



Derailing National Consciousness- How Herbert Hope Risley Crafted the Ideology of Subjugation Through 'Pseudo Science'

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ABSTRACT

The paper concentrates on how H H Risley crafted the discipline of Anthropology and the tools of Craniometry and Anthropometry to toe the line of Pseudo Science in an effort to wreck the headway of nationalism in India by disturbing the fabric of the colonial society. The work also remembers the role played by the colonial state apparatus, in general, and Risley, in particular, in cementing the notions of correlation between Race and Caste and composing caste as a stagnant category with no hope of upward mobility. The article also credits Risley and the colonial census for the establishment of caste as a socio-political and cultural reality in today's India.

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Contextualizing 'People of India'

A book; the purpose it holds, the nomenclature it bears, the language it speaks, the source and scientific methods it employs and the audience it targets; are a product of the age in which the book is conceived. Before delving into a book, it is apropos to understand the context in which the book was envisioned. As noted by Marc Bloch in his monumental volume, 'French Rural History'; where he engaged antecedently unheard practice of 'retrospective history narration', speaks extensively of the how to comprehend the context of a volume. Bloch resolves that a 'historical phenomenon ought to be explained in terms of its own time rather than of earlier periods'. Discerning the ideological tinge or latent scheme of the author is as weighty as discerning the context. Mortimer J Adler and Charles Van Doren in their book titled 'How to read a book' convey with the reader the significance to read the author before reading his work. The weight of these words proliferates when read against the assessment of E H Carr on the discretion of the historian in selecting and interpreting his sources. The author becomes 'extremely selective' (a phrase used by Romila Thapar when speaking about Public memory, but finds as weighty to the discretion of the author also) in preference of his sources to bake what he thinks history is. The book is a commonplace where the author meets the reader and shares what he thinks ought to be articulated. The author, in the act of composing history, only welcomes those sources which aid his purpose. Thus nor the author neither his context can be divorced from his book.

This paper is dispositioned to chronicle the "scientific techniques" employed in the identification of racial types in India, through applying anthropometric parameters, by Herbert Hope Risley (H H Risley) in his volume 'People of India', in an endeavour to hinder the innate progression of National Consciousness. As mentioned in the above paragraph, it is important to understand the author and his

times (context) before burrowing into the paxamonica –People of India. H H Risley was the gallant poster boy of 'Pseudo Science', on which was built the tall structure of racial difference between the 'aborigines' and the whites and on which rested the racial pre-eminence of the colonizer. Risley conducted an extensive study on; scientific racism, the races and tribes of India; in the most empirical manner by amalgamating the techniques and tools of anthropometry, anthropology and craniometry, in a pursuit to distinguish and situate them in the 'ladder of civilisation'.

Crippling Nationalism...

'People of India', was conceived in the backdrop of an intensifying second phase of Industrial revolution, competition and intermittent battles for consolidating colonies in Asia and Africa by European nations, in the intellectual milieu of orientalism and also in an age where Indomania has given way to Indophobia. The initial response of the British to the challenges put forward by the encounter with the unknown was to figure out their everyday life, in order to grasp how they were to be ruled upon and how plunder of the colony should be organized. The aforementioned process was accompanied by sensitivity to the Indian way of life and sympathy to Indian culture. As William Dalrymple notes in his distinguished volume, 'The Last Mughal', the officials of East India Company who inhabited the 18th century Delhi were deeply attracted to the city. He mentions an anecdote of Lady Maria Nugent, the spouse of the British Commander in Chief, who seems bewildered by the acceptance of the Indian ways of life, by her country men stationed at Delhi. After the initial encounters the focus deviated from appreciating the unknown to placing the unfamiliar in garb of the familiar and arrange them in the ladder of civilisation, thus initiating a impression of familiarity as well as imposing inferiority into the Indian minds, especially the educated ones. Though postmodern historians like Dalrymple himself assign the motivation for

the change in the attitude of the British towards India and her people to the arrogance resulting from the stature of undisputed military supremacy of Britain and the 'ascendancy of Evangelical Christianity', it should be viewed critically, especially the role of military supremacy in the birth of animosity of such high order. The paramountcy of Evangelical Christianity cannot be discounted and should be considered as one of the prima facie reasons for the apathy and antagonism, the British held towards India. The ladder of civilisation was envisaged with the British, an Industrialised nation, at the top and the communities that practiced lesser modes of production below that. It was also put that the Indians, not all of them, belonging to the upper strata of the caste system were fallen brethren. Risley was adept at making readjustments and placing the upper castes in the higher reaches of the civilizational ladder, which was based on the supremacy of racial attributes arrived through 'scientific enquires', and vindicated such operations with 'pseudo-science'. The lesser castes and tribes were put in still a lower category, in a ladder which resembled Darwin's ladder of evolution. This led to a distinction between the Pure Aryan stock and the aboriginals, who were not seen as the part of a common racial stock, began to be emphasized upon.

