In his perceptive introduction to the Charles Wilkins translation of *Bhagavad Geeta* (1784), Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India (1773-85), writes about the presence of distinct knowledge pursuits of the natives which help separate “the mind from the notices of the senses,” preventing it from “wander [ing] to some object of present sense or recollection.” Commenting on the concluding line of the *Gita* “Hath what I have been speaking, O Arjoon, been heard *with thy mind fixed to one point?* Is the *distraction* of thought, which arose from thy ignorance, removed?” (Wilkins 1785, 8; italics in the original), Hastings observes:

> To those who have never been accustomed to this separation of the mind from the notices of the senses, it may not be easy to conceive by what means such a power is to be attained; since even the most studious men of our hemisphere will find it difficult so to restrain their attention but that it will wander to some object of present sense or recollection;...But if we are told that there have been men who were successively, for ages past, in the daily habit of abstracted contemplation, begun in the earliest period of youth, and continued in many to the maturity of age, each adding some portion of knowledge to the store accumulated by his predecessors, it is not assuming too much to conclude, that, as the mind ever gathers strength, like the body, by exercise, so in such an exercise it may in each have acquired the faculty to which they aspired, and that their collective studies may have led them to the discovery of new tracks and combinations of sentiment, totally different from the doctrines with which the learned of other nations are acquainted: doctrines, which however speculative and subtle, still, as they possess the advantage of being derived from a source so free from every adventitious mixture, may be equally founded in truth with the most simple of our own. But as they must differ, yet more than the most abstruse of ours, from the common modes of thinking, so they will require consonant modes of expression, which it may be impossible to render by any of the known terms of science in our language, or even to make them intelligible by definition. This is probably the case with some of the
English phrases, as those of “Action,” “Application,” “Practice,” &c. which occur in Mr. Wilkin’s translation; and others, for the reasons which I have recited, he has left with the same sounds in which he found them. When the text is rendered obscure from such causes, candor requires that credit be given to it for some accurate meaning, though we may not be able to discover it; and that we ascribe their obscurity to the incompetency of our own perceptions, on so novel an application of them, rather than to the less probable want of perspicuity in the original composition. (9)

Hastings calls attention to the strangeness of the concepts such as “Action,” “Application” and “Practice” which were central to these knowledge pursuits and ponders over the impossibility of rendering some of these concepts and their salience “by any of the known terms of science in our language.” Though Hastings would undermine his own insightful observation by reducing the pursuits of the natives to the expressions of the religious doctrines of the natives, “of a theology accurately corresponding with that of the Christian dispensation” (11), Hastings nevertheless recognized, however vaguely, distinct forms of inquiry specific to the culture which he considered worthy of being known, learnt and understood. 214

It is therefore not surprising that it is with Hastings that the British colonial state’s engagement with the Indian educational tradition is often considered to begin. With an imperial vision that Indians must be ruled in accordance with their laws, Hastings promoted several scholarly enterprises. His administrative policy, accompanied by his fascination with Asian learning and civilization, fuelled his encouragement of an independent Oriental scholarship. However, despite the fact that Hastings’ policy encouraged Oriental scholarship to a significant extent, it would not be until almost three decades later that a systematic attempt to ascertain the state of indigenous education in India would be made by the British colonial state, specifically with the aim of guiding colonial policy. This was on account of the

214 I would like to thank Jakob De Roover for drawing attention to this passage in a discussion forum.
1813 East India Charter where for the first time, a sum was set apart to support educational activities in India, forcing the EIC to focus on indigenous education in India which till then was not an object of priority for them. As a result, a series of surveys were initiated by the governments of Madras, Bombay and Bengal to ascertain the nature and extent of the indigenous system of education. One of the first surveys on the indigenous educational system was conducted in Madras Presidency (1822-26), followed by a survey of the Bombay Presidency, *Survey of Indigenous Education in the Province of Bombay* (1825-28), ordered by Mountstuart Elphinstone. Thirteen years later, another survey by William Adam followed, culminating in the celebrated Adam’s reports. William Adam, a Unitarian missionary, conducted a survey of indigenous education in the Presidency of Bengal and Bihar at the behest of William Bentinck, the then Governor General of India. The results were published in the form of three reports titled *Report on the State of Education in Bengal 1835 and 1838*, an elaborate account of the rich and varied educational practices in India that existed then. The next significant survey of indigenous education was undertaken by G. W Leitner in 1882, almost forty-five years later, which was a survey of the indigenous system in Punjab (Baber 1996; Dharampal 1983). Much of the secondary scholarship on indigenous education that emerged in the early twentieth century during the nationalist period was based on these primary works. Most of these survey reports borrowed from the accounts of indigenous education in the writings of the Orientalists, Missionaries and Anglicists written in the early nineteenth century India as part of their general observations on the society and its institutions.

It should be remembered that these surveys were conducted at a time when new forms of knowing the world in the form of Western sciences and literature were just making inroads.

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215 William Adam’s surveys were published soon after Macaulay’s famous minutes (though the effort was on for several years before). The reports detail the state of indigenous education, a product of painstaking labour undertaken in the districts and thanas of Bengal and Behar at the behest of the Government. See Adam (1835, 1836, 1838).
into pockets of Indian cities. The moment of transition provides us with an interesting vantage point from which to understand the cross-cultural educational encounter because the British influence is still to extend to the interior parts of the region. In these regions, indigenous educational institutions remained the main network through which learning took place. The account not only gives us some understanding of the forms of learning that thrived in various parts of India before modern knowledge emerged as the most dominant form, but also throws light on the cognitive limit of the European framework.

At the very outset, it must be made clear that the aim of this chapter is not to write a chronological account of indigenous institutions and what they taught and then trace their subsequent decline with the coming of British rule, both due to neglect by the British officials and the introduction of modern liberal education. Nor is it to argue that we too had our indigenous institutions which suited us better and that we would have been better off if subsequent educational policies had promoted these native institutions rather than promote liberal education brought in by the British (Dharampal 1983; DiBona 1983).216 Instead, my attempt is to probe into the very framework that structured the European understanding of what constituted education, learning and knowledge and how it came to determine how they viewed indigenous education. What did Europeans identify as constituting education in India? What forms of knowledge did they recognize and what eluded them? From the European description of indigenous education, can we get a grasp on the specific nature of educational encounter and the conceptual moves involved in the transition from one to another? In short, the attempt is to arrive at a genealogical understanding of education during the crucial moment of transition that marked the early nineteenth century.

216 There have also been studies which examine the relation between educational change and the socio-economic changes of the period which caused indigenous systems to decline, giving rise to formal educational systems as we know them today. See Rukmini Banerji (2003, 163–72) who studies the social and economic changes that brought about the decline of indigenous education. The British land settlement policies which brought the lands given out by earlier rulers for purposes of learning under the British control for greater revenue, is mentioned by her as one of the main causes for the decline of indigenous education.
In the first section, I examine some of the contemporary scholars who have theorized the moment of transition in order to take account of how they characterize this shift. In the second, I use the writings of Europeans on indigenous education, particularly the works of William Adams (though where necessary I will refer to reports by others)\textsuperscript{217} to both reconstruct their account of Indigenous education and to make an argument that their own data constantly threatened to exceed the frame that they brought to bear upon the material. In the last section, I make an attempt to account for the limitations of the European frame.

6.1 Same form, Different Content?

Sheldon Pollock in his “Death of Sanskrit on the Eve of Colonialism” draws attention to an important shift that occurred in late eighteenth century India with the arrival of what he calls, “different principles of knowing and acting in the world.” These new ways of inhabiting the world, he claims, led to the decline of the tradition of Sanskrit thought “in the face of the new epistemological and social regime of European modernity”:

The two centuries before European colonialism established itself decisively in the Indian subcontinent (ca. 1550-1750) constitute one of the most innovative eras in Sanskrit intellectual history. Thinkers began to work across disciplines far more intensively than ever before, to produce new formulations of old problems, to employ a strikingly new discursive idiom and present their ideas in what were often new genres of scholarly writing. Concurrent with the spread of European power in the mid-eighteenth century, however, this dynamism began to diminish. By the end of the century, the tradition of Sanskrit systematic thought-which for two millennia or more constituted one of the most remarkable cultural formations in world history - had more or less vanished as a force in shaping Indian intellectual life, to be replaced by other kinds of knowledge based on different principles of knowing and acting in the world.

\textsuperscript{217} Though my focus is largely on the three reports by William Adam, I draw from similar surveys ordered by Thomas Munro (see Annexure A, Dharampal 1983) as well as accounts by Francis Buchanan (1833), William Ward (1811) and others where necessary.
In these two phases of history lie the core issues of this research project: the nature of the "knowledge systems" or scholarly disciplines in India on the eve of colonial rule, and the fact of their decline in the face of the new epistemological and social regime of European modernity. (Pollock and et. al. 2001)

Pollock recognizes that a fundamental shift occurred during this period that threw into crisis people’s relations to their previous social and educational institutions. He also characterizes the colonial encounter as one between “two knowledge systems” based on “different principles of knowing and acting in the world,” where newer knowledge systems comprehensively replaced older modes. However, what remains unclear in this description of the moment of transition is the nature of this educational encounter and the specific character of the transformation that ensued.

