

13 The “Quickening of Evolution”: Education for Initiation in the Central Hindu College and the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*

The 19th century saw an attempt by European states to monopolize education within their borders, a refashioning of the educational system that was consequently exported to the colonies. This process began in the 18th century in France, in the wake of the European enlightenment, and was then pioneered by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The goal was to establish an idea of belonging that was centered around similar language groups, as well as a sense of communality connected to the emerging nationalism.¹ This was in no way a homogeneous development either within or across nations, and several other stakeholders besides the state also provided educational facilities. Most notable among these were the institutions of Christian education organized by various churches, monastic societies, and private associations, in both the colonies² and in Europe.³ The educational landscape in India in this period, and in Benares in particular, provides a paradigmatic example of the diversity of educational programs which existed before, and often continued alongside, the new state schools.⁴ All social strata in Benares had their own systems of education, which were often exclusive institutions bound by caste and religion. The Indian pandits, representing the brahmanical caste, controlled the Sanskrit schools which were meant for the education of brahmans. The merchants, mostly vaishyas, had their own vocational schools, and Muslims, again, had institutions of their own.

The institutionalization of state education had a great impact on the idea of what constituted valid and useful knowledge. This was henceforth defined by the state, resulting in local, non-state, knowledge being marginalized. The British education system in India was a vocational system: Although it claimed to provide a “liberal education,” it was actually intended to educate clerks for the British colonial administration. It failed in its claimed attempt to provide mass

1 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*, 61–62. For the expansion of university education, see Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1132–47. For the process of the institutionalization of university education in Europe and abroad, see Pietsch Tamson, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 1–90.

2 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*, 343–51.

3 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1121.

4 Nita Kumar, *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage, 2000), 14.

education, since it was unable to provide sufficient schools for every Indian pupil. In addition, positions in the administration of the British Raj were restricted in quantity and quality, so the educational system would have been unable to ensure the ability of all to participate equally in the economy even if it had achieved a universal reach. This lack of capacity left open a space for Indian educators to establish their own schools. As long as they taught the full curriculum of the English schools, they were free to offer additional courses in Indian religion and culture. However, since these courses were additional and often optional, they were frequently perceived as being less important than the compulsory courses and were thus often attended by only a few pupils.⁵

English education was at first not seen by all Indians as the right instrument for education, because it did not provide the vocational education needed for the traditional professions of the brahmins, the merchants, and the craftsmen. Kumar explains that, as a result, only a thin stratum of Indian society opted for an English education. Amongst those who chose this option in Benares were the Agarwallas, and the family of Madhav Das, in particular, to which Bhagavan Das belonged. The family were rich merchants who could afford to live off their fortune and who initially educated their children at home. Numerous, mostly caste-bound, societies were later to found their own schools. To a great extent, these focused on providing an English education because it was, on the one hand, mandatory if the institution wished to gain state support, while, on the other hand, it was perceived as “progressive” in contrast to traditional “backward” Indian ways. As a consequence of the spread of English education and the perception of its “progressive” nature, traditional systems of education were marginalized and lost their importance, to a certain degree at least.⁶

It was in this milieu that the Central Hindu College was founded. Its founders included both Indians and non-Indians, with sometimes overlapping and sometimes concurring agendas. The college made religious instruction compulsory and attempted to combine “Western” education with classical Indian education in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy and religion. It can be understood as a structure in which numerous encounters took place and in which many potential connections among discursive fields were realized.

⁵ Kumar, *Lessons from Schools*, 14–37.

⁶ Kumar, *Lessons from Schools*, 38–83.

13.1 The *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* and the Central Hindu College in the Research on Theosophy: Sources and Dispositions

The importance of the Central Hindu College and the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* for Theosophy and the wider context of colonial India is generally acknowledged.⁷ However, a detailed study of the history of the college, and detailed studies of the editing and writing process, as well as the content, of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* remain research desiderata. The following chapter tries to partially fill this void by discussing in detail the ethics expounded in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* and interpreting them against the background of the “Quickening of Evolution” as elaborated in Annie Besant’s Theosophy (see Chapter 8). I argue that the *Sanātana Dharma Texts Books* were written as books of initiation and that the ethics therein are based on the preliminary stages of initiation.

In the following, I will sketch the history of the Central Hindu College and discuss the major scholarly problems in relation to the writing, editing, and publishing process of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*. This will provide the background against which the subsequent analysis of the ethics expounded therein will be understood. Most of the information given in the following section is drawn from the few accounts found in secondary sources. The main resource for the history of the college is Arthur Nethercot’s biography of Annie Besant.⁸ Some additional information based on primary sources can be found in Anne Taylor’s biography of Besant.⁹ She based her account *grosso modo* on information found in the *Central Hindu*

7 Wessinger Lowman, *Annie Besant and Progressive Messianism (1847–1933)*, 223–29; John S. Hawley, “Sanātana Dhrama as the Twentieth Century Began: Two Textbooks, Two Languages,” in *Ancient to Modern: Religion, Power, and Community in India*, ed. Ishita Banerjee-Dube and Saurabh Dube (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 314; Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*, 197; Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi and Romila Pruthi, *Annie Besant: Founder of Home Rule Movement* (Jaipur: Pointer Publishers, 2003), 13–14; Malinar, “Karmic Histories and Synthesis of ‘East’ and ‘West’,” 65; Moritz, “Globalizing ‘sacred Knowledge’,” 216–17; Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 15–212.

8 Nethercot’s work is still the most exhaustive biography on Annie Besant. However, one of the problems with Nethercot’s biography is that he does not reference his information properly. Some of his information is drawn from *The Central Hindu College Magazine* but he also draws on interviews and other sources which are not referenced, and it is thus often impossible to verify his sources. Later work, especially that of Catherine Wessinger, is almost entirely based on Nethercot’s text.

9 Pécastaing-Boissière’s biography of Annie Besant also does not provide any new information on the Central Hindu College. Although, she does not refer to Nethercot in her account but bases her description almost exclusively on other secondary sources.

College Magazine, which is one of the main sources for the college's history. Almost all the issues of the magazine are preserved in Varanasi in the library of the Indian section of the Theosophical Society. Unfortunately, the collection is in very bad shape and pages are sometimes missing, as I discovered when I had the opportunity to consult these issues during a visit to Varanasi in December 2017.¹⁰ Other accounts which are largely first-hand can be found in 1) the memories of Sri Prakasa, son of Bhagavan Das, about Annie Besant and his education at the Central Hindu College.¹¹ 2) *The Annie Besant Centenary Book*, edited by James Cousins, which includes several articles written by close co-workers of Besant during her time in Benares. 3) Ester Bright's *Old Memories and Letters of Annie Besant*, which contains several of Besant's letters to the author, the daughter of Ursula Bright, one of Besant's major sponsors, as well as the author's memories of Besant.

Details concerning the events that led to the establishment of the Benares Hindu University (henceforth BHU) can be found in the works of Jürgen Lütt and Leah Renold on the establishment of the BHU and in Nita Kumar's broader work on education in Benares. These three secondary sources focus neither on Annie Besant nor on Theosophy, and are, in consequence, mostly blind to, or uninterested in, any Theosophical dimensions in the content of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. Similarly, Nethercot, Wessinger, and Taylor do not analyze the content of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* and do not, therefore, interpret them as products of the wider Theosophical milieu. In the following I will confine myself to a short overview of the history of the CHC with a focus on the religious instruction offered there. A comprehensive history of the college remains to be written.

13.2 A Brief History of the Central Hindu College

The idea for a Hindu college in Benares was first promoted by Besant some time around 1895, and she began to raise funds for such an institution on her tour through India in late 1896 and early 1897. Besant's engagement with Benares in general, and with the Central Hindu College project in particular, was supported by Upendranath Basu, the general secretary of the Indian section,

¹⁰ I thank Pradeep H Gohil, Mr. Mishra, and the staff of the library for their warm reception and support. I also thank all the other members of the Indian section with whom I have had the chance to converse in Hindi and to therefore improve my speaking skills. I have some especially fond memories of the gate keeper who allowed me to sit by his fire every night when I returned from my Hindi lessons – it was very cold in Varanasi during the days I spent there.

¹¹ Sri Prakasa, *Annie Besant*, Bhavan's Book University 24 (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1954), ix.

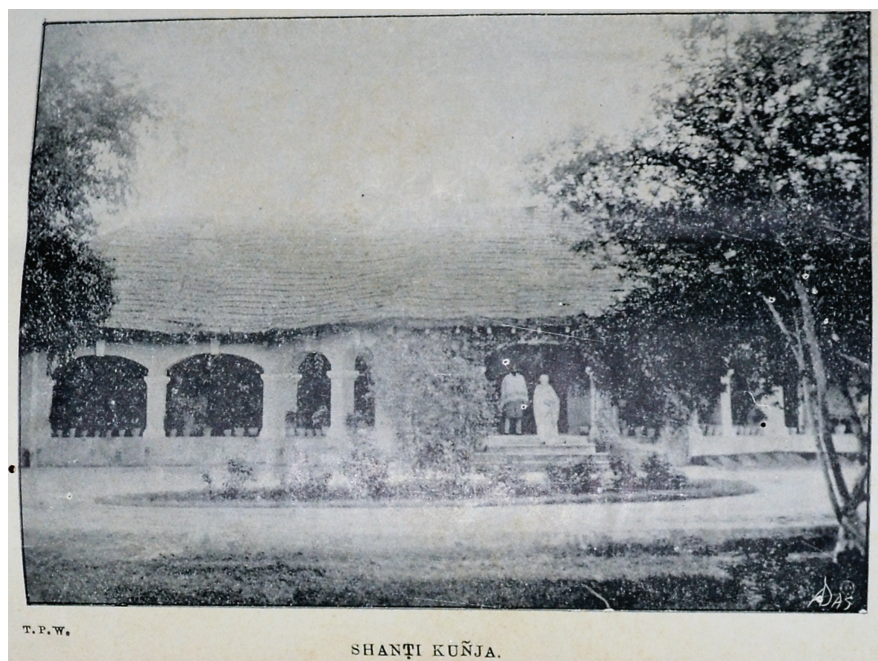


Figure 11: Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das in front of Shanti Kunj, Benares. (Photograph by an unknown photographer. Shanti Kunj, Benares, around 1909. Detail from *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, Vol. IX, No.11, Nov. 1909. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai).

who rented a bungalow which became both her first residence in Benares and the section's first headquarters. The CHC was officially opened on the same site in July 1898. Besant herself was not present at the opening because she was in London for the summer months,¹² but she was back in Benares in September and took an active interest in the development of the project. Soon after, with both the school and the Indian section of the Theosophical Society flourishing, a new compound was purchased with the financial aid of Ursula Bright.¹³ The compound was large enough to include “a hall for meetings; offices; a printing press; [. . .] a pharmacy [. . . and] a house for Chakravarti and his family,”¹⁴ and Besant also had her new home built there, which she called shanti kunj (Figure 11), “abode of

¹² Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 40–63.

¹³ Ester Bright, *Old Memories and Letters of Annie Besant* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1936), 62–63; Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 63–64.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 277.

peace” (or shanti kunja in the Sanskrit version – both renderings are common – I opt for “shanti kunj” because this better reflects the likely pronunciation in the Hindi milieu of Benares). The house was large enough to accommodate herself, Countess Wachtmeister, and Bertram Keightley.¹⁵ The Central Hindu College was soon to receive another generous donation, when the Maharaja of Benares donated one of his palaces that was very near to the recently purchased compound.¹⁶ Taylor explains that this act of generosity was a direct reaction to a comment by the Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Antony Macdonald, who suspected that the CHC was serving as a hotbed for radical politics.¹⁷

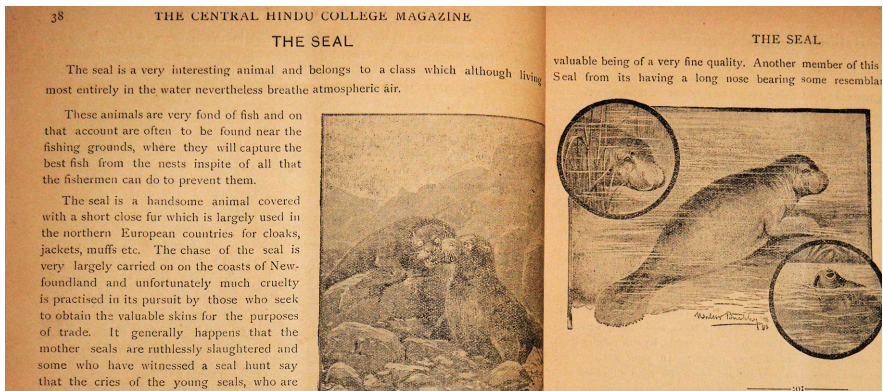


Figure 12: *The Central Hindu College Magazine* contained numerous pictures of wildlife, such as “the seal” pictured here. (Photograph by an unknown photographer. Around 1902. Detail, The Seal. From *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Feb. 1904. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai).

This grant, in addition to other generous donations of wealthy Indians, enabled the college to flourish further. Besant’s lectures and journalistic efforts attracted several talented young Indians who later became teachers at the CHC, including C. S. Trilokekar, B. Sanjiva Rao, G. V. Subba Rao, and Sri Prakasa. Besant’s journalistic endeavors also led to the establishment of a new journal, *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, which was published for the first time in January 1901. In the same year, the college became formally affiliated with Allahabad University.¹⁸ In its first years of publication, *The Central Hindu College Magazine* included a wide

¹⁵ Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 66.

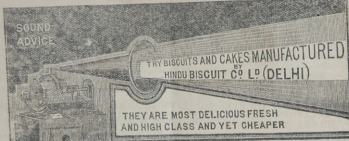
¹⁶ Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 68.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 279–80.

¹⁸ Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 70.

range of topics. Already in its early volumes it included illustrations ranging from animals (see Figure 12) to monuments, both South Asian and from elsewhere around the world. Starting from around 1909, its front page was redesigned and at the end of each volume an extra picture page and advertisements were included (see Figure 13).

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The only GOLD MEDAL for Biscuits awarded in the
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Hindu Biscuit Co., Ltd., DELHI.
Recommended by Mrs. Annie Besant, as more suitable than foreign made.

