The Ambivalence of Aryanism: A Genealogical Reading of India-Europe Connection

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Abstract
How do historical ideas of global, supremacist connection exist alongside ideas of civilisational and racial difference? And what enables certain reactionary, political alliances to traverse colonial hierarchies of power? With an onset in contemporary, transnational connections between a Hindu and a Western Right, this article offers a critical genealogical reading of the concept of Aryanism. Understanding it as articulated historically through interactions between British colonialists and upper-caste Hindus in India, this reading focuses on these elites’ intersecting and contradictory ideas of hierarchy, difference, and cross-civilisational connection. Tracing the empirical, theoretical and political implications of these entanglements, the article contributes to on-going discussions on the imperial roots of conceptual formations and knowledge production in postcolonial International Relations.

Keywords
Aryanism, caste, global right

La ambivalencia del arianismo: una genealogía de la conexión India-Europa

Resumen
¿Cómo coexisten las nociones históricas de conexión global y supremacista con las ideas de diferencia racial y civilizacional? ¿Qué hace posible que determinadas alianzas políticas reaccionarias atraviesen jerarquías coloniales de poder? Este artículo propone una genealogía crítica del concepto de arianismo, a partir de las conexiones transnacionales contemporáneas entre la derecha hindú y la derecha occidental. Entendiendo al arianismo como un concepto formulado históricamente a través del contacto entre los colonialistas británicos y la casta superior hindú en India, esta genealogía se enfoca en las ideas contradictorias y transversales de estas élites sobre la jerarquía, la diferencia y la conexión entre civilizaciones. Al rastrear las repercusiones
In recent years, an idea of solidarity has developed, discursively and materially, between a Western and an Indian Right. From state-sponsored trips for European Union (EU) far-right politicians to Indian-occupied, Muslim majority Jammu & Kashmir,1 to the Hindus for Trump lobby campaign,2 political formations in geographies often thought to be divided by racial, (neo-)colonial hierarchies are finding common ground. These connections are not merely strategic or transactional in nature. Rather, these organisational morphologies see their interests aligning through conjunctures of a shared politics: Islamophobia, the fight against the ‘hegemonic Left’ on university campuses, and the vilification of ‘anti-nationals’ and immigrants. What has enabled these political, material and ideational connections?

Grappling with these questions, this article offers a critical, genealogical reading of the concept of Aryanism, examining how it has been articulated historically as inter-elite connection between British colonialists and Indian, Hindu elites. These conceptual

1. ‘From Anti-Immigration Views to Neo-Nazi Far-Right Background, Parties of Many MEPs Visiting Kashmir Have Hard Stance on Islam’, Firstpost, 29 October 2019. Available at: https://www.firstpost.com/india/from-anti-immigration-views-to-neo-nazi-far-right-background-parties-of-many-meps-visiting-kashmir-have-hard-stance-on-islam-7565861.html.
2. Reza Rumi and Nihal Krishnan, ‘Understanding the ‘Hindus for Trump’ Phenomenon’, The Wire, 5 November 2016. Available at: https://thewire.in/uncategorised/understanding-the-hindus-for-trump-phenomenon.
entanglements were influenced by both groups’ intersecting and contradictory processes of knowledge production, specifically on ideas of hierarchy, difference, and cross-civilisational connection.

Postcolonial International Relations (IR) have long been preoccupied with questions of how imperialism and colonial hierarchies of ‘civilisation’ and ‘race’ have been constitutive of the international state system.³ As one of the most salient concepts denoting civilisational and racial connection between ‘the East’ and ‘the West’, a critical examination of Aryanism is of key interest to these discussions. Examining the history of knowledge production on Aryanism, and the inter-play between Hindu and European elites central to it, enables us to interrogate critically the role of ‘global connection’ in international politics.

