Wilkins, Kasinatha, Hastings, and the First English *Bhagavad Gītā*

Richard H. Davis

The appearance of *The Bhăgvăt-Gēētā, or Dialogues of Krĕĕshnă and Ărjŏŏn* in London in 1785 was a foundational event in the history of Sanskrit studies in the West.[1] Published by the East India Company, it was the first work translated directly from Sanskrit into English. The translator, Charles Wilkins, was widely acknowledged as the first Englishman to learn the classical Indian language. As an obituary in *The Asiatic Journal* of 1836 put it, Wilkins was "the first adventurer on this literary ocean[,]…a sort of Columbus…venturing to explore unknown regions" (Anonymous 1836: 166). The publication was the first in a series of important translations of ancient Indic works that would make an enormous impact on European letters, inspiring a veritable "Oriental renaissance." And this translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* was the first of well over three hundred published renderings of this single work into English, with more appearing each year in a never-ending wave from that literary ocean.

Charles Wilkins did not work entirely on his own in producing his translation, of course. He relied on the active patronage of the governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings. And like all the early British Orientalists, Wilkins did not navigate the ocean of Sanskrit alone. He worked closely with Indian Brahmin pundits, the erudite masters of traditional learning. The pundits were also embarking on new intellectual territories in their collaborations with British officials as students. In particular, Wilkins enjoyed the assistance of Kasinatha Bhattacharya, one of the

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most esteemed pundits of Benares. Wilkins did not credit Kasinatha or any other pundit in his published translation. Following this pattern, the role of pundits in the foundation of Indology as a Western discipline of knowledge has often been obscured. Only recently have Western scholars begun to examine more closely the interactions of Indian pundits with their British pupils and patrons and the changing fortunes of these "pre-colonial intellectuals" in India during the political and cultural transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[2] As a contribution to this new attention to the role of pundits in the formation of Indology, in this essay I narrate the production of the first English *Bhagavad Gītā*, with particular focus on the roles of Charles Wilkins, Kasinatha Bhattacharya, and Warren Hastings.

Charles Wilkins

Born in 1749, Charles Wilkins arrived in Calcutta in July 1770 to take up an appointment as a writer, or junior clerk, with the East India Company. In contrast to the other early British Orientalists, who came from aristocratic backgrounds, Wilkins came from a modest family background of clothiers in Somerset. He was fortunate to gain a position with the Company, apparently through the intervention of a great-uncle who was a London banker. As Wilkins served in a series of administrative positions in Calcutta, he distinguished himself as an adept and diligent student of Indian languages. He learned the vernacular languages of Hindustani and Bengali and then applied himself to the courtly language of Persian. The new governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings (taking up his position in 1772) placed a high value on language learning among Company employees, and Wilkins rose quickly through the ranks.[3]

Nathaniel Brassey Halhed was the first British official to acquire a working knowledge of Bengali, and Hastings requested that Halhed write a grammar of the Bengali language. Wilkins, the great-nephew of a gem-engraver in England, was assigned the task of producing a set of types to print Bengali characters. He completed this work in 1778. In the preface to his *Grammar of the Bengali Language*, Halhed praises Wilkins's work:

> In a country so remote from all connexion with European artists, he has been obliged to charge himself with all the various occupations of the

> Metallurgist, the Engraver, the Founder and the Printer. To the merit of invention he was compelled to add the application of personal labour (1778: xxiii–xxiv).

Halhed fails to mention the assistance that Wilkins received in this work from local artisans, including a gem-engraver and the expert blacksmith, Panchanana Karmakara. Nevertheless, Wilkins clearly earned credit with Halhed and Hastings for his contribution to this important endeavor.

In 1778 Wilkins took up the study of Sanskrit. The British officials of Calcutta recognized this classical language as a great repository of valuable literature and as the linguistic source of most modern Indian languages. Halhed observes:

> The grand Source of Indian Literature, the Parent of almost every dialect from the Persian Gulph to the China Seas, is the Shanscrit;… which although at present shut up in the libraries of Bramins, and appropriated solely to the records of their Religion, appears to have been current over most of the Oriental World; and traces of its original extent may still be discovered in almost every district of Asia (1778: iii).

