

# 5 The redemption of the Brahman

## Garbe and German interpreters of the *Bhagavadgita*

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### Introduction

German Indologist engagement with India, as we have shown in a recent book,<sup>1</sup> tends overwhelmingly to be framed in terms of a critique of Brahmanism.<sup>2</sup> These criticisms range from accusing Brahmans<sup>3</sup> of arrogance and sophistry to corrupting the morals of the Indians and keeping them in a state of permanent intellectual immaturity.<sup>4</sup> The reasons for a critique of Brahmanism,<sup>5</sup> and for the German obsession with Brahmans, require further inquiry.<sup>6</sup> So-called critical scholarship does not simply supersede traditional knowledge, but remains locked in a struggle with it.<sup>7</sup> Further, there is evidence that Indologists were replicating the same structures of power and discourse as they claimed to critique: Western Orientalist scholarship was not the alternative to Brahmanism (as Indologists claimed), but in fact its usurper and dispossessor.<sup>8</sup> Among the many sources for the German critique, the work of the Indologist Richard Karl von Garbe (1857–1927) offers a lucid example of German anti-Brahmanic sentiments.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, taking his 1894 *roman à clef* *The Redemption of the Brahman*<sup>10</sup> as our starting point, we shall trace German attitudes towards Brahmanism and see what these attitudes reveal about Indology and, beyond that, about the encounter between India and Germany itself.

### In search of the Orient

On the death of his teacher, Rudolf von Roth, Garbe became the senior scholar of Sanskrit studies in Germany. Garbe had gained his PhD under Roth in 1876 and taught from 1878 to 1894 in Königberg. On Roth's death in 1895, Garbe was appointed to his chair in Tübingen. One year prior to his appointment, he had published *The Redemption of the Brahman*. In this work, which drew on Garbe's own encounters with Brahmans in Benares during a one-year study abroad, Garbe constructed a hyperbolic account unsparing in its criticism of Brahmanism. As this work is at the center of Garbe's antipathy towards Brahmans, it is worth tracing the events that led him step-for-step to this state.

Like many Indologists of his age, Garbe's encounter with India began through its Sanskrit texts. It was an encounter strangely mediated by European scholars:

Garbe had first studied under Roth and then studied in London and Paris (under <cite> and Eugène Burnouf, respectively). Moreover, while these scholars worked with Sanskrit texts, they could not offer Garbe a glimpse into the world of these texts. As Christopher Ryan notes:

Whereas the reintroduction of Greek learning in the fifteenth century was . . . stimulated by the arrival of both manuscripts *and* commentators skilled in their exegesis, the nineteenth-century encounter with Indian literature was limited to the manuscripts alone, and only a small number at that. As a result, the burden of explanation and commentary fell upon a select circle of European philologists.<sup>11</sup>

Until he set foot in India in 1885, it is doubtful whether Garbe had come into contact with Indian culture at all.

Arriving in the country for which he had expressed in his diary his “desire of many years” and his “newly minted youthful enthusiasm,”<sup>12</sup> he found little that met his expectations of the Orient. Only the sunset as he disembarked in Bombay seemed to excite his interest, “It was,” he wrote:

an event that will powerfully move the soul of every German in whom there breathes that sensitivity for the fabled world of the Orient which is unique to our nation, for whom India is not merely the land of cotton, of indigo, and of grain.<sup>13</sup>

Thereafter, his attitude towards India was chiefly one of resentment. He found the climate, especially the heat and the mosquitoes, to be a nuisance; he regarded the natives with a mixture of arrogance and contempt; he was especially suspicious of attempts to sell him anything; and he gradually withdrew into the company of other Europeans. As Bagchi has already dealt at length with Garbe’s racism and his support for colonialism,<sup>14</sup> we shall focus here on the reasons for Garbe’s disparagement of Brahmins.

## **Studying with the Brahmins**

Garbe’s initial reaction to Benares was one of disappointment. In place of the “magnificent temple complexes, shimmering palaces, marble stairways that led down to the Ganges, luxuriant tropical vegetation, sensuous forms of worship, and priests at prayer”<sup>15</sup> of his imagination, he found almost everything to be inferior. The Ganges was “sluggish and muddy,” “exceptionally ugly,” and no comparison (Garbe found) to the “lovely Oder”<sup>16</sup>; the vegetation “scanty” and “in the distance, looks very similar to our own kinds of trees”; the sight of the bathing terraces “grotesque but not beautiful and hardly romantic”<sup>17</sup>; the temples “small, wretched and dirty.”<sup>18</sup> Only at the sight of early morning bathers, the women fully clothed in saris, did he feel reality matched up to his expectations: the scene, he wrote, offers “the most original image . . . that the Orient can offer.”<sup>19</sup>

Overall, Garbe was horrified by the city. Each time he visited the "stinking places" and had to "force his way through" the "Hindu hordes," he experienced bouts of "nausea" he could "not be rid of for hours after."<sup>20</sup> "This is religion, these are holy places!"<sup>21</sup> he cried in amazement. "The modern forms of religion of the Hindus," he wrote:

are of such a crude and, at times, senseless nature that they are hardly worth a detailed observation and description. . . . I believe there is hardly a cult so abhorrent and so base to be found anywhere in the world as in India and especially in Benares.<sup>22</sup>

