RICHARD GARBE, GERMAN INDOLOGY, AND THE MESSINESS OF (A)THEISTIC SĀṂKHYA

Jonathan Dickstein
University of Colorado at Boulder
Boulder, Colorado
This paper delves into early modern German Indology and its claims concerning the history of Sāṃkhya philosophy, arguably the oldest strain of structured metaphysical speculation in ancient India. Guided by Protestant ideals and Enlightenment-inspired ‘science,’ this field of scholarship employed imaginative

1 Cited in Suzanne Marchand, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 278.
hermeneutical techniques to reconcile ‘reason’ with Indian religio-
philosophical traditions. The subject under scrutiny is Richard Garbe
(1857-1927), a Protestant Indologist who wrote considerably on
Sāṃkhya and offered ambitious (at times illuminating) yet ultimately
misleading depictions of the history and import of this philosophical
tradition. Generated during a potent period of domestic orientalism, Garbe’s conclusions sought to influence European conceptions of
their own history and potential future. Considering the fact that many
Garbesian claims survived throughout the twentieth century, he is a
very important figure in the history of German Indology and its rela-
tionship to contemporary understandings of Indian philosophy.

The opening sections introduce the Indological climate that
Garbe inhabited, one marked by a struggle between Catholicism and
Protestantism in intellectual discourse and the overarching influence
of post-Enlightenment conceptions of science and rationality. As this
formative period in German Indological history has been capably
investigated and continues to be, the present work specifically en-
gages Garbe’s views on Sāṃkhya and its ‘true’ formulation. The focal
point within Sāṃkhya is the link between its supposedly rational core
and an ‘original’ atheistic orientation. The middle sections discuss
theism and atheism in Sāṃkhyan thought and the connection with
Mahābhārata studies. This portion is essential in highlighting the
narrow perspective of Garbe and his personal agenda of supporting
a pure thought preliminary Sāṃkhyan rationalism. The final sections

2 “In the case of German Indology we might conceive of it as potentially direct-
ed inward—toward the colonization and domination of Europe itself.” Sheldon
Pollock, “Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and and Power beyond the Raj,” in
Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and
3 See Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, The Nay Science (New York: Oxford
University Press, 2014); Suzanne Marchand, German Orientalism; Douglas T. Mc-
Getchin, Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson
University Press, 2009); Dorothy M. Figueira, Aryans, Jews, Brahmins (Albany:
State University of New York Press, 2002); Ronald Inden, Imagining India (Bloom-
address Garbe’s hypothesis of an Indian monotheism-through-atheism, epitomized in his reconstituted *Bhagavad Gītā*.

I conclude the paper with two major points. First, echoing the outstanding recent work of Adluri and Bagchee, I emphasize Garbe’s immediate influence on the German understanding of India (and thus itself). From this perspective, the essay magnifies part of the backdrop of Sheldon Pollock’s “Deep Orientalism?” Garbe’s era of Indology assisted in forging the “finally essentialized dichotomy between ‘Indo-German’ and ‘Semitic’” that would decades later course through the academically-inflected rhetoric of National Socialism. “German romanticism-Wissenschaft” with its ‘rigor’ and ‘fact-finding’ lent credence to National Socialist propaganda even if there was little rigorous or factual about these scholarly findings. Second, I offer the general assessment that although the force of Garbe’s hypotheses waned in mid- to late-twentieth century scholarship and public opinion, his anti-Brahmanical, de-theized depiction of the Sāṃkhya tradition has remained largely intact. As Andrew Nicholson has recently remarked, “the conventional wisdom expressed by Garbe in the late nineteenth century is still the conventional wisdom in the early twenty-first.” This is evident in the elimination or trivialization of strong theistic claims in discourse on Sāṃkhya and its related tradition of Patañjala Yoga.

**IN GERMANY, ARYANS AND PANTHEISTS**

Tomoko Masuzawa has capably presented the infatuation with comparative philology that swept over Europe, perhaps nowhere more dominantly than Germany, in the eighteenth and nineteenth

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centuries.\textsuperscript{6} This work generated ‘factual’ connections between language structures and the degree of civilization (intellectual, social, religious) of the cultures that employed them. With anti-Semitism incentivizing the construction of an Indo-European lineage anchored in linguistic association, a slew of German (and British) linguists worked to establish a firm relationship between the ancient civilization of India and that of Europe. Regardless of the complexities of this root Indo-European language network and the accompanying Indo-Aryan hypotheses,\textsuperscript{7} Germans including Richard Garbe worked to trim prevailing theories to create a specific type of Indo-European bond, namely a Indo-Germanic/Aryan one. Relations of the old Germanic tribes had once civilized ancient India and modern India was but a brittle fossil of this forgotten history. The culture of these civilized Indian Aryans had gradually been perverted and morphed into what modern India had unfortunately become.

Richard Garbe (1857-1927), the esteemed professor at Tübingen, was a primary figure in the study of India’s religious traditions and \textit{Bhagavad Gītā} scholarship. For Garbe the two grandest achievements of ancient India were its rational, atheistic Sāṃkhya philosophy and its devotional, monotheistic Bhagavata religion (“Krishna-ism”). These two accomplishments were intimately connected. The emergence of the ancient monotheistic tradition was predicated upon an antecedent stage of rational inquiry, one that had inevitably and necessarily proved spiritually unfulfilling. This theory will be handled in detail below. But rather than being the products of a comprehensive and “value-free”\textsuperscript{8} determination of India’s religious history, Garbe’s ideas sprouted mainly from the dynamics of do-

\textsuperscript{6} Tomoka Masuzawa, \textit{The Invention of World Religions} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), Ch. 5 and 7.