In this preface to the *Grammar*, Halhed goes on to point out the similarity of Sanskrit with other languages—Persian, Arabic, Latin, and Greek—suggesting a "grand Prototype" (1778: iv). (Halhed's Indo-European hypothesis came eight years before William Jones's more famous declaration of the parallels among classical languages in his 1786 discourse to the Asiatick Society.) Halhed had made an effort to learn the classical language of India, but without satisfactory progress.

Halhed's efforts, however, inspired Wilkins. "My curiosity was excited by the example of my friend, Mr. Halhed, to commence the study of the *Sanskrit*," Wilkins writes. "I was…fortunate as to find a *Pandit* of a liberal mind, sufficiently learned to assist me in the pursuit" (Wilkins 1808: xi; emphasis in the original). The name of this liberal-minded pundit, unfortunately, is not recorded. Probably the pundit hailed from Nadiya (Navadvipa), a center of Brahmanic scholarship upriver along the Hoogly from Calcutta. He may have been one of the eleven pundits previously recruited by Rājā Rajavallabha in 1773 on behalf of the East

India Company to work on the production of a *śāstra*-based *Code of Gentoo Laws* (Halhed 1776). Not all Brahmin pundits were eager to interact with the British, but this group had already established working relationships with Hastings, Halhed, and other Company employees.

By 1783 Wilkins had acquired multiple duties in Calcutta. Now at the rank of senior-merchant, he was supervisor at the printing works and Persian translator. He had also been appointed collector of Petty Mahals in the Khalsa. These obligations interfered with his growing passion for Sanskrit study, and they evidently took a toll on his health. Or so he claimed. Wilkins asked Hastings to request on his behalf a leave of absence from administrative duties in Calcutta so he could recuperate in the more benign climate of Benares. Hastings obligingly, even eagerly, put in a request to the Board of Revenue:

> Mr. Wilkins has represented to me that his health has suffered so much by the united application which he has given to the duties of his official appointments and other gratuitous studies as to render a change of air necessary to him, and that he wishes for that purpose to be allowed to go to Benares, and to reside there for some time without prejudice to his emoluments.[4]

Hastings goes on to reveal a second motive behind this request, namely, the pursuit of Sanskrit learning. He observes that the "professors of the Shanscrit learning" have recently become more forthcoming in their willingness to work with British officials. "From this favorable change of their ancient habits," Hastings goes on, "Mr. Wilkins is the first who has derived any substantial advantage; having with much labor and an unwearied application attained a great proficiency in the Shanscrit tongue." Wilkins has begun work on translating "a book called *Mahbaurat*, which is esteemed the first of their literary compositions and of a very high and ascertained antiquity." Hastings admits that this is an unusual request, but he observes that the Board has previously encouraged the East India Company officials in their efforts to learn the native languages. After some quibbling over the costs of this leave and after Wilkins had found a candidate to take on his duties in Calcutta, the Board accepted the request in January 1784.

Many historians have pointed to the instrumental motivation behind

Sanskrit learning among the early British Orientalists. Hastings and other British officials were themselves quite explicit about the political and economic benefits they sought through their quest for knowledge of ancient Indian texts. Yet, among the first generation of Orientalists, Wilkins was perhaps the least concerned with practical application. As another gifted early Sanskritist, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, admiringly described him, Wilkins was "Sanskrit-mad" (cited in Kejariwal 1988: 78). His move to Benares would allow him to indulge this affliction away from cumbersome administrative duties.

