

**THE EXPOSITION OF THE VEDANTA
PHILOSOPHY. VINDICATED, BEING
A REFUTATION OF CERTAIN
PUBLISHED REMARKS OF
COLONEL VANS KENNEDY**

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THE
EXPOSITION
OF THE
VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY,

BY

H. T. COLEBROOKE, ESQ., F.R.S.,
&c. &c. &c.

DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND,

VINDICATED;

BRING A

Refutation of certain Published Remarks

OF

COLONEL VANS KENNEDY,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

BY

SIR GRAVES C. HAUGHTON, KNT. K.H., M.A., F.R.S.
&c. &c. &c.

“ Amicus enim Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas.”

*(Extracted from the ASIATIC JOURNAL for November 1835, and containing some
Paragraphs and Notes omitted in that Journal for want of room.)*

L O N D O N :

M.DCCC.XXXV.

INTRODUCTION.



CONTROVERSY is always painful; and would be worse than useless, if it did not lead to the removal of error, and even, occasionally, to the discovery of truth. As the writer believes that both these ends have, to a certain degree, been attained in the following remarks, he has had a few copies printed off separately for his private friends, as well as for the use of scholars. The limits assigned to such letters in a Journal caused a few paragraphs and notes to be omitted, which will be now found incorporated in the following pages, as the writer deemed their insertion necessary to complete his views of the various subjects of which he has treated. Had the *Védanta* philosophy been the only point of consideration, it would hardly have been of sufficient importance to have called for this separate impression; but, as other topics of more general interest have arisen out of that question, it seemed to him advisable, particularly as it supplied the unavoidable omissions of his published letter, to put the whole in that form that might at once give them a chance of more general perusal, as well as of deliberate consideration. A few verbal inaccuracies that occurred in the hurry of its first publication have been corrected.

An Appendix has been added with the special view of elucidating the question of Cause and Effect; as well as of demonstrating the absurdity of the celebrated ancient maxim, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*.

London, 3d November, 1835.

THE VEDANTA SYSTEM.

REPLY OF SIR GRAVES HAUGHTON TO COLONEL VANS KENNEDY.

Addressed to the Editor of the *Asiatic Journal*.

SIR :—In the last number of your Journal, I find a letter addressed to you by Colonel Vans Kennedy, the object of which is to refute certain remarks of mine accompanying his paper on the *Védānta* philosophy, published in the third volume of the *Transactions* of the Royal Asiatic Society. My first feeling was not to put forth anything in reply; further consideration, however, led me to deviate from the course which I should otherwise be disposed to follow. I reflected, that silence might be construed into an admission that Colonel Kennedy's arguments were valid, and his assertions correct; besides which, it appeared to me that justice to Mr. Colebrooke's reputation for accuracy, and to my own motives for defending him, with the respect due to those which influenced the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society in ordering my sentiments to be printed, rendered it almost imperative on me to draw up the remarks contained in this letter. Here, I feel myself taken at a disadvantage, from having been, for a long time past, in a state of health which unfits me for any literary exertion.

With regret I perceive, that the observations, to which allusion has been made, were not accepted in a spirit resembling that which gave them utterance. I can appeal with confidence to my published remarks, and to the members who were present when I delivered them, that nothing was said, or indicated by tone or manner, which should have caused to Colonel Kennedy the slightest pain had he been even present. My observations were restricted to the expression of my conviction, that Mr. Colebrooke had been misunderstood; and that the Hindūs really *had* a word in the Sanserit language equivalent to *matter*; indeed, so much was my whole feeling opposed to anything calculated to give offence, that I spoke of Colonel Kennedy as an able and learned writer. Those sentiments were delivered on the impulse of the moment, and without premeditation, as the scope of his argument had been unknown to me, until the paper was read before the Society. It seemed a subject for regret that the meeting, which happened to be numerous, should carry away, at its separation, any impression unfavourable to Mr. Colebrooke; for, recollections left on my mind by the perusal of his paper, some years before, satisfied me that he had been misunderstood. I was the more desirous of counteracting any misapprehension on the subject, as Mr. Colebrooke was disabled by loss of sight and general infirmity from making any reply to Colonel Kennedy.

