

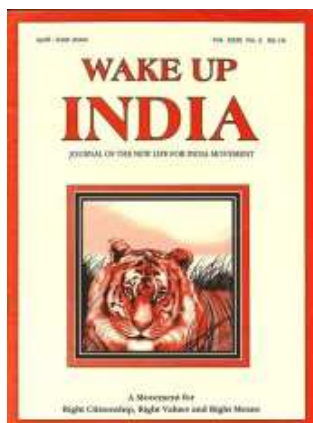
A life of service: a tribute to Radha Burnier, December, 2013



When a person is elected to the office of International President of the Theosophical Society, there are no guidelines to tell the person what their particular message should be. The message or theme of their administration rises to the surface gradually as they conduct the necessary duties of the office. Throughout Radhaji's time as president, one of her main focuses was humanitarian work. In almost every inaugural convention address, she mentioned the work of the Theosophical Order of Service and its importance in the work of the Theosophical Society. In her 1985 address she writes, "I appeal to members everywhere to give their full support to the TOS, seeing that there is widespread distress everywhere. The latest and most tragic example is the famine in Africa which has led to the death of millions. Even though there may not be such extreme need elsewhere, the

suffering of people and animals is enormous and the more fortunate among us must do whatever little we can to relieve such suffering."

Radhaji was not inspired to take on these endeavours because of her office, but because of who she was as a person. In 1968, while holding the office of General Secretary of the Indian Section, she started the New Life for India movement with the help of Indian independence activist and philosopher, Achyut Patwardhan and her father, N. Sri Ram, who was International President of the TS at the time. In his 1968 inaugural address, Sri Ram states that the New Life for India's aim "is to promote in public and private life a consciousness of the principles which should govern the conduct of an Indian in relation to his fellow citizens, surroundings and neighbours, in fact, the ancient idea of Dharma, translated into terms of practical conduct and social values. A number of representatives of different groups and organisations, including Mrs Burnier herself and other Theosophists, have been co-operating in this endeavour, which is wholly non-political and has already met with a measure of response, exemplified by the fact that the Governor of Madras, Sardar Ujjal Singh, came to its first public meeting in September last to inaugurate it."



The New Life for India movement's journal *Wake Up India* was revamped in 1988 to make it more appealing to readers.

In her address from that time, Radhaji mentions that the journal was distributed to 3,000 colleges, schools and other institutions. She writes, "By working for the right values, personal integrity and a clear sense of social responsibility, this movement paves the way for the upliftment of the mind into the spiritual sphere. It is hoped the momentum gained for this work in the last year will gather further strength in the near future." The momentum Radhaji mentions started most likely due to a comment she made in her 1985 address when she stated that the response to the call to "lift the moral gloom which lies over India" was "apathetic." She rarely minced words. However, she was also enthusiastic and hopeful when opportunities arose and she encouraged the Indian Section to use the movement as a vehicle to put Theosophy into action.

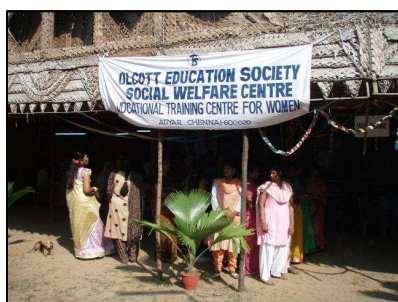
After taking office, there were many areas that needed attention at Adyar and around the world. Having been born and raised on the Adyar campus, Radhaji had a strong love for Adyar and was very familiar with the various theosophical projects and initiatives that were housed there. One area that needed great attention was the Olcott Memorial High School. The school was founded by Olcott in 1894 to provide free education to poor students in the nearby areas, and at one time served over 700 students. However, because the school was run through government funds, the teaching staff was not sufficiently qualified and examination scores were consistently low. This raised doubts about whether the school was truly benefitting the students it was supposed to be helping.



Education in the general sense of the term was extremely important to Radhaji. She believed that through education and the development of open-mindedness, we can come to understand the world around us and in turn develop our inner selves. She had been a board member of the school since 1959, and during her administration, Radhaji regularly visited the Olcott School and the HPB hostel that housed some of the boys who attended the school. She carefully considered ways that the school could be improved. When she visited the students, she would ask them directly how they were getting on. While engaging in conversation with them, the childlike nature of Radhaji would shine through. Her voice would become gentler, her body would relax, and she would have a playful tone to her voice.



In an effort to provide different educational avenues for the students and to maintain a more theosophical environment, an endowment fund was started in 1987 to improve the teaching staff and equipment at the Olcott School. By 1988, a centre for educators called "Banyan" was started under the Olcott Education Society (OES). The Banyan programme worked to upgrade the skills of the teachers and "enlarged teacher's perceptions of the educator's role" in a child's life.



By this time, OES became the parent body for the Olcott Memorial School, the HPB Hostel and the Social Welfare Centre (previously known as the Olcott Welfare Society). Radhaji was adamant that the only way to ensure that theosophical values were instilled in the work of these institutions was to make sure they came under the Theosophical Society and they were guided by those who understood the oneness of life. The proof of the success of



all this effort was mentioned in Radhaji's 1993 address when she stated that the examination scores of the students at Olcott Memorial High School were "increasing steadily." The scores went from a 32% passing rate in 1988 to a 72% passing rate in 1993.

In her 1997 address, Radhaji proudly announced that the Tamil Nadu Government gave permanent recognition to the Olcott Memorial School after it changed from a government funded school to a self-financing one. This was a huge step toward the school becoming autonomous. By 2001, "a few students achieved distinction in the school final exams." She credited Ahalya Chari and G. Gautama, the former Headmistress and former Principal, respectively, of the Krishnamurti Foundation India School in Chennai, with providing vision and guidance to the school, as well as the Banyan programme.

In her 2004 address, Radhaji commented that the teaching staff were working diligently to make sure students were prepared to meet the world technologically ready. In one of her last addresses, she states that “48 of the 53 students” graduated from the high school; quite a record considering where the school started. As of August 2013, Olcott Memorial School has 459 students (267 boys and 192 girls) and is considered one of the best schools serving the underprivileged in the state of Tamil Nadu.