\textsuperscript{8} Sheldon Pollock, “Deep Orientalism?,” 84.
mestic intellectual disputes and his own harsh appraisal of modern India. Garbe was significantly influenced by a pressing agenda of denouncing Catholicism, Judaism, and the pantheistic philosophy that surfaced in the wake of Enlightenment rationalism, notably in Spinozian thought. An understanding of the “pantheistic dilemma” that existed in Germany, which in some ways encapsulates all of the scholar’s concerns, is indispensable when calibrating oneself towards Garbe’s approach to Indology.

REBUTTING SCHLE格尔, REWORKING BRAHMANISM

In response to the Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment, the newly converted Catholic Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1839), dispatched a widely received interpretation of Indian religious history to combat Protestantism, rational theology, natural philosophy, and pantheism. Peter K.J. Park has analyzed Schlegel’s On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians (1808) and concludes of the work,

*On the Language* is a defense of Christianity, and its author’s goal was to try to retake for Christianity some of the losses it experienced due to three hundred years of the rationalization of religion and the naturalization of God, which the Protestant Reformation—according to Schlegel—unleashed.  

Schlegel’s *On the Language* reached way back into Indian religious thought to retake some of these losses. The stakes were high in scriptural interpretation, as an ancient Indo-Germanic bond was being forged and the oldest ‘texts’—they had been orally transmitted—of ancient India, the Vedas, were recognized as the earliest works of the

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entire lineage.\textsuperscript{10} In addition, if the yuga theory of descending epochs was to be appropriated and applied to a model of authentic religious understanding, then for Schlegel, among others, the character of this foundational age of the Veda was crucial.

Schlegel maintained that religious devolution occurred in four distinct stages: Emanation, Nature Worship, Dualism, and Pantheism. The initial, most virtuous stage of emanation was a time of “divine and marvelous revelations” and the tragic fall in pantheistic thought was the “offspring of unassisted reason.”\textsuperscript{11} The dualistic philosophy of Sāṃkhya, tainted by the temptations of reason yet not entirely irreligious, occupied a place in between. Its “doctrine of the two principle” actually heralded the approaching dissolution of true religion.

When the doctrine of the Two Principles ceased to be a religious belief, and was degraded into a merely philosophical system, the idea of the two primal powers being united and absorbed into one higher being could hardly fail to be admitted.\textsuperscript{12}

Religious decay was the result of a triumph of a “mere philosophical system,” Vedānta in the Indian case and scientific Protestantism in Germany. The pantheism that followed called for the collapse of “the distinction between nature and God, [and] transferring to the creation those qualities usually associated with the Creator.”\textsuperscript{13} For Schlegel, this was all but synonymous with terms like rational theology, naturalism, atheism, materialism, and nihilism.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Ronald Inden, \textit{Imagining India}, 98.


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 492.

\textsuperscript{13} Peter K.J. Park, “A Catholic Apologist in a Pantheistic World,” 85.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 99. Also see Suzanne Marchand, \textit{German Orientalism}, 62-3, and Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, \textit{The Nay Science}, 190.
But was this professed descent from emanation to pantheism a source of fierce controversy in the Indian texts themselves? Though citing Indian texts to bolster his claims, the allegedly serious dilemma of reconciling theism and pantheism was generally absent or minimal in the native material. The “controversy” endured more as a European intellectual concern of religio-political alignment, whether with Church orthodoxy, Protestantism, or another strain of naturalized religion or philosophy. For Schlegel, religious decrepitude was apparent in the shift from Catholic emanation to Protestant pantheism, with the latter having a clear Indian parallel in the reductive All-is-One Brahmanism (which he also equated with All-is-None Buddhism). This was a significant departure from the divinity and marvel dominant in the Vedic period. Schlegel warned against a similar fate in Germany through an appeal to the deterioration of India, a gesture altogether justified given the prevailing racial theories of an Indo-German heritage which he helped to manufacture. That Schlegel worked to introduce the pantheistic debate into early Indian texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gītā*, strongly suggests that the controversy was a calculated strategy for solidifying his case back home.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* was a locus of heavy linguistic, historical, and philosophical debate around this time period. Its storied history of interpretation by German Indologists is meticulously detailed in Herling’s *The German Gītā* and more recently by Adluri and Bagchee in *The Nay Science*. As emphasized by Adluri and Bagchee, the pantheistic controversy in Indian religious literature only emerged after Schlegel’s *On The Language* and was largely enmeshed in diverse European interpretations of the *Gītā*. This is to highlight the fact that Richard Garbe entered a scholastic scene fully infused with the importance of addressing pantheism in both German and Indian contexts. Many German figures allied with Kantian or Spinozian thought were horrified by the Catholic rhetoric woven into Schlegel’s work on India and thus amplified their anti-religious, pro-science, pro-reason stances. This time in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the so-
called “Spinoza Renaissance,”15 certainly informed Garbe’s own reading of the Indian material in addition to his pre-existent anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, yet very Indo-German/Aryan and Protestant agenda.

