

1 Introduction

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.

(Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*, 1889)

The first two lines of Kipling's famous poem states the claim that "East" and "West" are mutually exclusive spheres, both as fixed cultures and as clearly distinguishable geographical spaces, unconnected and each in itself monolithic. However, the poem takes a rather different turn as it continues: "*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!*"¹ In the poem, Kamal, a local chieftain in what is today the border region of Pakistan, stands "face to face" with the son of a colonel in the British Army after Kamal steals the colonel's mare. The two figures here embody and illustrate the encounter between "East" and "West." At the end of the poem, the colonel's son regains his father's horse while Kamal, in turn, receives the son's pistol. The British soldier rides back to his fellows accompanied by Kamal's own son, whom Kamal has sent with the British soldier for his protection. The pair swear blood brotherhood to one another and ride off together towards the British fort. When they arrive at their destination, the colonel's son tells the other soldiers that his companion is one of them now. "*Last night ye had struck at a Border thief – tonight 'tis a man of the Guides!*"²

The story of Kamal and the colonel's son provides a vivid image of what will be discussed in this book under the heading of "hybridization." Kamal endangers the British by taking away something that belongs to them. His appropriation of this piece of British identity is so threatening to the British colonel that he sends his own son after Kamal to retrieve what has been stolen. The chase leads deep into Kamal's territory, where he occupies a position of power. In the encounter, both sides are altered: Kamal acquires a British pistol, while the colonel's son rides back with Kamal's own son as a companion. The retrieval of the mare triggers a close interaction in a liminal space in which Kamal occupies a superior position and the life of the colonel's son (the British identity) is potentially endangered. In this liminal space, new relations are established between Kamal, his son, and the son of the colonel. Both sides impart something to the other that has the potential to alter each of them fundamentally. When Kamal's son enters

1 Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," in *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1892), 75.

2 Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West," 83.

the British fort at the end of their journey, he becomes “one of them,” marking the end of the process which is now irreversible.

This image – and one should keep in mind that it remains only an image – illustrates how “exchange” processes between “East” and “West” are understood in the present book. The language of “exchange” is misleading when it comes to thinking about the conceptualization of “hybridization” as a metaprocess (Chapter 4.3), as I do in this book. The “metaprocess of hybridization” is understood as a complex of numerous multifaceted and interlocking processes in which “elements” and “structures” are “transferred, translated, repeated, and de- and recontextualized.” In these processes, “original” and “copy” constitute each other³ by establishing new and altered relations. Being dependent on each other in such a way, it is impossible to distinguish an “original” or a “copy” as existing outside that relationship. Nevertheless, the theoretical approach advanced in this book can still be read as a conceptualization of “exchange” processes between “East” and “West.” However, the approach developed here allows for the identification and management of an increased level of complexity and is therefore better suited to the identification of heterogeneity instead of homogeneity. Such an increased level of complexity and heterogeneity is better suited to give a balanced account of the discursive fields analyzed in this book. It is my intention to move away from essentialist and Eurocentric perspectives. This means that notions of “mutually exclusive spheres, both as fixed cultures and as clearly distinguishable geographical spaces, unconnected and each in itself monolithic” become untenable. It is not to be claimed here that the theory used as a framework here, and an analysis such as I am conducting, can explain “everything,” nor can it transcend or even erase power asymmetries. Nevertheless, it adds many new and altered perspectives on a phenomenon that has too long been perceived as purely “Western.”

The primary goal of this book is to investigate the “hybridization processes” that arise from the encounters between Indian and Non-Indian Theosophists and Non-Theosophists, and to consider how these processes are reflected in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*, the textbooks of the Central Hindu College (see below). The main subjects of analysis here are the stages of initiation in the grand scheme of Theosophical evolution. These initiatory steps are connected to an idea of evolutionary self-development by means of a set of virtues that are relative to the individual’s position on the path of evolution. The central thesis is that these stages were translated from the “Hindu” tradition to the “Theosophical” tradition through multifaceted “hybridization processes” in which several

3 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), 3.

Indian members of the Theosophical Society partook. These processes cannot be understood as following a simple linear genealogy but, rather, need to be seen in terms of metaprocesses of meshing hybridizations in which different positions were negotiated. Starting with Annie Besant's early Theosophy, the stages of initiation will be traced through Blavatsky's work to Manilal Dvivedi and T. Subba Row, both Indian members of the Theosophical Society, and then on to the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.