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4. Vikram and Urvashi pages 108 As. 4. 5. Mocha Duta pages 72 As. 2. 6. Mahabharata abridged in
verse and poetry pages 120 As. 10. 7. Usha, Usha Chaitanya pages 140 As. 8. 8. Hanuman Nataka
11 acts. 9. Ananga Raghava, 1 act. 10. Karna Raghava 9 ptes. 11. Vidula Sahasranika 9 ptes.
12. Suddha-charita 6 ptes. 13. Agastya and Mahatma 11 acts. 14. Mahavira Charita As. 2.
15. Yashwantra 2 acts. 16. Mallanandacharya 8 ptes. 17. Bhagwan-Gita, As. 4.
18. The above 17 books of Rs. 3.50 if bought together will cost Rs. 2.12 including all postal charges.
A GUIDE TO MOTHERS.—Selling, milk, weaning, bottle feeding, all diseases with
their causes, symptoms and treatment and medicines with Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Burmese, &c., names fully
mentioned Page 190 As. 8.
19. A Clerk's Letter Writer, As. 5. Its Guide Translation As. 4. Universal Letter Writer
As. 4. Railway Correspondence Book As. 5. Official Letter Writer As. 4. New Letter Writer As. 2. Pocket Letter
Writer As. 1. Guide to Letter Writing with Letters &c. 1. Adventures of a Soldier As. 5. Style, Idioms
and Idiomatic phrases As. 10. How to Speak and Write Good English As. 6. Krishna marriage with
Brahman As. 2. Parvati's story of Shiva As. 2. The Avesta of Vishnu As. 2.
20. Bhagwan Gita As. 2. Duti As. 2. Student and Clerk's Hindi-Mat As. 5. Golden Smith's
Deserted village and Mowday's Humour. Copies notes and paraphrases, each As. 4. Allahabad and
Punjab Univer Entrance examination questions solved As. 5. Delhi and Agra in Aurangzeb's time As. 5.
Delhi and its environs As. 5. Magic Ring As. 1.8.
N. B. The above 49 books of Rs. 12 including all postal charges if bought together will cost Rs. 9
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BRASS RISING FRONT, FINE QUALITY ACHROMATIC
MENISCUS LENS, GIVING PERFECT DEFINITION
AND STRAIGHT LINES, NEW IRIS SHUTTER
GIVING TIME OR INSTANTANEOUS
EXPOSURES, DIAPHRAGM
PLATE WITH F. 8, F. 11, F. 16, F. 22 APERTURES, TWO-FOLD
STAND OF SPECIAL CONSTRUCTION.

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PACKET OF DRY PLATES, ONE PORCELAIN DEVELOPING
DISH, ONE JAPANNED DISH, ONE PAPER
MACHINE DISH, ONE BOTTLE REGAL DEVELOPER,
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MORADABAD, U. P.

Figure 13: *The Central Hindu College magazine* featured advertisements, such as these two for “The Hindu Biscuit” and a “Beginner’s Photo Camera.” (Image by an unknown graphic artist. Around 1904. Advertisement page. From *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Dec. 1904. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai).

The continuous efforts of Annie Besant and others, such as Bhagavan Das, Upendranath Basu, and Gorge and Francesca Arundale, made the Central Hindu College a success. The CHC was far from being the only school directly or indirectly set up on Besant’s initiative, but it was probably the most important¹⁹ given both

19 Prakasa, *Annie Besant*, xvi. Prakasa hints at the several schools that came into being owing to Besant’s efforts. A history of the Theosophical school system remains a research desideratum. The little article by Max Lawson on this topic is an important pioneering work in this respect. His account of the “Lotus Circles” and “Golden Chain” should be of great interest to anyone who is interested in Theosophical education. His argument that the methodological

its later history and the energy Besant invested in it. Several other schools were built on the model of the CHC and became affiliated with it. The crowning glory of this success was a visit in 1906 by the Prince and Princess of Wales, who would later become George V, the King of England, and Queen Mary, his consort.²⁰ The royal couple accepted a personal invitation from Besant, who herself stood as guarantor for their safety while they visited the college compound (see Figure 14), since she would not allow the government police to enter the grounds. As will be seen below in the analyses of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, Annie Besant was a loyalist²¹ and her affection for King and Empire both shaped the curriculum of the Central Hindu College while also being a significant subject of debate.

After Besant's election as President of the Theosophical Society in 1907, she returned to India in late November to find that all was not well in the Central Hindu College: Not only did it have financial problems, but its students had also performed poorly in the last round of examinations. The CHC's financial woes were a result of the refusal of the board of trustees either to raise the fees charged by the college or to acquire state support, despite the significant growth in the number of students and staff since 1898. The college thus remained dependent on private donations and Besant financed much of its expenses with the honoraria she earned from her lectures.²² Around this time, Besant began to formulate her ideas for a pan-Indian University that would be welcoming to all faiths. Her initiative took on an official form in 1910 when she filed a petition for a Royal Charter for her "University of India," which was initially not forwarded to the Secretary of State by the Viceroy.²³ At the same time, the Indian Muslim community initiated a movement for the establishment of a Muslim University,²⁴ while

approach of these schools was based on the spiritist educational endeavor also seems plausible (cf. Lawson, "Theosophy and Education," 85–91). However, it only scratches the surface of the vast system of Theosophical education that included hundreds, if not thousands, of schools around the globe.

20 Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 86–88.

21 Prakasa, *Annie Besant*, 76–80; Herman A. de Tollenaere, "The Politics of Divine Wisdom: Theosophy and Labour, National, and Women's Movements in Indonesia and South Asia, 1875–1947" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 21.05.1996), 86–87.

22 Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 104–14.

23 Jürgen Lütt, "The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University," in *German Scholars on India*, ed. The Cultural Department of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, New Delhi, 2 vols., Contributions to Indian Studies (Varanasi, Bombay: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office; Nachiketa Publications, 1973–1976), 2:169–70.

24 For additional information on Muslim education in India, see Kumar, *Lessons from Schools*, 129–35.

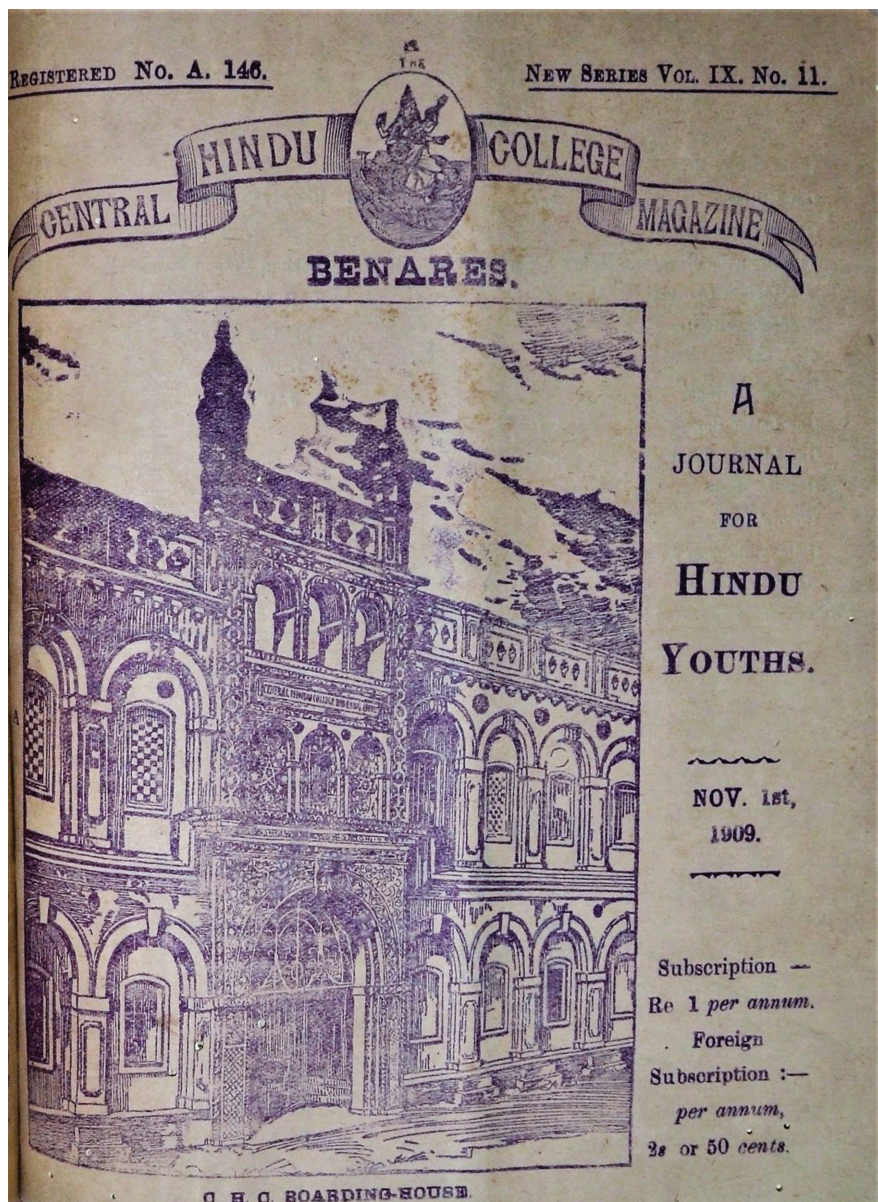


Figure 14: Cover page of *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, displayed is the Boarding House of the CHC. (Image by an unknown graphic artist. Around 1909. Cover page. From *The Central Hindu College Magazine*, Vol. IX, No. 11, Nov. 1909. Courtesy of the Theosophical Society, International Headquarters: Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai).

orthodox Hindus in the circle of Pandit Malaviya sought to establish a specifically Hindu university.²⁵

In 1909, Besant and Leadbeater identified a young Indian boy, Krishnamurti, as the future “World-Teacher.” Their proclamation of the boy’s status, and their subsequent establishment of the “Order of the Star in the East” to prepare the way for him, an organization that they sought to introduce into the Central Hindu College, led to opposition from the staff of the CHC.²⁶ Although Besant tried – at least to some extent – to mediate at first, she ultimately came to insist on her position regarding Krishnamurti, even going so far as to claim that no one could be a member of the Theosophical Society without also being a follower of Krishnamurti. This enraged many of Besant’s prominent supporters in the college, including Bhagavan Das²⁷ and George Arundale,²⁸ to such an extent that they resigned their positions. Lütt and Renold argue that the coincidence of the problems Besant encountered in raising enough money for the CHC and the lack of support for her Indian University was the reason why she agreed to merge her plans with those of Pandit Malaviya. He, in turn, was forced to work with Besant because the government would only approve the establishment of a Hindu university if it was based on an existing college.²⁹ With the strategic partnership between these two forceful individuals driving the vision for a Hindu university forward, the foundation stone of the Benares Hindu University was laid in 1916.

It seems that the traditions of the Central Hindu College concerning religious instruction, especially the daily readings of the *Bhagavadgītā* and the lectures on the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, were not continued at the BHU.³⁰ As for the

25 Lütt, “The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University,” 2:169–74. For a detailed discussion of the different movements that tried to establish “their” universities in Indian at the time, see Renold, *A Hindu Education*, 29–63.

26 For information on Krishnamurti and his brother, and on the establishment of the “Order of the Star in the East”, see Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 135–73.

27 Das was especially estranged by the actions of Annie Besant and the “Krishnamurti cult.” He wrote a long letter to the editor of the *Christian Commonwealth* which was published and later translated and republished, in which he vehemently complains about Annie Besant and the “Krishnamurti movement.” Bhagavan Das, *Das Central Hindu College und Mrs. Besant: An den Herausgeber des “Christian Commonwealth” London, England* (Berlin: Philosophisch-Theosophischer Verlag, 1914), Uebersetzt nach dem englischen Text herausgegeben von The Divine Life Press 614 Oakwood-Blox. Chicago Ill. U.S.A. Nonetheless, Bhagavan Das remained a friend and ally of Annie Besant up to her death. Prakasa, *Annie Besant*, ix.

28 Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 177.

29 Lütt, “The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University,” 2:177–78; Renold, *A Hindu Education*, 51–52.

30 Lütt, “The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University,” 2:174–84; Prakasa, *Annie Besant*, 115.

Sanâtana Dharma Text Books, we have opposing accounts. Renold maintains that the *Text Books* were used in the University and that they were republished especially for this purpose.³¹ Unfortunately, it is unclear on what evidence she bases her account. Nethercot, by contrast, maintains that Malaviya wished to destroy all copies of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, or at least to store them somewhere and not to use them in the university.³² Lütt's view is somewhere in between, maintaining that the text books were indeed used for religious instruction in the BHU but that Malaviya had them replaced with other text books some years later.³³ Whichever of these accounts is accurate, it seems plain that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* form an important part of the history of both the Central Hindu College and the Theosophical Society, and that they also contributed to the religious instruction offered by the BHU in at least its early years. In the following, the writing and editing process that led to the publication of the *Text Book* series is discussed in more detail, along with other methods for teaching religion that were used in the CHC.

13.3 The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*: The Process of Editing and Implementing the Texts in the Central Hindu College

The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* series comprises three books which were initially prepared for the religious education provided in the Central Hindu College. 1) The *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism*, first published in 1902, was a textbook for young children in question-and-answer form. 2) The *Sanâtana Dharma, An Elementary Text Book*, also first published in 1902, was compiled for older children. Finally, 3) the *Sanâtana Dharma, An Advanced Text Book*, first published in 1903, was intended for the use of the more advanced students. The authorship of the text books is usually attributed to Annie Besant, with Nethercot and Taylor adding that the books were published with the help of several of Besant's Indian colleagues, with Bhagavan Das being mentioned most prominently.³⁴ These accounts

³¹ Renold, *A Hindu Education*, 53.

³² Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 303. It seems that Malaviya did not destroy them. At least two editions of each of the *Advanced* and the *Elementary Text Books* are listed in the Catalogue of the Benares Hindu University Library from 1923. The Benares Hindu University, *The Benares Hindu University Library Catalogue* (Benares: The Benares Hindu University, 1923), 80.

³³ Lütt, "The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University," 2:191.