REASON AND GOD IN SĀṂKHYA PHILOSOPHY

In order to make sense of both Schlegel and Garbe’s conclusions regarding religion/theism and reason/science, a short discussion of Sāṃkhya and its relevant aspects is in order. Sāṃkhya is commonly included among the six orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy, though the question as to what “orthodox,” “school,” and “philosophy” actually refer is certainly up for debate. For the present analysis these complicated topics cannot be engaged, and while I occasionally refer to Sāṃkhya as a “system,” perhaps calling it as a “style” of thought is most fitting.16 Whatever the case may be, historically this strain of metaphysical thought involves a categorization of the world into a fixed number of categories or tattva-s. What marks the ordering on a fundamental level is the divide between individual pure consciousness (puruṣa) and the phenomenal world (prakṛti).17 This separation is why Sāṃkhya is often labeled India’s dualistic philosophical tradition, or as Schlegel remarked, the “doctrine of the two principles.”

The ancient sage Kapila is traditionally accepted as the original teacher of the Sāṃkhya philosophy. This view is adopted in spite of

16 Daya Krishna, Indian Philosophy: A Counter Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 13. Many studies have investigated this issue of “schools” but I here point to Daya Krishna’s objections in “Three Myths about Indian Philosophy” (1966) and “Is Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya-Kārikā really Sāṃkhyan?” (1968), included in the above volume.
17 I here note Mikel Burley’s basic premise of framing Sāṃkhya primarily from a phenomenological and not ontological perspective. The status of prakṛti is by no means easily understood given its simultaneously-posited cosmological and psychological roles. For this perspective, see Mikel Burley, Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga: an Indian metaphysics of experience (London: Routledge, 2007).
the fact that there is no proof for Kapila’s historical existence and more importantly, no existing texts that can be verifiably attributed to him. One text ascribed to Kapila and regarded as the predecessor to Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s “classical” Sāṃkhya-kārikā, the Ṣaṣṭitantra, has a blurry history. The work itself has been lost, is referred to only in later texts, is sometimes thought to be two or more texts, and has no conclusive author. Given the lack of a tangible, definitive work on Sāṃkhya prior to the Sāṃkhya-kārikā, many twentieth century scholars (G.J. Larson, S.N. Dasgupta, P. Chakravarti, K.B.R. Rao) have described the transition of Sāṃkhya-as-speculation to Sāṃkhya-as-system according to a type of condensation or maturation model. These studies rightly assert that no singular Sāṃkhya-as-system can be isolated in the Vedic, Upaniṣadic, or epic sources. Furthermore, the inability to identify a consistent Sāṃkhya points to a diverse field of perspectives during this wide period, yet with no cohesive surviving texts to their credit.

While the temptation exists to argue that this period contained an unsure, embryonic Sāṃkhya that slowly matured into Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhya, this represents only one avenue of thought (as K.B.R. Rao emphatically argues). Richard Garbe offered another interpretation quite early on, one that differed considerably from the maturation

18 Kapila’s teachings are also propounded in the Purāṇa-s, such as the Vishnu Purāṇa. These texts have been continually and largely ignored or harshly criticized in academic circles for various reasons. Yet, as Nicholson helpfully warns, “the historian of Indian philosophy can ignore Purānic Sāṃkhya only at his or her peril.” Andrew Nicholson, Unifying Hinduism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 75.
model. Garbe maintained that a staunchly dualistic and atheistic Kapila-Sāṃkhya is the ‘original’, ‘true’ Sāṃkhya, and this system is accessible through ancient texts and especially the fifteenth century Sāṃkhyasūtra. While later reprimanded for this quasi-utopian depiction of a fully-formed philosophical system stemming from a single founder, Garbe’s starting point ought not to be rejected in toto. As Mikel Burley has noted, great ideas can in fact start great. Which is to say, a sophisticated Sāṃkhya may have once been expounded and contained in the Saṣṭitantra or some other lost text of Kapila. It is only responsible to guard against the reflex assumption of a philosophical maturation process in all situations. That being said, Garbe’s unsupported claim of having identified this ‘original’ Sāṃkhya and then characterizing it as both profoundly atheistic and Kṣatriyan (Aryan, warrior class) cannot be spared from due critique.

Up until the fifth century C.E. (the time of Īśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhyakārikā), most scholars agree that “pre,” “early,” or “proto” Sāṃkhya cannot reasonably cast as atheistic in orientation. As Franklin Edgerton classically remarked, “Where do we find that ‘original’ atheistic view expressed? I believe: nowhere.” Johannes Bronkhorst follows suit and carries it well into the Common Era concluding, “Important is, however, that no Sāmkhya texts of the first millennium deny God’s existence. Rather, more often than not they give us the impression that they accept God’s existence as a matter of course, but do not accept his causal agency with respect to the world.” Bronkhorst is quick to point out that the atheistic perspective on Sāmkhya gained traction through Haribhadra’s doxography, the Saddarśanamsamuccaya (8th cent. C.E.), which differentiates a

21 Mikel Burely, Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga, 37.
22 See sources in Note 18, especially Rao’s work.
Sāṃkhya with God (ṣeśvara) from a Sāṃkhya without God (nirīśvara). Yet Bronkhorst contends that there is no reason to believe that Haribhadra’s īśvara (“God”) is anything but a reference to a Creator God, and not any and all other formulations of God. In Mādhva’s Sarvadarśanagsaṃgraha (14th cent. C.E.), once again the atheistic component of Sāṃkhya is emphasized, yet it is only in the manner of denying the causal agency of God. Still Mādhva sees this as proof enough to deny the possibility of any type of God in the Sāṃkhya system. Forecasting Garbe in doing so, Mādhva goes so far as to invoke the ‘original’ Sāṃkhya of antiquity in his claim. He concludes, “For this end has the doctrine of those who follow Kapila, the founder of the atheistic Sāṃkhya school, been propounded.”

