

# Scholarly Personae in Colonial South Asia: Cultural Brokers and their Antagonists

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This paper presents an analysis of the pandit as a scholarly persona of the Sanskritic culture in colonial South Asia. It looks at how the interaction between pandits and Orientalists brought about and characterized the new persona of the »orientalist pandit« in late 18<sup>th</sup>-century to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Calcutta. Furthermore, it shows how the idea of cultural broker as described in the field of social anthropology can be usefully applied to the »orientalist pandit«, as it encourages us to investigate social aspects and authority-related issues in processes of mediation of knowledge between pandits and British scholars. The community of specialists of the Sanskritic culture reacted in various ways to the knowledge brokerage of some pandits. The philological and intellectual activity of Gangadhar Ray Kaviraj, a specialist of the Ayurvedic tradition, showcases an antagonistic reaction to such brokers in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when pandits had already been marginalized but contributed in different functions to the production of knowledge about »the Orient« in colonial South Asia.

*Keywords:* scholarly persona, cultural broker, pandit, Orientalists, Sanskritic culture, colonial South Asia, Ayurveda, Madhusudan Gupta, Gangadhar Kaviraj

## ***Introduction: The Scholarly Persona and the Cultural Broker***

The intense interaction between South Asian and European people during the colonial period resulted in an equally intense exchange of knowledge between the groups of the colonized and the colonizer. The plurality of actors in the production and transmission of knowledge is hardly reflected in the present picture of this exchange. The present study aims to address this plurality by looking at specialists of knowledge systems of the Sanskritic culture who operated within as well as outside colonial institutions in 19<sup>th</sup>-century South Asia. It reflects on different modes of dealing with the Sanskritic cultural heritage in a colonial context which was increasingly characterized by intercultural interaction.

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Therefore, this essay considers the scholarly activity of some pandits and *vaidyas* through the conceptual tools of »scholarly persona« and »cultural broker«, reflecting on how interactional practices formed and transformed patterns of indigenous scholarly activity as well as broader dynamics of cultural production and transmission in the colonial period. We begin describing the concepts of »scholarly persona« and »cultural broker« that we will be using here.

### *The Scholarly Persona*

Historians of science first elaborated the concept of »scholarly persona« as they investigated the attitudes and personalities of those who contributed to the production of scientific knowledge in modern Europe. They identified authority and an ethically virtuous life as major components of the scholarly persona, as they emphasized the cultural dimensions of social and institutional life and its changes. The idea of *persona* has since been adopted in the social sciences and the humanities in relation to individuals and individual agencies.<sup>1</sup> It has been understood as an identity mostly formed through »self-fashioning«, with scholars individually shaping and performing their professional identities.<sup>2</sup> In around 2000, Lorraine Daston and H. Otto Sibum developed the idea of scientific personae as models of scientists that exist as collective entities into which individual ways of being human are moulded. The cultural templates for scholarly roles represented by such personae depend on the cultural and social institutions in which they perform their roles rather than on individual personalities. Therefore, such templates are to some extent »pre-existing prototypes«<sup>3</sup> of individualized personae, whose embodiments are observed over time and place within a society.<sup>4</sup> As noted by Gadi Algazi and Hermann Paul, the term *persona* is used in a third sense too, namely »as a cultural template for a codified social role«<sup>5</sup> that individuals can assume. Therefore, rather than corresponding to and depending on an individual person who embodied a specific persona, a *persona* results from a pool of existing models<sup>6</sup> and can be at least partially refashioned by different actors at different points in time.<sup>7</sup> As an identity linked to social traditions and shaped by individual agency, in Algazi's use, personae relate to persons as »the recognised, codified templates through which they may be perceived, by means of which they can be shaped and which they are likely to negotiate«. <sup>8</sup> So, a persona template can be attributed to persons who may not unequivocally or exclusively adhere to it, but may nevertheless display virtues, vices and skills of that particular model. Furthermore, the template that a scholar embodies can appear in contrast to other present or past templates.

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1 See, among others, Shapin, *Scholar and a gentleman*, Shapin, *Scientific Life*, Clark, *Academic Charisma*, and more recently, Niskanen and Barany (eds.), *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of the Scholarly Persona*, and Paul, *Performing history*.

2 Kirwan (ed.), *Scholarly Self-Fashioning*; Bosch, *Scholarly personae and twentieth-century historians*.

3 Algazi, *Exemplum and Wundertier*, 10.

4 Daston and Sibum, *Introduction: Scientific personae and their histories*, 3-4.

5 Algazi, *Exemplum and Wundertier*, 8.

6 Paul, *Introduction: Scholarly personae*, 7.

7 Algazi, *Exemplum and Wundertier*, 11-12.

8 Algazi, *Exemplum and Wundertier*, 17.

It is the historian's task, Paul has observed, to understand, »when, how, and why historical agents felt a need to distinguish between different models of being a scholar«,<sup>9</sup> thus appropriating or differentiating themselves from existing personae. Therefore, »the prism of scholarly personae encourages historians to acknowledge *synchronic variety*«<sup>10</sup> and analyse different models represented by individual scholars in the same cultural space.

The investigation of scholarly personae in 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial South Asia requires us to consider components which typically shape a scholarly personhood, from affiliations and competitions at a personal level to continuities and tensions at the level of generations and traditions.<sup>11</sup> But we also specifically need to ask whether and how the interaction<sup>12</sup> between indigenous scholars and »Orientalists« (namely European scholars who undertook so-called Oriental studies in late 19<sup>th</sup>- to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe)<sup>13</sup> contributed to shaping scholarly practices and ideologies of indigenous scholars of the time. For such an interaction poses the question of how existing templates were refashioned or consolidated, or different templates created during the colonial period, following, as well as generating, changes in the representation, production and management of knowledge.

The cultural broker is a model that can be fruitfully incorporated in the study of scholarly personae as a way of identifying the contours of scholarly activities within the landscape of the interaction between indigenous and European agents of knowledge.