1.1 The Theosophical Society

In 1898, the English Theosophist Annie Besant (1847–1933) and the Indian Theosophist Bhagavan Das (1869–1958) together founded the Central Hindu College, Benares, which became the nucleus around which the Benares Hindu University was instituted in 1915. In this context, three textbooks, two story books, and a monthly magazine were published. These were part of a geographically widespread Theosophical educational system that encompassed hundreds, if not thousands, of schools. The Theosophical Society was undeniably the most important institutional structure to emerge from the field of occult currents in the 19th century. It was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and others in 1875 in New York.⁴ Annie Besant joined the Theosophical Society fourteen years later, in 1889. The Society's headquarters moved to Adyar, a suburb of Madras, today Chennai, in 1883 where it still remains. The Theosophical Society opened numerous branches around the world, some of which are still active, especially in Britain, the U.S., India, Australia, and the Philippines. The history of the Theosophical Society is complicated, with a number of schisms leading to the creation of numerous branching divisions. In the following, I will mainly be concerned with Adyar Theosophy and it is to this branch that I refer whenever I use the term "Theosophy." However, this distinction only becomes meaningful after 1895, when the American branch, under William Quan Judge (1851–1896), seceded from Adyar Theosophy. These topics have received little scholarly attention, and, in general, the Theosophical Society in both its historical and its contemporary forms remains severely under-researched.

This book contributes to a profound conceptualization of initiation into higher knowledge in the Theosophical Society and its socio-cultural consequences. In

⁴ For a full list of the elected officers, see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 28.

doing so, it succeeds in making understandable how “esoteric” knowledge was transferred into public institutions and how a wider public could be reached as a result. In contrast to older research that focused on “Western” Theosophists, I contextualize this central finding in such a way that I am able to sketch a broadly spun field of discourse in which Indian Theosophists were significantly involved in the conception of the “stages of initiation.” Thus, the “stages of initiation” cannot simply be described as “Western” or “Eastern,” but are to be understood as the result of diverse, interlocking processes of hybridization.

1.2 Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1 of the book, the main topics are introduced, along with an overview of each of the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the current state of research, in which a homogenizing and Eurocentric tendency is identified. In Chapter 3, I elaborate the theoretical foundation for my analytical tool by discussing “postcolonialism,” “hybridity,” and the global history approach. In Chapter 4, the analytical tool itself is developed.

In Chapter 5, a “field of encounters” is presented in which Indian and non-Indian Theosophists and non-Theosophists came into contact with each other. I argue that these encounters initiated numerous “hybridization processes.” In Chapter 6, “evolutionism” is discussed. The stages of initiation in the Theosophical Society were embedded in a scheme of evolution in which several discursive fields were connected, including European evolutionism, the reception of that evolutionism in India, and Indian concepts that had the conceptual vocabulary of “evolutionism” retrospectively applied to them.

Chapter 7 discusses a central motif of the Theosophical narrative, the master/disciple relationships that are a precondition for initiation in the Theosophical Society. These relationships structure the Theosophical dissemination of occult knowledge as well as providing support for claims of authority and securing lines of succession. The “Quickening of Evolution” can be understood as a reaction to the “Master Paradox.” This is a crucial context for an understanding of the discursive dynamics within the Theosophical Society.

Chapter 8 draws on this discussion to elaborate on the idea of the “Quickening of Evolution” and on the stages of initiation that formed the core of this concept in Annie Besant’s early Theosophy. This early phase extends to the beginning of the 20th century, and I take it that its *terminus ante quem* is marked by the publication of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* in 1902 and 1903, to which Besant contributed.

Chapter 9 presents a close reading of Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*. As a book of initiation, it communicates the idea of the acceleration of evolution that is spurred on by the passing of the individual through stages of initiation. In this respect, Blavatsky's work was pivotal for Annie Besant because it served as her own "book of initiation," the reading of which allegedly led to contact with the Theosophical masters. Chapter 10 discusses the uptake of "Hinduism" in the Theosophical Society, mapping out a discursive field in which Indian members and non-members of the Society were the experts on this topic. It describes the reception of Advaita Vedānta in the Theosophical Society and its equation with "occult" wisdom, and the process by which non-Indian Theosophists gradually also came to claim expertise on "Hinduism" just as they presented themselves as the expert on the "occult" wisdom.

