JOHANNES BRONKHORST

The Reliability of Tradition

From among the definitions given in dictionaries of the term *tradition* we must retain the one that specifies that a tradition is a cultural feature (as an attitude, belief, custom, institution) preserved or evolved from the past.[1] This definition reminds us that traditions are handed down from generation to generation, but also that most traditions are accompanied by the claim, often implicit, that they preserve an earlier state of affairs. A tradition is therefore something which exists in the present (any present), but which at the same time makes claims about the past. If we assist at a traditional dance performance, we are not merely entertained; we are at the same time informed about how people danced in the past.

It is this claim about the past which makes it possible to speak about the reliability of a tradition. Traditions can make an implicit claim about the past which is not true. Indeed, traditions can be newly created (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983). In that case they are strictly speaking no traditions at all, or at best unreliable traditions. Traditions, moreover, normally have a role to play in the present (each present) in which they occur: they may be linked to nationalistic movements, or to the sense of belonging that unites members of a certain group, or indeed they may be expressions of a religious identity. That is to say, traditions are rarely innocent survivals from a distant past, and far more often factors that play a role in the present. Traditions may be needed, which may tempt certain people to create new ones when the need arises.

Reflections like these should remind us of the fact that the study of traditions is not at all the same as the study of history. Traditions may at times provide information about the past, but this is never

[1] See *s.v.* in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1986.

self-evident, and is always in need of verification. It should also be clear that people who like their traditions do not for that reason necessarily like their past. Indeed, historical research that brings to light that this or that tradition does not really continue a feature or habit from the past may not always be welcomed. The lover of traditional dances may not be pleased to learn that the dances he is so fond of are in fact a recent creation. This implies that traditions, once in place, may have a tendency to force the past into a straight jacket: the past *has* to be seen in this particular way, and dissonant opinions are not accepted.

Classical Indian culture has many traditions, and does not look upon these as mere sources of amusement. Traditions constitute the heart of much that we call classical Indian culture, and no pains are spared to preserve these traditions and keep them alive. This applies to the present, but also to the past. There are plenty of reasons to believe that traditions played an important role during much of Indian history. Since in each tradition a vision of this or that aspect of the past is implied, the network of traditions that make up classical Indian culture is inseparable from a vision of India's past, which is, to be sure, multifaceted and complex. An especially important tradition, which often serves as a sort of backbone to some of the others and which has a particularly close bearing on this vision of India's past, is the Vedic tradition. The importance of this tradition, or more precisely of the textual corpus that is preserved by this tradition, is illustrated by the fact that certain other traditions have borrowed its name: Veda. India's longest, oldest and most important Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, calls itself the fifth Veda. The fundamental text on Sanskrit dramaturgy and related matters, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, makes a similar claim. Indian medicine is known by the name *āyurveda*, the Veda of long life. Other traditions claim links to the Veda without necessarily borrowing its name. Obviously these traditions felt that they could add to their prestige by imitating the Veda, or by claiming a close connection with it.

The Veda occupies a very special position in the vision of India's past that came to predominate in brahmanical circles. Briefly put, the Veda is, or is closely connected with, the origin of all there is. The most traditional representatives of Vedic orthodoxy, known by the name Mīmāṃsakas, maintained that the Veda has no beginning in time at all; it has always been there. This they often linked up with the idea that the world has no beginning either, that it too was always there, essentially in the same form in which we know it. Other currents of thought do accept that the world we live in had a beginning in time, but do not accept that the Veda was created along with all the other things that constitute this world; on the contrary, creation itself was determined by, or carried out in accordance with, the words of the Veda. In this view the Veda predates the creation of our present world. The creation of our world itself is often thought of as the most

recent installment of an infinitely long series of creations, which has no beginning in time. The Veda stands above or outside this infinite series, and is sometimes depicted as being pronounced anew at the beginning of each new creation, exactly in the same form as in all the preceding ones.

This timelessness of the Veda also finds expression in other ways. The language of the Veda, i.e. Sanskrit, is as eternal and as unchangeable as the Veda itself. Language change does occur, but not in the language of the Veda, but in its corruptions which have led to the many languages that are spoken today. 'Development' is hardly the term to be used for this process, which is rather an ongoing process of corruption of the original perfect language which is Sanskrit.