³⁴ Taylor does not clearly reference her source for the information that Besant wrote the *Text Books*. Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 278–79; Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, 45; Malinar, "Karmic Histories and Synthesis of 'East' and 'West'," 66. The reference given by Renold, *Benares Hindu University Calender*, is inconclusive because the referenced pages do not

are all problematic due to their being drawn from relatively late sources. The main sources for the claims concerning Besant's authorship are:

- 1) A preface on the "History of the Sanātana-Dharma Text-Books" that was included in republications by the Theosophical Publishing House of the *Elementary* and the *Advanced Text Books* in 1939 and 1940.
- 2) The *Papers Regarding the Educational Conference, Allahabad, February 1911*, in which the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* series is repeatedly mentioned (see below) and is described in one instance as "Mrs. Annie Besant's books."³⁵
- 3) What is written about the *Text Books* in either the *Central Hindu College Magazine* or in other Theosophical magazines.

In the preface to the 1940 edition of the *Advanced Text Book*, the author, G. Srinivasa Murti, includes several extracts from the *Annual Reports of the Central Hindu College*.³⁶ Therein we find an account on how the *Text Books* were drafted. First, a scheme was developed which outlined how religion should be taught in the Central Hindu College. This was drafted by Besant and Bhagavan Das and then circulated for amendments and suggestions among a number of individuals, both Indian and non-Indian and from within and outside the Theosophical Society. The draft was then reviewed, and the final scheme was approved by the board on December 30, 1900. Instruction in religion had started already before the *Text Books* were issued. According to Murti, "soon after the institution started functioning, the need was felt, as was inevitable, for proper Text-Books, on the basis of which systematic instruction could be given."³⁷ This led to the appointment of a sub-committee in order to write such books. Murti claims that "the Indian members of the sub-committee, as well as other learned scholars, supplied Sanskrit texts, English translations, and other material. Dr. Annie Besant drafted the running text of the book in English. This was done in two months, middle of May to middle of July, 1901, at S'ri-nagar, Kashmir."³⁸ Soon after, "proof-copies of it are now in circulation amongst the members of the Board of Trustees and

indicate the authorship of the text books (Renold, *A Hindu Education*, 18). Kumar, Devi, and Pruthi do not give any references at all. Kumar, Devi and Pruthi, *Annie Besant*, 98.

35 "Papers Regarding the Educational Conference, Allahabad, February 1911." Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Department of Education CCCCXLVIII (Calcutta, 1911), 82.

36 I could not obtain copies of the reports during my research in the Theosophical archives. The reports have to be there, but they were not available to me. I will therefore have to rely on the accounts by Murti for the relevant information on the *Text Books*.

37 The Theosophical Publishing House, ed., *Sanātana-Dharma: An Advanced Text-Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1940), ix.

38 Theosophical Publishing House, *Sanātana-Dharma*, ix.

the Managing Committee, and other learned Hindu friends possessing special knowledge on the subject. (A hundred proof-copies were thus circulated.)”³⁹ Following this stage, another revision of the *Text Books* was made and again “printed proofs of the first were then in circulation. The suggestions for additions, alterations, omissions, and improvements, that were received, were discussed, and decided on, at eight special meetings of the Board of Trustees, and the book, as thus finally shaped, is now in the press.”⁴⁰ If we are to trust this account, it indicates that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were the product of a collaboration by both Indian and non-Indian contributors, some of whom were members of the Theosophical Society while others were sympathetic to the Society and its goals.

13.3.1 Catechisms and other Textbooks for Religious Instruction in the Theosophical Society

In 1903, Mead wrote a short paragraph about the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* in *The Theosophical Review*. It was an introduction to a review that had been published earlier in *The Theosophist* and then reprinted. Therein Mead wrote,

we are only sorry that we have not seen a copy ourselves – and that too not only of No. III. but also of Nos. I. and II. One of our keenest regrets has for long been that the excellent series of Catechisms which was begun many years ago at Adyar, and of which only the *Buddhist*, *Dvaita* and *Vîṣhisṇûâdvaita Catechisms* have appeared, was not continued.⁴¹

Mead had not yet seen a copy of any of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* in December 1903, which suggests that they were not circulating widely in England at the time. He understood them as genuinely Theosophical writings in the tradition of other textbooks on religion issued by Theosophists. The catechisms listed by Mead are – with the exception of the *Buddhist Catechism*, of course⁴² – not well-known in the research on Theosophy. The *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism* fits well in this genre of catechisms published by Theosophists in India. Interestingly, Mead did not include *A Catechism of Hinduism* by Sris Chandra Vasu⁴³ in his list,

³⁹ Theosophical Publishing House, *Sanâtana-Dharma*, x.

⁴⁰ *The fourth Annual Report of the C.H.C., for 1902*, pp. 6–8 as quoted in Theosophical Publishing House, *Sanâtana-Dharma*, x–xi.

⁴¹ George R. S. Mead, “A Text-Book of Hindu Religion,” *The Theosophical Review* XXXIII, no. 196 (1903): 294–95.

⁴² See, e.g., Bretfeld and Zander, “Henry Steel Olcott”.

⁴³ See also Sris Chandra Basu for a biography of Vasu, see Phanindranath Bose, *Life of Sris Chandra Basu* (not indicated: R. Chatterjee, 1932).

and it thus seems that this catechism was not widely known within the Theosophical Society.

Vasu, a Theosophist and one of the Indian supporters of the Central Hindu College, first met Annie Besant in 1896 and maintained a friendship with her throughout his life. His catechism was first published in *Prasnottara*, the journal of the Indian section of the Theosophical Society in Benares.⁴⁴ We can thus assume that it was well-known among the Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College. In addition, Vasu writes in its preface that “the profits of this edition will all go towards the Central Hindu College Fund,”⁴⁵ so it seems that this catechism would have been a viable alternative to that which was issued by the trustees. This represents a remarkable instance of the discursive dynamics prevalent in the Theosophical Society. Vasu’s catechism was excluded from the curriculum of the Central Hindu College despite having been authored by an eminent Indian scholar and fellow Theosophist. However, this sleight seems not to have affected the relationship between Vasu and Besant. In a letter to Vasu written by Besant in the summer of 1912, she writes: “I shall reach Benares, if all goes well, on September 7th. I shall be so glad to be at home again, for Benares is ‘home’ to me as is no other place on earth save my master’s *ashrama*. With affection always, my dear good son, Annie Besant.”⁴⁶

At the current stage of research on the Theosophical Society, it is only possible to make assumptions about the debates that led to the exclusion of Vasu’s catechism. However, some hint may be found in the answer to the first question in Vasu’s catechism: “Who is a Hindu?”. The answer has it that a Hindu is “he who accepts the Vedas, the Smritis, the Puranas, and the Tantras as the basis of religion, and the rule of conduct, and believes in one Supreme God (Brahm), in the law of Retributive Justice (Karma), and in Re-incarnation (punar-janma).”⁴⁷ This emphasis on the Vedas and the Tantras points towards a canon of Indian literature that is quite different from that which was generally received in the Theosophical Society and from that found in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. In addition, the emphasis on the monotheistic interpretation of “Brahm” seems to contradict the theistic *bhakti* version of Advaita Vedānta (see Chapter 12) that is advanced in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, as will be elaborated below. The version of “Hinduism” in the *Text Books* is aligned with the idea of “Hinduism” that crystallized through the writings of Indian spokespersons such as T. Subba Row and Manilal Dvivedi, and which was then in turn repeated by Blavatsky and Besant in the Theosophical tradition. This must remain a mere

⁴⁴ Bose, *Life of Sris Chandra Basu*, 175–79.

⁴⁵ Sris Chandra Vasu, *A Catechism of Hinduism* (Benares: Freeman & Co., Ltd., 1899), Preface.

⁴⁶ Besant Annie, Letter, July 1912, as cited in Bose, *Life of Sris Chandra Basu*, 178.

⁴⁷ Vasu, *A Catechism of Hinduism*, 1.

observation for the time being, as further research is needed to trace these dynamics further. However, it can be noted a) that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* fit within a Theosophical tradition of issuing textbooks for religious instruction, and b) that at the time when the first, the *Catechism*, was published, at least one other catechism was available which could have been used instead as a text book for the Central Hindu College. I argue that Vasu's catechism was not used because the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were more in accord with the notion of the "Quickening of Evolution," which, at the time, was in the process of becoming the dominant interpretation of Theosophy.

13.3.2 The Question of Authorship of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*

The question of the authorship of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* has no conclusive answer as yet. In 1904, Mead wrote a review of the *Advanced Text Book*. In general, he applauded the publication because it was the first of its type: "This was the difficulty which confronted the Board of Trustees of the Central Hindu College, and with the characteristic energy of their chairwoman they at once set to work to supply themselves with the necessary instruments of instruction in the form of text-books."⁴⁸ The chairwomen mentioned here was Besant. Mead claimed that Besant's "hand and handiwork are visible in every page of the 400; especially is this the case in the 'Ethical Teachings,' with the general trend of which our readers have been made very familiar since the publication of *The Science of the Emotions*."⁴⁹ The mention of *The Science of the Emotions*, a work published by Bhagavan Das in 1900, is particularly interesting and we will return to this publication below. For the moment, it suffices to say that this mention fits well with the general narrative that the books were co-authored by Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das.

Mead's article ends with another telling passage.

If we might venture to make any criticism it is that the wording of the translations of some of the very numerous and most useful quotations (of which the Sanskrit text is wisely appended) might be occasionally improved; for instance, the English of the Shloka on p. 114 is exceedingly obscure. The transliteration of some of the Sanskrit letters also, e.g., the *n*'s, is not always regular.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ George R. S. Mead, "Reviews and Notices: A Synopsis of Hindu Faith and Morals," *The Theosophical Review* XXXIII, no. 198 (1904): 561.

⁴⁹ Mead, "Reviews and Notices," 562.

⁵⁰ Mead, "Reviews and Notices," 563.

That the translations differ in style and wording as well as transliteration might hint towards the shared work of several authors. However, while this is an interesting hint, it moves us no closer to a conclusive understanding of the process involved in writing the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.

We are confronted with similar issues concerning the print run and distribution of the *Text Books*. As Lütt writes,

Translations of them appeared in all major Indian languages. By 1906, about 130,000 copies altogether of the three textbooks in the original English and in the several translations as well as reprints, had gone into circulation throughout the country. Other colleges were founded in Indian princely states on the pattern of the Central Hindu College: in Kashmir, Mysore, Baroda, in Rajputana and even in Hyderabad, where the textbooks of the CHC were the basis for religious instruction.⁵¹

Lütt's source for these claims is Murti's presentation of the history of the Central Hindu College, was already quoted above. It seems that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were translated⁵² and that several schools adopted them,⁵³ and if this is the case then it suggests that they were issued in large numbers. We cannot be sure about the exact numbers and the translations that were published at the current state of research. It is nonetheless highly plausible to suppose that the *Text Books* had an impact far beyond the Central Hindu College. I hope that more research will be carried out on these issues in the future, and especially on the reception of the *Text Books* in Indian and "Western" academia. It is interesting in this regard that Arvind Sharma uncritically refers to the *Text Books* in his *Classical Hindu Thought*, published in 2000.⁵⁴

13.3.3 The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* between Universalism and Sectarianism

The subtitles of the *Sanâtana Dharma Texts Books* – *Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* for the basic and advanced books, and *Hindu Religion and Morals* in

⁵¹ Lütt, "The Movement for the Foundation of the Benares Hindu University," 2:164.

⁵² The very brief entry in the review section of *The Theosophist* mentions a Telugu and a Sindhi edition of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. It is also noteworthy that it mentions a "Telugu Translation Committee of the Indian section of the T.S." It seems that the translations were supervised by whole committees for each separate language. Anon, "Sanatana Dharma Catechism," *The Theosophist* XXIV, no. 4 (1903): 247.

⁵³ "Papers Regarding the Educational Conference, Allahabad, February 1911." 85–88.

⁵⁴ Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99; 188.

the case of the Catechism – summarize the aims of the works. The goal and the means for achieving these ends are outlined in the prefaces to the *Advanced* and the *Elementary Text Books*. The purpose is the “the building up of a character – pious, dutiful, strong, self-reliant, upright, righteous, gentle and well-balanced – a character which will be that of a good man and a good citizen”⁵⁵ and the means are “the fundamental principles of religion, governing the general view of life and of life’s obligations, [which] are alone sufficient to form such a character.”⁵⁶ The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are distinctly “Hindu” in their language and they use “Hindu” religious concepts, yet they do so while always claiming universality. This claim of universality is a central motif in Theosophical thought and teaching.

Malinar explains that the title *sanâtana dharma* was used by “orthodox Brahmanical circles, so-called ‘sanatanis’ [who] had begun to organize themselves as defenders of what they viewed as ‘Hindu tradition.’”⁵⁷ Besant was familiar with this context and The Board of Trustees discussed the issue in the introductions to the *Text Books*. In the *Advanced Text Book*, one reads that the “religious and ethical training” in the Central Hindu College “must avoid all doctrines which are the subject of controversy between schools recognised as orthodox.”⁵⁸ This is another instance of the Theosophical commitment, discussed above,⁵⁹ to the idea that the ancient wisdom religion involved taking a universalistic approach to religions. Diverging positions were likewise often excluded by denoting them as “sectarian,” which can be understood as a hierarchical evaluating relationizing. In the case of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, striking a balance between “universalism” and “sectarianism” was a delicate endeavor. The books had, on the one hand, to be sufficiently “Hindu” to gain the support of the Indian members of the Board of Trustees. Yet, at the same time, they had to avoid making statements, be they “Hindu” or “Theosophical,” about what would constitute a “Hindu” orthodoxy, as this would risk marginalizing or excluding those whose views or practices differed, and would thus draw the resistance of those who wished to establish a universal “Hinduism.”⁶⁰

55 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, v.

56 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, v.

57 Malinar, “Karmic Histories and Synthesis of ‘East’ and ‘West’,” 67.

58 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, I.

59 See Chapters 8, 10, and 12.

60 For a thorough discussions of these dynamics, see Malinar, “Karmic Histories and Synthesis of ‘East’ and ‘West’,” 65–71.