Extending Pollock’s thesis, Kaviraj, in his “Death of Sanskrit”, attempts to characterize the nature of this “immense intellectual transformation” and poses the question of how this massive intellectual change could be conceptually viewed. He observes that the conceptual movement between one form of knowledge to another was essentially “a language change” in two different but related ways: The immense shift was a movement from one natural language, Sanskrit or Persian–Arabic to another natural language, English. Secondly, these two languages housed entirely different conceptual and cognitive worlds, each entailing its own “comprehensive structures of cognitive grammar.” In short, what was apparently a linguistic change was a massive cognitive change which resulted in a complete transformation of what was to be considered as “knowledge” in various fields of knowledge:

There is hardly any dispute that in the 19th century, in some parts of India slightly later, a massive ‘epistemological rupture’ occurred. Sanskrit, or in Islamic contexts Persian–Arabic, was replaced as a vehicle of serious, complex, highly valued knowledge by English. More significantly, this was a ‘language change’ in two distinct but related ways. Not only was this a massive shift from one natural language, Sanskrit, to another, English. These natural languages housed deeply entrenched conceptual
languages. These conceptual languages were, in turn, part of comprehensive structures of cognitive grammar – i.e., the acknowledged ways in which ‘knowledges’ were recognised as knowledge, acquired, deposited, examined, disseminated and continued as intellectual and practical traditions. This cognitive change was utterly comprehensive: in fields of knowledge as widely distant as mathematics, logic, astronomy, medicine, moral enquiry, religious reflection, grammar and aesthetics, what counted as ‘knowledge’ was transformed.” (Kaviraj 2005, 120)

Kaviraj’s formulation, which casts the transition as a conceptual movement from one structure of “cognitive grammar” to another, tells us little about what constitutes the two different ways of knowing and acting in the world. Neither does it tell us why one conceptual scheme housed in one language should so comprehensively replace another other than provide us with social and historical changes. In short, what was distinct about the knowledge form such that one knowledge form by its very structure could be destructive of the other – is a question unanswered if the difference is cast in terms of a language shift rather than the distinctly peculiar operation of the new knowledge form. Instead, in the rest of the essay Kaviraj speaks of the character of indigenous forms of knowledge exactly as one would of Western knowledge forms – “as complex structures of interconnected propositions,” essential to the idea of a “knowledge system” where “Knowledge, particularly its intellectually compelling power, resides in its character as a system”:

Individual performances and propositions however do not constitute traditions. The rational compulsion of assent that is central to any knowledge comes from intellectual activity that connects single propositions to larger and more complex structures of interconnected understanding. True knowledge is not made up of single units of ideas, as propositions which carry them linguistically, but in complex structures of interconnected propositions. Knowledge, particularly its intellectually compelling power, resides in its character as a system. Thus the interconnectivity of knowledge, the fact that it connects subjects, gives rise to the minimal idea of a tradition. Building of knowledge is thus an intrinsically collective activity, both at a single point and across time. (125)
The hazards of understanding earlier forms of knowledge through the lens of modern knowledge forms are illuminatingly brought out by Sanjay Seth. He notes that modern studies have often ended up comparing the content of curriculum and pedagogies of indigenous education with that of modern ones. By doing so, he argues, they miss the point, because they work with the assumption that indigenous knowledge practices were more or less similar in form but different merely in content. It is, he points out, borrowing from Timothy Mitchell on the kind of learning that happened in the great mosque of al-Azhar, ‘To take a dominant practice of the late nineteenth century and twentieth century and project it back onto a world in which it did not exist, resulting in unhelpful observations about the limited nature of its curriculum’ (Seth 2007, 39). We thereby end up reproducing Macaulay’s understanding, seeing these forms of knowledge as “outdated” and “inferior” when compared to modern knowledge forms. Alternatively, we could, like the Orientalists believe that India was never barbaric and once had a great civilization in the Sanskrit Cosmopolis which subsequently declined due to the corruption of the priestly class (what Kaviraj calls “the thesis of internal intellectual atrophy”’) or due to Islamic rule (Kaviraj 2005, 121) and go about retrieving the underlying principles of various practices in its more glorious days, like the Orientalists did and once again cast them as variants of modern forms.

I side-step both these approaches and instead shift the gaze on the lenses through which the Europeans viewed indigenous education. If in Gandhi and Tagore, we find another distinct conception of education articulated which is centred on practical forms, ethical learning and reflection on action, why did the Europeans not see it? What kind of assumptions determined

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218 This feature is evident in most writings on indigenous education in India. Rather than make an attempt to comprehend what forms of understanding constitute another culture, evaluations are made on the basis of lack of printed texts, absence of scientific learning, technological innovation and advancement that characterised Europe during this time. See Basu (1985) for one such appraisal. For an interesting account of the learning that took place in the great mosque of al-Azhar, see Mitchell (1988). Mitchell points out how till the third decade of nineteenth century in Egypt, learning took place within the craft/profession one practiced.
their evaluation? In order to examine how the British viewed indigenous education, I turn to the reports on indigenous education, particularly the reports by William Adam.

6.2 Evaluation of Indigenous Education: Reports of William Adam

The three reports by William Adam on the extensive survey of indigenous education in Bengal and Bihar conducted by him and his aides in the 1830s, are unique records of Indian institutions before modern, liberal education began to make their way into the interior villages of Bengal and Bihar. The reports are a testimony to Adam’s meticulousness and his self-conscious effort to represent the facts as accurately as possible, almost rivalling contemporary ethnographic efforts at eliciting the state of education in a particular region and its links to the larger society. The reports are a veritable census of the Province of Bengal and South Behar, containing a list of each district, the number of villages, towns, thanas in them, the population, the number of families and the number of inhabitants, both Hindu and Mohammedans. They consist of a wealth of social and ethnographic detail - of centres of learning including the number of teachers and students in schools and “colleges,” the caste composition of teachers and students, the various branches of learning, number of years spent in elementary and advanced learning, the books used in each course, and in the third report, the works authored by the teachers as well.

The surveys are interspersed with Adam’s alert and reflective corrections in the form of identification of factors which might have produced exaggerations of data in some instances and the paucity of them in others. He often consciously proceeds to err on the side of under-estimation rather than over-estimation with regard to the number of institutions in the area. Despite the wealth of information and the painstakingly recorded details, till date the data has been insufficiently analyzed though we have several reprints of the reports themselves. To
Adam’s credit and luckily for us, he also records the data which challenges his own framework in considerable detail, often drawing attention to the inadequacy of his theory.

Adam mainly documents three types of schools in the districts of Bengal and Bihar – Indigenous\(^\text{219}\) Elementary Schools (the Vernacular *Pathshalas* and *Maktabs*\(^\text{220}\)), Indigenous Schools of (advanced) Learning (the Sanskrit *tols* and the Arabic *madrasas*) and the Elementary Schools (the non-indigenous missionary schools). What does Adam see as constituting the activity of education? The reports,\(^\text{221}\) as we shall see, challenge several of our currently held opinions about indigenous education in India.

**Adam’s Observations**

One of the striking features of Adam’s reports is the presence of an extensive network of elementary education in various parts of the region. After a fairly elaborate calculation to rule out any possibility of exaggeration, Adam concludes that in the Bengal presidency, there was a school for every 63 students of school going age, with almost every village having one (Adam 1835, 9). The extraordinary extent of elementary education was made note of in the

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\(^{219}\) By “indigenous education,” Adam refers to those “originated by natives themselves, in contradistinction from those that are supported by religious or philanthropic societies” (Adam 1835, 8). I have retained the usage here because it is a classificatory category used by Adam and others to indicate those institutions which they recognized as native to the land and as largely uninfluenced by the modern system.

\(^{220}\) The Maktabs, Adam notes, did not make use of Urdu at all and were not in the vernacular. I have largely focussed on “Hindu” institutions for the purposes of my study though Adam also has a fairly elaborate account of Mohammedan institutions as well. These merit a separate study.

\(^{221}\) There are three reports to Adam’s credit which document his study. His first report, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* (1835) is largely based on the previous work on the subject by Francis Buchanan, Hamilton, William Ward, missionary school reports and a memoir by the Searcher of Records at the India House. Adam notes that he has not introduced any statement of fact resting on his own observation and authority but has brought together previously scattered work on the subject of education in all the districts of Bengal in a “methodized form.” Nonetheless, we do find various points where Adam offers a corrective to a statement present in a previous work when it contradicts his own experience or when the facts are challenged by natives known to him. However, this report does not contain the results of any survey conducted by him. The *Second Report on the State of Education in Bengal* (1836) is an intensive study of Nattore thana, a subdivision of Rajshahi district. The *Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal: Including Some Account of the State of Education in Behar* (1838) includes three additional districts of Bengal along with districts of Bihar (South Bihar and Tirhoot). The second and third reports are based on his surveys, conducted with the help of several aides, and include a great deal of new statistical information concerning the caste of teachers and students as well as a comparison of the state of indigenous education between the two regions of Bengal and Bihar as it existed then.
Sir Thomas Munro, in his minute dated March 10, 1826 (the result of an enquiry he ordered in 1822 in Madras presidency), also noted that ‘every village had a school,’ with one boy out of three attending schools, a high ratio compared to even European nations of the time (Dharampal 1983, Annexure A, 252). The result of these inquiries, pronounced both by Munro and Adam, provoked a fair bit of anxiety among the British back home, leading one member of Central Society of Education in London to comment: “The truth is, England will soon be, if it be not already, the worst educated country in Europe. Even in countries deemed uncivilised, more is done for the poorer classes than our own. In Bengal, for example, from the report of Mr. Adams, it appears that there is scarcely a native village throughout the province in which reading, writing and arithmetic are not taught to the peasantry, while in England there is scarcely a village in which a school exists of any kind accessible to an industrial labourer, save a Sunday school or a dame school, in which reading only is taught” (Duppa 1837, 51).

