figure of the material universe will, of course, be a *Dodecahedron*, the geometrical model imitated by the Demiurgus in constructing the material universe. If *Thula* was subsequently invented and if instead of the three signs "Kanyā," "Thula" and "Vrischikam," there had existed formerly only one sign combining in itself Kanyā and Vrischikam, the sign now under consideration was the eighth sign under the old system, and it is a significant fact that Sanskrit writers generally speak also of "Ashtathisa" or eight faces bounding space. It is quite possible that the number of *thisa* might have been altered from 8 to 10 when the formerly existing Virgo-Scorpio was split up into three separate signs.

Again, *Kara* may be taken to represent the projecting triangles of the star-shaped figure so often alluded to in the columns of this journal in connection with Scorpion-sting. This figure may also be called a kind of regular pentagon (see, Todhunter's *Spherical Trigonometry* p. 143). If this interpretation is accepted,

* See the article in the August (1881) number "the Five-Pointed Star," where we stated that the five-pointed star or pentagram represented the five limbs of man.—Ed. THOS.

the Rasi or sign in question represents the "Microcosm." But the "microcosm" or the world of thought is really represented by *Vrischikam*. From an objective point of view the "microcosm" is represented by the human body. *Makaram* may be taken to represent simultaneously both the microcosm and the macrocosm, as external objects of perception.

In connection with this sign I shall state herein a few important facts which I beg to submit for the consideration of those who are interested in examining the ancient occult sciences of India. It is generally held by the ancient philosophers that the macrocosm is similar to the microcosm in having a *Stoola Sariram* and a *Sooksma Sariram*. The visible universe is the *Stoola Sariram* of Viswam; the ancient philosophers held that as a substratum for this visible universe, there is another universe—perhaps we may call it the universe of Astral Light—the real universe of Noumena, the soul as it were of this visible universe. It is darkly hinted in certain passages of the Veda and the Upanishads that this hidden universe of Astral Light is to be represented by an *Icosahedron*. The connection between an *Icosahedron* and a *Dodecahedron* is something very peculiar and interesting though the figures seem to be so very dissimilar to each other. The connection may be understood by the undermentioned geometrical construction. Describe a Sphere about an *Icosahedron*; let perpendiculars be drawn from the centre of the Sphere on its faces and produced to meet the surface of the Sphere. Now, if the points of intersection be joined, a *Dodecahedron* is formed within the Sphere. By a similar process an *Icosahedron* may be constructed from a *Dodecahedron*. (See Todhunter's *Spherical Trigonometry* p. 141 : art 193.) The figure constructed as above described will represent the universe of matter and the universe of Astral Light as they actually exist. I shall not now, however, proceed to show how the universe of Astral Light may be considered in the light of an *Icosahedron*. I shall only state here that this conception of the Aryan philosophers is not to be looked upon as mere "theological twaddle" or as the outcome of wild

For an explanation of the dodecahedron, see: L. Gordon Plummers *Mathematics of the Cosmic Mind*, Tho' Pub Hse, Wheaton 1970. (1976 note)

fancy. The real significance of the conception in question can, I believe, be explained by reference to the psychology and the physical science of the ancients. But I must stop here and proceed to consider the meaning of the remaining two signs.

XI. *Kumbhum*.—(Or *Aquarius*). When represented by numbers, the word is equivalent to 14. It can be easily perceived then that the division in question is intended to represent the "Chaturdasa Bhuvanam" or the 14 lokams spoken of in Sanskrit books.

XII. *Meenam* (or *Pisces*). This word again is represented by 5 when written in numbers and is evidently intended to convey the idea of *Panchamahabhutams* or the 5 elements. The sign also suggests that water (not the ordinary water but the universal solvent of the ancient alchemists) is the most important amongst the said elements.

I have now finished the task which I have set to myself in this article. My purpose is not to explain the ancient theory of creation itself, but to show the connection between that theory and the Zodiacal divisions. I have herein brought to light but a very small portion of the philosophy imbedded in these signs. The veil that was dexterously thrown over certain portions of the mystery connected with these signs by the ancient philosophers will never be lifted up for the amusement or edification of the uninitiated public.

Now to summarize the facts stated in this article, the contents of the first chapter of the history of this universe are as follows:—

- (1). The self-existent, eternal Brahman.
- (2). Pranava (Aum).
- (3). The androgyne Brāhm, or the bisexual Sephira-Adam Kadmon.
- (4). The Sacred Tetragram—the four mātras of Pranava—the four avasthas—the four states of Brahman—the Sacred Thāracam.

