



# **German Visions of India, 1871-1918: Commandeering the Holy Ganges during the Kaiserreich**

*Perry Myers*

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The field of Indian studies and the wide-ranging fascination with India in Wilhelmine Germany emerged during a time of extraordinary cultural and political tensions, which explicitly informed the analyses, understanding, and interpretation of Indian traditions. That is, German *Indologen* - eminent professors in Indian Studies - and other intellectuals transacted concerns with religious traditions, scientific imperatives, and sociopolitical transformations. Specifically, these German intellectuals drew on non-Western traditions to assemble an archive of knowledge through which they could negotiate a number of issues, including: denominational agendas - both Catholic and Protestant - as the established Churches sought to solidify their roles in a more secular world dominated by Bismarckian power politics and eventually imperial designs; the perceived faltering of religious signifiers, sparked in part by the scientific challenges to Biblical exegesis as the primary source for establishing human knowledge and spiritual identity; a new paradigm for the nation as Germany sought to identify itself during the age of Empire, with its inherent colonial competition among the European powers; and new, innovative paths for re-shaping intellectual identity and re-building community consensus in response to these perceived stresses. The image of India became a powerful sounding board during the Kaiserreich for many intellectuals to re-negotiate modern definitions of science, culture, and religion - to re-formulate their destabilized sense of history and progress. Just as Chamberlain projects in 1905, German Indologists had already long sought to navigate the unstable religious, social and political waters of Wilhelmine Germany through their constructed India. This study shows that these religious (denominational and spiritual) dilemmas, political agendas, and shifting social consensus became inextricably entangled in the wider German encounter with India.

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