The reason for the extent of these schools could be that they were largely of a “one teacher, one school” model (DiBona 1983). They were held in open spaces, temples or houses of native inhabitants with minimal infrastructure, with pupils from the neighbourhood attending them. These initiatives, it was noticed, were neither “state-sponsored” as understood in the current sense (though sometimes supported by the local rulers or their representatives who

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222 In Bombay presidency, G. L. Pendergest, a senior official, observed that "there is hardly a village, great or small throughout our territories in which there is not at least one school” (cited in Fisher 1833, 301–02). Also see Dr. G. W. Leitner (1882) on Punjab. Years later, Gandhi, in his speech at Chatham House Meeting, London (October 20, 1931), would use these surveys on indigenous education to make a claim that India was more literate before the British came to India: “I say without fear of my figures being challenged successfully, that today India is more illiterate than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and so is Burma, because the British administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. They scratched the soil and began to look at the root, and left the root like that, and the beautiful tree perished. The village schools were not good enough for the British administrator, so he came out with his programme. Every school must have so much paraphernalia, building, and so forth. Well, there were no such schools at all... I defy anybody to fulfil a programme of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century” (Gandhi 1999, 54; 59). Philip Hartog would challenge Gandhi’s statement, leading to a series of exchanges between them. Till the very end, Gandhi refused to retract the statement, despite Hartog’s dogged attempt to get him to do so. See Gandhi-Hartog correspondence published in Dharampal (1983, Annexure F, 348–85).
would often allot rent free land for educational purposes and also award allowances in some cases to the teacher) nor were they a result of religious organizations at work. Instead, they were often a result of an arrangement between parents with school-going children and a learned person in the vicinity, with the more wealthy ones offering their houses for learning or local rulers sanctioning land for use.

Adam notes that these elementary schools mainly imparted ‘practical,’ ‘secular’ knowledge in the vernacular dialects of the people, the language in which everyday transactions and local business were conducted. Students were taught reading, writing and arithmetic. Commercial and/or agricultural accounts based on their need, tables of numeration, money, weight, measure and modes of letter writing constituted part of what was learnt. In some schools, minimal Sanskrit grammar and verses would be taught. Much of the learning that took place was functional in character. Unlike in the Western debates around Bildung as self-formation where there exists a pre-existent, normative, universal goal in the light of which all human beings must be formed, it appears that indigenous system is driven by no such normative goal. Instead, the subject of education was shaped according to the logic of the practice one was already a part of.

The children in the elementary schools were taught to read and write simultaneously, a method, which Adam noted, was an improvement over the European one and also challenged the commonly held perception that writing was not of importance to the natives:

…native school-boys learn everything that they do learn not merely by reading but by writing it. They read to the master or to one of the oldest scholars, what they have previously written, and thus the hand, the eye, and the ear are equally called into requisition. This appears preferable to the mode of early instruction current amongst ourselves, according to which the elements of language are first taught only with the aid of the eye and the ear, and writing is left to be subsequently acquired. It would thus appear also that the statement which represents the native system as teaching chiefly by the ear to
the neglect of the eye, is founded on a misapprehension, for how can the aid of the eye be said to be neglected when, with the exceptions above mentioned, nothing appears to be learned which is not rendered palpable to the sense by the act of writing? (Adam 1835, 20-21)

In standard histories of society, oral cultures are often considered to be primitive, meant to be supplanted by a written culture which is considered to be a superior stage in the development of a society. Within such a conception of history, India has predominantly been seen as an oral culture which with the coming of British moved towards a written mode, a more advanced stage. However, more recently such an assumption has been shown to be false in the case of India. For example, Sheldon Pollock points out that in “the sphere of imagination and its written expression, South Asia boasts a literary record far denser, in terms of sheer number of texts and centuries of unbroken multilingual literacy, than all of Greek and Latin and medieval European culture combined” (Pollock 2011b, 4). Similarly, Axel Honneth notes that “although the Indian techniques of preserving texts by memorization...are undoubtedly impressive, it is equally impressive that South Asia preserves a wealth of written text material (perhaps more than 20 million manuscripts and thousands of texts)” (Michaels 2001, 11). These written traditions have often coexisted with rich oral traditions without any conflict, with the former often aiding and revitalizing the latter. Thus, Adam’s observation that “nothing appears to be learned which is not rendered palpable to the sense by the act of writing” (Adam 1836, 21) seems to overturn our simplistic assumption between orality and literacy and the complex relation between the two in our context.

Adam, however, constantly draws attention to the imperfect and deficient nature of what is taught, the poor teaching methods, the absence or poor quality of printed material and written

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223 This method of learning drew the attention of many Europeans, along with the monitorial system. As the child wrote the letter on sand with his finger, he also said it aloud. See extract from Walker Papers published in Dharampal (1983, Annexure C, 264–69). That there is a long history of written tradition in Sanskrit and the vernaculars (in the second millennium) is now well-known. See Pollock (1998), Pollock (2006) for an account of “literary traditions” in India. These also included a rich tradition in the vernacular. Thus, it is highly unlikely that “higher learning” remained confined to Sanskrit.
manuscripts. Emphasizing that while improvement was required both in the mode and matter of instruction, the “chief evil” of the Bengali school system consisted “less in the value of that which is taught or in the manner of teaching it, as in the absence of that which is not taught at all” (Adam 1835, 21). What was required was to expand the mind by unshackling it from the “trammels of mere usage” and teach it to “employ its own powers.” This could be done by introducing some “new branch of knowledge in itself perfectly useless” which would stimulate “the mind to the increased observation and comparison of external objects and throwing it back upon itself with a larger stock of material for thought” (22). Even though Adam was British, we find here the distinct echo of the Humboldtian conception of education as Bildung come into play in Adam’s assessment of indigenous education where the self in the process of its engagement with an object, hones its own intellectual powers. However, even this form of higher intellectual cultivation, Adam contends, though necessary, was not enough. It was the absence of any form of moral cultivation that, according to Adam, accounted for the peculiar character of the native. Adam highlights the absence of anything resembling moral learning in these native institutions:

...there is no text or school-book used containing any moral truths or liberal knowledge, so that education being limited entirely to accounts, tends rather to narrow the mind and confine its attention to sordid gain, than to improve the heart and enlarge the understanding. This description applies, as far as I at present know, to all indigenous elementary schools throughout Bengal. (Adam 1835, 11)

**The Diversity of Caste Groups in Indigenous Elementary education**

Another noticeable feature of indigenous elementary education as detailed by William Adams is the significant presence of various caste groups deemed to be outside institutions of education. This is most evident in Adam’s *Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal* where he presents the results and analysis of the surveys that he conducted in Bengal and South Behar for a period of about 15-16 months during which he investigated six districts and
one principal city (District and city of Moorshedabad, districts of Beerbhoom, Burdwan and Midnapore and the districts of South Behar and Tirhoot in Behar). Adam repeatedly draws attention to the anomaly that contrary to the usual assumption that “lower” castes were not permitted to be beneficiaries of education according to Indian customs, his data of indigenous schools presents a considerable presence of not only scholars (pupils) but also of teachers from “lower” castes, including Kalu, Sunri, Dhoba, Malo and Chandal:

The Kalu, Sunri, Dhoba, Malo and Chandal castes are of those that were generally deemed to be excluded from the benefits of instruction in letters; but the above enumeration shows that some individuals of those castes have even become instructors of others. (Adam 1838, 24)

Both in Bengal and Behar, the teaching community is not dominated by Brahmins as might be presumed, but by Kayasthas. Even here, though the Kayasthas dominate, this does not exclude other caste groups:

Both in Bengal and Behar the business of teaching common schools is chiefly in the hands of the Kayastha or writer-caste. In the Bengal districts this hereditary privilege has been largely invaded by other castes both superior and inferior to the Kayastha, but still so as to leave the latter a decided majority in the class of vernacular teachers. In the Behar district this privilege is enjoyed in nearly its pristine completeness. (38)

In his analysis of the District and city of Moorshedabad, Adam notes that “parents of good castes do not hesitate to send their children to schools conducted by teachers of an inferior caste and even of a different religion. For instance, the Musalman [sic] teacher who taught a Bengali school had Hindus of good caste among his scholars, and this was equally true of the Chandal and other low-caste teachers enumerated” (Adam 1838, 18–19). Of these low-caste teachers, there were five who gave instruction gratuitously (without any reward or payment,
other than accepting presents on occasions). Two of these were family priests.\(^{224}\) One of them was a weaver by the day and taught in the evenings, and another was a retail-dealer, compelling Adam to remark about the merit attached to the communication of knowledge that moves people of all castes:

There are also many cases in which paid teachers instruct a greater or less number of their scholars gratuitously. It gives great pleasure to mention these instances of unostentatious benevolence in the humblest ranks of native society. They prove both the merit attached to the communication of knowledge, and the readiness to receive instruction on the part of many who can offer no compensation for it. (19)

The diversity in the caste composition was also a feature of the scholars (students) taught, with the enumeration of the caste composition of the scholars revealing considerable presence of “lower castes” who were deemed to be excluded from education - Mali, Kalu, Sunri, Chandal, Kahar, Jalia, Lahari, Bagdhi, Dhoba, Muchi, Dosad, Pashi, Luniar (the last three among the “very low and degraded castes” in South Behar and present in fairly considerable numbers too). In Bengal, the number of Brahmin scholars though individually higher than others in some institutions, is outnumbered significantly by other caste groups when added together. These caste groups are extremely diverse, many of which are unheard of. The district of Beerbhoom also records three Dhangars and Santhals receiving instruction in these schools:

From the number of scholars of the Brahman caste, we may infer not only the large number of brahman caste in the district, but also in some measure the extent to which they have engaged in the worldly employment prohibited to their castes. Another circumstance worthy of notice is the comparatively large number of scholars of the Kalu and Sunri caste, which are not only on religious grounds excluded from association with brahmans, but, according to former custom and usage, were generally deemed

