

## 10 The Reception of “Hinduism” in the Theosophical Society: Encounters in the Indian Middle Class



**Figure 5:** Theosophical Convention. Unfortunately, many of the people are unknown to us. The little information given on the back of the picture is also unclear. Olcott is clearly visible in the center of the picture. To his right sits T. Subba Row, and the man two seats to Olcott's left is most likely Alfred Cooper-Oakley. One row behind, on the far right of the picture, stands Tookaram Tatya with glasses, turban, and mustache. In the center, all in white, one recognizes Charles Webster Leadbeater. It is noticeable that there are no women in the picture. Blavatsky's absence is not surprising, however, since the picture was taken after she left India in March 1885 and never returned. (Photograph by an unknown photographer. Adyar, December 1885. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai.)

The main narrative concerning the influence of Indian thought on Theosophy has it that Blavatsky and Olcott were mainly interested in Buddhism and that it was Besant who brought “Hinduism” into the picture.<sup>2</sup> This development is often highlighted by reference to Olcott's engagement in Ceylon and to the

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<sup>2</sup> This is especially true for Prothero, *The White Buddhist*. This work promotes the idea that Olcott was almost exclusively concerned with Buddhism. Blavatsky is presented along similar

episode in which Blavatsky and Olcott took *pansil*,<sup>3</sup> understood as a de facto conversion to Buddhism. This narrative is then read against the background of the Theosophical Mahatmas. These figures are thought to dwell in the mountains of the Himalayas, a location that was equated with Tibet and, therefore, with Mahayana Buddhism. Johnson presents a slightly different picture in his *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*. He identifies the first generation of Indian Theosophists, most prominently Mohini Chatterji, Babaji, Damodar Mavalankar and T. Subba Row, as critically important for the Theosophical Society. However, his focus lies on their relation to the Theosophical masters rather than on their influence on the conception of “Hinduism” within the Theosophical Society and their contributions to the Theosophical world view.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Bergunder has also identified the early debate on “Hinduism” in *The Theosophist* as a formative phase for Theosophical engagement with “Hinduism.”<sup>5</sup> Figures 4 and 5 of the Theosophical conventions of 1884 and 1885 also indicate that Blavatsky and Olcott were in close contact with many – mostly Hindu – Indian Theosophists.

By focusing on Besant’s reception of the earlier uptake in the Theosophical Society of Advaita Vedānta, and on how she integrates this with her concept of the “Quickening of Evolution,” the present chapter attempts to draw a more complex picture.<sup>6</sup> It will be argued that the uptake of “Hinduism,” and especially Advaita Vedānta, played a crucial role in the formation of the Theosophical world view. This influence can already be seen prior to the founders moving to India, but it intensified after they settled there. The formation of the Theosophical world view was a complex process, with various Christian, Jewish, Neoplatonic, and many other non-Indian traditions of thought playing important roles alongside the Indian traditions. The Theosophical Society’s uptake of the *Upaniṣads*, as well as of other South Asian scriptures, especially those of the (Advaita) Vedānta tradition, began very early on. In the present chapter we will see a) that a specific idea of “Hinduism” emerged in this discursive field, and b) that this reception of “Hinduism” played a key role in the formation of concepts of stages of initiation, both in Theosophy in general and in Besant’s writings in particular.

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lines in Prothero’s work. However, he also mentions the connection to “Hinduism.” Similarly, Lubelsky, *Celestial India*, 243.

<sup>3</sup> Lubelsky, *Celestial India*, 101.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*, 17–69.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bergunder, “The Early Turn of the Theosophical Society to ‘Advaita Vedanta’ and ‘Hinduism’ in 1882–1883: A Story of Global Religious Entanglements in Colonial British India,” (forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> The role of Hindu thought in Blavatsky’s concept of evolution is discussed in Nanda, “Madame Blavatsky’s Children”. She is mostly concerned with the Theosophical influence on the “Neo-Hinduist” movements.

## 10.1 “Buddhism” versus “Hinduism”: Early Encounters with “Hinduism” in the Theosophical Society

This section will draw attention to the early engagement with Hindu thought in the Theosophical Society. Consideration of this engagement will show that the Theosophical Society was neither “Buddhist” nor “Hinduist,” but rather was embedded in numerous hybrid fields of encounters.

For instance, Olcott claimed that the Theosophical Society’s motto, “There is no religion higher than truth,”<sup>7</sup> was a phrase that had its origins in the *Upaniṣads*<sup>8</sup> and was then adopted by the Maharaja of Benares before being taken up, with his permission, as the motto of the Society. The whole paragraph in which this claim is made is an interesting example of Olcott’s reception of Hindu thought. He quotes several South Asian scriptures (*Manusmṛti*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Upaniṣads*, etc.) before ending with the question: “Is there anything more noble in any other Scripture?”<sup>9</sup> This is an instructive instance of Olcott’s interest in Hindu tradition that has often been overlooked in the current research on the Theosophical movement.

When Olcott was in Benares in 1885, he held a lecture on the *darśanas*. He says of himself: “I gave a summary digest of the Six Schools of Indian Philosophy, and which caused an orthodox Hindu gentleman to call on me next day and say that I had now brought the orthodox community to realize that our Society was not a mere Buddhist propaganda.”<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that there was already at this time an impression that the early Theosophists were primarily advocating Buddhism. It is argued by many scholars that the Theosophical founders exhibited distinct approaches towards “Hinduism” and Buddhism. As Brettfield and Zander have argued, Olcott presented Buddhism as a philosophy while at the same time employing a religious strategy, his *Buddhist Catechism*, to teach it. The contents of the *Catechism*, or rather the plural *Catechisms*, cast

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7 Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 4.

8 Olcott does not give the exact passage, but he most likely refers to Mund. 3.6: “Truth conquers alone, not falsehood.” Eduard H. H. Röer, “The Muṇḍaka Upanishad of the Athara Veda,” in Tatyā, *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, 661. As Bergunder maintains, it is likely that the phrase was adopted from the *Mahābhārata*. See Bergunder, “Experiments with Theosophical Truth,” 415.

9 Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society*, 3 vols. 3 (London, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing Society; Theosophist Office, 1904), Third Series, 1883–1887, 272–73.

10 Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 280–81.

light on the gradual development of Olcott’s learning about Buddhism and the repeated changes in his presentation of Buddhist thought that flowed from this.<sup>11</sup> Although Brettfield and Zander’s article is an important pioneering work in this respect, a thorough analysis of the *Catechisms* remains a research desideratum. Buddhism was understood by Olcott and Blavatsky as a philosophy rather than as a religion and, as such, they could take *pansil* without departing from their non-sectarian stance. The understanding of “Hinduism” was rather different, with the early encounter of the Theosophists with the Arya Samaj and the controversies with Dayananda Sarasvati probably fueling this distinct approach. As I argue in this section, the narrative of distinct approaches being taken towards “Hinduism” and Buddhism must be reframed to take account of the significant uptake of Hindu ideas in the Society. This process started as early as the 1880s and was mediated by numerous Indian Theosophists.

It will be seen below that the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, and the *Bhāṣya* (commentaries) of Śaṅkara and his disciples, as well as other Indian scriptures, were received in the Theosophical Society. These are the core scriptures of Advaita Vedānta, so it is not surprising that they were widely known within Theosophy, although this reception has not yet been documented in the scholarship. I argue that Besant did not establish a new tradition of “Hinduized” Theosophy, but that she rather continued in the footsteps of a pre-existing Theosophical tradition. In the remainder of this chapter, and in those that follow, I will show a) that the interest in Hindu scriptures began at least as early the first issues of *The Theosophist*, b) that knowledge about these scriptures was mediated by Indian Theosophists’ intimate knowledge of the scriptures and the source languages, as well as by the writings of European (and also Indian) Orientalists, and c) the *Upaniṣads*, as Śaṅkara interpreted them – or rather on a 19<sup>th</sup> century reinterpretation of Śaṅkara’s interpretation – were central to Besant’s concept of initiation, which stands at the core of her larger project of the “Quickening of Evolution.”

## 10.2 Mapping Out a Field of Encounters: The Already Hybrid *Upaniṣads*

This section identifies another context in which the discursive field of the Theosophical Society was embedded within and points towards the shared spaces in the global colonial discursive continuum. The first subsection will discuss some of the translations of the *Upaniṣads* that were available around 1900. In the

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11 Brettfield and Zander, “Henry Steel Olcott”.



final subsection, I will argue that Annie Besant used in her writings a specific translation that was well known in the Theosophical Society.

Most of the references made to Indian scriptures in Besant's writings are to the *Upaniṣads* and to the *Bhagavadgītā*, a propensity which points towards an identification of Indian religion with (Advaita) Vedānta. Besant includes references to five early *Upaniṣads* and to one of the minor *Upaniṣads*. These are the *Shvetāśhvataropaniṣad*, *Mundakopaniṣad*, *Kathopaniṣad*, *Bṛihadāraṇyakopaniṣad*, and the *Chhandogyaopaniṣad*. The minor *Upaniṣad* to which she refers is the *Ānanda Lahiri*, one of the Sanyāsi *Upaniṣads*. In early scholarship on the texts, the word *Upaniṣad* was often explained as meaning sitting down near a teacher in order to receive the "secret knowledge" contained in the scriptures.<sup>12</sup> This description could well be applied to the ideas about initiation found in Theosophy.

The major *Upaniṣads* were translated by Max Müller in the *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. I and Vol. XV, in 1879 and in 1884, respectively. These were probably the best-known translations into English at the time. However, Müller's translations of the early *Upaniṣads* were not the first into European languages. Anquetil-Duperron had translated the *Upaniṣads* from the Persian into Latin at the turn of the century, publishing his work in 1801 and 1802. It was this early translation that Schopenhauer used as the basis for his knowledge of Indian philosophy. Rammohun Roy (1772–1833, translations between 1816 to 1819) also translated a number of *Upaniṣads* into several Indian languages and into English.<sup>13</sup> Among the first translations by "Western" scholars directly from Sanskrit into English are the those of Edward Röer (1805–1866, translation 1853) and Edward Byles Cowell (1826–1903, translation 1861) in the *Bibliotheca Indica*, in which the translations of Rajendralal Mitra (1822–1891, translation 1862) were also published.<sup>14</sup> Another seminal work was Paul Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, published in 1897.<sup>15</sup> Several

<sup>12</sup> Paul Deussen, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy: With an Appendix on the Philosophy of the Vedānta in Its Relations to Occidental Metaphysics* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1907), 21–22.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Max Müller, *The Upanishads: Part 1*, The Sacred Books of the East Vol. 1 (Oxford, London: Clarendon Press; Macmillan & Co, 1879), The Khândogya-Upanishad, The Talavakâra-Upanishad, The Aitereya-Āraṇyaka, The Kaushîtaki-Brâhmana-Upanishad, and the Vâgasaneyi-Samhitâ-Upanishad, lvii–lxv. Müller's introduction to the *Upaniṣads* is deserving of its own extensive analysis, since he discusses the *Upaniṣads*, their philosophical value, Schopenhauer's uptake of the texts, the meaning of the words, and so on. However, as will be shown below, Müller's translations were not consulted – or at least were not explicitly used in her writings – by Besant, so his understanding of the *Upaniṣads* falls outside the scope of the present book.