13.3.4 The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* as Books of Initiation

The interdependence of the *Text Books* and Besant's Theosophy is evident in several features of the texts, and in their evolutionary trajectory in particular. It is notable that the references to Hindu works other than the *Bhagavadgītā* multiply in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* when compared to those of Besant's works considered elsewhere in this book. In addition, the *termini technici* used in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are more frequently borrowed from Sanskrit than they are in Besant's writings. For example, almost everywhere throughout the *Text Books*, "Jīvâtâmâ" is used as the term for the "Self." In Besant's writings, by contrast, the term "Jīvâtâmâ" does not occur at all, although she did use "Âtmâ" frequently. But "Âtmâ" in Besant's writings referred to "Âtmâ-Buddhi-Manas"⁶¹ rather than to the idea of the reincarnating "Self." This is not to say, however, that Besant never refers to such a Self, but when she does so she tends to use the English "Self" or "Spirit" for the concept that is analogous to the Jīvâtâmâ of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.⁶²

The general objective of the *Text Books* was outlined. They were meant to teach morals and to enable the reader to distinguish right from wrong. As in Besant's thought, the idea of good conduct was connected to evolution. The "Will of Ishvara" is the force that guides evolution, and the fundamental moral principle is that "to work with this Will is Right; to work against it is Wrong."⁶³ Analogous ideas are formulated in Besant's writings.⁶⁴ As will be discussed below, the principle that appears in Besant's writings as submission to the "divine will" in order to accelerate evolution was also the main subject of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. The language nevertheless changes in some respects, and concepts such as "Sat, Chit and Ânanda," and especially Ânanda as "Bliss," become more important

61 E.g., Besant, *The Seven Principles of Man*, 59. This usage of the term can be seen in many other writings, such as *Death and After?*, *Man and His Bodies*, and *The Ancient Wisdom*. More detailed research would be welcomed to develop a more comprehensive picture of the use of the term in Besant's writings. It seems that there is a shift from the idea of Âtmâ as simply being a principle connected to Buddhi and Manas to a more complex understanding of Âtmâ as the reincarnating Self, which is closer to the idea of Jīvâtâmâ in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.

62 E.g., Besant, *The Birth and Evolution of the Soul*, 15. In Besant's *Bhagavadgītā* translation, *âtmâ* is usually translated by "Self" or "Spirit." More research is needed on the topic of Besant's *Bhagavadgītā* translations, as they change in wording over the editions, and it is still unclear how well Besant knew Sanskrit and how much she was aided and influenced by her associates in Benares, most prominently Bhagavan Das.

63 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 115 – *The Elementary Text Book* always appears as such in footnotes.

64 See, e.g., Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 284. See also Chapter 8.

in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. Their key concepts of sacrifice and duty as daily practice, mediated by social institutions and ideals which lead to initiation, are structurally coherent with Besant's writings. What is notable here is that the idea of mental powers (see Chapter 8.2) has a less explicit role in the *Sanâtana Dharma Textbooks*.

I argue that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* stand in the same tradition as Besant's "Quickening of Evolution" and that they were conceptualized as books that aimed to prepare students for initiation. Initiation thus provides the primary focus for the present chapter, in which it will be shown that the ethics described in the *Text Books* are derived from the preliminary stages of initiation as they appear in Besant's writings.

13.4 The Ethics of Initiation

In the *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism*, question forty-seven asks: "What are Right and Wrong?" "T'shvara guides His worlds along the road that is best for them; [it is answered] all that helps the worlds to go along that road is Right; all that hinders them is Wrong."⁶⁵ Doing that which helps the worlds' advance means that right conduct is that which accelerates evolution, while that which "hinders evolution" is wrong.⁶⁶ This view is wedded to a moralizing pedagogy which aims at obedience to the teacher and to the divine will, with this obedience being equated with human progress.⁶⁷ The *Catechism* thus introduces a distinct mode of conduct to the youngest pupils of "Hinduism," and a mode of conduct that aligns with the general idea of the "Quickening of Evolution" discussed in Chapter 8. It will be seen that the ethics presented in the *Text Books* build on the Theosophical tradition. At the same time, numerous divergences, at times only apparent as nuances in the textual layer, indicate multifaceted processes of hybridization meshing together in these works. These claims will be elaborated in what follows and will be traced through the *Elementary* and the *Advanced Text Books*.

⁶⁵ The Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism: A Catechism for Boys and Girls in Hindu Religion and Morals* (Benares: Board of Trustees, Central Hindu College, 1902), 14.

⁶⁶ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 275 – *The Advanced Text Book* always appears as such in footnotes.

⁶⁷ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma Catechism*, 16.

13.4.1 The Ethical Science as the Means for the “Quickening of Evolution”

Ethics in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were understood as the “Ethical Science.” This science was presented as “a definite and systematically arranged series of facts of conduct in their proper relations to each other.”⁶⁸ This statement indicates that the “ethics” were based on “facts” and that the authors of the *Text Books* understood these “facts” and were the authorities on “correct” human conduct. The authors thus positioned themselves as moral teachers occupying a pivotal position in the hierarchy of educators. The claim that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are based on an “Ethical Science” can be read as an attempt at relationalization. The ethical rules found within are positioned as universal laws based on scientific facts. The deployment of a supposedly scientific epistemology in an attempt to translate the structure of scientific reasoning into a presentation of “Hindu” ethics is an instructive and striking example of hybridization.

The aim of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* was to show “men, through the Science of Conduct, how to live in harmony with each other and with their surroundings.”⁶⁹ The language of obedience found in the *Catechism* was substituted with a language of mutual love and happiness in the *Elementary Text Book*,⁷⁰ and then relativized in the *Advanced Text Book*. This shift can be understood as being based on the idea of individual progression. While younger children are supposed to follow their teacher uncritically, older children, by contrast, should follow the code of conduct given in the *Text Books* because they understand the underlying principles. “Ethics” are also presented as science, “the Science of Conduct,”⁷¹ in the *Advanced Text Book*, but

the conduct of man has reference to his surroundings, as well as to himself. We have to ascertain what is good in relation to those who form our surroundings, as well as in relation to the time and place of the actor; and we may take a wider and wider view of our surroundings, according to the knowledge we possess. [. . .] Ethical Science is therefore a relative Science.⁷²

The “ethics” presented are connected here to stages of development – “the knowledge we possess”⁷³ – of the individual and his surroundings. These surroundings were understood in Besant’s Theosophy to be the results of the individual’s past

⁶⁸ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 107.

⁶⁹ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 107.

⁷⁰ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 107.

⁷¹ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 257.

⁷² Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 257.

⁷³ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 257.

evolution as well as providing the necessities for its further evolution. In Besant's thought, this view was connected to her ideas about *karma* and how *karma* was the principle which secured human progress. In her concept of evolution, individual humans have to acquire every experience that is possible if they are to reach the end of this evolution. The effects of *karma* were thus such as to bring human beings to the right place and time to gain the experiences they require in order to take the next steps in their evolution. On this view, it was not only the circumstances that were influenced by *karma* and served as instruments of further evolution, but also the bodies which were shaped according to the current level of the individual's evolution. Each new body acquired in the sequence of reincarnations would be better fit to express the Âtma within and to facilitate the transfer of consciousness upwards. In Besant's later writings, certainly no later than *The Evolution of Life and Form*, this view was connected to an idea of vibrations which needed to be in harmony with each other and with the vibrations coming from "Îshvara" in order to communicate with the bodies and with the higher being, thus leading to swifter progress.⁷⁴

If read through the lens of Besant's Theosophical thought, then, it seems that the "ethics" of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were meant to be the means by which to accomplish a swifter individual evolution. It is argued in the following that the general idea of "ethics" in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, as well as many specific paragraphs, should indeed be read against this background. As discussed in Chapter 8, initiation stood at the core of the "Quickening of Evolution" because it was only after initiation that the most significant progress could be made. For this reason, I will discuss the ethics elaborated in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* with a focus on the preliminary stages of initiation.

13.4.2 Unity as the Foundation of Universal Ethics

The foundation of the ethics in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* is claimed to be the unity of all beings, meaning that "in each separate upâdhi there is a part or reflection of the One Self."⁷⁵ This is repeated in the *Advanced Text Book*, where it is said to be the only firm basis of morality: "The *first* thing we learn from religion

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Besant, *Reincarnation*, 64; Besant, *Reincarnation*, 70; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 350; Besant, "Karma the Law of Causation, of Justice and the Adjustment of Effects," 77; Besant, "Karma the Law of Causation, of Justice and the Adjustment of Effects," 77; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 319; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 392; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 348; Besant, *Evolution of Life and Form*, 17; Besant, *Evolution of Life and Form*, 28–29.

⁷⁵ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 111.

is the Unity of all selves, and this is the foundation of Ethics. Ethics is built upon: THE RECOGNITION[!] OF THE UNITY OF THE SELF AND THE DIVERSITY OF THE NOT-SELF.”⁷⁶ On this basis, mutual help is “the only thing that really helps each, and that what injures one really injures all.”⁷⁷ The *Advanced Text Book* presents the idea of unity with the “One Self” as the highest good: “The ultimate object of Morality, of Ethic, of the Science of Conduct, is to bring about Universal Happiness, Universal Welfare, by uniting the separated selves with each other and with the Supreme Self.”⁷⁸

The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* claim that this principle of unity was introduced by the *ṛṣis* based on “reason.” The “reason” spoken of here is equated with “chit,” as this is the one principle which enables “all mental processes, concrete and abstract, the perception in the higher as well as in the lower worlds, direct clear vision of truths as of objects.”⁷⁹ This is why “the authoritative declarations of the Shruti on general morality are [the] final [. . .] binding and universal obligation.”⁸⁰ It follows from this that every insight deduced by reason is authoritative truth. This morality of “union” is relationized in an epistemologically hierarchical way to every other every other ethical framework. Following a two-fold logic, this morality is declared to be a science based on reason, which “reason” is itself said to be based on the higher faculty of “chit” and thus to be a transcendental universal principle. Likewise, this universal law is included in the Theosophical master narrative, in which the *ṛṣis* are presented as advanced teachers of the ancient wisdom. The term “chit” is translated into the scientific epistemology while also rooting it in another epistemology based on higher knowledge.

The “reason” in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* is, on the basis of the premises mentioned above, considered to be the faculty that is able to “distinguish between precepts of universal and those of local and temporary obligation.”⁸¹ This is also one of the qualities of the *ṛṣis*, who are thought to be able to interpret the Shruti in such a way that it can be adapted to specific times and places. Against this background, the *ṛṣis* are presented in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* as advanced initiates, “Masters” who taught the Ancient Wisdom according to the needs of given times and places, or, to put it another way, in a

76 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 262.

77 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 111. This is similarly repeated in the *Advanced Text Book*. Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 263.

78 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 258–59.

79 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 265.

80 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 264.

81 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 265–66.

manner appropriate to particular stages in the evolution of humanity. The ability to perceive the “universal,” in contrast to the “local and temporary,” is the first preliminary quality of the would-be initiates (see Chapter 8.2). The key point here is that the “permanent,” which equates with the universal, is what is most important. This idea of the “permanent” and “universal” principles also applies to the “real Self,” which is taken to be the foundation of the universal unity.

13.4.3 Love and Hate Equal Unity and Separateness

The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* argue that “the recognition of the Unity of the Self by the Reason, which is Wisdom, shows itself in a world of separate forms as Love.” Similarly, “the many-ness of the Not-Self is the cause and explanation of Hate.”⁸² A similar motif can be found in Bhagavan Das’ *The Science of the Emotions*, published in 1900, which was identified by Mead as one of the models for the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. Das wrote that the “desire to be united with or separated from an object is Love (राग, raga) or Hate (द्वेष dveṣha).”⁸³ Love projected to higher beings, and especially to God, was understood by Das as, “Love universal and the capacity for work in identification with the life of Ishvara and gradually to find greater and greater joy in sacrifice for others, even as He finds joy in sacrifice for His worlds.”⁸⁴ This view of love is also one of the main concerns of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* and accords with Annie Besant’s Theosophical thought.⁸⁵ The depiction of love here can also be read as a reference to *bhakti*, which I discuss in relation to Row’s theistic *bhakti* Advaita Vedānta in Chapter 12.

The idea that the works of Das and Besant are connected both to each other and to the contents of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* is further suggested by Das’ claim on the opening pages of his 1900 publication. There one reads:

From वैराग्य, *vairāgya* – from the ceasing of desire – from विवेक *viveka* – from the discrimination which sees that all objects of desire are limited and fleeting, and, therefore, painful – from these alone, but from these without fail, proceeds the बोध, *Bodha*, the

⁸² Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 271.

⁸³ Bhagavan Das, *The Science of the Emotions* (London, Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900), 22.

⁸⁴ Das, *The Science of the Emotions*, 182.

⁸⁵ It seems that the collaboration between Das and Annie Besant was close at the time. Das included the following statement in his book: “INSCRIBED TO ANNIE BESANT, BY WHOSE WISH AND UNDER WHOSE GUIDANCE THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN.” Das, *The Science of the Emotions*, not paginated.

Knowledge, the true Philosophy that grasps that which is not limited, not fleeting, and, therefore, not painful.⁸⁶

Viveka and *vairâgya* are similarly the first two preliminary stages of initiation in Besant's thought, and are also included in the stages of initiation in the work of Blavatsky and Dvivedi work (see Chapters 9 and 11). Around 1900, Das and Besant seem to have worked in close collaboration, as is suggested by several mutual influences on their thought. Not only do we see this in Das' *The Science of the Emotions*, but it is also apparent in Annie Besant's later work, *A Study of Consciousness*, from 1904,⁸⁷ in which the motif of "love" is repeated and connected to the idea of the "Quickening of Evolution." Worship based on this "love" is one of the most important elements in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, since the worship of ideals, for example in the form of heroes, was understood as one of the means by which individuals could elevate themselves. This point will be developed in more detail below in the discussion of "Hero-worship."⁸⁸

13.4.4 The Right and Wrong of the Relative Morality: The Two Paths and the Stages of Evolution

The third chapter on the "Ethical Science" is entitled "Right and Wrong." It begins with a description of the two paths, the well-known *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti mārḡas* of Śāṃkhya philosophy, which together are termed "evolution"⁸⁹ in the *Text Books*. This translation transfers these concepts, which did not appear in Besant's earlier writings, into the center of (Theosophical) evolutionism. It seems that Besant only adopted the idea of the *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti mārḡas* – they appear most prominently in her commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* – after the publication of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.⁹⁰ This is an interesting point because it suggests that Besant

⁸⁶ Das, *The Science of the Emotions*, 10.

