

Chapter 7

The Racial Theory of Indian Civilization

Around 1850 one begins to hear voices, soon swelling to a chorus, expressing the belief that language and race do not necessarily correlate. "Language no test of race," the title of a paper delivered before the British Association in 1858 (cited in Muir 1874-84, 2:277), epitomizes the rising theme, the new Big Idea of the day. It is an idea that has become so normalized for later generations that it takes an effort of the historical imagination for us to recapture the power it had for its first audience, the sense of a long hidden error suddenly exposed to public scrutiny. The abrupt decoupling of race and language was a reaction against the Aryan idea itself, especially against the assertion that Indians were kin to Europeans, and it attacked the authority of the comparative philologists and Sanskritists. Their proofs of the racial unity of the Indians and Europeans had henceforth to be qualified and drawn back to meet the new skepticism. We see the effects of this new skepticism in John Muir's influential collection, *Original Sanskrit texts on the origin and history of the people of India*. In the first edition (1858ff.) he had argued from the evidence of language that the Indians were kin to the Europeans on grounds that "affinity in language implies affinity in race" and went on to demonstrate that "there is no objection arising from physiological considerations, *i.e.* from colour or bodily structure, to classing the Hindus among the Indo-European races." But in the second edition (1868-73), in response to criticism, he scaled that back to the view that "affinity in language affords *some presumption* of affinity in race" (emphasis added) and treated it as a question of whether physiological considerations prevented classing the Indians. among the Indo-

European races (Muir 1874-84, 2:277-286). The retreat of the Sanskritists had begun.

That a truth which to us is obvious and commonplace had to be articulated with such force tells us two things. It tells us that the belief in the correlation of language and race had been for a very long time an unexamined assumption, governing in fact the previous half-century of ethnological writing, whose signature was the subordination of physical traits to linguistic ones and to the method of compiling word lists in the enterprise of forming ethnological classifications. And it tells us that the accumulating strain in the relation between linguistic and physical-anthropological methods was now driving the two apart. Increasingly, the authority claims of race science were being advanced against the authority of philology in general and the Sanskritists in particular.

We have seen in the last chapter how the revolt of race science against "the whilom tyranny of the Sanskritists" ended the subordination of human physiology to language within the conversation that constituted British ethnology. I do not wish to leave the impression that the race science crowd were the bad guys and the Sanskritists the good guys. The disarticulation of race and language was not a solution but a problem, and the problematizing of that relation at mid-century meant that Sanskritists as well as race science types had to reconsider what the relation was in fact, more especially the relation of race to the Indo-European concept. In this reconsideration racial essentialism found a place at the heart of the work of the British Sanskritists in the formation of what I call the racial theory of Indian civilization.

One of the many signs of the times is the way in which the terms of the discussion had changed. *Nation* and *race* had so changed their meanings that it is scarcely paradoxical to say that they are nineteenth-century inventions. *Nation*, *race*, and *stock* in the writings of Sir William Jones are words which are approximately equivalent, and *nation* is preferred as the name of the unit of ethnological discourse. In Jones's anniversary discourses the subject of world history is the nation, but the word means something quite different from what it means to us. Our present-day sense that popular sovereignty is the only legitimate basis for political authority, to which governments of all kinds appeal (even ones that are very unpopular in fact), has been immensely influential and by now has become nearly universal. The success of the concept of the people's will as the source of sovereignty—the only legitimate source—has imbued the idea of nation with the sense that it is the necessary precondition of the state, and makes the state the political des-

tiny of the nation. In Jones's time, however, the nation-state was just being invented, and the surcharge of political significance that comes with it had not yet invaded the idea of nation. For Jones, *nation* had on the one hand a genealogical aspect, an aspect of codescent and membership by birth, whence he speaks interchangeably of the Indian nation, stock, or race. On the other hand, he also speaks interchangeably of the Indian or Hindu nation, giving a religious tincture to the idea of nation. It reminds us that the nation is the unit of the story in the English Bible upon which his style of ethnology is based. *Nations* in the English Bible answer to *ethnoi*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the Hebrew word *goyim*, that is, the gentiles or heathens. The sense that the largest ethnological units are the great religions remains strong as late as the works of James Mill, as we have seen. A final difference between current and older senses of the word *nation* is the segmentary character of the nation idea at the beginning of the British-Indian period, by which Colebrooke, as we have seen, finds it natural to speak of the ten polished nations of India, which itself is a nation. By comparison, we would have to say that the modern idea of nation does not have this relativistic, contextualist character; it is, we may say, substantialist. All these differences taken together account for the curious fact that at the beginning of their Indian empire the British regularly referred to the Indians as a nation, and at the end of it, as Indian nationalists were laying claim to independence, they were denying that Indians constituted what could properly be called a nation. Much the same is true of British writings on Egypt over the same period. Thus, to catch the Jonesean sense of *nation* we must empty it of the political content it acquired through nationalism.¹

Race changes meaning too, and equally drastically. As *nation* comes to have a heightened political significance, *race* becomes less interchangeable with it and takes on a more specialized meaning, coming to signify the visible, physical characteristics of the human body—or rather, to stand for that invisible entity of which the physical characters are the signs and upon which the taxonomist depends in the making of classifications. The most telling changes to the conception of race came about through the double revolution that overtook British intellectual life be-

¹. Similarly, American Indian groups were regularly called nations in eighteenth-century writings in English, but they were increasingly referred to as tribes in the nineteenth century. Nationalist leaders of today are reviving the word *nation*, imbuing it with a political content (nation-state as the teleology of the nation) that it did not have in the earlier usage.

ginning in the late 1850s: the revolution in ethnological time, and the Darwinian revolution.

Up to about 1860 most learned opinion in Britain, and in Europe generally (some notable skeptics apart), adhered to a short chronology for human history that was based on the Bible. By the chronology of Archbishop Ussher, which prevailed in Britain, the world and the life within it had been created in 4004 B.C. Although early in the nineteenth century geologists had begun developing a timeline for earth history and for the history of fossilized plants and animals that was not constrained within this narrow limit, the ethnological time in which the human species diversified and covered the earth remained within the short Biblical chronology until the discovery of human remains in association with long-extinct animal forms forced the issue. The Brixham Cave excavation of 1859 was the breakthrough event. More or less simultaneously, Darwin's *On the origin of species* (1859) appeared and precipitated vast changes in the story of living forms.

