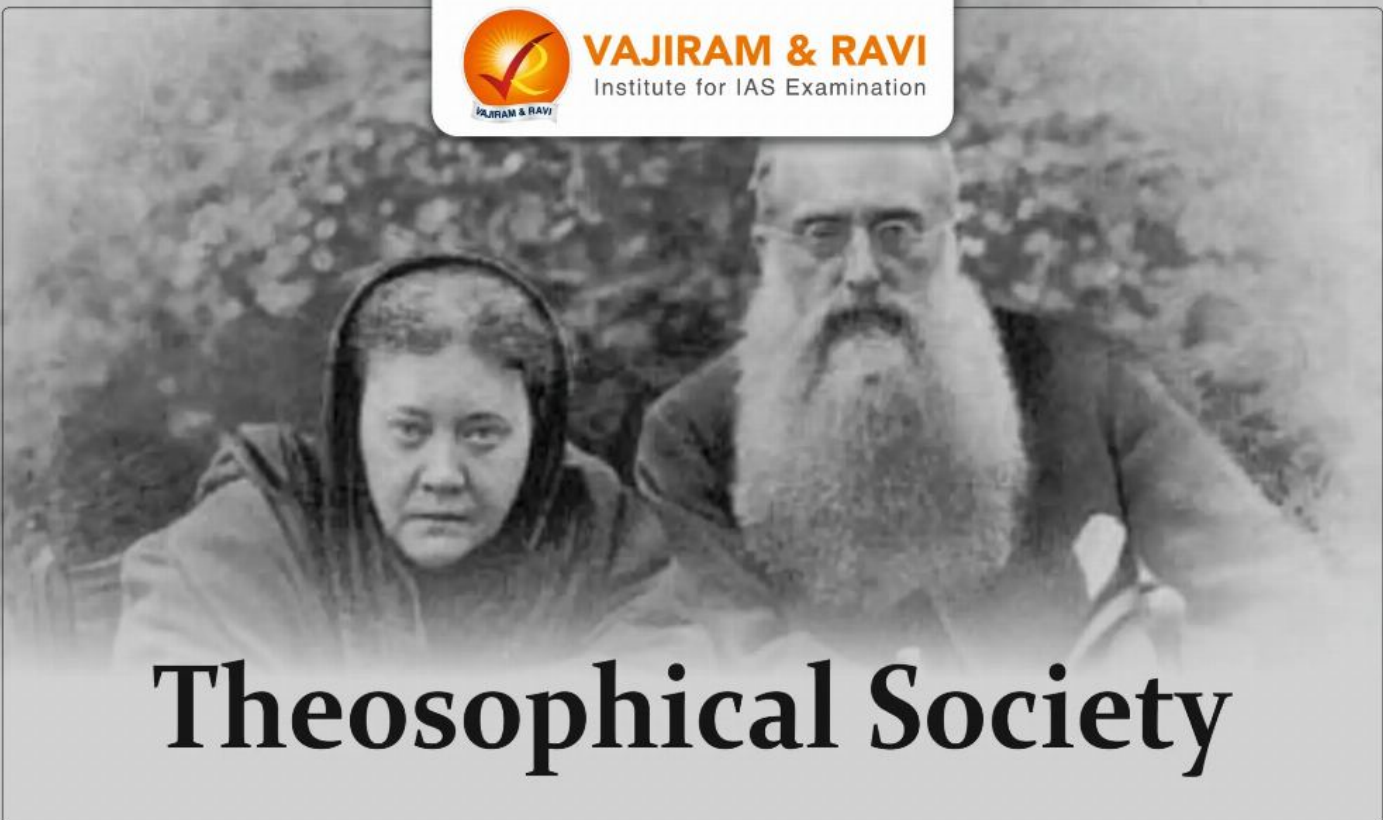


Theosophical Society, Founder, Objectives, Tenets, Shortcoming

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Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York City in 1875 by **Helena Blavatsky, a Russian mystic, and Henry Steel Olcott**, the society's first president. The society seeks to bridge the divide between East and West by emphasising the similarities in human culture.

In India, the Theosophical society played a key role in the Hindu awakening by promoting literary and research activities, reviving faith in Hindu philosophies, studying Aryan religion, publishing and translating scriptures, and supporting reforms and education.

Theosophical Society

Theosophy is a philosophical and religious system that combines mystical insight with teachings about God and the world. It was an **occult movement that originated in the 19th century** and has roots in ancient **Gnosticism and Neoplatonism**. Theosophy is the knowledge that forms the basis of all religions, free from superstitions. It offers a philosophy that clarifies existence, explaining how law and compassion govern the universe while revealing the spiritual essence of humanity.