### *The Cultural Broker*

The origins of the concept of the cultural broker are linked to the study of processes of cultural formation and transformation in the field of anthropology in the 1950s. Unlike brokers, whose role usually relates to commercial aspects, cultural brokers primarily deal with knowledge. The Indian subcontinent is in some ways an ideal place to explore the concept of the »cultural broker« because of the intense exchanges between cultures of the Indian subcontinent and other cultures, among which the European one in the colonial era is our focus of attention. Studies of the interaction between indigenous and European knowledge agents have already examined roles that can be identified with the cultural broker, loosely understood as a mediator of knowledge in the interaction with the other, and one who facilitates the crossing of cultural boundaries by another person or group of people.

Kapil Raj, in particular, has used the concepts of »knowledge go-between« and »knowledge brokerage« in relation to agents belonging to intermediary communities who possessed specific knowledge useful in trade networks.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Paul, Introduction: Scholarly personae, 9.

10 Paul, Introduction: Scholarly personae, 14.

11 Paul, Introduction: Scholarly personae, 7-8.

12 I use the word »interaction« instead of »encounter« in consideration of Mukharji's remarks on the use of »encounter« with reference to India and Europe (Mukharji, *Nationalizing the Body*, 8-9).

13 »Oriental studies« is the label under which different kinds of research on cultures of North Africa and Asia have been lumped together since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to Edward W. Said's critical engagement with the notion of Orientalism. Edward W. Said's book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, has changed the approach to the study of these cultures and the institutions within which such studies are carried out. These changes are reflected in designations such as »Oriental Department« being replaced with the names of the regions and cultures on which research is conducted, for example »Department of Asian Studies«. Urs App has shown that the genesis of modern Orientalism goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*The Birth of Orientalism*).

14 Raj, Mapping knowledge go-betweens, 111.

His analysis aims to show how »cross-cultural mediation emerged as a specialized activity in its own right, becoming increasingly differentiated and gaining autonomy from trade communities during the course of the second millennium CE«. <sup>15</sup> Raj's essay is part of a book titled *The Brokered World*, whose editors (and he is one of them) use the expression »go-between« to designate people who since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century have been »identified as crucial for regimes of politics, commerce and empire: brokers and spies, messengers and translators«. <sup>16</sup> In their role of go-betweens, these people made and transformed both the contents and the paths of knowledge, contributing to »the very construction of this modern world, notably in the domain of knowledge and sciences«. <sup>17</sup> Outlining »brokered knowledge«, Raj sketches translation activities and knowledge-making policies of the Calcutta decades 1770-1820, <sup>18</sup> and argues that,

a variety of go-betweens played crucial roles not only to enable and sustain the very process of European expansion but also to negotiate the very definition of the cultural boundaries which they were to straddle, and indeed to construct and manage the cultural differences which lay at the heart of the sciences of the 19th century. <sup>19</sup>

The »knowledge go-betweens« described by Raj are similar to the »cultural brokers« conceptualized by Marc von der Höh, Nikolas Jaspert and Jenny R. Oesterle as »those who actively or deliberately transfer cultural messages or contents to a different environment« <sup>20</sup> in the Mediterranean courts in the Middle Ages. Such an inclusive way of understanding the cultural broker or the knowledge go-between has made these concepts quite broad but less specific. So, equating cultural brokerage with the function of understanding and translating the other's language, figures as diverse as teachers in the field of indigenous science education (Gondwe and Longnecker) or missionaries in 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Mexico (Schönhärl) have been identified as cultural brokers. <sup>21</sup>

As Kurtis Schaeffer explains in his contribution to this volume, the anthropologists Wolf, Geertz and Press instead used the concept of cultural broker in relation to agents of cultural exchange who perform their function in a quite specific way.

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15 Raj, *Mapping knowledge go-betweens*, 106; Qaisar, *Role of brokers in medieval India*, focuses on trade networks and does not consider learned agents of knowledge.

16 Schaffer *et al.*, *Introduction*, x.

17 Schaffer *et al.*, *Introduction*, x-xi.

18 Raj, *Mapping knowledge go-betweens*, 127, 131, and 136.

19 Raj, *Mapping knowledge go-betweens*, 106.

20 von der Höh *et al.*, *Courts, brokers and brokerage*, 9. This kind of definition of the cultural broker has become problematic because of the metaphor that it contains regarding knowledge. In particular, the idea of »knowledge transfer« suggests having something solid being moved from one place to another. But, as aptly observed by R. Ennals, P. Totterdill, and R. Parrington, knowledge is not one such thing: »Books can be transferred between people. Knowledge is more complex. Knowledge transfer is not a linear process managed by administrators. It is a matter of cultural change, with knowledge as integral to the culture. Knowledge is socially constituted, and not simply held by individuals« (Ennals *et al.*, *Can knowledge be transferred?*, 3).

21 Gondwe and Longnecker, *Scientific and cultural knowledge*; Schönhärl, *Wie tief der Kern*, 289-292. Schönhärl suggests using the notion of »allelipoiesis«, or mutual transformation, to explain the phenomena of cultural brokerage in which the description of disturbing foreign aspects as »living antiquity« is a way to make sense of them (Schönhärl, *Wie tief der Kern*, 288: »In einigen, ganz speziellen Fällen von cultural brokerage ist der Begriff der Allelopoiesis dennoch hilfreich: immer dann nämlich, wenn eine irritierende, verstörende Fremde als „lebende Antike« beschrieben wurde, um sie sinnhaft zu deuten.«). However, consideration of the feature of »allelipoiesis« does not help to make the use of the concept of cultural brokerage more specific.

Here, cultural brokers are the ones who (1) act as social mediators and (2) operate within the local group and between the local and translocal groups, while (3) attending to needs and expectations of both. Two additional characteristics of the cultural brokers are (4) gaining authority through their activity, just as the members of the group who work with them do, and (5) having the capacity for cultural innovation, which is at times mandatory.<sup>22</sup> While delimiting the concept in relatively narrow terms, this definition of the cultural broker highlights the social functions of knowledge as well as its intersection with power and authority. Furthermore, it helps to identify agents of knowledge who operate in a network of relationships that they also actively, and sometimes creatively, contribute to shaping. It is this definition of the cultural broker that we use here in the investigation of scholarly personae in 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial South Asia.