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\(^{224}\) This challenges the assumption that only Brahmans performed the role identified to be similar to that of “priests.”
unworthy of participating in the advantages of literary instruction even in its humblest forms. The appearance also of Dom, Keot, Hari and other low castes in the list of scholars, although in less numbers, affords additional and still stronger illustrations of the increasing desire for instruction and of the unforced efforts to obtain it; for those castes are the lowest of the low and were formerly as undesirous of instruction in letters as they were deemed unworthy of it. (27)

In South Behar, the number of students from Gandhabanik, Magadha and Teli castes considerably outnumbered the Brahmins and in Tirhoot there were seven other castes that exceeded the number of Brahmin scholars. Clearly, here was data challenging Adam’s assumptions about Indian society.225

Adam’s Puzzle

How does Adam account for the presence of lower castes in educational institutions? In most cases Adam’s explanation is that with the coming of Europeans, these castes have greater aspirations and have therefore come forward to derive the benefits of education: “The encroachment of these caste on the outskirts of learning is a spontaneous movement in the native society, the effect of a strong foreign rule unshackled by native usages and prejudices and protecting all in the enjoyment of equal rights” (Adam 1838, 21–22). However, if this were true, Adam is quick to note, the presence of lower castes in both Beerbhoom and Burdwan districts in Bengal should be found in the new missionary schools which do not acknowledge caste distinctions. This however was not the case for the “increase” was peculiarly to be found in schools of native origin. In the analysis of the district of Burdwan, Adam observes:

225 Interestingly, even in Madras Presidency, the number of “middle” and “lower” castes predominated schools in various regions. Munro’s survey involved the collection of information by various collectors from all the twenty one districts of the Presidency. Details regarding the schools and colleges in the districts, the number of male and female students, their castes (the categories used are Brahmin, Vysee, Soodra, other castes, and Mussalman scholars), the books used among other details have been documented. In schools, the presence of the “soodra” caste exceeded any other. See Dharampal, (1983, Annexure A, 89-250).
Compared with the preceding districts there is a much larger number of scholars, and all castes, both high and low, partake of the increase. There are some low castes also which here appear for the first time as the Tior, Garar and Mal castes. The number of scholars of the low caste is so considerable that without explanation it might be supposed that they were chiefly found in the Missionary schools which are more numerous in this district than in any other I have visited, and which of course do not recognize distinctions of caste. The fact however is otherwise, for the number of scholars belonging to sixteen of the lowest caste amounts to 760, of whom only 86 are found in Missionary schools and the remaining number in native schools. (30)

Thus, Adams concludes that despite the fact that the proportion of lower caste students in missionary schools might be higher, “the total number of the same castes in native schools is so considerable as to prove that other and independent causes (are) in operation stimulating the humbler classes of native society to improvement of their condition and to the attainment of those advantages, hitherto for the most part denied to them, that arise from a knowledge of letters” (31). What these are Adam never makes clear, other than conclude that these castes have become more desirous of education with the coming of the British. However, as he himself points out this explanation is flawed for two reasons: If it were true that the British were responsible for the increasing desire for education in the case of lower castes, then this desire should result in a corresponding increase in missionary schools which were largely free of cost (as opposed to the pathshalas which took a minimal fee) and made no distinctions with regard to caste. Secondly, if a change in circumstances demanded that lower castes attend pathshalas, then it appears that they could and they did. This clearly was not an unusual occurrence and did not seem to greatly disturb the native society. This could only mean that Adam’s theory of the native society was inadequate or wrong.

At this point, a question arises. What was the theory of the native society that Adam worked with? What were its elements? In his overall view of the districts and a comparison of
indigenous education in Bengal and Behar, Adam makes explicit his pre-suppositions regarding the native society and notes the contradictions he observed:

Hindu society on a large scale may be divided into three grades; first, Brahman who are prohibited by the laws of religion from engaging in worldly employments for which vernacular instruction is deemed fit and dispensable preparation; second, those castes who though inferior to Brahman are deemed worthy of association with them or to whom the worldly employments requiring vernacular instruction are expressly assigned; and third, those castes who are inferior as to be deemed unfit worthy both of association with Brahmans and of those worldly employments for which vernacular instruction is the preparation. This would exclude the first and third grades from the benefits of such instruction, and in the Behar districts the proportion of both is considerable. (38)

There are two anomalies that Adam is trying to account for within his theory of native society: firstly, the presence of Brahmins in vernacular education which was largely geared towards “worldly,” “secular” employments in which he expected Brahmins to be absent and secondly, the presence of lower castes in education.

The presence of Brahmins in vernacular education among other castes is explained by Adam as an indication of the fact that the caste had to a large extent come to engage in worldly activities and had moved away from the “non-worldliness” which was traditionally appointed to them. This was only to be seen as another sign of the corruption of the priesthood. Here, we can recall similar complaints made against Brahmins by other Europeans missionaries: that most Brahmins do not know Sanskrit, that they do not know the meaning of what they recite, that they are not well-versed in the Vedas and only know by rote the part they are expected to know for specific ritual duties and have entered profane professions. These were common criticisms against them. However, current scholarship has shown that this criticism
is misplaced. Not all Brahmins were expected to know the Vedas and not all did.\footnote{This was a familiar criticism in the nineteenth century. See, for instance, Buchanan (1833, 109). Also see Altekar (1934, 148-50) and Seth (2007, 35) who note the prevalence of this perception.} Similarly, not all Brahmins were “priests” and many in fact performed several Laukika functions without any tag of corruption from the native community. The ones who did know the Vedas, did so with an emphasis on form, sound, correct action and not with an emphasis on meaning. Meaning was not regarded as the most important element within the tradition (Staal 2008). However, the presence of Brahmins in vernacular education was a sign of Brahmins deviating from their original vocation in Adam’s eyes.

The presence of lower castes in the realm,\footnote{Poromesh Acharya notes that the considerable presence of lower castes and Muslims in Pathshalas is responsible for its “secular” and “democratic” character (Acharya 1978, 1983). However, only if we see this through the frame of “secular” and “religious,” and view them from present-day categories, can we make this a positive or negative evaluation. Otherwise, it is likely that people went to whoever taught them in the neighbourhood, based on their respective needs.} despite there being a customary prohibition against their presence, as pointed out earlier, is attributed to the higher desire and aspirations among the lower castes with the coming of British. However, given that there was a substantial presence of lower castes in these schools, it is clear that our assumption about prohibition is either wrong or its nature inadequately understood. Even if we were to accept Adam’s explanation that the British presence had resulted in “increased” aspirations, one would still have to conclude that the prohibitions have little effect and therefore play no rigid, regulatory role in the society. Either way, it would call for the revision of the view of Indian society and the framework which Adam employs in the analysis of his data.

Why did Adam perceive what he did? In the beginning of the chapter, we noted that Hastings identified the centrality of “action,” “application” and “practice” to the native culture. While Hastings could at least faintly recognize the distinctness of certain knowledge pursuits and their strangeness (however fleetingly), we see that this domain gets completely hidden by the time we come to Adam. The constitution of the religion of “Hinduism” in the last decades of
the eighteenth century quickly comes to determine the lens through which the Europeans looked at the native culture. Actions and practices come to be seen as expressions of underlying beliefs or doctrines of “Hinduism,” comprising the caste system. Like most Europeans of the early nineteenth century, Adam too processed the world he encountered through the structures of thought that were largely determined by the Protestant framework and the theory of natural religion. As we saw in chapter III, the conception of religion presupposed the two-tiered structure of a corrupt priestly class which was responsible for the decline of religion from its “pure” and “pristine state. The theory of natural religion had resulted in the equation of Brahmans with “priests” who had kept the scriptures out of reach of the masses and had kept them buried in “rituals”, “ceremonies” and “superstition.” Since, religion is seen to be constitutive of the social domain, and the history of not just religions but also of societies is the story of the corruption of universal, natural religion (recall Harrison 1990), the social, by implication is only an accretion of deliberately maintained false practices. The social gets configured as “corrupt” and is not recognized as a site of learning. These pre-suppositions which were an integral part of the very conception of natural religion and its notion of society, also resulted in a disservice to the so called “lower castes”: it virtually eclipsed the fact that there were many among them who were teachers and students, and many who were bearers of knowledge in different domains, sometimes even imparting learning gratuitously, as Adam’s data reveals. Their own empirical data frequently posed a challenge to many of their assumptions and the early generations of Europeans like Adam, we see, are alert to it. Of course, despite his alertness, Adam is unable to transcend the limitations of his own frame because the category of religion forms a cognitive limit through which he views indigenous education.

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228 Identifying Brahmans as priests involved two assumptions: a) that the Brahmans “mediated” between the laity and God like the Christian priesthood did b) that the members of other castes did not perform similar functions.
Schools of Higher Learning

Early generations of Europeans also noted the presence of a fairly widespread network of schools of higher learning called *tols, madrasas*, or versions of higher learning spread all over the country. Unlike elementary education which was considered to be largely in the vernacular, Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, or Tamil as the case may be, schools of higher learning were always identified as Schools of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. Of course, this observation cannot be an accurate one. It is more likely that Adam expected higher learning to be in Sanskrit, and other “classical languages,” as was the case in medieval Europe. As a result, he identified only these as comprising higher learning. While the pathshalas charged a nominal fee, schools of higher learning were at the expense of the teacher or guru, who bore lodging, clothing and other expenses, often incurring debt in order to do so. The teacher would sometimes be supported by the ruling king through land grants or by wealthy families in the vicinity.