<sup>14</sup> Müller, *The Upanishads*, lxxxiv.

<sup>15</sup> Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und indischen Altertumskunde*, 50. Windisch's *Geschichte* is still an informative work, containing many details about the history of Indology, and especially the German context. There was also a second volume, published in 1920.

other partial translations were published, as well as a vast number of commentaries, articles, and editions, among the most comprehensive of which were probably Albrecht Weber’s *Indische Studien*.

A number of translations and commentaries by Theosophists, and/or published in Theosophical journals or by one of the many publishing houses of the Theosophical Society, appeared in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The articles on the *Upaniṣads* in Theosophical journals are numerous and a discussion of the reception of the *Upaniṣads* within the Society could easily fill a monograph on its own. In the following, a number of these publications will be examined in order to identify those that were relevant for Besant’s writings.

One such translation is that from 1896 by Jagadisha Chandra Chaṭṭopādhyāya, published in two volumes by the Theosophical Publishing Society with “a Preamble and Arguments” by G. R. S. Mead. Another is Charles Johnston’s 1897 *From the Upanishads*, which includes translations of the “Katha Upanishad,” the “Prashna Upanishad,” and the “Chhandogya Upanishad.” Neither of these publications can have been used by Besant in either *In the Outer Court* or *The Path of Discipleship*, because her two works are based on lectures she gave in 1895, in August (*Outer Court*) and in December (*Path*). However, Johnston’s translations were available earlier in the form in which they were published in 1893 and 1894, in the Theosophical journal *Lucifer*. Their publication in this journal suggests that Annie Besant was familiar with them, since she was, along with G. R. S. Mead, the co-editor of *Lucifer* at the time. Other translations of the *Upaniṣads* by Johnston were also published in *The Irish Theosophist* in 1892 and 1893. In addition, Johnston published extensively on the *Upaniṣads* in *The Path*, *The Oriental Department Papers*, *Theology*, and *The Theosophist*. The quantity of Johnston’s papers on the topic suggests that he was the society’s main *Upaniṣad* expert in the 1890s. This supposition receives further support if we consider that the many translations of the *Upaniṣads* and Śaṅkara’s comments on the *Upaniṣads* found in *The Oriental Department Papers* should probably also be identified as Johnston’s work, as I argue elsewhere.<sup>16</sup>

Despite Johnston’s voluminous writings on the texts, and Besant’s presumed familiarity with some of his work, it seems that her main encounter with the *Upaniṣads* took place through her reading of another translation. In 1891, a

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**16** For a discussion of Johnston’s work on the *Upaniṣads*, see Yves Mühlematter, “Charles Johnston’s Interpretation of Yoga: Theosophy, Consciousness, and Spiritual Progress,” in *Yoga and Sacred Texts*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz (London, New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

book, *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, edited by Tookaram Tatya and with a foreword by Manilal Dvivedi, was published by the Bombay Theosophical Publishing Fund. This volume contained translations of the early *Upaniṣads* by three notable scholars: Edward Röer, Edward Byles Cowell, and Rajendralal Mitra. In one of her works, Annie Besant explicitly refers to the translations by Röer. Her spelling of the titles of the *Upaniṣads*, such as “Chhandogya,”<sup>17</sup> also suggests that Besant consulted this translation, which transliterates the Sanskrit in the same way.

The following short biographies indicate the multiple hybridization processes which manifested in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*. This publication connects numerous discursive fields, simultaneously bringing the already hybrid translations from Röer, Cowell, and Mitra together and recontextualizing them in an anthology introduced by Manilal Dvivedi. On the one hand, Röer’s background as a German scholar built on German Romanticism, Protestantism, and the specific school of Indology established by Bopp in Berlin. Cowell was a trained Oxford scholar whose background was in Anglicanism and English Indology under Wilson and Müller (Müller himself was a paradigmatic case of an actor who connected numerous discourses). In the biographies of both scholars we can detect a closeness to the Christian mission and a high esteem for Christianity. Both also lived in India for a significant part of their lives and mastered several Indian languages.

Mitra’s background was different. He was raised and educated in India and probably experienced a Hindu religious socialization. He was largely interested in European culture, mastered several European languages, and was well versed in European history and other subjects, although he also advocated a pan-Indian Hindu nation. These three scholars knew each other due to the connections forged by a British society for research into Indian religion and philosophy. The structure of the Royal Asiatic Society can be seen as an agent of hybridization here as it connected several actors and their works. These three scholars belonged to an earlier generation of Indologists when compared to Manilal Dvivedi and Tookaram Tatya, who took up their work and published it in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, thus repeating it in another context. Calcutta provided a shared space in which these multifaceted processes of hybridization could take place.

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17 Müller, for example, transliterates “Khândogya-Upanishad.” See Müller, *The Upanishads*.

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**Hans Heinrich Eduard  
Röer (1805–1866)**

Röer was born in 1805 in Braunschweig and educated in Königsberg. He studied philosophy and *habilitierte* in 1833 in Berlin. Through the influence of the work of Franz Bopp (see also 6.3) and his colleagues, who established Indology as a thriving discipline at the University of Berlin, Röer became more and more interested in Indian literature. Initially, he planned to go to India as a missionary, but joined the “*östindische Compagnie*”<sup>18</sup> instead, moving to Calcutta in 1839 to take up his post. There he became a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and later its secretary (1847). Röer published several translations in the Society’s journal and founded the series *Bibliotheca Indica*, of which he was the chief editor from 1847 onwards. Röer published most of his translations in this series, including his translations of the *Upaniṣads* together with Śaṅkara’s commentaries. In 1861 Röer had to return to Germany due to health issues. He settled in Braunschweig, where he worked on several publications before his death in 1866.<sup>19</sup>

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**Edward Byles Cowell  
(1826–1903)**

Edward Byles Cowell was born in Ipswich in 1826. It is reported that Edward was interested in studying from an early age. He attended grammar school at the age of eight and turned to Oriental literature when he was fifteen. In the local library, he stumbled across William Jones’ *Persian Grammar* and his translation of the Śakuntalā story.<sup>20</sup> Soon after, he also became interested in Sanskrit via Wilson’s *Sanskrit Grammar*. He then learned Persian and (probably) Arabic under a retired officer, Major Hockley, who had been stationed in Bombay for many years. A year later, Cowell wrote his first articles for the *Asiatic Journal*.

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**18** It is not entirely clear to which “Compagnie” Klatt refers here. However, given his chosen rendering as “Compagnie,” he most likely refers to the Dutch *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*.

**19** Johannes Klatt, “Röer, Hans Heinrich Eduard,” *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band 29, 1889.

**20** The Story of Śakuntalā is a poem by Kālidāsa, one of the most famous poets of classical Sanskrit literature. The Story is also included in the Mahābhārata. Śakuntalā grows up in the forest with a hermit who is her foster father, but she is originally of royal blood. One day, a young king comes along and the two fall in love with each other. He returns to his castle, leaving her pregnant, and when she goes to the palace to see him he does not recognize her as a result of a spell. In the end, the king regains his memory and honors Śakuntalā and his child. The poem was first translated by William Jones in 1789, with his translation inspiring many writers of the time, among them Goethe, who read the story in a German retranslation of Jones’ English translation. Will J. Johnson, *The Recognition of Śakuntalā: A Play in Seven Acts* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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When his father died that same year, Cowell entered his trade and was trained to become a merchant. He nevertheless maintained his interest in oriental, as well as classical, languages. During this period, Cowell was introduced to the intelligentsia of the time, including Horace Hayman Wilson, Thomas Carlyle, and Edward Fitzgerald, with all of whom he corresponded frequently during his lifetime. When his brother was old enough in 1850 to steer the family business, Edward went to Oxford, where he studied at the University for six years. There he came into close contact with “Jowett, Morfill, Max Müller, and Theodor Aufrecht.”<sup>21</sup> He learned Sanskrit in Wilson’s classes. Already as an undergraduate, he worked on cataloging the oriental manuscripts of the Bodleian Library and published his first translations.

After leaving Oxford, Cowell was appointed Professor of English at the Presidency College in Calcutta, where he founded the “Vernacular Literature Society.” The aim of the society was to provide reliable translations of English literature in Indian languages. By 1857, Cowell had become more interested in missionary work and initiated a series of bible readings at his home. In 1858, after having learned “Hindustani and Bengali” he became the principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College. In this position, he devoted many hours to the mastery of Sanskrit and published several works in the *Bibliotheca Indica*, among them his translations of the “Kauṣītaki” and the “Maitrī” *Upaniṣads*. Due to health issues, Cowell left India in 1864 and took a position as “examiner in Oriental subjects to the Civil Service Commission.” In 1867 he was appointed as the first Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Cambridge, a position he retained until his death in 1903. During his time at Cambridge, Cowell pursued many interests, studied new subjects, and translated works from many different classical and modern languages. He was a member of many honorary clubs and societies and the winner of the first gold medal of the Royal Asiatic Society.<sup>22</sup> Cowell’s knowledge of languages and the sheer quantity of his translations and articles of and about Sanskrit literature is impressive. As a Cambridge professor, he was an influential figure in early Oriental studies. However, it is clear

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21 William T. Frederick, “Cowell, Edward Byles,” in *The Dictionary of National Biography: Supplement*, ed. Sidney Lee Vol. I Abbey-Eyre (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press; Humphrey Milford, 1927), 427.