Aryanism in Postcolonial IR and Beyond

Aryanism’s constitutive role in the racist ideology of the National Socialist project of the Third Reich is perhaps the most infamous iteration of the concept.⁴ However, Aryanism has played a far more expansive role in the global imaginary, also outside these deployments. In addition to its foundational role in European colonial knowledge production on the ‘East’ more broadly, Aryanism has provided creative inspiration for Hindu, Christian and Islamic mystic traditions,⁵ as well as those of Western esotericists⁶ and anti-colonial movements.⁷ The concept has also been key to the emergence of academic disciplines, ranging from comparative philology⁸ and Indology,⁹ to geography¹⁰ and law.¹¹

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3. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda and Robbie Shilliam, *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London: Routledge, 2014); Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
4. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).
5. Michael Bergunder, ‘Experiments with Theosophical Truth: Gandhi, Esotericism, and Global Religious History’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 2 (2014): 398–426; Alireza Doostdar, *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
6. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought, New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998).
7. Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretch-Bearer of Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Marshall J. Getz, *Subhas Chandra Bose: A Biography* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2002).
8. Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
9. Pollock in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).
10. Ishan Ashutosh, ‘Mapping Race and Environment: Geography’s Entanglements with Aryanism’ *Journal of Historical Geography* 62 (2018): 15–23.
11. Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
I approach Aryanism from the theoretical vantage point of postcolonial IR, and an emerging literature on the colonial histories of political concepts and knowledge production. In recent years, this literature has increasingly recognised the mutually constitutive nature of these processes. One of the key tenets of this critical engagement with colonial and orientalist ideology has been that the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ are mutually constitutive, and therefore that modern conceptual formations in the ‘West’ cannot be divorced from those in the so-called non-West. In other words, just as colonialism has shaped the intellectual trajectories of those in its ‘peripheries’, so too have the political, social and cultural ideas of the metropole been fundamentally influenced by those of its colonial subjects.

In contrast, postcolonial interventions in the field of IR and beyond have traditionally privileged analyses of predominantly uni-directional trajectories of Western ideological constructions moving into the colonies, and their consequent reformulations and circumventions there. Recent scholarship in postcolonial IR attests to more mutually constitutive exchanges of intellectual thought. While this position has gained greater currency in the discipline, there are as yet relatively few nuanced analyses of how these concrete historical, material, and ideational processes have unfolded. Where such interventions have been made, both inside and outside the discipline of IR broadly construed, the focus has been on transnational bonds of solidarity: especially those of anti-colonial movements, South-South intellectual entanglements, emancipatory, political movements structured around race and caste, and finally through particular individuals and unusual friendships.

This work has largely focused on conceptual and ideational entanglements understood as politically progressive, where ideas of radical solidarity and anti-colonial
resistance have been its predominant focus. A critical engagement with Aryanism allows us to challenge this progressive bias in the present literature. Offering a genealogical reading of a concept often thought of as emblematic of reactionary thought, the article opens up questions about the contours of a supremacist internationalism.

In addition to contributing to core debates within postcolonial IR, the present article also speaks to the emerging literature on the Global Right. While scholarship on the morphologies of international connections of the Right gestures towards inter-connections traversing colonial hierarchies of ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’, these literatures are still in the process of grappling more fully with the historical and ideational roots of these entanglements.

Despite its notorious prominence in 20th-century European history, the idea of an Aryan race, and the larger concept of Aryanism, has, in Western-centric scholarship, received little critical attention outside of its role in the Nazi Germany political project. When theorised, the concept has often been understood as an esoteric ideology of 19th-century European Romanticism centred around racial difference and white supremacy. Here, the concept is largely understood as a product of colonial Europe’s fascination with India, and ideas of ‘Eastern’ knowledge systems more generally. Unfortunately, by displaying only cursory interest in Aryanism’s extra-European iterations, the existing literature ends up reproducing a Eurocentric view of the concept.

In scholarship on South Asian ideas of Aryanism, the concept is overwhelmingly understood within the framework of Hindu Nationalist ideology and history. Albeit predominantly focused on the concept’s role in modern, Hindu identity formation under the British Raj and postcolonial India, these India centric literatures have shown greater curiosity when it comes to Aryanism’s connections with Europe. However, I argue that

19. Eviane Leidig, ‘Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism’, Patterns of Prejudice, 54 (2020): 215–37; Bob Clifford, The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Benjamin Zachariah, ‘A Voluntary Gleichschaltung? Indian Perspectives Towards a Non-Eurocentric Understanding of Fascism’, Transcultural Studies - A Series in Interdisciplinary Research, no. 2 (2014): 63–100; Benjamin Zachariah, ‘Global Fascisms and the Volk: The Framing of Narratives and the Crossing of Lines’, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies 38, no. 4 (2015): 608–12.