While formal education was important to Radhaji, she also knew that academics alone cannot give rise to the sensitivity needed to awaken the heart. According to her, exposure to the beauty of nature as well as an understanding of our role in protecting it was crucial. In many of her writings, she stressed the need for humanity to understand our relationship to nature; that we are not separate but a part of a system that must be kept in balance. She believed that by being around nature we can become sensitive to the oneness of life.



In her 1997 address she writes, “The feeling for life in any form is the foundation for the acquirement of spiritual knowledge. To every creature its life is precious; every creature seeks freedom. The ant as much as the elephant or the human being wants to avoid being trapped, injured or destroyed. In the depth of their consciousness, which is the one all-pervading consciousness, there is awareness that life in every form, great or small, is part of a cosmic scheme, by which Divine Will moves all beings towards the unfoldment of their own latent and hidden divinity and perfection.”



Changing the attitude of adults was difficult enough, but if children were educated and exposed to this view, they might influence the adults around them. Radhaji therefore housed the fledgling Environmental Society of Madras (of which she was president) on the TS campus in 1987 and stated in her address that “With their awareness of the interlinked and unitary nature of



life, members of the Theosophical Society cannot but take interest in environmental protection.”

Through the Environmental Society, Radhaji helped campaign to have the beaches of Chennai cleaned and preserved and brought ecological attention to the estuary of the Adyar River. Birdwatchers and conservationists in Chennai found a solid ally in their fight against the urban sprawl, and Radhaji’s campaign for environmental awareness inspired programmes in the Olcott School and the Besant Scout Camping Centre.





As she started her second term, Radhaji was profoundly affected by exploitation, whether it was animals, children, or humans. In her address of 1987, she states, "One more question to which members of the Society should address themselves is that of exploitation. The weak are the victims everywhere of those who have greater powers. In vast areas of the Third World and even elsewhere, women spend their entire lives practically as beasts of burden and child bearing machines. The abuse and exploitation of children is a world-wide problem. The exploitation of the weak is so ubiquitous that there is a danger of too many minds becoming used to it and therefore losing the will to resist it and protect its victims. Courage is needed to challenge and fight against injustice, it is only too easy for obscurantists to justify the suppression of people, the confining of women and other immoral acts in the name of religion and tradition."

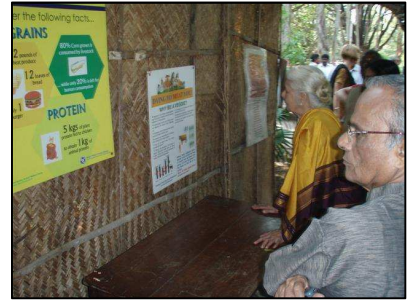


She once again appealed to members that "the Theosophical Order of Service is an important wing of the Society's activities, and it would be desirable to have more members take part in its varied relief work." She stressed the need that "the avenues for work are numerous: protest against the use of torture, propaganda against factory farming and other cruelties committed against animals, environmental awareness, helping disaster stricken areas, help [for] the aged, the handicapped, the blind, and so forth. Each group is left free to take up programmes which are feasible to it, but the desire to help one's fellow human beings and other creatures is in itself an aid for spiritual realisation, for it cleanses the heart through compassion."



As the Olcott Educational Society seemed to stabilise in its work with the running of the Olcott School, the HPB hostel and the Social Welfare Centre, Radhaji moved her energy toward animals. For years the Blue Cross Animal Hospital had leased TS land to run their clinic. However, reports of unethical treatment of the animals came to the forefront and notice was given to the Blue Cross to vacate the premises. The Blue Cross refused and a legal battle ensued for eight years. In 2001, the High Court of Madras finally decided in favour of the TS and the day after the Blue Cross left, the TS moved in and started the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary. In 2003 an airy, well-equipped operating theatre was built and today the dispensary provides service to over 6,000 animals a year with three veterinarians and their assistants on staff. It also works to educate animal owners on humane treatment and the cruelty done to animals in relation to beauty products. Beauty Without Cruelty products were regularly promoted by Radhaji. She stated in her 1993 address that "we need to encourage people to abstain from using products involving cruelty, to protest against atrocities committed against animals, and also to support the work to give our younger brethren a happy and dignified place on earth."





It took almost 20 years to get Radhaji's various projects on a solid foundation and once this happened, the next 13 years were spent exploring and expanding new avenues to ensure the prosperity of these particular endeavours. With the turn of the millennium, Radhaji's 1999 address stated that "many members felt that we should not have a hostel only for boys, but do something for girls as well; so we are inaugurating a Vocational Training Centre for Women." The Vocational Training Centre was housed under the Social Welfare Centre and offered training courses to women so they could obtain suitable employment.



One project Radhaji did not live long enough to see, but which she began planning for, is a technical trade school for students who do not want to pursue a university degree. The school will be housed in the building where the KFI School is now, in Damodar Gardens, after the lease for the KFI school ends in 2014. The trade school will be overseen by the Olcott Educational Society and proposes to offer courses such as electrical engineering, and home health so the sick and aged can live out their lives in their homes.

As the world continued to change around her, Radhaji continued to keep abreast of the needs of society and ways to approach the world in the most theosophical manner. The reader is reminded that the projects mentioned here were in Adyar alone and do not cover all she did elsewhere in India in the area of education for the needy and for the protection of animals, as well as her work for the Society internationally. Her tireless efforts had a profound impact on both the TS and the TOS. Radhaji showed us how to put theosophy into action and what fruit that action will bear through steadfastness, patience and compassion. In her 33 years in office, she never once expected a thank you or recognition. She worked selflessly for the betterment of humanity and, for many of us, became an example to follow. Our gratitude is profound.



TOS International Secretary, Diana Dunningham Chapotin, writes about Radha's strengths as International President of the Theosophical Order of Service.

Left: Diana and Radha at the World Congress in Brazil in 1993.