One potential source of tangible atheistic support arrives in the theological stance of Garbe’s preferred Sāṃkhyasūtra, which conspicuously rejects the existence and relevance of the God-principle. Somehow ignoring the apparent inconsistency of favoring such a late work on Sāṃkhya, it was nevertheless Garbe who “was almost single-handedly responsible for the notoriety of the work, as it was he who first edited the text and translated it.” Selectively sidestepping the typical Indological affinity for older, ‘authentic’, and even ur-texts that had not suffered the corruption of time and commentarial accretion, Garbe offered the Sāṃkhyasūtra as representative of the ‘original’ and authoritative Sāṃkhya; serendipitously this text contained sharp atheistic arguments that could not be found anywhere else in the Sāṃkhya corpus.

This is all to say that the claim of atheistic Sāṃkhya is by no
means be an easy sell. Yet despite Sāṃkhya’s theistic or semi-atheistic past, Garbe audaciously professed that Sāṃkhya since the Upaniṣads had always been wholly atheistic and that claims to the contrary are the result of suspect insertions and unreliable commentary. This was necessary to argue in order to project the medieval Sāṃkhyaśāstra as the proper heir of this “genuinely philosophical spirit” that began with Kapila and had survived essentially in tact. Yet, as Larson pointed to decades ago, “the main problem in Garbe’s interpretation of the origin of Sāṃkhya is, of course, lack of evidence.”

A similar problem is found in Garbe’s handling of the great epic of India, the Mahābhārata, and the origin of its renowned Bhagavad Gītā.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GREAT EPIC

Nestled within the tremendous Mahābhārata one encounters the Bhagavad Gītā. Due to the poem’s richness and influence it is often regarded as a stand-alone work. Pertinent to the present analysis is the fact that both the Mahābhārata and the Gītā contain many (at times contradictory) references to Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and theology. German Indology produced competing theories about the history and content of the epic, often times with the Gītā at the epicenter of the debate. Owing to a dominant trend of suspicion regarding the ‘authenticity’ of existent Indian texts, the question arose as to how to read and interpret the epic. Was it to be received ‘as-is’? Or read without the late ‘addition’ of the Gītā? Or handled ‘as-is’ but with a firm recognition of the Gītā’s questionable status? Adolf Holtzmann Jr.’s large study of the Mahābhārata (1892-1895) was a major early contribution to this field and one that Garbe’s work relied on and responded to.

While the details of Holtzmann’s project are distinctive, the three main pillars of his work on the epic are common to German Indology

of the period. Adluri and Bagchee have described these three stages as: (1) postulation of an Indo-Germanic Epic and people, (2) portrayal of Brahmanism as a corruption and an interruption, (3) restoration of an integral history to Germany. Holtzmann was convinced that through a critical-historical and objective or “value-free” engagement with the work, he could identify discrete currents of thought embedded therein. In turn these currents of thought and accompanying worldviews (and ethics) could be justifiably attributed to specific social groups of ancient India. Holtzmann’s fundamental bifurcation drew a sharp line between the warrior and priestly classes, the former responsible for the ‘original’ Mahābhārata and the latter having produced the Veda. Based on an assumption one would only expect “heroic” and “honorable” (akin to an ancient Germanic spirit) passages from a warrior class, Holtzmann undertook the task of locating a ‘true’ epic and a corrupted one.

One interesting point, following Adluri and Bagchee, is that prior to Holtzmann’s study Brahmans were typically considered to be an “Aryan” group alongside Kṣatriyas (“ārya” meaning “noble”, but later used to denote warlike, Indo-Germanic ancestry). Which is to say, the ancient Indic struggle had previously been understood as a conflict between two “noble” and “pure” Aryan communities, not between one Aryan and one “other.” In Holtzmann’s work the racial division was brought to the fore, a move of utmost importance and consequence in later scholarship. As has recently been argued, the words of Holtzmann’s Mahābhārata “suggest a pervasive anxiety regarding foreign domination. The language is always cataclysmic, the events always presented as a loss of purity or an effacement of identity.” For Holtzmann the enduring struggle in India (and Germany) was bound

29 Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, The Nay Science, 120.
30 Ibid., 61.
31 Ibid., 68. See note 167.
32 Ibid., 103. See note 89 for several examples of the German phrases routinely utilized by Holtzmann in his study.
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up in geography, religion, and color/race. Whether it be in the theory of an originally noble Germanic tribe (Aryans) entering India from afar, or in the commonalities between corrupt Brahmans and corrupt Catholic priests, or in elaborate color/race theories surrounding the names Pāṇḍu (“white”) and Kṛṣṇa (“black”) in the epic itself, this religio-ethnic battle was never far from sight. The legacy of a supposed ancient Aryan/non-Aryan feud with ethnic underpinnings would resound in Richard Garbe’s own work, though not without significant reconceptualization.

Garbe’s work on Sāṃkhya and the Bhagavad Gītā rested on the same bedrock assumption. There was most certainly an original race of Indo-Germanic warriors who had produced the great epic of India. Furthermore, the epic and other warrior-born texts had been infected or appropriated by the Brahmans (now cast as non-Aryan). While the question cannot be satisfactorily entertained at the moment, exactly how oral traditions get infiltrated or corrupted (and the evidence for it) is certainly a worthy one. Nevertheless, Garbe accepted the ‘fact’ of corruption and then pursued two additional ends: (1) the elevation of Sāṃkhya as proof of positive philosophy, science, and reason in India33 and (2) the promotion of an Indian monotheism as the pinnacle of Aryan achievement, epitomized in the Gītā. The first point has been alluded to in preceding pages. The second point however, must be approached from the perspective of the Indological claims of the period, for Garbe’s theory of a staunchly theistic Gītā separated him from others, notably Holtzmann.