The Council of the Royal Asiatic Society (I speak from some years' personal experience) has always been guided by motives of the strictest impartiality; and has invariably endeavoured to foster a spirit of research and investigation into whatever relates to the ancient or modern condition of the East; and when it has made public any observations that seemed of themselves questionable, it has taken every pains that they should be so qualified as not to lead to

a hasty and an immature decision. Acting upon these principles, the Council referred some remarks made by Mr. Money, Secretary to the Bombay Branch of the Society, on an interpretation of a Greek inscription by the Baron Silvestre de Sacy, to that very eminent scholar himself; and his reply will be found at the end of Mr. Money's remarks, in the very same *fasciculus* of the *Transactions* containing Colonel Kennedy's essay. If the Baron's letter is made to follow Mr. Money's paper, whilst most of my remarks precede Colonel Kennedy's essay, the difference must be attributed solely to the unanimous conviction of those members of the Council, who were present when Colonel Kennedy's paper was ordered to be published, that his views were altogether erroneous, and that the attack on their venerable director required special notice. The publication, therefore, of Colonel's Kennedy's essay is, of itself, a decisive proof of the strict impartiality which regulates the proceedings of the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Guided by these considerations, the Council of the Royal Asiatic Society ordered, what you had reported as spoken on the occasion, to be printed with Colonel Kennedy's paper. The ill-health of our Director rendered the secretary the only official organ of the society, and, while filling that office, my reply, consequently, proceeded no less from the necessity of performing its duties than from admiration of Mr. Colebrooke's rare talents, mingled with sympathy for his sufferings, which did not allow him even to defend himself from a simple misconception. Though acting under the impulse of the moment, I felt that, in addressing a public assembly on one of the most abstruse points of Hindú metaphysics,—one in which few persons take an interest, and on which fewer still possess any definite notions,—it was desirable to put the argument in that form which would admit of general comprehension. The meeting at large understood that Mr. Colebrooke was represented by Colonel Kennedy to be in error, though but few possessed the requisite *data* in order to form a correct judgment on the points of difference. It was evident that the patience of the meeting was nearly exhausted in listening to the long extracts from the mystic metaphysicians of Germany, with which that essay concluded; and that the only chance left of rousing the attention of the members was to follow the homely recommendation given by that eminent physician and philosopher, Dr. Matthew Baillie, when assisting in a consultation with some of his professional brethren; and I accordingly endeavoured to give my auditors "a mouthful of common sense." For this reason, I refrained from the use of technical terms, and scholastic forms of illustration. In accordance with this view, my reply was limited to the maintaining of two positions; the first, that Mr. Colebrooke comprehended the sense of his author; the second, that the Hindús *had*, contrary to Colonel Kennedy's opinion, a word for *matter*. What I said on the occasion was received with approbation, for all were gratified to find that their venerable director *was* in the right. Subsequently, when the Council of our Society determined that my sentiments should be prefixed to Colonel Kennedy's essay, it appeared requisite that something more special should be given regarding certain points, on which I had not thought proper to touch in addressing a public assembly; and the last paragraph and note were therefore added. It was evidently necessary that these should be in keeping with the rest, so that the whole argument might preserve a popular form; for I have always entertained the persuasion, that the strength of an argument consists in its own cogency, and not in an array of technical phrases, which can be understood only by the initiated few.

Unwilling to rely on my own judgment, where the reputation of the Royal

Asiatic Society, as well as that of Mr. Colebrooke, was concerned, I referred the whole subject to the late Rammohun Roy. It will probably be conceded by all persons acquainted with such matters, that it would have been difficult to find a man more competent to pronounce an opinion on the question at issue than that gifted individual.

Profoundly versed in the literature and philosophy of his own country, himself an expounder in English of the *Védánta* philosophy, both by a reference to the *Védas* and the comments written to explain them, he was the very man to be considered as the *ductor dubitantium*. Rammohun Roy reiterated on this occasion his high admiration of Mr. Colebrooke's perfect acquaintance with Indian literature, which he had so often expressed in public* and private; and declared his entire concurrence in the manner in which Mr. Colebrooke had described the *Védánta* philosophy. He also gave his approval of my remarks. To substantiate his opinion, he pointed out two passages in his own works, one of which fully supported Mr. Colebrooke's interpretation, "that, according to the *Védánta* philosophy, God was not only the *efficient* but the *material* cause of the universe." Those passages† were printed with my remarks, by way of corroboration: no allusion is, however, made to them by Colonel Kennedy.

Having given this explanation of the causes that led to my remarks, and their subsequent publication by the order of the Council of the Society, I now proceed to adduce arguments in proof that Mr. Colebrooke has really been misapprehended by Colonel Kennedy. If I did not do so more explicitly before, the reason will appear in the foregoing statement, wherein the object of my published remarks has been shewn, and my conviction that all who took any interest in the subject could themselves refer to Mr. Colebrooke's own publications.