Since Radha passed away, several people have asked what it was like working under her as International President of the TOS.

The first thing that comes to mind was the great degree of freedom she allowed us. The international team corresponded relatively little with her, considering the extent of the organisation's work. To some, the great measure of freedom she accorded may have been regarded as risky, laissez-faire or lax. In fact the freedom allowed room for... the world. Yes, the freedom accorded us by Radha was quite simply a precious key permitting a creative opening to larger society in natural, spontaneous ways. She always said she wanted us to reach out... and she allowed us to do so. She never once imposed her own agenda in major matters without reflection and discussion.

Radha was herself deeply concerned about the state of society at large. She was able to converse fluently on the latest ethical problems posed by science, economic issues, the internal politics of other countries, the effects of corporate greed on the environment, the exploitation of the masses by international conglomerates... and she spoke out openly on these matters in *The Theosophist*. Given the tendency of some spiritual seekers to consider the state of the world and social change as of remote relevance to the 'real' work of inner transformation, Radha's approach was salutary and inspiring. Her *On The Watch-Tower* commentaries were courageous and richly thought-provoking, as were her father's, our fifth international president.



The TOS celebrated 100 years of activity in 2008. Here we see Radha attending the centenary event held at Adyar in January of that year.



Another strength in Radha as our president was her understanding of the subtle relationship between the TS and the TOS. "Unfortunately not enough members of the Theosophical Society realise that the Order of Service is a wonderful means to the realisation of unity. Its work has the potency to ennoble the worker while relieving the distressed," she wrote in an *On The Watch-Tower* article in December 1994. She was aware of the contribution of the TOS to the community outreach of the Theosophical Society and its role in drawing people to examine theosophical teachings of which they otherwise might never have heard. She never lost sight of the fact that when Mrs Besant created the TOS, she called it the Theosophical **Society** Order of Service, indicating its existence within and not separate from the TS.

Left: Our TOS International President visited the fund-raising bazaar organised by the TOS in Italy at the TS World Congress held in Rome in mid-2010.

Oddly, it wasn't Radha's public acts and decisions as president of the TS that etched themselves on my memory but a whole series of small personal acts on her part. For instance, in the late 1970s, during a stay at our international headquarters at Adyar, I was in my room when a squeal of tyres was heard on the road outside. I looked over the balcony to see what was going on. The presidential vehicle had hit a dog that had run across its path. I saw Radha jump out of the car and kneel down in the dust beside the dog and care for it until medical help arrived. She had a convention of well over a thousand people to run, she was on her way to a meeting, she had an honoured friend in the car and yet she stayed kneeling in the dust. She could have asked one of the staff at Leadbeater Chambers to take care of the matter; she could have left once professional help had been called, but she stayed on, caring for the dog herself. I have never forgotten the tender care Radha showed. To me it was the perfect illustration of HPB's well-known words in *The Key to Theosophy* (Section XII, On Charity):

"The Theosophical ideas of charity mean personal exertion for others; personal mercy and kindness; personal interest in the welfare of those who suffer; personal sympathy, forethought and assistance in their troubles or needs."



Another example of Radha's 'charity' from a theosophical perspective is evident in her work focused on animals. Radha was aware that underprivileged people don't have the means to pay for medical help for their animals. Are many of us aware of all she did to make the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary what it is today? In addition to its operating theatre and the thousands of animals treated every year almost free of charge, a van travels within a radius of 100 kms (60 miles) to villages where there are no veterinary facilities.

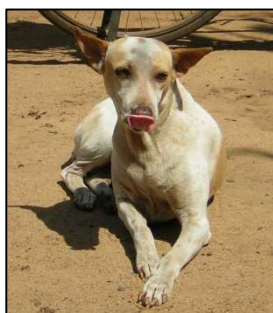


Animal Welfare Dispensary



Radha with dog

Staff also look after puppies, kittens and older animals that are abandoned at the gate of the Dispensary or even thrown inside. A number of cats and around 50 dogs on the Adyar compound are fed and cared for because they have no other home and have wandered in. Staff ensure that they are neutered. Little of this would have happened without Radha's personal care and determination.



Radha ensured that the TOS joined in animal protection campaigns within India such as one to stop the skinning of snakes while alive, hardly a problem of which the average Theosophist is even aware. In 2002, thanks to her, a special appeal was made to members around the world to write to the Prime Minister of India about plans for a massive expansion of the meat industry, urging him to consider the ecological and health repercussions of industrial farming. Many thousands of signatures were collected with significant media impact. When Radha became aware of the cruelty to animals involved in the dairy and egg industries, she didn't hesitate to reduce considerably her personal consumption of these items, within the constraints imposed by her extensive travelling.



Snakes are routinely skinned alive in certain countries and their bodies thrown on to heaps where they can take two days to die.

Another example of Radha's personal mercy and kindness involves her work with the Olcott School in Adyar. She worked forcefully and effectively to improve the standard of education offered there. She was extremely generous with her own time and resources in this regard, something else possibly few realise.



I never stopped to thank Radha for the inspiration she provided in all these ways and more – but then if I had, she undoubtedly would have interrupted me or brushed my words aside. Some could have interpreted this as brusqueness, others simply as indifference to her own achievements.

Ask a hundred people for their observations of a well-known figure and you will receive almost unrecognisably different portraits. To one the figure is a saint and to the next a sinner. Consider these remarks made since Radha has passed away:

“Radha’s life was a saga of simplicity, selflessness, and service at the altar of divinity.”

“Radhaji could come across as gruff with a sting to her words which could be intimidating but there was another side to her that was gentle, giving and playful.”

“With a personality which was at times difficult to understand, she had around her an abiding aura of strength, deep contentment and undeniable holiness. One did not have to be especially sensitive to feel this and to be affected by it. At times it could pour forth like a sudden wave of beneficence.”

“The advent of the internet with its democratic open forums and ready communication by e-mail posed a challenge to the governance of the TS in the later years of Radha’s presidency as members around the world flexed their muscles and challenged the level of democracy and transparency in the Society’s management.”



