PART ONE.

Patriotic Chelas

A key point of dispute between Theosophists and their opponents is the testimony of a handful of "chelas," disciples who claimed to have personal knowledge of the Masters' existence. Between 1880 and 1885, Damodar Mavalankar, T. Subba Row, "Babaji" Nath, Mohini Chatterji, Keshava Pillai, and S. Ramabadra Ramaswamier were all publicized as special pupils of the mysterious adepts. Several Europeans, including William T. Brown and Godolphin Mitford, as well as Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky, were also in this select company. Despite the later defection of most of these witnesses, their testimony has been valued by Theosophists as evidence of the Masters' existence. On the other hand, critical writers have stressed their unreliability as witnesses. A closer look at these characters suggests political secrets behind the scenes of the society.

Hodgson's Mistake

The judgment of Richard Hodgson on HPB has stood unchallenged for most of the past century except by Theosophical true believers. Standard reference works have accepted his judgment of her as "neither . . . the mouthpiece of hidden seers, nor as a mere vulgar adventuress, [but] one of the most accomplished, ingenious, and interesting imposters in history."[1] The founder of the Theosophical History Centre, Leslie Price, published in 1985 an inquiry into the Hodgson report entitled *Madame Blavatsky Unveiled?* This was adapted from a lecture given to the Society for Psychical Research outlining the weaknesses of the case against HPB. In 1986, Vernon Harrison, a non-Theosophist expert in handwriting, published "J'Accuse," an analysis of the Hodgson Report, which draws attention to its weakest points. These are the veracity of HPB's accusers,

Alexis and Emma Coulomb, and the handwriting analysis of J. D. B. Gribble, who concluded that KH and HPB were the same person. In *Blavatsky and Her Teachers,* Jean Overton Fuller's linguistic analysis of incriminating letters produced by the Coulombs lends further weight to the evidence that they are forgeries. Future studies may probe more deeply into the paranormal phenomena discussed in the report, but progress is also being made in understanding the cultural bias inherent in Hodgson's approach. At the Fourth International Conference on Theosophical History in 1989, Joy Dixon, a graduate student at Rutgers University, presented a paper on the Hodgson report. She noted that Hodgson made racist assumptions leading to the dismissal of Indian witnesses. The confusion of technical and moral untrustworthiness is repeatedly made in the report. His bias, and that of the SPR leaders, was against HPB, due in part to her activities, which were totally in opposition to Victorian definitions of women's roles. In 1993, Dixon's studies were published as *Gender, Politics and Culture in the New Age: Theosophy in England, 1880–1935.* In light of the critiques which have emerged from these and other writers, it appears that Richard Hodgson's judgment on HPB will not be that of history.

Rather than questions of forgery and psychic phenomena, what make the Hodgson report relevant to the present study are its conclusions rejecting the reality of the Mahatmas and the reliability of various witnesses to their existence. While Hodgson's suspicion that HPB and the supposed chelas of the Masters were engaged in a massive fraud was understandable, it led him to two false conclusions: that the Masters were nonexistent, and that HPB's mission was to advance Russian interests. In both cases, he was profoundly mistaken. Evidence concerning the alleged "chelas" of the Mahatmas provides considerable proof that these Masters were real persons, and that Blavatsky's allegiance to them involved service to native Indian interests rather than to those of any foreign power.

Information about the Theosophical Society's relations with native Indian rulers and reformers makes it possible to understand the nature of Hodgson's mistake. It may be tempting to condemn Hodgson for his blindness, but the information available to him in the 1880s was so limited as to virtually insure that he reached false conclusions. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of his analysis are sometimes obvious. For example, Olcott's testimony is crucial to any investigation of the Masters, yet Hodgson began by rejecting Olcott as a witness because he had falsely denied knowing any

Hindus until HPB started making one appear phenomenally in New York. This obviously conflicts with his meeting of Moolji Thackersey and a Hindu friend on a transatlantic voyage in 1870, which Olcott later claimed that he had "momentarily forgotten." Moolji Thackersey is described by J. T. F. Jordens as "a wealthy mill-owner born in Kathiawar, [who] had visited England in the sixties and had played a prominent part in municipal politics, the widow-remarriage movement, and the crusade against the Vallabhacharya Maharajas . . . [who] strongly supported Dayananda right from the start."[2] Swami Dayananda Sarasvati was the leader of the Arya Samaj, a group with which the TS was allied when its founders decided to relocate in Bombay. Dayananda aimed to reform Hinduism and Indian society on the basis of his monotheistic interpretation of the Vedas. Olcott and Blavatsky had established correspondence with Thackersey after their Spiritualist friend James Peebles noticed a photograph of the wealthy Hindu that had been taking during the 1870 voyage. Peebles recognized Thackersey as someone he had met during his recent trip to India, and told HPB and Olcott about Thackersey's new guru, Dayananda. Correspondence with Thackersey led to acquaintance with Harischandra Chintamon and Shyamaji Krishnavarma, both leaders in the Arya Samaj. In the spring of 1878, less than a year before her arrival in Bombay, HPB wrote to Thackersey in reference to her hopes for the TS in India:

> Is our friend a Sikh? If so, the fact that he should be, as you say, "very much pleased to learn the object of our Society" is not at all strange. For his ancestors have for centuries been—until their efforts were paralysed by British domination, that curse of every land it fastens itself upon—battling for the divine truths against external theologies. My question may appear a foolish one—yet I have more than one reason for asking it. You call him a Sirdar—therefore he must be a descendant of one of the Sirdars of the twelve mizals, which were abolished by the English to suit their convenience—since he is of Amritsir *[sic]* in the Punjab?
>
> Are you personally acquainted with any descendant of Runjeet Singh, who died in 1839, or do you know of any who are? You will understand, without any explanation from me, how important it is for us to establish relations with some Sikhs, whose ancestors before them have been for centuries teaching the great 'Brotherhood of Humanity'—precisely the doctrine we teach.***

> As for the future "Fellows" of our Indian branch, have your eyes upon the chance of fishing out of the great ocean of Hindu hatred for Christian missionaries some of those big fish you call Rajahs, and whales known as Maharajahs. Could you not hook out for your Bombay Branch either Gwalior (Scindia) or the Holkar of Indore—those most faithful and loyal friends of the British (?).[3]

This letter reveals several important facts about Blavatsky's political motivations. She is frankly hostile at this point to British rule of India, and seeks to ally her society with native rulers who share this feeling. Through Thackersey, she is developing an alliance with a Sikh Sirdar from Amritsar, who admires the objectives of the TS. Abundant evidence links this Amritsar Sirdar to the persona of Mahatma Koot Hoomi, who in *The Masters Revealed* is tentatively identified as Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia. This is relevant to HPB's search for a descendant of Ranjit (Runjeet) Singh, the Sikh maharaja who died in 1839. Thakar Singh was the cousin of Ranjit's son and successor Dalip Singh, who was deposed in early adolescence. The ex-maharaja converted to Christianity and lived as an English country squire, but Thakar was later instrumental in inducing Dalip's doomed attempt to regain his throne. At the time of Hodgson's investigation, Thakar was in London persuading his cousin to return to India. These facts suggest that Olcott's failure to mention Moolji to Hodgson may have been due to concern that it might lead to identification of some of the Theosophical adepts. Such suspicions did not occur to Hodgson, whose final conclusion on the President-Founder is:

> I cannot, therefore, regard Colonel Olcott's testimony as of any scientific value. In particular, his testimony to the alleged "astral" appearance in New York proves, in my opinion, no more than that he saw some one in his room, who may have been an ordinary Hindu, or some other person, disguised as a Mahatma for the purpose, and acting for Madame Blavatsky. And the same may be said for all of his testimony to apparitions of Mahatmas.[4]

Olcott had repeatedly testified to his normal contacts with Mahatmas as well to apparitions, which Hodgson failed to explain. The researcher began with a false distinction between Mahatmas and ordinary persons, derived from Theosophical literature. This led him to the false conclusion that the Masters did not exist. His

mistakes were made possible in large part by the dubious veracity of many of the witnesses to the existence of the adept brotherhood.

Damodar Mavalankar was the Indian chela most explicitly accused of deception in Hodgson's report. Despite his youth, he had become manager of *The Theosophist* when it began publication in late 1879, soon after he joined the society. A wealthy Maratha Brahmin, Damodar renounced his caste, his family and his income in order to serve the cause of Theosophy. Damodar contributed many articles to *The Theosophist,* and introduced the use of the word *Mahatma* to describe the Theosophical adepts. He lived with Blavatsky and Olcott at the Bombay headquarters, and joined them on their December 1879 journey to North India.[5] It was on this trip that all three first met A. P. Sinnett and his wife Patience. Sinnett, editor of the Allahabad *Pioneer,* was Theosophy's most eminent Anglo-Indian convert. During an October 1880 visit to the Sinnetts in Simla, HPB performed an astounding series of paranormal phenomena which were reported in Sinnett's 1881 book *The Occult World.* During this visit, Sinnett received his first letters from the Master KH, beginning the correspondence for which both are best known. The overwhelming majority of his letters from the Mahatma were received in 1881 and 1882, and he wrote a second Theosophical book, *Esoteric Buddhism,* based on their teachings.

Second in rank among the Indian chelas was T. Subba Row, who met HPB and Olcott in April 1882, during their visit to Madras. Within the month, he became Corresponding Secretary of the newly-formed Madras branch of the TS. Subba Row was a Brahmin from the Coromandel coast north of Madras, and a promising young lawyer at the time of his encounter with Theosophy. He was undoubtedly the most intellectually capable among the Indian Theosophists, held in such high esteem by Blavatsky that she would later ask him to help her write *The Secret Doctrine.* He was an Advaita Vedantin, and thus a disciple of the same tradition as Maharaja Ranbir Singh.[6]

In May, the idea of moving the society's headquarters to Madras was first raised. That spring and summer, many omens indicated that North Indian links were weakening. Swami Dayananda first attacked the society publicly in March. In June, relations between Sinnett and his employer, Rattegan, began to worsen, leading to his eventual dismissal and return to England. Never again was the hand-picked recipient of Mahatma letters to be in a position of influence in Anglo-India.