And invoking the example of the Old Testament prophets, he wished he could "with the horsewhip" "drive the wild, raging rabble – the priests out in front – out of their stinking nests of filth."<sup>23</sup>

Some of Garbe's disappointment was doubtless due to the fact that he did not find the Aryan civilization he had expected. Earlier, before his arrival in India as he had studied with Roth, Burnouf, etc. he had held that that the "modern forms of religion of the Hindus" could be "traced back in direct evolution to the beautiful ancient Indian (Vedic) religion."<sup>24</sup> But now, having seen Benares firsthand, he was convinced that "there is no bridge from the luminous forms of the Veda to the modern forms of the gods, whose monstrous representations with their tastelessly multiplied animal parts, etc."<sup>25</sup> "In spite of their *Aryan* names, . . . the modern Hindu gods," he claimed, "are not Aryan conceptions, but those of the aboriginals."<sup>26</sup> "Today the blood of the Indians is without doubt only in the least measure Aryan and even the Brahmanic lines are strongly polluted with aboriginal blood." Their "idolatry," their "meaningless customs," Garbe concluded, could only have come from the "dark side."<sup>27</sup>

Although Garbe occasionally had good things to say about the Brahmans (of the westernmost Brahmans he wrote that they are the "whitest Brahmans, indeed, their skin color is practically European")<sup>28</sup> on the whole he was intensely critical of them. Some of this was due to injured pride. "The good old Benares pandit of the old school," he found, ". . . takes little interest in European things in general and little notice of his European fellow-researches; he despises the work of the latter and ridicules whatever he hears of European method and criticism."<sup>29</sup> Garbe valued the education he received with these traditional scholars, of whom he wrote that they "commanded the *factual* with a mastery such as can only be attained by a specialist who from his youth onwards had been concerned with nothing else other than a very narrowly delineated field."<sup>30</sup> But he also noted that the "critically schooled" European scholar (though it was important for him to receive an education from the pandits in "factual matters") could lay the "historical theories of the latter simply *ad acta*."<sup>31</sup> "Whoever," he wrote, "*begins* his studies with a pandit is lost forever to science."<sup>32</sup>

In his interactions with the pandits, Garbe was constantly skeptical. He felt he had to catch his teachers out on a contradiction or an absurdity. When he heard that a certain pandit had declared himself a *jzvanmukta* (a liberated

soul), but the others, jealous, had decided not to acknowledge this accomplishment, he wondered why they did not instead decide that “the entire pandithood of Benares was, at a single stroke, ‘freed while living’.”<sup>33</sup> The *jzvanmukta* meanwhile, Garbe cynically noted, even though already saved, continued to draw his salary “as before.”<sup>34</sup> He considered the pandits “completely incapable” of “adapting themselves to European thought” and therefore, whoever wished to work with them, “had to simply accustom himself to the Indian manner of thinking and teaching.”<sup>35</sup> That did not mean one could let one’s guard down: as Garbe wrote, “one had not only to follow the man [i.e., the teacher], but also to keep tabs on him at every turn.”<sup>36</sup> Early on, Garbe discovered that the pandits “never concede their ignorance.”<sup>37</sup> Even if a sentence in the text was “fully unclear” to the pandit, the pandit would begin “to speak and to explain . . . and after one or two hours had passed [he, Garbe,] would find that the teacher had no idea of the topic he had been explaining.”<sup>38</sup> Against such “Brahmanic sophistry,”<sup>39</sup> Garbe felt he could do little except to constantly press them even as they turned evasive, once even wagging his finger at his teacher after finally catching him out.

From his diary, we also know that Garbe struggled with Indian philosophy. He complained bitterly about the philosophical exercises his teachers set him; he had to “grasp concepts which cannot be translated into European languages, understand things that have never been thought in Europe, and grasp combinations that are only possible in India.”<sup>40</sup> “And the whole time,” he grumbled, “the pandit does not have the least little idea—and the more learned he is, the less of an idea he has—what must be difficult and what easy for the European to understand . . .”<sup>41</sup> Once, when his teacher tried to explain something to him that required a series of negations (of what it was not), Garbe retorted that the use of the word *abhava* (non-being) should be punishable with “a hundred blows of the cane.”<sup>42</sup> It is clear from this that, as Bagchi notes, Garbe felt that he was the “teacher who had to educate the pundits.” “Everything was convoluted, and explanatory examples were always from the ‘fabricated world of gods and demons.’”<sup>43</sup> Reading Garbe’s account of his stay in Benares, we have to wonder what he gained from all this, why he had bothered to come, and why he had been funded for a period of study abroad in the first place. Most importantly, his account provokes the question of why, if he had failed so abjectly to understand the texts he had been sent to study, he was permitted, on his return to Europe, to pose as the authority on Indian philosophy.<sup>44</sup>

### Reading the *Bhagavadgītā*

Garbe was not alone in his antipathy towards the Brahmins. As we have shown in our book, German anti-Brahmanism has a long history, going back to an earlier generation of Indologists (among them, Lassen, Holtzmann, Sr., and Garbe’s own teacher, Roth).<sup>45</sup> In fact, there is a direct, causal link between German anti-Brahmanism and German Indology, the latter constituted itself as a discipline precisely through identifying what it was not: it was not traditional,

it was not confessional, it was not dogmatic, etc. Thus it saw itself as scientific and *critical* precisely because it was, in its very inception, against traditional authority.