### *The Pandit as a Scholarly Persona of the Sanskritic Culture*

In identifying and outlining scholarly personae from South Asia, the use of »scholar« and »scholarly« requires critical attention. The terms »scholar« and »scholarly«, which derive from the Latin *schola* (»school«), indicate an expert in a field of study and the context in which he/she acts, which is the academic context. Therefore, scholarly personae are characterized by their learning as well as their belonging to institutions of higher education and learning such as universities, advanced colleges, academies, research institutes and the like, where knowledge is produced, managed and transmitted. Now, knowledge is produced, managed and transmitted everywhere, but the institutions that perform such tasks and the related functions vary culture by culture and region by region. For example, the most important educational institutions of modern South Asia were the *pāṭhaśālā* in Hindu communities<sup>23</sup> and the *madrasa* in Muslim communities.<sup>24</sup>

In the Sanskritic culture of the Indian subcontinent, designations such as *ācārya*, *guru*, and *śāstrin* denote learned persons who also perform the teaching function. Such words have been subsumed under the English umbrella term »pandit«, which derives from the Sanskrit adjective *paṇḍita* (»learned«).<sup>25</sup>

22 Schaeffer, Cultural brokers, 118-120.

23 As explained by Lubin, Davis, and Krishnan (Introduction, 1-4), »Hindu« was an ethnic label used by the Persians and later the Greeks to refer to the peoples who lived around and beyond the Sindhu River (»Hindu« being the way the Persians and Greeks pronounced »Sindhu«). It seems that after Turkic rulers established Persianate Islamic kingdoms in various parts of India in the early thirteenth century, the Indians applied the term Hindu to themselves as opposed to »Turaka«. By the early nineteenth century the ethnonym »Hindu« had yielded the umbrella term Hinduism. However, during the Victorian age, »Indians came increasingly to reflect on what made their religious culture distinctive in comparison with Christianity and Islam, and in so doing came to adopt the name Hindu« (Lubin, Davis, and Krishnan, Introduction, 2). On the political utilization of religion in shaping images of culture, see Paramore, *Religion and Orientalism*, where the editor and the volume's contributors also reflect on how such a utilization of religion »is not limited to the West and not limited to the past« (Paramore, Introduction, 5).

24 For a few remarks on the *pāṭhaśālā*, see Scharfe, Education in Ancient India, 76-78. The *madrasa* (also transliterated as *madrasah* or *madrassa*) was sometimes not only a school, but also a cultural centre. The identification of the *madrasa* education with religious education goes back to the British presence in South Asia and was reinforced by the 1854 Education Despatch, which stipulated the teaching of »useful knowledge« as opposed to the kind of learning imparted in »Hindoo« and »Mahomedan« institutions (Ingram, »Modern' Madrasa, 218).

25 Michaels, Traditional Sanskrit learning, 3. A notable exception is the meaning of »pandit« in Kashmir, where it corresponds to a Brahmin, without any further specification (see Witzel, Brahmins of Kashmir). The pandit is an eminently male person, but since women occasionally had access to high-level education, there have been female pandits, too. A case of a female pandit is Ramabai, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century specialist of Sanskrit literature who became a social reformer (see, more recently, Victor, Pandita Ramabai: A forgotten hero, and bibliography therein).

The pandit can easily be, and has indeed been, equated with the more general category of scholar<sup>26</sup> and can be identified as the overarching template of the scholarly persona of the Sanskrit culture. The scholarly persona of the pandit is characterized by specialization in one or more Sanskrit knowledge systems (*śāstras*), the ability to recite by heart selected Sanskrit treatises and being able to copy as well as paraphrase them.<sup>27</sup> It is also typical for a pandit to belong to a particular lineage (*paramparā*) within a tradition and learned community, which usually has a regional base.<sup>28</sup> Affiliation is determined by the educational training received within the framework of a master-disciple relationship (*guru-śiṣya-sambandha*). The pandit's individual expertise in one or the other *śāstra* traditionally corresponds to specific titles, such as the Sanskrit *vaidya* or *jyotiṣa*, which indicate a specialist of Ayurveda and a specialist of astronomy, respectively. Such titles usually correspond with similar names in cognate languages or with regional designations; for example, the Sanskrit *vaidya* corresponds to *vaid* in Hindi and *kaviraj* in Bengal.

A survey of the pandit's scholarly persona throughout history would easily reveal a variety of templates based not only on political circumstances and regional diversity, but also on different specialized fields of knowledge.<sup>29</sup> One of the main features of the pandit's persona that has changed over time is the pursuit of spiritual attainments, which characterized the *paṇḍita* but gradually disappeared, as is clear from increasingly common depictions of the pandit as someone with a conservative attitude and only interested in making a living through learning and teaching.<sup>30</sup>

### *Changes in the Template: The »Orientalist Pandit«<sup>31</sup>*

Major transformations in the persona of the pandit arguably occurred during the colonial period, when European scholars who began to systematically explore all that was deemed Indian came into contact and then regularly interacted with pandits. With a focus on 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bengal, one of the regions where such a contact was most pronounced, we consider cooperation with the Orientalists<sup>32</sup> the main feature that characterizes a new type of scholarly persona, whom I call the »orientalist pandit«. <sup>33</sup> Through the expression »orientalist pandit«, two characterizing aspects of the activity of orientalist pandits are emphasized: first, their sustained exchange of knowledge with the Orientalists, and secondly, their contribution to the creation and dissemination of knowledge about »the Orient«. <sup>34</sup>

26 The equation of the word »scholar« with the word »pandit« appears, for example, in the heading »The pandit as a scholar and teacher«, in Michaels, *Traditional Sanskrit learning*, 3.

27 Michaels, *Traditional Sanskrit learning*, 3.

28 Aklujkar, *Paṇḍita and pandits in history*, 32-33.

29 One could begin such a survey with the 2001 collected volume *The Pandit. Traditional Scholarship in India*, edited by Axel Michaels; Dalmia, *Sanskrit scholars and pandits*; Hatcher, *What's become of the pandit?*; and O'Hanlon and Minkowski, *What makes people who they are?*

30 Aklujkar, *Paṇḍita and pandits in history*, 20-29.

31 The scare quotes here enclose a historically given expression that I normally would not use because of its problematic associations (see fn. 13 above).