Holtzmann had asserted in his work that the Indo-Germanic warrior mentality as pantheistic in nature and that the Gītā strays significantly from this worldview. Rather than representing the crown-jewel of the Mahābhārata, the Gītā is its nadir, undeniable proof of Brahmanical interjection. The insertion of the Gītā “transformed the

33 “For Holtzmann, these ideas [concerning epic scholarship] had to do with his interest in an Indo-Germanic people. For Garbe, they had to do with his interest in demonstrating a rationalistic core to Indian thought.” Ibid, 178.
ancient heroic poem, the greatest spiritual treasure of their people into a tedious Purana that only preaches worship of Vishnu, reverence before the Brahmans, and thoughtless good works.” Garbe assumed a completely different stance on the status of the Gītā. For him the devotional monotheism (“worship of Vishnu”) woven into in the “Song of the Lord” signified the climax of Kṣatriyan religious awakening. It was by no means the Brahmanical formulation of a “tedious Purana.” In fact, it is the pantheistic thought that Holtzmann incorrectly linked to the warrior class that represented the true “transforming” of the Brahman priests. Moreover, not only is this cunning pantheistic transformation visible in the Gītā and other parts of the Mahābhārata, but also in the earlier Upaniṣads.

Here it makes sense to harken back to Schlegel and his general attack on pantheism and the Protestant Reformation as its source. Garbe could not carry Holtzmann’s argument for an original Kṣatriyan pantheism as it would play directly into Schlegel’s assessment. But Garbe sensed that he could salvage the Gītā so long as Holtzmann’s conclusion was undermined and the devotional theistic aspect of the text was re-placed at its core. The Gītā’s inclusion of Sāṃkhyan elements would support his overall theory, explained below, that reason/science predated this climactic devotional monotheism. Garbe could assent to some of Holtzmann’s objections, such as the Gītā’s deplorable inclusion of “good works” and “reverence of Brahmans”, but the most deplorable aspect of all was the infection of pantheistic philosophy that had compromised the work. It was Garbe’s duty to extract the ‘original’ theistic Gītā, purified of Brahmanical influence, and in doing so he could counter Schlegel’s old but resonant accusation.

34 Quoted in ibid., 64.
35 Ibid., 179. Adluri and Bagchee list Garbe’s eight main arguments for a theistic Bhagavad Gītā.
Returning to the pantheistic controversy itself, through his four stages of religious devolution Schlegel had demonstrated his familiarity with the four periods of cyclic existence in Indian thought and also the presence of Sāṃkhyan speculation in early texts. Signaling an approaching pitfall into pantheism, Schlegel isolated a phase of burgeoning reason with its “doctrine of the two principles.” The Protestant Garbe recognized the alleged domino-effect from rationalism to pantheism and even atheism, but still embraced India’s Sāṃkhyan heritage. Garbe approached India’s philosophical history very differently than Schlegel, even inverting his hierarchy. Instead of representing the penultimate period of decline, Garbe recast this dualistic, scientific rationality as the time of ascension foreshadowing the highest phase of religious achievement. Sāṃkhya was a preparatory phase, albeit a dangerous one.

This sharp line of demarcation between the two domains was first drawn by Kapila. The knowledge of the difference between body and soul is one condition, as it is also an indispensable condition, of arriving at a true monism. Every view of the world which confounds this difference can supply at best a one-sided henism, be it a spiritualism or an equally one-sided materialism.36

Contrary to Schlegel, Garbe saw a developing rebellious spirit woven into the “doctrine of the two principles,” one defiant of the ritualism and domination of the priestly order, whether at home in Germany (Jews, Catholics) or abroad in India (Brahmans). It was unnecessary for Garbe to compromise his eventual championing of a Protestant-esque ‘pure’ monotheism, as this scientific, Enlightenment-esque temperament was by no means antithetical to authentic spiritual pursuit. In fact, it was its

precursor, snipping away extraneous elements such as rituals and good works. While Schlegel asserted that the Sāṃkhya mentality eventually eroded into pantheism (idealism, Vedānta), Garbe rebutted that actually it was this Sāṃkhya dualism (to-be-monotheism) that had emerged in virtuous opposition to the “idealistic monism of the Upanishads.” Sāṃkhya worked to combat the “ancient, genuine, Brahmanic elements, the ritual and idealistic speculation of the Upanishads.” Here Garbe tied both ritualism and idealism to the Brahman class. This last line is by no means in praise of “ancient, genuine, Brahmanic elements.” Garbe freely admitted that Brahmanical elements are embedded in the early Upaniṣads (and the Mahābhārata), but he unabashedly argued that they represent defensive tactics exercised by the Brahmans to counter the original Aryan/Kṣatriyan aspects of the works. These Brahmanical countermeasures were required because of the dangerous potency of Kṣatriyan rationality, as represented in Kapila’s Sāṃkhya system, and its oncoming monotheism. It was “In opposition to this idealistic monism of the Upanishads, [that] Kapila founded the oldest real philosophical system of India in the atheistic Sāṃkhya philosophy, which bears a strictly dualistic character.” Hence objecting to the irrationality and irreverence promulgated by the Brahmans, which was visible to Garbe particularly in the early Vedic literature, a Kṣatriya-based spirit arose to directly challenge priestly dominion. In response to this challenge, a new idealistic monism was cunningly inserted into the Upaniṣads by the Brahmans themselves, a move indicative of some dynamic conflict with Upaniṣadic Sāṃkhya Kṣatriyanism.