Wilkins quickly relocated. He established residence in a commodious house on Shivala Ghat, the former palace of the Rājā of Benares, Chet Singh. Removed from his Calcutta responsibilities, he established contact with the local pundit community and recommenced his Sanskrit study with great vigor. At this point Wilkins worked on the portion of the *Mahābhārata* that had long had an independent circulation as the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Though Wilkins does not mention him by name in his later publication, all evidence indicates that he worked in Benares primarily with Kasinatha Bhattacharya.

Kasinatha Bhattacharya

No obituary or biography of Kasinatha Bhattacharya (or Kasinatha Sarma, as he is sometimes called) appears in British records, so we are left to infer his career from scattered comments and from a few remaining manuscripts. These references are frequent enough, however, to indicate his prominent role among the Brahmin pundits who worked with the first generation of British Orientalists. Going a step further, I would argue that Kasinatha, identified in one colophon as *sarvaśāstraguru*, ought to be recognized along with Wilkins, Jones, and other British pioneers for his role in the foundation of Indology as a Western discipline of knowledge.

Kasinatha was known to the Orientalists of Calcutta before Wilkins moved to Benares. He had already supplied Sanskrit manuscripts to Halhed (Rocher 1983: 124). In a later document Kasinatha himself describes Wilkins's initial contact with him in Benares:

> I beg further to say that Mr. Charles Wilkins came to Benares in order to study the *Sastras*. He sent for many learned Pandits and requested

> them to teach him the subject. Some of them did not agree to take up the work while others failed to do it efficiently. Mr. Wilkins then summoned me for a purpose. By the grace of God I taught him the subject within a short time.[5]

Once Wilkins had established a working relationship with Kasinatha in Benares, Kasinatha's role as a Sanskritic authority grew in their eyes. We see this reflected in the letters of William Jones.

William Jones arrived in Calcutta in 1783, to serve as judge in the Bengal Supreme Court, and was already acknowledged as a linguistic wunderkind and polymath. In 1784, with the support of Governor-general Hastings, Jones established the Asiatick Society, in which Wilkins was one of the charter members. When Jones took up the study of Sanskrit in 1785, he acknowledged Wilkins as his predecessor and model, but when it came to a difficult passage in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, he asked Wilkins to request a reading from Kasinatha. The pundit's status was great enough that he could recommend other younger pundits for service. So when a position as pundit for the supreme court in Calcutta became available, one Govardhana Kaul applied for the position. In 1785 Jones wrote to Wilkins for verification:

> *Goverdhen Caul Pendit* has just brought a certificate of his qualifications, to which I see the respectable signature of *Cáshynát'h*, your Pendit: if I give my voice in favour of *Goverdhen*, it will be owing to the testimonial of the good man, who brought me three daisies at Benares, and of whose learning, since you employ him, I can have no doubt. We have proposed that the candidate shall be examined by some learned Pendits. Will Cáshyanáth be one of the number, and give his opinion fairly without being biased by his good-nature? (see Jones 1880: 110; emphasis in original).

Jones clearly identifies Kasinatha here as Wilkins's pundit, in his employ, and acknowledges Kasinatha's authority. He also notes Kasinatha's "good-nature" and intriguingly mentions a gift of three daisies. Govardhana was hired and went on to produce for Jones a short essay on Sanskrit literature, "On the Literature of the Hindus, from the Sanscrit, Communicated by Govardhan Caul," which Jones translated, read at a meeting of

the Asiatic Society, and had published in the first volume of *Asiatick Researches* (Jones 1788).[6] This was the first work written by an Indian scholar in a colonial British journal (the first such journal to be published in India, and one that would achieve a worldwide circulation). It is also worth noting here that Indians were denied membership in the Asiatic Society of Bengal for the first forty-five years of the Society's existence, after its founding under Jones's watch.