32 See p. 128 above.

33 The expression »orientalist pandit« appears in some online Indian publications with reference to Indian scholars who specialized in what is nowadays called South Asian studies and used to be called Indology; see, for example, »6 July 1837- Prominent orientalist Pandit Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar was born«, accessed 11 June 2024: <https://www.thefamousday.com/todays-famous-day-on-6-july-in-historical-events/>.

34 See fn. 31 above.

The latter aspect consisted, on the one hand, in providing linguistic, cultural, and social information to the Europeans with whom they worked, who then, through their studies, contributed information and interpretive tools to the colonial imaginary and made both communication and imperial administration possible.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the contribution of the pandits to the dissemination of knowledge about »the Orient« was effective in their own cultural environment in the sense and to the extent that it showed ways of looking at things from the outside.<sup>36</sup>

Before turning to whether and how the concept of cultural broker can be usefully applied to the orientalist pandit, we review the main modalities of orientalist pandits that emerged in the initial phase of their interaction with British scholars. First, the British scholars with whom the pandits cooperated embodied a type of Orientalist that has been called a »field-worker«.<sup>37</sup> Orientalists who worked in the field spent part of their life in South Asia. Their profile was essentially characterized by their unmediated interaction with local agents of knowledge, which enabled them to distinguish themselves from and claim authority over the »armchair philologists« (whose research was based on the materials available in the libraries of Europe)<sup>38</sup> as well as non-scholarly figures like missionaries, travellers and political or military representatives of European administrations in South Asia.<sup>39</sup> In view of the Orientalists' interest in antiquity, the main tasks in their research agenda were the study of ancient languages and texts from the past, as well as collecting the necessary sources to undertake such study. However, as agents of the translocal group, they could hardly gain direct access to indigenous knowledge. The sources were not readily available in the ways Europeans were accustomed to, namely by consulting manuscripts and printed books in public library spaces. Moreover, the required linguistic and interpretive competence could only be achieved through interaction with indigenous scholars, who were heirs to the traditional methods of oral transmission of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> British fieldwork scholars identified the pandits as agents of knowledge whose assistance was needed not only for obtaining manuscripts but more importantly, for learning languages, as well as for carrying on larger hermeneutical projects concerning the legal and administrative systems of South Asia, its religious traditions, philosophies, medical sciences, and so on. They thus looked for pandits with whom they could work together.

The first Orientalists with whom pandits directly and continuously collaborated were William Jones (1746-1794) and Henry T. Colebrooke (1765-1837), who thanks to the pandits, were able to acquire a command of Sanskrit that enabled them to autonomously consult Sanskrit sources.

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35 See Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

36 Studies on the reception of knowledge about the »Orient« produced by indigenous scholars are, notably, Heschel and Ryad, *Muslim Reception* and, regarding Japan, Krämer, *Orientalism and the study of lived religions*; Licha and Krämer, *Learning*; and Zhong, *Race, Buddhism, and the formation of oriental (Tōyō) philosophy*. An example concerning South Asia is Killingley, *Basis of theism*, where the author comments on a selection from R. G. Bhandarkar's 1883 anniversary lecture to the Prārthanā Samāj. In the lecture, Bhandarkar presents the reconstruction of Indian religious history provided by European scholars as well as Western-educated Indians, among whom he could count himself.

37 Engberts and Paul, *Scholarly Personae in the History of Orientalism*.

38 For a study concerning specialists of South Asia, see Rabault-Ferhahn, *German Indology challenged*.

39 Paul, *Introduction: Scholarly personae*, 11.

40 On the role of oral tradition and transmission in the making of a print culture in South Asia, see Pecchia *et al.*, *Print cultures in the making*.

The pandit Rādhākānta began to be in regular contact with Jones in 1787.<sup>41</sup> Along with other pandits, he assisted Jones over the years and worked for him in various capacities, preparing translations and digests of a variety of texts, from Sanskrit inscriptions to Vedic texts;<sup>42</sup> providing interpretations of those texts and guiding the foreign scholar in the vast world of Sanskrit literature. For example, it was after Rādhākānta's suggestion that Jones turned his attention to the Sanskrit play Śakuntala.<sup>43</sup> Through Jones, Rādhākānta was appointed as the pandit for Bengal in the team of salaried pandits who worked on the composition of a digest of Hindu and Muslim laws.<sup>44</sup> To accept a salaried position was an important aspect in the development of the relationships between pandits of Rādhākānta's calibre and the British administration. It was in fact customary for pandits who received Indian royal patronage to be rewarded with land with a yearly revenue. Indeed, in an initial phase, Rādhākānta received this kind of reward from Governor Warren Hastings for his composition of a digest of Purāṇas.<sup>45</sup> Jones' appreciation of Rādhākānta and the latter's high status in the eyes of the British administration are reflected in the subsequent appointments Rādhākānta had (including his giving opinions to the superior court even after Jones' death) and having the power to negotiate his salary.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly to Rādhākānta, Citrapati worked for Colebrooke in various functions,<sup>47</sup> also contributing to one of Colebrooke's major projects, namely bringing to completion Jones' project of a digest of Hindu and Muslim laws, through the composition of the *Vyavahārasiddhāntapīyūṣa*, an annotated compilation of codes of Hindu civil and criminal law.<sup>48</sup> Another authoritative pandit, Bāla Śarman Pāyaguṇḍa, contributed to the same project as he began to compose a never completed digest of civil law, the *Dharmaśāstrasamgraha*.<sup>49</sup>

Pandits like Rādhākānta and Citrapati shaped a new pandit's persona, first characterized by entering into a concrete conversation with British scholars, not only teaching them and sharing knowledge but also producing new works commissioned by the foreign scholars for their own agenda. The pandit is well aware of the value of his learning and of his linguistic and interpretive competence for the projects pursued by British scholars. Furthermore, he is one who has radically changed his view on how his scholarly work should be rewarded, shifting from the donation of land to a salary for a fixed term. But prior to this, he must have changed some religious and caste-based views that would have prevented him from collaborating directly with foreign scholars. Rādhākānta, for example, initially refused a salaried position, probably for religious reasons,<sup>50</sup> but the political power that British administrators could boast (Hastings was on friendly terms with Rādhākānta's patron, Maharaja Navakṛṣṇa, or Nobkissen, of Sobha Bazar, Calcutta)<sup>51</sup> probably facilitated a process of setting aside some religious and caste-related bias toward foreign scholars.