In the final count, the infinite variety of opinions of well-known figures throws us back on ourselves and leaves us with questions such as, "What lessons have I been open to learning from the strengths and weaknesses of this person? How has my interaction with him or her helped me turn outwards and be more fraternal toward others?"

In the TOS's case, interaction and collaboration with Radha as its president taught that a deep caring for the state of the world and a commitment to making it a better stage for human evolution are as central to the spiritual path as study and meditation. All of us have our own memories of our seventh International President. We know our link with her is unbroken.



In the following pages, you'll find a number of personal reminiscences from people who worked with or met Radha, or were members of her family. Most people related to Radha as the International President, but through these stories, readers will see a very human side of her.

We'd like to thank the following contributors for their stories:

Teaching selflessness...Jason Shreeram

A simple yet rich Life...Bernice Croft

Heart of a mother...Pedro Oliveira

Honoured by her trust and grateful for her support...Lorraine Christensen

Memories of Radhaji...Deepa Padhi

Until we meet again...Joy Mills

Fond memories of Radha...Barbara Hebert

From darkness to light...Ananya Sri Ram Rajan



Jason Shreeram is the son of Radha's younger brother Vajra, who died in March of 1982 and his wife Doris, who died eight months earlier. He is also the elder brother of Ananya Sri Ram Rajan. Jason lives in Georgia in the USA and volunteers as the youth minister at his church.

Teaching selflessness

When I was 21, my family had disintegrated in such a profound and rapid way I had no idea what to do. My mother had died and eight months later, my father followed. As the oldest in my family, I suddenly found myself solely responsible for not only myself and my own new family, but my two younger sisters, one of whom is disabled and needs full-time nursing care. The death of my parents had forced my sister Rani to be placed in a nursing home, living with elderly geriatric patients, and left my younger sister Ananya in an utter void, with tremendous grief, anger and an inability to see any hope in life. We were all lost in our own way.

Few people know how my Aunt Radha reacted to this upheaval on a personal level. When my father was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1981, she stayed in Wheaton for four months to care for him and see to his healthcare. As he was receiving treatment at Fermi Lab in Batavia, a suburb near Olcott, she lived with him at Olcott despite her hectic schedule as International President and eventually took him to Adyar so he could see friends and family one last time and die where he was born. After his passing, my aunt returned to the US several times to assist with the multitude of problems, both emotional and financial, that we children faced with this loss, which was her loss as well. However, I never heard her ask for anything other than for me to pay attention to myself and my own healing. When she felt our security for food, shelter, and basic necessities were appropriately in place, she coaxed my younger sister to move to India to live with her. Considering that my aunt was 60 years old and had never had her own children, bringing a young American girl to Adyar was quite a risk. Yet she never hesitated. She repeatedly said it was the right thing to do.

As I write this today, I am a successful businessman in the technology field, my younger sister is an accomplished author and professional mental health counsellor, and both of us are healthy, functional members of society at large as well as members of the Theosophical Society. Between the two of us, we have raised five wonderful children and I have two beautiful grandchildren. Our sister with disabilities happily lives near Olcott and the three of us remain emotionally close to one another.



Right: Jason, Rani and Ananya

As I approach the same age that my Aunt Radha was when she taught me the meaning of selflessness, I hope that I can emulate her example; for indeed, she saved our lives with no hesitation, no expectations, and no ego. She lived the life she taught and there was no compromise, no consideration of the impact of such burdens added to her new responsibilities as International President, and no distance between Adyar and Wheaton. There were no boundaries in the selflessness she taught and example of the life she lived. May we all come to know such a teacher in our own lives.



Bernice Croft acted for ten years as secretary to our International TS President, Radha Burnier, before retiring in February 2011 and returning to her native New Zealand. Radha called her back into service the very next year to accompany her on a world tour for the TS that lasted two months. In this article, Bernice tells us a little about Radha's day to day activities.

A simple yet rich life

It is a privilege to be invited to write on the life and legacy left by our late President, Radha Burnier.

Radha Burnier was born into a theosophical family on the compound at Adyar on 15 November 1923 and died there on 31 October 2013. She was in her 90th year. Her late father N. Sri Ram was the fifth International President of the Society.

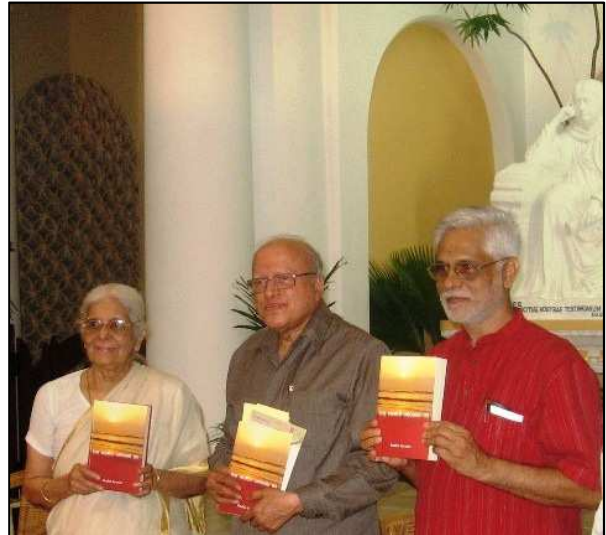
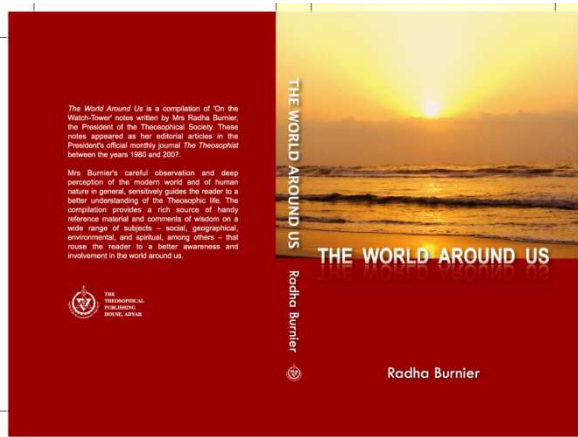
Radha's whole life was devoted to the work of the Society and during this very long life she worked tirelessly to promote the ideals of Theosophy not only in India, but throughout the world. In 1984 the Nagarjuna University of India conferred an honorary Doctorate of Literature on her for her work in promoting learning and values, and in 2012 the Government of India conferred upon her 'The Developers India's Vibrant Indian Award'.