The discipline of Anthropology was called in for further assistance to prove the polygenesis of the Aryans and the Aborigines. With the establishment of Anthropological Society of London under James Hunt, the Constructs of Social Darwinism and white man's burden began to gain more ground. The liberal justification of the purpose of the empire, "an empire which was governed by purpose of power, commerce, culture, religious influence, progress, pride, jealousy, compassion, curiosity, adventure and resistance", was to endorse the government as a legitimate political representative by invoking facets of well decorated and 'proper' history, civilizational

hierarchy, and ethnicity and by race and blood ties.

Hunter and Risley, both ethnographers by taste, wrote their scientific study on the Indian races in the backdrop of the revolt of 1857. The empire which had only faced localised, unorganised and spontaneous responses to its undemocratic and non-representative tyrannical rule now faced a more organised and structured resistance, though the degree of organisation and strength of the structure are still debatable. The political changes that occurred post 1857 was miniscule when compared to what occurred in the realm of Epistemology. The revolt led to significant othering of the Indians from all arenas of administration and defence services. Only some races were qualified, based on their racial qualities, to occupy the aforementioned offices. An attempt was also initiated to instil in the minds of the subject population as to how uncivilised savages they were and which lowest rung of the ladder, of civilisation, they occupied, when compared to the mighty whites. Risley writing in 1908 was endowed with vast volumes of data, especially caste census that commenced in 1872, collected by the Empire for chronicling every region. Risley attempted to view these data through the lens of the theory of Paul Topinard, thus fusing the discussion of caste into theories of biologically determined races. A peculiar change in the enumeration of castes brought about by the census of 1901 urges mention here. Though the caste census spelled out castes and religious categories along with tribes and race, the distinction between these categories remained obscure, till 1901. A separate category of tribes was assimilated in the census along with that of race and caste, since 1901. The enumerators made no attempts to define the categories such as caste, tribe and race, but still found it prudent to compartmentalise the population on its basis. Insensitivity to the cultural realities was at its height and a 'porous, dynamic and mobile' category like caste was left undefined,

while ill convincingly defining tribe as a group that is yet to become a caste, thus by putting caste as a linear trajectory that a race should achieve in the path of its journey towards civilisation. This was a major break down from the earlier notions on caste and tribes. The earlier colonial historians and sociologists considered Tribe as a political organisation and caste as a social grouping based on occupation. Risley and the caste enumerators, both deriving inspiration from each other, had us believe that Tribe is the primitive commune or amorphous form of caste. It can also be comprehended that the latent schemes of Risley was to make good these 'empirical' data "forged" by the enumerators.

Delving into the physical types, as identified by Risley through his extensive research employing anthropometry, anthropology and craniometry and putting them in the perspective of how the 'pseudo-science' of classification of race and how the knowledge thus created was employed in subjugating the native population further. Risley in the onset of his chapter disregard the attempts to classify the population as different races based on the customs and ceremonies as measuring rods, as these cultural facets are prey to be plagiarised by the lower castes, a process which later came to be coined Sanskritisation by M N Srinivas. As culture and ceremonies fail to classify the population as races, Risley tries to identify physical characters as the measuring rods to identify and differentiate races. He finds justification for taking up physical characteristics in the caste system that existed in India, which precluded intermixing of races.

Risley employs the scheme approved by Sir William Flower of the British Museum and Prof. Topinard in measuring the indigenous population. He uses a wide array of characteristics to arrive at a method; three among them is provided much prominence- 'Cephalic Index or the size of the head, Nasal Index or size of the nose and Orbito Nasal Index or the relative projection of the root of the

nose above the level of eye sockets'. Administering the aforesaid techniques and contemporary theories on race, Risley broke down the Indian population to seven mutually exclusive and non-pervious racial types- the Indo- Aryans, the Mongoloids, the Dravidians, the Turko-Iranians, The Monglo-Dravidians, the Scytho-Dravidians and the Aryo-Dravidians. The Dravidians and Mongoloids were projected as the original inhabitants of the country, who settled in North Eastern and Southern reaches, respectively. The mixed races were pronounced as a product of the admixture of races due to the successive incursion of 'foreign' races into the subcontinent. Risley, identified the low ranking races with the tribes and, the agricultural communities in North India with either the mixed races or of Aryan origin. As the mandate of this paper is confined to the effectiveness of these techniques used by Risley in categorizing the population and thus by stemming nationalism, the author would like to fall short on the classification and sub grouping of the population by the colonial ethnographer.