The suspicion of traditional authority is the hallmark of the Enlightenment, even though, as Gadamer remarks, this suspicion was often misplaced.<sup>46</sup> As we have come to realize in the wake of Gadamer's seminal work, to be against tradition is not a sufficient criterion for being scientific; there is a form of traditional authority that is legitimate because it is founded on an appeal to reason.<sup>47</sup> Thus, once we set aside the simplistic equation of being against Brahmanic tradition with being critical, we need to ask just what is "scientific" about Indology. We shall take up Garbe's interpretation of the *Bhagavadgīta* as an example.

In 1905, in response to Holtzmann's claim that the original *Bhagavadgīta* had been a pantheistic poem (with later theistic interpolations),<sup>48</sup> Garbe published his own edition and reconstruction of the text.<sup>49</sup> Against Holtzmann's claims, he sought to show that it was the pantheistic doctrines that had been imposed and intruded upon the text. Garbe presented eight main arguments for seeing the GTa as a theistic text:

- 1 He cited *Gīta* 7.19 which says, "At the end of many lifetimes, the sage approaches me with the thought 'Vasudeva is everything.' Such a noble-minded one is very hard to find" and interpreted this passage as evidence that "Krishna is very rarely interpreted as the All (or as Brahman), but rather almost always as a personal god." "Does not the redactor," asked Garbe, "tell us in clear language here, *that the equation of Krishna with Brahman was originally unfolding in his time?*"<sup>50</sup>
- 2 He argued that "Krishna is at first only occasionally identified with Brahman in the *Gīta*":

At times the terms Krishna and Brahman are placed close to each other as distinct [terms] so that we almost have the impression that the redactor shied away from asserting the identity of Krishna and Brahman too forcefully in light of the evidently theistic character of his original.<sup>51</sup>

- 3 Garbe further pointed out that in verse 8.1, "Arjuna asks 'what is this Brahman?'" and Krishna does not respond in verse [8.]3 with 'I am it,' but 'Brahman is the imperishable highest.'"<sup>52</sup> He took this as evidence that Kṛṣṇa, at least in the original poem, was distinct from Brahman.
- 4 Garbe claimed that:

Kṛṣṇa and Brahman are expressly distinguished from each other. They are not only two here, but also throughout the poem as a whole (ignoring precisely the passages where the Vedantic redactor completely identified and mixed the two notions with each other).<sup>53</sup>

5 According to him:

in the old poem, Krishna referred to himself—and Arjuna to Krishna—as an individual, a person, a specific divinity; [whereas] in the ingredients of the revision the neutral Brahman appears as the highest concept and is occasionally equated with Krishna.

From this he concluded: “in a nutshell: the old poem proclaimed a [religion of] Krishnaism philosophically founded on the basis of Samkhya-Yoga; the elements of the revision preach Vedantic philosophy.”<sup>54</sup>

- 6 Garbe also cited the general opinion, “known since a long time,” “that the doctrines of Samkhya-Yoga are the foundations of the philosophical observations of the *Bhagavadgita* and Vedanta steps back significantly next to them.” As further evidence, he cited the fact that the former are frequently mentioned in the poem “by name”; in contrast, “Vedanta only occurs once (*vedantakṛt*, 15.15) and that, too, in the sense of an *Upanishad*.”<sup>55</sup>
- 7 “If we keep in mind the irreconcilable opposition of Samkhya-Yoga and Vedanta, which can only be eliminated by distinguishing between old and new, the Vedantic components of the *Bhagavadgita* once again appear as nonoriginal.” “Irrespective of whether we examine the GTa is from the religious or the philosophical side, in both cases we gain the same result.”<sup>56</sup>
- 8 Finally, as a concluding and conclusive argument, he brought forth: “It became clear to me that in the wake of this excision [i.e., in Garbe’s reconstruction], no real gap arises in the *Bhagavadgita*; rather, *the context, which is now interrupted, is restored in several passages*.”<sup>57</sup>

In spite of the name “critical method,” however, there is really nothing critical about Garbe’s efforts. The problems with his arguments are many; we present a few here:

- 1 As regards the first argument, Garbe confused a statement made in the context of a doctrine of metempsychosis with a statement made in historical time. Whereas the passage explicitly refers to the “many lifetimes” (*bahunam janmanam*, *Bhagavadgita* 7.19a) required to arrive at the insight “Vasudeva is everything” (*vasudevaḥ sarvam iti*, 7.19b), Garbe took it to refer to the passage of years necessary before the poet or redactor could assert the identity of Kṛṣṇa and Brahman.
- 2 Arguments 2, 4, 5, and 7 are all circular, since they invoke either the early or late passages of the poem as support for Garbe’s thesis, when what is at stake is precisely whether different passages of the *Bhagavadgita* are of different ages.
- 3 The question “what is this *Brahman*?” (*kim tad brahma*) can simply be a request for clarification about the nature of Brahman rather than a request for identification. Especially as a philosophical concept, introduced by *kim* (“what”) rather than *kaḥ* (“who”), the passage seems to require the kind of