20. Léon Poliakov, The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas of Europe (London: Sussex University Press, 1974).
21. Trautmann, Aryans and British India; Dorothy M. Figueira, Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity (New York: State University of New York, 2002).
22. Romila Thapar, ‘The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics’, Social Scientist 24, no. 1/3 (1996): 3–29; Edwin Bryant, The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christophe Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism: A Reader (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).
23. Thomas R Trautmann, The Aryan Debate, ed. Thomas R. Trautmann (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Zachariah, ‘A Voluntary Gleichschaltung? Indian Perspectives Towards a Non-Eurocentric Understanding of Fascism’; Marzia Casolari, ‘Hindutva’s Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence’, Economic and Political Weekly 35, no. 4 (2000): 218–28.
these same literatures display certain temporal constraints, largely glossing over Aryanism’s earlier, historical iterations in the subcontinent. Particularly important for the present discussion is the lack of critical engagement with the continuities and disruptions concerning pre-colonial ideas of Aryanism, especially as it relates to Brahmanical caste hierarchy, and its inter-play with later European iterations of the concept. I argue that centring literatures on India’s early modern period and those focused on the historical and political continuities of caste opens up a greater understanding of the political continuities of what Pollock calls a ‘morphology of domination’.

In sum, the present literature on Aryanism is striking both in its spatial and temporal limitations. In the following, I offer a genealogy of Aryanism guided by a curiosity towards its transnational, temporally expansive iterations; as a concept articulated through the intimate, inter-elite dynamic between British colonialists and upper-caste Hindus. A more spatially and temporally connected understanding of the concept will make us better equipped at analysing contemporary connections between a Hindu and a Western Right.

Rethinking Aryanism: Ambivalence, Entanglement, Genealogy

Walter Benjamin reminds us that attempting to understand the past is to seek to ‘take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger’. History, then, is not a straight-forward process consisting of neatly bounded, a priori defined actors and groups exercising their will upon the world, driving time forward and leaving ‘historical events’ in their wake. Rather, history is a messy, contradictory, conflictual morphology, up for radical interpretation and political manipulation. I understand Aryanism as fundamentally marked by ambivalence, oscillating historically between ideas of interrelation and rejection. This ambivalence constituted itself, at times, as India-Europe opposition, at other times as a set of mixed feelings, and at yet other conjunctures as mutual, emphatic connection.

In addition to seeing Aryanism as constituted by ambivalence, I also understand it as an entangled concept. This is because a critical reading of its history troubles the neatness of core binaries often associated with colonialism. Principal among these are conceptions of the opposition between British colonialism and Indian anti-colonial resistance; the ‘universal’, colonial category of ‘race’ and Indian, parochial ideas of ‘caste’; and the dichotomy of European, white supremacy and ‘coloured’ subjugation.

Accepting the analytical lens of genealogy for this article illuminates the conceptual complexities of Aryanism as a historical idea. My emphasis on Aryanism as entangled ambivalence echoes core assumptions of this analytical framework, as it has been offered

24. A notable exception here is Trautmann, The Aryan Debate.
25. Pollock in Breckenridge and Veer, Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament.
26. Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’, marxists.org. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm. Last accessed September 7, 2020.
to us principally by Foucault and Nietzsche. When interrogating the emergence and
dynamics of particular constellations of forces shaping and defining concepts, this ana-
lytical approach is less interested in understanding the exhaustive totality of these.
Neither is it preoccupied with grand narratives of history. It is rather concerned with the
muddled, contradictory, often untenable contradictions at the centre of political concepts.
Genealogy is apt for the questions put forth in this article, where understanding the par-
ticularly confounding contours of the contemporary Global Right demands careful atten-
tion to the contradictions that forms its organisational and political drive.