As Ronald Inden cautions us, Risley was inimical to equating these racial types with any language families, though his races are named after them. Risley, as mentioned in the preceding arguments, lauds the efficacy of using physical types to determine races, with respect to the Indian condition, due to the precluding of intermixing of races, beyond recognition, by an 'efficient' caste system, which placed taboo on inter caste marriages and thus gave birth to endogamous groupings. He equates caste with race and proposed that the exclusivity that was created allowed the ethnographer to work retrospectively to the probable origins of caste and of racial stakes. Thus Risley takes away the formation of different racial types and castes from the figment of Brahmanical order and provide it with an aura of a well-established 'scientific' fact. Exercise like this, though should be analysed with in the bigger picture of the scheme of

colonial masters in subjugating the colonized, intellectually, but also should be seen as the curiosity of an inquisitive mind which was part of the scientific consciousness of a generation.

The bigger picture of the need for such a well thought out and executed scientific research on compartmentalization of the native population, needs to be understood in the light of the social manifestations a research of such magnitude was to offer. Risley may have believed that caste which was embedded in the Indian social reality could be used as an effective apparatus to stem the growth of national consciousness, and thus perpetuate British rule. In this scheme the British officers were aided by their native collaborators or the comprador bourgeoisie- the upper caste Hindus, with their coarse interpretations of the textbooks, on religion and jurisprudence, like Manusmriti which was interpreted to provide corroborative evidence to the conclusions Risley arrived at. These interpretations misled the entire population to believe in the rigidity of caste system with no scope of further advancement. Risley equated each caste with a racial type and equated each race with a quality- intelligence, labour, belligerence, trustworthiness- being some of them. The caste census and the gradation of castes, as high and low, led to instances where each caste became overtly conscious and concerned of their caste rankings and led to a period of rigorous research, about their ancestral origin, and petitioning the government to provide them upward mobility in the 'official records' thus by making caste a reality in the Indian society. The coming forward of caste as the main agenda retarded the pace of the development of national consciousness and imposed the tyranny for a longer period than it was to stay.

Anthropological knowledge thus came to be effectively used as a subjugation strategy. As Nicholas B Dirks observes in his work 'Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the making of Modern India', the colonial state transformed itself into an "ethnographic state". This

subjugation strategy was further provided substance and purpose by the Evangelical Church and its desire to convert the population. The discourse of barbarianisms and savagery was dusted and put to use by the colonial government in repressing the nationals, for the 'sake' of maintaining law and order and providing good governance, a burden of the divine providence.

Denouement

The dominant dogmatic motif in the 'People of India' and tomes of this disposition was the stress on the inferiority and inequality of the colonized population. As Rousseau puts it in his magnum opus, 'Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men', Natural inequality is the product of the nature and involves the difference between one man's body to another. He was not anxious about natural inequality like he was with Moral inequality, concerning disparity of wealth; power and rank. Risley proved the anxiety of a visionary of such high order, well placed by using the vantage point of Moral superiority to instill belief of natural inequality and to attach exclusive and unchangeable traits to specific races. Scientific racism was used to create a binary between the civilised and the barbarians. The other was no longer seen as different from the self, but as a 'noble savage' or a 'fallen brethren', unable to keep pace with the white man. The white man was fashioned as burdened with the weighty divine mandate to uplift these fallen brothers, a notion to which the Evangelical missionaries added more 'life and colour'. An abrogated version of 'The four fold theory of development,' propounded by the Scottish thinker Adam Smith and later perfected by John Miller, was put to use to exemplify that the congenital faculties of each race is related to a specific stage of mode of production they have achieved. Thus the supreme race, the whites, which developed a commercial society, was seen as racially superior to the ones which still lived in a hunting-gathering subsistence economy, the tribes, or in a feudal mode of

production or agricultural societies, native Indians.

The compartmentalization of the entire population to races and attaching qualities was the hallmark of the colonial governance in India. The aforementioned attribute of the rule led to the conception of specific tribes as 'criminal' because of the perceived, like using forest without permission of the colonial officialdom, deplorable pursuits conducted by their predecessor. Pseudo-science established a gimmick of unalterable qualities, which are acquired by birth, and not subject to revision. The same quality of constancy was later added to various castes giving birth to nomenclature like martial races. This permanence of traits of such an inferior population was advertised as the requirement for the guidance of a superior race, till the races were civilised. This unparalleled emphasize on immutable and rigid attributes led to what Bernard Cohn has termed as 'Surveillance Modality' and archiving of records, like finger prints, pertaining to criminal tribes, which, as Radhika Singh has pointed out was used as an apparatus to subjugate the other. Thus the precious Jewel in the British Crown was precluded to en masse and prosper under a national flag for long by employing notions of caste and race.

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