One of the salient features of these accounts is that despite the fact that some Europeans noted the presence of higher learning in the form of *tols* or colleges in various districts, very often it was reported that no institutions of higher learning existed in several districts and that “there is nothing belonging to it which can assimilate it with a shadow of public education, or indeed of regularity in learning” (Dharampal 1983, Annexure A, 94). However, even in these places where no such public institutions were reported, collectors of Madras presidency reported that learning on the *Vedas*, the *Puranas, Ganeethashastram, Jyothish-shastram, Dharmashastram, Turkum, Kavyum, Agamashastram* (relating to when and how to perform certain rituals for the gods), *Nayeshadum, Vaidyam* among others were taught at the homes of well-known practitioners of these forms. It is likely that the number of those who received instructions in the homes of “private tutors” far exceeded the more recognizably institutional
forms of learning, a fact noted by both the collectors of Madras Presidency and William Adam in his study of Bengal.

Adam classifies the various forms of learning in Bengal and South Behar, often using Western equivalents. The branches of learning that he records include grammar, rhetoric, lexicology, literature, law, logic and mythology, astrology, medicine, *Vedanta* and *tantras*. In Bengal, Adam notes, “the study of grammar occupies about seven years; lexicology about two; literature about ten; law about ten; logic about thirteen; and mythology about four”\(^{229}\) (Adam 1838, 45). The duration of higher learning also seems much longer since Adam notes that in some of the districts like Rajshahi, studies lasted for not less than twenty-two years, which means that the scholar has to be more than thirty before he leaves the “college” (Adam 1835, 49).

Adam makes an elaborate list of the “text-books” used in each district. His notes on the district of Beerbhoom gives us some idea of the nature of learning that thrived though it must be remembered that it is likely that these text-books\(^{230}\) did not constitute the core of the learning process:

In grammar, the works used as text-books are Panini with the Kaumudi commentary, Sankshipta Sar with the Goyicandri commentary, and the Mugdhabodha; in lexicology the Mara Kosha; in literature the Bhatti Kavya, Raghuvesa, Naishadha, and Sakuntala; in rhetoric the Kavya Prakasa, Kavya Chanrica, and Sahitya Darpana; in law the Tithi, Ahnika and Prayaschitta Tatwas of Raghunanda, and the Daya Bhaga; in logic the Jagadisi commentary of Siddhanta Lakshana and Vyaddhikaranadharmavachinnabhava, and the Mathuri commentary of the Vyapti Panchaka; in the

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\(^{229}\) Adam’s categories may need some clarification since they can tend to mislead. Literature perhaps refers to *kavya*. The domain of rituals and the *smritis* are largely referred to as “law.” The *puranas* and other stories which were taught are characterized as either literature or mythology. Thus, we see an arbitrary bundling up of the various learning traditions by Europeans, based on categories from their own experience.

\(^{230}\) In fact, it is likely that the natives gave whatever printed material they had because that was the demand made, even though they were not crucially a part of the teaching and learning process.
Vedanta or theology of the Veds, the Vedanta Sara; in medicine Nidana; in mythology the Bhagavata Purana; and in astrology the Samaya Pradipa and Dipika. (Adam 1838, 48)

While the above classification gives us a sense of settled categories, the early European efforts to study indigenous education is beset with classificatory problems, with a great deal of uncertainty about how to categorise the various forms of learning that existed. This confusion persists even today where the tendency to map existing forms of knowledge to Western disciplinary forms continues to result in much distortion. William Ward, for instance, notes that the name given to Hindu college is “chutooshpathi” which signifies the place where the four shastras are studied: grammars, works of law (the smritis), puranas and darshanas. Adam on the other hand lists them as grammar, law and logic or as grammar, law and metaphysics. The last of these, he notes, comprises the six darshanas of which four are taught in schools, the four being Nyaya, Vedanta, Mimamsa and Sankhya (Adam 1838, 61–62). Nyaya is variously translated as logic, ethics, philosophy or metaphysics. Buchanan classifies literature, law and metaphysics as “higher sciences” and theology (“bedanto”), worship, astrology and magic as “lower sciences.”

Drawing from William Ward’s earlier writing on Hindu learning, Adam identified three kinds of “colleges” in Bengal. Bringing to bear the idea of trivium in medieval universities in Europe which comprised grammar, rhetoric and logic, Adam similarly classifies them as such – the first kind in which grammar, poetical works and occasionally the puranas as well as the smritis are taught, a second order of colleges in which chiefly law and the puranas are studied and a third order in which nyaya (rendered as logic by Adams, as ethics by Buchanan) is taught. According to Adam, the acquirement of a teacher of logic generally pre-

231 The organization of knowledge in the medieval university took place along the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and quadrivium (astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, music) along with natural philosophy, medicine and law. See E. Grant (1996) for details. The structure of the trivium is also brought to bear in the way the Europeans hierarchize the various forms of learning.
supposes the acquirement of a teacher of “law” which in turn presupposes the acquirement of a teacher of grammar and “general literature.” However, recent scholarship indicates that this hierarchy of knowledge forms may not hold in the Indian case where language was given primacy and potentially infinite generative and recursive linguistic systems were transmitted orally (Staal 1996).

Adam notes that those who have acquired some mastery over the grammar and “literature” of Sanskrit may move on to the study of *smriti* which consisted of twenty-eight books of “Roghunondon,” a Brahmin of “Noodiya” and not of “Menu” [sic]. In these parts of Bengal (Rajshahi district), Adam observes, Manu is known only by name (Adam 1836, 60). Adam consistently translates the *smriti* as law. In his survey of Sanskrit learning in the city of Moorshedabad, Adam notes that “in law, the following Tatwas or treatises of Raghunandana, viz. Tithi, Prayaschitta, Udbaha, Suddhi, Sraddha, Ahnika, Ekadasi, Malamasa, Samayasuddhi, and Jyotisha are first studied; and these are followed by the Dayabhaga and Prayaschitta Viveka” (Adam 1838, 45). Anybody familiar with the culture can recognize the list mentioned above as records of ritualistic knowledge on various occasions. This mistranslation occurs in Francis Buchanan too when he mentions the eight books which are usually studied in Dinajpur, Bengal, as part of *smriti* or law:

a) Tithi Tottwo, which treats of the laws to be observed in the performance of ceremonies at new moons and eclipses.

b) Prayaschitto Tottwo, concerning the ceremonies which ought to be performed for the remission of sin.

c) Dayo Tottwo, concerning succession to property.

Adam classifies them as Sabdikas, teachers of “Philology” or general literature, Smartas or teachers of law and Naiyayikas, teachers of logic (Adam 1835, 50).
d) Molomas Tottwo, concerning what is to be done or omitted during the intercalary month of the lunar year.

e) Suddhi Tottwo, concerning what is to be eaten on certain days, especially those of mourning.

f) Udbaho Tottwo, concerning marriage.

g) Ahnik tottwo, concerning the rules for prayer.

h) Sraddho Tottwo, concerning what is to be done in commemoration of deceased parents. (1833, 87)

It is clear from the above that these texts are more to do with how to perform rituals on various occasions. The list includes the rituals to be performed during marriage, death and eclipse, the practices to be observed and the ones to be avoided during certain months and the kind of restrictions in eating during a period of mourning, among others observances. These rituals, with their attendant set of practices are translated as “law” by Buchanan. The Orientalist presumption that everyday customs and traditions have a law underlying them and that the practices in the household derive from obedience to God’s laws or doctrines results in this perception. The relation between the Vedas (sruti or ‘that which is heard’) and smriti (‘that which is remembered’) is deemed to be similar to the relation between the Bible and legal texts in the West, again causing much confusion. However, as pointed out in Chapter IV, the Vedas are not scriptures. They are addressed to the gods rather than addressed by gods and are not anything like the God’s Law/Revelation. Neither the sruti nor the smritis have a law-like status or force in India. Moreover, rituals are not learned through “text-books” but by inserting oneself in the practice and learning them from recognized practitioners.
Neither Buchanan nor Adam separates out the study of the Vedas as the main activity of the schools of higher learning that they identify in Bengal. In fact, as pointed out earlier, Buchanan classifies grammar, law and metaphysics as “higher sciences” and “Bedanto,” “Agom,” “Jyothish” and “medicine or magic” as “lower sciences” (Buchanan 1833, 88), and observes that the pundits who have knowledge of the lower “sciences” are not entitled to be called “odhyapaks.” Perhaps, Buchanan wants to distinguish between purohits and gurus. The first of these (“Bedanto”), he points out, is an investigation into “the doctrines of the Bedas” concerning the divinity and bemoans the fact that the Brahmins are exceedingly divided in their opinions and in the South of India this appears to be their favourite study. In Dinajpur in Bengal, where Buchanan bases his study, there is no Brahmin who is a Vedanta pundit. It was often alleged that Bengal had no Vedanta pundit till the eighteenth century when a rich Kayastha brought a few learned men from Benares, with the tribe growing thereon. Thus, though there were several Brahmins in Bengal, it was rare to find one well-versed in the Vedas. Buchanan complains that most Brahmins in Dinajpur are content to read certain portions of the “Bedas” out during certain occasions and are little concerned about the meanings of these sacred books. This ignorance is only judicious, he concludes, both because of the obscurity of their doctrines and due to lack of consensus amongst “sects” who worship different supreme beings, with each one considering the one worshipped by the other as the Devil (88). Different kinds of practitioners come to be classified as part of differing “sects,” and the distinction between them is thought to be doctrinal in nature.233 It is the second of the “lower science,” “Agom” or the “science which teaches the proper manner of worshipping the gods so as to obtain power,” that is studied by several Dinajpur Pundits. Though none

233 Timothy Fitzgerald points out that the word “sect” has the sense of “section” of some larger whole, with the larger whole being religion itself, understood as Christian truth or the true Church. It had the negative implication of a faction that is destructive of the unity of the whole. Arguing that it is wrong to classify Hinduism as a religion and the traditions as sects, he points out the anomaly in current scholarship where Vaishnavism is sometimes classified as a religion and sometimes as a sect, thereby adding to confusion than aiding understanding: “it would be doubtful what it would mean to say that Vaishnavism is either a sect, or a religion, or both at the same time” (Fitzgerald 2010, 124–25).
teach it, he notes that those who obtain knowledge of it go to other places, especially to Dhaka where the books which explain this doctrine, are much studied (88). Buchanan, while pointing out that these books are much in demand seems at a loss as to how to categorize these *tantras* (a problem which besets the classification of all shastras in general). At one point he says that they are the science of modes of worship and at another that they inculcate modes “of worship accompanied by intoxication, indecency, or horrible practices,” which he notes to his relief, does not have many takers amongst the Brahmins of Bengal who are mostly married. It is confined to “the holy men who have relinquished the world, and can trust themselves in the midst of temptation” (89). At yet another point, he describes them as a “system of magic” dealing with six kinds of invocations, dealing with various ways of injuring the enemy. The last of the lower sciences, according to Buchanan, was held as the lowest of sciences among natives. This was the *Jyotishastra*, a combination of astronomy and astrology, largely practiced by the “soodra,” though a large number of Brahmins practiced it too since it was profitable.

