

Honouring Saraswati Narayan, former National Secretary of TOS India

Saraswati Narayan was National Secretary of TOS from 1981 to 1998. Originally from Banaras, she moved through a number of cities in India with her husband, Surendra Narayan. Surendra, a lifelong Theosophist, worked in government service for 35 years, retiring as the Chairman, Central Board of Direct Taxes, New Delhi.



Saraswati Narayan, former Director TOS India

John Coats, the President of the Theosophical Society, appointed Surendra International Vice-President after Joy Mills resigned. After John's death in 1979, Surendra arranged for the international election, and a new president, Radha Burnier, was elected in 1980. Radha-ji requested Surendra to continue at Adyar as Vice-President, which he did. Radha-ji also asked Saraswati Narayan to consider becoming the National Secretary of TOS in 1981, and she worked in that capacity until 1998.

Saraswati was a graduate of Vasanta College for Women, Varanasi, affiliated with Banaras Hindu University. The college was established by Annie Besant in 1913, and was located on the campus of the Indian Headquarters of the Theosophical Society. She majored in Political Science, Hindi and Domestic Science. The degree of Sahitya Ratan, literally meaning 'literary gem', was conferred on her at college.

Saraswati was born into a rather conservative Hindu family on her father's side, some of whom objected to her attending college. However, she persisted, becoming the first woman in her extended family and community to attend and graduate from college. This paved the way for other young women in the community to go on to college.



Surendra Narayan

Saraswati and Surendra had five children, so perhaps it was natural for Saraswati, as National Secretary of the TOS, to focus attention on working with children, including the fishermen's children nearby. The Social Welfare Centre had languished somewhat and required energy and leadership to revive its activities. Saraswati initiated and organised programmes at the Adyar campus centre according to the children's ages and interests, including activities such as sewing, weaving and candle making. The goal was for the older children to learn how to make useful items, develop marketable skills and gain some economic independence. Saraswati hired teachers to instruct the children, and bought sewing machines, a loom and other supplies. Some of the work was shown and sold at the annual TS conventions, and the booths helped highlight the TOS work being done. She made sure the children were served a glass of milk and a nutritious mid-day meal. She also instituted weekly doctor visits to the centre, and encouraged the children to trust the doctor, which, she reports, was a challenge initially.

Bro. Birendra Battacharyya remembers Saraswati and Surendra with these words: "National Committee Meetings of TOS India used to be held at their bungalow at Adyar during the period of the International Convention of TS. Bro. Surendra Narayan used to attend such meetings and enquired about the activities of TOS in India. He was the source of inspiration for us. After the meeting, Sis. Saraswati Narayan used to serve us mini meals which we enjoyed as members of the same family. I still remember them with reverence and pray for their peaceful long life."

Today, Saraswati, aged 88, and Surendra, aged 99, reside in New Delhi with their oldest son and family.



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