conceptual explanation Kṛṣṇa provides rather than the kind of demonstrative response Garbe imagines. Further, Arjuna's initial question is followed by a series of others, all of which request information about various entities and are introduced by the same interrogative: *kim* In van Buitenen's translation, these verses read: "What is that *brahman*? What is the individual self? What is act, Supreme person? What is called 'elemental,' and what 'divine'?" (*Bhagavadgīta* 8.1). Only in the second verse do we get an interrogative pronoun (*kaḥ*), which van Buitenen rightly renders as "who." Arjuna asks, "Who in this body is the 'sacrificial' one, and how is he so, Madhusudana [an epithet of Kṛṣṇa's]?" to which Kṛṣṇa responds, "I myself am the 'sacrificial' here in this body, O best of the embodied." Clearly Kṛṣṇa is fully capable of distinguishing between interrogative pronouns.

- 4 Regarding Garbe's fifth and sixth arguments, as he does not clarify his sources it is not clear who (besides him) is supposed to hold this thesis. Garbe's work on *Sāṅkhya* is similarly biased so that citing it here is not reliable evidence. Further, Vedānta in *vedāntakṛt* (15.15c) is not used in a terminological sense as the designation of a school; Kṛṣṇa only states that he is the maker of the Vedānta, i.e., the concluding portion of the Veda or, on an alternative reading, that he puts an end to the knowledge of the Veda (cf. *Bhagavadgīta* 2.46).

On the basis of these arguments, flawed as they were, Garbe proposed a radically pared *Gīta* as the original:

In this way, of the 700 verses of the *Bhagavadgīta*, 170 fall out of consideration; if [however] one subtracts the 24 verses at the beginning and end of the poem, which in any case do not belong to the genuine *Gīta*, then 146 or more than a fifth of the whole [do not belong to the original poem].<sup>58</sup>

He was careful to note, however, that he did not harbor "the delusion" that he had succeeded in eliminating "all the nongenuine portions of the *Bhagavadgīta* in this manner," for, "there could still be some other verses that were added at the time of the revision, verses of which not a word was to be found in the original poem." "But," added Garbe, "we lack the resources to be able to recognize them and I do not wish to commit myself to mere assumptions[!]"<sup>59</sup> The following figure summarizes Garbe's reconstruction of the text:

A closer look at Garbe's reconstruction, however, as we have undertaken it in our book, demonstrates that his arguments for retaining or keeping individual verses or portions of chapters were completely ad hoc. Further, contrary to his claim that, "in the wake of this excision, no real gap arises in the *Bhagavadgīta*; rather, *the context, which is now interrupted, is restored in several passages*,"<sup>60</sup> there were many instances in which he completely shattered the connections between individual verses and/or chapters. For instance, the opening verses of chapter eleven depend on the concluding verses of Chapter ten. In Chapter ten, verses 19–42, Kṛṣṇa presents a list of his divine manifestations and concludes by saying:

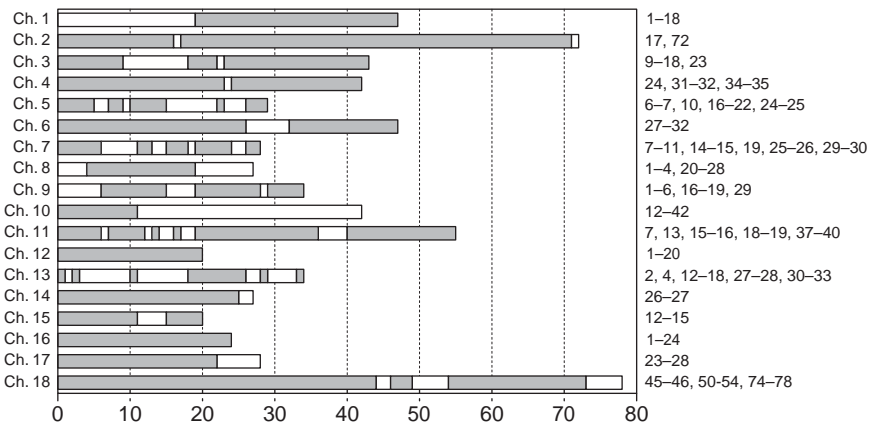


Figure 5.1 Garbe's deletions and the fragmentation of the text.

I am whatever is the seed of all creatures, Arjuna. Not a being, standing or moving, can exist without me. There is no limit to my divine ubiquities, enemy-burner: the full extent of my ubiquity I have here merely indicated. Whatever beings have transcending power, luster and might, know that each and everyone of them has its source in a particle of my splendor. But what is the point to you of knowing this much, Arjuna? I support this entire universe with but a single portion of mine!

(*Bhagavadgīta* 10.39–42, trans. van Buitenen)

In Chapter 11, Arjuna resumes the conversation, stating:

This ultimate mystery bearing upon the soul, which you have propounded to me as a favor, has dispelled my delusion. I have heard from you in all detail the becoming and unbecoming of the creatures, lotus-eyed one, and your own indestructible greatness.