At the request of Wilkins and Jones, Kasinatha put together fundamental works of Sanskrit lexicography. For Wilkins he assembled a vocabulary of Sanskrit "radicals" or verb roots, the *Dhātumañjarī*. Wilkins had this arranged alphabetically by his scribe in Benares, Lala Mahata Baraya, and later published it in English under the title *Śrī Dhātumañjarī: The Radicals of the Sanskrita Language* (1815).[7] In the introduction Wilkins acknowledges that the vocabulary of radicals is based on the work of Kasinatha. Kasinatha appears also to have assisted Wilkins in the compilation of materials for *A Grammar of the Sanskrita Language*, the first grammar of Sanskrit in any European language published in Europe, which Wilkins completed in England and published in 1808.[8] For Jones, Kasinatha compiled a lengthy vocabulary list of ten thousand Sanskrit words, the *Śabdasandarbhasindhu*. Kasinatha refers to himself in the colophon of this work as a "teacher of all *śāstra*s." This became part of Jones's personal library and is now in the British Library (Wilkins 1798).[9]

Wilkins and Kasinatha completed a draft translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* sometime in 1784. In the introduction that Wilkins wrote for the published version, he suggests that his choice of this work was based on its prestige among the Brahmin pundits. "The *Brāhmăns*," he says, "esteem this work to contain all the grand mysteries of their religion" (Wilkins 1785: 23). For the first generation of Orientalists, the selection of texts and construction of a canon of Indological works relied necessarily on the advice of pundits. Jones gives an unusually forthright account of this process in the preface of his 1796 translation of *Śakuntalā*. He describes how he first learned of the genre called "Nátac," which he initially believed was historical, and was eventually informed by a Brahmin pundit named Radhacant that these resembled the kinds of things publically performed by the British in Calcutta, which they called "plays." Jones inquired which of these was the most universally esteemed, and Radhacant replied without hesitation, *Śakuntalā*, supporting his

opinion by reciting a verse approbation of the work (Jones 1796: i–ii)[10] This encounter led to Jones's ground-breaking translation of the classic Sanskrit *nāṭaka*.

Warren Hastings and Publication of the *Bhagavad Gītā*

The third figure crucial to bringing the first translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* to fruition was Warren Hastings. Governor-general of Bengal from 1772 to 1784, Hastings has often been credited for his support of Sanskrit and Indological scholarship among British officials like Wilkins and Jones. He also claimed credit for creating a more cooperative relationship between these British officials and the Brahmin pundits of Bengal and northern India. He wrote of this shift in attitudes in his letter to the Board of the East India Company requesting Wilkins's leave of absence:

> It has been a generally received opinion that the professors of the Shanscrit learning were prohibited by some religious precept from communicating that language to strangers. This supposition has been of late years discovered to be ill-founded.…The means which were used some years ago to conciliate the Pundits who were employed to compile the Code of Hindoo Law for the use of this government and the liberal and beneficent purposes to which that work has been since applied, have totally removed their former objections; and I myself have found them not only willing but forward in gratifying every disposition manifested by the individuals of our nation to be instructed in their sacred language, in their sciences, and even in the mysteries of their religion.[11]

As for the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Hastings not only enabled Wilkins to travel to Benares, but moreover played a direct role as agent in the publication of the translation. Without Hastings, the work might not have appeared at all.

Benares was at the periphery of British control during Hastings's administration, and from the British perspective it was filled with intrigue and corruption. Affairs of state therefore brought Hastings to Benares more than once in 1784. In March 1784, four pundits of Benares greeted Hastings with an effusive Sanskrit tribute, in true *praśasti* style, to the king, the

East India Company, Benares, and Hastings:

> 1. Let the blessing of the wise men of Kasee ever shed prosperity upon the King of Kings, the Ruler of the People of England, the Delight of Mankind.
> 2. Let the perpetual blessing of the learned men of Kasee be upon the prosperous Company, the eye of the code of justice, the defender of religion.
> 3. Kasee is the perpetual abode of the Prince of Deivtas of the Lunar Crown, giver of eternal freedom to the soul from the confinement of a mortal frame and worthy to be seen but of such as by repeated regenerations have treasured up much virtue. She is revered by the Seers, for even the celestial spirits, after loss of happiness, fearful of a mortal life, long for her, that their deaths may be eternal.[12]

The ode goes on to celebrate Hastings himself as one who has "raised up the Sastra of Truth, sunk in the ocean of a prince of the Kalee Age." The pundits' praise fits well with how Hastings wanted others to see his efforts.