This article traces the concept of Aryanism through three historical periods, which
also makes up the three main sections of the article. In the first section, Aryanism is
examined in its pre-modern, Indian upper-caste iterations and in ensuing meetings
between pandits (religious scholars learned in the Vedic tradition) and British
Orientalists in the British East India Company period (from the 1770s onwards).
Because these historical junctures are less studied in the context of Aryanism, I devote
the most time to this section. The article’s next section examines the concept’s itera-
tions in the years of formal British colonisation in India. As opposed to its earlier itera-
tions, Aryanism now became more overtly articulated as an inter-elite racial concept
connecting Hindu and British elites. Finally, the last section of the article considers the
implications of this historical genealogy for contemporary, political connections
between Indian Hindu nationalists and a Western Right.

‘Indian Fables’: 18th-Century European Iterations of
Aryanism

In line with a genealogical approach, I understand ideas of Aryanism to have multiple
origin points. However, its origins in religious texts such as the Hindu Vedas and the
Zoroastrian Avesta, are often highlighted in the literature. I focus on its origins and con-
nections with the Indian Vedic tradition, where it was seen predominantly as a marker of
socio-religious and ritualistic hierarchy.

Within the Vedic tradition, ārya first came about as the self-designated name for the
Indo-Iranian people who migrated to the subcontinent around 1500 BCE, bringing with
them the Vedas. These liturgical texts are considered one of the main source for under-
standing the ensuing Vedic period in South Asian history. ārya is used to designate Aryans,
around which the Vedas centre: a self-identified ‘noble’ community migrating to āryāvarta
(the land of the Aryans), an area roughly corresponding to present-day North India.

27. Raymond Geuss, ‘Nietzsche and Genealogy’, European Journal of Philosophy 2, no. 3
(1994): 274–92; Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in Language, Counter
Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, ed. Michel Foucault (Ithaca: Cornell
University, 1977), 139–64.

28. Wendy Doniger, The Hindus - An Alternative History (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2010); Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, ‘Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of
the Aryan Discourse in Iran’, Iranian Studies 44, no. 4 (2011): 445–72.

29. Doniger, The Hindus - An Alternative History.

30. Doniger, The Hindus - An Alternative History.
The Vedas stipulate how the Vedic Aryans fought against the indigenous inhabitants of the subcontinent, the dāsas, eventually settling and dominating the ‘indigenous’ of the area. The Brahmin caste is often understood to be the present-day Aryans of the Vedas.31

In the literatures on Aryanism’s European history, its starting point is often understood to have been formulated by the early French Indologist Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron. In a public lecture given in 1763, he referred to the term ‘aryen’.32 Anquetil-Duperron had lived in the subcontinent for 6 years prior to this, and had noted the concept in the Avesta, as he was working on its translation into French.33 It was principally through the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire’s engagement with Aryanism that the concept became directly tied to this intellectual juncture in European history. This period would become crucial to modern, European understandings of the concept, increasingly tied to its preoccupation with the exalted nature of ‘Eastern’ civilisations, cultures and religions, and their connections to Europe.34

Discovering a religion that had traces of a monotheism that preceded the Bible in historical time was crucial to Voltaire’s larger intellectual and political project. For him, Vedic, Aryan religion enabled his critique of Judeo-Christianity’s persecutions and superstition.35 Voltaire’s scorn of Christianity and the institution of the French church was also oriented around a wish to return to a pure, unified religion. This was the idea of an original monotheistic, Brahmanical Vedic religion and its people, the Aryans.

British Jurist and East India Company accountant William Jones is most widely understood to be the progenitor of Aryanism as a modern, colonial concept. Credited with discovering the linguistic link between Sanskrit and European languages, Jones and the larger group of Company Orientalists make up the focus of the next section. Prior to their arrival in Bengal in the 1770s, Jones and other British Orientalists of his generation actively contributed to debates on India-Europe connection. Jones’ linguistic and juridical scholarship, as well as his prolific and erudite letter-writing, had given him a prominent place in pan-European debates on ‘the East’, with his discourses and letters being read with anticipation and gravity by European audiences.36 Thirteen years before Jones set out for India, he scolded Anquetil-Duperron in an anonymous pamphlet, deeming his translation of the Avesta ‘useless junk’, intimating that Anquetil-Duperron had ‘fallen in love with Indian fables’.37 Jones’ initial scepticism of India would later be referenced as evidence for the validity of his research on India-Europe connections: this was a man of reason, not easily duped by the mystical snares of India. How did Jones go from being a sarcastic critic of European enthusiasts of the ‘East’, to becoming one himself?