President Radha Burnier lived a simple life. Material acquisitions were of little value to her. An example: one day, the President came out of her office and I noticed that the border of her sari was torn. I was concerned that she might get her foot caught and fall. The only immediate remedy was to staple the sari together. I offered to mend the sari. When I returned it to her, President Radha looked at me and said, "You may be surprised to know that this sari would be more than 50 years old."

I thought it would be appropriate to relate a little about her day to day activities. Radha Burnier lived a simple, uncluttered life. She had a huge capacity to work tirelessly for the good of others, not only for all human beings, but also for the care of animals. She lived at Parsi Quarters in a simple house which was very near to the boundary of the Adyar Estate which separates the Society from the Bay of Bengal. Normally while in residence she rose early and was at the office at 7:30 a.m. and worked six full days. On Sundays when she was in residence, she delivered the Esoteric School of Theosophy lecture in the Shrine Room. That was up until she had a mild stroke on November 11, 2007. After a month's rest, she returned to work in the office from 8 to 11:30 a.m.



During her years in office, she administered the work of disseminating the ideals of Theosophy as well as lecturing and corresponding with Sections and members throughout the world. She wrote and published four books including *No Other Path to Go* in which she referred to the spiritual path as like a 'razor's edge', difficult to cross and hard to tread. She described the nature of the path and the many pitfalls. In another of her books, *The Way to Self-Knowledge*, she explored how to work with the psychological aspects of our nature in order to awaken spiritual perception. All her books are available in TS libraries. President Radha was also the author of countless *On the Watch-Tower* editorials which appear in the TS's international monthly journal, *The Theosophist*. She edited all the articles for this magazine and also many other books that were published by the Theosophical Publishing House at Adyar. The *On the Watch-Tower* articles were diverse and topical, and there were many requests to have them published in a book. This was done by Professor Schinde, the Librarian at Adyar Library, in 2009 under the title, *The World Around Us*.



Radha Burnier received many dignitaries and visitors throughout the week while she was in residence, as well as personally attending to matters on the Estate and delegating various tasks. Up until the time of her stroke, President Radha walked the compound daily after she left the office to ensure that it was well maintained. Her programme included visits to the Olcott School where hundreds of children receive a free education, free uniforms and one meal a day; visits to the Welfare Centre where women from the nearby village are able to leave their children to be cared for free of cost so they can go to work; visits to the Besant Memorial Animal Dispensary which is well equipped with a surgery and has an outreach programme. The Society covers 263 acres of land and there are many buildings and services that require maintenance. Our president took a personal interest in all this work.

President Radha lectured all over India and abroad, delivering talks to members and the public, inspiring all those who attended to live a nobler and higher life. Many of her programmes centred on reflection and meditative inquiry into life's deeper aspects. She did this in conjunction with her administrative responsibilities for the Society in India and worldwide. A deep student of the theosophical philosophy and well versed in oriental learning, she actively popularised theosophical ideals, with special emphasis on daily living and 'human regeneration'. She was the founder of 'The New Life for India Movement' in 1968 whose aims were to create an awareness of Indian Youth, focusing on right citizenship, right values and right means.

According to our late President, the philosophy behind Theosophy must remain relevant to present-day issues. She promoted service-oriented organisations such as the Theosophical Order of Service that deal with education, animal welfare, vegetarianism and environmental issues.

Over her years in office, President Radha Burnier constantly endeavoured to raise human consciousness to higher levels.





Of Brazilian origin, Pedro Oliveira is part of the TS staff in Australia where he currently acts as the Education Coordinator.

Heart of a mother

For those who knew her only in her presidential persona, Radha Burnier was seen as a strong leader, a careful and meticulous administrator, as well as someone who did not suffer fools gladly. Whenever she presided over meetings at Adyar she was brief, measured and free from the excessive talk that renders some meetings an unexpected exercise in prolonged patience. She always addressed the heart of a subject or theme, always shining a light on our own responsibility as individuals in the world.

There was, however, another side to her. In August 1992, when I was working at Adyar, my mother died tragically. On talking to my brother-in-law on the telephone I was informed that she had taken her own life. Still in deep shock I rushed to the President's Office to inform Radhaji. She was taken aback. I then informed her that I needed to travel immediately to Brazil to be with my father and my sister and her family. She knew I was receiving a small honorarium as a worker at Adyar. She proceeded to call her travel agent, asked her to book an immediate ticket and later on paid for it with a cheque from her personal chequebook. The cost of that ticket, in 1992, was Rs. 62,000. Before I left her office she took my hands in hers and said: "I hope you will not be too affected by what is waiting for you there." After I came back I wanted to reimburse the amount of the airfare but she refused. "It had to be done," she said.

In 1996 I had to leave Adyar following a period of illness and continued stress. When I wrote to her later on to say that I was sorry for any headache I had given her, she wrote back saying: "You need not apologise for anything you did not do deliberately. You will have other opportunities." In 1999 she invited me to conduct a session of the School of the Wisdom.

During my two periods of residence at Adyar I saw many examples of Radhaji's motherly nature: her love for animals, for children and the financial help she gave, personally, to countless people. She never had children of her own but the heart of a mother was very much alive in her. And in the depths of that heart, purified from conflict and self-interest, committed to the work of the Great Ones, there was certainly a special place for Adyar. She was convinced, with every fibre of her being, that sacredness dwelled in Adyar. And that sacredness called her home.



Right: Radha plants a tree at the Theosophical Institute near Brasilia in 1993.