Chapters 11 and 12 discuss the writings of two eminent Indian-Theosophists, Manilal Dvivedi and T. Subba Row. Dvivedi's work was crucial for the conceptualization of the stages of initiation in the Theosophical Society, which was based on his understanding of *rājayoga* and Advaita Vedānta. He was not only one of the distinguished experts on "Hinduism" in the Theosophical Society but also a recognized expert within European academia. His work is a paradigmatic example of the connection of numerous discursive fields in the global colonial discursive continuum. Row was *the* expert on "Hinduism," and on the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular, in the Theosophical Society between 1880 and 1890. Chapter 12 documents his ideas on "Hinduism" as theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta. This approach was closely linked to later developments in the Theosophical Society and to the development of ideas of evolution towards divinity.

Finally, Chapter 13 discusses the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* with a special focus on the "Ethical Science"⁵ elaborated therein. It illustrates how the stages of initiation were adopted both in and beyond the educational establishments of the Theosophical Society as the foundations for ethical education.

1.3 A Note on Citations, Diacritics, and the Use of Proper Names

The Chicago Manual of Style Online (CMOS) has served as my guide for all questions concerning citations, the use of numbers, titles, proper names, etc. However, the numerous sources from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries

⁵ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book: Of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Benares: Central Hindu College, 1902), 107.

do not always fit easily into this framework. CMOS acknowledges these difficulties and leaves authors with a degree of freedom in deciding how to handle such cases. I will give some examples in this section of how certain difficult cases will be handled throughout. In some cases, it was not possible to follow the guidelines strictly because dates, authors, publishing houses, or other pieces of information were missing. I have taken a pragmatic approach to such absences. Rather than expend enormous amounts of time carrying out meticulous investigations into trivial points (e.g., the first name for which an initial stands), I have opted instead to cite such works in a manner that is sufficiently clear for the reader to follow the paper trail, so to speak, even if all the normal information cannot be included. As for proper names, I have used those given in the sources except in cases in which these names are variants of well-known persons or key protagonists. For example, I use T. Subba Row throughout the book, including in all citations, footnotes, and the bibliography, rather than adopting variant spellings that might appear in a given text, such as Subba Rao. The same is true for Manilal Dvivedi, given consistently instead of variants such as Manilāla Nabhubhāi Dwivedi, and for Annie Besant, rather than Annie Besant Wood or Dr. Besant. Academic and aristocratic titles have been omitted throughout unless they are included in direct quotations.

Diacritics are included in proper names only in cases in which the person or institution in question is not well-known and it cannot be said with certainty to which historical person or institution the names refer. Exception to this rule are the ancient Indian authors, especially Shankara, who appears throughout as Śaṅkara. Diacritics for other words are usually included following ISO 15919, with the exception that in the case of ऋ ṛ is used instead of ॠ. Other diacritics are used in direct quotations and in some cases when referring to a specific use in the source text. For example, *âtma* or *âtmâ* are written instead of *âtman* when referring to a specific use in Theosophical writings. In some cases, it was not clear how the sources transliterated the Indian languages. In the 19th century and early 20th century, many competing systems of transliteration were used (several different systems are sometimes still in use today).

Throughout the book, “Hinduism” is written in quotation marks to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Hindu religions and the problematics in the formation of the term “Hinduism” for these religions. “Hindu,” on the other hand, is usually written without brackets. The names of other “religions,” such as “Buddhism,” “Jainism,” “Christianity” are usually given without brackets, although their connotations could also be problematized and therefore marking them with brackets would be justifiable. Following the CMOS, names of (major) religions are capitalized, e.g., “Hinduism” and “Theosophy,” and also “Hindu” and “Theosophical,” but “Christian theosophy.”

1.4 For Reasons of Readability

1) DOIs are not included in references to journal articles. 2) In the running text, titles of articles are given in italics instead of within quotation marks, although the normal quotation marks are retained for references in the footnotes and the bibliography. 3) Square brackets indicate changes in direct quotations, although minor changes to e.g. punctuation are not marked. Square brackets are also inserted when deleting parts of the direct quotations or when including words, etc. 4) Theoretical concepts, such as “hybridization,” “already hybrids,” “relationizings” are given in quotation marks where they are elaborated as terms for the analysis, especially in Chapters 3 and 4. In later chapters, once they have been established as analytical categories, they usually appear without quotation marks.