- (5). The five Brahmas—the five Buddhas representing in their totality the Jeevatma.
- (6). The astral light—the holy virgin—the six forces in nature.
- (7). The thirty-six Tatwams born of Avidya.
- (8). The universe in thought—the Swapna Avastha—the microcosm looked at from a subjective point of view.
- (9). The nine Prajapatis—the assistants of the Demiurgus.*
- (10). The shape of the material universe in the mind of the Demiurgus—the DODECAHEDRON.
- (11). The fourteen lokams.
- (12). The five elements.

The history of creation and of this world from its beginning up to the present time is composed of *Seven* chapters. The *Seventh* chapter is not yet completed.

Triplacane, Madras, 14th September, 1881.

- Some editions of T. Subba Row's "12 Signs".....
- First published in the Theosophist, Vol III, p.41-44 for November 1881. (9x12 format)
 - Included in "Five Years of Theosophy", second revised edition, edited by G.R.S. Mead in 1894, with some changes in spelling of the critical words in the zodiacal signs, and the deletion of the words "which follows" preceding 'Virgo' in that sign's footnote.
 - A reprint of the above edition in 1910, published at Madras and London.
 - Included in "The Esoteric Writings of T. Subba Row", by Rajaram Tookaram, Bombay, 1917, Tatva Vivechaka Press. Text of 12 signs altered similarly to the "5 Yes Theo".
 - Adyar Pamphlet 2:31. "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac", by T. Subba Row, Adyar, 1923. There are numerous instances of spelling out numbers, making footnotes out of titles originally in the main text, reversing word sequences etc, but the work is substantially as the original.
 - Included in "The Esoteric Writings of T. Subba Row", by T. Tookaam Tatya, Adyar, 1931. Again the changes mentioned above were in this edition, which differed slightly from the original of 1881.
 - "The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac", published by Wizards Bookshelf, Minneapolis, 1975. This was a reprint of the 1931, by T.T. Tatya, and was erroneously stated to be a "photographic copy of the 1881 Theosophist". About 250 copies of this white cover ersatz pamphlet were distributed, and all of these that are returned to Wizards Bookshelf will be replaced free of charge.

The question of the 'correct' spelling of the names of each of the zodiacal signs, hinges on the idea that the english phonetic spelling has validity for Mr Rows second rule, that is, 'find out the numerical value of the letters' etc. It is most likely however, that this idea will only apply to the sanscrit. It is also suggested that by changing the english phonetic back into the sanscrit for this purpose..... that one must be very careful to get the sanscrit spelling correct.

This edition has been typeset in the greatest care to duplicate exactly that of 1881, even to errors and accent marks, paragraphs and indentations. Pagination could not be duplicated, as the original format was two columns on 9x12 sheets. Curiously, it came out to 12 pages, with 'the two reasons' on page 2, 'the 4 rules' on page 4, sign 'V' on page 5, sign 'VI' on page 6, 'VII' on 7, etc. Such coincidences are interesting. The price is intended to be 50¢ per copy.

* The nine Kabalistic Sephiroth emanated from Sephira the 10th and the head Sephiroth are identical. Three trinities or triads with their emanative principle form the Pythagorean mystic. Decad, the sum of all which represents the whole Kosmos. —ED. THOOS.

T. Subba Row Garu was a Vedāntin of the Niyoga caste of the Smārta (Adwaita) Brāhmaṇas. He was born at Cocanāda, July 6, 1856. His native country was the Godāvarī District on the Coromāndel Coast of India. His vernacular tongue was Telugu. His grandfather was the Sheristādār of the District, and his maternal uncle was Diwan (Prime Minister) to the Rājah of Pithāpuram. His father died when he was but six months old, and his uncle brought him up. He attended the Cocanāda Hindū School, where he showed no unusual talents. After passing his matriculation examination at that school, he went in 1872 to the Madras Presidency College, where he showed great brilliancy in his studies and won his B.A. in 1876 at the top of his class.

Later in the same year, Sir T. Madhava Row, then Diwan of Baroda, offered him the position of Registrar of the High Court in that State, where Subba Row remained for about a year, returning thence to Madras, where he passed his B.L. examination. Having chosen the law as his profession, he served his apprenticeship under Messrs. Grant and Laing, and was enrolled a Vakil (Pleader) of the High Court in the latter part of 1880. His practice became very lucrative, and probably would have continued to bring him a good income, had he not given most of his attention to philosophy, drawn to it, as he told Col. Olcott, by an irresistible attraction. His brilliant mental ability is well illustrated by the fact that he successfully passed an examination in geology for the Statutory Civil Service in 1885, though this was a new subject to him and he had only one week to prepare himself.