Besides these, there were practitioners of other forms noted – native medical practitioners, village doctors, small pox inoculators, mid-wives and snake conjurors. In some parts of India, *Naushastra* (navigation) and *Mauna* (silence) are listed as “subjects” taught.

Interestingly, no mention is made of any of the performative forms that were evidently taught or even the various kinds of crafts and the high level of skilled activity they involved in terms of modes of teaching and transmission while ascertaining the state of indigenous education. It is probable that the Europeans did not see these as being part of the process of formal

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234 Clearly the word “science” had not acquired the singular meaning of natural science that it came to acquire a little later. Some of the Europeans use science here to indicate various forms of knowledge, including how to worship.

235 See Fra Paolino Da Bartolomeo, an Austrian, on “Education of Children in India” who was in India from 1776-89, published in Dharmpal (1983, Annexure B, 258-59). Bartolomeo notices several other “sciences and branches of learning” which included fencing, chess, tennis, Botany and medicine, *tarkashastra, svadhyaya* (translated as “law”) and poetry.
education at any level. As transmission of knowledge is equated with the transmission of explicitly written rules in the form of text-books, complex, practical forms of social organization which transmitted intricate knowledge of various crafts and other performative forms get overlooked.

Works authored by Teachers

What kind of scholarly output did teachers in various schools of higher learning produce? In the third report, Adam makes an exhaustive list of the various texts and their authors, which are fascinating in their range, the different languages they are written in and in what they attempt to do. These works by the pundits include commentaries and treatises on grammar, nyaya, smritis, the various puranas, medicine, as well as slokas on various gods, Sanskrit plays and translations of texts from Sanskrit to “easy Sanskrit” and into Bengali among other kinds of compositions. The most fascinating entry Adam makes is with regard to the most prolific writer Raghunandana Goswami, at Maro in Patna thana. Adam enumerates 37 works by Raghunandana Goswami (all of these written in Sanskrit), which besides being commentaries on treatises on nyaya and metrical explanations of Sanskrit roots, included the following: Rogarnava Tarini, a compilation from various medical works on treatment of diseases extending to 6000 slokas; Arisha Nirupana, a description of various signs or symptoms of approaching death, a compilation in verse of 400 slokas; Sarira Vivritti, a treatise on the progress of gestation and on the various humours and their locations in the human body; Dwaita Siddhanta, a defence of the distinction between ‘the human and divine spirits in opposition to pantheism’; Hariharastotra, the praises of Vishnu and Siva, in nine slokas, so composed that every sloka has two senses of which one is applicable to Vishnu and the other to Siva; Siva Sarmadastotra, eight slokas containing a double sense, one expressing

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236 This point is noted by Dharmapal as well (1983, 51–52).
the praises of Siva and another different meaning; *Antalapsika*, four slokas, in question and answer so framed that the answer to one question contains the answers to all the questions in the same sloka; *Radha Krishnastotra*, eight slokas, containing the praises of Radha and Krishna, and so framed that they may be read either backward or forward; a specimen of *Alata Chakra Bandha*, two slokas, so framed that each sloka contains materials for 64 slokas by the transposition of each letter in succession from the beginning to the end, first the thirty-two syllables from left to right, and afterwards the thirty-two from right to left; *Bhakta Mala*, 5000 slokas, explanation of the different forms in which Krishna has been favourable to his votaries, interestingly translated from *Marwari to Sanskrit* (rather than the other way round); *Desika Nirnaya*, a compilation on the qualifications of a spiritual guide and on the tests by which one should be selected. Besides works in Sanskrit, the author had also written Rama Rasayana, the history of Rama, containing 30,000 slokas in Bengali and Patra Prakasha, letter writing, with examples from Sanskrit and explanations in Bengali (Adam 1838, 50–52).

Another pandit Radha Kanta Vachaspati had written *Nikunjavilasana*, a drama illustrative of the loves of Radha and Krishna in seven different languages - Sanskrit, Prakrit, Paisachi, Apabhramsa, Maharashtri, Magadhi and Sauraseni (52). Jagaddurlabha Nyayalankara authored *Uddhava Chamatkar* consisting of 175 slokas relating to an incident in the life of Krishna connected with his friend Uddhava and Pratinataka, a drama in seven parts consisting of 530 slokas narrating the life of Rama and a commentary on both these works. Viswambhar Vidyaratna, a medical teacher authored *Susrusha Charkha*, a medical treatise (47).

A careful examination of the list above reveals to us the creative and reflective nature of these forms. While some of the texts are in the realm of commentaries on existing texts, others are part of kavya where reflection is extended to smaller themes from the mahanatakas. Most of these are the works of practitioners of a particular art form. In some of the texts noted above,
we find that meaning is subordinate to the skill of versification itself and the texts do not call for an elaborate hermeneutic activity. Instead, they embody a creative performance. They involve metrical, mental and linguistic dexterity. A wide range of techniques such as maintaining a specific metre, linguistic play, felicity with different permutations and combinations of syllables, extraordinary powers of memory, abstracting of patterns of sound as well as different kinds of literary and verbal skills are employed.

This linguistic performance that is a test of several skills such as concentration, memory, versification and literary skills, combining intellectual and ethical virtuosity, finds mention in European accounts of the practice of avadhana.237 As late as 1880, Monier-Williams would note the “great powers of memory” of the natives. Monier-Williams recounts witnessing a performance by an impromptu versifier in Sanskrit who impressed him by offering to compose six sets of extemporaneous verses simultaneously on any six subjects in any six metres of Monier-Williams’ choice. Monier-Williams opts for three subjects – a description of Bombay, the advantage of Sanskrit learning, and the advent of the Prince of Wales to India, naming the three most difficult metres he could remember. Impressed by the scholar’s extraordinary performance, Monier-Williams notes that such a performance is common in India and the native kavi’s capacity “for keeping a number of difficult subjects in his recollection at one time and yet abstracting his mind so as to concentrate his attention on each one separately and consecutively is surprising. In this respect he far outdoes the European” (Monier-Williams 1880, 192). Recalling his meeting with a “Satavadhani,” a man who could attend to hundred things at once in South India, Monier-Williams marvels at his ability to play several games of chess, write poetry, work out problems and make calculations of all kinds simultaneously. Noting that the less-skilled ashtavadhanis, those capable of attending to

237 Most of the avadhanis are polyglots, performing in several languages. For example, Shatavadhani Ganesh who is a practitioner of the art of avadhana (concentration) from Karnataka is known to have composed extempore poems in Kannada, Telugu, Sanskrit and Prakrit. For more on the art of avadhana, see Datta (2006, I: 292–94).
eight subjects simultaneously, are not at all uncommon in different parts of India, Monier-Williams recounts a performance where a man displayed his skill by asking eight different strangers who speak eight different dialects to repeat the first word of eight different sentences, then the second and so on consecutively till every word in all sentences has been uttered. Thereupon, without a hesitation, the ashtavadhani reproduces all the eight sentences, separately and continuously, with each word in the proper order even though each word has been interrupted by the interpolation of seven other words (192). These accounts make it clear that memory itself was subject to training and pedagogy.

The centrality of memory and the native capacity to recite an inordinate number of verses finds mention in other spheres too. For example, in a report (dated August 17, 1823), A. D. Campbell, collector of Bellary, observes, in a deprecating tone, that most natives repeat numerous verses from memory without knowing what they mean:

…but the poetical is quite distinct from the prose dialect, which they speak and write; and though they read these books, it is to the pronunciation of the syllables, not to the meaning or construction of the words, that they attend. Indeed few teachers can explain, and still fewer scholars understand, the purport of the numerous books which they thus learn to repeat from memory. Every school boy can repeat verbatim a vast number of verses, of the meaning of which, he knows no more than the parrot that has been taught to utter certain words. Accordingly, from studies, in which he has spent many a day of laborious, but fruitless toil, the native scholar gains no improvement, except the exercise of memory and the power to read and write on the common business of life; he makes no addition to his stock of useful knowledge. (Dharampal 1983, Annexure A, 190–91)

Extraordinary capacity of reproducing from memory was also noticed in the case of those Brahmins whose task it was to recite from the relevant portions of the Vedas on certain ritual occasions and preserve the Vedas through recitation. As noted earlier, the Vedas are compositions in archaic Sanskrit transmitted orally over an extraordinary span of time,
roughly over 3000 years. The remarkable span of three millennia through which a culture has preserved the texts, in its original form and mainly through oral recitation has often evoked amazement, especially because the general assumption is that writing is seen as more reliable than oral transmission. The persistent search for ancient scripts by Indologists is revealing of the deep-seated nature of this assumption (Staal 2008). However, here again it was often pointed out that the natives often did not know the meaning of what they chanted. Similarly, as Ashok Aklujkar notes, in several statements that Indologists have made about the pundits, it is often assumed that “a pandit is characterized by memorization or near-memorization of a number of traditionally valued texts, either of a particular branch or of several branches,” (Aklujkar 2001, 44) with an ability to command the contents without consulting written or printed forms. That the pundits display no interest or competence with regard to historical reasoning, are unable to pursue true historical research and that “something in their education” prevented them from taking a detached perspective expected of a historian remains a frequent criticism against them (47).