31. Wilhelm Halbfass, India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding, State University of New York (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988).
32. Zia-Ebrahimi, ‘Self-Orientalization and Dislocation’.
33. For literature on Zoroastrian and modern Iranian conceptions of Aryanism, see Zia-Ebrahimi; Doostdar, The Iranian Metaphysicals.
34. Urs App, ‘William Jones’s Ancient Theology’, Sino-Platonic Papers 191, no. 19 (2009): 1–125; Figueira, Aryans, Jews, Brahmins.
35. Figueira, Aryans, Jews, Brahmins.
36. Urs App, The Birth of Orientalism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); App, ‘William Jones’s Ancient Theology’.
37. App, ‘William Jones’s Ancient Theology’, 7.
‘. . . Not in a Savage State’: Company Orientalism in Late 18th Century Bengal

We have seen that conceptions of Aryanism as they were articulated in 18th-century pan-European discourse were centred around its ability to speak to alternative ways of conceiving of human origins and an original, monotheistic religion preceding the Bible. Here, the idea of a Europe-India, or perhaps more specifically a Europe-Vedic, connection was quite loosely defined, often pin-pointed in ancient times.\(^{38}\) In the following, we will see that, at the moment where Aryanism is said to consolidate as a modern concept, following Jones’ discovery of the linguistic connection in 1786, a discourse of ambivalence: cultural respect and proximity, rather than India-Europe Aryan connection, took its place.

This ambivalent discourse of cultural respect and proximity emerged at a critical time in European knowledge production on India, namely the time of the first mass translations and standardisations of texts from the Vedic period, understood as India’s ‘Golden Age’. The upper-caste pandits who contributed to this process of linguistic and cultural translation shared the British reluctance when it came to ideas of India-Europe civilisational connection. However, socio-economic changes caused by the presence of the British East India Company in Bengal led to a shift in pandits’ source of legitimacy. Prior to the British, pandits’ symbolic and material power had been tied to a plethora of sources, both land ownership and royal patronage.\(^{39}\) With the increase in British consolidation of power in Bengal, pandits’ source of legitimacy and caste privilege became more exclusively tied to contact with the British.

British colonisation of the subcontinent from the 1770s onwards brought existing pan-European discourses on Aryanism and ideas of India-Europe connection into real confrontation with the material and discursive agenda of the nascent imperial project. Genealogically speaking, ideas of cultural connection in late 18th-century Bengal constituted a moment of real crisis for the British. Aryanism, now, was no longer only concerned with a connection in the abstract; in the ancient past, or merely existing in the minds of men like Anquetil-Duperron and Voltaire, for whom it was of relatively insignificant material consequence. Now, an idea of civilisational connection, carrying with it dangerous inflections of equality, constituted a real risk to the legitimacy of the British imperial project.

Ballantyne argues that the origins of India-Europe connection, and Aryanism as it materialised in the British Empire, starts with what he calls ‘Company Orientalism’.\(^{40}\) This has become the defining discursive framework for understanding connection during this period of early colonisation. To Ballantyne, this entailed a specific interest in India among Company civil servants, resulting in a large and detailed body of knowledge produced in close collaboration with Bengali pandits.

\(^{38}\) Trautmann, Aroms and British India; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism (New York/London: New York University Press, 1998).

\(^{39}\) S. Bayly, Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Christophe. Jaffrelot, India’s Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

\(^{40}\) Tony Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
In 1765, a British East India Company diwan (revenue manager) for Bihar, Orissa and Bengal was appointed by the Mughal emperor Shah Alam. This marked a significant shift in the relationship between the Company and local Indian authority, ultimately changing the Company’s status in to becoming a territorial power. The appointment of a Company diwan tied the British closer to the already existing Mughal courtly and diplomatic infrastructures, and until 1772 it relied on these networks for its tax collection. The Bengal famine of 1770, which killed one-third of the province’s population, led the British to accuse Mughal administrators of mismanagement and corruption. Consequently, the British took over tax management in the Presidency, thereby initiating projects of large-scale knowledge production on the territory, including the study of Indian agricultural systems, commercial relationships and social structures. It also assumed control of the justice system, putting (what the British perceived to be) ‘indigenous laws’ under Company administration. Legal procedures were standardised, attuned to what was understood to be ‘local culture’ and ‘indigenous’ ideas of justice. This all created a greater need for linguistic competency among the Company officers. While Persian was still the main administrative language, a growing group of Company civil servants, believing Sanskrit to be the ‘original’, Indian language, started studying this under the auspices of the first Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings.