22 Frederick, “Cowell, Edward Byles,” 427–30.

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|                                          | from his letters that he was also a strong advocate for the Christian faith and that missionary work was highly important to him. <sup>23</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Rajendralal Mitra<br/>(1822–1891)</b> | <p>Rajendralal Mitra was born in 1822 in Calcutta. His father, a learned scholar of Sanskrit, Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi, was from an important and wealthy family with a long pedigree. Unfortunately, Mitra's grandfather had spent almost all of the family's wealth, so there was little money to be had when he was a child. Mitra was never formally educated but engaged himself in the study of various subjects, including European classical languages. He was appointed as secretary and librarian of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1846. Through his post in the Society, Mitra came into contact with the writings of all the famous European scholars of the age and was well acquainted with the European members of the Society in Calcutta.<sup>24</sup> He was later, in 1885, to become the Society's first Indian president.<sup>25</sup> In the course of his life, he published a number of articles, translations, and books in the <i>Bibliotheca Indica</i> and in many other respected journals, writing in both Bangla and English. He also issued vernacular magazines under the auspices of the Vernacular Literature Society. However, this was just one part of his engagement with vernacular education and the education of young Indians in general.</p> <p>Mitra played an important role in the Bengal Renaissance, while simultaneously being accepted by the European intelligentsia and even awarded prizes and honors, such as membership in the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Rajendralal died in 1891.<sup>26</sup> One main topic of his work is the superiority of the Aryan civilization, a theme that is connected with a glorification of Hindu identity in opposition to Islam. However, this Hindu identity seems not to have been conceived in opposition to the British Empire as he admired the British Imperial Darbar and compared it to the royal presentations that appear in the <i>Mahabharata</i>.<sup>27</sup></p> |

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**23** For more information, and many reprints of Cowell's letters, see George Cowell, *Life & Letters of Edward Byles Cowell* (London, New York: Macmillan & Co; The Macmillan Company, 1904). This biography is still the only monograph dedicated to E. B. Cowell. There is no critical publication concerned with Cowell's life and work; such a study remains a research desideratum.

**24** Shyamali Sur, "Rajendralal Mitra as a Historian: A Revaluation," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 35 (1974): 371.

**25** Abu Imam, "Mitra, Raja Rajendralal," accessed March 13, 2019, [http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Mitra,\\_Raja\\_Rajendralal](http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Mitra,_Raja_Rajendralal).

**26** Imam, "Mitra, Raja Rajendralal".

**27** Sur, "Rajendralal Mitra as a Historian," 373–75.



### 10.3 The Already Hybrid *Upaniṣads* in Annie Besant's Work

As we have seen, it is likely that Besant used the translations of the *Upaniṣads* that were published in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*. In this section, I will take a closer look at this work. The preface to the volume was written by Manilal Dvivedi, and is, for the most part, a presentation of an Advaita Vedānta interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*. Dvivedi defended the *Upaniṣads* against the “prejudice and preconception [directed against] the Philosophy of the Upaniṣads”<sup>28</sup> by the orientalisists.

He was primarily concerned with the position of a certain “Mr. Gough.”<sup>29</sup> “Mr. Gough” was Archibald Edward Gough, a trained scholar of Sanskrit who worked at several institutions in India, including Benares College, Muir Central College, Allahabad, and a number of others. Gough was responsible for the entry on “Vedanta” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and published *Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysics* in 1881, the book to which Dvivedi refers. Gough's work also included an early translation of the major *Upaniṣads*. Dvivedi reported that Gough wrote “that there is little that is spiritual in all this, and that this empty intellectual conception void of spirituality is the highest product the Indian mind is capable of.”<sup>30</sup> Gough continued by claiming that the *Upaniṣads* are “a very early attempt, on the part of thinkers of a rude age and race, to form a cosmological theory. The real movement of philosophic thought begins, it is true, not in India, but in Ionia; but some degree of interest may still be expected to attach to the procedure of the ancient Indian cosmologists.”<sup>31</sup>

Referring to Hegel's devastating verdict regarding Indian philosophy, Gough went on to say that the *Upaniṣads* present “the pantheistic view of things in a naively poetical expression, and at the same time in its coarsest form.”<sup>32</sup> Although Gough also exhibited some admiration for Indian philosophy in his preface, he concluded: “India had little intellectual wealth for exportation to the Alexandrian emporium.”<sup>33</sup> Gough's racial bias is apparent. He understood the *Upaniṣads* as “an exhibition of the thoughts of thinkers of a lower race, of a people of stationary culture, whose intellectual growth stands almost apart from the

28 Manilal N. Dvivedi, “Preface,” in Tatya, *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, i.

29 Conjeeveram H. Rao, “Gough, Archibald Edward,” in *The Indian Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Conjeeveram H. Rao (Madras: Pillar & Co., 1915).

30 Dvivedi, “Preface,” i.

31 Archibald Edward Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic: As Exhibited in a Series of Articles Contributed to the Calcutta Review*, Trübner's Oriental Series vol. 32 (London: Trübner & Co., 1882), v.

32 Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic*, v–vi.

33 Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic*, xii.

general movement of human intelligence.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it must be noted, Gough continues, that “in treating of Indian philosophy, a writer has to deal with thoughts of a lower order than the thoughts of the everyday life of Europe.”<sup>35</sup> For Gough, the translation from Sanskrit into English, “from a lower to a higher language, is a process of elevation.”<sup>36</sup>

It would be interesting to follow Gough’s Eurocentric and racist argumentation in detail, as it provides interesting documentary evidence of an actor who connected several discursive fields within the global colonial discursive continuum. However, to attempt such a project would require more material on Gough’s life, his religious socialization, his ideas on Indian education, and the like than is currently available. Bringing these materials together would probably paint a complex picture of a man caught between fascination and admiration for Indian culture, on the one hand, and a racist colonial agenda, on the other. Gough’s work is, in many respects, “already hybrid.”

In referring to Gough, Dvivedi was responding to a strong exponent of the orientalist bias. Nonetheless, Dvivedi also notes that “even the great Max Müller, the greatest of Oriental scholars and the professed follower and worshiper of Kant, solemnly asserts in his Hibbert’s [!] Lectures that the *advaita* is that stage in the development of the human mind which, will lead to the philosophical (?)”<sup>37</sup> ideal taught by Christianity!”<sup>38</sup> Dvivedi’s preface is therefore an interesting example of an Indian response to orientalist scholarship. This can be read as a relationalization in Dvivedi’s work and therefore an attempt to claim hegemony, a response to colonial power that will be discussed further in Chapter 11. Dvivedi defended the *Upaniṣads* by referring to the “esoteric truths which were taught through the Upaniṣads to the select few.”<sup>39</sup> According to Dvivedi, this knowledge forms the true meaning of the Vedas and is, thus, “the end of the Veda (Vedanta).”<sup>40</sup>

This framing of *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* provides an interesting example of relations established by actors in multiple encounters. It is also indicative of the already hybrid *Upaniṣads* on which Besant built her interpretation of “Hinduism.” As the next section will show, it is plausible that *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* formed the template for Besant’s reception of the *Upaniṣads*.

34 Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic*, 2.

35 Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic*, 4.

36 Gough, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads and Ancient Indian Metaphysic*, 5.

37 The question mark in brackets is included in Dvivedi’s preface, although why it appears here is unclear. Perhaps Dvivedi doubted that there was any “real” philosophy in Christianity.

38 Dvivedi, “Preface,” i.

39 Dvivedi, “Preface,” ii.

40 Dvivedi, “Preface,” ii.

## 10.4 Translations of the *Upaniṣads* Found in Besant's Work

When we compare the paragraphs of the *Upaniṣads* cited by Besant with the same paragraphs of the translations in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* (see Table 6), we find that they are very close to each other, although they do differ in some regards. If we further compare Besant's text to the other translations published around the turn of the century, we can see that the resemblance of the paragraphs in Besant to the translations in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* is much closer. This similarity conclusively shows that Besant based her reading of the *Upaniṣads* on these translations, as can be demonstrated by looking in more detail at three paragraphs quoted by Besant.

**Table 6:** Comparison Translation of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1. By the author.

| Besant                                                                                                                            | <i>The Twelve Principal Upanishads</i>                                                                                                                             | Müller                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> 3.14.1                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| "Man is a creature of reflection; what he reflects upon, that he becomes; therefore reflect upon Brahman [ . . . ]" <sup>41</sup> | "Man is a creature of reflection, whatever he reflects upon in this life, he becomes the same hereafter; therefore should he reflect (upon Brahma)." <sup>42</sup> | "Now man is a creature of will. According to what his will is in this world, so will he be when he has departed this life. Let him therefore have this will and belief." <sup>43</sup> |
| <i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i> 6.12.3                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| "Thou art Brahman,' 'Thou art That'? so the Buddhists repeat also: 'Thou art Buddha'." <sup>44</sup>                              | "Mind it, my child, that particle which is the soul of all, that is Truth – it is the Universal Soul. O Svetaketu, Thou art that." <sup>45</sup>                   | "Believe it, my son. That which is the subtile essence, in it all that exists has its self. It is the True. It is the Self, and thou, O Svetaketu, art it." <sup>46</sup>              |

<sup>41</sup> Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 84.

<sup>42</sup> Raja R. Mitra, "The Chan'dogya Upanishad," in Tatya, *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, 537.

<sup>43</sup> Müller, *The Upanishads*, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Mitra, "The Chan'dogya Upanishad," 596.

<sup>46</sup> Müller, *The Upanishads*, 104.

Table 6 (continued)

| Besant                                                                                                                            | <i>The Twelve Principal Upanishads</i>                                                                                             | Müller                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i> 2.20                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| “When he is free from grief, it is then in the tranquillity of the senses that he beholds the majesty of the Soul.” <sup>47</sup> | “He, who is free from desire and without grief, beholds by the tranquillity of his senses that majesty of the soul.” <sup>48</sup> | “A man who is free from desires and free from grief, sees the majesty of the Self by the grace of the Creator [In footnote: The commentator translates ‘through the tranquillity of the senses,’ i.e. dhātuprasādāt, taking prasāda in the technical sense of amprasāda. As to kratu, desire, or rather, will, see Brih. Âr. IV, 4,5.].” <sup>49</sup> |

We can see that the proximity of the passages in Besant and *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* is striking. When compared to Müller’s translation there are significant differences. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.1, the term “reflection” is used by Mitra and Besant. In Müller’s translation, on the other hand, the term “will” has a different connotation. This is also important for Besant’s concept of the “Quickening of Evolution,” because meditation is understood by her as a “reflecting” on something.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the role played by the “ideal” in the preliminary steps is to be an object of reflection.<sup>51</sup> For *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.12.3, the difference is subtle. Another blueprint for Besant’s version of this passage was probably Blavatsky’s *The Voice of the Silence*, as both phrases, “Thou art That” and “Thou art Buddha” can be found there. For *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.20, Besant’s rendering is close to both of the earlier translations, but all three differ slightly in their rendering.

<sup>47</sup> Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 64.

<sup>48</sup> Eduard H. H. Röer, “The Kaṭha Upanishad,” in Tatya, *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, 424.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Max Müller, *The Upanishads: Part II*, The Sacred Books of the East Vol. XV (Oxford, London: Clarendon Press; Henry Frowde, 1884), The Katha-Upanishad, the Mundaka-Upanishad, the Taittirīyaka-Upanishad, the Brihadāranyaka-Upanishad, the Svetāsvatara-Upanishad, the Prasña-Upanishad, the Maitrāyana-Brāhmaṇa-Upanishad, 11.