The new Orientalism had come into existence under the short chronology, and it explored an India whose culture of time could not have been more different, positing vast cycles of time through which the world had passed. As a Muslim scholar of the eleventh century had noted, Hindus did not even believe in creation as such, since the world was made anew of the "same clay" from the ruin of the old, after its dissolution (al-Biruni 1964-:321-322). After a period of experimentation during which several British-Indian writers took up the idea of a longer chronology suggested by Indian ideas of world time, Jones more or less established the terms upon which the Oriental renaissance was based, rejecting Indian time in favor of Biblical time, but in every other respect drawing upon Indian antiquities as independent evidence of the truth of the Biblical narrative. The effect of rejecting the vast timeframe proper to ancient Sanskrit literature, and of situating that literature within the short chronology of the Bible, was to make of that literature, most especially the Veda as its oldest work, one of the earliest testimonies of human life, of "man's primitive state" and of "primitive monotheism" in the original meaning of the word *primitive*. It was specifically within a short Biblical timeframe that India and the Veda acquired their heightened significance for Europeans as a window upon the original condition of mankind and of ancient wisdom.

The breaking open of the short chronology for human history and the new Darwinian reading of the history of biological forms had a variety of effects in the minds of Europeans, of which the leading one

as it concerns our subject was that India's ancient literature was no longer a testament of the primitive state and was now seen to be quite recent in human history; the period of Indo-European origin of which it was the oldest evidence was no longer at the beginning of the human story. As a long period of prehistory opened out behind the oldest written records—the Veda, the Greek and Latin classics, and the Bible—the Ancients suddenly became very young, Indians among them. At the same time it became increasingly clear that the formation of races followed a much slower tempo than the formation of language families, putting strains on an ethnology that attempted to correlate race and language. In a curious way, even as Darwinism made it clear that race was not fixed and permanent, the deepening time of race formation acted to solidify the idea of race as an entity independent of language, an entity that was far more durable and had a far deeper history.²

The paradox of these developments is that in spite of the growing distrust between Sanskritists and race science, the two sides of an often noisy dispute nevertheless collaborated, without really meaning to, in the creation of an enduring synthesis, what I call the racial theory of Indian civilization. By this I mean the theory, which by century's end had become a settled fact, that the constitutive event for Indian civilization, the Big Bang through which it came into being, was the clash between invading, fair-skinned, civilized Sanskrit-speaking Aryans and dark-skinned, barbarous aborigines. It was a local application of the double binary that guided all nineteenth-century European ethnologies, the double binary of the fair and the dark, the civilized and the savage. We can best explore this formation through the leading representatives of the sides of this fraught relation: Friedrich Max Müller and H. H. Risley.

Friedrich Max Müller on Language and Race

Max Müller's dictum that the same blood ran in the veins of the soldiers of Clive as in the veins of the dark Bengalese, as a finding

². On the time revolution, see Trautmann 1992b; on the deepening of race history and persistence of polygenist thought after Darwin, see Stocking 1968:chap. 3.

of philology, was much attacked for the very good reason that identifying race ("blood") with language and pitting them against complexion was a direct provocation to a nascent race science in which complexion was at the forefront. Max Müller had surely gone too far in asserting the claims of language, and the very year in which that provocation was issued (1854) he began his retreat, proposing something like a nonaggression pact between the two sciences according to which each would go about its business without interfering with the other. This theme, which appears in his writings with increasing frequency, develops into direct opposition to a racial conception of the Aryan, a rejection of the idea of "dolichocephalic languages" and the like.

But for purposes of elucidating Max Müller's unintended collaboration with Risley in the working out of an ethnological master narrative for India, I must begin at the beginning. The foundational text is Max Müller's long contribution to Christian Bunsen's *Outlines of the philosophy of universal history, applied to language and religion* (1854a), which is concerned with the "last results of the researches respecting the non-Iranian and non-Semitic languages of Asia and Europe, or the Turanian family of languages" (1854:263). In the course of his exposition he considers the evidence advanced by Hodgson and Stevenson concerning an "aboriginal" element in the Indian population and its languages, the element that Hodgson called "Tamulian," which Max Müller regarded as a section of the larger "Turanian" group.

In a section titled "Ethnology v. phonology," Max Müller asserts that the proper relation between the two sciences in question should be one of providing each other with advice and suggestion, nothing more, and that much confusion of terms and indistinctness of principles have come from mixing these "heterogeneous sciences" together: "Ethnological race and phonological race are not commensurate, except in ante-historical times, or perhaps at the very dawn of history. With the migrations of tribes, their wars, their colonies, their conquests and alliances . . . it is impossible to imagine that race and language should continue to run parallel." The physiologist should study skulls, hair color, and complexion but be deaf to language, and the phonologist should collect his evidence and arrange it into classes "as if no Blumenbach had ever looked at skulls, as if no Camper had measured facial angles, as if no Owen had examined the basis of a cranium" (Max Müller 1854a:349). The phonologist will not scruple to classify the English language with the Low German as Teutonic even though the physiologist informs him that the skull is of Celtic type or the family arms are Nor-

man. He adds that although ethnological suggestions of an early substratum of Celtic inhabitants in Britain and historical information as to a Norman conquest will be useful, the phonologist can detect the resulting admixture of languages in English without this outside help. "With the phonologist, English is Teutonic, and nothing but Teutonic, and that because what we may call its soul—the grammar—is Teutonic" (1854:350).

Applying this reasoning to India, Max Müller goes on to argue, the phonologist needs no physiological or historical evidence to determine that the languages of India were not derived from one uniform language. The ethnological division of the inhabitants of India into Aryan and non-Aryans was at first chiefly based on linguistic evidence without recourse to physical features. Thereupon, tribes speaking languages deriving from Sanskrit were set down as Aryans; others speaking non-Sanskritic languages were classified as of the Turanian race. This has led to confusion and futile controversy, he says. On the one hand it is undeniable that millions of people in North India speak modern languages descended from Sanskrit, although they are decidedly "Tamulian" in physical type; on the other hand it is equally certain that many brahmins of the Deccan, now speaking Dravidian languages, were of Aryan extraction. This has led to the error of trying to prove that the Bengali and Hindustani languages have a "Tamulian" grammar, or, in an opposite direction, that the tribes speaking Assamese, a Sanskritic dialect, "had Caucasian blood in their veins, and were Caucasians modified and deteriorated by the influence of climate and diet" (the same).

But although the majority of people who speak Bengali may be of Tamulian extraction, does it follow that the grammar of their language is Tamulian? Or does it follow that the original inhabitants of Asam were Aryans, because the language at present spoken in that country is Sanskritic in its grammar? (1854:351)

The answer is in both cases plainly "no," and in reaching this conclusion Max Müller as plainly cancels his provocative statement about the racial brotherhood of the soldiers of Clive and the dark Bengalese.

In another section of this text, however, Max Müller just as plainly violates his own edict of separation and investigates what historical traces of the aboriginal races of India (for whom he proposes the label Nisada instead of Hodgson's Tamulian) in the *Rg Veda*. He was at that time engaged in preparing the first published edition of the *Rg Veda*,

and his discussion of this topic therefore carried a great deal of authority and served to set the direction of discussion for a very long time.