Hastings’ decision in 1772 to adjudicate according to local religious scripture in matters of religious concern created a need for translations and codifications of expressly ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ legal texts. Pandits were initially reluctant to share knowledge of their own Vedic tradition with the Company because, as relayed by Hastings himself, other Europeans had used this kind of information to ‘turn their religion into derision’. Moreover, contact with mlecchas (‘foreigners’) was believed to make the pandits ritually impure.

This attitude of scepticism changed in large part as a consequence of the Bengal famine, which dried up sources of local patronage (e.g. land-owning zamindars had traditionally sponsored Bengali pandits) and depleted the supply of new students to Sanskrit schools. A second famine in 1783, and increased migration to the urban centre of Calcutta exacerbated the situation. Pandits from the countryside established Sanskrit schools in the city where British Orientalists increasingly represented a reliable source of income. These schools were, along with British colonial institutions such as the Royal Asiatic Society and Fort William, central in the work to coordinate, centralise and codify knowledge on Indian history and cultures.

41. Ballantyne, _Orientalism and Race_.
42. Rosane Rocher, ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ’, _American Oriental Society_ 109, no. 4 (1989): 627–33; Ballantyne, _Orientalism and Race_.
43. “Hindus” and “Muslims” were the two religious communities believed by the British to exist in the subcontinent prior to their arrival. This, of course, grossly conflated the plethora of systems of worship and devotional practices present at the time.
44. Ballantyne, _Orientalism and Race_, 23.
45. Ballantyne, _Orientalism and Race_.
46. Rocher, ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ’.
47. Ballantyne, _Orientalism and Race_.

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Initially, the Company administrators in London were reluctant to fund knowledge production on India, beyond what was seen as strictly relevant for trading purposes. Having experience in accounting was at the time the only formal requirement for getting a posting in India. This institutional logic changed under Hastings, who himself had a keen interest in Indian languages and cultures, understanding knowledge of these to be vital to the imperial project. The first Governor-General of Bengal was intent on providing proof that

the inhabitants of this land are not in the savage state in which they have been unfairly represented (. . .) [they] do not require our aid to furnish them with a rule for their conduct, or a standard for their property.48

Sending the Bhagavadgita49 to be translated in Britain, Hastings hoped that it would consolidate the legitimacy of Indian civilisation, which consequently might yield more political acceptance for his orientalist project at home.

Favouring written sources to everyday practices and customs led to the entrenchment of upper-caste, pandit interpretations of what would become an emerging ‘Hindu’ tradition.50 To Hastings, India consisted solely of Hindus and Muslims, with the effect of subsuming other communities (such as e.g. Jains and Sikhs) under the umbrella of ‘Hindu’. This inflated the Company’s idea of how large this group was. By this, Hastings and other Company Orientalists contributed to the creation of a political definition of the ‘Hindu’, further sanctioning the connection between ‘Hindu’ and very particular liturgical texts. From the 1770s onwards, there was a dramatic upturn in British political, administrative and infrastructural presence in Bengal. This led to a significant change in imperial outlook as well as policy, tying knowledge production and Company business strategy closer together.

This section has examined the structural and material context which helped to facilitate British institutional entrenchment in Bengal. The ensuing comprehensive, large-scale project of documenting Indian religions, languages and cultures was a moment of potential vulnerability for the British: they required help learning how to read and write in Sanskrit, ‘the language of the Gods’.51 What kind of cultural contamination, even ideas of connection, would arise when the British required Bengalis to be their teachers?