- **Theosophy Meaning:** Theosophy, derived from the Greek words for "god" (Theos) and "wisdom" (Sophia), means "divine wisdom." It emphasises a **syncretic approach to uncovering universal truths** from various religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

Theosophical Society Founder

The Theosophical Society was co-founded in New York City on November 17, 1875, by **Helena Petrovna Blavatsky**, a Russian occultist and author, and **Henry Steel Olcott**, an American military officer and lawyer.

Theosophical Society Objectives

The primary goal of the Theosophical Society was to **conduct comparative studies of various religions, philosophies, and sciences**. It also aimed to discover the indomitable spirit hidden within humans, emphasising the **Universal Brotherhood** and Hindu reform. The society also sought to investigate unexplained natural laws and man's latent powers.

Three Tenets of Theosophy

The Theosophical Society is built upon three foundational tenets: **Universal Brotherhood**, which fosters unity and compassion; **Comparative Study**, which promotes the exploration of diverse beliefs; and **Exploration of the Unknown**, which seeks spiritual enlightenment through nature's mysteries.

- **Universal Brotherhood:** This tenet emphasises the unity of all humanity and the importance of compassion and understanding across different races, religions, and cultures.
- **Comparative Study:** This tenet encouraged the study of various religions, philosophies, and sciences to gain a deeper understanding of universal truths.
- **Exploration of the Unknown:** This tenet investigates the unexplained laws of nature and the latent powers within humans to achieve spiritual enlightenment

Theosophical Society Features

The Theosophical Society is characterised by its **inclusive** and **universalist outlook**, embracing people from all backgrounds and promoting a syncretic approach to spirituality. Several key features distinguish the Theosophical Society:

- **Universalism:** The Society welcomed people from all religious, cultural, and social backgrounds. It promoted the concept of universal brotherhood, which transcends all human divisions.
- **Syncretism:** It took a syncretic approach to spirituality, combining elements from various religious traditions to discover universal truths.
- **Education and Reform:** The Theosophical Society is dedicated to social reform, focusing on caste discrimination, women's rights, and education. It views education as vital for both personal growth and societal advancement.
- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The Society promotes studying science, philosophy, and religion as interconnected disciplines. It aims to investigate the mysteries of the universe through an interdisciplinary

lens.

Theosophical Society In India

Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were greeted with open arms everywhere they went in 1879 during their tour of India. This gave the movement its basic structure in India. Thus, the Theosophical Society **shifted its headquarters to India** in 1882, establishing itself in **Adyar**, Chennai (then Madras).

- They saw India as ideal for promoting Theosophy, which sought to uncover deeper spiritual truths and universal brotherhood among religions.
- It accepted Hindu beliefs in reincarnation and karma and was **inspired by Upanishad philosophy, the Samkhya, yoga, and Vedanta schools of thought.**
- The shift to India marked a pivotal moment for the Theosophical Society, enabling deeper engagement with Eastern traditions and playing a vital role in the Indian Renaissance and cultural revival.

Theosophical Society Contribution

The Theosophical Society in India made significant social contributions by actively combating caste discrimination and untouchability. It promoted universal brotherhood, directly challenging India's rigid caste hierarchy.

- **Advocacy for Equality:** Theosophists, including **Annie Besant**, were outspoken supporters of ending caste discrimination. They contended that all humans are spiritually equal and must be treated with dignity and respect.
- **Support for Reform Movements:** The Society encouraged and collaborated with Indian social reformers, who were leading the fight against untouchability. Theosophists worked to increase awareness and shift societal attitudes towards oppressed groups.

Theosophical Society and Theosophist Roles

The Theosophical Society and its members, known as Theosophists, served in a variety of spiritual and social capacities. They were spiritual seekers, educators, and reformers who promoted interfaith dialogue.

- **Spiritual Seekers:** Theosophists were committed to discovering spiritual truths and deepening their **understanding of the divine**. By studying the spiritual laws that govern the universe, they aimed to bridge the gap between science and religion.
- **Educators and Reformers:** The Society and its members were actively engaged in educational and social reform. They **founded schools**, encouraged the study of ancient texts, and worked to improve marginalised communities.
- **Interfaith Dialogue:** Theosophists were pioneers in promoting interfaith dialogue, fostering understanding between religious traditions, and emphasising shared spiritual truths among them.

Theosophical Society Annie Besant Contribution

Annie Besant was one of the most prominent Theosophists and played a crucial role in both the Theosophical Society and the Indian freedom struggle. She became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1889 and firmly

believed in the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads. She became President in 1907 and served until she died in 1933. Her leadership significantly expanded the Society's influence, especially in India.

Theosophical Society UPSC PYQs

Question 1: Annie Besant was (UPSC Prelims 2013)

1. Responsible for starting the **Home Rule Movement**
2. The founder of the Theosophical Society
3. Once the President of the Indian National Congress

Select the correct statement/statements using the codes given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

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