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41 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 629, fn. 24.

42 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*.

43 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 629.

44 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 630.

45 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 628.

46 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 633, fn. 57.

47 Rocher, *Marginalization of Indian pandits*, 737, 743.

48 Eggeling, *Catalogue*, no. 1508 of 1508-1510.

49 Eggeling, *Catalogue*, no. 1507.

50 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 628.

51 Rocher, *Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa*, 627-628.



The persona of the orientalist pandit that, based on collaboration with British scholars, took shape in the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, continued to develop in the 1800s. As stated by Rosane Rocher,

A period of pandit authority in the 1770s morphed into one of collaboration with British scholars in the 1780s and 1790s, and finally gave way to pandit work under British direction in the 1800s.<sup>52</sup>

British fieldwork scholars who operated in the Bengali and, more particularly, Calcutta social and political context participated directly in »critical changes in the information order of north India during the early nineteenth century«, when new, knowledgeable institutions were created, including »revenue, legal and educational establishments«.<sup>53</sup> Already with Colebrooke, a project commissioned by British scholars or administrators and entirely led by Indian pandits – such as the composition of the Sanskrit *Vivādārṇavasetu*, commissioned by Governor Warren Hastings from a group of eleven Calcutta pandits in 1773<sup>54</sup> – would have been hardly conceivable, because pandits were no longer considered completely reliable as regards their interpretive activity and their ability to extract and select texts according to the needs of the British scholars. In a note written in the margins of folios 1 and 2 of Pāyaguṇḍa's *Dharmaśāstrasamgraha* (dated 1 to 3 May, 1800), Colebrooke remarks that the digest was a plagiarized version of another work, the *Vīramitrodaya*, which in his opinion, was »far better than the *Pāyaguṇḍa* is capable of producing himself«.<sup>55</sup> In the same note, Colebrooke also observed that the public had more confidence in the pandits than in him,<sup>56</sup> and nevertheless he decided to compile a digest of Hindu law himself, because »no Pandit is capable (or adapted by his habits of thinking) to compile a digest in the form I require«.<sup>57</sup>

Colebrooke's attitude towards the pandits, as observed by Rosane Rocher, marked an increasing marginalization of the pandits in the production of knowledge about »the Orient«.<sup>58</sup> Such a change in the relationship between pandits and British scholars was surely reflected in the persona of the pandit, who, in view of the asymmetricality imparted by the colonial mentality, worked under British direction in modalities that could make them be »perceived as little more than servants«.<sup>59</sup> While the pandits saw their intellectual role and contribution seldom adequately recognized by the British scholars, the reward they received was probably a good incentive to collaborate with foreign scholars. Furthermore, working for the British not only took the form of regular conversations between pandits and Orientalists but also increasingly meant to coordinate the work of other pandits and students (which must have given authority to the pandit within his community) and to teach in British institutions.

52 Rocher, *Marginalization of Indian pandits*, 736.

53 Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 143.

54 See Rocher, *Overlapping recensions*. Through Persian and Bengali versions, the *Vivādārṇavasetu* was translated into English as *Code of Gentoo Laws* by Nathaniel B. Halhed (see Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry, and the Millennium*, 48-72).

55 The information is recorded in Eggeling, *Catalogue*, no. 1507, p. 459a.

56 Rocher, *Marginalization of Indian pandits*, 742, reporting the information in Eggeling, *Catalogue*, no. 1507, p. 459b.

57 See fn. 55 above.

58 Rocher, *Marginalization of Indian pandits*.

59 Rocher and Rocher, *Making of Western Indology*, 67.

A case in point is Madhusudan Gupta (1800?-1856), who represented a specific category of pandits who specialized in Ayurveda. They assisted the British not only regarding the translation of ancient Ayurvedic texts but also with the interpretation of various types of medical contents, importantly including materia medica. Following an attested usage of having personal names preceded by both titles »pandit« and »vaidya«, scholars like Madhusudan can be called pandit-vaidya.<sup>60</sup> Madhusudan's persona was characterized by his teaching activity. He first taught Ayurveda at Calcutta's Sanskrit College (from 1830) and then anatomy at the Calcutta Medical College (founded in January 1835).<sup>61</sup> Madhusudan's teaching role at Sanskrit College, whose educational programme included the study of Sanskrit medical sources, is most probably connected with his publication of the first printed edition of the *Suśrutasamhitā* (»Suśruta's Compendium«), one of the foundational works of Ayurveda (c.2<sup>nd</sup> century). Published in two volumes in 1835 and 1836 by two different printing houses, the Education Press and the Baptist Mission Press, under the auspices of the Education Committee and the Asiatic Society, respectively, the publication reflected the radical change that the English Education Act of 1835 had brought about in British educational institutions through the compulsory adoption of the English language and curriculum.<sup>62</sup> While the completion of the printing of the *Suśrutasamhitā* shows the value attached by British scholars and administrators to the work, the publication itself shows the status of independent scholar that Madhusudan had, with his editorial work being fully recognized by the British presses and, consequently, the institutions that supported the presses. His scholarly status was due not only to his linguistic and Ayurvedic expertise but also, and perhaps even more, to his training in European medical science and the cadaveric dissection that he allegedly performed, the first time that this had been done in India. Documentary evidence is not beyond doubt,<sup>63</sup> but the British celebrated Madhusudan because of this act and described him as »the pioneer who cleared a space in the jungle of prejudice«,<sup>64</sup> alluding to religious concerns in the Hindu tradition that prevented Ayurvedic doctors from dissecting human corpses. Another component of Madhusudan's persona was his role as a translator from English of medical content. Combining knowledge of Ayurveda and European medical science, he assisted English teachers translating technical terms and concepts into Sanskrit and Bengali. Furthermore, he translated into Sanskrit Robert Hooper's *The Anatomist's Vade Mecum* with the title *Śārīravidyā* (we will come back to this in the next section).<sup>65</sup>

As was typical of orientalist pandits, Madhusudan's collaboration with British institutions also included having a regular exchange with British scholars about a specific field of knowledge. In particular, Madhusudan worked together with Thomas Alexander Wise (1802-1889), a Scottish medical doctor who served as a physician for the East Indian Company and held other appointments, including being the principal of the Hooghly and Dacca colleges.