The ethnological facts Max Müller gathers from the *Rg Veda* are few and modestly put forward. The four castes, Brahmana, Ksatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra preexisted the collection of the *Rg Veda* (RV), and (according to later, Brahmana texts) only the first three are Aryan, the Sudra being an-arya. In addition to the four castes are frequent allusions to the Dasyus, a name which means simply "enemy" as, for example, when Indra is praised because he destroyed the Dasyus and protected the Aryan "color" (*varna*). The Dasyus of the *Rg Veda* mean non-Aryan races in many hymns, but it is not always clear that this is meant. Other epithets that are applied to barbarous nations or wild tribes are "devil" in the sense of "giant" and "barbarian" (*raksas*); "they who do not keep the fire" (*anagnitra*); and flesh-eaters, that is, "eaters of raw meat" (*kravyad*). "All these epithets seem to apply to hostile, and most likely aboriginal races, but they are too general to allow us the inference of any ethnological conclusions." The composers of the Vedic hymns certainly distinguish between Aryan and non-Aryan enemies, but "there is no allusion to any distinct physical features such as we find in later writings" (1854:344-345). He then tentatively offers a possible reference to a difference of noses (I normalize the transliteration of Sanskrit words):

The only expression that might be interpreted in this way is that of "susipra," as applied to Arian gods. It means "with a beautiful nose." As people are fain to transfer the qualities which they are most proud of in themselves, to their gods, and as they do not become aware of their own good qualities except by way of contrast, we might conclude that the beautiful nose of Indra was suggested by the flat-noses of the aboriginal races. Tribes with flat or with even no noses at all, are mentioned by Alexander's companions in India, and in the hymns of the Rigveda Manu is said to have conquered Visisipra (Pada-text, visi sipra), which may be translated by "nose-less." The Dasa or barbarian is also called vrsasipra in the Veda, which seems to mean goat or bull-nosed, and the "Anasas" enemies whom Indra killed with his weapon (RV. V, 29,10), are probably meant for noseless (anasas), not, as the commentator supposes, for faceless (an-asas) people. (1854:346)

This first effort to find direct evidence of the physical features of the Indian aborigines in the Sanskrit text dating from the time of the Big Bang that brought Indian civilization into existence, therefore, boiled down to a matter of noses. Max Müller himself later abandoned his own interpretation of the word *sipra*, so that the evidence as to noses was reduced to a single word (*anasa*) in a single passage (RV 5.29.10),

to which we shall return. But Risley, for quite different reasons, put noses right at the center of his ethnology of India.

H. H. Risley on Noses

Herbert Hope Risley (1851-1911) was but a toddler when this passage by Max Müller was published, and his rise to eminence as the leading ethnologist of India came much later, in the 1890s, with the publication of his pattern-making *Tribes and castes of Bengal* (1892). Thereafter, as census commissioner he injected ethnological content into the 1901 census, became director of ethnography for India in 1901, published, among many books, *The people of India* in 1908, and became president of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1910.

Risley was very much the India hand, a member of the Indian Civil Service who served in India from 1873 to 1910. He had a preference for rural India, and his ethnological interests first developed themselves in the surveying of land tenures and the writing of gazetteers. His advocacy of fieldwork is modest but more prophetic than he knew. Writers on ethnology when writing on Indian subjects, he once wrote, rely too much "on mere literary accounts which give an ideal and misleading picture of caste and its social surroundings" (Risley 1891:237). Risley himself would not be so unreasonable as to ask that all ethnographical evidence be gathered at first hand through fieldwork, but he often senses in the writings of European ethnologists that "the writers were a long way removed from the subjects they were dealing with, and had never quite got into touch with their facts." It was not for him "to lay down a course of preliminary training for distinguished ethnologists, and to demand that Mr. Herbert Spencer should get himself enrolled, like Mr. Frank Cushing, in the sacred societies of the Zunis, or that Sir John Lubbock should follow the example of Mr. Lewis Morgan in joining himself to the Iroquois," the prospect of which would perhaps turn people away from the new science. But in ethnology a little firsthand knowledge is a very good thing, "and some slight personal acquaintance with even a single tribe of savage men could hardly fail, to be of infinite service to the philosopher who undertakes to trace the process by which civilization has been gradually evolved out of barbarism" (1891:238). Both in his career and in his taste for fieldwork, Risley was as different

as can be from Max Müller, which makes their unwilling collaboration all the more intriguing.

Risley's grand syntheses of Indian ethnology are contained in the 1901 census report and in *The people of India*, but a programmatic article on "The study of ethnology in India," published in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* (1891), gives an exceptionally clear view of his project at the state of what we might call its early maturity. In this article, Risley opens by deploring "the comparatively scanty use that has been made of the great storehouse of ethnographical data which British rule in India has thrown open to European inquirers" (1891:235). After reviewing the shortcomings of Indian ethnographic literature and its methods he asserts the advantages of India for ethnology, which are mainly two. In the first place, it gives access for scientific study to "the wilder tribes" who, however, have not been exposed to European colonists "which has proved so destructive to the aborigines of Australia and America." Moreover, the so-called non-Aryan races of India show no tendency to disappear and in some parts of India their numbers appear to be on the increase (1891:239).

In the second place, however, not only do "the administrative conditions of the country"—colonialism—lend themselves readily to the collection of evidence, but the caste system of India is so constituted as to render that evidence peculiarly telling (the same). In Europe and elsewhere *métissage* or crossing of races complicates investigation and obscures and confuses the results. In India, however, the institution of caste breaks up the population into mutually exclusive aggregates of homogeneous composition and forbids marriage outside the group. The bond of caste is in fact *race*, and when new occupational specialties arise within a caste the difference of profession leads to a new matrimonial aggregate, "being held by a sort of unconscious fiction to be equivalent to the difference of race, which is the true basis of the system" (1891:240).

The conviction that caste is race, and that the differences among Indian castes and tribes are racial in character, makes Indians uniquely appropriate objects for the newly developing anthropological subsience of anthropometry. The appeal of the new methods is that they might "enable us to detach considerable masses of non-Aryans from the general body of Hindus" and to refer them at the least to the general category of non-Aryans and perhaps to more specific stocks as the Kolarian, Dravidian, Lohitic, Tibetan, and so forth (1891:247).

For the needed injection of improved methods into the ethnological

study of India, Risley turns to metropolitan science in the person of Paul Topinard, pupil of Broca and secretary of the Société d'Anthropologie of Paris, and, particularly, to the thousand densely printed pages of Topinard's *Éléments d'anthropologie générale* (1885) with its dozens of anthropometric techniques. From these Risley selects twelve, plus two others (the bimalar and nasomalar dimensions of Oldfield Thomas) under advice from Professor William Flowers. Chief among the measurements that Risley got from Topinard was the nasal index, a ratio of the breadth of the nose to its height, which serves to assign individual noses into leptorrhine (narrow), platyrrhine (broad), or mesorrhine (medium) classes.