37 Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, The Nay Science, 191.
39 Ibid., 588.
40 Ibid., 585.
41 This idea of “Upaniṣadic-Kṣatriyan” is in distinction to the term “Upaniṣadic Brahmaism” employed by Edgerton, which he attributes first to Hopkins. Interestingly enough, this latter phrase is employed in Edgerton section titled “Epic ‘Sāṅkhya’ is Brahmaistic.” This runs in sharp contrast to Garbe’s idea of Kṣatriyan Sāṃkhya. See Franklin Edgerton, “The Meaning of Sāṅkhya and Yoga,” 20.
According to Garbe's overall view, early Brahmanical thought is the catalyst for Kapila's original Sāṁkhya system, and later Brahmanical thought (as idealistic monism) is the response to that same system's “awakening” to a higher monotheism. Garbe states, “Progressive ideas are first opposed by the priesthood, their [i.e. of the warriors, Aryans] born enemy, until they have become so powerful that they cannot be opposed any longer, whereupon the priest adopts them and tries to harmonize them with his superstitions.”42 These “progressive ideas” allude to the true Kṣatriyan monism/monotheism that stood as the gem of Indian religio-philosophical evolution. The “priests” attempted to harmonize this with their deplorable superstitions, thus producing an inferior idealistic monism, one paling in comparison with the religious awakening of the Kṣatriyas. So while sharing Schlegel’s depiction of pantheism as a degenerate form of religion, Garbe divergently ascribed it to reactionary idealistic/pantheistic Brahmans and trumpeted the rationalism-to-become-monotheism of the warrior class. This latter product of religious development, the religion of the Bhagavatas, was for Garbe the monotheistic tradition responsible for the ‘original’ theistic Bhagavad Gītā.

RELATING TO MODERN INDIA

Convinced of a timeline towards a “true” monism, Garbe had objected to the ritual, hierarchy, and irrationality infused in Jewish, Catholic, and Brahmanical priestliness. To get a sense of his disposition apart from mere theory, one can look at his personal reaction to modern India. For Garbe the disastrous results of priestly influence were evident in the present state of the country. He saw in modern India a repulsive rabble, completely lost and misguided, the inheritors

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of a religious erosion from purer, Aryan times. This is conspicuous in Garbe’s travel notes from 1885-1886 and his subsequent novel, *The Redemption of the Brahman*. The apparent chaos of all daily transactions, the incomprehensibility of his Indian teachers’ pedagogical techniques, the throngs of people and seemingly irreverent proceedings involved in temple worship, all but proved to the German scholar that modern India was an appalling, decrepit shell of a pristine antiquity. It was ancient age and civilization of India that he had expected on arrival.

Kaushik Bagchi has provided an excellent account of Garbe’s voyage to India and his subsequent critique (through Garbe’s *Sketches and Redemption*). From just one footnote from his *Outlines of a History of Indian Philosophy*, one can appreciate Garbe’s unflinching assessment of India. Referring to another Indologist’s work, Garbe writes, “The singular unfavorable judgment of the whole philosophy of the Upanishads which Gough pronounces in the opening of his otherwise valuable book, may perhaps be explained by the morbid aversion to all things Indian, which difficult and absorbing work so frequently produces in the Europeans dwelling *any length of time* in India.” Garbe had little sympathy for any features of Indian-ness that rubbed against his own agenda and sensibilities. Garbe abhorred Hindu ritualism, Brahmanism (in his mind exemplified by Indian pandits whom he found either ignorant, misleading, or unnecessarily cryptic), primitivism, and most importantly, pantheism, which for him proceeded naturally from these former elements. Modern India reflected the demise instigated by ritualistic and also idealistic priests. Garbe’s reading and repeated reconstitution of the *Bhagavad Gītā* was a reflection of the anti-Brahmanical stance that undergirded the bulk of his work.


Jonathan DiCkstein

FIXING THE GĪTĀ

Adluri and Bagchee have thoroughly analyzed how the Bhagavad Gītā was both manipulated and wielded by generations of German Indologists. In the case of Richard Garbe, the text was downsized substantially on two occasions to support his thesis of an ‘original’ Gītā free from pantheistic doctrine. This ur-Gītā was the textbook, the finest scripture of the monotheistic warrior class during its highest stage of religious evolution. In his first reconstitution Garbe excised about a quarter of the total verses of the Gītā (172 of 700). In his second edit he reduced it to less than half its original size.⁴⁵ Central to Garbe’s editorial process was the notion that pantheistic passages could be identified and isolated as foreign impositions, post facto accretions of a reactionary Brahman class. This point warrants repetition. In Garbe’s interpretation, it was the scientifically-minded Kṣyatriyas who were responsible for the true, revolutionary philosophy of India dating back to the early Upaniṣadic age and culminating in the Gītā. This is initially visible in various Upaniṣadic passages where Brahmans are challenged or taught directly by Kṣatriya-s.⁴⁶ It is then exemplified in the Bhagavad Gītā (Garbe’s reconstituted Gītā) where Kṣatriyan rationality is finally wed to Kṣatriyan monotheism. Since many verses of the Gītā incontrovertibly lend themselves to Vedāntic (pantheistic) deductions, Garbe concluded that the ‘original’ Gītā had obviously been infiltrated (though in a different way than Holtzmann). The Gītā in its common, present form was a type of forgery, another instance of Brahmanical reprisal against an anti-Vedic, Upaniṣadic Kṣatriyan spirit.