It is known to every one acquainted with Indian literature, that Mr. Colebrooke has given, in distinct publications, in the *Asiatic Researches* of Calcutta, and in the *Transactions* of our own Society, which he founded, and of which he accepted the office of director, some masterly translations of original works, and many admirable essays on the language, the literature, and the philosophy of the Hindús. In all these he had undertaken to be the *expositor*, and not the *critic*, of the works he brought before the public. Acting on this principle, he has seldom, by any expression, given his own opinion of his author. It will shortly be seen, however, that, by a fortunate departure from his usual reserve, he has left a record of his opinion of the *Védánta* philosophy that removes all doubt as to his own conception of its nature; and, consequently, should it appear to be, as Colonel Kennedy asserts, a system of gross and material pantheism in the writings of Mr. Colebrooke, such an inference must be deduced from the expressions of its Indian interpreters, who are faithfully rendered by him.

* The following is an extract from the report of the Anniversary Meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society, held on the 11th of May 1833, as given in the *Asiatic Journal* for July of that year:—"The Rája Rammohun Roy, in rising to propose the vote of thanks to Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Esq., director of the Society, said, that he could not allow himself to do so without stating his high opinion of Mr. Colebrooke's talents and character; he might, indeed, say, that he never knew any person who stood higher in his estimation than that venerable gentleman. It had long been the opinion of learned Hindús, the Rája observed, that it was impossible for Europeans to acquire a profound and accurate knowledge of the Sanscrit language, and it was Mr. Colebrooke's translations of the *Dáya Bhága* and the *Mitheshára*, the two most esteemed commentaries on the Hindú law of inheritance, which first convinced him of the contrary, and proved to him that it was possible for Europeans to acquire a knowledge of Sanscrit equally comprehensive and correct with the natives of India."

† *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. iii. p. 413—414.

I shall now briefly reply to such of Colonel Kennedy's remarks as seem to require attention.

Colonel Kennedy, in repeating his assertion that "the essay in question exhibits a system of the grossest pantheism," and in supporting it by extracts which he has given from Mr. Colebrooke's essay, overlooks what he ought to know, that a refutation had already been given of such an opinion by the quotation made from Rammohun Roy's Abridgment of the *Védānt*, which leaves no doubt that the *Védāntins* themselves assert the Deity to be the *efficient* as well as the *material* cause of the universe. The consequence, therefore, that ensues, according to Colonel Kennedy, namely, that the *Védānta* system is one of "gross materialism," must be referred to the *Védāntins* themselves. The imputation cannot in any way lie against Mr. Colebrooke, and, had Colonel Kennedy been more diligent, he would have found, that, in the instance where Mr. Colebrooke has departed from his usual reserve, he has expressed himself as follows: — "The latter (*Uttara Mīmāṃsā*), commonly called *Védānta*, and attributed to VYĀSA, deduces, from the text of the Indian scriptures, a refined psychology, which goes to a denial of a material world."* He ought not likewise to have founded a new charge† of inconsistency upon an objection already unanswerably refuted. If there be inconsistency, it must be referred to the native commentators, from whom the passages are drawn, and not to Mr. Colebrooke.

Colonel Kennedy has adduced a few passages from the comments of SANKARA and the *Sūtras* of VYĀSA, where the word *māyā* is employed, and he thence infers that the doctrine of mere ILLUSION, which is so much insisted upon in modern expositions of the *Védānta* system (both written and oral), is the true and ancient one, contrary to the declaration of Mr. Colebrooke. That, however, this is a misconception on the part of Colonel Kennedy, will, I think, appear quite evident from the following considerations. In those ancient *Sūtras* or memorial verses, and in SANKARA's comment upon them, the Deity, or BRAHM, is represented as the sole source of every thing. Individuality is denied to all other existing things. All the phenomena of physical nature result merely from the exertion of his energy (*śakti*), likewise called *nature* (*prakṛiti*), and *illusion* (*māyā*). This energy, nature, or illusion, is to be considered as *unreal*, because there is nothing but BRAHM; and it is *real*, inasmuch as it is the cause of every thing we behold about us.

These words, therefore, so restricted, are not to be taken in the sense they are employed in dictionaries or other systems. Energy, nature, or illusion, is further qualified by being called *unborn* (*ajā*), and it is also termed *ignorance* (*avidyā*‡), when visible nature is taken for a real essence by minds unenlightened by divine knowledge. Energy, nature, or illusion, therefore, cannot be said to be anything *essential*, but it is something *actual*. Hence, these three words are not the terms for a power, a state, or an abstraction personified by the abuse of language, but are intended to intimate something certainly that never before entered the head of any other than a Hindú philosopher, and which, for want of a better term, we must call an *actuality*; that is, something possessing potentiality, but destitute of essentiality, and busily employed in presenting to the Deity, while he is in calm repose, all the phenomena dependent upon sensation, thought, and the contemplation of the visible world, and causing him to behold himself diversified into an infinite but fallacious

* *Trans.* Royal Asiatic Society, vol. i. p. 19.

† *Ibid.* Col. Kennedy's letter, p. 96.

‡ As these five terms are quoted by Colonel Kennedy himself, I have been particular in their explanation.