The essential timelessness of the Veda —or at any rate its hoary antiquity, which amounts pretty much to the same thing— has not disappeared from India with the arrival of modernity. There may not be all that many people left these days who maintain that the Veda is literally beginningless and eternal, numerous are those who assign to the Veda incredibly ancient dates. Nor has the Veda stopped, in the Indian semi-popular imagination, being the beginning and source of all that it is worth knowing. 'Research' discovers evidence for the presence of the most recent scientific and technological developments in the Veda, and many a Hindu may expect that further research into this ancient textual tradition may bring to light useful knowledge such as, for example, a cure for aids.

Modern scholarship, one would expect, is not influenced by this traditional attitude towards the Veda. This optimistic expectation is not in total agreement with the facts. Modern indological scholarship, which was initially a european affair, brought along with it its own set of presuppositions, which were in some respects not all that different from the Indian beliefs.

Note, to begin with, that the 'discovery' of Sanskrit by european scholarship came at a time when the idea of India as the cradle of all civilization had numerous adherents in Europe. Edwin Bryant enumerates a number of representatives of this position, among them the astronomer Bailly and Voltaire, Pierre de Sonnerat, Schelling, Friedrich von Schlegel, and Johann-Gottfried Herder (Bryant 2001: 18 ff). Sanskrit came in this way to be looked upon not just as one branch language of the Indo-European family, but as its parent-language, or at any rate very close to it. Lord A. Curzon, the governor-general of India and eventual chancellor of Oxford, maintained as late as 1855 that "the race of India branched out and multiplied into that of the great Indo-European family". Scholarly interest for Sanskrit remained for a long time inseparable from the quest for the original Indo-European language. As in India, the study of Sanskrit remained also in Europe for quite a while closely linked to the quest for origins.

These romantic ideas about India did not survive for long among serious scholars, at least not in these extreme forms. It was soon discov-

ered that Sanskrit was not the original Indo-European language. The discovery by archaeologists of the Indus valley civilisation, which in the opinion of many preceded the period in which the Veda was composed, has placed the Veda in a relatively recent historical period.

However, in other respects modern scholarship has come up with results which have boosted the idea of the reliability of the Vedic tradition. The study of early phonological texts has shown that the oral preservation of at least certain Vedic texts has been more faithful than one might have considered possible. Max Müller was the first to edit and study the *Ṛgvedaprātiśākhya*, an old text which describes the phonology of the *Ṛgveda* in great detail. Müller discovered in this way that the *Ṛgveda*, which is the oldest text of the Vedic corpus, had been handed down for a period of well over two thousand years without the slightest change even in a single sound.[2] Some scholars nowadays go to the extent of stating that present-day recitation preserves the *Ṛgveda* and other Vedic texts so well that one might speak of a tape-recording (Witzel 1995: 91). The classical Indian belief in the unchangeable nature of the Veda has in a way been vindicated by these and other similar findings.

Modern scholarship has discarded many beliefs to which it was originally attracted, for whatever reason. No, Sanskrit is no longer the original language, it is not even the original Indo-European language. No, India no longer represents the origin of all culture, nor of all philosophy and wisdom. Yes, ancient India culture was 'just another' major culture, less old than some (e.g., Egypt), older than others (e.g., Islam). One might like to think that modern scholarship has been able to free itself from all unreliable presuppositions and unfounded beliefs.

As so often, reality is more complex. There can be no doubt that in-depth research has dismantled numerous preconceived ideas, both those of Indian origin and those that were European. The belief in an original invasion by conquering Aryans who brought civilisation to India, a belief so convenient to Western colonisers and invented by Europeans, is one of those that have fallen by the wayside. Indeed, the reaction in scholarship against colonialism and its intellectual heritage has done much good in unmasking certain types of presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are connected with colonialism or colonialist attitudes. Presuppositions that are pleasing to those belonging to the culture studied will be less systematically subjected to critical assessment and may linger on, either because no one is

[2] "Wenn man bedenkt, dass das Prātiśākhya nicht nur Tausende von Stellen aus den beiden Texten (i.e., padapāṭha and saṃhitāpāṭha of the Ṛgveda, JB) citirt, sondern auch die anscheinend geringfügigsten Abweichungen des einen von dem andern auf das genaueste registrirt, und dass in allen wesentlichen Punkten unsere besten Handschriften der beiden Texte mit den Angaben des Prātiśākhya übereinstimmen, so darf man wohl mit Zuversicht schliessen, dass wir wirklich den Text des Rig-Veda so besitzen, wie er vor mehr are 2000 Jahren den Verfassern des Prātiśākhya vorlag". (Müller 1869: 3)

aware of them, or because it is considered politically correct (or merely convenient) to leave them in place. It is to some of these ideas that we now turn.