Native students too were known to memorize their tables to an incredible extent, including fractional tables. For example, a senior official of education, H. Sharp reported that native arithmetic (which is acknowledged to be “good of its kind” but incompatible with European systems), often involved learning of tables up to an incredible extent. Some pupils displayed “a capacity for rapid and certain calculation which would nonplus an English schoolboy” (Sharp 1904, 69–70). Sharp claims that he even found a small boy in a school who was so well-versed in square tables and could tell without a moment’s hesitation, the square of any number up to 1000. However, he also concluded that most of this learning was restricted to the banias or the trading community and an average student attending these would find himself “thrown” in the world of multiplication tables. His “mind shapes itself to this environment.” Moreover, the native student’s ability to memorize, while leading to rapidity
of calculations, came at the expense of reasoning which was essential to the European systems: “Tables and rules are guiding principles. These, while they stimulate memory and quickness of thought, leave unrestrained the reasoning faculty which the European system of mathematics so largely develops” (71).

While the role of memory has often been acknowledged to be central to the South Asian culture, the Europeans characterized it as a “primitive” form of learning, contrasting it with reason and understanding which required you to generalize and arrive at underlying principles (see Seth 2007). Memorization has been separated from learning. It is seen as “ritualistic”, “iterative” and “repetitive,” often characterizing a lack of understanding and a failure to arrive at the “principle” or law that drives the system. However, such a dismissal would leave unexplained the emphasis on techniques of preserving texts through memorization and the development of forms such as slokas, sutras, the various smritis, puranas and itihasas, the enormous repertoire of oral as well as reflective forms which are crucial to a culture. The extraordinary emphasis on memory is often attributed to the lack of printing. Today, since printed material is abundant, we would explain it as rote learning, implying lack of understanding. This would be true if learning by rote interferes negatively, which it often does, in the process of learning modern forms of knowledge. However, we must acknowledge that reciting from memory has and can play other roles. For example, Mary Carruthers points out that in medieval England, memory learning and training continued long after print technology acquired dominance. Even after books became abundantly available, they were used as aids and themselves committed to memory as part of an ethical practice (Seth 2007, 35-36; Carruthers 2008, 7-9). Memory was subject to training through an elaborate and well-developed pedagogy which required the application of certain techniques. Training one’s memory was not just a way of displaying virtuosity in an activity but an integral ethical practice which enabled right moral judgement in various circumstances.
(Carruthers 2008, 9). One can perhaps see the extraordinary emphasis on memory in India playing a similar role. The recollection of the various puranas and other forms of ethical know-how which have been passed on, have often been regarded as heuristics with regard to how to live and act during various circumstances. Rather than be antithetical to reasoning, they have been regarded as conducive to reasoning. It is likely that training in memory was considered an important aspect of building character as well as honing one’s intellectual and moral judgement. Often slokas from puranas are recalled and brought to bear in various circumstances to illuminate current predicaments. In fact, one could venture to say that memory itself is not conceptualized as externalized in written texts but as embodied in the person who is part of a particular tradition of learning. Various traditions of performative activity themselves are ways of preserving and transmitting ways of being and modes of reflection. Thus, it is not surprising that singers, poets, dancers and musicians and various forms of recitations have remained central to this form of life. Adam, given his focus on written texts, completely misses these forms.

**Stories as Ethical Knowledge**

Adam notes several “stories” as part of what is taught: Mahanatakas (Ramayana and Mahabharata), Gitagovinda, Hitopadesha, Sudam Charitra, Bhagavata Purana, Bhagavad Gita, Markandeya Purana, Shakuntala, Naishadha Kavya (on the love between Nala and Damayanti), Bharavi Kavya (on the war between Yudhisthira and Duryodhana) among many

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238 Ananda Coomaraswamy notes in his essay on “Memory in Education” that one of the most conspicuous features of Indian education was training in memory: “But it is not only from the point of view of the thing remembered that memory is important in education. Memory, in the Indian view, is itself a most important part of personal character, associated specially with the ideals of self-control and mental concentration (1909, 126).

239 See for instance V. Rao (2014) who argues that it may make sense to speak of the colonial encounter as a conflict between two ways of articulating and transmitting cultural memory: one which is largely archival and transmitted through institutions such as the university and the other through performative means. He points out that while externalization of memory is common to all life forms, cultural memory is preserved and articulated in South Asia largely through performative and embodied means. Thus, memory is not merely what is recalled from the “chamber” of one’s head. The articulations and inheritances take the form of songs, recitations, music, dance and other performative forms which themselves are modes through which transmission, reflection and preservation takes place.
others. These are mostly classified by Adam as literature or as mythology (Adam 1838). For most Europeans, these “polluting” stories and legends about gods, goddesses and their amorous love was one of the main sources of immorality of the natives. Far from seeing these epics and stories as ways of shaping one’s sensibilities and judgement, many considered them as an explanation for the “corrupt” character of the natives. To their puzzlement these “immoral stories” of gods and goddesses were innumerable in number, recounted at various occasions and were even transmitted through indigenous education. These stories were told in different versions, often contradicting each other. That these stories were sources of ethics (among many others sources) which were non-normative in nature and played a crucial role in the cultivation of one’s judgement and character is completely missed by most Europeans.

The Invisibility of “Hindu” Educational Institutions

One of the striking features of Adam’s report is what I would like to call, the phenomenon of invisible institutions. In some districts, like in Midnapur, Burdwan and Backergunge, Adam reports that the alleged absence of Hindu institutions of higher learning in a population which consists largely of Hindus, is incredible and needs to be further investigated. The absence, he points out, is often denied by the natives themselves who are personally acquainted with several such institutions in the area (close to forty such institutions, in one case, is asserted by the native inhabitants). However, despite the assertion by the natives and to Adam’s puzzlement, he is unable to find them, notwithstanding his efforts. One reason, he surmises is

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240 As part of the report of Madras Presidency, A. D. Campbell, the collector of Bellary, notes that while Ramayana and Mahabharata are common to all, the children of manufacturing class have their own texts in addition to the above. These include Nagalingayna Katha, Vishvakurma, Puranas and Kamalesherra Ralikamahata among others (Dharampal 1983, Annexure A, 190).

241 Balagangadhar draws attention to the extraordinary presence of various stories –itihasas and puranas - in India. He sees them as dominant units of teaching and learning in a practical form of life. These stories do not make knowledge claims about the world and are neither “true” nor “false” but are oblique “instructions for actions.” See Balagangadhara (1987, 88–89; 1994, 363–70) for the important role of stories in Indian traditions.
the fairly significant presence of home learning. The other he attributes to greater emphasis by Europeans on Mohammedan languages and literature which combined with the “retiring character of the learned Hindu, sometimes leads the public functionary to overlook institutions of Hindu origin” (Adam 1835, 56). This neglect also happens in the case of Mohammedan learning much of which was domestic. Education clearly did not have the “public system” character that we are so familiar with today. Adam notes the “strange phenomenon” of the overlooking of Hindu institutions on several occasions, with Nuddea, which was deemed to be an important centre of learning, being one such example.

Referred to as Navadvipa, Nadia or Nuddea, Adam notes that Nuddea was the “capital” of a principality before Mohammedans arrived in India and had in more recent times emerged as an important seat of learning. Adam refers to Hamilton’s observation in his record of 1801 that the seat of learning must have declined by the 1800s since a judge and magistrate of the region, in response to interrogatories by Wellesley, replied that there were no “seminaries” in the region which taught “Hindoo” or Mohammedan law. However, Adam observes his own findings contrasts with the remark of Hamilton, affording another illustration of the observation that “the educational institutions of the Hindus are sometimes strangely overlooked.” Observing that “the celebrity of Nuddea as a school of Hindu learning is wholly unconnected with any notion of peculiar sanctity as in the case of Benares” (83), Adam attributes the reasons for its importance to the subsequent support given by the latter day Bengal princes and Rajas who generously endowed teachers with land and extended support to teachers and scholars for educational purposes.

242 Current scholarship has identified Nuddea as one of the most important learning centres, a key institution of the innovation in Sanskrit literature and thought that is believed to have flourished from 1550 – 1750. See Ganeri (2012).
In some cases, a rapid vanishing of indigenous institutions within a small span of time is also noted. Adam observes that previous authors on indigenous education in 1801 have mentioned the existence of certain colleges but by 1835, no traces of these can be found, as in the case of learning institutions in Dacca.