<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 177–78.

<sup>51</sup> See e.g. Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 64.

These observations lead me to maintain that Besant used the translations in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads* as her models. This view is backed by a review of this edition of the *Upaniṣads* that was published in *Lucifer* in 1892. This article was written anonymously, which is often an indication in Theosophical journals that it was written by the editor or one of several co-editors. In the case of *Lucifer* in 1892, these positions were held by G. R. S. Mead and Annie Besant. Even if it was Mead who wrote this review, it is very likely that Besant, as co-editor, was familiar with it and supported the opinion expressed therein.

We learn in the review that the translations were republished by “the courtesy of the Asiatic Society.” Although the reviewer regrets that the editor chose to use older translations and that “new translation and an intelligible modern commentary, by some advanced student of the Yoga” were included, he or she notes that:

Nevertheless, the publisher has laid us under a debt of gratitude by placing within our reach these scattered versions at a moderate price, which is all the more acceptable in the face of the high prices demanded for the two volumes of the ‘Sacred Books of the East’, in which Professor Max Muller has succeeded in evaporating the spirit of the Upanishads and leaving nothing but the dry bones, neatly labelled and varnished with the size of a scientific philology which is entirely absent in the originals. We do not want the fossil remnants of the past when the living soul still exists.<sup>52</sup>

This passage gives a telling description of the attitude towards Müller’s translation of some in the Theosophical Society. Given the high probability that Besant used the translations in the volume edited by Tatya, it can be assumed that Besant’s interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* was not only influenced by the translations of Röer, Mitra, and Cowell, but that she also read Dvivedi’s preface and the introductions to the translations. This is another instance of the discursive field in which Besant formulated her concept of the “Quickening of Evolution.” The already hybrid *Upaniṣads* translations she used in her work form part of the global colonial discursive continuum. They were hybridized through translation and then re- and decontextualized in Besant’s work, but they were also already hybrids before their translation because they were part of a long tradition of repetition. In the next section, I will examine the discursive field in the Theosophical Society more closely by looking at the early reception of “Hinduism” in the pages of *The Theosophist*.

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52 Anon, “The Twelve Principal Upanishads,” *Lucifer* IX, no. 54 (1892): 511.

## 10.5 The Early Reception of “Hinduism” in *The Theosophist*: Indian Theosophists as “Experts” on South Asian Religions

In Chapter 5, the “Indian Middle Class” was discussed. One of the key features of that middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was a well-connected publishing industry. Journals and newspapers were an important part of the daily life of this middle class and provided possibilities for public debates which enabled numerous encounters. As argued above, the middle class was not Indian in ethnicity, but rather geographically, meaning that Indians and non-Indians alike should be included in this field of encounters. The Theosophical Society can be understood as a mediating structure in this field. It not only provided infrastructure, such as its journals, above all *The Theosophist*, but also encouraged its Indian and Non-Indian members to engage actively in India’s (colonial) public life. In the following, the reception of “Hinduism” in the pages of the early issues of *The Theosophist* will be discussed. This will a) map out the specific discursive field in which the ideas of “Hinduism” and the concept of stages of initiation in the Theosophical Society emerged, and b) draw close attention to the discursive dynamics, that is, the strategies of relationizing that prevailed in this field.

In the discussion below, many explanations about Sanskrit terms and Hindu concepts are given in footnotes in order not to disturb the flow of the text too much. The explanations are given as an aid to the reader if she or he should stumble across unfamiliar terms, rather than to provide authoritative interpretations of them. Some of the articles discussed below include numerous Sanskrit terms and were written in a very dense style, so it has not been possible to explain every last concept in the footnotes.

### 10.5.1 Who is the Audience? An Instance of Debating Advaita Vedānta in the Pages of *The Theosophist*

In the first and second volumes of *The Theosophist*, we find a series of articles by Rama Misra Shastree, “Professor of Sankhya [at] Benares College”<sup>53</sup> and a

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<sup>53</sup> Rama M. Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy: Expounded by the Society of Benares Pandits, and Translated for the Theosophist by Pandit Surya Narayan, Sec’y,” *The Theosophist* 1, no. 8 (1880): 202.

member of the “Society of Benares Pandits.”<sup>54</sup> His articles were originally written in Hindi (or probably in Sanskrit)<sup>55</sup> and were translated by Pandit Surya Narayan. The series was titled *The Vedanta Philosophy*. However, it was no mere introduction to Vedānta, but rather a discussion of some specifics of Advaita Vedānta. It thus takes for granted that the reader will be familiar with a) the Devanagari script and b) a number of specific concepts and terms, such as *mānas*, *ātman*, *indriya*, *sanchit*, *agami*, and *prārabdha karma*.

The first part of the series discusses the relation between *jiva* and *brahman*. *Jiva* is defined as:

that state of the One Animate Being, which consists in the unconsciousness of His real nature. In that state He possesses qualities, in virtue of which He is called a doer, an enjoyer, and a possessor of limited knowledge of things; and the Supreme Being, having as it were brought *Maya*, the instrument of His disguises, under His yoke, is the only possessor of the qualities contrary to those we have ascribed to *Jiva*.<sup>56</sup>

We see that the author presupposes that his audience is familiar with the discussions in the Vedānta tradition about the “doer” and the “enjoyer,”<sup>57</sup> and the stages of consciousness that are connected with cosmological spheres and anthropological levels.

Shastree further discusses how the *jiva* might attain *moksha*. He explains that when “*Jiva* [is] brought back to the right path through an adviser [and it] recognises his native form. Having been thus released from the troubles he has endured on account of his actions, he obtains salvation or the everlasting happiness.”<sup>58</sup> Then there is “unity of *Brahma* and *Jiva*, [. . .] or everlasting freedom for the latter (upon his obtaining knowledge of his real nature with the aid of an able adviser).”<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to read that “the aid of an able adviser” is

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<sup>54</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 201.

<sup>55</sup> Dodson claims that the article was originally written in Sanskrit especially for the Theosophical Society. However, he simply refers to the article itself and gives no further references to support his claim. The article states that it was translated for publication in the pages of *The Theosophist*, but it does not say in what language it was originally written or that it was especially written for the Society. In my opinion, it may well have been written in Sanskrit, because the Pandits often communicated and held presentations in Sanskrit, as Dodson shows, but it is unlikely that it was especially written for the Theosophical Society. I give my arguments for this claim below. Cf. Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire, and National Culture: India, 1770–1880*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 180.

<sup>56</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 201.

<sup>57</sup> Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 60–61.

<sup>58</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 201.

<sup>59</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 201–2.



needed for gaining *moksha*. The idea of the help of teachers is, of course, not alien to vedānta thought.<sup>60</sup> This was highlighted in the writings of Śaṅkara in particular.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless this idea also fits perfectly into Theosophical thinking (see also Chapter 8).

Shastree further discusses why “the wise (ज्ञानी) [who] break loose from the transmigration of the soul”<sup>62</sup> still undergo troubles in life. This is explained by referring to

three kinds of actions – the *Sanchit*, the *Agami* and the *Pravdha*.<sup>63</sup> The *Sanchit* actions lie buried in the hearts of man without giving vent to the effects produced. The *Agami* actions are those which remain to be finished or those which are being done, while the *Pravdha* action is the result of our future actions terminating in bringing into light our present existence.<sup>64</sup>

Again, this is interesting because it refers to a specific problem that was widely discussed among Advaita Vedāntists. The main question that is discussed concerning *prārabdha* karma is why bodies continue to exist after liberation. Several answers are given, one of which is that there is still *karma* that is working, which must be worked out. This is the *prārabdha karma*, which is the “currently manifesting” karma.<sup>65</sup>

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**60** Several *Upaniṣads* which are important for Advaita Vedānta are arranged as teacher-student conversations. The teacher is also a source for valid knowledge, as the right knowledge is transmitted through the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*. Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 62–63.

**61** First, Śaṅkara is often presented as the perfect teacher, who was in turn sent by his teacher to teach students all around India. Secondly, Śaṅkara wrote the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, a small treatise in which he elaborates a teaching method. Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedānta*, Treasures of the World’s Religions Series (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 161–63.

**62** Shastree, “The Vedānta Philosophy,” 202.

**63** As suggested above, “pravdha” is most probably *prārabdha*. This would suggest the usage of the term in Shastri’s article. Why he uses this rather unusual transliteration is unclear. It may be that the translator of the text transliterated “v” for “b,” since these letters are similar in the Devanagari script. In any case, he did not transliterate the length of the letters using diacritics, which explains the short “a” instead of a long “ā” in “pravdha.”

**64** Shastree, “The Vedānta Philosophy,” 202.

**65** Andrew O. Fort, *Jivanmukti in Transformation: Embodied Liberation in Advaita and Neo-Vedānta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 8–9.

The second article discusses “Purushārtha (human effort)<sup>66</sup> [which] overwhelms the result of the Prāravdha actions.”<sup>67</sup> The author explains that human beings are under threat from four troubles in life.

The first group includes the various sorts of diseases with which a man is attacked; the second come in the form of some desire or object, anger, thought, and the like; the third sort of trouble which is experienced by *Jiva* is set on foot by the agency of material beings, as, for instance, serpents, tigers, and various other hurtful creatures; and the fourth or last, is that which is brought about by the agency of spiritual beings.<sup>68</sup>

The main precaution to be taken against these troubles is to “promptly take in hand the attainment of the knowledge of those things only which may extirpate his troubles and leave no room for their genus to grow again.”<sup>69</sup> This “attainment of the knowledge” is described as the “distinction between the spiritual (आत्मा) and non-spiritual (अनात्मा).”<sup>70</sup> In its implication, this description of the “attainment of knowledge” is very close to the first stage of “discrimination” included in the stages of initiation by Blavatsky (Chapter 9), Dvivedi (Chapter 11), and Besant (Chapter 8). What this means is that only the real understanding of things, the giving up of any misconceptions of reality, may render these troubles ineffective. This is especially true when the real nature of *jiva* is understood.<sup>71</sup>

The third article is directed towards those who act as if they were “as pure and holy as *brahma*”<sup>72</sup> but “are not well grounded in the subject.”<sup>73</sup> This criticism was directed towards apparently incorrect notions about the bodily practices that were performed to attain *brahman*. This seems to have been a critique

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66 The term is commonly understood as “the four ‘aims of humanity,’ or *puruṣārthas*, namely, virtue, wealth, pleasure, and liberation, [ . . . ]” Although often presented as a distinctive feature of “Hinduism,” this view was also contested. See Donald R. J. Davis, “Being Hindu or Being Human: A Reappraisal of the *Puruṣārthas*,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1–3, no. 8 (2004): 1. Shastree interprets the *puruṣārthas* with a different nuance as “human effort.”