We have seen that the Veda, in brahmanical tradition, is at the origin of almost all there is. In this form this idea has no appeal to modern scholarship. However, in a weakened form it is still very much alive, even among serious researchers. Questions about the origin of this or that feature of classical Indian culture are routinely investigated by tracing its roots in the Veda. At first sight this may seem reasonable, given that the oldest parts of the Veda are certainly the oldest literary remains we have from that part of the world. Yet on closer inspection it will become clear that it only makes sense if one accepts another presupposition, namely, that all those features of classical Indian culture belong to traditions that have their origin in the Veda. This is not self-evidently the case. Other influences may have been at work which were altogether different from the Veda and its adherents.

It goes without saying that the question here raised has to be investigated separately for each case that may attract our attention, and that general and unsupported assertions are of little use. Some classical traditions may derive directly from Vedic roots, others may not. Unfortunately modern scholarship often avoids the question altogether, and has a tendency to dive straight into the Vedic texts. An example is the research into the origins of the Sanskrit drama. In this case it is particularly simple to think of a non-Vedic source. The classical Sanskrit drama being a court drama, it is hard *not* to think of the rulers who, on the Indian sub-continent itself, cultivated a courtly drama not long before the Sanskrit drama manifested itself. These rulers were, of course, the Greeks, whose historical presence in north-western India (and whose love for drama) is not contested. In spite of this, indological research discards the presence of the Greeks as a possible factor in the development of the Sanskrit drama, and prefers to concentrate on possible Vedic roots, knowing all the while that Vedic culture had no courtly drama and late-Vedic and early post-Vedic culture no sympathy for this kind of entertainment. By way of justification for this omission indologists tend to refer back to arguments which were originally presented by Sylvain Lévi at the end of the nineteenth century, but which are outdated in the present state of our knowledge and stopped being supported by their originator himself later on in his life. In spite of this, scholars refrain from carrying out a renewed reflection on this issue and obviously feel more comfortable with their old habit of searching for Vedic antecedents (Bronkhorst 2004).

There are serious reasons for exercising restraint while looking for the origin of everything Indian in the Veda. It is becoming ever more clear that it is not justified to identify the Aryans —i.e. those who called themselves *ārya*, the authors and early users of the Vedic

texts— with the Indo-Aryans, the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages.[3] Those who adhered to the *ārya* ideology (the 'Aryans') were no doubt a sub-group of the Indo-Aryans, but it is by no means evident that they were in the early centuries more than a minority. And it is not at all certain that this minority was in any way representative of the other speakers of Indo-Aryan. Indeed, "the emergence of an *ārya* ideology can be traced [...] to the geographical milieu of the Ṛgvedic hymns, bounded by the Indus and Sarasvatī rivers, and need not be linked to the spread of Indo-Aryan languages" (Erdosy 1995: 3).

Few scholars nowadays would doubt that Indian civilisation has other sources than only the Veda. The very presence in South-Asia of speakers of languages belonging to other families, such as Dravidian and Munda, supports this. Scholars like to speculate what elements in Indian civilisation might have 'pre-Aryan' roots. However, even the early speakers of Indo-Aryan languages themselves were most probably divided in groups many of which did not adhere to, or even know about, the *ārya* ideology that finds expression in the Vedic corpus. Unfortunately only the Vedic Indians have left us a literary corpus whose oldest parts date back to a period from which we have no other literary remains. A close inspection of the other literary remains that we do possess (all of them admittedly younger than the oldest parts of the Veda) indicates that, among the speakers of Indo-Aryan, there existed at least one other important ideology, utterly different from the *ārya* ideology, which left its traces not only in non-Vedic movements and religions, but deeply influenced the tradition which saw itself as the continuation of the Vedic tradition: brahmanism or, if you like, hinduism.