By mid-1882, the Theosophical Society had made astounding progress in recruiting native rulers to its cause. Prior to its founders'

arrival in India, they had secured the support of the maharajas of Kashmir and Indore. Sometime before the durbar in Lahore, in November 1880, the Sikh Maharaja Bikram Singh of Faridkot, patron of the Singh Sabha, had joined the ranks of TS sponsors. According to HPB's *The Durbar in Lahore,* Bikram Singh joined "Ram-Ranjit-Das" in welcoming the founders to the durbar, where they visited Ranbir Singh's encampment prior to the ceremonies. She described for her Russian readers an elaborate series of events culminating in the maharajas' exchange of gifts with the new Viceroy. At the conclusion of the durbar, Olcott proceeded to visit the Maharaja of Varanasi, whose motto, "There is no religion higher than Truth," was adopted by the TS. Neither Theosophical writers nor hostile biographers have paid adequate attention to the relationship between these maharajas and the TS founders. It seems incredible that two eccentric foreigners, without means or celebrity, could have gained entry into so many royal courts. Especially striking is the establishment of such sponsorship in advance of the founders' arrival in the country.

In June 1882, HPB and Olcott accepted an invitation from the Gaekwar of Baroda, visiting Daji Raja Chandra Singhji, Thakur of Wadhwan, *en route* back to Bombay. It was on this visit that Prince Harisinghji Rupsinghji, cousin of the Thakur, joined the TS at Daji Raja's home. Daji Raja was a Rajput prince whose early death ended a promising career. Wadhwan was fairly progressive and well-governed during his brief reign. His support for the TS was evidenced by his presidency of the Daji Raja Theosophical Society in Wadhwan, as well as by his attendance at annual meetings in Bombay.[7]

Pilgrimage to Darjeeling

In September 1882, a mysterious journey was undertaken by HPB. She departed from Bombay for Sikkim, passing through Varanasi, Calcutta, Chandernagar, and Cooch Behar. On 1 October, she wrote from Sikkim to her old friend Aleksandr Dondukov-Korsakov, military governor of the trans-Caucasian region. Her previous letters to Prince Dondukov-Korsakov were filled with exaggerations and falsehoods, for example claiming fifty thousand members of the TS when in fact there were fewer than one-tenth that number. In an outright fabrication, she claimed that a Sanskrit translation of *Isis Unveiled* had attained great literary success. Equally outrageous was her claim to have journeyed from New York in the early 1870s

to Japan, to meet Master Morya. Yet despite their unreliability, these letters are valuable as evidence, often all that is available, for various aspects of HPB's life in India. Her contempt for her Theosophical disciples is repeatedly expressed, for example in her reference to "some fifty fools of all races, Hindus, Parsees, Mongolians and English, officials of the Society, on the way to attaining Nirvana and catching Parabrahm by the tail—at the foot of my personal pagoda."[8] Most intriguing is a partly fictional account of her travels dated 5 December 1881, which foreshadows her genuine journey the following year:

> Can you image *[sic]* it? These silly Englishmen began by spending enormous sums to run after the daughter of my father. The red-cheeked secret police with large yellow moustaches have followed me step by step for seven months, travelling about 5,000 kilometres by train, running after me from Bombay to the North of Hindustan in Rajputana, from there to Central India, then to the Punjab, Kashmir, and Darjeeling, where after seven months I left British territory and took leave of them with a thumb to my nose. They are not allowed to set foot on Tibetan territory and I went there *alone,* leaving the Hindus and Americans, my traveling companions, waiting for me at Darjeeling. I went to the monastery of my Lama friends, performing a pilgrimage "in worship of Buddha," as I wrote mockingly in the note I sent to the spy who had followed me. Returning after three weeks, I found my companions again and the spies who were waiting for my *dangerous* person.[9]

In fact, HPB's North Indian travels before the writing of this letter never took her anywhere near Darjeeling and certainly not beyond the frontier to a monastery. Nor were there any American travel companions. Yet within a year she was to actually make this journey, although its details remain unclear. In June 1882, she told the prince her intended itinerary:

> . . . I am going for two months to the North-West Province of India, then to Darjeeling, Bhutan, Assam, and much further into Tibet than the English are allowed to penetrate. Lamas from the Lamasery (monastery) of Tong-Douma will come to fetch me.[10]

Bhutan, Assam, and Tibet were no more than literary flourishes, but she did make it to Darjeeling in September. In her letter of 1

October, HPB gave Dondukov-Korsakov an elaborate description of her pilgrimage:

> As you see, my dear Prince, I am in the solitude of Ghum. And what is Ghum? It is a mountain in Sikkim and a monastery where Lamas live on their way to Tibet . . . no English are allowed to enter and I am *welcomed* . . . I went via Calcutta and Chandernagore to Cooch Bihar *[sic]* (the Rajah is a Theosophist) . . . A dozen Babu Theosophists from Calcutta accompanied me, together with three Buddhists from Ceylon and one from Burma . . . But instead of 15 people, only 5 followed me to Sikkim: the 4 Buddhists and one from Nepal—all the others were laid up . . . It was too late to go to Shigatse, the capital of the Tashi Lama, but I decided to go to the Lama Monastery, 4 days from Darjeeling . . . the chief Lama himself came and brought me tea with butter and all kinds of delicacies . . . he ordered me to be brought to his monastery . . . I remained there 3 days. I was only afraid they would not let me go away again. I lived in a small house at the foot of the walls of the monastery and I talked day and night with the monk Gylynjanic (also an *incarnation* of Sakya-Buddha) and I spent hours in their library where no woman is allowed to enter—touching testimony to my beauty and my perfect innocence—and the Superior publicly recognized in me one of the feminine incarnations of the Bodhisattva, of which I am very proud. I read to them a letter from Koot Hoomi in *The Occult World,* and the guides carried me back by another way to the bridge . . . and that is how I arrived in Sikkim where I find myself at present and where I am staying in another monastery, 23 miles from Darjeeling. Of course the English were very angry. I have heard long accounts of their wiles. They are doing their utmost to get into Tibet. They take boys, generally converts, teach them Tibetan, give them a Buddhist education and when they are ready, dress them up as Lamas, and give them a prayer wheel in which, instead of the prayer "Om mani padme hum," are hidden instruments. But not one of them was able to reach Lhasa, or even Shigatse . . . Then why did they let me pass? It is because I am an incarnation of Buddha.[11]