67 Rama M. Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy: Expounded by the Society of Benares Pandits, and Translated for the Theosophist by Pandit Surya Narayen, Sec’y,” *The Theosophist* I, no. 11 (1880): 287.

68 Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 287.

69 Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 287.

70 Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 287.

71 Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 287.

72 Rama M. Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy: Expounded by the Society of Benares Pandits, and Translated for the Theosophist by Pandit Surya Narayen, Sec’y,” *The Theosophist* II, no. 3 (1880): 55.

73 Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 55.

of ascetics and *haṭhayoga*, in contrast to the *rājayoga*, with the article promoting (*rāja*)*yoga* without mentioning it.<sup>74</sup> The author writes:

As an advice to the *Vedantis*, we would say that unless they bring the ‘*mana*,’ the eleventh organ into subjection, the seat of all acts – virtuous or sinful – there is no royal road to obtain salvation, and so to put an end to the troubles of this world. Uttering the phrase “ब्रह्माहं”<sup>75</sup> (I am Brahma) would never suffice to chalk out the path for *mukti* or everlasting freedom.<sup>76</sup>

This passage is followed by a description of eight yoga practices, called *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyaṇa*, and *samādhi*.<sup>77</sup> Following this eightfold yoga will lead the practitioner to be “perfectly initiated in sounding the backward as well as the forward abyss of time and at the same time in attaining the true knowledge of all mysterious things in the universe.”<sup>78</sup> We can see that (*rāja*)*yoga* is presented here as a means for initiation into higher knowledge.

The last article in the series deals with the distinction between temporary happiness and “the highest happiness (परमानन्द).”<sup>79</sup> Temporary happiness is connected to the fulfillment of human passions and desires. Therefore, “until the fumes of his passion subside and the image of his *Atma* is reflected with full vigour in his heart, he is never brought home, but attributes his pleasure to

<sup>74</sup> If we understand *rājayoga* as practice of mind control, it can be deduced that Shastree refers to *rājayoga*. The distinction between *rājayoga* and *haṭhayoga* was a well-known and widely discussed topic at the time. Its importance for the Theosophical Society will be discussed below in more detail. See Peter Schreiner, “Yoga: Rāja Yoga,” in Jacobsen et al., *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*.

<sup>75</sup> *Brahmāhaṇ*.

<sup>76</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 55.

<sup>77</sup> The Sanskrit names of these stages are here transliterated from the Devanagari script given in a footnote in the article. These stages of yoga are presented in the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali. This work is often considered to be the basis of “Yoga,” at least as a system of practices which shall ultimately lead to liberation. In “modern” interpretations, the term “Yoga” is often used in the sense of “union.” The *Yogasūtra* is a work belonging to the Śāṅkhya tradition and is therefore rooted in a dualistic world view. Nonetheless, it proved to be compatible with various systems of thought, including Advaita Vedānta (cf. Knut A. Jacobsen, “Introduction: Yoga Traditions,” in *Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, Numen Book Series 110 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 1–27). For the usage of these terms and the uptake of yoga in the Theosophical Society in general, see Baier, *Meditation und Moderne*, 253–423.

<sup>78</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 55.

<sup>79</sup> Rama M. Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy: Expounded by the Society of Benares Pandits, and Translated for the Theosophist by Pandit Surya Narayen, Sec’y,” *The Theosophist* II, no. 4 (1880): 83.

the indulgence only.”<sup>80</sup> Desires are identified as the main obstacles here and the control of mind as the means to overcome these obstacles, but “it is wisdom alone (ज्ञान) that exalts man, without which he is more degraded even than the animals of the lowest order.”<sup>81</sup>

The stress on the concepts of *jñāna* and *paramānananda* is specific to this article. Both of these notions are important in Advaita Vedānta, as well as being common in Śāṃkhya. They can be read as demarcating Mīmāṃsā traditions which focus on the pursuit of rituals, especially Vedic sacrifices.<sup>82</sup> This is interesting because Benares was (and still is) known as a center of the Mīmāṃsā tradition. This suggests that the article emerged from encounters with the Indian Middle Class, which did not necessarily represent the Brahmanical establishment, who we would typically associate in the context of Benares with the Mīmāṃsā tradition. As we will see, the concept of the highest happiness (*paramānananda*) is an important feature of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*, which were the textbooks of the Central Hindu College in Benares.

This series of articles provides an interesting example of the early reception of Indian thought, especially Advaita Vedānta, in the Theosophical Society. I argue that the articles were most likely not written for a “Western” audience. This is suggested by three of their characteristics: a) they were not originally written in English, b) the Devanagari script is often included without transliteration or translation, and c) they make reference to concepts and debates current within the Vedāntin community. These points suggest that the articles were not directed at Theosophists but rather at sections of the Benares Vedāntin community. If this is correct, then it illustrates a certain attitude towards Indian thought in the early years of the Theosophical Society. As Sharpe notes, “during the first decade of Theosophical work in India the Society’s leaders were wisely reluctant to set themselves up as authorities on Indian religion.”<sup>83</sup> In discussing this claim, he also includes a paragraph of an editorial from *The Theosophist*, published in August 1882, in which Blavatsky explicitly states that she and Olcott are not interested in claiming authority on matters of Indian philosophy and science but in encouraging learned Indians to write about the subject. The native Indians were seen as the experts and any contact that could be

<sup>80</sup> Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 83.

<sup>81</sup> *Paramānananda*, Shastree, “The Vedanta Philosophy,” 83.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Johannes Bronkhorst, “Vedānta as Mīmāṃsā,” in *Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta: Interaction and Continuity*, ed. Johannes Bronkhorst, Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference vol. 10.3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007), 1–91.

<sup>83</sup> Eric John Sharpe, *The Universal Gītā: Western Images of the Bhagavadgītā* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1985), A Bicentenary Survey, 89–90.

established with them, and any information that could be gathered, was to be welcomed. As mentioned in 10.1 above, this tendency shifted somewhat in the years around 1890, a shift that will be discussed in more detail below. The Theosophical Society and their small publishing industry provided a structure for Indian members of the Indian Middle Class to engage not only in the formation of an idea of “Hinduism” in and beyond the Theosophical Society, but also in the wider global colonial discursive continuum.<sup>84</sup>

### 10.5.2 The Pandits of the Benares Sanskrit College: Theosophy Between Sectarianism and Universalism

The early articles in *The Theosophist* took up a much older debate that was still ongoing when Blavatsky and Olcott arrived in India. This was a dispute between the Pandits of the Benares Sanskrit College, founded in 1791, and the British administrators of the institution. This dispute revolved around the question of whether the Sanskrit College should adopt a “Western” method of philology or base its work on the traditional Sanskrit learning.<sup>85</sup> Initially, this debate was primarily discussed in the pages of *The Pandit*, the journal of the College, but the establishment of *The Theosophist* provided a new outlet for the disputants. This debate, and the related articles in *The Theosophist*, serves as an instructive example of Indian members of the Indian Middle Class actively engaging in the colonial discourse. Babu Pramadas Mitra, who wrote several articles in *The Theosophist*, was one of the prominent exponents of these Indians present in Benares. He was Professor of Sanskrit at the Benares Sanskrit College and a strong defender of the traditional Sanskrit learning. In addition, he was also well versed in European scholarship.<sup>86</sup> Mitra was one of the chief

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<sup>84</sup> Similar conclusions could be drawn from the relationship between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj, on which see, e.g., Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 302–31.

<sup>85</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, “Sanskrit Scholars and Pandits of the Old School: The Benares Sanskrit College and the Constitution of Authority in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (1996): 321–22.

<sup>86</sup> Vasudha Dalmia discusses the debate between Babu Pramadas Mitra and George Thibaut. It is interesting that Mitra argued against Thibaut by applying European terminology. Thibaut’s main argument was that traditional Sanskrit scholarship lacks the European critical method of textual analysis. Mitra, on the other hand, was strongly opposed to the universalist claims of the European scholars and defended traditional Sanskrit scholarship for its importance to the maintenance of a living culture. He understood the critical method as an important addition to traditional Sanskrit learning, but highlighted the value of the texts in themselves (cf. Dalmia, “Sanskrit Scholars and Pandits of the Old School,” 321–37). In a

local informants and contact persons for Olcott and Blavatsky in their early engagement with “Hinduism” in Benares. Olcott, in particular, sought to forge contacts with the local pandits and the Maharaja, as well as with George Thibaut, at the time the principal of the Benares Sanskrit College. Mediated by Mitra, Olcott signed a treaty, most likely in 1880, with a long list of Pandits and with Thibaut.<sup>87</sup> The aim of this treaty was to foster an alliance between the Pandits, the German scholar, and the Theosophical Society to work for “the interest of Sanskrit Literature and Vedic Philosophy and Science [which] will be eminently promoted by a brotherly union of all friends of Aryan learning throughout the world.”<sup>88</sup> This alliance, especially with the involvement of George Thibaut, is an interesting instance of the early activities of the Theosophical Society in Benares and illustrates well the field of encounters present in the Indian Middle Class. The Theosophical Society provided a structure that facilitated discourse between several parties, not only in their journals, but as this treaty shows, also in close interaction with each other.

Olcott seems to have had a close relationship with Thibaut and Mitra, calling them both “friends.”<sup>89</sup> The Theosophical Society connected several spaces in such a way that a discursive field was able to emerge in which interactions and engagements between numerous Indian and non-Indian actors initiated multifaceted processes of hybridization. Theosophical journals, and *The Theosophist* in particular, played pivotal roles in bringing this about. The discursive dynamics outlined in the following section were an important part of the milieu in which Besant immersed herself when she came to Benares. Her first contacts there were most certainly mediated by Olcott, with

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comment in *Old Diary Leaves*, Olcott says about Thibaut that he was a “most agreeable man, deeply versed in Sanskrit, yet without pretence or pomposity: in short, a real specimen of the German litterateur[!].” On the same page Olcott mentions a gathering of several people at Benares, among whom were Thibaut and Blavatsky: “Doctor Thibaut, the College Sanskrit Pandits, Babu Pramádā Dásā Mitra, Swami Dyānand, Mr. Ram Rao, one of S’Yami’s disciples, Damodar, Mrs. Gordon, H.P.B., myself, and others.” Interestingly, Babu Pramádā Dásā Mitra is written differently here than in another passage, where Olcott writes Babu Prāmada Dāsa Mitrā (120). There is thus a possibility that these are two different individuals (Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society*, 3 vols. 2 (London, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing Society; The Theosophist Office, 1900), Second Series, 1878–1883, 130–31). However, I think it more likely that this difference arises from inconsistencies in transliteration and editing.

**87** Unfortunately, Olcott only rarely gives the dates. But the last year mentioned is 1880, hence it is plausible that this event took place in the same year. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 124–28.