In October 1784, Hastings was again in Benares, and at this time Wilkins gave him a copy of the *Bhagavad Gītā* translation he had been working on with Kasinatha. Evidently, Hastings was so taken with this work that he decided on his own to get it published. As he wrote to his wife Marian, "My friend Wilkins has lately made me a Present of a most wonderful Work of Antiquity, and I am going to present it to the Public" (November 20, 1784; Grier 1905: 364–65). (Wilkins stated that he had no awareness of Hastings's plans until later.) Hastings goes on to tell Marian that he finds Krishna's teaching on dutiful action delightful and relevant to his own life:

> Among many Precepts of fine Morality I am particularly delighted with the following, because it has been the invariable Rule of my latter Life, and often applied to the earlier State of it, before I had myself reduced it to the Form of a Maxim in writing. It is thus: "*Let the Motive be in the Deed, and not in the Event.*—"Be not One whose Motive for Action is the Hope of Reward. Let not thy Life be spent in Inaction. Depend on Application"…"perform thy Duty, abandon all Thought of the Consequence, and make the Event equal, whether it terminate in

> Good or Evil; for such an Equality is called *Application*" (Grier 1905: 365; emphasis in original).

In his subsequent life, Hastings would have ample opportunity to put Krishna's precept to the test.

By December 1784, Hastings had sent Wilkins's draft translation to Nathaniel Smith, chair of the East India Company Board, along with a lengthy letter proposing that the Company publish this work. After describing the work and its context and acknowledging that parts of it were bound to remain obscure to European readers, Hastings praises the *Bhagavad Gītā* fervently:

> With the deductions, or rather qualifications, which I have thus premised, I hesitate not to pronounce the Gēētā a performance of great originality; of a sublimity of conception, reasoning, and diction, almost unequalled; and a single exception, among all the known religions of mankind, of a theology accurately corresponding with that of the Christian dispensation, and most powerfully illustrating its fundamental doctrines (1785: 10).

Meanwhile Wilkins made corrections to the draft translation and expanded his preface and notes.

The East India Company, a most commercial enterprise, had been responsible for scholarly publications before: Halhed's *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776) and his *A Grammar of the Bengali Language* (1778) were both published under Company patronage. But these works had more direct application to the needs of colonial administration. The *Bhagavad Gītā* was something different, a work of ancient Hindu religious philosophy. Hastings grounded his argument to the Board for publication not on a narrow instrumentality, but on the broader need to "diffuse a generosity of sentiment" between colonial officers and native subjects that, Hastings alleged, would contribute to the "permanency of their dominion" (1795: 12). The Company directors accepted Hastings's strong support and brought out *The Bhăgvăt-Gēētā* in May 1785. The publication included Hastings's letter to the Company and an advertisement explaining the Company's view: "The antiquity of the original, and the veneration in which it hath been held for so many ages, by a very considerable portion

of the human race, must render it one of the greatest curiosities ever presented to the literary world" (Wilkins 1785: 2).

This curiosity created a sensation. Within two years Wilkins's translation had been translated into Russian and into French. A few years later Friedrich Maier rendered it into German. William Jones advised all those who wished to "form a correct idea of *Indian* religion and literature" to forget "all that has been written on the subject, by ancients and moderns, before the publication of the *Gítà*" (Jones 1799: 363; emphasis in original). Wilkins's translation made its way throughout Europe, and across the Atlantic, where it became a key scripture for American Transcendentalists. When Henry David Thoreau, living at Walden Pond in 1846, wrote of bathing his intellect "in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta," he did so in the pool of Wilkins's translation (Thoreau 1992: 264).