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60 See MacDonald, *In Clear Words I*, 168, where the author refers to a manuscript of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* in the possession of Pandit Vaidya Asha Kaji Bajracharya of Pathan.

61 Bose, Madhusudan Gupta, 32.

62 Pecchia, Ayurveda, philology and print, 119-120.

63 Bhattacharya, First dissection controversy. Mukharji has illustrated the role of cadaveric dissection and explained it as a historiographic red herring, *Doctoring Traditions*, 59-62.

64 Bose, Madhusudan Gupta, 32-33 and 39, with reference at fn. 41.

65 See Bose, Madhusudan Gupta, 36; Bhattacharya, Hospital transcends into hospital medicine, 45; and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society, 663-664 and 742-745.

After a ten-year-long study, in 1845 he published the *Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine*, the first comprehensive outline of Ayurveda (which at the time was identical with »Hindu medicine«) written by a European scholar and based on Sanskrit sources.<sup>66</sup> Unlike some European scholars, Wise acknowledged the help he received from local scholars for his interpretation of the original texts and even mentions two of them by name:

For arriving at the true meaning of words and expressions, I have had the assistance of able Pandits, of these I must particularly mention the assistance I have derived from Abhaycharan Tarkapanchánan, now superintendent of the Bengálí department of the College of Muhammad Mohsem, Hoogly, and of Madhusudan Gupta, Lecturer of Anatomy to the Medical College, Calcutta, whose accurate knowledge of the medical shástras is combined with an extensive knowledge of the sciences of Europe.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, works such as Wise's *Commentary* can hardly be explained without many years of contact with experts in the Ayurvedic tradition who selected and made available Ayurvedic sources, while at the same time providing expert advice on textual and linguistic issues as well as Ayurvedic concepts.

The persona of the orientalist pandit outlined so far, whose contours are shaped by an intense interaction with European scholars, is undoubtedly characterized by the desire to share with a cultural other (in this case, the Orientalists) one's own learning, as well as the linguistic and interpretative tools that enable one to understand another culture (in this case, the Sanskritic culture and other cultures of South Asia). This characteristic is clearly crucial for the exchange of knowledge between the two cultural worlds and may hint at the orientalist pandit embodying the complex role of the cultural broker. As we turn to consider whether orientalist pandits can be described as cultural brokers, it becomes clear that this is an exercise in bringing into focus the functions and modalities of the pandit that contributed most to mediating knowledge to the other, as well as the role of the community and the wider social context to which the pandit belonged. The latter two aspects, in particular, are connected with the social-anthropological background of the broker idea we refer to, which is the one outlined by Schaeffer in his reflection on the cultural broker.<sup>68</sup>

#### *The Orientalist Pandit as a Cultural Broker*

The definition of the cultural broker offered by Schaeffer presents knowledge as being shared and mediated within a complex network of social and power-based relationships that link the broker to the receiver of the object of brokerage as well as to the group to which the broker belongs. In testing the broker concept, we have to consider whether and how the orientalist pandits examined above (1) acted as social mediators and (2) operated within the local group and between the local and translocal groups; whether and how, in doing so, they (3) dealt with needs and expectations of both groups; and if their activity (4) granted authority to them as well as to the members of the group who worked with them, and (5) was connected with cultural innovation.

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66 Lange, A Dundee's doctor's collection(s), 436-438. On medical Orientalism see Mukharji, *Doctoring Traditions*, 55-59.

67 Wise, *Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine*, xix.

68 See pp. 109-127 above.

A pandit who had a direct and privileged relationship with an Orientalist operated between the local group of learned people and the translocal group of the Orientalists in various ways. The pandit provided the latter with copies of manuscripts that he himself copied or arranged to have copied by other pandits or students. The work done was much more than just copying or organizing the copying, though. It presupposed selecting texts and collecting manuscripts to be copied, as well as deciding how to copy them and what to do in problematic cases. These preliminary, essential steps involved a great deal of intellectual and relational work that was moulded by the pandit's ability to attend to the needs of the Orientalists. Based on such an understanding, the pandit selected the texts to be read and copied, contacted individuals and families who possessed relevant manuscripts and had them copied. This process could entail an aspect of social mediation, because caste and religious issues within the local group (on which the pandit de facto depended) could hinder the pandit's personal work or having others work for him. Furthermore, the pandit had to fulfil the expectations of his group in terms of monetary gain and social reward.

At this point I pause to consider how programmatically asymmetrical relationships between two culturally diverse groups can complicate the assessment of the interaction of different agents. In the colonial context of 19<sup>th</sup>-century South Asia, the aspects of authority and innovation are especially problematic for a clear identification of pandits as cultural brokers. The processes of exchange of knowledge in the colonial period cannot be described in much detail, because the paucity of South Asian sources is compounded by distorted information in European sources. The dismissive attitude of British scholars towards the pandits' abilities (see, for example, Colebrooke's statement quoted above at p. 134) a priori denies any agency to the group of the colonized regarding processes of exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, the colonizer controls the production and circulation of knowledge and thereby can largely control the narrative about the »quality« of the work done by local agents of knowledge. The historiography of the Orientalists has shed some light on different narratives concerning the knowledge of the pandits and their interaction with the Orientalists. Despite the marginalization of pandits that began with Colebrooke,<sup>69</sup> from the 1770s and throughout the 1800s, prominent pandits interacted with British scholars, having a sense of their agency in the mediation of their inherited knowledge and the transformation of paradigms of traditional knowledge, on the one hand, and on the other hand, having the value of their agency acknowledged by the British.