**88** Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 124–25.

**89** Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 272.

whom she visited the city for the first time, most likely in 1893, during Besant's first trip to India.<sup>90</sup> Olcott had prepared the ground for Besant's arrival and had arranged a lecture tour for her throughout India and Ceylon.<sup>91</sup> Future scholarship will, I believe, have much to say on this formative journey and on Besant's relation to Olcott. Much of the present narrative about the Theosophical Society is based on a supposed opposition between the first and the second generations of the Theosophical Society, and between Olcott (equated with Buddhism) and Besant (equated with “Hinduism”), in particular. According to this narrative, Besant's decision to settle in Benares is seen as a choice made in opposition to Olcott.<sup>92</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that it was Olcott who convinced Besant to come to India and he who organized her arrival. It is entirely plausible to suppose that he may even have advised her to settle in Benares as the official representative of the Theosophical Society. While the “truth” of the matter may be impossible to recover, more thorough research has the potential to provide a more detailed, and therefore more comprehensive, picture, although for the time being this must remain a research desideratum. Be this as it may, Babu Pramada-das Mitra is explicitly mentioned as one of the “friends of mine at Benares”<sup>93</sup> in Besant's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* from 1895, and this in itself strongly suggests that she was following along a path laid down by Olcott, rather than blazing a new trail.

In an article published in the very first issue of *The Theosophist*, Mitra discusses the relation between *brahman*, *Īśvara*, and *māyā*. His primary “opponent” in this context was Archibald Edward Gough (see Chapter 10.6.2), who was also employed at the Benares Sanskrit College from 1868 to 1878. Mitra's main point is that *brahman* is an unchangeable entity which is not subject to any progress or development. He presented this view of *brahman* as being in opposition to Gough's idea that *brahman* could be equated to the transcendentalist notion of a progressively perfecting idea which manifests in the world.<sup>94</sup> The January 1880 issue of *The Theosophist* carried a response to Mitra's article. Sri Paravastra Venkata Rangacharia criticized Mitra's views by referring to the problem of *avidyā* and its relation to *brahman*,<sup>95</sup> drawing attention to the

<sup>90</sup> Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 272–79.

<sup>91</sup> Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 15–19.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 277–92.

<sup>93</sup> Annie Besant, *The Bhagavad Gītā, or: The Lord's Song* (London, Benares, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing Society; The Theosophist Office, 1895), xii.

<sup>94</sup> Pramada D. Mitra, “Brahma Iswara and Maya,” *The Theosophist* I, no. 1 (1879): 13–18.

<sup>95</sup> The problem is that if there is *avidyā* then this would suggest that there is something different from *brahman*. But if *avidyā* belongs to *brahman* he could not be omniscient. And if *avidyā*



several commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) of Śaṅkara and his disciples, and concluding: “Before, therefore, the Theosophists extend their researches to one and all of the above specified Bhashyas, and discover by which of them these mighty problems are dearly solved, it is too premature to uphold the doctrine laid down by Pramada Dasa Mittra.”<sup>96</sup> The “Note by the Editor” that follows the article responds by saying that, “the Theosophists *not* having as yet, studied all these Bhashyas, have no intention to uphold any particular sectarian school. They leave this to the pandits, for whose especial benefit, among others, this journal was founded.”<sup>97</sup> This note was in turn followed by a reply by Mitra. In his response, Mitra discusses the problem of *avidyā* in relation to the two realities put forward by Śaṅkara and defends his positions by claiming that the problem of *avidyā* only arises in the realm of relative existence, but above that only *brahman* exists and, therefore, the question is of no importance in the absolute realm. He concludes:

By confounding Avidyā (ignorance) with the soul, P.V.R. [Paravastu Venkata Rangacharia] supposes that according to Śaṅkara, beatitude consists in the annihilation of the soul, whilst on the contrary it is the obtaining the realization of the true self. Nothing can be farther from Śaṅkara’s teaching than that beatitude lies in annihilation. The mistake arises from the difficulty of conceiving Being above the consciousness (*buddhi*) with which we identify ourselves.<sup>98</sup>

In summary, the commentary from the editors of *The Theosophist* shows the ambivalent stance taken by Theosophists towards Indian religion. On the one hand, they promoted it, while, on the other, they consciously tried not to advocate “any particular sectarian school.” This approach should be understood in connection with the Theosophist claim to universalism and the idea that all religions are based on the same fundamental truths, a topic that will resurface when we consider the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* in Chapter 13. In contrast to the Theosophical stance, when we look at Mitra’s argumentation we see that he took a specifically Advaita Vedānta stance and defended it against the criticism of his opponent. He quotes Śaṅkara as the main authority and attributes “ignorance” to his opponent. The argument that Śaṅkara’s idea of “beatitude”

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does not, then it could not be overcome, and knowledge of *brahman* would hence not be possible. This is a paradox which was also widely discussed in the Vedānta tradition. However, Śaṅkara does not seem to be much concerned with it, because it would be of no importance once *avidyā* is overcome. On the problem of *avidyā*, see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, “Śaṅkara on the Question: Whose Is Avidyā?,” *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 3, No. 1 (1953).

<sup>96</sup> Venkata P. Rangacharia, “Brahma, Iswara and Maya,” *The Theosophist* I, no. 4 (1880): 88.

<sup>97</sup> Rangacharia, “Brahma, Iswara and Maya,” 88.

<sup>98</sup> Rangacharia, “Brahma, Iswara and Maya,” 89.

is the opposite of “annihilation” can be read as a response to a common topic in the Orientalist writings of the time. Ideas of Moksha and Nirvana were often described as “annihilation,” which was then negatively contrasted with the Christian belief in an afterlife spent in paradise.<sup>99</sup> In addition, he refers to Herbert Spencer, who “clearly distinguishes the Absolute and the Relative in our minds.”<sup>100</sup>

This is an instance of relationalization through which Mitra aimed at a double-sided effect: 1) he could connect his statements to the colonial discourses, and 2) by doing so he could claim authority and superiority for his thought. Mitra’s response to the article from 1879 is an example of de- and recontextualization within the global colonial discursive continuum. The demarcation between “translation” and “re- and decontextualization” introduced above seems to become fluid in this instance. This issue will be addressed in 10.5 below.

### 10.5.3 Experts on “Hinduism” and Experts on all “Occult” Matters

During the same period, a series of articles by Kashinath Trimbak Telang on the life of Śaṅkara was published in *The Theosophist*. Telang is an interesting figure who was engaged in several scholarly fields, and translated the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Anugītā* for *The Sacred Books of the East* series.<sup>101</sup> His series of articles for *The Theosophist* is particularly notable because the editors of the journal chose to comment on some parts of the article. For example, Telang relates to the episode from Śaṅkara’s hagiography in which Sarasvati asked him “*a question on the science of love*.”<sup>102</sup> However, Śaṅkara did not know anything about the matter, since he had been a renouncer all his life. As a result of this question, he left his previous life and went in search of an answer. When he came across the corpse of a king named Amarakara, he entered his body and “learned practically all that pertained to the science and art of Love, and fitted himself to answer the query of the cunning wife of Mandana [Sarasvati in disguise].”<sup>103</sup> The editors commented on this episode with the following remark:

<sup>99</sup> Cf., e.g. Monier Monier-Williams, *Hinduism*, Non-Christian Religions Systems (London, New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Pott, Young, & Co., 1878), 83–84.; Horace Hayman Wilson, *Essays and Lectures Chiefly on the Religion of the Hindus: Miscellaneous Essays and Lectures*, Works by the Late Horace Hayman Wilson II (London: Trübner & Co., 1862), 113–14.

<sup>100</sup> Rangacharia, “Brahma, Iswara and Maya,” 89.

<sup>101</sup> Bergunder, “Die Bhagavadgita im 19. Jahrhundert,” 197–99.

<sup>102</sup> Kāshināth T. Telang, “Śaṅkaracharya, Philosopher and Mystic,” *The Theosophist* I, no. 3 (1879): 72.

<sup>103</sup> Kāshināth T. Telang, “The Life of Sankaracharya, Philosopher and Mystic,” *The Theosophist* I, no. 4 (1880): 89.

The power of the Yogi to quit his own body and enter and animate that of another person, though affirmed by Patânjali and included among the Siddhis of Krishna, is discredited by Europeanized young Indians. Naturally enough, since, as Western biologists deny a soul to man, it is an unthinkable proposition to them that the Yogi's soul should be able to enter another's body. That such an unreasoning infidelity should prevail among the pupils of European schools, is quite reason enough why an effort should be made to revive in India those schools of Psychology in which the Aryan youth were theoretically and practically taught the occult laws of Man and Nature. We, who, have at least some trifling acquaintance with modern science, do not hesitate to affirm our belief that temporary transmigration of souls is possible. We may even go so far as to say that the phenomenon [!] has been experimentally proven to us in New York, among other places. [ . . . ] We urge our readers to first study Aryan literature, and then get from personal experience the corroborative evidence.<sup>104</sup>

This comment is an instance of the editors positioning themselves as authorities when it comes to “occult” matters. In this early phase of the reception of Indian thought, they were not willing to pass comment on Indian philosophy, but they did take a clear stance when it came to the “occult.” We know that Telang continued his contacts with the Theosophists after the publication of these articles.<sup>105</sup> It would be interesting to know what he thought about these editorial comments, although, at present, we have no record of his views on this topic. Be this as it may, we can see that Śaṅkara was introduced to a Theosophical readership from very early on as “one of the greatest men who have appeared in India.”<sup>106</sup> In addition, he was presented by the editors of *The Theosophist* as “an initiate”<sup>107</sup> who was in possession of the *siddhis*. The early presentation of Indian philosophy and religion within the pages of the journals of the Theosophical Society was dominated by native Indians which were not necessarily members of the Theosophical Society. The comments on Telang's article, however, indicate a shift in the representation of Indian religion and philosophy, a shift that can also be detected in Olcott's presentation of the Indian *darśanas* and that will be elaborated further below. What we see in this change is the European Theosophists beginning to speak *for* Indians and to present Indian philosophy and religion as part of their own Theosophical thought. I have discussed these developments elsewhere in the context of the uptake of the *Bhagavadgītā* within the Theosophical Society.<sup>108</sup> Although my earlier argument may have been correct in detecting this tendency, it will be

**104** Telang, “The Life of Sankaracharya, Philosopher and Mystic,” 89 [Editor's footnote (2)].

**105** Bergunder, “Die Bhagavadgita im 19. Jahrhundert,” 197–99.

**106** Telang, “Śankaracharya, Philosopher and Mystic,” 71.

**107** Telang, “The Life of Sankaracharya, Philosopher and Mystic,” 89.

**108** Mühlematter, “Philology as an Epistemological Strategy to Claim Higher Knowledge”.

seen that the constellation was even more complex, as the following article by Alfred Cooper-Oakley illustrates.