I am not the first to draw attention to the ideology of those who often appear in the texts under the name Śramaṇas. In order to do justice to my predecessors, but also to introduce some important qualifications, I cite a passage from the third edition of G.C. Pande's *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*:[4]

> We find, thus, that in the Vedic period there existed two distinct religious and cultural traditions —the strictly orthodox and Aryan tradition of the Brāhmaṇas, and, on the fringe of their society, the straggling culture of the Munis and Śramaṇas, most probably going back to pre-Vedic and pre-Aryan origins. Towards the close of the Vedic period, the two streams tended to mingle and the result was that great religious ferment from which Buddhism originated. (Pande 1983: 261)

[3] Parpola writes: "we must distinguish between the modern use of the name 'Aryan' to denote a branch of the Indo-European language family, and the ancient tribal name used of themselves by many, but not necessarily all, peoples who have spoken those languages" (Parpola 1988: 219). Similarly Erdosy: "Until recently, archaeologists, and to a lesser extent linguists, had persistently confused 'Aryans' with 'Indo-Aryans'" (Erdosy 1995: 3). Many scholars distinguish, often on linguistic grounds, two or more waves of immigration of 'Aryans', only one of which is responsible for the production of the Vedas. See Deshpande 1995: 70 ff; Witzel 1995a: 322 ff).

[4] Other authors who have drawn attention to the separate tradition of the Śramaṇas include A. K. Warder and Padmanabh S. Jaini.

The part of this citation which I fully support concerns the "[...] two distinct religious and cultural traditions" that existed in the Vedic period. Besides the *ārya* ideology incorporated in the Veda there was the ideology of the Śramaṇas. This ideology belonged to certain ascetics commonly referred to as Śramaṇas, but obviously not only to them. Ascetics come from social milieus, and are never more than a tiny minority in their particular milieu. The ideology of the Śramaṇas (to be discussed below) was not the exclusive property of those who left the world to become ascetics, but characterized the community in which they grew up.

It is significant that Pande, in spite of drawing this important distinction between two altogether different cultures that coexisted in the Vedic period, feels obliged to speculate as to the origins of the culture of the Śramaṇas. He calls it a 'straggling culture', which suggests that it had wandered off from the earlier Vedic culture. He also speculates that the culture of the Śramaṇas most probably had pre-Vedic and pre-Aryan origins. All this is speculation which is not based on any reliable evidence. It merely distracts attention from the important observation that already several centuries before the beginning of the Common Era (i.e. at the time when Buddhism and Jainism made their appearance) there existed in northern India an identifiable culture, the culture of the Śramaṇas, which had no visible links with Vedic culture.

There is a further element in Pande's passage which has to be considered with much caution. It is the mention of Munis besides Śramaṇas. This mention suggests that there is a historical connection between the Śramaṇas here talked about and the Munis and other marginal figures referred to in early Vedic texts from the *Ṛgveda* onward. The assumption of such a connection could be misleading, as will become clear below.

In the terminology here adopted, the Śramaṇa tradition is the one which has given rise to religious movements such as Buddhism, Jainism and Ājīvikism; all of these can in a way be said to belong to this tradition. This Śramaṇa tradition is distinct from the Vedic tradition and cannot be derived from it. A variety of arguments support this position. They are unfortunately rarely taken into consideration by the majority of scholars, who go on repeating the by now classical *opposite* position according to which certain developments recorded in Vedic literature are the basis from which all those other religious movements arose. I am primarily referring to the ideas about karma and rebirth, and the possibility of liberation from these, which we find in the Vedic Upaniṣads. These ideas —so the argument runs— arose at the time of the Upaniṣads; all developments in which they

ered that Sanskrit was not the original Indo-European language. The discovery by archaeologists of the Indus valley civilisation, which in the opinion of many preceded the period in which the Veda was composed, has placed the Veda in a relatively recent historical period.

However, in other respects modern scholarship has come up with results which have boosted the idea of the reliability of the Vedic tradition. The study of early phonological texts has shown that the oral preservation of at least certain Vedic texts has been more faithful than one might have considered possible. Max Müller was the first to edit and study the *Ṛgvedaprātiśākhya*, an old text which describes the phonology of the *Ṛgveda* in great detail. Müller discovered in this way that the *Ṛgveda*, which is the oldest text of the Vedic corpus, had been handed down for a period of well over two thousand years without the slightest change even in a single sound.[2] Some scholars nowadays go to the extent of stating that present-day recitation preserves the *Ṛgveda* and other Vedic texts so well that one might speak of a tape-recording (Witzel 1995: 91). The classical Indian belief in the unchangeable nature of the Veda has in a way been vindicated by these and other similar findings.