Lorraine Christensen is a long-time stalwart member of the Canadian Theosophical Association. She resides in the province of Alberta where she and her husband Henning run the Veritas Study Group.

Honoured by her trust and grateful for her support

My memories of Radha Burnier go back to June 16, 1986 when she came to Calgary and gave a talk to TS members living in the city and surrounding areas. I recall that her presentation on *The Powers Latent in Man* was very well received and her down to earth approach was appreciated. During the social hour which followed, I had the opportunity to talk privately with Radha, seeking her advice concerning a challenge I was facing in my Theosophical work. She offered me sound, practical guidance, and her words stayed with me through the years, helping me to stay on course.



In 2006, Radha Burnier installed me as director of the TOS in Canada by Order of Appointment. I shall never forget how honoured I felt by the trust she demonstrated in me by that appointment. Two years later in 2008, when I became president of the Canadian Theosophical Association, Mrs Burnier was very supportive. With both my TS and TOS work, I am very grateful for her kindness and support.



Dr Deepa Padhi is a very active TOS member in the city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha State, India where her work to uplift oppressed women is drawing international support. Deepa is currently President of the Mahabharat group. She talks about Radha's visits to the city.

Memories of Radhaji

Ever since I joined TOS, Radhaji has been my source of inspiration. For the last five years she has been sending messages for our magazine with encouraging words, which has really sustained my morale. She was delighted when she learned that university students had participated in our TOS workshop on self-development.

With Radhaji's passing, there are a couple of memories that come to mind. In 1995 she had come to Bhubaneswar for the Annual Conference of Utkal Theosophical Federation. At that time my father, the late Dr R. C. Rath, the founder President of Utkal Theosophical Federation, was dying and was confined to bed. Radhaji was very fond of him and he also had high regard for her. When she learned about my father's condition, she came to look him up. He was 86 and was on a catheter and a nasal feeding tube. He had lost his ability to talk, but was fully conscious. When he saw her, his face brightened up. Radhaji felt bad seeing him in that condition. She expressed her disagreement to my brother, who was a doctor and using artificial life supports to prolong my father's life. She stated that one should be allowed to carry on as ordained by nature. Then my brother replied, "You are saying this from a Theosophical point of view. But I am looking at it as my duty as a son and a doctor to keep him alive as long as possible." Radhaji responded in her own characteristic way: "While prolonging his existence, are you able to relieve him of his suffering?"

Later in 2003, Radhaji again attended our annual conference at Bhubaneswar. The meeting was about to start and a member walked up to her to present her with a flower bouquet. She suggested that the flowers be handled gently as the member held the bouquet almost crushing the flowers. It was expressive of her sensitivity, sense of aesthetic value and keen observation of minute detail. After the meeting she shared some thoughts with me about the need for order and harmony. In this case, members had removed their sandals in a disorderly fashion. Radhaji stated that members should know that there is an orderly harmonious pattern in the macrocosm and there is a conscious design and intent behind and within this orderliness. Therefore, we must try to maintain this orderliness in the micro level, in all our activities, outer and inner. Otherwise, there will be chaos and disharmony. It was interesting to see her use our sandals as a teaching moment.



Joy Mills is surely the TS member on the planet who least needs an introduction! Now aged 93 and still residing in her own home at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in California, Joy talks about her friendship with Radha going back 47 years.

Until we meet again

I first met Radha (that is, in this life!) in 1966 at the great World Congress held in Salzburg, Austria. There had been, so I recall, some correspondence earlier, when we were both active Young Theosophists – she in India and I in the United States – but the physical meeting in Salzburg seemed like only a resumption of a long and very treasured friendship, and friends we remained through all the subsequent years. My memory is filled with countless small vignettes of times shared with Radha through the years; times of sadness, times of laughter, of happiness, of journeys together, visits at Adyar, at Krotona, at Varanasi during a Convention. It is difficult to recount just one anecdote, for what remains in memory are not so much separate incidents as the rich flavour of those times of meeting. And the flavour is a beautiful one, rich with deep respect for each other's views, with a delight in each other's company that called as much for a companionable silence as for a steady stream of conversation.

I recall how she gave up her bedroom at Shanti Kunj in Varanasi to Ann Greene and me during the 1974 International Convention there; how she hosted my stay at Adyar at her home, Parsi Quarters, on several occasions when I came for the International Conventions, and in my mind's eye I see her guiding me through the maze of the Paris streets and the metro to the Co-Masonic Headquarters when we were attending meetings of that organisation. What stands out is her thoughtfulness, her graciousness, her awareness of another's needs (whether animal or human), and above all her commitment to Theosophy and the Society through which it could be expressed, her love of Adyar, her unparalleled familiarity with every inch of the property, as though she could speak personally to every bird, to every creature whether wild or tamed, every tree and plant and bush, aware of the beauty and wonder of every living thing.

Until we meet again, in another time and in another place, dear Radha; thank you for a friendship that will endure through all time and space, Joy.



A member of the TS for 63 years, Joy has served in a number of capacities, including that of National President of both the American and Australian Sections of the Society, as well as International Vice-President. Her lecture tours have taken her to more than 50 countries. Joy has published several books and her writings have been published in theosophical journals throughout the world. Here we see her with her latest contribution to Theosophical literature, Reflections on an Ageless Wisdom: A Commentary on the Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett. In 2011, Radha bestowed upon her the Subba Row Medal in recognition of her extensive contribution to Theosophical literature.



Barbara Hebert, currently Central District Director for the TS in America, reminisces about two of Radha's visits to the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in Ojai, California where Barbara and her family lived for four years in the mid-1980s.