The compiler of the collection in which this letter appears notes that Ghum was in British India, not Sikkim, and that HPB was mistaken in claiming that no British spy had reached Lhasa

or Shigatse. In fact, at that very moment Sarat Chandra Das, a Bengali explorer, and his companion Ugyen Gyatso, a lama from Sikkim, were in Shigatse preparing to return home to Darjeeling. The two were employed by the Bhutia Boarding School, which indeed trained young boys as future surveyors of Tibet. Considerable evidence links Das and Gyatso to the TS. Olcott was later on very cordial terms with Das, meeting him repeatedly in Darjeeling and supporting his Buddhist Text Society. On one of his trips to Darjeeling, Olcott was introduced to Gyatso by Das. Das, who returned from his year in Tibet with over two hundred sacred texts, appears to have supplied some of these to Blavatsky for use in her later writings, as suggested by internal evidence.

A peculiar event later in October 1882 suggests HPB's acquaintance with Das. For most of the rest of the month, she remained at Darjeeling, proceeding then to Allahabad, where she visited the Sinnetts, who were adrift after A.P.'s dismissal from editorship of *The Pioneer.* Just before HPB's arrival, Sinnett was visited by two chelas, "Darbhagiri Nath" and "Chandra Cusho." The visit of the two chelas is one of the more dubious missions carried out on behalf of the Mahatmas. Dressed in yellow robes, the two young Indians delivered letters from Master M, but were at a loss when Sinnett asked that they astrally transmit his latest letter to KH. Before departing, Babaji borrowed thirty rupees from Sinnett to replace the travel allowance he had lost *en route.* When KH returned the loan he called Babaji a "little wretch."[12] The use of parts of names of her genuine sponsors in her fictionalizations is a frequent feature of HPB's writings about the Masters. "Chandra Cusho" ("Cusho" being Tibetan for "Mister") seems to be a veiled allusion to Das.

S. Ramabadra Ramaswamier was a clerk from Tirunelveli in South India, on leave after a nervous breakdown. Following HPB on her travels, on October 5 he allegedly went from Darjeeling into Sikkim and penetrated twenty miles beyond the border, where he claimed to have met the Master M. Blavatsky's biographer Marion Meade interprets this as the hallucination of a madman, rather than a role played under direction of real Masters.[13] Ramaswamier's account is indeed inherently preposterous, but a closer look reveals it to have been inspired by HPB and her Masters. Published as extracts from a private letter to Damodar, Ramaswamier's tale begins:

> When we met last at Bombay I told you what had happened to me at Tinnevelly. My health having been disturbed by official

> work and worry, I applied for leave on a medical certificate, and it was duly granted. One day in September last, while I was reading in my room, I was ordered by the audible voice of my blessed Guru, M———Mararshi, to leave all and proceed immediately to Bombay, whence I was to go in search of Madame Blavatsky wherever I could find her, and follow her wherever she went. Without losing a moment, I closed up all my affairs and left the station. For the tones of that voice are to me the divinest sound in nature, its commands imperative. I travelled in my ascetic robes. Arrived at Bombay, I found Madame Blavatsky gone, and learned through you that she had left a few days before; that she was very ill; and that, beyond the fact that she had left the place very suddenly with a Chela, you knew nothing of her whereabouts. And now I must tell you what happened to me after I had left you.[14]

Ramaswamier continues his tale with the information that the mysterious voice directed him to Berhampur, where he attached himself to a party of Calcutta Theosophists, whose path he crossed entirely by accident. Their destination, after some discussion, becomes Darjeeling, where they plan to join HPB. They reach her at Chandernagar, after she has travelled into Sikkim to meet the Mahatmas. The entire party of Theosophists leaps onto the train with HPB, but they are mysteriously separated by a railway accident which is left unexplained. While all her pursuers were delayed by "accidents," Ramaswamier concludes, "It required no great stretch of imagination to conclude that Madame Blavatsky was perhaps, being again taken to the Mahatmas, who, for some good reasons best known to them, did not want us to be following and watching her. Two of the Mahatmas, I had learned for a certainty, were in the neighborhood of British territory; and one of them was seen and recognized by a person I need not name here, as a high Chutuktu of Tibet."[15] That the Masters are rarely even near British territory, much less actually in it, is the assumption conveyed to the reader. Ramaswamier's journey to Sikkim is a long, fanciful tale of a weak and fearful man, driven onward by his compulsion to find the Mahatma, encountering a leopard and wildcat *en route*, and supported by some "secret influence": "Fear of anxiety never once entered my mind. Perhaps in my heart there was room for no other feeling but an intense desire to find my Guru."[16]