#### 10.5.4 Experts on “Hinduism” and Experts on all “Occult” Matters 2.0

Already in the early years of the Theosophical Society, the “Western” members talked and lectured about Indian religion and philosophy, although they were often supported in doing so by Indian members. This joint approach points towards interactions between Indian and Non-Indian members of the Theosophical Society which induced processes of hybridization. An interesting incident in this respect took place with the publication of an article by Alfred Cooper-Oakley, *The Vedanta*, in the ninth issue of *The Theosophist*. The article was not directly attributed to the author, but was described, rather, as a “Lecture read by the Secretary before the Convention of the Theosophical Society, December 1887.”<sup>109</sup> A. J. Cooper-Oakley was one of the secretaries that year, alongside C. W. Leadbeater.<sup>110</sup> However, it seems that Cooper-Oakley was in charge of the official duties. This can be deduced by the fact that he read the report of the “Asiatic Branches” of the Theosophical Society at the “Twelfth convention and anniversary of the Theosophical Society at the Head-Quarters, Adyar, Madras, December 27<sup>th</sup>–29<sup>th</sup>, 1887.”<sup>111</sup> In the report, Cooper-Oakley mentions twenty-six branches of the Theosophical Society in India. Their work ranged from weekly meetings and discussion groups on various topics, often the *Bhagavadgītā* in connection with Row’s lectures (see Chapter 12.8), to mesmeric healing, homeopathic

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**109** Alfred J. Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta: A Lecture Read by the Secretary Before the Convention of the Theosophical Society, December 1887. The Quotations from and References to Sanskrit Works Have Been Supplied by Pandit N. Bhashyacharya,” *The Theosophist* IX, no. 103 (1888): 411.

**110** Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society* (Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1989), 225. Hence it is also possible that the article is based on a lecture by C. W. Leadbeater. Tillet also names both Cooper-Oakley and Leadbeater as the secretaries in those years, stating that this double secretaryship was a result of the resignation of Blavatsky in the wake of the Coulomb affair, but he, too, provides no conclusive information on the issue of authorship: “Amongst the eight members were two Europeans, Mr Cooper-Oakley, and Leadbeater, who acted as secretary. The Committee operated for several months, but eventually faded away” (Gregory Tillet, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London, Boston, Melbourne, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 45). Tillet also notes that Leadbeater and Cooper-Oakley did not get along well. Nevertheless, both men seem to have been chelas of T. Subba Row. Tillet, *The Elder Brother*, 48.

**111** Alfred J. Cooper-Oakley, “Secretary’s Report of Asiatic Branches,” *Supplement to the Theosophist* IX, no. 100 (1888): xiv.

medicine, and general social work. Cooper-Oakley mentions many Indian Theosophists who translated books, both Theosophical and non-Theosophical and both Indian and non-Indian, into Indian vernaculars.<sup>112</sup> This broad scope well illustrates the ambiguity of the Theosophical movement, with a deeper examination of the Indian branches of the Theosophical Society remaining an important research desideratum.

The lecture on the Vedānta was prepared together with Pandit N. Bhashyacharya. We do not know much about Bhashyacharya other than that he was a Pandit for the Adyar Library and that he was well versed in Sanskrit.<sup>113</sup> As the title suggests, Cooper-Oakley discussed the Vedānta systems in his lecture. He was aware that Vedānta did not only mean Advaita Vedānta, and he also discussed other Vedānta schools. Nonetheless, Śaṅkara was his main authority. He explained that Vedānta means “‘the end of the Vedas.’ This ‘end’ – the furthest point to which our speculation can rise – is the Supreme Spirit.” Besides “the Bhagavad Gita [. . .] the Vedanta Sutras or Brahma Sutras,”<sup>114</sup> he unsurprisingly identifies the *Upaniṣads* as a main source for the Vedānta. He explains:

In the Upanishads this [knowledge about the determination of the Supreme Spirit] is said to be *rahasya*, from *raha*, secret: *rahasya*, occult knowledge or science. The word Upanishad is derived from *upa*, near, and *nishad*, he who stands; that is, he who stands nearer the Supreme Spirit. The scriptures that teach what may be known about the Supreme Spirit are called Upanishads.<sup>115</sup>

Explaining the meaning of the word “*upaniṣad*,” Cooper-Oakley put forward an original idea. The “occult knowledge” was identified by Cooper-Oakley with the knowledge about the relation between *ātman* and *brahman*.

When Parabrahm takes on its manifested state, it does so by the evolution of a centre of energy called Iswara, the Atma, or as Mr. Subba Row has conveniently named it, the Logos.<sup>116</sup> The second of these names – Atma – is peculiarly characteristic. It furnishes, one might almost say, a key to the Vedanta.<sup>117</sup>

During the lecture, the differences between the manifest and the unmanifest were discussed and equated with the enduring and the vanishing – reality and

<sup>112</sup> Cooper-Oakley, “Secretary’s Report of Asiatic Branches,” XIX–XXV.

<sup>113</sup> Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, 391.

<sup>114</sup> Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 411.

<sup>115</sup> Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 412.

<sup>116</sup> See Tallapragada Subba Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita: To Help Students in Studying Its Philosophy* (Bombay: Theosophical Publication Fund, 1888), V. Row’s concepts relating to the Logos will be discussed in more detail below, see Chapter 12.

<sup>117</sup> Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 414.

illusion – which results from the multiplying between *ātman*, *brahma*, and *prakṛti*. Cooper-Oakley explains that “from a metaphysical point of view the Prakṛiti is sometimes called Avidya – ignorance, or maya – illusion. This is because it has not, like the Atma, any real existence.”<sup>118</sup> Atma was characterized as possessing the “power to call into existence innumerable centers of energy, which are like reflections of itself, in Prakṛiti, which form to themselves bodies or upadhis.”<sup>119</sup> This development of centers is called “evolution” by Cooper-Oakley. “The atma is further said to carry within itself the plan of the whole cosmos [. . .] and according to this plan the whole system of evolution proceeds.”<sup>120</sup> These ideas bear a striking resemblance to Besant’s ideas about the evolution of the cosmos, in which Shiva as one part of the Trimurti has the capacity to form the universe according to his mind-power.<sup>121</sup> In referring to the Advaita Vedānta system, Cooper-Oakley discusses the “Jivatma” as one of these centers that were brought into existence by *ātman*. He explains that “the Jivatma is a reflection of the Paramatma. The difference between them is that the Jivatma is said to be bound, whereas the Paramatma is said to be free. Or we may say that the consciousness of the Paramatma is unlimited, while that of the Jivatma is limited.”<sup>122</sup> The main quality that differentiates between *brahman*, *paramatma* (which is equated with Subba Row’s notion of Logos, on which see Chapter 12), and *atma* and *jivatma* is, thus, according to Cooper-Oakley, the capacity of consciousness. Therefore,

the Jivatma has to raise its own consciousness through successive stages, each higher than the last, until its consciousness becoming at length identical with the consciousness of the Paramatma, the two become united, the Jivatma becomes the Paramatma. The theory involved may briefly [be] said to be this. Any given stage of existence has a conscious-

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**118** Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 415.

**119** Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 414–15. *Upādhi* is “a limiting condition (*upādhi*) wrongly superimposed on the *ātman*,” see Bartley, “Vedānta,” and can therefore be understood as a delusion or a disguise of the real nature of *ātman*. It was included in this sense by Monier-Williams in his dictionary. Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Enlarged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1872), 213. *Upadhi* in this rendering became a common term in Theosophy for referring to a “body.” See Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London, New York, Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), 353.

**120** Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 415.

**121** Besant, *Reincarnation*, 30–31. See also Chapters 12 and 13.

**122** Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 416.

ness of its own, and above that stage are higher stages of existence with corresponding states of consciousness.<sup>123</sup>

Because the expansion of the consciousness is the means for uniting with *brahman*, “all initiations and all occult training have as their object the enabling [of] men by realising the higher planes of consciousness to rise higher and higher towards union with the supreme Atma.”<sup>124</sup> Again, this idea of the “union with the supreme Atma” by an expansion of consciousness is very close to Besant’s ideas about the forming of bridges between the bodies on the different planes of existence.<sup>125</sup> It also fits well with Besant’s definition of initiation.<sup>126</sup>

Having discussed the expansion of consciousness as the means by which to achieve union, Cooper-Oakley goes on to explore several systems of moral conduct for the attainment of moksha that were propounded by the different schools of Vedānta. Turning to Advaita Vedānta, he writes:

We are called upon not merely to assent to truth, but to *live* the truth. Before a person is fit to receive this knowledge at all, four preliminary conditions are requisite. These are (1) *Viveka*, the power of discriminating the real from the unreal. This is to be attained not only by study but by meditation and reasoning. [. . .] (2) *Vairagyam*. Freedom from desire, passion and all earthly longings. (3) *Shat sampati*, of which there are six divisions: (i) control over the mind, (ii) control over the senses, (iii) ceasing to care for worldly things, (iv) endurance as of pleasure and pain, heat and cold and all the pairs of opposites, (v) confidence in the teachings of the guru, (vi) tranquillity of mind. (4) *Mumuksha* or desire for liberation.<sup>127</sup>

This paragraph comes tantalizingly close to Besant’s idea of the preconditions that must be fulfilled before initiation.<sup>128</sup>

This article is an outstanding example of the dynamics that can be detected during the early years of the Theosophical Society in India. First, we can note that all “quotations from and references to Sanskrit works have been supplied by Pandit N. Bhashyacharya.”<sup>129</sup> This suggests that Bhashyacharya wrote a large part of the article, since the references to Indian scriptures are so numerous that, when stripped away, only very little remains. Indeed, this last part seems to be Cooper-Oakley’s main contribution to the article. The references provided by Bhashyacharya throughout the article are combined with ideas of

123 Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 416.

124 Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 416.

125 See, e.g., Besant, *Man and His Bodies*, 105.

126 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 91. See also Chapter 8.2.

127 Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 419.

128 See Chapter 8.2.

129 Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 411.



self-improvement and evolution. In addition, they are connected to a moral code which explains good behavior as behavior that accords with the universal law.<sup>130</sup> We will see that this idea was adopted by Besant.