(*Bhagavadgīta* 11.1)

In Garbe's reconstruction, however, Chapter 10 ends with verse 11 ("Residing in their own very being I compassionately dispel the darkness of their ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge") leaving Chapter 11 hanging in the air. Likewise, although he implied that his emendations to Chapter 2 (deletion of verses 17 and 72) restored the original context, he actually disrupted the text, since the truth of verse 17 is assumed in verse 18, while verse 72 is the necessary and logical conclusion to Kṛṣṇa's description of the man of stable disposition (*stithaprajña*) beginning verse 55. Verse 72, furthermore, caps this train of thought and chapter 2 as a whole; it describes the state of the man established in Brahman (*eṣa brahmā stithi...*). Without it, there is a very real sense of

something missing. Verse 71, with which Garbe concludes the chapter, is very much like the preceding verses; it is a description of the man of stable disposition, but does not step outside these descriptions to provide a reflexive summary of the entire section (as verse 72 does). Evidently, Garbe's main reason for rejecting it is that it contains the word "Brahman" and thus was unpalatable to him. And, as later scholars from Jacobi to Oldenberg were quick to point out, Garbe's version of the *Gzta* was not more consistent than the original, since his edition abounded in contradictions. As for Garbe's claim that "the *Bhagavadgita* as reconstructed by [him] significantly exceed[ed] the text as transmitted in poetic beauty and coherence,"<sup>61</sup> we leave this uncontested. Just as the intense smells of an Indian temple were too much for Garbe's "European nose,"<sup>62</sup> so too, perhaps, the complex patterns of the *Bhagavadgzta* were too much for his European ear.

### Making up a science

The wider problem that concerns us here is the appropriation of the term "critical" to describe any form of research that begins with the presumption that Indian tradition is wrong. As we have shown in our book, Garbe's 1905 edition becomes the founding act for a generation of *Bhagavadgzta* scholarship, all of which is concerned with the question of what the original *Gzta* is.<sup>63</sup> This so-called critical approach explicitly sets itself off from the classical commentarial tradition, now degraded to an allegedly dogmatic, confessional approach, because the latter, allegedly for theological reasons, took the *Bhagavadgzta* to be a whole. This idea that Indian interpreters and scholars, because they are oblivious to the alleged breaks and contradictions in *Bhagavadgzta*, are "uncritical" or "ahistorical" and therefore not worth taking into consideration, becomes a deep-seated assumption of Indology by the late twentieth century. No one has gone back to the origins of German *Gzta* scholarship to ask how these assumptions of breaks in the text came about. Instead, Indologists, in the name of critical scholarship, continue trading in stereotypes that are little better than Garbe's racial prejudices.<sup>64</sup> Since Indology continues to define its scientific character vis-à-vis traditional Indian hermeneutics, it is worth taking a second look at Garbe's criticisms of the Brahmins, and how his own *Gzta* interpretation measures up against those criticisms.

Garbe raised five main points against the pandits:

- 1 they were ignorant of European intellectual history<sup>65</sup>
- 2 they lacked historical sense; the European scholar, he claimed, could lay their "historical theories simply ad acta"<sup>66</sup>
- 3 their knowledge was a sham and they did not have genuine insight into the texts they claimed to explain<sup>67</sup>
- 4 their arguments were casuistic<sup>68</sup>
- 5 and finally, he implied that the Indian scholars were incapable of critical work, being beholden to a specific religious tradition.

When we look at Garbe's work, however, we find that all these charges apply to the German scholar himself:

- 1 Garbe himself was ignorant of European intellectual history. The roots of the *Gzta's* so-called pantheism arose from a debate that had taken place among European intellectuals of the nineteenth century: the so-called pantheism controversy.<sup>69</sup> The problem of pantheism was not innate to the *Gzta* at all; the question of its alleged pantheism was a German projection on to the text in service of political and religious ends.
- 2 Garbe was thus no more "historical" than the pandits. He was unaware not only of the origins of the problem of the *Gzta's* pantheism in the pantheism controversy, but also of the fact that the problem of pantheism first became germane to Indian texts after 1808, when Schlegel in his *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* used Indian philosophy as a foil to make political points against Protestantism.<sup>70</sup> Thereafter, both Humboldt and Hegel had been forced to confront the question of the pantheism of Indian philosophy, each doing so in his own way depending on whether he wished to recommend or reject Indian thought.<sup>71</sup>

As with the Indian pandits, Garbe's historical theories of the Indian poem could thus be laid "simply ad acta." There was no basis for asserting a historical evolution articulated in terms of the contrast between the original theistic elements and later pantheistic insertions: neither did the *Gzta* contain pantheistic doctrines nor was the question of its pantheism of relevance to anyone except German scholars. Garbe's history was in fact a fiction designed to ensure that the *Bhagavadgzta* was politically innocuous for German readers and thus to demonstrate that the pursuit of Indian studies did not present a threat to the state.<sup>72</sup> Since his so-called historical reconstruction was based not on past facts (Indian) but present needs (German), it was no less a fabrication than the pandits' theories of the historical origins of their texts.