Modern scholarship has discarded many beliefs to which it was originally attracted, for whatever reason. No, Sanskrit is no longer the original language, it is not even the original Indo-European language. No, India no longer represents the origin of all culture, nor of all philosophy and wisdom. Yes, ancient India culture was 'just another' major culture, less old than some (e.g., Egypt), older than others (e.g., Islam). One might like to think that modern scholarship has been able to free itself from all unreliable presuppositions and unfounded beliefs.

As so often, reality is more complex. There can be no doubt that in-depth research has dismantled numerous preconceived ideas, both those of Indian origin and those that were European. The belief in an original invasion by conquering Aryans who brought civilisation to India, a belief so convenient to Western colonisers and invented by Europeans, is one of those that have fallen by the wayside. Indeed, the reaction in scholarship against colonialism and its intellectual heritage has done much good in unmasking certain types of presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are connected with colonialism or colonialist attitudes. Presuppositions that are pleasing to those belonging to the culture studied will be less systematically subjected to critical assessment and may linger on, either because no one is

[2] "Wenn man bedenkt, dass das Prātiśākhya nicht nur Tausende von Stellen aus den beiden Texten (i.e., padapāṭha and saṃhitāpāṭha of the Ṛgveda, JB) citirt, sondern auch die anscheinend geringfügigsten Abweichungen des einen von dem andern auf das genaueste registrirt, und dass in allen wesentlichen Punkten unsere besten Handschriften der beiden Texte mit den Angaben des Prātiśākhya übereinstimmen, so darf man wohl mit Zuversicht schliessen, dass wir wirklich den Text des Rig-Veda so besitzen, wie er vor mehr are 2000 Jahren den Verfassern des Prātiśākhya vorlag". (Müller 1869: 3)

aware of them, or because it is considered politically correct (or merely convenient) to leave them in place. It is to some of these ideas that we now turn.

We have seen that the Veda, in brahmanical tradition, is at the origin of almost all there is. In this form this idea has no appeal to modern scholarship. However, in a weakened form it is still very much alive, even among serious researchers. Questions about the origin of this or that feature of classical Indian culture are routinely investigated by tracing its roots in the Veda. At first sight this may seem reasonable, given that the oldest parts of the Veda are certainly the oldest literary remains we have from that part of the world. Yet on closer inspection it will become clear that it only makes sense if one accepts another presupposition, namely, that all those features of classical Indian culture belong to traditions that have their origin in the Veda. This is not self-evidently the case. Other influences may have been at work which were altogether different from the Veda and its adherents.

It goes without saying that the question here raised has to be investigated separately for each case that may attract our attention, and that general and unsupported assertions are of little use. Some classical traditions may derive directly from Vedic roots, others may not. Unfortunately modern scholarship often avoids the question altogether, and has a tendency to dive straight into the Vedic texts. An example is the research into the origins of the Sanskrit drama. In this case it is particularly simple to think of a non-Vedic source. The classical Sanskrit drama being a court drama, it is hard *not* to think of the rulers who, on the Indian sub-continent itself, cultivated a courtly drama not long before the Sanskrit drama manifested itself. These rulers were, of course, the Greeks, whose historical presence in north-western India (and whose love for drama) is not contested. In spite of this, indological research discards the presence of the Greeks as a possible factor in the development of the Sanskrit drama, and prefers to concentrate on possible Vedic roots, knowing all the while that Vedic culture had no courtly drama and late-Vedic and early post-Vedic culture no sympathy for this kind of entertainment. By way of justification for this omission indologists tend to refer back to arguments which were originally presented by Sylvain Lévi at the end of the nineteenth century, but which are outdated in the present state of our knowledge and stopped being supported by their originator himself later on in his life. In spite of this, scholars refrain from carrying out a renewed reflection on this issue and obviously feel more comfortable with their old habit of searching for Vedic antecedents (Bronkhorst 2004).

There are serious reasons for exercising restraint while looking for the origin of everything Indian in the Veda. It is becoming ever more clear that it is not justified to identify the Aryans —i.e. those who called themselves *ārya*, the authors and early users of the Vedic

self-evident, and is always in need of verification. It should also be clear that people who like their traditions do not for that reason necessarily like their past. Indeed, historical research that brings to light that this or that tradition does not really continue a feature or habit from the past may not always be welcomed. The lover of traditional dances may not be pleased to learn that the dances he is so fond of are in fact a recent creation. This implies that traditions, once in place, may have a tendency to force the past into a straight jacket: the past *has* to be seen in this particular way, and dissonant opinions are not accepted.