‘Brahmanisation’? Inter-elite Interactions in Calcutta

Company Orientalism fundamentally relied on interactions with pandits, who taught Sanskrit and acted as cultural ‘gate-keepers’ for British scholar-administrators. British

48. Rocher in Breckenridge and Veer, Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament, 221.
49. A part of the Vedic epic Mahabharata.
50. The 20th century Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar would later argue that the attention given to particular Vedic texts (by both Orientalists and upper-caste Hindus), notably the Bhagavadgita and the Manusmriti, entrenched particularly rigid ideas of caste, providing: ‘a philosophical foundation to the Varna system by arguing that Varna was based on the innate qualities of man’ (Meena Dhanda, ‘Anti-Casteism and Misplaced Nativism: Mapping Caste as an Aspect of Race’, Radical Philosophy 2, no. February 2014 (2015): 5.).
51. Javed Majeed, Nation and Region in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India (London/New York: Routledge, 2018).
conceptions of India, as well as ideas of cultural connection more specifically, was profoundly influenced by these interactions. But how did the pandits’ influence manifest itself, how did they exert their power, and what did they themselves think about ideas of connection with the British? These questions are important as we now consider the contours of the relationship between these two groups, and their mutual, if different, refusals to conceptualise each other as mutual Aryans.

As mentioned previously, pandits, up until the latter decades of the 18th century, had as a general rule been reluctant to share their knowledge with Company officials. Nathaniel Halhed, the East India Company writer who translated the seminal ‘A Code of Gentoo Law’ in 1776, complained of the difficulty to get pandits to teach him Sanskrit; ‘[they] were to a man resolute in rejecting all solicitations for instruction in this dialect’. Similarly, Warren Hastings persuaded the renowned pandit Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa to be his pandit only once he promised him land rather than monetary payment, with land considered less impure to receive from a mleccha.

William Jones was deployed to Calcutta in his capacity as lawyer and reputable linguist, with extensive knowledge of Persian. In 1785, he received the Manavadharmashastra, the Vedic law code of the School of Manu, and decided to learn Sanskrit. Initially, Jones’ decision to learn the language was primarily based on it being a tool to better be able to adjudicate; he didn’t trust the judgement of the pandits at the Bengal Presidency Courts. However, once he started learning the language, Jones is said to have become increasingly taken with the intellectual and aesthetic tradition of what he understood to be Hindu India, going on to translate many of the key plays and works of poetry in the Sanskrit tradition.

Jones took 3 months off every year from his job with the East India Company, and every year from 1785 onwards, he spent these months in Nadiya Sanskrit College, studying Sanskrit. Soon, he met John Shore’s Brahmin interlocutor, Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, who became Jones’ primary pandit. He assisted Jones on his translations, compared nātakas (Indian dramas) to English plays in their conversations, and recommended Shakuntala as a supreme Sanskrit play. Tarkavāgīśa had initially turned down a position

52. Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race, 23.
53. Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race; Rocher, ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ’.
54. Claire Gallien, ‘From Tension to Cooperation: Complex Interactions Between British Orientalists and Indian Scholars in Calcutta, 1784-1794’, 2008.
55. Rocher, ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ’.
56. At Nadiya Sanskrit College, a primary centre of Sanskrit learning at the time, Jones initially failed in recruiting a Brahmin pandit because of the potential ritual pollution associated with fraternising with mlecchas. In the beginning, then, he had to make due with Ramalocānā, a non-Brahmin pandit. However, these attitudes changed over time, and two years later, Jones reported in a letter that the Raja of Nadiya and his court pandits had made him a “Hindu of the Military tribe, which is next in rank to the Brahmanical” (Gallien, ‘From Tension to Cooperation: Complex Interactions Between British Orientalists and Indian Scholars in Calcutta, 1784-1794’, 6).
at the Supreme Court, telling Governor General Hastings that he couldn’t accept it, even at a doubled salary, because of religious reasons.  

In his Third Anniversary Discourse at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1786, three years after his arrival in Bengal, William Jones demonstrated a linguistic connection between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek. In what was to become his most notable contribution to the history of India-Europe connection, Jones spoke of ‘an immemorial affinity’ between Hindus, Persians, and Europeans, positing that the inhabitants of these countries derived from a singular, central location. Despite Aryanism not being mentioned in the Discourse, the establishment of an official, linguistic connection between India and Europe would remain the key interpretational frame for understanding Aryanism in the ensuing decades.

No Aryans in Bengal?