⁸⁷ The connection between Das' work and Besant's work has already been noted by Crow. He interprets two points in a totally different light to me. First, he does not credit the Indian Theosophists with any agency, but sees them as simply repeating Theosophy employing Indian terminology. I strongly disagree on this point. The other assumption I would contest is Crow's view that the system proposed in terms of bodily control served primarily to maintain control over the Theosophical Society and to claim exclusive contact with the masters. Crow, "Taming the Astral Body," 699.

⁸⁸ E.g. Annie Besant, *A Study in Consciousness: A Contribution to the Science of Psychology* (London, Benares: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904), 325.

⁸⁹ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 115.

⁹⁰ Besant, *Hints on the Study of the Bhagavad-Gītā*, 67.

may have learned about the concepts from one of her Indian informants, possibly Bhagavan Das, during the writing process that led to the publication of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*. However, this must remain a possibility for now as several other sources can plausibly be suggested as providing the origin for her interest in the concepts (Subba Row, for example, talks about the two *mārgas* in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*).⁹¹

In the *Text Books*, the two paths were translated into a concept of evolution and interlinked with the “divine will,” which latter provides the basis for human progress as it enables one to determine the difference between “right” and “wrong”: “These two paths make up what is called evolution, and along this road of evolution the Will of Īshvara in His aspect of Viṣṇu, is guiding His universe. To work with this Will is Right; to work against it is Wrong.”⁹² Interestingly, the individualist tone that is rather prominent in Besant’s Theosophical writings is somewhat subdued in the *Text Books*. Good conduct is rather presented as being connected to the general evolution of the whole world: “Speaking generally, that which is suitable to the stage of evolution which the world has reached, that which helps it onwards, is RIGHT; that which obstructs and hinders evolution is WRONG. For the will of Īshvara points steadfastly to the highest good, and guides His universe towards good.”⁹³ The aim of good conduct is declared here to be an acceleration of evolution – “helps it onwards” – by working with the will of Īshvara. At this point in the explanations in the *Elementary Text Book*, the relativity of the ethics to the stages of evolution is made explicit. It is explained that all of one’s desires that lead towards “unity” should be followed because the world at large is on the turning point from the *pravṛtti* to the *nivṛtti mārga*, with the former being equated with the lower stages of evolution and the latter with the higher stages.⁹⁴ This is repeated in the *Advanced Text Book*, in which the *nivṛtti mārga* is described as “spiritual evolution.”⁹⁵ In passing across from the lower to the higher stages, the desire the desire for “separateness” is given up and replaced by the desire for “unity.” It is this desire that is identified as marking the difference between advanced human beings and “animals, savages, and backward undeveloped Jīvātmās.”

For animals, savages, and backward undeveloped Jīvātmās, whose individuality is still very weak, separateness has still to be aimed at, and what is right or wrong for the more

⁹¹ Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 92.

⁹² Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 115.

⁹³ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 275.

⁹⁴ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 115.

⁹⁵ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 274.

advanced is not yet right or wrong for them. This is what is meant by saying that morality is relative. It is related to our position in evolution, to the path we are on.⁹⁶

The quotation above points to two dimensions of evolution. First, there is a correspondence between the stage of evolution and the code of conduct maintained by the individual in this stage. Secondly, this correspondence is expanded to whole races, encompassing a “morality” of “savages” and “undeveloped” individuals in general. Such a relativized “morality” could potentially justify any kind of action. Inherent in this view of morality are hierarchical distinctions between, and biases towards and against, races: Some humans are almost equated with “animals” and are categorized as underdeveloped “savages,” a view that partly contradicts Besant’s claim that human beings are qualitatively different from animals in their evolution.⁹⁷ This perspective was, however, controversial within the Theosophical Society and forms part of the general concept of the “Quickening of Evolution” (see Chapter 8.2). The idea of the relativity of morality is translated in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* into the idea of the *āśrama* system and the *varṇas*.

13.4.5 Recontextualization in Theosophical Evolutionism: The *Āśrama* System and the *Varṇas*

In the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*, the *āśrama* system and the *varṇas* are described as guidelines for ways of conduct that are fitting for the stage of evolution one has reached. Social status, as well as changes due to life cycles, are recontextualized and located within the grand scheme of evolution and individual progress.

The Āshramas and the Varṇas were given in order to shew people what kind of virtues they should aim at, in the particular place and time in which they find themselves, and thus to help on their orderly evolution. As all men have not the power nor the time to find out for themselves the Will of Īshvara, the Shâstras have been given to tell us of that Will, and so to help us in distinguishing between Right and Wrong.⁹⁸

The Āshramas and Varṇas⁹⁹ are presented as guidelines the following of which allows one to be secure that one is acting in line with the divine will, the “Will of Īshvara.” These guidelines, it is claimed, were championed by the “Shâstras.” Dharma is presented in the *Text Books* as a set of virtues corresponding to the

⁹⁶ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 115.

⁹⁷ Besant, *Reincarnation*, 61–62.

⁹⁸ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 117.

⁹⁹ The terms are given here as they appear in the *Text Books*, without the normal diacritics.

stages of evolution. Adopting these virtues would “help [the person] on their orderly evolution,”¹⁰⁰ which we can understand as another way of saying that it will “accelerate their evolution.” The Âshramas and the Varṇas are discussed in the *Text Books* as an example of the laws given by Manu. The “four Âshramas [the *Text Books* state] are dictated by the facts and laws of individual evolution; and the rules of the four Castes by the facts and laws of human evolution at large.”¹⁰¹ What are identified as the social rules of Indian society are described as parts of the ancient wisdom religion that were institutionalized in order to facilitate the evolution of mankind and all “jivas.” We read that these universal “divisions” according to the *varṇas* and *āśramas* are to be found everywhere. As is the case with the claim about the exalted position of Manu (see below), the Indian system is evaluated as the most concrete and thus the system that is best able to help individuals forward in their evolution.

The Shastras are transferred into the Theosophical master narrative through the claim in the *Text Books* that “the ancient Sages and Seers [. . .] have left to us a complete outline of the scheme of evolution of our world-system, and have also left to us general rules for so dealing with our own life and the lives of others.”¹⁰² The most prominent of these “ancient Sages and Seers” in the *Text Books* is Manu, and, with the exception of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Manusmṛiti* is the most frequently quoted scripture in the *Text Books*. The *Manusmṛiti* was the most widely translated and best known of the *Dharmaśāstras* at the turn of the 20th century, with Georg Bühler’s 1886 translation in the *Sacred Books of the East* remaining the standard translation for over a hundred years.¹⁰³ In the *Text Books*, Manu is presented as “the great Law-giver of the race.”¹⁰⁴ Manu was translated into the Theosophical master narrative in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* and represented as a (Theosophical) master himself, with Besant adopting in her later writings the terminology of Manu as the “great ancient Law-giver” of India.¹⁰⁵

100 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 117.

101 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 279.

102 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 279.

103 Patrick Olivelle and Suman Olivelle, *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmasāstra*, South Asia Research (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3–4.

104 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 4.

105 Annie Besant, “The Ancient Ideal of Duty: Speech Delivered at the 27th Anniversary, 1910, of the Srinivasa Mandiram and Charities, Bangalore,” in *For India’s Uplift: A Collection of Speeches and Writings on Indian Questions*, ed. G.A. Natesan, 2nd ed., rev. and enl (Madras: G.-A. Natesan, 1917), 7; Annie Besant, *India Bond or Free? A World Problem* (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, Ltd, 1926), 20.

Manu is further described as the producer of the *Pitris* and of numerous “divine and human races.”¹⁰⁶ The *Pitris* are discussed prominently in Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*¹⁰⁷ and in several of Besant’s writings¹⁰⁸ as those beings, also called the *Manasaputras*, who brought about the swifter progress of humanity in the past, a view that was connected to the idea that there is a qualitative difference in evolution between humans and animals (see Chapter 6.7). Although the role of the *Pitris* is not discussed in detail in the *Text Books*, it is stated that “the full meaning of descent from *Pitris* is ascertainable only by study of occult science.”¹⁰⁹ In the light of the status given to Manu as a (Theosophical) master, this statement can be understood as a two-step relationalization: 1) Manu is first relationalized to other (religious) Law-givers and placed in an exalted position as the producer of the *Pitris*. This is a move of hierarchical genealogical relationizing, as Manu can be understood as the ancestor of all later “law-givers.” Then, 2) it is stated that the “full meaning” can only be understood through “occult science,” which can be equated with Theosophy. This can be described as a move of hierarchical epistemological relationizing.

It can be observed that numerous elements, such as the *varṇas* and *āśramas*, were translated into (Theosophical) evolutionism and relationized a) to other religions and b) to Theosophy. Similar translations of a wide range of elements will be discussed in the following section, beginning with the *guṇas*, which are discussed as characteristics of certain stages of evolution in the *Text Books*.

13.4.6 The *Guṇas* as Bodily Tendencies which Determine the Path of Human Evolution

The transition between the two paths, *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti mārgas*, is described in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* as the result of bodily tendencies that accord with the composition of the three *guṇas*: *tamas*, *rajas*, *sattva*.¹¹⁰ This is an interesting example of the incorporation of Śāṃkhya terminology in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*. Physical explanations concerning tendencies within the bodies leading to higher stages of evolution are common in Annie Besant’s Theosophical writings, although she usually employs language that is more

¹⁰⁶ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 114–17.

¹⁰⁸ Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 423–25; Besant, *The Birth and Evolution of the Soul*, 14–15.

¹⁰⁹ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 202.

¹¹⁰ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 286–87.

rooted in “Western” science.¹¹¹ But Besant also refers to the *guṇa* in several instances, especially in connection with the transitions from one tendency to another in the evolution of humans.¹¹²

The general trajectory of the process of development presented in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* tends towards the development of the higher qualities associated with the sattvic *guṇa*. We read in the *Text Books* that “When Sattva asserts itself man begins to realise the littleness of efforts directed towards the personal self [. . .] He takes a calm and broad view of all things. He discriminates between the real and the unreal.”¹¹³ Here we find included in the description of the sattvic quality of evolution the two main characteristics of the first two preliminary stages of initiation: *viveka*, discrimination “between the real and the unreal,” and *vairāgya*, indifference,¹¹⁴ “a calm and broad view” with regard to worldly objects (see Chapter 8.2).

This is an instructive piece of evidence for the repetition in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* of the view that the preliminary stages of initiation, with their main aim of “Quickening Evolution,” serve as the basis for ethical instruction. It can also be observed that several elements, such as the *guṇa*, the *varṇas*, and the *āśrama* system, are translated into this evolutionary scheme in the *Text Books*. The integration of these books in the Indian educational system involved, then, an act of de- and recontextualization. In the next section, another de- and recontextualization will be discussed, that of the Indian epics, which were drawn upon in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* to provide numerous illustrations of the ethics expounded therein.

13.5 The Indian Epics and Heroic Ideals

In 1904, Besant wrote: “Hero-worship is often decried because a perfect ideal is not possible to find among men living in the world, but a partial ideal that can be

¹¹¹ See, e.g., Besant, *Evolution of Life and Form*, 28–29; Besant, *The Seven Principles of Man*, 14; Besant, *Evolution of Life and Form*, 14; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 67–68; Besant, *Man and His Bodies*, 59. Interestingly, in Dvivedi’s *Monism or Advaitism?*, as well as in *Rāja-Yoga*, references to the *guṇas* can be found in connection with evolution. See, e.g., Dvivedi, *Monism or Advaitism?*, 51; Dvivedi, *Monism or Advaitism?*, 49; Dvivedi, *Rāja-Yoga*, 23–24; Dvivedi, *Rāja-Yoga*, 36. Tracing these possible continuities must remain a research desideratum for the time being.

¹¹² She does so most prominently in *The Ancient Wisdom* and in *The Path of Discipleship*. See, e.g., Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 95; Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 17.

¹¹³ Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 286.

¹¹⁴ Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 77.

loved and emulated is a help in quickening evolution.”¹¹⁵ The idea of “worship” as a means for spiritual uplift and the cultivation of universal love already had a significant place in Besant’s early Theosophy,¹¹⁶ but the idea of Hero-worship seems to have found its way into her thought only around 1900. This shift was most likely a result of her interactions with her Indian collaborators in the Central Hindu College, such as Das, Sris Chandra Vasu, and others.

Ethical principles are illustrated in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* using stories drawn from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹¹⁷ The passages cited in the *Text Books* would most likely have been familiar to students at the Central Hindu College, since two volumes prepared by Besant on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* belonged to the canon of books used in the college. Some paragraphs of the text in the *Elementary Text Books* were taken verbatim from Besant’s *The Story of the Great War*, published in 1899, and her *Shrī Rāma Chandra*, published in 1901.¹¹⁸

In the *Text Books*, the stories from the Indian epics illustrate the right way of conduct and provide heroic ideals for the reader to live up to. The ethics expounded in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are accompanied throughout by illustrative stories from the Indian epics, and this is especially true in the *Elementary Text Book*. These principles were then explicitly connected in the *Advanced Text Book* to what are presented there as core teachings of “Hinduism”, such as sacrifice (=yajña), debt (=karma), and the duty that results from one’s debts¹¹⁹ (=dharma).¹²⁰ These translations of both key terms and the broader narratives of the Indian epics are de- and recontextualized in the ethics of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* in such a way that “Hinduism” is presented as conveying the ideal model of a morality that is able to accelerate evolution.

115 Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*, 405–6.

116 See, e.g., Besant, *Reincarnation*, 56; Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 83 Besant, “Theosophy and its Practical Application,” 313; Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 196–197, 394.

117 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 125–29.

118 See Annie Besant, *The Story of the Great War: Some Lessons from the Mahābhārata for the Use of Hindu Students in the Schools of India* (Benares, Adyar, London: Theosophical Publishing Society; Theosophist Office, 1899); Annie Besant, *Shrī Rāma Chandra: The Ideal King*, Central Hindu College Lectures II (Benares, London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1901), Some Lessons from the Rāmāyaṇa for the Use of Hindu Students in the Schools of India.

119 It is explained in the *Text Books* that, due to karmic effects, humans owe certain debts to numerous others, such as the ancestors, the devas, and so on. Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 103–4. These are to be repaid by sacrifices and good conduct. See Chapter 13.9.

120 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 293–97.