The nature of Hindu institution of advanced learning where a single teacher attracted scholars, to whom he would impart whatever form of knowledge he specialized in, is likely to be one of the primary reasons for such institutions to be overlooked. For Adam this was a proof of the “Brahman-pandits” lack of co-operation with each other:

> There is no instance of two or more Brahman-pandits in a similar way co-operating with each other, and uniting their talents and acquirements for their mutual advantage. Every one stands or falls by himself. In this district, and even in a single thana, there are materials for a Hindu university in which all the branches of Sanscrit learning might be taught; but instead of such a combination each pandit teaches separately the branch or branches of learning which he has studied most or for which there is the greatest demand, and the students make their selections and remove from one to another at their pleasure. (Adam 1836, 45–46)

What needs to be underscored here is that the idea of the university, necessarily a corporate institution where a group of people come together as a corporate body, seems to be absent. Instead, the individual teacher is the institution. This is made most evident in Adam’s account of Nuddea where he draws from William Ward and lists the names of single teachers, each constituting a “college” (Adam 1835, 84–85).

**Conclusion**

There are various forms of knowledge practices that the Europeans identify: ranging from ordinary activities like reading, writing and accounting to identifying various kinds of shastras. Some of these knowledge forms are meant for a wider section of the people while
others are restricted to specific community of practitioners. However, there are some striking ways in which the account of the Europeans is structured and how they perceive what constitutes learning and what does not.

In the way most Europeans record their observations, it is evident that they have a difficulty in locating where higher learning takes place. For instance, Adam expects a separate domain of education, with explicit institutional structures with external sets of codes in which one can identify education and learning as occurring. What he records are some overt and familiar forms of learning activities that he can locate. In other words, education and learning clearly had not separated out as a distinct activity that took place only within classrooms and physical institutions. It permeated the society, taking place within families, the larger society and within the logic of the practice that one was part of. These were important sites of learning in themselves.

One of the reasons Adam fails to think of learning as permeating the larger society is because the concept of natural religion determines Adam’s view of society, almost functioning as an explanation and as a theory of society itself. Though Adam is acutely aware that his data contradicts the theory of the society that he works with, the concept of religion and its history in the West forms the cognitive limit through which he sieves his data. It forms the theoretical edifice within which he makes sense of the various set of actions. Thus, it is not surprising that Adam is keener to examine the violations of each community from the norm they are supposed to adhere to in terms of their practice rather than inquire into forms of learning and understanding as they prevail.

We see that the Europeans mostly ask the question of “what is taught” in these indigenous schools – which are the text-books that are used, whether these text-books are of good quality and whether students understand the meaning of what they read. In other words, they
examine indigenous education based on its propositional content and identify “text-books” or written texts and manuscripts as the main source of transmission of knowledge and the mode through which the culture preserves its memory and learning. Thus, someone was taught the Vedas, meant that someone had learnt the meaning of the various “doctrines” of the Vedas. Hence, they go about making sense of the Vedas as embodying doctrines from which people derived their beliefs, which in turn explained their rituals and actions. However, it is clear even from Adam’s description that in indigenous learning the emphasis is on transmitting “know-how”: how to perform and observe rituals in the right manner on various occasions, of acquiring a particular form of proficiency in a certain tradition of activity and to learn the repertoire necessary to be a practitioner of an art form. Thus, while Adam looks for instances where learning takes place largely from written texts, these though not absent, are not the dominant ways in which the traditions appears to have preserved and transmitted its cultural memory. Adam misses the dominant traditions of learning and modes of reflection which are passed on performatively.

The kind of practitioners that these traditions of learning aimed to create cannot be compared to those created by “vocational” or professional education against which liberal education in the West emerged. For unlike industrial, vocational education which focussed largely on a mechanical, factory-oriented transmission of skills with a focus on profit, these forms of learning initiated one not only to the skills necessary for a particular art form but the very learning of these skills took place within larger interacting matrices whose ends, as Dhareshwar points out, are discovered in the “unfolding of the practitional matrices.”243 They aim at creating practitioners of a particular form, who would both preserve the practice by

243 See Vivek Dhareshwar for an account of how the practical domain is elaborated in India: “So we have gayanshastra, natyashastra, kamashastra, jyothisshastra. Criss-crossing matrices are not only not exceptional, but their dynamic presence and functioning is also a testimony to the health of this form of life. The ends of ethical life (purusharthas, for example) are ways of organizing the matrices in order to reflect on them. As a result, the matrices are the best examples of what (following Rodl) we have termed the unity of infinite ends. The ends, however, are discovered in the unfolding of the practitional matrices” (2013, 41).
passing it on and would also extend the limits of the practice within a larger matrix of practices that help cultivate the necessary intellectual and ethical virtues. However, a whole range of what we can call “practical knowledges” which were taught and transmitted – natyashastra agamashastra, jyothishastra, tantrashastra, puranas, tarkashastra and mahakavyas (among many others) are mistaken to be in the nature of theoretical explanations of the world. By evaluating them as theories about the world which can be proved true or false, the Europeans relegate them to the status of outdated theories and “false science.”

Clearly, the native culture had an elaborate set of practices to be followed on various occasions. Often these called for practices which remained highly differentiated and specific to communities. Similarly, there are several puranas that were popular across communities, performing an important role in shaping one’s character and judgement. However, while Adam makes note of the various puranas taught in these schools, he classifies the Mahabharata, Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita as belonging to the genre of literature or as mythology. Adam does not connect these to any form of ethical learning. Without going into too many details, a few lines from the Bhagavad Gita, that is known to have inspired Gandhi and several others, should suffice to make it clear that it is a form of ethical reflection which is a meditation on what constitutes right action. Its central problematic is an investigation into the nature of right action and what constitutes freedom in action:

a) What is action? What is inaction? As to this, even the “wise” are deluded. (Swami Chinmayananda 1976, 237)

b) He who recognizes inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among one; he is a yogi and a true performer of all action. (241)

c) Having abandoned attachment to the fruits-of-action, ever content, depending on nothing, he does not do anything, though engaged in actions. (246)
Like memory could be trained, here was a way of training desires and senses. What does it mean to perform an action in freedom? How do we learn to perform the right action without allowing our self-interests and desires to dominate? Who is a true performer of action? – these are the questions considered. If in Kant, training desires takes the form of an external state that puts in constraints and sanctions in order to allow each individual to pursue his interests (in accordance with the universal law), here was a very different form of training one’s desire which involved another kind of labour and effort. It did not involve a theoretical activity from which you derive the right action but a practical one where one inserted oneself in different kinds of practices in order to achieve self-control. Thus, the Gita elaborates on the various senses to be controlled, the means that can be adopted to control and subdue them and the various kinds of “sacrifices” that can be made. Some are advised (mainly the householder) to give part of their material possessions for the larger good. Others are advised to follow practices such as observing fasts, maintaining silence, performing actions without expecting its fruits, practicing austerities such as vows, exposing oneself to extreme climate, living on fruits and milk alone, practicing yoga and the controlling of one’s breath among others. The practices that one is advised to adopt depends both on the stage of life one is in and what one finds appropriate to one’s situation. 244

Why did Adam or the other Europeans examining indigenous education not see these as ethical knowledge being transmitted through the domain of the social? We can only conclude that Adam was looking for a particular kind of written texts or compendia of normative moral codes transmitted where there was elaborate moral reasoning, justifying one particular doctrine in opposition to another. Principles are “moral truths,” context invariant and involve a process of justification through reasoning which will eliminate other contradictory ways of

244 This is not to be collapsed with the Gita as a “Holy text” which all ought to read as a “national text.” There are several kinds of paths that can be taken and these remain highly diverse. The transmission of the practices, even those listed above, are not dependent on any texts.
acting in the same situation. The absence of transmission of distinct moral principles or justificatory forms of moral reasoning compelled Adam to remark that the native culture is not concerned with the moral formation of its people. The dominant understanding of moral knowledge as that which is transmitted through the acquisition of doctrines through formal institutions makes Adam blind to ethical learning which is transmitted as a practical activity or as ethical know-how.

This also gives us a clue to understand what the phenomenon of “invisible institutions” could mean. We saw, in the previous section, that the natives assert the presence of many institutions of higher learning but Adam was unable to identify them. This could mean that a) the natives were deceitful and were trying to inflate the figures of institutions of higher learning present in the area or b) Adam was careless in his task of identifying these institutions. However, given the care and meticulousness with which Adam records his observations, at various points offering corrections for any form of over-estimation, it is unlikely that the latter is the reason. To assume that the natives were deceitful and gave an exaggerated data to Adam would be to question the moral integrity of the natives. How can we understand the situation such that the integrity of Adam’s observation and the native assertion about the presence of these institutions of higher learning are both maintained? What must be the nature of these self-pursuits if the natives recognize them to be part of higher learning but Adam is unable to recognize them as educational pursuits? We can now say that it is related to forms of ethical know-how which Adam is unable to recognize as learning.

I would like to hazard a conjecture as to why these forms of self-pursuits do not even emerge in the form of written texts in Adam’s narrative and are not visible to Adam’s eyes. One possibility is that by the late eighteenth century, in Europe, the idea of education as Bildung
or actualization of the self had become the dominant way of thinking about education. It is likely that certain forms of knowledge pursuits that required one to learn from a master through a form of initiation which involved submission to the master were not seen as education at all. This is so because “education as actualization of the self” or as the autonomy of the self (which gets translated into the subject possessing free-will) formed a cognitive limit of the lens through which one recognized an activity as an educational activity. As a result various kinds of practices including meditation (which taught one not to see self and consciousness as objects) and other forms of performative activity were categorized as religious, mystical practices rather than as knowledge pursuits which aimed at curbing intentional, object-directed activity. Practices such as these could only be communicated by direct instruction, example and action rather than by precepts, instruction or propositions, which though not absent are not the dominant mode of transmission in these cases. These forms of pursuit which required submission to the tradition and a master constituted the “oppressive”, “non-freedom” of the other. Such an attitude was inimical to the very idea of formation of the subject as conceptualized in modern education.