## 10.6 Preliminary Conclusion: Benares, Calcutta, and *The Theosophist* as Spaces of Encounters

This chapter started by arguing that the early Theosophists, namely Olcott and Blavatsky, were more invested in “Hinduism” than the common narrative about the Theosophical Society has it. Several examples were then discussed which served to shift that narrative to a certain extent. Beginning with Olcott, I noted that he not only lectured on the Hindu *darśanas* but was also engaged in agreeing a treaty between several Pandits, George Thibaut, and the Theosophical Society to support the promotion of Sanskrit learning. The Benares Sanskrit College was of great importance in this respect. Two instances in which Professors of the College, Mitra and Shastree, wrote about “Hinduism” in *The Theosophist* were also considered. Both articles formed part of a larger debate between the Pandits of the college and their English colleagues. Olcott’s initiative to create the treaty and have it signed by the participants can be understood in the same context. Thibaut was employed at the Benares Sanskrit College and was one of the English exponents against whom the critique of the Indian Pandits was directed. However, their main “opponent” was not Thibaut but Gough, who was criticized not only by Mitra but also by Dvivedi. This illustrates well how the Theosophical Society was embedded in the the Indian Middle Class and how several discursive fields overlapped therein. However, the overlap was not simply between “Western” and “Eastern” discourses; the article by Rangacharia illustrates that Indian discourses also overlapped in the Theosophical Society. A similar point arises from consideration of Shastree’s article, which addressed the Benares Vedānta community rather than Theosophists. This article can also be read as part of a debate between Vedānta and Pūrvamīmāṃsā traditions, although it seems that the orthodox brahmins were not much invested in these debates at the time – at least not in pages of *The Theosophist*. What can nevertheless be noted is that the early Hindu informants of the Theosophical Society presented here advocated Advaita Vedānta.

The introduction to *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, in which Dvivedi argues against Gough, is another instance of the overlapping discursive fields in

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130 Cooper-Oakley, “The Vedanta,” 420–22.

the Indian Middle Class. I suggest that this introduction and Mitra's article in response to Gough can be understood as an instances in which Dvivedi and Mitra claimed hegemony by employing a strategy of relationalization. They argued against Gough by using European categories and they epistemologically hierarchized "Hinduism" and "European Philosophy" by claiming that "Hinduism" was more philosophical and had a deeper understanding of the "truth." Through this evaluative process of hybridization, Dvivedi and Mitra claimed hegemonic positions for themselves. Indeed, as we will see, in the case of Dvivedi the processes of hybridization were even more complex (see Chapter 11).

The articles by Shastree and Mitra, and the introduction by Dvivedi, point to an early reception of "Hinduism" within the Theosophical Society that was based on the accounts of the Indian "experts," as Olcott and Blavatsky understood them. This reception was complemented by the accounts of Orientalists such as Thibaut, Röer, and Cowell. Olcott and Blavatsky were personally acquainted with Thibaut while the translations of the *Upaniṣads* by Cowell and Röer were included in *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, edited by Tatya. As discussed above, this publication is a paradigmatic example of the overlapping discursive fields in the Theosophical Society. Not only did two Indian members of the Theosophical Society, Dvivedi and Tatya, introduce and publish the work, but it also included translations by "Westerners" and one by Rajendralal Mitra, who was both an Indian scholar and the first Indian president of the Calcutta Branch of Britain's Royal Asiatic Society. Besant probably based most of her early reception of the *Upaniṣads* on this publication, a noteworthy instance of "already hybrids" which were then further de- and recontextualized in Besant's work and consequently repeated in the Theosophical tradition.

The idea of the "Indian" expert gradually shifted in the Theosophical Society. The article by Telang illustrates well that Olcott and Blavatsky initially only claimed expertise in occult matters, while Olcott's later lecture on the six Indian philosophical systems points to a shift in this distinction between the "Hindu" sphere of expertise and the "occult." Cooper-Oakley's article is an instance in which a "Westerner" represented "Hinduism" and claimed not only "occult" but also "Hindu" expertise. In the next section, these findings will be brought together and included in the analytical instrument that is being abductively developed in this book.

## 10.7 The Indian Middle Class in the Global Colonial Discursive Continuum

In this section, several of the ideas provided by the analytical tool will be reevaluated. It seems necessary to discuss the questions of whether “hybridization” is intentional and whether it can be understood as a deliberate strategy, as is suggested by the cases of Mitra and Divedi. Another issue that is worth considering again is the description of the global colonial discursive continuum. This term remains vague and does not have much analytical value beyond the claim that *everything* is connected. I will thus attempt to elaborate on this idea in order to provide a terminology that describes the possible overlaps in that continuum. The third issue concerns the terminology surrounding “encounters.” Next, I turn to the idea of the “already hybrids” before, finally, discussing the notion of the Indian Middle Class.

### 10.7.1 Relationalization as Intentional Hybridization?

Bhabha’s approach to the question of intentionality is ambivalent. As already discussed in 3.2.5, above, with a specific emphasis on the “already hybrids,” hybridity and mimicry are treated by Bhabha as intentional, but also as non-intentional in relation to hybridity as “historical necessity” and to mimicry as an “effect.” He explains in *The Commitment to Theory* that the “Third Space” is a precondition for “hybridity” and that meaning can only be produced by a passage through the “Third Space” in which the sign, the signified, and the producer of the sign are related to one another and likewise separated. The signified can never be present in the sign, just as the sign is not the signified and both are disconnected from the producer of the sign as soon as the sign is produced. This process must be unconscious and cannot be totalized. “Content” and “context” are necessarily intertwined but are also necessarily separated as a result of their iterability.<sup>131</sup> Taking this claim as my starting point, I argue that “hybridization” can never be intentional because it refers to an unconscious uncontrollable process. It seems that Bhabha is struggling with this problem when he writes that the “liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent relinking.”<sup>132</sup> The word “strategy” implies intentionality, but at the same time this “strategy” is

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<sup>131</sup> Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” 53–54.

<sup>132</sup> Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” 265.

produced in a moment of “liminality” that undermines every fixation, every possibility of control. Bhabha insists that this liminal moment of identification “requires direction and contingent closure.”<sup>133</sup> This paradox is also included in Bhabha’s idea of mimicry. Mimicry is an “intentional” act of adopting the colonial way of life including language, clothes and so on but it is constantly accompanied by an unintentional moment of “slippage.”<sup>134</sup> Drawing from Butler’s differentiation between intentional parts of speech acts and unintentional parts (or effects),<sup>135</sup> I propose to understand relationalization as the intentional part of the hybridization process and hybridization itself, in the sense of the establishment of “relations” or “in-betweens,” as the unintentional effects which cannot be controlled. I further suggest that we should understand all of the “processes of hybridization” as consisting of intentional and unintentional parts. In each process, “traces of hybridization” manifest and “results” are forged. In the cases of “translation” and “de- and recontextualization,” it seems that the goal is to close the discourse, albeit to a lesser degree than in the case of “relationalizations.” By contrast, “relationalization” is a direct attempt to claim a position of hegemony. The texts by Mitra and Dvivedi discussed above are instructive instances of this mode of hybridization. In the following, I will therefore talk of “relationalization” when describing a process of hybridization that aims at the establishment of non-inclusive hierarchical relationizings. “Relationizing(s)” is, then, reserved for descriptions of the establishment of traces of hybridization.

### 10.7.2 The Global Colonial Discursive Continuum: Overlapping, Entangled, and Connected Discursive Fields

Earlier in this chapter, two difficulties emerged when considering the Pandits of the Benares Sanskrit College and *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*. 1) These examples suggested that there were several ongoing discourses in which the Theosophists engaged when they came to Benares. These were arguments between “Westerners” (Gough, Thibaut), on the one side, and “Easterners” (Mitra, Dvivedi), on the other, and also arguments among “Easterners” themselves (Mitra, Rangacharia). The main difficulty in considering these debates is to find terms which convey ideas of self-containment as well as openness. Discourses are not closed or fixed but are potentially interconnected to each other. This is what is connoted

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<sup>133</sup> Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern,” 265.

<sup>134</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” 129.

<sup>135</sup> Judith Butler, *Hass spricht: Zur Politik des Performativen* [Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative] (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1998), 22–24.

by the formulation “the global colonial discursive continuum,” as was discussed in more detail in 4.5. In the earlier chapters of this book, it became apparent that the idea of “connections” is an important element in any description of “hybridization,” and this notion will now be used to refer to the overlapping of discursive fields. The metaphor of a “field” still, I think, works as a way of describing both the relative self-containment and the connectedness of a discourse in some specific context. A field may have a fence (hegemonic positions) that demarcates it from, but is still connected via the soil, etc. to other fields. A metaphor is of course never complete, since it is a model of thinking and cannot represent the “actual” thought, and the field metaphor is no exception. One of the main limitations of the metaphor is the spatial dimension of a “field,” which is only directly connected to those neighboring fields to which it stands in spatial proximity, while the “discursive fields” are understood as being interconnected, potentially at least, to all other fields (although geographical, and thematic, proximity increases the chance that the connections will actually be realized). Connections may be realized in encounters, whether these are encounters between actors or encounters between an actor and a text. Hence, in the following I will talk about “connected (discursive) fields” when describing the contact between different discursive fields.

### 10.7.3 Structures and Encounters

The terms 1) “structure” and 2) “encounter” are related to each other. 1) In several instances I have written above that the Theosophical Society was a, or provided a, “mediating structure.” In these structures, actors engage with each other or with texts that were produced by other actors while using the infrastructure of the structure. This infrastructure describes a “space” in which encounters may happen. “Spaces” are not the loci where “hybridization” takes place but rather where encounters happen which then trigger “processes of hybridization.” These loci have so far been identified as a) mediums and b) infrastructures. I would now like to reintroduce the term c) “context” to describe actual geographical places, such as Benares and Calcutta, which were previously described as the spaces in which encounters took place. 2) Encounters were described above using the term “interaction.” It seems that this term fits well with the idea of mutual agency as both of the “agents of encounters” engage in the encounter. Contact is in this respect a precondition. There is no “interaction” without “contact” (See also, overview of the “parts of hybridization,” Chapter 4.6).

Two of the terms elaborated above, the “Indian Middle Class” and the “already hybrids,” proved to be useful tools a) for describing the discursive fields

in which the Theosophical Society was embedded in India and b) for pointing towards previous hybridization processes. The concept of the Indian Middle Class has not been included in the overview in Chapter 4.6. However, it would fit between the “abstract” and the “actual” spaces of encounters, as it summarizes numerous “actual” spaces and “discursive fields” but is not as abstract as is the “global colonial discursive continuum.” The idea of the “already hybrid” also prevents any looking towards an “original” meaning. This was briefly illustrated in 10.2.1 through a discussion of the idea of Orientalism and Indology – and indeed academia *in toto* – as a tradition of repetition. This is, of course, inconvenient for those who self-identify as “scholars” insofar as being a “scholar” means producing “true” knowledge. However, I think this view of the “already hybrid” does indeed point to the central problem of scholarly work: there is no evidence, only interpretation. These concepts will be applied in the following to analyze the writings of Manilal Dvivedi. His work and his role as an actor provide instructive examples of multifaceted encounters in which numerous connections were realized.