- 3 It is clear from the foregoing two points that Garbe had not understood the *Bhagavadgzta* at all. In place of the text's complex dialogical unfolding, which struggles to rethink existential facticity with ontology, Garbe offered a simplistic account of a theistic poem interpolated by pantheistic elements to account for the *Gzta's* form. Instead of trying to understand how the texts's complex philosophical elements held together (a task generations of Indian commentators before him had struggled with), each time he encountered an interpretive difficulty or a seeming contradiction, he declared the passage in question an "interpolation." If it could but be removed, the "original context" would be restored and the poem would make sense again. In pursuit of this goal, Garbe reinterpreted the *Bhagavadgzta's* philosophy along the lines of an austere religion based on the promise of eternal salvation, eternal self-consciousness, and a rejection of a philosophical "quietism." His critical scholarship consisted in no more than creating a made-to-measure *Gzta* in keeping with his own ideas of the original revelation of the ancient "Aryans."

- 4 Although Garbe charges the pandits with casuistry, in his own work, in the space of just seven arguments, he committed fourteen logical fallacies (some repeatedly). In his first four arguments alone we find the fallacies of: *ignora-tio elenchi*, genetic fallacy, *petitio principii*, correlation not causation, complex question, *non sequitur*, false dichotomy, circular reasoning, and cherry picking. The fifth argument, on which Garbe placed so much weight, suffers from four logical fallacies: *petitio principii*, redefinition, equivoca-tion, and *argumentum ad verecundiam*. The last two arguments add argu-mentum ad verecundiam, equivocation, *petitio principii*, complex question and *post hoc ergo propter hoc* to the list. Additionally, all seven arguments commit the no-true-Scotsman fallacy.

This long list of fallacies suggests that when Garbe complained about the pandits' casuistry, the real problem was not with their reasoning, but that the German scholar simply lacked the logical training to follow them. From his own account, he seems not to have had much patience with complex logical problems.<sup>73</sup> In his travelogue, Garbe recounts how one of his teachers once, when Garbe persisted in asking questions, cried out, "I have already taught two sahibs of your kind and their thoughts always followed mine; you, however, ask questions that reduce my learning to nothing. From this I must conclude that you are stupider than the other two gentlemen."<sup>74</sup> Although Garbe recounts the story as evidence of his brilliance, we cannot help but feel sympathy for his teacher: without knowing Aristotle's *Organon*, without basic training in logic, grammar, or philosophy, the twenty-eight-year-old Garbe wished to demonstrate his superiority over his teachers.

- 5 Although Indologists insist their work is secular, a look at the history of German *Bhagavadgita* scholarship demonstrates otherwise. To cite but one example, the debate about the *Gzta*'s pantheism originates in a controversy about whether it is Catholicism or Protestantism that leads to pantheism. The pantheism controversy first became a salient concern of Indian studies in Germany after the publication of Schlegel's *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* in 1808. Though ostensibly a work on Indian philosophy, Schlegel's book was in reality a broadside against Protestantism. Schlegel used Indian thought as a means of exploring the decline into pantheism. In the story he told, pantheism emerged from an excessive (and hubristic) rationalism. His message was clear: If Germany followed down the path of the Enlightenment, it, too, would end up in materialism and atheism. Only a return to Catholicism (such as Schlegel himself had undertaken, not coincidentally, in the same year as he published *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*) could ward off the danger.

When the Indologists entered the pantheism controversy on behalf of the establishment on the eve of the twentieth century, their central concern was to refute Schlegel by showing that texts such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavadgita* had originally adhered to a rationalistic, ethical philosophy. Contrary to the story

Schlegel told, it was the rise of the priesthood that was responsible for the decline into pantheism. As with Christianity, which degenerated once it became an affair of the priests, the original revelation in these texts had been corrupted and there could be no doubt about the mechanism of corruption: Brahman priests, wishing to take control of the minds of their people and to lead them away from their original faith, had interposed a mass of philosophical and theological doctrines into the texts.

### In pursuit of scientific legitimacy

At the end of *Redemption*, Garbe has the Brahman Ramchandra abuse and almost assault the household priest. As Ramchandra tears off his sacred thread, his bride-to-be falls at the feet of the English judge and sobs, “oh sahib; oh protector of the poor, you are great and good!” The English judge, who is named “White,” congratulates the pair; in them, he says, he sees “the future of the country.”<sup>75</sup> No doubt this was the rosy future Garbe envisioned for India, a nation of emancipated individuals casting off the fetters of tradition, the “soul-smothering bonds of Brahmanism.”<sup>76</sup> It is perhaps also a vision of how Garbe, the prototype of the White of his novel, had hoped his encounter with Indians would be: fair-faced exotics eager to be converted to European values; a younger generation eager to turn its back on its teachers, parents and authority figures to accept the Indologist as the new *primus inter pares*.