Fond memories of Radha

While I had the privilege of being in Radha's presence a number of times, two special memories of her stand out for me. The first memory involves my elder son, Jason. When he was about two years old, we lived at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy in Ojai, California. One late afternoon, I could not convince Jason to come inside and have a bath. He wanted to stay outside and play in the yard. Since it was a warm afternoon, I decided to 'bathe' him with the garden hose and a bar of soap in the front yard while he was playing. While in the midst of doing so, I realised that Radha was walking down the hill and would soon be in front of my house. The realisation that the Head of the Krotona Institute was headed in my direction dismayed me. Sure that I would be in trouble for bathing a naked toddler with a garden hose in the front yard, there was nothing I could do! Radha stopped at the walkway to our house and gazed on the spectacle. She stood laughing and smiling at Jason's playful demeanour as he ran back and forth in the water. Her only comment focused on the fun that he was having and the practicality of bathing him outside. So much for my fears of giving offence!

My other special memory of Radha occurred on another of her visits to the Krotona Institute. At that time, I was about six months pregnant with my second son. One afternoon, I was called to the house in which Radha was staying. Certain that I must be in trouble, I felt like a schoolgirl headed to the principal's office to be scolded for some unknown wrong. Nervously, I rang the doorbell and Radha invited me in and offered me tea. After a brief conversation, Radha gave me a lovely dress in what would probably be called a 'tent' style with no waist in a beautiful pastel gauzy fabric. She said that she had thought of me when she saw the dress and thought that I could wear it while pregnant. She was right, of course. It was the only item of clothing that fitted me through my entire pregnancy. Once again, Radha's kindness and thoughtfulness rose to the forefront. In both instances, Radha's practicality, her thoughtfulness, kindness, and caring for others touched my life. It makes me wonder how many lives she touched in her years of travel around the globe as she modelled 'living theosophy'.

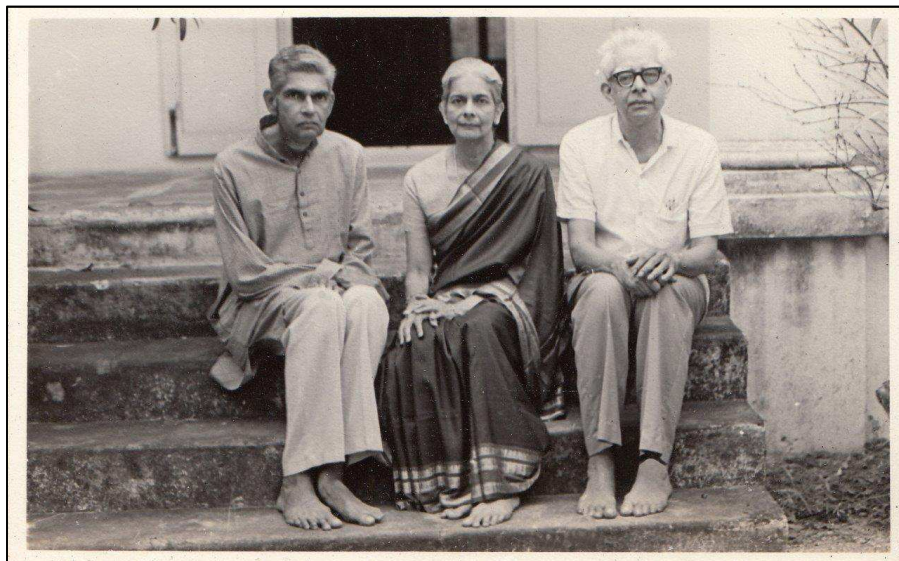




In September 1983, Ananya Sri Ram Rajan moved to India and lived with Radha for six years. In the following article, Ananya shares what her life was like living with the woman known to her as 'Athai'.

From darkness to light

It is difficult to express the extraordinary gift I was given when I went to live with my "Aunt Radha" as she was known to me then. I was a teenage girl from another country who had little structure to my life, believed I was not smart enough to go to college, and had no aspirations due to the shock of losing both my parents within a year. Here I was at the age of 18 living with a woman I barely knew, in a country I knew little about, and in a house with simple furnishings. It was far from what I was used to. At the time, I kept telling my aunt I would only stay for six months, but I ended up staying for six years.



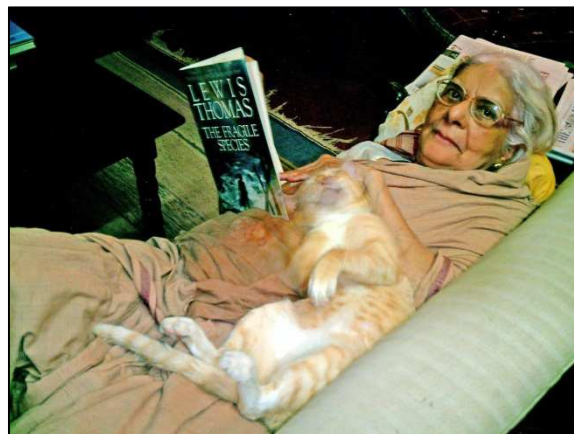
Left: Radhaji with her brothers Vajra and Vasant at Adyar. This was the last photo taken before Vajra's death.

In those six years and the years after, I developed a deep relationship with a woman whom I called 'Athai' (which is Tamil for 'father's sister'), but in reality for me meant 'mother.' For what we shared was more of a mother/daughter relationship filled with moments that provided a type of healing for both of us. Athai gave an edge to my rounded shoulders and I gave softness to hers. I needed structure and she needed flexibility and together we found a relationship that filled what the other lacked through affection and a love that had many layers.

Athai had the ability to be almost embarrassingly honest. She didn't mind mentioning the 'elephant in the room' and while she did not apologise for it, she had a side that was apologetically gentle in order to take away the sting she had just doled out. I experienced this many times with her and realised it was part of who she was. There was no malice in what she said. She just said what she thought needed saying. It was up to the person whether to take it personally or not. It has been a great lesson for me on how to step back from a situation or a comment and not react to it.

After moving to India I was sick, time and again, with one serious ailment or another. Strangely, the greater illnesses of hepatitis and appendicitis happened when Athai was out of town. However, I would feel reluctant to let her know I was not well and often tried to hide it from her because it added to her workload. Athai's worry and concern would manifest as severity because she couldn't 'fix' my health. This didn't happen all the time, but when my fevers got excessively high or I was too weak to do much, she would worry. I once came down with a high fever and became hallucinatory. I was told later that Athai had stayed up part of the night sponging me, trying to keep my body cool. After I was well, she sat me down and told me how she cared about me and not to feel I needed to hide my illnesses from her. It was one of many moments that we shared where her motherly love came to the forefront.