Subba Row gave no early signs of possessing any mystical knowledge and even Sir T. Madhava Row did not notice any such while he was serving under him at Baroda. Col. H. S. Olcott writes:

"I particularly questioned his mother on this point, and she told me that her son first talked metaphysics after forming a connection with the Founders of the Theosophical Society: a connection which began with a correspondence between himself and H. P. B. and Damodar, and became personal after our meeting him, in 1882, at Madras. It was as though a storehouse of occult experience, long forgotten, had been suddenly opened to him; recollection of his last preceding birth came in upon him; he recognised his Guru, and thenceforward held intercourse with him and other Mahātmas; with some, personally at our Headquarters, with others elsewhere

and by correspondence. He told his mother that H. P. B. was a great Yogi, and that he had seen many strange phenomena in her presence. His stored up knowledge of Sanskrit literature came back to him, and his brother-in-law told me that if you would recite any verse of *Gītā*, *Brāhma-Sūtras* or *Upanishads*, he could at once tell you whence it was taken and in what connection employed. Those who had the fortune to hear his lectures on *Bhagavad-Gītā* before the T. S. Convention of 1886 at Adyar, can well believe this, so perfect seemed his mastery of that peerless work. . . . As a conversationalist he was most brilliant and interesting; an afternoon's sitting with him was as edifying as the reading of a solid 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. His constant answer to her importunities for occult instruction was that he 'dared not reveal any of the secrets entrusted to him by his Guru.' *He lived his occult life alone.* That he was habitually so reserved, gives the more weight to the confidential statements he made to the members of his own household." (*The Theosophist*, Vol. XI, July, 1890, pp. 577-578.)

H. P. B. and Subba Row were pupils of the same Adept, Master M. As evidence of the very high esteem that H. P. B. had for Subba Row's occult knowledge, we might recall her editorial remark (*The Theosophist*, Vol. IV, February, 1883, p. 118) to the effect that "we know of no better authority in INDIA in anything, concerning the esotericism of the Advaita philosophy" than Subba Row. It should also be remembered that she associated his name with her own on the printed announcement of the forthcoming publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, which appeared on several occasions in the pages of *The Theosophist* in 1884. At the time, her book was to be "A New Version of *Isis Unveiled*. With a New Arrangement of the Matter, Large and Important Additions, and Copious Notes and Commentaries." As she wrote herself to A. P. Sinnett, in the early part of 1884: "And now the outcome of it is, that I, crippled down and half dead, am to sit up nights again and rewrite the whole of *Isis Unveiled*, calling it *The Secret Doctrine* and making three if not four volumes out of the original two, Subba Row helping me and writing most of the commentaries and explanations." (*Letters of H.P.B. to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 64.) This original plan, however, did not materialize. Later, after H. P. B. had received from Master M., on January 9, 1885, a plan for *The Secret Doctrine*, and had worked on it for quite some time, she sent portions of the MSS. to Subba Row for his opinion and corrections. This was in 1886, when she was in Germany. His judgment was a disappointment to H. P. B., because he found the draft both diffuse and chaotic. This forced H. P. B. to begin all over again, and may have been partially instrumental in producing a grander and more magnificent text.

Approximately at this time, differences arose between Subba Row

and H. P. B., mainly on what would appear to be minor points of a philosophical kind, connected primarily with the classification of human principles. While it is not possible to state anything positive in connection with this controversy, there is sufficient evidence to show that the two variants of the teachings concerning the principles were presented in the pages of *The Theosophist* by order of Master M., who, as will be remembered, was the Teacher of both H. P. B. and Subba Row; and that this so-called controversy was to a very large extent a "put up job."

However, even if this be true, and we think it is, there remains another, and much more valid reason, for misunderstanding between the two. We must bear in mind that Subba Row was a most conservative and rigid Brāhmaṇa, an initiate into the more esoteric aspect of the ancient Brāhmaṇical teachings. He was greatly disturbed by the vulgar profanation of the Masters' names which had then taken place, and, as a Brāhmaṇa, he strongly disapproved the fact that H. P. B. revealed to the public some of the inner meanings of the Hindū Scriptures, concealed until then in the secrecy of the inner temples. It is probable that he overlooked the fact that in doing so H. P. B. obeyed her superiors, who were Subba Row's superiors as well.

That this should be done by a woman of European descent was another fact difficult for a rigid Brāhmaṇa to accept. Hence the inner conflict within Subba Row's mind and heart, a conflict which, to judge by outward circumstances at least, brought about his temporary withdrawal from active participation in the affairs of The Theosophical Society. Writing to Mrs. and Miss Arundale, on June 16, 1885, H. P. B. says:

"Such as Subba Row—uncompromising initiated Brahmins, will never reveal—even that which they are permitted to. They hate too much Europeans for it. Has he not gravely given out to Mr. and Mrs. C[oo]per O[akley] that I was henceforth 'a shell deserted and abandoned by the Masters'? When I took him for it to task, he answered: 'You have been guilty of the most terrible of crimes. You have given out secrets of Occultism—the most sacred and the most hidden. Rather that you should be sacrificed than that which was never meant for European minds. People had too much faith in you. It was time to throw doubt into their minds. Otherwise they should have pumped out of you all that you know.' And he is now acting on that principle." (*Ltrs. of H.P.B. to A.P.S.*, pp. 95-96.)