The idea of orientation towards the ideal and towards those who are more advanced is understood in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* as a means for a temporary elevation which goes on to become permanent when one manages to maintain a constant orientation towards the ideal.¹²¹ This concept was not alien to Annie Besant's writings,¹²² but it figures more prominently in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. There, "heroism" is repeatedly connected to the stories of the *Mahābhārata* and even more prominently to that of Rama, the protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This motif was familiar to Victorian society due to the publication in 1844 of Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. Carlyle's ideas about manliness as it manifested in certain historical persons, who he described as almost God-like hero figures, influenced not only the perception of Victorian Christianity as masculine but was also adopted in mimetic fashion by reform Hindus.¹²³ This appearance of this motif in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* and in Besant's presentation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* can be described as a recontextualization of the structure "Western Heroism" into the Indian epics.

In the *Advanced Text Book*, heroism is linked to the virtues elaborated above and in particular to the idea of help: "Compassion and Pity readily give rise to *Protection* of the weak, whenever they are threatened by those stronger than themselves, and in protecting them *Heroism* appears, the cheerful risking of one-self for the sake of a weaker."¹²⁴ Help, Heroism, and Self-Sacrifice go hand in hand in the *Advanced Text Book* with the feeling of love towards the less evolved, a feeling which demands that the more advanced help to elevate their inferiors. Another virtue discussed in connection to those of an inferior status is "*Liberality*." This is described as "a virtue [. . .] the virtue of *Charity*, is one which has been placed by Hinduism in the very first rank. दानम्, gift, has always been an essential part of every sacrifice, and the feeding of Brāhmaṇas has been no less essential."¹²⁵ This statement illustrates well how the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* proclaimed a unified vision of "Hinduism" in which certain virtues were deemed to be essential.

121 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 382. See also Chapter 13.4.

122 See, e.g., Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 376; Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 46–47. However, the motif can be found prominently in the books on the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Besant, which were also meant for use as school books. Besant, *The Story of the Great War*; Besant, *Shrī Rāma Chandra*.

123 Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 89–90.

124 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 383.

125 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 383–84.

13.6 Sat, Chit, Ânandam: Thought-Power instead of Consciousness and Love as the Guiding Principle for Universal Happiness

The qualities of the “Spirit” are described in the *Text Books* as “Sat, Chit, Ânandam – Being, Thought-Power and Bliss.”¹²⁶ These qualities are of great importance for the argument that love should be the guiding motivation for moral actions. The *Text Books* explain the interconnection of “Sat, Chit, Ânandam” as follows: Reason, which is the effect of “chit,” can guide these feelings of love towards the realization of the highest “Bliss,” which can only be found in *brahman*. Therefore, virtues which aid in “unification,” as a general principle that stands in opposition to “division,” were understood as being based on *brahman* and, consequently, one is able to make swifter evolutionary progress if one is in the possession of these virtues.¹²⁷

The *Text Books* explain that the impulse of “Jīvâtma” to look for outer objects will gradually lead to a discrimination between desirable and non-desirable objects. The process of rethinking one’s desire for such objects is triggered by the “rebuffs of pain,”¹²⁸ and these rebuffs are, the authors maintain, therefore necessary if one is to realize the difference between temporal bliss and eternal bliss. In the course of this process, men develop a “center of I-ness”¹²⁹ which becomes the separating principle for as long as their knowledge remains limited. However, the accumulation of knowledge – which is here equated with experience – leads to the center eventually comprising “the great centre of the Universe, the centre of Īshvaric existence [. . .] and becomes the possessor of universal knowledge.”¹³⁰ This statement combines Advaita Vedāntic elements, the “Ahamkāra,” with theistic ideas of an “Īshvaric existence.” The theistic nuance here recalls quite strongly Subba Row’s concept of “Hinduism” (see Chapter 12).

The progression of the “Jīvâtma” is explained step by step in more detail: 1) The rushing out to objects; 2) Learning that this might lead to pain; 3) The development of the qualities of “discrimination,” “prudence,” “forbearance,” and “toleration”;¹³¹ and finally 4) The guidance of one’s whole life by the principle of love.¹³² As a result, “the ahamkāric mind becomes Manas, or the reflection of

126 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 11.

127 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 135.

128 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 304.

129 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 304.

130 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 305.

131 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 304–7.

132 These are all qualities that are listed as belonging to the preliminary stages of initiation (see Chapter 8.2).

the Universal Mind, the emotions also break through the barrier of indriyas and ascend to Buddhi, and reflect the life of Íshvara within. Verily then the Trinity of Âtmâ, Buddhi and Manas becomes a Unity, and the man a Jîvanmukta.”¹³³ The concept of the Âtmâ-Buddhi-Manas is deeply rooted in the Theosophical idea of the constitution of man and was well-known among Theosophists at the time.¹³⁴ Similarly, the term “Jîvanmukta” was probably known to at least some of the Indian pupils and was also the highest stage of initiation described by Besant in *The Path of Discipleship*.¹³⁵

The keynote of this process of evolution is the pursuit of “happiness.” The authors explain that happiness is eventually found in the “self” because it is essentially the same as “Íshvara.” Finding the “self” means relying on the qualities of the “self,” and these are described as “Íshvara,” “purity, wisdom and bliss, Sat, Chit and Ânanda.”¹³⁶ Realizing the “self,” by which the authors mean that one becomes Íshvara, which is all bliss, is described as the object of the ethical philosophy expounded in the *Text Books*.¹³⁷ The translation of Ânandâ as “bliss” is also prominent in Dvivedi’s writings.¹³⁸ But it is interestingly absent in Bhagavan Das’ *The Science of Emotions*.

It is notable that “Sat, Chit, Ânandâ” is translated here as “purity, wisdom and bliss,” while a few pages earlier it was translated as “Being, Thought-Power and Bliss.” “Chit” is most significant in this respect, as will be seen below, the translation as “thought-power” in the earlier version hints towards an important concept that runs through the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* and becomes intelligible in the light of the Theosophical tradition. In its translation as “wisdom” and in relation to the idea that it forms the basis of “reason,”¹³⁹ “chit” is presented as the main principle that eventually enables one to realize the unity of all beings. “Wisdom” can likewise be read here as a reference to the “ancient wisdom,” which would mean that what is referred to here is derived

133 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 307.

134 Sometime also referred to as the monad or the higher triad, it was understood as the immortal, reincarnating part of human beings. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary*. Besant also often refers to Âtmâ-Buddhi-Manas. See, e.g., Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 214–15; Besant, *The Seven Principles of Man*, 59.

135 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 109. See also Chapter 8.2.

136 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 310.

137 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 310.

138 See, e.g., Dvivedi, “The Advaita Philosophy of Sankara,” 14–15; Dvivedi, *Monism or Advaitism?*, 54; Dvivedi, *Râja-Yoga*, (translations) 12–13.

139 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 265.

from a universal transcendental higher knowledge. Interestingly, “chit” is also translated elsewhere as “consciousness.”¹⁴⁰ This translation is an essential element in Dvivedi’s explanation of the working of consciousness,¹⁴¹ but in the *Text Books* “chit” and consciousness are not so closely linked. However, the idea of different stages of consciousness and the expansion of consciousness that ultimately leads one to reach the consciousness of Īśvara, which is key to Dvivedi’s notion of “chit,” is present in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*,¹⁴² as it is also in Besant’s writings¹⁴³ and in Row’s Theosophical thought.¹⁴⁴

Another paragraph in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* gives us yet a third translation of “Sat, Chit, Ânandâ,” this time as “Pure Being, Pure Intelligence, Pure Bliss.”¹⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, when translating it is not possible to define a one-to-one correspondence between words from different languages because words have to be rendered according to their particular contexts. However, in this instance, the conceptual distance between the various translations makes it almost seem as if several different authors have offered differing translations on different pages or that the authors collectively have deliberately adopted a variety of renderings. What can be seen in the paragraphs considered here is that this merging with Īśvara – in some cases “*brahman*” is used interchangeably with “Īśvara” – was identified as the goal of evolution. In the *Text Books*, this merging is more closely linked to “Universal Happiness, Universal Welfare, by uniting the separated selves with each other and with the Supreme Self”¹⁴⁶ than it is in the other examples considered in the present book.

13.7 Thought-Power and Emotional Power as Means for Helping Others: Cosmic Ideation and Its Repetition in Human Beings

In Chapter 11 of the *Elementary Text Book*, it is explained that “a virtue helps to produce a virtue in another, and a vice a vice, so that we may learn how to help others to rightness of thought and action, and thus promote their happiness. By showing love to others, we awaken love in them; by showing hate, we awaken

140 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 82.

141 Dvivedi, *Rāja-Yoga*, (translations) 4–6. See also Chapter 11.4.

142 See Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 94–95, 143, 303.

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

144 Row, *Discourses on the Bhagavat Gita*, 5 See also Chapter 12.8.

145 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 47.

146 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 258–59.

hate.”¹⁴⁷ The view articulated here points towards the idea that one’s emotions and thoughts can have a great influence on others. Viewed through a Theosophical lens, this phenomenon can be explained by reference to the thought images and thought-forms which emerge when one produces a thought.¹⁴⁸ These forms attract similar forms and can cluster together so that they might ultimately have a very significant influence on the one who originally formed the thought.¹⁴⁹

The concept of thought-forms is important to Annie Besant’s Theosophy. Besant argues that this creative power shows man’s divinity, because thought-forms are the lesser reflection of God’s ability to create the world through his thoughts, which serve as a medium for his creative power. As we have seen above, this was also a motif in Subba Row’s writings, in which he speaks of cosmic ideation.¹⁵⁰ We also find this idea in Besant’s work, where it is usually termed “Divine ideation.”¹⁵¹ The same idea is described by Dvivedi with the phrase “divine ideation,” although Dvivedi differs – at least in his early writing – in thinking that this ideation was not a deliberate action taken by a God.¹⁵² In Besant’s view, and here we see how close the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are,

One of the objects of theosophical teaching, partly lifting up the veil of the unseen world, is to give men a sounder basis for conduct, a more rational appreciation of the causes of which the effects only are seen in the terrestrial world. And few of its doctrines are more important in their ethical bearing than this of the creation and direction of thought-forms.¹⁵³

Besant claims here that “conduct” is one of the main issues of the Theosophical Society. The ethical component in Besant’s writings was closely linked to the idea of the “Quickening of Evolution.” The “thought-forms” and “thought-powers” as they appear in her writing are important because they have the potential to work on the higher planes of being and they also have, as mentioned above, the ability to elevate human beings to divinity. The control of these thought-powers was thus one of the main characteristics of the masters in Besant’s Theosophy. The training of this power was, perhaps unsurprisingly, also extremely important for aspirants.¹⁵⁴ I argue that this element in Besant’s thought constitutes part of the background to the last chapter of the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*.

¹⁴⁷ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 214.

¹⁴⁸ Besant, *The Birth and Evolution of the Soul*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Besant, “The Supreme Duty,” 188–89; Besant, *Karma*, 17; Besant, *Reincarnation*, 36.

¹⁵⁰ Row, “A Personal and an Impersonal God,” 138.

¹⁵¹ Besant, *Reincarnation*, 30–31.

¹⁵² Dvivedi, “The Purânas,” 196.

¹⁵³ Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 81.

¹⁵⁴ Besant, *Thought Power*, 73.

“Chit” is translated in the *Text Books* as “Thought-Power” (see above)¹⁵⁵ and is connected to a notion of psychological reaction to certain modes of behavior, in the sense that “an emotion – and the virtue or the vice that is its permanent mood – when exhibited by one person to another, provokes in that other a similar emotion, virtue or vice.”¹⁵⁶ These emotions have the potential to either amplify each other or to eradicate each other. The virtues that will be elaborated on below were interpreted as the foundation of a strong nation because the “student of to-day is the citizen of to-morrow.” In the next section we will see that the nation and the Empire are understood in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* as communities which have the potential to form the basis for the realization of universal unity.

13.8 Excursus: Hindu Nationalism and British Royalism

The motif of “love and compassion” is characteristic of *bhakti* traditions. The practices of *bhakti* are described in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* as practices that aim to extend the feeling of love: “The cultivation of devotion is by meditating on the Object of devotion, by worshipping Him, by reading about Him, and by listening to, talking to and associating with those who are superior in devotion.”¹⁵⁷ As a direct consequence, it is realized that God is everything and that he is manifested fully in one’s superiors, and “Reverence to the Sovereign, the Head of the State, comes naturally.”¹⁵⁸ After the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, King Edward VII ascended to the throne.¹⁵⁹ The death of the old Queen and the coronation of the new King were probably still fresh in the minds of the people of the Empire in 1903, when the *Advanced Text Book* was published. “Patriotism” was the virtue that sprang from the other virtues of “*Loyalty, Fidelity and Obedience*” towards the King, “which make a good subject”:¹⁶⁰ “The motherland, the country as a whole, is looked up to as an ideal, as an object of reverence, to be served and worked for above and beyond all else. Though, as a whole, the country is greater than the patriot, the patriot has the power of helping his country by his service.”¹⁶¹ This idea of service for the greater good is repeated and extended to the “motherland,” which was India in the first instance but “Britain” in the second. This unique

155 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 11.

156 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 393.

157 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 340.

158 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 343.

159 Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*, 397.

160 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 344.

161 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 345.

mixture of “Indian nationalism” and “Royalism” relating to pan-Indian “Hinduism” and to the British King and Empire will again be encountered below.

13.9 The Importance of Virtues for the “Quickening of Evolution”

So far, the general ideas of the *Text Books*’ ethics, and the foundations on which they rely, have been discussed. I now turn to consider the virtues relating to the bodies which surround the “self.” The aim described in the *Text Books* is the development of “the great virtue called self-control – the control of the lower selves by the higher Self, of the bodies by the Jīvâtma.”¹⁶² The appearance of the idea of “self-control” here can be read as a reference to several of the preliminary stages of initiation as they appear in Besant’s thought, but most prominently to “dama, control of the senses and the body” and to “shama, control of the mind.”¹⁶³ Several of the dimensions of this control as it is discussed in *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* can be identified as belonging to Annie Besant’s concept of the “Quickening of Evolution.” Most prominent among these is the idea of the purification of the lower bodies by the undertaking of daily practices.¹⁶⁴

With respect to the “Sūkshma Sharîra,”¹⁶⁵ the *Text Books* explain that the Indriyas¹⁶⁶ were “largely guided by animal appetites, which are distinctively râjasic.”¹⁶⁷ From this it follows that one should not trust one’s senses because the

162 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 139.

163 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 79–80.

164 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 313.