As nightfall approached, Ramaswamier found a small hut, into which he was able to climb through an unlocked window. He

was awakened from his sleep by men in the other room of the hut, who might have killed him if they thought him a burglar. Faith in the Master sustained him, and they left in the morning without disturbing him. The next morning, completely absorbed by his compulsion, he was almost oblivious to his surroundings when lo! in the distance, appeared a solitary horseman:

> From his tall stature and skill in horsemanship, I thought he was some military officer of the Sikkim Rajah. Now, I thought, I am caught! He will ask me for my pass and what business I have in the independent territory of Sikkim, and, perhaps, have me arrested and sent back, if not worse. But, as he approached me, he reined up. I looked at him and recognized him instantly . . . I was in the awful presence of him, of the same Mahatma, my own revered Guru, whom I had seen before in his astral body on the balcony of the Theosophical headquarters. It was he, the Himalayan Brother of the ever-memorable night of December last, who had so kindly dropped a letter in answer to the one I had given but an hour or so before in a sealed envelope to Madame Blavatsky, whom I had never lost sight of for one moment during the interval. The very same instant saw me prostrated on the ground at his feet. I arose at his command, and leisurely looking into his face, forgot myself entirely in the contemplation of the image I knew so well, having seen his portrait (the one in Colonel Olcott's possession) times out of number. I knew not what to say: joy and reverence tied my tongue. The majesty of his countenance, which seemed to me to be the impersonation of power and thought, held me rapt in awe. I was at last face to face with the Mahatma of the Himavat, and he was no myth, no "creation of the imagination of a medium," as some sceptics had suggested.
>
> His complexion is not as fair as that of Mahatma Kuthumi: but never have I seen a countenance so handsome, a stature so tall and so majestic. As in his portrait, he wears a short black beard, and long black hair hanging down to his breast: only his dress was different. Instead of a white, loose robe he wore a yellow mantle lined with fur, and on his head, instead of the turban, a yellow Tibetan felt cap, as I have seen some Bhutanese wear in this country.[17]

His only advice to the seeker was to wait patiently to become an accepted Chela. He promised that if HPB was allowed by the

Chohan (a chief among the Mahatmas) to visit Parijong the next year, then Ramaswamier could come along. When asked if an account of the meeting could be published, Morya urged his disciple to write it all in a letter to Damodar. After the Master returned from whence he came, the young Tamil returned to Darjeeling, where he arrived in complete exhaustion. HPB scolded him for his rashness, but she and the Bengali Theosophists pleaded with him to recount his story:

> They were all, to say the least, astounded. After all, she will not go this year to Tibet; for which I am sure she does not care, since she has seen our Masters and thus gained her only object. But we, unfortunate people! we lose our only chance of going and offering our worship to the Himalayan Brothers, who, I know, will not soon cross over to British territory, if ever, again.[18]

With this penultimate paragraph, the main goal of the letter is accomplished. The Masters of HPB are inhabitants of remote Tibet, whose Indian origins are far behind them. Although HPB and Olcott had repeatedly visited the northwestern and north central parts of India, attention was successfully diverted from any suspicion that the Mahatmas might reside in those regions. Ramaswamier concludes in a tone which reveals his awe of the superhuman Masters:

> And now that I have seen the Mahatma in the flesh, and heard his living voice, let no one dare say to me that the Brothers do not exist. Come now whatever will, death has no fear for me, nor the vengeance of enemies; for what I know, I know![19]

After Ramaswamier's death in 1893, one of his sons published the letters he received from the Masters, intending them as proof that his father had been deceived by HPB. The eloquence of Ramaswamier's report raises the question of how much of it HPB may have written for him. That an elaborate scheme of deception was indeed being engineered is apparent from these letters and those directed to Mohini Chatterji and R. Keshava (Casava) Pillai, which suggest a conspiracy to prove the Masters' existence.

Ramaswamier's first letter from the Master M was a very brief note, consisting of greetings, acceptance as a chela, the information that "Upasika has all the instructions" and the advice that the new chela follow those instructions. This was received in Sep-

tember 1881 in Bombay.[20] The following September, KH wrote to Ramaswamier telling the chela that he could not go to Tibet until earning the right by two or three years of labor. In the meantime:

> You must be prepared to do anything told to you, anything you are ordered through her. If you have faith in us—others have not—are you prepared to do all and everything to prove our existence?[21]

Instructions from M arrived at the end of the month, advising Ramaswamier to dress as an ascetic, stop in every town he passed through *en route* to Allahabad, and preach Theosophy and the Vedanta. Keeping HPB informed of his whereabouts at all times, Ramaswamier was to follow M's orders which would be transmitted through her. Most importantly:

> Every one must know that he is my chela, and that *he has seen me* in Sikkim . . . His whole aspiration and concern must be directed towards one aim—*convince the world of our existence.*[22]

Even Olcott required some convincing, for Morya advises the chela to "Tell him that he too often mistakes Upasika" and that "she has never deceived him—only left him ignorant of many things in accordance with my orders." The Master continues:

> Dress yourself as a pilgrim from to-day, and tell your friends you have received direct orders from me—how or in what way is no one's business. Silence, discretion and courage. Have my blessings upon your head, my good and faithful son and chela.[23]

In the penultimate paragraph Morya provides a clue to Ramaswamier's willingness to carry out such an elaborate scheme:

> I will not say your surmise as to certain Prince's relation is not correct; but the secret is not mine to impart. Use it in a discreet way, and use your own intuitions. There are two men in T. who know the secret, search them out.[24]

In the next letter, received in Bombay on December 1, Morya wrote to say "You have worked unselfishly and with great profit to both your country and the good cause. And we thank you."[25] These two passages indicate that Ramaswamier was willing to do whatever

was asked of him by HPB because he suspected the involvement of a certain prince behind the scenes and he saw the TS as a way to serve his country. With this powerful motive it is small wonder that he did and said all that was asked of him.

Ramaswamier was not the only young Indian receiving strange instructions in the fall of 1882. The letters received by Keshava Pillai, a young police inspector from Nellore, appealed to the same motives and gave rather bizarre instructions. The first letter he received was unsigned, and was apparently addressed to the entire Nellore branch TS after its President resigned. It asserts that until each member considers it "a duty to work for his country regardless of any consequences," the branch will not "be looked upon with confidence and respect, by those who—think what you may—still watch over the destinies of India tho' themselves unseen and unsuspected."[26] Again, the Master appeals to patriotic motives. Sometime later, Pillai was told of an opportunity to prove the existence of the Masters.

Koot Hoomi informed him that Babaji had been ordered to go to Darjeeling, where he would receive letters to be delivered to A. P. Sinnett in Simla. The Master requested that Pillai join him, promising that "The task is easy and there will not be much to do for either but be silent, and successfully play their parts," adding "If the mission is accomplished, in return I will permit some of our secrets to be taught to Keshu . . .[27]

The next letter from KH to Pillai was received "phenomenally" (meaning paranormally) on a train, and advised him to carry out "literally and faithfully" the instructions received from Damodar.[28] This involved a change of name to Chandra Cusho and a change of attire to a Tibetan yellow robe and cap. The Master sternly warned, "From the moment you set foot in Darjeeling you have ceased being K.P. You are Chander. Go direct to D. [Darjeeling] from Mogul S. [Sarai] Do as you are bid. Save your nation—my blessings upon you."[29] Small wonder that such instructions occasioned "unfortunate doubts," as is mentioned in KH's last letter to Pillai, received at Adyar during the 1883 Convention of the TS.

After Emma Coulomb published her denunciation of HPB, which accused Pillai and other chelas of being her accomplices in fraud, he answered her with a very long letter published in the *Indian Mirror* of 3 March 1885. The newspaper's publisher, Norendro Nath Sen, was a devoted Theosophist, which may explain why he was willing to provide space for Pillai's response. The first half of the letter consists of a spiritual autobiography detailing the events which led Pillai to Theosophy. It begins with a vision he experi-

enced at the age of seventeen in 1869. A "majestic figure in very likeness of the Great Mahatma M, whom I have subsequently seen on the other side of the Himalayas,"[30] appeared in Pillai's bedroom as he was falling asleep. The Master handed him an English translation of the Upanishads and warned him against converting to Christianity, which he had been considering. After reporting several less dramatic events of the following years, Pillai explains that it was through a chela in Nellore that he came into contact with Damodar in early 1881. In the following year, the unnamed chela (apparently Babaji), HPB and Olcott visited Nellore to help establish a TS branch. A series of paranormal performances helped strengthen the commitment of the new believers, for example when "Madame Blavatsky was writing at the table, we were seated down, and on her telling us that she felt the presence of the Guru in the room, we all looked up, and then within a minute or two, a letter fell before us from the ceiling in broad daylight at about 3 P.M."[31] During this visit, HPB informed Pillai that he was being watched by the Masters, and that his own guru was Mahatma KH. After several weeks of meditation and prayer directed toward establishing psychic contact with the Master, Pillai received a long-awaited message: "I fervently prayed to him that I might be allowed the happiness of seeing him in his physical body, to which after a moment's consideration, the *Guru Deva* replied that I should have to cross the Himalayas *alone*."[32] Four months later, he visited the TS headquarters in Bombay, and on 15 September left with HPB for North India. Emma Coulomb had commented about this departure that Pillai's change of attire was intended by HPB to be deceptive:

> before he left he had his costume made consisting of a yellow cotton satin blouse, a cap of the same shape as Mr Deb, a pair of top boots, and a pair of very thick cloth trousers . . . they started very quietly, and Madame begged us not to say to anyone that she had left. This was to give the thing a mysterious appearance as usual.[33]

Pillai indignantly rejects the implication that there was anything suspicious in his change of attire; he is, however, silent on the change of name that accompanied it.