When we look at Indological scholarship in light of Garbe's work, we find that many of these anxieties continue to this day. Like Garbe, Indologists hoped to find a pure “Aryan” civilization, open to their methods and ideas. Instead, they found an indigenous intellectual tradition; one that, despite centuries of colonization, remained surprisingly vital. Like Garbe, they felt caught up in a struggle for power against traditional authority. If it could be “shown” that Brahmans were uncritical, that they did not know what was contained in their texts, that they had no understanding of history or historical research, then there was a place for German scholarship.<sup>77</sup> Like Garbe, they felt that the only way Indology could legitimate itself was via a critique of traditional Indian hermeneutics.<sup>78</sup> Stietencron writes:

the analytic thinking of Western interpreters who were schooled in historical [and] philological methods stands in contrast to the traditional Indian commentators, who not only harmonized and freely downplayed all breaks in the text [i.e., the Bhagavadgīta], but, above all, sought to read their own philosophical [and] theological concepts out of individual textual passages, in order to secure Kṛṣṇa's divine authority for them—a spectrum that has, since the beginning of India's independence movement been further supplemented by politically motivated interpretations in modernity.<sup>79</sup>

These comments suggest that the struggle with tradition for authority remains an unfinished process for Indology. A century after Garbe wrote *Redemption*,

Indologists continue to invoke stereotypes of traditional scholarship as justification for their discipline.<sup>80</sup> Beyond Garbe and his acolytes,<sup>81</sup> however, Indology needs to rethink its status as a scientific enterprise. Mantras of anti-Brahmanism, however rhetorically effective, do not substitute for an epistemic grounding of Indology.

## Notes

- 1 Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- 2 For a typical example, see Jilrgen Hanneder, "Review of *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India*," ed. by Michael Axels, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (2001) 155: 671–672.
- 3 Although we use the term "Brahman" here without scare quotes, it should be noted that the "Brahmans" of the Indologists correspond to no known socio-economic groups designated as Brahmins in the Indian context. Rather, the "Brahmans" of the Germans are a priori creations, based on suspicions of the priesthood, German anti-Semitism, and a narrative of the decline of "Aryan" civilization. Thus, "Brahman" in Indological scholarship is a monolithic concept that can include Dravidians, interlopers into the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, characters drawn from mythic and epic literary works, the Brahmins of a petrified caste-system, as well as crafty priests misadvising and exploiting Indian kings. In the form of the latter two, they have often formed part of the justification for colonialism (see Gelders and Derde's article, cited in note 5).
- 4 See Theodore Goldstilcker, "The Inspired Writings of Hinduism," *The Westminster Review* (1864) 81: 65-76 and "Hindu Epic Poetry: The Mahabharata," *The Westminster Review* (1868) 89: 180–198.
- 5 See Monier Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism, or Religious Thought and Life in India*, London: Murray, 1883; British sources for anti-Brahmanism are discussed in Raf Gelders and Willem Derde's "Mantras of Anti-Brahmanism: Colonial Experience of Indian Intellectuals," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2003) 38 (43): 4611–4617.
- 6 Both the Protestant need for a narrative of religious corruption and German anti-Semitism have been suggested as possible factors (see, for instance, Dorothy Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity*, Albany: SUNY, 2002). While these played a role, in this contribution, we investigate a more immediate cause: the need to constitute Indology as a science via a criticism of traditional sources and modes of knowledge.
- 7 For examples, see Heinrich von Stietencron, "Introduction," in Angelika Malinar, *Rajavidya: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996, 1, Angelika Malinar, *Rajavidya: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996, pp. 21-22 and 22, note 4 and Angelika Malinar, *Bhagavadgita: Doctrines and Contexts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 17.
- 8 See *The Nay Science*, Chapter 4 "Problems with the Critical Method."
- 9 Although we focus in this contribution on German scholarship, anti-Brahmanism is not restricted to German scholars: American Orientalists such as E. W. Hopkins and James L. Fitzgerald also appropriated the language of anti-Brahmanism.
- 10 Richard Garbe, *The Redemption of the Brahman*, Chicago: Open Court, 1894.
- 11 Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance*, Leuven: Peeters, 2010, p. 6.
- 12 Richard Garbe, *Indische Reiseskizzen*, Berlin: Verlag von Gebrüder Paetel, 1889, p. 4 (all translations ours).
- 13 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 27.

- 14 See Kaushik Bagchi, "An Orientalist in the Orient: Richard Garbe's Indian Journey, 1885–1996," *Journal of World History*, 14 (3): 307 (on Garbe's racism) and 301–303 (on Garbe's colonialism). To be fair to Garbe, he appears not to have started out with these prejudices, but to have acquired them in the course of his journey to the Orient. Arriving in Alexandria, he informs the reader, "I learned for the first time with my own eyes the colossal gulf that separates the Sahib and the non-European; the former in fact does not even consider the latter a species of the genus homo sapiens Linné," Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 10. And in Bombay, he gradually cultivated the mores by which sahibs distinguished themselves from the natives.
- 15 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 75.
- 16 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 76.
- 17 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 77.
- 18 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 77.
- 19 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 78.
- 20 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 82.
- 21 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 83.
- 22 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 83.
- 23 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 84.
- 24 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 84.
- 25 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 85.
- 26 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 85 (Garbe's italics).
- 27 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 28 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 85, n.
- 29 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 30 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86 (Garbe's italics).
- 31 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 32 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86 (Garbe's italics).
- 33 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 88.
- 34 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 88.
- 35 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 89.
- 36 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 37 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 38 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 39 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 92.
- 40 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 41 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 42 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 43 Bagchi, "An Orientalist in the Orient," pp. 310–311.
- 44 For an excellent account of Garbe's studies of *Samkhya*, see Andrew Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Hindu Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Nicholson identifies many of the same problems in these studies (for instance, the insistence on the theistic, rational nature of *Samkhya*) as we do in Garbe's interpretation of the *Gzta*.
- 45 For a detailed discussion of Roth's comments, see *The Nay Science*, Chapter 4 "Problems with the Critical Method." Roth, we argue, creates the model of German criticisms of the Brahmins.
- 46 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, London: Continuum, 2004, pp. 277–279.
- 47 See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 280.
- 48 Adolf Holtzmann, Jr. made this claim in his book *Die neunzehn Bucher des Mahabharata*, Kiel: C.F. Haessler, 1893, pp. 121–167.
- 49 Richard Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgita*, Leipzig: Haessel, 1905; 2nd revised edition, 1921.
- 50 Richard Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgita*, Cologne: Anaconda Verlag, 2008; reproduction of the 1921 edition), p. 12 (Garbe's italics; all translations ours).