165 The Sūkshma Sharîra is described in the *Advanced Text Book* as the subtle body which comprises several koshas. It is composed from the subtle physical world of the different ethers of that region in which only manas exists. Between the region of manas and the physical body is the kâma-manas, in which manas is connected to the desires (kâma). In this intermediate region, two sets of indriyas (“organs”) play an important role: one, the “karmendriyas,” are the organs of action which belong to the lower bodies (the Sthûla Sharîras), and, second, the “jñânendriyas,” the organs of knowledge (Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 153–56). There is still no study that exhaustively discusses the differences between the various conceptions of the human constitution within the Theosophical Society. The best publication in this respect is that by Julie Chajes (née Hall). However, she focuses on the “Western” influences on the conceptions within the Society and is mostly concerned with Blavatsky (cf. Chajes (née Hall), “The Saptaparṇa,” 11–47). As it is not the aim of the present book to discuss the conception of the constitution of man in the Theosophical Society, a further discussion of the concepts expounded in the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* must remain a research desideratum.

166 See previous footnote.

167 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 314.

senses are tainted by likes and dislikes and they thus lead to separateness. Hence, the preliminary stages of initiation demand that “the mind should be guided by its own discriminative faculty [viveka and shama], and should then subdue the senses [dama],”¹⁶⁸ a process that aims at “indifference to worldly objects, Vairâgya.”¹⁶⁹ Consequently, “the mind, when wedded to the indriyas, becomes rājasic. When wedded to Buddhi, it becomes sâttvic. The mind of an average man is normally rājasic at the present day. He should make efforts to change it to sâttvic.”¹⁷⁰ When the mind is rajasic, it is constantly concerned with the outer world and is driven by the objects around it. In this state it “is compared to a chariot, which is constantly being drawn away in ten different directions by ten horses, which are the ten indriyas.”¹⁷¹ In pursuit of this goal, it is recommended that one should turn one’s mind to more abstract thoughts and away from concrete thoughts in order to avoid it being distracted: “The training of the mind is man’s most important duty, and next to this follows the control of speech and actions. At the same time, he must not neglect his physical body. All the vehicles forming his body must be controlled and made harmonious with each other.”¹⁷² To reach this point, it is necessary to develop several characteristics.

The *Text Books* refer to the *Manusmṛiti* 6, 92, which includes “some of the characteristics needed,”¹⁷³ and to *BhG* 16, 1–3, which provides an “exhaustive list”¹⁷⁴ for the achievement of full control over one’s mind, speech, bodies, and action. In the next section, I will discuss the translation of *BhG* 16, 1–3 in the *Sanâtana Dharma Advanced Text Book*.

13.9.1 Translation within the Theosophical Society; The *Bhagavadgītā* and the List of Virtues

The list of virtues drawn from *BhG* 16, 1–3 is provided twice in the *Advanced Text Book*, once on page 291, as a general description of the virtues, and a second time on page 318, where it is embedded in a discussion of the specific virtues. When comparing the two versions of the list, three points stand

168 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 314.

169 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 78.

170 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 315–16.

171 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 316.

172 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 317.

173 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 317.

174 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 318.

out: 1) The second list is most likely based on Besant’s 1896 translation; 2) However, both of the lists in the *Text Book* differ in at least some respects from Besant’s translation (see chart below); and 3) There are some major differences between the first and the second versions of the list given in the *Text Book*.

A quick survey of some of the best-known *Bhagavadgītā* translations of the time,¹⁷⁵ as well as of some of the *Bhagavadgītā* translations circulating in and around the Theosophical milieu,¹⁷⁶ will show that there was no consensus regarding how the list of virtues given in *BhG* 16, 1–3 should be rendered (see Table 8). In the light of this survey, the conclusion that the model for the second list on page 318 of the *Advanced Text Book* was Annie Besant’s *Bhagavadgītā* translation seems at least plausible. In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, there is no evidence that Bhagavan Das was involved in the 1896 edition of Annie Besant’s translation.¹⁷⁷ From this starting point, it seems at least reasonable to doubt whether Bhagavan Das was single-handedly responsible for the selection of the Sanskrit texts in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*, as is claimed in the later editions of the works.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the differences between the versions on page 291 and page 318 still requires an explanation.

175 Charles Wilkins, *The Bhāgavāt-Gēētā, or: Dialogues of Krēṣhṇā and Ārjōṇ, in Eighteen Lectures; with Notes* (London: The East India Company (C. Nourse), 1785), Translated From the Original, in the Sānskrēṭ, or Ancient Language of the Brāhmāns, 115; J. Cockburn Thomson, *The Bhagavd-Gītā: Or, a Discourse Between Kṛiṣhṇa and Arjuna on Divine Matters* (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1855), A Sanskrit Philosophical Poem, 103; Kāshināth Trimbak Telang, *The Bhagavadgītā with the Sanatsugātīya and the Anugītā, The Sacred Books of the East* 8 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882), 114.

176 Mohini Mohun Chatterji, *The Bhagavad Gītā, or: The Lord’s Lay* (Cambridge (Massachusetts): John Wilson & Son, 1887), 234–35; William Quan Judge, *The Bhagavad-Gita: The Book of Devotion*, 9th ed. (New York: The Theosophical Publishing Co., 1913), Dialogue Between Krishna, Lord of Devotion, and Arjuna, Prince of India, 110; Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial, or: Bhagavad-Gītā (From the Mahābhārata) Being a Discourse Between Arjuna, Prince of India, and the Supreme Being Under the Form of Krishna; Translated from the Sanskrit Text* (London: Trübner & Co., 1885), 144.

177 “There is no evidence that Bhagavan Das helped to edit either the first or the second edition, which latter was published in 1896” (see Mühlematter, “Philology as an Epistemological Strategy to Claim Higher Knowledge”). He is not credited for doing so, at least, and if he did one would have to explain why his name was prominently included only in the 1905 edition as co-author and then excluded again in the later editions.

178 In a 1916 edition of the *Elementary Text Book*, the preface outlining the authorship of the *Text Books* was not yet included. Interestingly, the title of the publishers changed from The Board of Trustees to The Managing Committee. The Managing Committee, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Benares: Central Hindu College, 1916). The claim of authorship is then found from 1939 onwards in the editions published by The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar. Theosophical Publishing House, *Sanātana-Dharma*;

Table 8: Overview of the Translations of BhG 16, 1–3. All lines underlined with grey include changes from one translation to another. By the author.

Sanskrit	Besant's <i>BhG</i> 1896	<i>SD Advanced Text Book</i> , page 291	<i>SD Advanced Text Book</i> , page 318
abhayaṃ	fearlessness	fearlessness	fearlessness
sattvaśuddhir	cleanness of life	sāttvic purity	clean-living
jñānyogavyavarthitīḥ	steadfastness in the Yoga of wisdom	steadfast pursuit of wisdom	steadfastness in the Yoga of wisdom
dānaṃ	almsgiving	charity	almsgiving
damas	self-restraint	control of the senses	self-restraint
yajñāś	sacrifice	sacrifice	sacrifice
svādhyāyas	study of the Shāstras	study	study of the Shāstras
tapas	austerity	austerity	austerity
ārjavam	straightforwardness	uprightness	straightforwardness
ahiṃsā	harmlessness	harmlessness	harmlessness
satyam	truth	truthfulness	truth
akrodhas	absence of wrath	absence of anger	absence of wrath
tyāgaḥ	renunciation	resignation	renunciation
śāntir	peacefulness	peace of mind	peacefulness
apsiśunam	absence of crookedness	avoidance of calumny	absence of crookedness
dayā bhūṣu	compassion to living beings	pity for all beings	compassion to living beings
aloluptvaṃ	uncovetousness	absence of greed	uncovetousness
mārdavaṃ	mildness	gentleness	mildness
hrīr	modesty	modesty	modesty
acāpalam	absence of fickleness	absence of restlessness	steadfastness

The Theosophical Publishing House, ed., *Sanātana-Dharma: An Elementary Text Book of Hindu Religion and Ethics* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1939).

Table 8 (continued)

Sanskrit	Besant's <i>BhG</i> 1896	<i>SD Advanced Text Book</i> , page 291	<i>SD Advanced Text Book</i> , page 318
tejaḥ	vigour	energy	energy
kṣamā	forgiveness	forgiveness	patience
dhṛtiḥ	fortitude	endurance	fortitude
śaucam	purity	purity	purity
adroho	absence of envy and pride	freedom from hatred and from pride	absence of envy and pride ¹⁷⁹

“Damas” is explicitly mentioned in the list. It is also one of the “mental qualities” that one must have in the “shatsampatti” stage of preliminaries to initiation. “Patience,” as a translation for *kṣamā*, is also included in the list. This rendering is especially interesting because it differs from the translation given by Besant in 1896. I argue that this change was deliberately adopted in order to adapt the passage to the wording she uses elsewhere in relation to the stages of initiation. The list also includes several virtues – such as “absence of wrath,” “peacefulness,” “mildness,” and the “absence of envy and pride” – which would correspond well with “*Titiksha*, endurance, a patient bearing of all that comes, a total absence of resentment.”¹⁸⁰

The main point made in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* concerning these virtues is that the bodies and the mind must be trained to go along with the rider (the inner Self), rather than allowing the horse (the outer bodies) to direct the rider.¹⁸¹ The metaphors of riding and the reference to *BhG* 5,34 are also found in *In the Outer Court*¹⁸² and in *The Path to Discipleship*,¹⁸³ which suggests at least some dependency. Although at the present state of research these translations processes cannot be analyzed in more detail, this provides another piece of evidence which suggests that the editing process of the *Text Books* was a complex affair, as it throws into question the supposition that Das singlehandedly provided all the Sanskrit texts and their translations. The translation of *BhG* 16 1–3 into the stages of

¹⁷⁹ All lines underlined with grey include changes from one translation to another.

¹⁸⁰ Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 82.

¹⁸¹ *Manusmṛti*. xii. 3, as translated in Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 319.

¹⁸² Besant, *In the Outer Court*, 59.

¹⁸³ Here the riding metaphor is missing. Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 60.

initiation also serves as an example of how translation can be understood as a process of hybridization.

13.9.2 The Subjugation of the Mind as the Key to “Righteousness” and “Happiness”

The subjugation of the mind is characterized by one’s insight that one is different from one’s lower bodies.¹⁸⁴ This subjugation is called “Abhyāsa”¹⁸⁵ in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*, and it is said that “this Abhyāsa will naturally strengthen Vairāgya, the absence of desire for personal and selfish ends.”¹⁸⁶ “Vairāgya” is described by Annie Besant as a preliminary stage to initiation (see Chapter 8.2), and of the one who achieves it, it is said that he “will establish himself in that constant mood of righteousness and performance of duty.”¹⁸⁷ Righteousness is understood here to be “truth” in the sense of being “real,” which is to say in the sense of the unity of *brahman* and self.

This insistence on righteousness as the only way to happiness in this world or in any other is characteristic of the Sanātana Dharma, whose very heart is duty, as justice is its key-note and unalterable law its life-breath. A man obtains every thing that he has duly earned, neither more nor less; every debt must be paid; every cause must be followed by its effect.¹⁸⁸

“Righteousness” and “happiness” are interconnected in this view because the discharging of one’s “duty” is understood as the guarantee that the “law” will maintain justice. Bearing in mind that the corresponding Indian concepts are translated in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*, the point could be rephrased as follows: Following one’s own *dharma* (duty) for the sake of *yajña* (righteousness, help) is the guarantor of karmic justice (law), which will eventually lead to *mokṣa* (union, bliss). “The virtue of *Content*,” the *Advanced Text Book* continues, “springs from a full recognition of this fact.”¹⁸⁹ The virtue of “Content” can be equated with “*titiksha*, edurance,” which is described by Besant as a result of one’s insight into the “good law.”¹⁹⁰ We

184 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 319.

185 In general, *abhyāsa* means (yogic) practice. In Advaita Vedānta it is often discussed as if *abhyāsa* is one of the means by which to overcome *avidyā*. Śaṅkara, for example, was critical of the use of *abhyāsa*. In contrast, Maṇḍanamiśra saw it as useful means for achieving this end. Bartley, “Vedānta”.

186 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 328.

187 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 328.

188 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 331.

189 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 331.

190 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 82.

read in the *Text Books* that “the contented man is happy under the most unfavourable circumstances, the root of his happiness being in himself.”¹⁹¹ This fits well with the description given in *The Path of Discipleship*.

Virtues Directed towards Superiors

One’s superiors are, the *Text Books* hold, “God, the Sovereign, Parents, Teachers, and the Aged.”¹⁹² This is illustrated, as are many other passages in the *Elementary Text Book*, by stories from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The main virtues that one should develop in relation to God are defined as “devotion” and “subjugation under the divine will,” while that which one should exhibit in relation to the Sovereign is described as “loyalty.”¹⁹³ One form of this loyalty is identified in the following way.

Patriotism, the love of one’s country, and *Public Spirit*, caring for the nation more than for oneself, are virtues that are so closely akin to loyalty that they should never be separated from it. ‘King and Country’ are the Object of true loyalty. No man should be without this love of country and the readiness to sacrifice himself for his native land.¹⁹⁴

Given the context of the *Text Books*, this passage can be read as an appeal to Hindu nationalism, but the use of the phrase “King and Country” here relationizes India to the British Empire. This interesting ambivalence can be traced through Besant’s oeuvre.

The virtue relevant to one’s parents is “obedience,”¹⁹⁵ which is also the primary virtue one should exhibit towards one’s “teacher.” “Reverence” and “service”¹⁹⁶ are added to the list of virtues directed towards teachers, while “reverence” is also the virtue due towards the aged. These virtues are described as resulting from a feeling of love, which starts out as a general feeling but then grows into “universal love”¹⁹⁷ through the process of evolution.

The *Sanātana Dharma Advanced Text Book* expands the list of virtues given in the *Elementary Text Book*. In the *Elementary Text Book*, “reverence” is presented as one of the key virtues in relation to one’s superiors. This is repeated in the *Advanced Text Book*, but to reverence is now added

Humility, the willing recognition of comparative littleness, unassociated with pain and coupled with the readiness to submit to guidance; by *Faith* in, and therefore *Submission* to, His

191 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 332.

192 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 153.

193 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 155.

194 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 156–57.

195 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 157.

196 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 161.