We come again, then, to the matter of noses. Reading through Topinard's treatment one gets the impression that the nature of the exercise is to assess anthropometric methods not according to what new knowledge they yield but by the degree to which they confirm what is already known. By this test the nose is by far the preferred site, as it had been for Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (Topinard 1885:264), much to be preferred to the uncertain skin color and the confusing results of the study of hair, which puts the Australians with the Europeans. By combining the nasal index of living subjects with the nasal profile and nasal index of the skull, according to Topinard, we can achieve Linnean classifications which we know to be correct:³

Lepto (living). White races.

very lepto (living)	Kymris
less lepto	
non-aquiline	Celts
aquiline	Semites

Meso (living). Yellow races.

nose flattened	
lepto (skull)	Eskimo
meso (skull)	Yellow races of Asia
nose prominent	American Indians

Platy (living). Black races.

nose relatively fine	Negroes of Africa
nose large, nostrils enormous	Melanesians and Australians

³. The nose has a further bonus as ethnographic indicator, according to Topinard: "Encore un avantage que possède le nez: il est le seul caractère qui permette de classer le Sémite" (Topinard 1885:306).

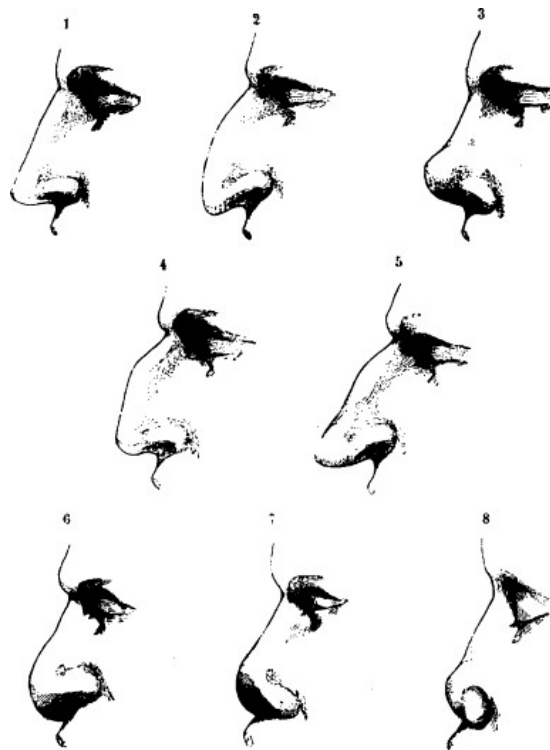


Figure 10.
Topinard's types of noses. (From Topinard 1885:298.)

Topinard's scheme is useful both in its exactness of application and in the reassuring way in which it conforms itself to what is already known to be true rather than presenting us with information that requires us to part with existing beliefs. Risley has other reasons to go for the nose, derived from his reading of the received wisdom about the ethnological information contained in the Veda and the unconscious convergence of Max Müller and Topinard:

No one can have glanced at the literature of the subject and in particular at the Vedic accounts of the Aryan advance, without being stuck by the *frequent* references to the noses of the people whom the Aryans found in possession of the plains of India. So impressed were the Aryans with the shortcomings of their enemies' noses that they *often* spoke of them as "the noseless ones," and their keen perception of the importance of this feature seems almost to anticipate the opinion of Dr. Collignon that the nasal index ranks higher as a distinctive character than the stature or even than the cephalic index itself. In taking their nose then as the starting point of our present analysis, we may claim to be following at once the most ancient and the most modern authorities on the subject of racial physiognomy. (1891:249-250, emphasis added)

In doing so he has of course greatly overstated the Vedic evidence; Risley's *frequent* references to the aboriginal nose which he says the Aryans *often* spoke of comes down, as we have already mentioned, to a single passage. Both Risley and Max Müller show a tendency to exaggerate the significance of noses in the ancient Indian evidence.

In Risley, as in Topinard, the purpose is to show the reliability of anthropometric tests by showing that their results conform to existing knowledge. For Risley the conventional wisdom concerns the formation of the Indian population, and his reading of it is a fully racialized one. The standard theory of the making of the Indian people holds that the Aryans, "a tall, fair-complexioned dolicho-cephalic [long-headed] and presumably lepto-rhine race," entered India from the northwest and moved down the great river valleys of north India. At an early stage of this advance they collided with "a black snub-nosed race" who were partly absorbed by the conquerors and partly driven away into Central and South India, where their descendants may still be found (1891:249).

In addition to confirming the standard theory, the new anthropometric methods have a positive contribution of their own, namely to controvert the view of E. T. Dalton and J. F. Hewitt, who "discover among the remnants of the black race two distinct types or groups of tribes, known as the Dravidian and the Kolarian," supposed to have entered India from the northwest and the northeast, respectively (the same). The burden of Risley's paper is to set out statistics of the nasal index going to show that the supposed Dravidian and Kolarian tribal peoples of Santal Parganas and Chota Nagpur are racially identical and differ as a group from narrower-nosed leptorrhines and mesorrhines. The evidence of the nasal index establishes the existence in India of two distinct racial types, the one broad-nosed to a degree closely approach-

ing that of the Negro, the other narrow-nosed in much the same measure as people of southern Europe. Between the extremes are intermediate types whose physical characteristics show that they must have arisen from intermixture of the extreme types and their descendants. The troublesome and contrary evidence that derives from measuring crania instead of noses, which puts the Kol with the Aryan, has to be set aside, and Risley is at pains to argue that "the Kol gets his long head from the non-Aryan races while the Brahman's dolichocephaly comes to him from the Caucasian stock" (1891:252). The difference between Dravidians and Kolarians is merely linguistic, corresponding to no appreciable differences of physical type. Thus anthropometry saves the unity of the aborigines against the linguists, and sustains a two-race theory of the making of the Indian people.

The value of the nasal index, then, is that it bifurcates the Indian population into its two original constituents. But there is more. In identifying the populations that fall between the extremes it tracks the gradations of the caste system, as Risley says in what has become an epigram: "The social position of a caste varies inversely as its nasal index" (1891:253). Finally, the structure is completed with consideration of Risley's other special preoccupation: totemism, especially exogamous clans with totemic names, in contrast to exogamous clans named after ancestors typical of caste Hindus. This, too, correlates with the breadth of the nose. In Bengal proper, castes with a platyrrhine index have totemistic exogamous divisions, castes with a leptorrhine index have eponymous clans, and those with nasal indices intermediate between the extremes show a mixture of totemistic, eponymous, and local clans. Thus the measurement of noses infallibly locates the distinction between tribes and Hindu castes.