It was unobjectionable to Garbe that Sāṃkhya philosophy, the later Bhagavata religion, and to a large degree the contents of the Upaniṣads, were the products of Kṣatriya ingenuity. If they have

⁴⁶ Richard Garbe, “Hindu Monism”
been ascribed otherwise, it is the result of either practical appeasement\textsuperscript{47} or more perversely, due to a later appropriation by Brahmans. While other scholars have similarly conceded that certain aspects of Upaniṣadic thought are either shared or attributable to Kṣatriyas, Garbe applied this feature consistently, especially with respect to his scriptural excavations of various monisms. For even though Garbe repeatedly denounced the idealistic monism of the Brahmans, locatable in corrupt areas of the Upaniṣads and the Gītā and culminated in the “later” Vedānta,\textsuperscript{48} he simultaneously posited the seed of another, ‘truer’ monism.

THE BHAGAVATA RELIGION
AND THE LANGUAGE OF YOGA

A virtuous and devotional monism/monotheism sprouted from the warrior class in the equation of the Brahma-Ātma, but not in the manner perpetrated by the Brahman pantheists. But somehow, according to Garbe, this all-too-important Kṣatriya-born religious disposition emerged without the full cognizance of the warriors themselves. Which is to say, somehow the originators were only vaguely aware of the weight of their monotheistic awakening. Garbe writes,

The fact that they are to be found in genuine Brahmanic writings, in books which are considered in India as the basis of the Brahmin caste, speaks a plain language. It shows that the thought of claiming the monistic doctrine of the Brahma-Atma as the in-


\textsuperscript{48} Obviously interesting because the term “Vedānta” itself can imply the “end” or “culmination” of the Veda, and was often used synonymously with the teachings of the Upaniṣads.
heritance to their caste, did not occur to the authors of the old Upanishads, or that they dared not claim it; it may be that they did not yet realise the great importance of the same.\textsuperscript{49}

Unfortunately and unsatisfactorily, this postulated chain of events is unresolved in Garbe’s work. Nevertheless, according to his theory, originating with a Sāṃkhyan rationality that cultivated a preliminary ground of atheistic dualism, there arose a much nobler doctrine, a Protestant-like Kṛṣṇa/Nārāyana-devoted monotheism. While this was not fully realized by the warrior caste in the older Upaniṣadic period, it was captured in the religion of the Bhagavatas and given form in the \textit{ur-Gītā}. Hence Garbe posited the antiquity of a monotheistic religion born from the Kṣatriya class. In his reconstruction of the \textit{Gītā} and his later \textit{India and Christendom}, Garbe set out to justify this claim, alongside other objectives such as establishing the influence of Christianity on this Bhagavata religion.\textsuperscript{50}

Asserting that the storied Kṛṣṇa was most certainly a man-of-flesh, Garbe then unequivocally pronounced that “Krishna is not a humanized God but a deified man [a “warrior” “chieftain”].”\textsuperscript{51} The rise of this Kṛṣṇa-devoted warrior sect (the Bhagavatas) occurred in pre-Buddhist times, most likely flourishing as early as the sixth century B.C. Then in agreement with and citing the work of R.G. Bhandarkar, Garbe stated that this religious uprising was the “original un-Brahmanic monotheistic religion, independent of Vedic tradition”\textsuperscript{52} and “probably preached the doctrine of love of God from the beginning and emphasized the ethical side to a much stronger degree than Brahmanism.”\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{49} Richard Garbe, “Hindu Monism,” 63 (emphasis added). A bold hypothesis indeed.

\textsuperscript{50} Richard Garbe, \textit{India and Christendom}. In particular, see Part II.XI, “Christian Elements in Later Krishnaism and Other Hinduistic Sects”

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 211.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 209.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 210.
Garbe distanced this ‘true’ monism monotheism not only from early Brahmanism, but later reactionary and devotional forms of Brahmanism that would eventually find their home in the non-dual monism of the Vedānta (he also attempted to prove this based on hypothesized ancient geography). As was mentioned in his work on the Gītā, Garbe argued that all Vedānta-like claims in the Gītā are inauthentic, and only the Bhagavata and to some degree the Sāṃkhya-Yoga elements are endemic to the original text.

With respect to the status of these Sāṃkhya-Yoga elements, owing to Sāṃkhya’s atheism and supposed lack of ethical orientation (two elements among others that would not line up cleanly with Protestantism) Garbe claimed that the Gītā’s use of the specific terminology of Yoga stems from the Yoga tradition’s unique admission of God, if only in a haphazard manner. Space does now allow for a satisfactory depiction of the “classical” Yoga tradition. Suffice it to say, the inclusion of God in a Sāṃkhya-infused Yoga has consistently troubled scholars from the first few centuries C.E. up until the present. But for Garbe, it “is not unjustified that this insertion has been undertaken in the interest of union with the Bhagavata religion.” In short, the Yoga tradition included God to accommodate Bhagavata prominence, recognizing the religious surge past the “doctrine of two principles.” Thus, even though Garbe held that the Bhagavad Gītā agrees with Sāṃkhya philosophy, he meant that it merely employed Sāṃkhyan depictions of phenomenal reality (prakṛti) and the individual, pure consciousness (puruṣa), and that the calculated use of Yoga terminology reveals the irrefutably theistic and devotional core of the text. For Garbe the Sāṃkhya system was still the work of diligent though devotional warrior scholars, and “the conception of the spiritual principle in the Bhagavad Gītā is essentially different from the Samkhya system, not exclusively philosophical but predominantly religious.”