Kasinatha Bhattacharya and the Sanskrit College

In 1785 Warren Hastings resigned from his position, under political pressure, and returned to England. That same year Wilkins had to leave Benares for health reasons, and he returned to England the following year. The subsequent careers of Hastings and Wilkins are well known. Less well documented is the later life of Kasinatha Bhattacharya.

Hastings had powerful enemies in parliament, including Edmund Burke and Henry Dundas, and in 1786 he was brought before the House of Commons on twenty-two counts of high crimes and misdemeanors. A lengthy public trial ensued, lasting until 1795. During the proceedings, Charles Wilkins often attended the hearings to support his former patron. The "Bengali Pandits of Benares," including Kasinatha and one hundred and eleven other pundits, sent a letter of support for Hastings to the British Parliament. The submission extols Hastings for his good services to the people and institutions of Benares. "When the said ruler came to this city, all who went to see him were received with respect according to their ranks," it proclaims, and "So long as he resided in this country he cherished us in every way like his children."[13] Ultimately Hastings was acquitted on all counts. The pundits of Benares responded with a Sanskrit letter of congratulation addressed to Hastings. After praising the equitable treatment Hastings extended to all ranks of Benares residents, the letter

strikes a *Gītā*-like philosophical tone:

> It is evident to the understanding of every man, that pleasure succeeds pain; that where there is darkness, at another time there is light: thus, through the mercy of the Almighty have been destroyed the foul suspicions which had entered the minds of those great men [Hastings's Parliamentary opponents], and this cause has been finally determined according to the merits of your former actions.…Thus we pray that happiness may attend upon your good actions; and may Almighty always preserve you in honour and respect.[14]

Kasinatha's name leads the signatories, and his seal proclaims him as "Ornament of Logic and among Pandits called the Chief of Science." It is likely that he composed the letter.

Wilkins returned to England with the Indological materials he had collected in India. Tragically, in 1796 a fire demolished his home in Kent, and many of these resources were incinerated. Nevertheless, he persisted and later brought out the Sanskrit *Grammar* (1808) and *Radicals* (1815). Wilkins actively promoted the idea of an Oriental Museum and solicited the help of Hastings in persuading the East India Company to establish the museum and to appoint him as its librarian. In 1801 Wilkins received this post, which he kept for the remainder of his life. In 1805 Wilkins was also appointed to a supervisory position in the new college the Company founded at Hertford (later Haileybury) in order to prepare British officials for service in India.

Kasinatha remained in Benares. As Wilkins prepared to leave India, Jones sought to hire Kasinatha as his personal pundit and bring him to Bengal. In 1785 he wrote to Wilkins:

> I (wish if you must go) to inherit your writer of Sanscrit, and, if *Cáśināt'h* would either go with me, to Chittigam, or go first to Cásy and return to me, I would make it worth his while, and would do all the good in my power to him and his family (Jones 1880: 116; emphasis in original).

We do not know the reasons why Kasinatha preferred to remain in Benares, rather than to serve Jones. But soon thereafter he became the personal pundit of Jonathan Duncan, British Resident in Benares.

Much like Wilkins, Duncan came from a modest background and was fortunate to gain a position as writer with the East India Company through family connections. He arrived in Calcutta in 1771, at age sixteen. Like Wilkins he was a gifted and assiduous student of languages, and he profited from the patronage of Hastings. In 1787 he was appointed Resident in Benares. Taking advantage of the reputation and intellectual resources of the city, Duncan proposed the establishment of a "Hindoo College or Academy." According to Duncan's petition to Lord Cornwallis, the intention was to create an institutional base, under British supervision, for the collection and transcription of ancient Sanskrit works and for the education and evaluation of new pundits who could serve within colonial courts. The plan was approved, and Duncan hired his pundit Kasinatha as principal of the new college.