Risley's conclusion is that "community of race, and not, as has frequently been argued, community of function, is the real determining principle, the true *causa causans*, of the caste system" (1891:260). The caste system of India is a highly developed expression of the primitive principle of tabu when the Aryans first came into peaceful contact with the so-called Dravidians, a platyrrhine race. The tabu derived its initial force from the difference of race as indicated by difference of skin color. Its great subsequent elaboration is due to a series of fictions by which heterogeneous sources of difference (occupation, religion, habitat, trifling departures from the established standard of custom) have been taken as denoting difference of blood and endogamous groups. Race, then, is the true origin of caste and the fictional idiom of its continuing

differentiation of units. For Risley, caste is race, in origin and by metaphorical extension.

Race and Language in the Camp of the Sanskritists

Risley must suffice as example of race science in India, for I now return to the British Sanskritists and their allies to see how race came to figure in their ethnological thinking.

Max Müller had proposed an amicable divorce between the study of language and the study of race, but the divorcing parties had been married for a long time, and as is so often the case, divorce served not to end the relationship but simultaneously to prolong it and make it very thorny. British Sanskritists could not ignore race and were obliged to come to their own determination about the actual relation of language and race in Indian history. The racial theory of Indian civilization was their Construction, a compromise formation that recognized the claims both of language and of race so effectively that it endures to this day. We must now see how it was built.

A good place to start is not with the Sanskritists themselves but with Sir Henry Maine. At the beginning of this book I referred to his 1875 essay, *The effects of observation of India on modern European thought*, in which he expressed the conviction that the evidence of language, more especially the Indo-Europeanist theory emanating from the European encounter with Sanskrit, had revolutionized European ideas about race. Maine never learned Sanskrit, but he was an avid and intelligent consumer of the Work of the Sanskritists. In his many books on comparative law he adopted an essentially Indo-Europeanist frame of reference in which Indian Dharmasastra played a large role. What makes his project useful as an index of the changes that were overtaking the European study of India is that all three of the interpretive issues—race, language, and time—are implicated with special clarity.

"From status to contract" was the famous maxim in which Maine epitomized his essentially social-evolutionist project. "Status" referred largely to the statuses conferred through kinship, and accordingly Maine's first book shows how in ancient Rome the statuses deriving from membership in the patriarchal, slave-owning family was the source of most legal relations and how contractual relations that are status-

blind, so to say, arise later and against the claims of the family. This is his sense of the evolutionary progression of laws.

That first book was called, tellingly, *Ancient law*, and it was published in 1861. Mostly it speaks of early Roman law, with considerable reference to Greece and slight reference to India; nevertheless, as the unqualified title implies, the movement from status to contract that Maine finds at Rome has a universal significance and is the evolutionary path to modernity for human societies generally. I have shown elsewhere that Maine's own sense of his project at this point was based on the short chronology and the belief that early Rome was close to the beginning of human history, such that from it we could learn of the "primitive condition of man," as the phrase was. The project quickly fell victim to the newly lengthened chronology for human history that was breaking about the same time (Trautmann 1987:180-186). The result was that as a long period of human prehistory opened out, the ancient Roman family law was increasingly seen to be not primitive at all but very recent in human history. Accordingly Maine redefined his findings as having to do principally with the Indo-European-speaking peoples, not ancient law in general, and the representative, evolutionary character of those findings was rendered less certain. His project, then, was now one of the comparison of the laws of ancient Indo-European legal systems, conceived as historically related to one another by codescent, modeled on the way philologists analyzed the Indo-European languages. Having been posted to India as the Law Member of the colonial government, his subsequent books became much more comparative, with increasing amounts of Dharmasastra material in them.

As Maine adjusted to the newly enlarged frame of human time, the place of India within his project of Indo-European comparative law became larger and more intellectually productive. But it was largely as a museum of the past of Europe that India exercised its revolutionary effects upon European thought and contributed to its new theory of race. That had been true for the first of the British Sanskritists, for Sir William Jones and his contemporaries at Calcutta. In some ways nothing had changed; in another, everything. By that time the idea of ancient wisdom had been purged from Orientalism and a progressive and coolly scientific style prevailed; Indomania had long since been marginalized and confined to vegetarian societies, Theosophists, and others outside the academy.

In Maine, then, the kinship of the early Indo-European-speaking societies is the working assumption behind a comparison of their laws,

especially as the law affects the family and the "village community" that increasingly fascinates him; within that undoubted kinship, difference is accounted for by a new principle, that some branches of the Indo-European family are progressive, to wit Greece and Rome, and others, especially India, are stagnant and stuck in archaic legal forms. Thus in a curious way the social-evolutionary principle becomes a principle of racial essentialization at the interior of Maine's project.

The Veda and the Racial Theory of Indian Civilization

The racial theory of Indian civilization was constructed by narrativizing the encounter of the polar opposites of Victorian racial thought, the fair-skinned civilized Aryan and the dark-skinned savage, and by finding evidence for their encounter in the Vedic texts. It was the work of Sanskritists, and British Sanskritists were at the forefront in its construction. The leading texts were those of Max Müller, which I have discussed, and John Muir's *Original Sanskrit texts on the origin and history of the people of India* (1874-84) to which I have alluded. The latter is a very important product of British Sanskrit study, which lays out the new, Orientalist reading of the Indian past with extensive citation of proof texts from Sanskrit literature, meant both as a contribution to European discussion and to propagate the new knowledge among Indians. I will concentrate my attention on a somewhat later text that can be taken as the end point and culmination of the formation of the racial theory of Indian civilization founded upon the study of the Veda, a work that is still much in use. This is the *Vedic index of names and subjects* (1912) of Arthur Anthony Macdonell and Arthur Barriedale Keith.

In all these texts the conception of an aboriginal population of India is given a Vedic foundation by identifying the aborigines with the Dasas and Dasyus of the Vedic texts, who are the enemies of the Aryans. In the *Vedic index* the difference between the new interpretive frame of the Orientalists and those that preceded is illustrated by references to the interpretations of Sayana, a commentator on the *Rg Veda* of medieval times. When Sayana wishes to explain a reference to "the black skin" (*kṛṣṇa tvac*) he does so not by reference to racial difference between aborigines and invading Aryans but by assimilating it to the view of the past that is familiar to him, the world of Puranic mythology.

Thus he alludes to a story of a demon (*asura*) named The Black (*krsna*) from whom Indra strips "the black skin." For the Orientalists, by contrast, the first interpretive move is not to assimilate the words of a difficult archaic text to a familiar mythological world but rather to *remove* what can be construed as fact from the realm of mythology, to rescue history from myth; indeed the "facts" are constructed by that act, as at the same time the mythological residue is drained of factuality. The Vedic text does not always cooperate, because Dasas and Dasyus are often described in superhuman form; whence discussion of the question must at the outset address the question of which passages if any may be taken to refer to human beings and to constitute ethnological facts.