The most impressive claim appears at the end of Pillai's letter, after a lengthy accounting of his travels with HPB. Arriving in Darjeeling on 20 September, he met Babaji and they proceeded together on a gruelling northern journey:

> We were both together until the 28th idem. We travelled together, both on horseback and on foot in Bhutan, Sikkim, etc. We visited several "Gonpas" (temples) . . . In the course of these travels, just about Pari or Parchong on the northern frontier of Sikkim, I had the good fortune and happiness to see the blessed feet of the most venerated Master Kut Humi and M. in their physical bodies. The very identical personage whose astral bodies I had seen in dreams, etc., since 1869, and in 1876 in Madras and on the 14th September 1882 in the headquarters at Bombay. Besides, I have also seen a few advanced chelas, among them, the blessed Jwalkul also, who is now a Mahatma.[34]

Juxtaposing these tales with the Mahatma letters received by Pillai indicates that he, like Ramaswamier, lent himself for use in a scheme of disinformation, believing real Masters to be directing it toward a patriotic end. Although Jinarajadasa notes that Pillai eventually lost interest in the TS, as late as 11 March 1898, Olcott saw Pillai in Gooty and had long friendly conversations with him and "the other admirable workers who have been leading this local group so successfully for so many years."[35]

Proving the Masters' Existence

Mohini Chatterji was active in the TS for five years, beginning in 1882. A Bengali Brahmin from Calcutta, Chatterji was a descendant of Ram Mohun Roy, founder of the Brahmo Samaj. He was also related to the Theosophist Debendra Nath Tagore, current leader of the Brahmo Samaj and father of the famed writer Rabindranath. Maharaja Sir Jotendro Mohun Tagore of Calcutta was another friend of Theosophy in Bengal, and welcomed the TS founders as guests in his home. Like Subba Row, Chatterji was a promising lawyer at the time of his affiliation with Theosophy.[36] As a "newly accepted chela" Mohini received a letter from Koot Hoomi which advised him that he was expected to, among other things, "devote all his energies to (a) prove to the unbelievers that we, the heirs of the Risis, are not dead, and that the Fr. of the TS are acting in many things under our direct orders."[37] The Master advised his chela to "never doubt, nor suspect, nor injure our agents by foul thoughts," and gave him a year's probation, until 17 September 1883, to "show what he can do and how much he is worthy of my trust."[38] Two months later, KH wrote a letter advising Mohini

to attend the meeting of the TS to be held in Bombay in a few weeks, presumably to testify to an investigation he had allegedly made into tales of Koot Hoomi in Tibet.

This was to be the last conference in Bombay, for on 17 November, a South Indian Theosophist paid the mortgage on Huddlestone's Gardens, which became the new Headquarters. A week later, HPB returned to Bombay with Ramaswamier, who obligingly told of his meeting with Master M to a large gathering on 6 December. Two weeks later, the founders had arrived in Adyar. On 16 January 1883, they were welcomed by the Madras Hindu community in a large public ceremony. Part of the many housekeeping chores involved in setting up the headquarters was the installation of the "Occult Room" which Hodgson later made famous. By February, the Headquarters was ready to receive guests, the first being the Thakur Daji Raja of Wadhwan. In March, the Sinnetts visited Adyar on their way home to England, and the first occult phenomena of the Shrine Room took place during their stay. At the end of the month, the Sinnetts left India forever. Through April and May, Olcott toured Bengal lecturing and healing for the TS. In June, Olcott was in Ceylon while HPB vacationed at Ootycamund. While the President-Founder returned via a healing tour of South India, HPB stayed in the hill country.

Three letters to Olcott from the Masters reveal that a change in the situation of KH during this period required a new author for his letters. On 1 June, an unsigned letter advised:

> Unless you put your shoulder to the wheel yourself Kuthumi Lal Singh will have to disappear off the stage this fall. Easy enough for you.[39]

On the 13th, the Master Hilarion wrote:

> You are asked by Maha Sahib to put your whole soul in answer to A.P.S. from K.H. Upon this letter are hinged the fruits of the future.[40]

Two days later, a letter in Morya's script advised Olcott to attempt to heal the Maharaja of Indore on his upcoming trip to the North West Provinces, for "Indore is a big bird and if you help him in his ailings you will get a name and fame." He concluded with the reminder "Be careful about letter to Sinnett. Must be a really *Adeptic* letter."[41]

The significance of all this may be illuminated by the fact that Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia was planning to go to England in the fall of 1883 to visit his cousin Dalip Singh. Although on 9 November he wrote Dalip that the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab had refused him permission, by late 1884 he was, nonetheless, in England. He was therefore still in the Punjab at least through the visit of Olcott and Damodar in November, but apparently his plans and preparations for the trip led him to resign temporarily from his role as correspondent to Sinnett. In anticipation of his departure, he asked M or HPB to find a replacement, and the above letters make it clear that Olcott was selected to fill the gap. Thakar Singh may have renewed his involvement with the KH correspondence once he arrived in England, where Sinnett had relocated several months before.

Hodgson and most other anti-Theosophical writers have concluded that Olcott was an innocent victim manipulated and deceived by HPB, who had invented the Masters. Theosophists have believed both to be entirely honest about their adept sponsors. But these and other letters from June 1883 suggest that both were serving real Masters, and willing to use deceptive methods when necessary. "Pass it off to him someway" sounds like a suggestion to deliver Subba Row's Mahatma letter in a way intended to make it seem paranormal. Since the young man was widely proclaimed as a personal pupil of M, seeing him as a victim of such manipulation is rather disappointing. The passages about getting shares and saving the journal refer to a failed effort to establish a newspaper, to be called the *Phoenix,* funded by native capital and edited by Sinnett under KH's inspiration. The collapse of this attempt would, HPB warned Sinnett, lead to KH's complete withdrawal from contact with the TS. Yet before the end of 1883, Koot Hoomi was to be involved in some of the most dramatic events in Theosophical history.