54 Ibid., 229.
55 Ibid., 232.
The *Gītā* is the key moment (or at least evidence of the moment) of religion surpassing reason, the point at which the esteemed intellection of the warriors confessed of the need for an overcoming by a higher, more spiritual orientation. The stage of the “two principles” is but the developmental period before the emergence of the truly religious, faith-based monotheism of the Bhagavatas. In the later chapters of *India and Christendom*, Garbe continued to elucidate the degree to which this eventual stage parallels Christianity and was even influenced by it in later centuries.

**LASTING CONSEQUENCES**

There can be no doubt that in terms of innovation, massive production, and philological precision, German Indology of the past two hundred years has been among the most powerful forces for making scientific knowledge of India’s philosophical, religious, scientific and literary heritage available to the scholarly community worldwide. In this, although one may debate some of its motives and methods, it has surely changed forever our understanding of the cultural and intellectual heritage of the human race.  

This inquiry has probed but a small sample of the “motives and methods” of German Indology. Gerald Larson has contended that Richard Garbe’s perspective on Sāṃkhya was the dominant one through first few decades of the twentieth century. Garbe’s presentation of Sāṃkhya philosophy was informed by a lofty goal of aligning an Indian Bhagavata religion with German Protestant Christianity. Even though this project eventually lost momentum due to the critique of his contemporaries, some of Garbe’s conclusions regarding Sāṃkhya, the *Gītā*, and Indian rationalism have obstinately persevered. In spite of the

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56 Robert P. Goldman, “Indologies: German and Other,” in *Sanskrit and ‘Orientalism’*, 31.
fact that the pantheism/theism debate was not birthed in India and the native population admitted alternative ways of formulating the God-concept, such details were ignored for the sake of establishing intellectual and political footholds in Europe. This simultaneously implemented a scholarly re-creation of the history and destiny of the Indian subcontinent. Such ‘histories’ of religion were put to political use at home and abroad, for in the latter case (as seen in the epigraph) the missionary process was encouraged to assist when ‘true’ religious understanding was lacking.

In the early to mid-twentieth century Garbe’s claims would have political effects in Germany, if not through direct adaptation then at least by contributing to the ‘science’ of Indology and the ‘truth’ of its findings. One can look to Pollock’s assessment of the relationship between Indology and National Socialism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Yet, whatever the actual effectivity of the ideational dimension of National Socialism may have been, there is no doubt that the builders of the movement believed in the necessity of providing it with an intellectually convincing doctrine. And this was to become one that in the end relied, more than any other state doctrine in European history, on the putative results of scholarly—archaeological, philological, anthropological, Indological—research.57

In one striking example in “Deep Orientalism?” Pollock cites a portion of a speech delivered by the Indologist Walther Wüst to a gathering of SS officers in 1937. Though unable to do it full justice here, in this speech the philosophy of the Führer is remarkably likened to that of Gautama Buddha. Such a distant and seemingly impossible intellectual kinship is made possible only through “basic fact of racial consti-

tion” or “the holy concept of ancestral lineage.” And this “basic fact” of Indo-Aryanism is an essential component of the “National-Socialist world-view.” In light of the preceding analysis, one could conceive of an Indologist substituting the Sāṃkhyan Kapila (or perhaps Kṛṣṇa?) for the Buddha. Kapila, while perhaps not fully mature in a religious or Protestant sense, purportedly strove in opposition to the weak and corrupt Brahmanical class of ancient India. Garbe regarded Kapila as a key figure in the early Aryan/Kṣatriyan resistance to the ritualism and idealism of the priestly class, a class whose unfortunate victory catalyzed the religious and material impoverishment of India. Was not Germany, owing to the force of this “holy concept of ancestral lineage,” in danger of the same fate? While the example of Garbe’s Kapila was not employed in any National Socialist rhetoric, one can see how the ‘facts’ of Indology could be utilized to lend scholarly credence to its socio-political agenda.

The consequences of Garbe’s work are also locatable in more general and popular veins. While academic studies in the later part of the twentieth century centered more on Vedānta than Garbe’s proclaimed Bhagavata religion, and the hypothesis of an Indo-Germanic pre-history lost its vigor, scholarship continued to reinforce atheism or a negligible theism in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga system(s). Fortunately, many scholars have pushed back against Garbe’s work and argued correctly that early Sāṃkhya assumed theistic components and that Sāṃkhya as a recognizable, unified, philosophy cannot be assumed any earlier than Iśvarakṛṣṇa’s Sāṃkhyakārikā. Yet what stubbornly clings to this work is the idea that Sāṃkhya was always in a teleological process of maturation, one of atheistic self-discovery by which the messy theistic elements were eventually and appropriately disregarded (Sāṃkhyakārikā) or expunged (Sāṃkhyasūtra).

Modern and contemporary scholarship have recognized the overseas (and domestic) “secularization” of Indian traditions and how

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58 Ibid., 90.
this process can often exile theistic or ‘irrational’ elements. Often excluded from philosophical consideration are provocative sects whose devotional traditions may unfortunately and contemptuously be regarded as ‘primitive’ or ‘emotional’ and undergirded by little rational/scientific rigor. But Sāṃkhya-Yoga survives as a theistically-inclined tradition that undeniably penetrates deeply into both areas, the religious and rational (as if they are necessarily separate). It is significantly due to the legacy of Richard Garbe and other Indological work that Sāṃkhya-Yoga theology has been offered a very slim place for serious consideration.
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