We must keep in mind as we approach passages from the *Vedic index* that the language of the Veda is archaic and its meanings are often hard to make out because of its poetic character and religious purpose. Extracting ethnographic facts from sources so recalcitrant and obscure is evidently a difficult enterprise calling for great expert knowledge and a nice judgment. The interpretation of such facts is always subject to a shading up or down, a magnification or a minimizing of their drift. We see this in Risley's reading of the Vedic evidence as to noses, and it shows itself not so much in the substantives as in the adjectives and adverbs: A *single* reference elicited by Max Müller becomes in Risley "the *frequent* references to the noses of the people whom the Aryans found in possession of the plains of India," whom they "*often* spoke of . . . as 'the noseless ones'" (1891:249-250). I shall, accordingly, talk both of "adjectival" as well as "substantive" aspects of interpretation.

The Orientalists brought many new tools to the interpretation of the Vedic texts that are valuable and that we would not wish to discard, and could not discard if we wished, including the comparative study of Indo-European languages which illuminates the language and, in part, the mythology and ritual of the Veda, and its chronological positioning in relation to other literatures, of which the most salient for Vedic interpretation is the *Avesta* of Iran. Reasons we should read the proof texts of the racial theory of Indian civilization skeptically lie not in faults of method proper to Orientalist production but in the ideas of race on which they draw, ideas that were generally held in Europe, especially in Britain, and in the United States. The racial theory of Indian civilization alludes to racial attitudes of whites toward blacks, found in the segregated southern United States after the Civil War and in South Africa, as a kind of constant of history, or rather as a transcendent fact

immune to historical change, that is as operative in the Vedic period as now. We need to keep it in mind that the racial theory of Indian civilization is a formation of the late nineteenth century when, in the wake of slave emancipation, white-black relations in the Anglo-Saxon World were being restructured with ideological support from a rush of racial essentialism.

The argument I should like to make, then, is not that the racial theory of Indian civilization is a fabrication, a tissue of lies, or that the Veda has nothing useful to say (or nothing that we can reasonably draw from it) about the ethnological situation of its time. What I want to show is that the Vedic evidence that has been brought forward has been subjected to a consistent overreading in favor of a racializing interpretation, and that the image of the "dark-skinned savage" is only imposed on the Vedic evidence with a considerable amount of text-torturing, both "substantive" and "adjectival" in character.

We come, then, to its expression in articles of the *Vedic index*. This book is an encyclopedia of historical and sociological knowledge extracted by study of the Vedic texts. It is based on a thorough review of Orientalist research, including especially the work of German Orientalists, but it is at the same time very much a British reading of the Vedic texts and the Orientalist interpretation of them.

We begin with entries for the non-Aryan enemies of the Aryans, the Dasyus or Dasas. As we review these entries it will be seen that Macdonell and Keith wish to impose the "dark-skinned savage" on what the *Rg Veda* says about the Dasyus/Dasas, but that the text does not entirely cooperate with the two parts of this image: First, darkness of skin was not a salient marker of Dasyu/Dasa identity to the hymn writers, for whom the most important attributes of these enemies had rather to do with language and religion; the matter of flat noses is limited to a single disputed passage. Second, the Dasyus/Dasas are depicted as 'wealthy and powerful opponents, but Macdonell and Keith minimize this evidence and represent them instead as marginal, barbarous hill tribes, consistent with their image of the dark-skinned savage. Here, in summary, are the two relevant articles.

Dasyu: The word, though clearly applied to superhuman enemies in many passages of the *Rg Veda*, is, in several others, applied to human foes, probably the aborigines, especially in those in which the Dasyu is opposed to the Aryan, who defeats him with the aid of the gods. The great difference between the two is their religion; the Dasyu are styled "not sacrificing," "devoid of rites," "addicted to strange vows," "god-hating," and so forth. That

the Dasyu were real people is shown by the epithet *anas* applied to them in one passage of the *Rg Veda*. The sense is not absolutely certain; Pada text and Sayana take it as "without face" (*an+as*), but "noseless" (*a+nas*) is possible and would accord well with the flat-nosed aborigines of the Dravidian type, whose language still persists among the Brahuis of the northwest. (1912, 1:347-349)

Dasa: Like Dasyu, the word sometimes denotes demonic enemies in the *Rg Veda*, but in many passages it refers to human foes of the Aryas. They are described as having forts (*purah*) and clans (*visah*); the forts, called "autumnal" (*saradih*) may allude to their being resorted to in the autumn season. The Dasa color (*varna*) is probably an allusion to the black skin of the aborigines, which is also directly mentioned (*krsna tvac*, two passages). The aborigines, as Dasyus, are called *anas* "noseless" (?) and *mrđhravac*, "of hostile speech," and are probably meant by the phallus-worshipper (*sisnadevah*, "whose deity is a phallus") of the *Rg Veda*. It is significant that constant reference is made to the differences in religion between Aryan and Dasa or Dasyu. "The wealth of the Dasas was no doubt considerable, but in civilization there is no reason to suppose that they were ever equal to the invaders." (1912, 1:356-358)

To these we must add the article concerning Sambara, evidently a Dasyu/Dasa chief.

Sambara: An enemy of Indra in the *Rg Veda*, called a Dasa in One passage, said to have deemed himself a godling (*devaka*). "His forts, ninety, ninety-nine, or a hundred in number, are alluded to, the word itself in the neuter plural once meaning 'the forts of Sambara.' His great foe was Divodasa Atithigva, who won victories over him by Indra's aid. . . . It is impossible to say with certainty whether Sambara was a real person or not. . . . Sambara was quite possibly an aboriginal enemy in India, living in the mountains." (1912, 2:321).

What is remarkable about these articles is the way in which they extract the dark-skinned savage from a very recalcitrant Vedic text. The first half of the image is drawn from a grand total of two passages referring to dark skin and a single one interpreted to mean "flat-nosed" against ancient authorities. But, as the articles themselves make abundantly clear, the significant social markers separating Aryas from Dasas or Dasyus for the writers of the texts are religion, above all, and language, while complexion is barely mentioned. The second half of the image, savagery, is completely contrary to the evidence of wealth and many forts possessed by these enemies, which the authors dismiss without evidence. The image of them as mountaineers is perhaps constructed

on the interpretation of "autumnal" (a word that has never been satisfactorily explained) in relation to forts; it in any case draws upon the prevailing notions that the mountaineers or hill tribes of contemporary India are the non-Aryan aborigines.