In a later statement, Kasinatha claimed to have originated the idea for a college in Benares:

> With a view to disseminating the knowledge of the *Sastras* I spoke to Mr. Wilkins that since a Madrasa for teaching Persian was set up in Calcutta, it was but proper that a *pathsala* for teaching of the *Sastras* was established in Benares which is a holy place of the Hindus. Mr. Wilkins represented this matter to Mr. Warren Hastings who approved of the idea and desired me to see him at Calcutta. I thereupon made arrangements for my departure, but for want of a proper boat for the journey a little delay occurred with the result that Mr. Hastings sailed for England and the matter was held in abeyance.[15]

According to Kasinatha's statement, he later brought the idea to the attention of Duncan, who succeeded in gaining Company approval to establish the institution. Kasinatha was hired as its first principal, or as he put it, Duncan "set up a *pathsala* and put me in authority and control of it and issued order to the treasury of Benares to make regular payments for its expenses."[16]

The Benares Sanskrit College (as it came to be known) did not flourish in its initial years, and Kasinatha's tenure as "rector" or "head preceptor" was a difficult one. Kasinatha hired eight pundits, including his son Syamananda Bhattacharya, representing various fields of Sanskrit learning. We do not know the internal politics of the institution, since institutional

records of the first seven years are missing. But not long after its founding, British observers began to level charges of incompetence, contumacy, and corruption against Kasinatha and other members of the faculty. Duncan had left Benares in 1795, and the new Resident did not share Duncan's personal relationship with Kasinatha. In 1801 the British convened a three-person committee to look into the affairs of the institution. The Committee Chair, John Neave, is reported to have declared Kasinatha "the greatest villain he ever saw" (Nicholls 1848: 6, cited in Dalmia 1996: 324).

The problems of the new institution resulted not from Kasinatha's villainy, but from a difference in institutional definition and culture. The British defined the institution as a college, similar to others in Europe, while Kasinatha spoke of it as a *pathsala* (*pāṭhaśāla*), like others he knew in Benares and northern India. The Brahmin professors were apparently meeting with students in their own homes, as would be normal in the *guru-śiṣya* relationship at a traditional Brahmanic school, while the British believed that classes should be conducted in college buildings. More seriously, Kasinatha and other pundits were charged with "corruption" for claiming the stipends paid to students by the East India Company as their own resources. This might be true in a *pāṭhaśāla*, where the *guru* would also take responsibility for the welfare of the pupil, but the British Committee took a different view of the matter.

When Kasinatha was dismissed from his position at the Sanskrit College in 1801, he composed a petition addressed to the new Governor-general, Richard Wellesley, Lord Mornington. He recounted his own role in working with Wilkins and in proposing the Benares *pāṭhaśāla* to Wilkins, Hastings, and Duncan. He opened the petition with two Sanskrit verses, a brief panegyric to the new Rājā, Lord Mornington. Since this is the last we know of Kasinatha Bhattacharya, it is fitting to close this essay with his verses:

Safe in the shade of your arms, your subjects sleep always without fear;
wandering in fear from place to place, your enemies never find rest.
Under your rule, the four-legged bull Dharma, after long losing its footing, again stands firm on earth.
What more can we say? O King, Lord Mornington, in virtue and fame

you surpass all kings.
Spared on the battlefield by your grace, your enemies left behind lands, forts, and treasures
when they fled across the ocean with their defeated troops.
Yet still, every morning they are confused when they see rising in the east
the disk of the fierce-rayed sun, mistaking it for your orb, o King, Lord Mornington.[17]

Notes

1. This essay is part of a larger project tracing the reception history of the *Bhagavad Gītā.* See Davis (2014) for a brief treatment of this episode within a larger biography of the *Gītā*. I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities and to the Bard College Research Fund for support of this project. Portions of the materials in this essay were presented to the Asian Religions colloquium at Yale University.

2. The phrase "pre-colonial intellectuals" comes from Wagoner (2003). The works of Rosane Rocher are particularly important in this revisionary history: see her 1989, 1995. Also see Hatcher (2005) and Dodson (2007).