- 51 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 13.
- 52 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 13.
- 53 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, pp. 13–14.
- 54 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 14.
- 55 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 14.
- 56 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 14.
- 57 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 15.
- 58 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 15.
- 59 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 15.
- 60 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, p. 15.
- 61 Garbe, *Bhagavadgita*, 16.
- 62 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 82.
- 63 See *The Nay Science*, Chapter 2 "The Search for the Original GTta."
- 64 See n. 7.
- 65 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 66 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 67 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 68 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 86.
- 69 The pantheism controversy erupted in the nineteenth century when minor philosopher, F. H. Jacobi, disclosed to Elise Reimarus that the philosopher Lessing had in his last days revealed to him that he was a committed Spinozist. Since Spinozistic philosophy was suspected of harboring materialistic and atheistic sympathies (in a word, of being pantheistic), Jacobi's revelation, by implicating an Enlightenment figure such as Lessing, was calculated to put the establishment on the back foot. Pantheism quickly became an intellectual hot topic, with figures such as Goethe, Kant, Herder, and Hamann all entering the debate. For a standard account of the controversy and its repercussions in German intellectual life, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.
- 70 For an excellent account of how the drama begins with Schlegel finding evidence of a decline into pantheism in Indian thought, see Peter K. J. Park, "A Catholic Apologist in a Pantheistic World: New Approaches to Friedrich Schlegel," in *Sanskrit and "Orientalism": Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750-1958*, ed. Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K. J. Park, and D. R. SarDesai, Delhi: Manohar, 2004, pp. 83–106. Park demonstrates convincingly that Schlegel uses the alleged decline of Indian thought from an excessive rationalism into pantheism as a way of making polemical points against the Enlightenment and, by extension, against German Protestantism.
- 71 For the source texts and a discussion, see *The Nay Science*, Chapter 2 "The Search for the Original GTta."
- 72 See the section "The Theistic GTta of Richard Garbe" in Chapter 2 of our *The Nay Science*.
- 73 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 90.
- 74 Garbe, *Reiseskizzen*, p. 89.
- 75 Garbe, *Redemption*, p. 82 (all translations ours).
- 76 Garbe, *Redemption*, p. 79.
- 77 See Jilrgen Hanneder, "Review of *Rajavidya: Das konigliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht. Studien zur Bhagavadgita* by Angelika Malinar," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 151.1, 2001, p. 240, explicitly insisting that the only reason for citing traditional scholarship is to exclude it from discourse.
- 78 Although beyond the scope of the present article, one of the unobserved consequences of the Indologists' critique has been a massive transfer of epistemic authority from the traditional interpreters of these texts to a new class of experts. This transfer was by no means inevitable; rather, it was brought about through the programmatic use of the trope of the absence of critical consciousness among Indians.

- 79 Stietencron, "Introduction," p. 1.
- 80 Occasionally, this can take bizarre forms, as when Hanneder insists that a "functional Indology" is necessary to protect German science against "flying yogis"; see Jilgen Hanneder, "Search the WEB: 'Deutsche Indologie'," in *Marburger Indologie im Umbruch: Zur Geschichte des Faches 1845-1945*, Munich: P. Kircheim Verlag, 2010, pp. 81–87.
- 81 For Malinar's comments commending Garbe for his commitment to the "Indological ethos" of "scientific objectivity and diagnosis," see her "'Kṣatriya-Glaube' und 'Opferwesen': Richard Garbe und die indischen Religionen," in *Indien-Forschung im Zeitenwandel. Analysen und Dokumente zur Indologie und Religionswissenschaft in Tübingen*, ed. Heidrun Brilckner *et al.* Tübingen: Attempto, 2003, pp. 121–141 (the quote is from p. 140). Against Garbe's critics who might see his work as typifying "a Eurocentric mode of thought and [hence] possibly one subject to the charge of Orientalism," she writes that "the example of Garbe . . . shows that this charge is no more than moralizing self-flagellation [Exerzitium] if we do not consider the respective aim of the individual protagonist and the intellectual historical context." Malinar, "'Kṣatriya-Glaube'," p. 141.