Madhusudan Gupta is a case in point. The printing of his edition of the *Suśrutasaṃhitā* was supported even when its primary readership, namely college students, had been erased by the English Act.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the printing of his *Śārīravidyā*, a translation into Sanskrit of Hooper's *Anatomist's Vade Mecum*, was decided in summer 1838 by a specially appointed committee of the Asiatic Society. The committee discussed, in particular, which language should be preferred for translating and disseminating European knowledge in South Asia.<sup>71</sup> The discussion by the committee members shows appreciation for Madhusudan's offer to collaborate in the correction and revision of the translation and depicts Madhusudan himself as »very anxious that his labor should not be lost to his countrymen«.<sup>72</sup>

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69 See p. 134 above.

70 See pp. 134-135 above.

71 Proceedings of the Asiatic Society, 663-664 and 742-745.

72 Proceedings of the Asiatic Society, 743.

Furthermore, most of the members of the committee favoured the printing of the *Vade Mecum* in Sanskrit so as »to convey to the medical pandits throughout India, who are an exclusive caste of hereditary monopolists in their profession, and all study their art in Sanskrit, a more correct notion of human Anatomy«. <sup>73</sup> Madhusudan's Sanskrit translation of an anatomical work in English mediated European knowledge to the Indian community, more specifically its learned medical community, which could be reached *in toto* through the medium of Sanskrit. In this way, he attended to the expectations of both communities, the translocal one that wanted its knowledge system to be disseminated among the colonized and the local one, which corresponded to the learned medical community, that would read a treatise in Sanskrit, the language of its classics. Madhusudan gained authority among the British scholars through his teaching of European anatomy, his Sanskrit translation and his knowledge of the Ayurvedic classics. Wise's explicit recognition of Madhusudan's learned assistance speaks for itself of his authority as a specialist of Ayurveda. By contrast, his alleged dissection of a human cadaver made him as much celebrated on the colonizer's side as contested on the Indian side, especially its Hindu part, <sup>74</sup> to which Madhusudan belonged. Within his learned community, probably only a quite narrow segment of students and specialists of medical science appreciated Madhusudan's openness to the new anatomical knowledge and his efforts towards the creation of an appropriate lexicon in Sanskrit and Bengali (the latter especially through the teaching). His innovative capacity in this regard, if seen together with his explanation of Ayurvedic concepts, would give us a sense of Madhusudan's possible integration of the Ayurvedic and European medical systems. It is, however, nigh on impossible to assess Madhusudan's contribution to Wise's presentation of Ayurvedic topics, which are in some cases quite different from the traditional Ayurvedic view. <sup>75</sup>

Turning back to the issue of authority, the continuity of relationships such as those between Rādhākānta and Jones or Citrapati and Colebrooke and the notes of these British scholars are evidence of the pandits' prestige and authority in the eyes of the British in the last three decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (the first two phases of Rocher's tripartition, see above p. 133). Furthermore, Jones' and Colebrooke's notes from this period also testify to the pandit's successful agency in facilitating the circulation of knowledge between two heterogeneous groups. However, the generally dismissive attitude of European scholars from the 1800s may not be equal to a mere denial of authority of the pandits. Recognition of the authority of the pandits can be inferred through the mere fact that their work was needed and the tasks assigned to them at times presupposed consideration not only of their learning but also of their ability to use such learning according to Europeans epistemic structures – which for the pandits entailed innovating with respect to their traditional knowledge or doing something new with it. For example, after funds for his Sanskrit dictionary project were cut, Colebrooke put the Bengali pandit Raghumaṇi Vidyābhūṣaṇa on his personal payroll to compile the dictionary. Colebrooke thus considered Raghumaṇi authoritative and competent enough to do the work, which was not merely mechanical but required the ability to produce something new and innovate with respect to what was available before.

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73 Proceedings of the Asiatic Society, 663.

74 Bose, Madhusudan Gupta, 33.

75 The issue of »temperaments«, for example, is discussed in Mukharji, *Doctoring Traditions*, 101-103.

And yet, Colebrooke later gave Raghumaṇi's draft of the dictionary to H. H. Wilson for his *Dictionary of Sanscrit and English*, where only Colebrooke's contribution is acknowledged.<sup>76</sup> A much later, explicit recognition of the pandits' authority is found in Peter Peterson's reply to Whitley Stokes, who had declared the lack of »learning, accuracy and persistent energy« of the native scholars for the task of making catalogues.<sup>77</sup> In his 1883 report on the search for Sanskrit manuscripts, Peterson writes,

no candid mind can engage in the study of that history [the history of literature, C.P.] in India without recognising that much, which remains for the European to discover, had never been hid from the native learned community.<sup>78</sup>

Peterson also voiced a criticism against his European colleagues who did not mention at all the names of the »native collaborateur« without whose knowledge part of their books »could not have been written.<sup>79</sup> While reflecting a more general denial of the authority of the pandits, the praxis of ignoring the effective co-authorship of pandits who cooperated in projects of European scholars also fails to attest the ways in which the pandits used their knowledge and in general precludes an assessment of the pandits' capacity for innovation. Overall, therefore, it is difficult to assess whether orientalist pandits can be fully considered cultural brokers, especially in terms of their capacity for innovation.

#### *Gangadhar Ray Kaviraj, an Antagonist*

As we consider the pandits' community at large during the colonial period and the model of the orientalist pandit, the part of it that was *not* in contact with European scholars – probably a majority – also emerges. Seen in contrast to the orientalist pandit, the other pandit persona is characterized by the absence of any interaction with the Orientalists and is here called »traditionalist pandit«. The scholar whom we look at for outlining the persona of the traditionalist pandit is Gangadhar Ray Kaviraj (1798-1885), one of the main figures of Ayurveda in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bengal. He received a traditional training in Ayurveda and became a renowned authority and teacher in this field. As regularly emphasized in his biographies, he was a polymath who authored works in Sanskrit on a variety of disciplines.<sup>80</sup> His edition of the *Carakasamhitā* and extensive commentary on it, the *Jalpakaḷpataru*, are monuments of Ayurvedic knowledge and philological work. The time in which they were made is telling. Gangadhar's first edition of the *Carakasamhitā*, which is in manuscript form and dated 1839,<sup>81</sup> is almost coeval with Madhusudan's *Suśrutasaṃhitā*. This is probably no coincidence; in fact, the edition of the *Carakasamhitā* and the subsequent composition of the *Jalpakaḷpataru* can be seen as Gangadhar's reply to Madhusudan's scholarly activity.