3. The most comprehensive overview of Wilkins's career is Lloyd (1978). For his work on Bengali type, see Ross (1999: 3–33). On his contributions to Sanskrit studies, see Johnston (1940), and on his later work in the creation of the India Museum, see Desmond (1982: 1–31).

4. Hand-copied notes from the Hastings files. Hastings to the Bengal Board of Revenue, in "Extract of Bengal Revenue Consultations, the 9th December 1783, No. 41" (IOR:H/MISC/207, pages 169–82) (British Library: India Office Records).

5. "Kasinath Pandit's Petition (Document 8)," in Sen and Mishra (1951: 58). This is part of a petition that Kasinatha wrote in his own defense, in 1801, when accused of corruption in the operation of the Benares Sanskrit College. See section below, "Kasinatha and the Sanskrit College."

6. In this article, Govardhana also refers to Kasinatha "who attended Mr. Wilkins" (Jones 1788: 351).

7. Wilkins's manuscript of Kasinatha's *Dhātumañjarī* is in the British Library (IO 776, as listed in *New Catalogus Catalogorum*). Wilkins's version, *Śrī Dhātumañjarī: The Radicals of the Sanskrita Language*, was

published in 1815 by the East India Company College for the use of its students learning Sanskrit in preparation for posting to India.

8. In the preface, Wilkins gives no names but does acknowledge that "with the assistance of my master" he was able to compile the necessary materials in India (1808: xi). Henry Thomas Colebrooke had completed a Sanskrit grammar three years earlier (in 1805), and it was printed in Calcutta by the Company Press, but Wilkins's grammar, printed in England, enjoyed a much wider European circulation.

9. Wilkins describes the work: "A dictionary of the *Sanscrita* language; by *Cásinátha Sarman*. It appears from the introduction, that it was compiled expressly for the use of S.W.J. The learned author is, at present, head professor in the newly-established college at *Varanási*" (1798: 591). In a letter of August 1787, Jones refers to his employment of a Brahmin and an English-speaking Bengali to create and translate the ten thousand word vocabulary of Sanskrit (Cannon 1970: 751).

10. "Radhacant" is Radhakanta Tarkavagisa. See Rocher (1989).

11. Hand-copied notes from the Hastings files. Hastings to the Bengal Board of Revenue, in "Extract of Bengal Revenue Consultations, the 9th December 1783, No. 41" (IOR:H/MISC/207, pages 169–82) (British Library: India Office Records).

12. Hand-copied translation of a Cubbit, or Ode written in the Sanskrit Language, and presented in March 1784, unpublished manuscript in Warren Hastings Papers (British Library), pages 28–38. These *śloka*s were composed by Sen-nāt Tarka-Bhoosan, a native pundit of Benares, and translated by Charles Wilkins. Later verses of the *praśasti* are ascribed to other Benares pundits.

13. "Bengali Pandits of Benares on Warren Hastings (OR 31 July 1788 No. 434)," in Sen and Mishra (1951: 75). The Sanskrit text appears on pages 11–16, and the English translation on pages 75–79.

14. Translation, by Wilkins, of an Address from Other Inhabitants of Benares, in *Debates of the House of Lords, on the Evidence Delivered in the Trial of Warren Hastings, Esquire; Proceedings of the East India Company in Consequence of His Acquittal and Testimonials of the British and Native Inhabitants of India…* (London, 1797), page 756.

15. "Kasinath Pandit's Petition (Document 8)," in Sen and Mishra (1951: 58).

16. "Kasinath Pandit's Petition (Document 8)," in Sen and Mishra (1951:

58). For the subsequent history of the Benares Sanskrit College, see also Dalmia (1996) and Dodson (2007).

17. "Laudatory Verses in Kashinath Pandit's Letter" (OR 3, June 1801 No. 349), in Sen and Mishra (1951: 25; my translation).

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RICHARD H. DAVIS is Professor of Religion, Director of Religion Program, and Director of Asian Studies Program at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York.

rdavis@bard.edu