It is important to bear in mind that in spite of his attitude towards H. P. B. at this later period, Subba Row had not the least doubt that H. P. B. possessed occult power and knowledge, and that she was in constant touch with the Adepts. H. P. B.'s occult integrity and the validity of her teachings were at no time doubted by Subba Row. This endorsement by an orthodox Brāhmaṇa is of immense importance.

Subba Row, as a representative, at Madras, of the Sringeri Matham, had considerable influence among the orthodox Hindūs. Therefore his attitude towards H. P. B. did have a profound effect on many

minds, to the distress of those who remained faithful to her.

In 1886, Subba Row withdrew from The Theosophical Society. Very soon after this a painful illness descended upon him. The cause of this affliction was unknown. He died in 1890, only 34 years of age.

Regarding this, Col. Olcott writes as follows (*Old Diary Leaves*, IV, pp. 234-35):

"On the 3rd of June I visited T. Subba Rao at his request and mesmerized him. He was in a dreadful state, his body covered with boils and blisters from crown to sole, as the result of blood poisoning from some mysterious cause. He could not find it in anything that he had eaten or drank, and so concluded that it must be due to the malevolent action of elementals, whose animosity he had aroused by some ceremonies he had performed for the benefit of his wife. This was my own impression, for I felt the uncanny influence about him as soon as I approached. Knowing him for the learned occultist that he was, a person highly appreciated by H. P. B., and the author of a course of superb lectures on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, I was inexpressibly shocked to see him in such a physical state. Although my mesmeric treatment of him did not save his life, it gave him so much strength that he was able to be moved to another house, and when I saw him ten days later he seemed convalescent, the improvement dating, as he told me, from the date of the treatment. The change for the better was, however, only temporary, for he died during the night of the 24th of the same month, and was cremated at 9 on the following morning. From members of his family I obtained some interesting particulars. At noon on the 24th he told those about him that his Guru called him to come, he was going to die, he was now about beginning his *tapas* (mystical invocation), and he did not wish to be disturbed. From that time on he spoke to no one. . . ."

The circumstances involved in the passing of T. Subba Row seem to point to some unexpended Karmic debt which he had to meet and overcome before proceeding further along the path of enlightenment.

The only work of T. Subba Row's which stands as a unity is his series of Lectures entitled *Notes on the Bhagavad-Gītā*. The introductory lecture of this series was given by him at the Anniversary Convention at Adyar, December, 1885, and was published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. VII, No. 77, February, 1886, pp. 281-285. The four actual lectures were delivered a year later, namely, at the Anniversary Convention at Adyar, December 27-31, 1886. They appeared originally in *The Theosophist*, Vol. VIII, February, March, April and July, 1887. They were published in book-form by Tookaram Tatyā, Bombay, 1888, though some omissions occur in this edition. The best edition of these Lectures is the one published by Theosophical University Press, Point Loma, Calif., 1934, which incorporates corrections in the text which Subba Row himself considered necessary at the time (See *The Theosophist*, Vol. VIII, May, 1887, p. 511).

PRONUNCIATION CHART

	<i>Pronounced as in the English word:</i>	<i>Sanskrit Word</i>
a	sonata, organ	aham
ā	alms, far	ātman
ai	die, aisle	daivīprakṛiti
au	now, house	aum
b	bode	bodhi
bh	abhorrence	bhūmi
ch	chosen	chohan
chh	watch-hound	chhâyā
d	dare	devachan
dh	adherence	dharmakāya
dhy	same as above, as though y were added after 'dh'	dhyāna
dz	adze	dzyan
e	grey	devanāgarī
g	god	gana
gh	leghorn	gharma
h	hansard	hansa
h	final aspirated h as in loch	briḥ; brahmā
i	pity	pitri
i	sheer	śarīra
j	jeer	jīva
k	calm, car	kāma
kh	inkhorn	khechara
ksh	buckshot	kshetrajña
l	local	loka
m	mundane	manvantara
n	need	nidāna
ng	linger	linga-śarīra
ñ	onion	sañjñā
o	no	soma
p	poor	puruṣha
ph	upheaval	phala
r	root	rūpa
s	satire	satya
ś	assure	śloka
sh	sheen	śishta
t	talent	tala
th	left-handed	sthūla-śarīra
u	pull	upādhi
û	pool	sūrya
v	vein	veda
y	you	yuga