There is yet the word *varna*, which is critical to the theory that caste is race. The ordinary meaning of the word is "color," but it is also the word for the four main castes or estates of the Indian social system: *Brahmana* ("priest"), *Ksatriya* ("warrior"), *Vaisya* ("yeoman farmer" or "merchant"), and *Sudra* ("dependent laborer"). These four are evidently not racially different among themselves, so it is by no means obvious how *varna* can signify complexion. But Max Müller in the 1854-piece discussed previously had constructed a racial reading of the second use of *varna* by combining two facts: The first is that the first three *varnas* are called the "twice-born" because their males take the Vedic initiation and have the religious competence to offer sacrifice, in contrast to the "once-born" Sudra. In some later texts the "twice-born" are contrasted with the Sudra as Aryan to non-Aryan. The second fact is that the *Rg Veda* contains mention of the *Arya-varna* in contrast with the *Dasa-varna*. Putting these two points together he concludes that *varna* in reference to human social categories indicates a difference of complexion between Aryas and Dasas.

This interpretation is elaborated upon by Macdonell and Keith in the corresponding article, which I give at some length (in paraphrase) in view of its importance:

Varna: The word (lit. "color") in the *Rg Veda* is applied to denote classes of men, the Dasa and the Arya Varna being contrasted, as (two) other passages show, on account of color. A footnote adds that there is no trace in Vedic literature of any real distinction of color save this main one, Arya v. Dasa. There is a later, heraldic sense in which colors are assigned to the social groups called *varnas*, the authors citing passages giving the brahmin's color as white (*Gopatha Brahmana*), the *vaisya* as white and the *rajanya* as swarthy (*Kathaka Samhita*); "and the later view makes the four castes black, yellow, red and white respectively."

The ultimate cause of the extreme rigidity of the caste system probably comes from the sharp distinction drawn from the beginning between the Aryan and the Sudra. The Vedic Indians felt a sharp contrast to exist between themselves and the conquered population, and which probably originated from the difference of color between the upper and the lower classes, and it tended to accentuate "the natural distinctions of birth, occupation and locality which normally existed among the Aryan Indians, but which among other Aryan peoples never developed into a caste system like that

of India." The doctrine of hypergamy marks the practical working of the caste system, and seems clearly to point to the feeling that Aryan males could marry Sudra females but not the reverse. This distinction probably lies at the back of all other divisions, its force being illustrated by "the peculiar state of feeling as to mixed marriages" in the South of the United States and in South Africa, or even in India itself, "between the new invaders from Europe and the mingled population which now peoples the country." "Marriages between persons of the white and the dark race are disapproved in principle, but varying degrees of condemnation attach to (1) the marriage of a man of the white race with a woman of the dark race; (2) an informal connexion between these two; (3) a marriage between a woman of the white race and a man of the dark race; and (4) an informal connexion between these two. Each category, on the whole, is subject to more severe reprobation than the preceding one. This race element, it would seem, is what has converted social divisions into castes." There appears to be a large element of truth in the theory of Risley and others that explains caste as mainly a matter of blood, and holds that the higher the caste, the greater the proportion of Aryan blood. (1912, 2:247-271)

In this fantastic back-projection of systems of racial segregation in the American South and in South Africa onto early Indian history, the relations of the British "new invader from Europe" with the peoples of India is prefigured thousands of years before by the invading Aryans. But what the British encountered was not their Aryan brethren, as Max Müller wanted to have it, but a "mingled population" toward whom a supposed perduring prejudice of whites against interracial sexual relations (or rather a perduring mixture of repulsion and desire) structured those relations in a certain, hypergamous way. We witness here the closing steps in the development of a conception of racial whiteness.

Back to the Veda

Let us briefly examine the evidence of the *Rg Veda*, and make tile experiment of subjecting it to an evaluation that is minimizing and skeptical in respect of the racializing interpretations that have prevailed and prevail still. I can be brief, for, as we have seen, the evidence of the *Rg Veda* amounts to three passages. I begin with the matter of noses.

Returning to Max Müller's passage cited previously, we find that he

himself later abandoned the meaning "nose" for *sipra*, upon which he had constructed evidence of a physical contrast between the Aryan and the Dasyu/Dasa (*susipra*, "with a beautiful nose," of the gods; *Visisipra*, "noseless," proper name of someone conquered by Manu; *vr̥sasipra*, "bull-nosed," applied to Dasas) (RV 1891:301-302); *sipra* is now "jaws" and *susipra* "possessed of strong jawbones." By the time of the *Vedic index*, the initial interpretation is completely exploded: *Sipra* is "a word of somewhat uncertain sense: it seems to mean 'cheeks' in several passages; in others it appears to designate the 'cheek-pieces' of a helmet, or of the 'bit' of a horse," and taking the authorities, ancient and modern, together give its meaning variously as cheek, lip, jaw, and nose (Macdonell and Keith 1912, 2:s.v. *sipra*).

And so the supposed noselessness of the Dasyu/Dasa comes to rest upon Max Muller's interpretation of a single passage, *Rg Veda* 5.29.10. In this verse Indra with his weapon kills the Dasyus who are described as *anasah* and *mrdhravacah*. Sayana, whose commentary Max Müller published with his edition of the *Rg Veda* text, analyzes the first as *an+as-*, that is, a-privative followed by *as*, "face, mouth," which by metonymy stands for *sabda*, "speech." Thus the Dasyus are "without speech," coordinate with *mrdhravac*, which Sayana glosses as *himsitavagimdriyan*, "having defective organs of speech." Now Sayana's commentary is by no means infallible, but at the very minimum it goes to show that a learned Indian commentator of the Middle Ages did not understand the Dasyus to be described as "noseless, i.e. flat-nosed," which itself tends against the significance of noses for ancient Indian ethnological notions. What is more, Sayana's explanation of the half-verse in question is rather good and convincing, as it coordinates the two characterizations of the Dasyu. As H. H. Wilson said in rejecting Max Müller's interpretation, the word possibly alludes "to the uncultivated dialects of the barbarous tribes, barbarism and uncultivated speech being identical, in the opinion of the Hindus, as in the familiar term for a barbarian, *mlechchha*, which is derived from the root *mlechchh*, to speak rudely" (*Rg Veda* 1854-57, 3:276 n.). Thus there is good reason to assimilate the expression in question into the well-known obsession with proper Sanskrit speech as an ethnic marker, abundantly evident in the *Rg Veda* itself.

That leaves the two passages that speak of hostile persons of black skin (*kṛṣṇa tvac*), *Rg Veda* 1.130.8 and 6.40.1. Here as elsewhere in the *Rg Veda* it is unmistakable that the verses in question are describing enemies of the Aryans and of their gods in the most unflattering terms.

But it is not always clear whether the persons being described are human or supernatural. Sayana takes the first of the passages to refer to a legend according to which a demon (*asura*) named Kṛṣṇa ("The Black"), having advanced with ten thousand followers to the banks of the Ansumati River where he caused great devastation, was defeated and stripped of his skin by Indra, who had been sent with his Maruts by Brhaspati. Thus even accepting that the Dasyus/Dasas are human enemies of the Aryans—which does not seem to be doubtful—some uncertainty attaches to the substance of the racial interpretation. Beyond that, even if the racial interpretation is right on this point substantively, it is wrong adjectivally, since the two passages on skin color are very few on which to base a theory of a systematic color prejudice and, in salience, are far outweighed by references to the shortcomings of the Dasyus/Dasas in respect of religion and language.