76 Rocher and Rocher, *Making of Western Indology*, 71-72.

77 Zysk, *Use of manuscript catalogues*, 257.

78 Peterson, *Detailed report*, 3, quoted in Zysk, *Use of manuscript catalogues*, 257.

79 Peterson, *Detailed report*, 3-4n, quoted in Zysk, *Use of manuscript catalogues*, 256, n. 3.

80 Pecchia, *Ayurveda, philology and print*, 114-115 and 123, fn. 14 for further references.

81 Pecchia, *Ayurveda, philology and print*, 115-116, and Pecchia, *With the eye of a scholar*, 799-802. For the date, see the colophon of the manuscript in Pecchia, *With the eye of a scholar*, 833.

Unlike Madhusudan, who taught, edited and translated for the British, Gangadhar used his Ayurvedic knowledge, and more generally his Sanskrit learning, as »a tool of the Ayurvedic learned elite for displaying their own grasp of and fealty to the knowledge system.«<sup>82</sup> His prodigious commentarial and authorial activity is not typical of the »traditional« persona of Ayurveda, the Kaviraj who practices Ayurveda and teaches orally in his own school, as he did. Gangadhar's monumental *Jalpakaḷpataru* is the first commentary, after centuries, on the earliest work of the Ayurvedic tradition, the *Carakasamhitā*. As observed elsewhere, it is a statement about the authority of the traditional part of the Ayurvedic learned group<sup>83</sup> – the part that did not appear in colonial spaces such as Europeans' houses, colonial educational institutions and European printing presses. His intense philological activity, displayed by the composition of more than seventy works in Sanskrit, can be seen as a reaction to the social and cultural transformations that characterized colonial Calcutta and the identity of the local learned groups, as a way to celebrate tradition and reinstate it at the centre of the activity of the learned specialist of Ayurveda. The scholarly persona fashioned by Gangadhar is thus the traditionalist *kaviraj* (or *vaidya*), who goes back to the original sources and explains them from within the tradition, rather than fusing it with foreign ideas. Gangadhar backs the traditionalist persona with the promotion of the special status of the Vaidya caste and a campaign against innovation in Hindu traditional views, standing as a clear antagonist of orientalist pandits and *vaidyas*, the latter being typically represented by Madhusudan.

The contrast between the personae embodied by Madhusudan and Gangadhar is well reflected in their editions of the fundamental works of Ayurveda. As the representative work of Ayurveda to be taught in a British college, Madhusudan chooses the *Suśrutasaṃhitā*, which has content related to surgery absent in the *Carakasamhitā*. The edition is printed, print being a relatively new technology in South Asia, and printed by government-related presses.<sup>84</sup> By contrast, Gangadhar edits the *Carakasamhitā*, the oldest work of Ayurveda and famous for its philosophical sections. His first edition is in manuscript form and partially copied by Gangadhar himself.<sup>85</sup> A printed version will appear more than three decades later, by the Indian printer-publisher Babu Bhuvana Chandra Vasak, who specialized in Sanskrit works.<sup>86</sup>

The contrast between the orientalist pandit-*vaidya* and the traditionalist pandit-*vaidya* is well reflected by Madhusudan's and Gangadhar's portraits. The one is represented standing, dressed as a *bhadralok*,<sup>87</sup> with a skull in his hand as if analysing it. The other is portrayed sitting cross-legged (his legs are covered though), dressed as a Brahman and with a manuscript opened in front of him. Madhusudan's picture depicts new social habits and new knowledge, while Gangadhar's picture reasserts a traditional role and the role of tradition.

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82 Pecchia, Ayurveda, philology and print, 121.

83 Pecchia, Ayurveda, philology and print, 122.

84 Pecchia, Ayurveda, philology and print, 119-120.

85 Pecchia, With the eye of a scholar, 832-833.

86 Pecchia, Ayurveda, philology and print, 116-117, 119.

87 In Bengal, in particular, the *bhadralok*, »respectable people«, indicates upper-caste Hindus who had access to higher education, enjoyed the financial benefits of working in British institutions and the social status provided by their wealth. Raj's overview of go-betweens includes the *bhadralok* (Raj, Mapping knowledge go-betweens, 147).

### *To Conclude*

In the attempt to understand visions and concerns of the protagonists of the interaction between South Asian and European scholars, we have used the concept of the scholarly persona and described a new type of learned pandit of the Sanskritic culture in colonial South Asia, the orientalist pandits, mainly characterized by their interaction with European scholars. The five aspects that form the definition of cultural broker deriving from social anthropological studies have functioned as a grid for understanding further characteristics of the orientalist pandit, especially in connection with his functions in the local and translocal groups. Within this framework, authority and innovation have been trying aspects. On the one hand, they have required much inferential reasoning, because it is difficult to assess the network of relationships within the group of the pandit and thus assess his authority in the group itself. On the other hand, since we mostly lack terms of comparison, it is difficult to evaluate the pandits' contribution to the changes that took place in their field of knowledge.

To examine the role of cultural brokers has also been useful in focusing on how the dynamics of the colonial context complicate the idea of the group against which the qualities of the pandit's activity are measured. As part of such dynamics, cultural brokers, or more generally personae who culturally interact with the translocal group, generate divisions based on cultural power and related ideologies. Their antagonists emerge when we look at the intellectual activity of the part of the pandits' group that did not interact with Europeans and yet, was aware of the transformations that were taking place.

When we consider the authority of the cultural broker in a context of asymmetrical relations such as that of colonial South Asia, another aspect emerges: the power of the broker's narrative for the agents of the translocal group, who acknowledge only the narrative of those who interact with them but provide their own interpretation independently from them. Thomas Wise, for example, presented his work on Ayurveda as »the best means of removing the state of ignorance, which now prevails over the whole of Hindustán«. <sup>88</sup> Such a remark is patently contradicted by Madhusudan Gupta and others who cooperated with him, and even more so by the work of a scholar like Gangadhar, whose traditionalist persona programmatically avoided joining the culture broker in representing knowledge for the Orientalists.

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88 Wise, *Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine*, iii.



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