Classical Indian culture has many traditions, and does not look upon these as mere sources of amusement. Traditions constitute the heart of much that we call classical Indian culture, and no pains are spared to preserve these traditions and keep them alive. This applies to the present, but also to the past. There are plenty of reasons to believe that traditions played an important role during much of Indian history. Since in each tradition a vision of this or that aspect of the past is implied, the network of traditions that make up classical Indian culture is inseparable from a vision of India's past, which is, to be sure, multifaceted and complex. An especially important tradition, which often serves as a sort of backbone to some of the others and which has a particularly close bearing on this vision of India's past, is the Vedic tradition. The importance of this tradition, or more precisely of the textual corpus that is preserved by this tradition, is illustrated by the fact that certain other traditions have borrowed its name: Veda. India's longest, oldest and most important Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, calls itself the fifth Veda. The fundamental text on Sanskrit dramaturgy and related matters, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata, makes a similar claim. Indian medicine is known by the name *āyurveda*, the Veda of long life. Other traditions claim links to the Veda without necessarily borrowing its name. Obviously these traditions felt that they could add to their prestige by imitating the Veda, or by claiming a close connection with it.

The Veda occupies a very special position in the vision of India's past that came to predominate in brahmanical circles. Briefly put, the Veda is, or is closely connected with, the origin of all there is. The most traditional representatives of Vedic orthodoxy, known by the name Mīmāṃsakas, maintained that the Veda has no beginning in time at all; it has always been there. This they often linked up with the idea that the world has no beginning either, that it too was always there, essentially in the same form in which we know it. Other currents of thought do accept that the world we live in had a beginning in time, but do not accept that the Veda was created along with all the other things that constitute this world; on the contrary, creation itself was determined by, or carried out in accordance with, the words of the Veda. In this view the Veda predates the creation of our present world. The creation of our world itself is often thought of as the most

recent installment of an infinitely long series of creations, which has no beginning in time. The Veda stands above or outside this infinite series, and is sometimes depicted as being pronounced anew at the beginning of each new creation, exactly in the same form as in all the preceding ones.

This timelessness of the Veda also finds expression in other ways. The language of the Veda, i.e. Sanskrit, is as eternal and as unchangeable as the Veda itself. Language change does occur, but not in the language of the Veda, but in its corruptions which have led to the many languages that are spoken today. 'Development' is hardly the term to be used for this process, which is rather an ongoing process of corruption of the original perfect language which is Sanskrit.

The essential timelessness of the Veda —or at any rate its hoary antiquity, which amounts pretty much to the same thing— has not disappeared from India with the arrival of modernity. There may not be all that many people left these days who maintain that the Veda is literally beginningless and eternal, numerous are those who assign to the Veda incredibly ancient dates. Nor has the Veda stopped, in the Indian semi-popular imagination, being the beginning and source of all that it is worth knowing. 'Research' discovers evidence for the presence of the most recent scientific and technological developments in the Veda, and many a Hindu may expect that further research into this ancient textual tradition may bring to light useful knowledge such as, for example, a cure for aids.

Modern scholarship, one would expect, is not influenced by this traditional attitude towards the Veda. This optimistic expectation is not in total agreement with the facts. Modern indological scholarship, which was initially a european affair, brought along with it its own set of presuppositions, which were in some respects not all that different from the Indian beliefs.

Note, to begin with, that the 'discovery' of Sanskrit by european scholarship came at a time when the idea of India as the cradle of all civilization had numerous adherents in Europe. Edwin Bryant enumerates a number of representatives of this position, among them the astronomer Bailly and Voltaire, Pierre de Sonnerat, Schelling, Friedrich von Schlegel, and Johann-Gottfried Herder (Bryant 2001: 18 ff). Sanskrit came in this way to be looked upon not just as one branch language of the Indo-European family, but as its parent-language, or at any rate very close to it. Lord A. Curzon, the governor-general of India and eventual chancellor of Oxford, maintained as late as 1855 that "the race of India branched out and multiplied into that of the great Indo-European family". Scholarly interest for Sanskrit remained for a long time inseparable from the quest for the original Indo-European language. As in India, the study of Sanskrit remained also in Europe for quite a while closely linked to the quest for origins.

These romantic ideas about India did not survive for long among serious scholars, at least not in these extreme forms. It was soon discov-