197 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 315.

wisdom; and by *Devotion* and *Gratitude* responding to His compassion, leading to complete *Self-Sacrifice* in His service.¹⁹⁸

Several similar motifs are also present in the stages of initiation as described by Besant. First, “faith” is key to the “shraddhâ” preliminary stage.¹⁹⁹ “Faith” in the abilities of the master as the notion appears in Besant’s Theosophy finds a parallel in the *Text Books* in “faith” in the wisdom of God. Secondly, “love and compassion” are attributed to the “hamsa” stage of initiation (see Chapter 8.2.7). In addition, the virtues of “submission” and “self-sacrifice” are leitmotifs in Annie Besant’s Theosophy.

These virtues are illustrated by and attributed to characters of the *Mahābhārata*, with Bhīṣma and Prahāda being presented as models for these virtues.²⁰⁰ The constant references to the Indian epics serve an extremely important role. 1) They have a didactic significance. By illustrating the virtues in a known setting – Indian students would probably have been familiar with the stories of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* – the virtues are connected to pre-existing knowledge and are thus more likely to be understood. 2) These illustrations recontextualize “Theosophical” ideas in the Indian epics. 3) They can be read as appeals to pan-Indian “Hinduism,” since these references imply that there is a single “Hinduism.” 4) This “Hinduism” provides an accessible route to the ancient wisdom religion and was therefore epistemologically hierarchized to other religions.

Virtues in Relation to Parents and Teachers

The last category of superiors is the “Parents and Teachers” to whom one owes the same virtues as one does to God and King, “and we may add to them the virtues of *Gentleness*, *Trustfulness* and *Teachableness*.”²⁰¹ In the case of “parents,” these virtues should be offered unconditionally because “parents are given to him by his prārabdha²⁰² karma.”²⁰³ Therefore, parents are understood

198 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 338.

199 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 86.

200 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 338.

201 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 348.

202 In the Advaita tradition, *prārabdha karma* is one of the three different kinds of karma, or, better, of the temporarily structured effects of karma. The *prārabdha karma* refers to past karma which is unfolding its effect in the current life, and these effects cannot be changed (Rambachan, *The Advaita Worldview*, 106). This concept of different karmic effects was well-known to Besant (see Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom*, 326; Besant, *Karma*, 47). Dvivedi also repeatedly refers to it in *Monism or Advaitism?* and *Rāja-Yoga*. See, e.g., Dvivedi, *Rāja-Yoga*, (translations) 31; Dvivedi, *Monism or Advaitism?*, 67.

203 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 353.

as especially fitting for the present stage of evolution. In the case of the teacher, the pupil often chooses the teacher himself and therefore must judge with his own reasoning whether the teacher has real authority. This is because, the *Text Books* explain,

in India especially, where the spirit of devotion to teachers is strong, having come down from the time when the teacher was a true teacher, there is exceptional danger of the misplacing of faith, and consequently there is exceptional need for preserving a balance of mind and for rejecting false claims.²⁰⁴

This is a pragmatic adaption to the perceived reality of the situation in India, but it also acts as a reference to the idea of the degeneration of the present era due to materialism.

Virtues in Relation to Equals

The first category of “equals” identified in the *Text Books* are the equals in the family, in particular the wife and the husband. While the books maintain that husband and wife are equals, the virtues relevant to each are nevertheless presented differently. Husband and wife “are one, not two; love makes the two into one – love protective, sheltering, tender, on the side of the husband; love yielding, sweet, devoted, on the side of the wife.”²⁰⁵ Despite the rhetoric of equality, we see quite clearly here that the *Text Books* in fact maintain an inequality between husband and wife.

Love and devotion are presented as the key virtues of wives because “a wife who truly loves and serves her husband gains more of inner development and knowledge than she can gain by long austerities and painful penances.”²⁰⁶ This position is linked to the idea of the stage of evolution of women as wives, since love in the form of submission and faithfulness is seen as the fitting virtue for this stage.

For relationships with equals outside the family, several additional virtues are added: “hospitality,”²⁰⁷ “readiness to forgive wrongs,”²⁰⁸ and “urbanity.”²⁰⁹ All of these virtues are based on the principles of love and compassion and are once again illustrated using stories from the Indian epics, especially the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These virtues directed towards equals are understood as being important because

204 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 354.

205 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 183.

206 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 179.

207 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 182.

208 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 188.

209 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 189.

those who are one's equals are the closest to oneself, and relations to them thus have the greatest potential for leading one to realize the essential unity of everything. In these relations, the feeling of "love" can be extended to the universal level. The virtues which should be practiced in the family and towards other equals in order to cultivate them as general virtues towards the world are "*Uprightness, Fair Dealing, Trust, Honour, Straightforwardness, Urbanity, Fidelity, Fortitude, Endurance, Co-operation* – these are virtues which are necessary for happy and prosperous social life."²¹⁰ In addition, "*readiness to forgive injuries* is a virtue necessary for peaceful living"²¹¹ and "*toleration* is an allied virtue that may be practised towards equals or towards inferiors [. . .] Tolerance has always been a characteristic of Hinduism, which has never sought to convert men from their own faith."²¹²

Several of these virtues can be linked either to the preliminary or to the actual stages of initiation, but tolerance provides the most striking example. Tolerance is identified as characteristic of the third preliminary stage, "*uparati*,"²¹³ and it is understood as being genuinely "Hindu." Interestingly, this idea of "tolerance" as a characteristic of "Hinduism" was also perpetuated by Gandhi,²¹⁴ among others, and featured in academic discourses.²¹⁵ Whether "Hinduism" "is" genuinely tolerant was widely discussed in the past and is still discussed now. For example, Paul Hacker maintained that "tolerance" in "Hinduism" is essentially a strategy of inclusivism in which all other forms of religion are understood as belonging to the same system but as inferior components.²¹⁶ Malinar maintains that tolerance was promoted by several notable representatives of "Hinduism," such as Gandhi and Radhakrishnan, but that this was not necessarily the opinion of the majority.²¹⁷ There are no in-depth studies regarding the influence of Theosophy on this notion of "tolerance" in "Hinduism," but it seems plausible that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* influenced this view.

In the *Advanced Text Book*, this "tolerance" is described as being "based on the belief in the One Self, and the reverent acceptance of the infinite variety of Its

210 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 370.

211 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 370.

212 Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 371.

213 Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 81.

214 Bergunder, "Experiments with Theosophical Truth," 399.

215 Stietenron, "Hinduism".

216 Paul Hacker, "Religiöse Toleranz und Intoleranz im Hinduismus," *Saeculum* 8 (1957).

217 Malinar, *Hinduismus*, 20. For a broader discussion of the question of tolerance in "Hinduism", see Harold Coward, "Tolerance and Responses to Religious Pluralism," in Jacobsen et al., *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*.

intellectual manifestations. Hence Hinduism has ever been permeated by the large-hearted toleration which is the very spirit of Īshvara.”²¹⁸ “Tolerance” should thus be the ideal for all true “Āryans” in the view of the authors of the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books*: “Such is the noble and liberal teaching of Hinduism, and it should shape the thoughts of every true Āryan, so that he may never fall into the error of trying to belittle or injure any of the religions of the world. Let him be tolerant even to the intolerant, and thus set a good example.”²¹⁹ Intolerance, by contrast, is equated with “sectarianism”²²⁰ and is identified as “undermining the ancient noble toleration of Hinduism.”²²¹ Therefore,

the true Āryan [. . .] must look on all Hindu sects as members of his own family, and refuse to quarrel with or to antagonise any. And he must look outside the pale of Hinduism, and see in the other religions that surround him rays of the same Spiritual Sun in which he himself is basking, and thus spread peace over India, and make possible for her united national existence. Let his religious watchword be ‘Include,’ not ‘Exclude,’ since the Self is One.²²²

The notion of an essential “unity” is put forward here, which appeals to Hindu nationalism. This inclusivist thinking is linked to an idea of the epistemological superiority of a pan-Indian “Hinduism,” a notion that comes close to Hacker’s idea about the inclusivism of “Hinduism.”²²³

Virtues in Relation to Inferiors

Chapter 10 in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* turns to the topic of the “Virtues and Vices in Relation to Inferiors.” The first category of “inferiors” are children, especially in relation to their parents, and the *Text Books* maintain that parents should show “*Tenderness, Compassion, Gentleness, Kindness.*”²²⁴ As the King is the most superior among men in his kingdom, the guiding “duty of *Protecting the Weal*: is incarnated in the righteous King, and it is the fulfilment of this duty which awakens the loyalty of his subjects.”²²⁵ When the virtues due to the King are recalled, we can see that the system elaborated in the *Sanātana Dharma Text Books* sets up a reciprocity of moral obligations. The *Text Books* warn of

218 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 371.

219 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 373.

220 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 379.

221 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 379.

222 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 380.

223 Hacker, “Religiöse Toleranz und Intoleranz im Hinduismus”.

224 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 197.

225 Board of Trustees, *Sanātana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 200.

the danger which is connected with the shewing out of tenderness and protection to the weaker than ourselves is the vice of *Pride*. It arises from *ahamkâra*, that gives the sense of separateness of 'I' and 'you', and thinks more of the fact that 'I am helping this weaker one,' than of sharing what is really a common store with one temporarily shut out from it by his separate form. By letting the mind dwell on one's own usefulness and power to do good, pride is awakened, and quickly ruins the good-work that has been performed. None that wears a separate body may escape the power of this subtlest and most dangerous of foes, that is known as *ahamkâra*.²²⁶

The "sense of separateness" here is given as a translation for "*ahamkara*," and identified as the major enemy of the one who seeks to do "good-work." Pride is also identified as one of the "five fetters" mentioned in Besant's *The Path of Discipleship*.²²⁷

Showing the virtues towards inferiors has a direct effect on them, the authors of the *Advanced Text Book* maintain, because "compassion and pity seek, as does all love, to lessen the distance between itself and its object, to raise its object towards itself."²²⁸ In receiving this compassion and pity, the inferior might temporarily be elevated to a higher stage of evolution and his evolution can therefore be quickened by the assistance of the superior.

"*Appreciativeness*, the full recognition of all that is best in them,"²²⁹ is understood as a necessary requirement to motivate inferiors to bring out their best, while "*patience* is also most necessary in all dealings with inferiors; lesser ability generally implies less quickness of understanding, less power to grasp or to perform, and the superior needs to practice patience in order not to confuse and bewilder the inferior."²³⁰ Patience is mentioned in all the lists of stages of initiation discussed in this book.

Let the student then remember in all his relations with his inferiors to cultivate sympathy and compassion and active beneficence. If in the family he shows these virtues to the younger and to the servants, in his later life in society and in the nation these virtues will still mark his character, and he will become a true philanthropist, a benefactor of his community and of his country.²³¹

Here we can see an idea that is frequently repeated throughout the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*: the view that the training of the virtues and an adherence to a certain code of conduct will be beneficial in the future. Implicit in this idea

²²⁶ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Elementary Text Book*, 205.

²²⁷ Besant, *The Path of Discipleship*, 107–8.

²²⁸ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 382.

²²⁹ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 387–88.

²³⁰ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 388.

²³¹ Board of Trustees, *Sanâtana Dharma: An Advanced Text Book*, 392.

is a notion of education as an endeavor that forms students to become that which their teachers intend.

In this light, the *Text Books* should be read as “books of initiation” in line with Besant’s notion of the “Quickening of Evolution.” It must, however, be noted that the “Quickening of Evolution” is not simply “adopted” but is de- and recontextualized while numerous Indian concepts are translated into it. This points to multifaceted meshing processes of hybridization in which numerous actors were involved. The *Text Books* should be understood as the products of these processes instead of conceptualizing them as the products of Das’ and Besant’s authorship.

13.10 Preliminary Conclusion: The “Science of Ethics” as the Means of the “Quickening of Evolution” and Preparation for Initiation

The *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* are instructive examples of hybridized texts within the global colonial discursive continuum around the year 1900. In the previous section, I have sought to illustrate how the preliminary stages of initiation presented in Annie Besant’s concept of the “Quickening of Evolution” were expanded into a concrete code of conduct in the *Elementary* and the *Advanced Text Books*. Almost all of the preliminary stages, including the different mental qualities and attributes, are to be found in the “Science of Ethics” that is presented in the *Text Books*. As has been shown in the previous chapters, the uptake of these qualifications was mediated by Indian Theosophists, such as Manilal Dvivedi. Their interpretation as stages of initiation was modeled by Blavatsky in *The Voice of the Silence* and then adopted by Dvivedi in the second edition of his *Rāja-Yoga*. These texts were most likely received by Annie Besant, who then elaborated her description of these stages in *The Path of Discipleship* and *In the Outer Court*. Both of these works emerged from numerous encounters in the Indian Middle Class and connected highly diverse fields within the global colonial discursive continuum.

Although the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* should be understood as the products of meshing processes of hybridization rather than as products of Besant’s authorship, I argue that the ethics expounded therein are nevertheless deeply indebted to her Theosophical thought. On the basis of these observations, I argue that the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books* were written in pursuit of the goal of the “Quickening of Evolution” of the students at the Central Hindu College, with initiation into Theosophy as their primary aim. These principles were recontextualized in an Indian context and retranslated into several Hindu concepts. This thus serves as an instance of the meshing processes of hybridization in

which this hybrid knowledge was presented as genuinely “Hindu,” which points towards a move of relationalization. This double-sided process of translation, re-translation, and de- and recontextualization with an overarching trajectory of relationalization can be read as forming part of the negotiations of concepts from asymmetric positions based on power relations that took place in the global colonial discursive continuum. This view will be elaborated in the next section.

13.11 Multiple Relationalization and the Involvement of the Author

The analytical tool abductively developed in this book has proven to be useful in several instances in this chapter on the *Sanâtana Dharma Text Books*. Several meshing processes of hybridization were identified by describing the traces found on the textual level. One of the key hybridization processes discussed here is translation, as the *Text Books* include numerous Sanskrit texts and quotations from Hindu scriptures, as well as many specific terms and phrases translated from these sources. Translation is usually accompanied by a process of de- and recontextualization. In several cases, as, for example, with the *āśramas* and *varṇas*, relationalization was deployed in order to establish relationizings of these elements to other religions, philosophies, or systems of ethics. In one instance, in which Manu was presented as the ancestor of the *Pitris*, a relationizing to the “occult science” was introduced which aimed at claiming a hegemonic position for Theosophy (= occult science).