I have always been an animal lover as was Athai, but there was a difference. I was used to a dog or cat being in the house, but when I first lived with Athai, she believed the animals should be outside. She was particular about the cleanliness of the house and liked things to be orderly. This was good practice for me because at the time I rarely bothered about messes. Soon after living at Parsi Quarters, I befriended two kittens I named Ginger and Cinders. They lived near the main gate (which was a mile from where we lived) and I began feeding them milk and bread every morning and evening. Athai realised that much of my time was spent worrying about the welfare of these two cats, so she told me to bring them to Parsi Quarters. Needless to say, the cats ended up living in the house with us and then Athai began to worry about their welfare! Ginger became Athai's cat and he would lie on her desk at home while she worked and eventually made his way onto her bed and slept with her at night. After that, there was no stopping Athai. Every time I visited her she had a new friend added to her menagerie and often her letters were about a little creature that adopted her.



I had been in India for about six months when one morning Athai said, "You should think about going to college. You can't sit around here doing nothing. What would you like to study?" I was shocked. I had graduated from high school by the skin of my teeth and thought I was not intelligent enough to study. Athai was adamant that I continue my education. I remember being close to tears, "Athai, I'm not smart enough to go to college." She looked at me from over her newspaper, ignored my dramatics and said, "Don't be silly. You have to try." It was one of the best decisions I made as it broke the myth of not being smart enough and in turn built up my self-esteem. I now encourage others, no matter what their age, to pursue a higher degree if they would like to.

One of the things that Athai loved to do was visit the market on Sunday afternoons. She enjoyed talking to the shopkeepers and haggling with them a bit over the price of groceries. Many of the poor vendors knew who she was and greeted her respectfully. She would talk to them about the produce, how they managed, whether business was good and so on. If we walked around the campus, she would regularly talk to the workers about the plants and trees or ask what they were working on. She was never shy in her position but greeted everything head on with a curiosity that became infectious. I remember once we had a number of small oranges and Athai decided we should make jam. She actually had a number of cookbooks, found a marmalade jam recipe and we made jam not really knowing what we were doing. It became a bit of a tradition when the oranges came into season.

Athai was strict about exercise and care for her body. After a mild stroke in 2007, the doctors said the effect could have been much worse if she had not been in such good general health. She normally walked two miles a day. When I lived with her or later visited her, we regularly walked to the main gate and back at a fast pace. One night during the monsoon season, the rains had stopped, so we decided to take a walk. Athai and I got about a quarter mile into our walk when it started to sprinkle, but we continued and didn't say anything. As we reached the half mile mark, the rains suddenly got heavier. Strangely, we stopped, looked at each other, smiled and continued walking. The rain was refreshing, but it came down so hard it was difficult to see. As we made our way home, we giggled at the sight of one another soaked to the bone, our saris weighed down from the water and our hair plastered to our heads!

The discipline Athai had toward her body had a strong impact on me. I will never forget talking to her one evening about dance and how much work it took. I think we were talking about the making of *The River*. She said it is much harder to learn classical Indian dance as an older person because the mind is less flexible and there are so many movements to remember. She suddenly stood in the long hallway of Parsi Quarters and showed me the foot, hand and eye movements of one sequence. She was as graceful as she was in the movie. When she was done, she laughed about how much slower she was and the stiffness in her neck due to spondylitis. But here she was well over sixty, moving like a young girl. It made me realise what an impact diet and exercise had on the body and aging.

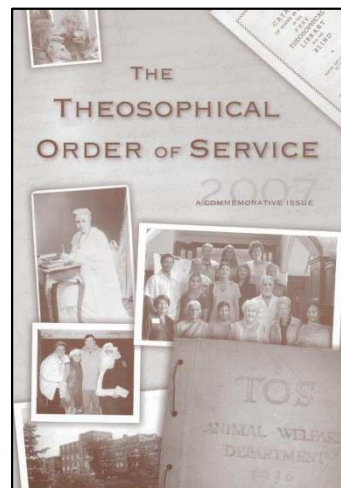


When I had children of my own, Athai took the role of grandmother. We came and stayed with her for an extended visit when my children were six and four. I worried about the children making too much noise or disturbing her, but she loved having them around. She would plan meals around them, let them randomly visit her at her office, and at dinner talk about what they did all day. My son, at the age of four, was bothered one day when Athai's driver didn't show up. He promised her that he when he was old enough he would drive her wherever she wanted to go. He was hoping to fulfil that promise this December.

As with my own parents, I felt Athai's passing very deeply. She not only provided me with a loving environment that introduced me to extraordinary people, events and a myriad of views, but she helped to peel away the layers so I could discover who I was. Somehow she knew Adyar and my heart were connected and somehow she knew I would find a home in Theosophy. I owe my spiritual life to her in so many ways and much of my involvement in the theosophical world is because of her. I once asked her, "Athai, how can I ever repay you for all you have done for me?" She shrugged it off, embarrassed, saying that thanks weren't necessary. About a minute later, she said quietly, "Work for the Masters. Work for Theosophy and help humanity."



Radhaji with her family during her last visit to the U.S. in May 2012. From left to right third row: Jason Shreeram, Janet Shreeram, Balaji Rajan. Second row l to r: Sahana Rajan, Cameron Shreeram, Ananya Sri Ram Rajan, Addie Shreeram Koenig, Preston Koenig, Front row: Rani Shreeram.



For the TOS's centenary celebrations in 2008, Ananya prepared a booklet on the history of the TOS, with particular emphasis on the work in the United States.



Ananya is current editor of the publications of the TOS in America and a member of the international TOS team.

These reminiscences of Ananya's bring our tribute to Radhaji to a close.
May the light of the Master illumine Radha's path and the wings of His love enfold her forever.



To serve is a privilege.
--Radha Burnier