At most, then, the racial interpretation of the relation between Aryans and Dasyus/Dasas in the *Rg Veda* appears to have two verses in its support. But there is also the question of *varna* which, as I have said, is the Ordinary Sanskrit word for "color." The proponents of the racial interpretation have been unable to bring forward a single passage in the entire body of Sanskrit literature that comes after the *Rg Veda* that shows that the system of four *varnas* is based upon color of skin, or that *varna* in this context is given any other color-related significance than a heraldic one. Since usage rather than etymology must be our guide to meaning, it is evident that *varna* in this sense means, as Monier-Williams's dictionary has it, "class of men, tribe, order, caste." It is quite clear, then, that skin color would not have come into Orientalist discussion of the four *varnas* but for the fact that in the *Rg Veda* we find mention of the Arya-varna in contrast with the Dasa-varna. But here again usage does not show that skin color is in question, and *varna* could as well mean no more than "class of men," "tribe," and so forth, in the absence of corroborating reference to skin color in such passages. We find once more that there is a doubt as to whether the racial interpretation is correct substantively, and it is in any case clear that it is wrong adjectivally.

In sum, without adopting an excessive degree of skepticism, this brief experiment of subjecting the evidence for the racial interpretation of Indian civilization to a minimizing reading shows just how soft that evidence is and gives some gauge as to the amount of overreading upon which it rests.

But, readers may ask, is not the minimizing interpretation guilty of

the opposite fault, of underreading the evidence for color prejudice? That Indians of all historical periods took an interest in variations of complexion can be amply documented. Madhav Deshpande, for example, cites a passage from Pantañjali's *Mahabhasya* to the effect that a brahmin is *gaura*, "fair," and that no dark person can normally be identified as a brahmin (Deshpande 1993:chap. 6). He gives a fascinating view of the complexion geography of India in Rajasekhara's *Kavyamimamsa*, according to which the people of northern India are *gaura*, "fair," those of eastern India are *syama*, "dusky," those of the south are *krsna*, "dark," and those of the west are *pandu*, "pale, yellowish-white," whereas the people of the Middle Country are a mixture of *gaura*, *syama* and *krsna*. Indian preference for a bride of fair complexion is attested in texts as ancient as *Vasistha Dharma Sutra* (18.18) and as recent as the matrimonial advertisements in last Sunday's newspaper. In the face of this and similar evidence it would seem foolish to argue against the entrenched racial interpretation.

It is important not to be misled by this evidence. That Indians have a lively interest in complexion is not in doubt, nor that Indians generally prize a fair complexion over a dark one. Complexion is not race in and of itself, but it may be *construed* as a *sign* of race; what is in question is whether complexion was in fact taken by the authors of the Veda to characterize large and opposed groups that we may call races. The racial interpretation of Indian civilization says that it was, and in examining its case we become aware not only that its makers overread the evidence but also that they did so out of a sense of the objective character of race, especially of white and black races, and of the permanent, transhistorical nature of certain attitudes of whites toward blacks. It is this belief that justified taking the Jim Crow system of the American South and the segregation of South Africa as evidence of the reactions, deemed natural, of Aryans to Dasyus thousands of years earlier.

My minimizing interpretation of the same evidence has its deeper roots in a view that race is socially constructed, that it is not objective but conventional, and that, therefore, it has a contingent, historical character that is not perduring but governed by forces in play at a given time. That is not to deny that variation of complexion has an existence independent of the observer, but so far as history is concerned, what is important is how those features are read and socially construed by humans. They are or are not construed racially for a host of contingent reasons which it is the business of scholarship to try to identify. It is with this changing sense of what race is that the racial interpretation

of Indian civilization is increasingly out of step. The view I propose does not, it is true, entirely rule out that a difference of complexion between Aryan and Dasyu may have existed, but it insists at the least that in the *Rg Veda* text the social construction of the difference stresses language and religion, and that complexion, if it is in fact referred to, has little salience.

The evidentiary base of the racial theory of Indian civilization was never very firm, and subsequent developments have only served to weaken it further. Its great appeal for Europeans had been that it attributed the civilizing of India to peoples related to themselves. But, by the 1920s, it became plain that mounds of old brick being excavated in the Indus valley were the remains of an urban civilization that was older than the chronological horizon of the Veda. The discovery of the Indus Civilization should have put paid to the racial theory of Indian civilization. Coordinating the evidence of archaeology and textual study is never easy and what successors to the Indus Civilization may have been meant by the Vedic expressions "Dasa" and "Dasyu" is uncertain, but it is clear enough from the texts themselves that these peoples were in some ways more economically advanced. What is more, race science has completely changed its nature since the 1950s; the evidence that races shade imperceptibly into one another is no longer resisted by appeal to ideal-type races, such that the races (as technical constructs of biology, and not the social entities we have been discussing) themselves have only a fleeting and statistical shape, and the correlation between race and civilization is given up as a bad job. That the racial theory of Indian civilization still lingers is a miracle of faith.

Is it not time we did away with it? I should like to suggest that the concept of race does nothing to illuminate our understanding of the ancient sources of Indian history and, on the contrary, has only served to corrupt our reading of them. What we know of the human resources out of which Indian civilization was built includes the following: We know that Sanskrit was brought to India from without and was spoken by people calling themselves Arya. We know that in India Sanskrit speakers encountered the speakers of distinct language families, including the Dravidian and the Austro-Asiatic. We know that there is a variety of complexions and physical features in the population of the Subcontinent today, and we grant that it is a perfectly legitimate scientific activity to study such variation. But, as has been argued since the 1850s, there is no necessary connection between race and language, or between

race and civilization, so of what value is "race" as a biological concept for history? What we need to know is whether ancient Indians socially constructed "races" in the way Macdonell and Keith assumed they did, that is, like "whites" in the American South or in South Africa. I suggest that they did not. It was Macdonell and Keith who engaged in a project of social construction, and the construct is that of a changeless racial "whiteness" accompanied by changeless attitudes toward non-whites.

For Britons and Americans it is different. "Race" and "race relations" are meaningful terms with which they talk about the socially constructed "races" in their populations. But when they go to India, Britons and Americans cannot help being struck that these expressions disappear and that their functional equivalents in Indian discourse are "communities" and "communalism." The markers of such communities are language, religion, and caste, but not complexion. Why then project an alien discourse onto the distant Indian past? It is more than three passages Of the *Rg Veda*, one of them of disputed significance, can reasonably be said to prove.