In August, an article signed by 201 Hindus, "Gurus and Chelas," protested A. O. Hume's irreverence to the Masters. Hodgson was later to note that several of their names seemed to have been invented for the occasion. Madras newspapers began to insinuate that the Theosophical founders were secret political agents. In September, after returning to Adyar from Ootycamund, HPB wrote to Sinnett that KH had ordered Olcott to "go to a certain pass."[42] On the 27th, Olcott left on a North Indian tour, and two days later William T. Brown arrived at Adyar with Mrs. Sarah Parker. On 10 October, Brown joined Olcott *en route* at Sholapur, and on the following day, Damodar left Adyar to join the party. On the 20th, HPB

met Olcott, Damodar, and Brown at Bombay, but two days later she was *en route* to Madras. At the end of the month, "A Protest of Theosophists" appeared, in which five hundred Hindus objected to Dr. George Wyld's irreverence to the Teachers. On the 30th, Swami Dayanand Saraswati died in Ajmer. Olcott's tour with Brown and Damodar continued into November, and the trio arrived at Lahore the evening of the 18th. They were welcomed to the city by a party that included the Singh Sabha leaders Sirdar Dayal Singh Majithia and Bhai Gurmukh Singh. On the second night of their stay, Koot Hoomi made his famous visit to Olcott and Brown in their tents, during which each had a message materialize in his hands. Another KH visit, in the company of Djual Kul, occurred the following evening, when the Master had long talks with Damodar and Olcott. The following day, the group headed to Jammu to visit Ranbir Singh, the Maharaja of Kashmir. On 25 November, Damodar vanished from the house in Jammu where Ranbir had lodged him, but HPB telegraphed that all was well in response to Olcott's worried queries. On the 26th, Brown received another note from the Master, and on the 27th, Damodar returned, greatly altered by the experience of the Master's ashram. In Hodgson's report, Brown, who had seen KH at a distance in Lahore in daylight and received a nocturnal visit from him in his tent, is dismissed as unable to distinguish between the Mahatma and any person who may have slipped into the tent at night.

Brown described his background and his experiences with the Theosophical Masters in a report to the Society for Psychical Research which was never published during his lifetime. Recently published for the first time, it makes claims about his encounters with Koot Hoomi that are so specific as to have possibly raised concerns in the minds of Olcott and HPB. Although Brown's testimony would seem to be of great value to the TS, it remained unpublished for reasons unknown. One might speculate that its details about the Masters were considered too indiscreet for public consumption, especially in the wake of the Coulomb scandal.

The report, entitled "Some Experiences in India," opens with an account of Brown's first encounter with Theosophy through Mary Gebhard, who he met at the home of a homeopathic physician in London in 1883. Upon graduation from the University of Glasgow in April 1882, Brown traveled extensively for several months in North America and Europe, which resulted in a breakdown of his health. After an allopathic doctor's treatment caused him to decline further, he found Dr. Nichols, under whose care he "recovered my pristine vigour, and was quite restored to health."[43]

Mrs. Gebhard, a former pupil of Eliphas Levi, introduced Brown to Theosophical literature, which inspired him with the compulsion to visit the East. After an exchange of letters with Sinnett, he proceeded to Ceylon and India, arriving at Adyar in the fall of 1883. Olcott had already begun a lengthy tour through central and northern India, arranging for Brown to meet him *en route.* Before leaving Adyar, Brown received a Mahatma letter from KH, who suggested that "we may yet become friends."[44] He next received a long letter from Olcott warning of the arduous conditions of travel but promising that "if all these warnings do not repel you, and you have decided to sacrifice yourself, your strength, your talents for our cause, then come and I shall treat you as a son or a younger brother, as the differences in our ages may call for."[45]

After meeting Olcott in Sholapur and being joined by Damodar in Poona, Brown proceeded with them to Bombay, Jabalpur, and Allahabad. In Jabalpur at a TS lecture, he saw mysterious men who seemed majestic and holy in the audience, and was later assured by Damodar that they were Mahatmas in their astral bodies. In Allahabad, he saw one of these figures again, this time in his physical form. Proceeding by an indirect northward route, the group arrived in Lahore on 18 November, and it was here that their real adventures began:

> . . . Lahore has a special interest, because there we saw, in his own physical body, Mahatma Koot Hoomi himself.
>
> On the afternoon of the 19th November, I saw the Master in broad daylight, and recognized him, and on the morning of the 20th he came to my tent, and said "Now you see me before you in the flesh; look and assure yourself that it is I," and left a letter of instructions and silk handkerchief, both of which are now in my possession.
>
> The letter is as usual written seemingly with blue pencil, is in the same handwriting as that in which is written communication received at Madras, and has been identified by about a dozen persons as bearing the caligraphy *[sic]* of Mahatma Koot Hoomi. The letter was to the effect that I had first seen him in visions, then in his astral form, then in body at a distance, and that finally I now saw him in his own physical body, so close to me as to enable me to give to my countrymen the assurance that I was from personal knowledge as sure of the existence of the Mahatmas as I was of my own. The letter is a private one, and I am not enabled to quote from it at length.