My own archival research has revealed that the concept of Aryanism does not feature in any substantial way in any of the major primary or secondary sources on British Orientalist scholarship in the subcontinent in this period. This includes the correspondences and personal papers of prominent British Orientalists such as William Jones and others. This makes Jones’ Third Anniversary Discourse perhaps the most central moment in which the absence of Aryanism in this period revealed itself. Strikingly, Jones did not contextualise his discovery of the linguistic affinity and the idea of an ‘original language’ in relation to already existing discussions in Europe on Aryanism; discussions he himself had participated in up until his own arrival in Bengal. This absence runs counter to how most of the secondary literature considers the India-Europe linguistic affinity, uncovered by Jones, as the constitutive starting-point for Aryanism in the modern period.

This ambivalence was part of a larger balancing act for the British Orientalists in this period of early colonisation, where their discourse on Indian culture and

57. Rocher, ‘The Career of Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, an Eighteenth-Century Pandit in British Employ’.
58. Today, we know this linguistic connection as the Indo-European language group.
59. App, ‘William Jones’s Ancient Theology’, 45.
60. I spent six weeks (29 April-11 June, 2019) in the India Office Records and Private Papers archives at the British Library (which details the administration of the East India Company and the pre-1947 government of India) trying to find mentions of Aryanism. I failed to find any such mentions. I contend that even if further research would reveal mentions of the concept in the Company period, my research has at the very least revealed a discrepancy between the secondary literature’s centring of the concept, and its lack of centrality in the archive. I am grateful to Professor Phiroze Vasunia and Professor Rosane Rocher for help in this regard.
61. Phiroze Vasunia, ‘Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism: On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India’, in Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology, eds. V Zajko and H Hoyle (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 179–91; Williams Jones, The Letters of Sir William Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Garland Cannon, Sir William Jones: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources (Amsterdams: Benjamins, 1979); Trautmann, Aryans and British India; Figueira, Aryans, Jews, Brahmins.
62. Ballantyne, Orientalism and Race; Thapar, ‘The Theory of Aryan Race and India’.
civilisational history veered near a language of ambivalent recognition, all the while stopping short of articulating this as a more fundamental, and Aryan, connection. After effectively fighting off French, Portuguese and Danish competition, Britain was, as the 18th century came to a close, the reigning colonial power in India. For the British, the question of cultural and civilisational connectedness carried with it a very explicit materiality: the legitimacy of the colonial project. Given the conspicuous absence of the word in archival material from this period, I argue that an idea of an inherent, Aryan cultural connection was too destabilising for the nascent, imperial project. How could the British justify ruling over people who might; civilisationally, linguistically, be uncomfortably similar to themselves? Hence, I posit, British Orientalists abstained from using the concept.

The discussions in this section has shown us the contours of one of Aryanism’s most salient features, namely its articulations as ambivalent connection. Despite the absence of the concept in British Orientalist scholarship, the British still availed themselves of a language of cultural respect and admiration. These ambivalences are illustrative of its future articulations, anxiously balancing ideas of connection with those of civilisational rejection, difference and hierarchy.

A World Outside āryāvarta? Self-Universalisation and Disinterest in the Vedic Tradition

So far, we have seen that the absence of the use of the concept of Aryanism, and the ambivalent discourse of cultural respect and proximity propagated by the British Orientalists in its stead, was used to negotiate both their relationship with India in general, and the pandits in particular. While the Vedic tradition, and its contemporary pandit proponents to a certain extent was seen as worthy of cultural consideration, British Orientalism of the latter decades of the 18th century was ultimately reflective of its own, overarching political agenda, namely the colonisation of the subcontinent. For the pandits, understanding ideas of India-Europe connection relied not only on the changing socio-economic changes buttressed by the expansion of British domination in India. For them, the Vedic tradition of ‘self-universalisation’ and disinterest in the world outside of the subcontinent made them sceptical of any real engagement with ‘outsiders’.

Historically, the upper-caste Vedic tradition has largely been disinterested in the extra-Sanskritic world. In Vedic scripture and historiography, as well as that of the larger tradition of Hinduism as we know it today, there is little mention of major, non-Hindu oriented historical events in India. Similarly, there is little discussion or engagement with Islamic or Christian theology and doctrine; traditions with a centuries-long presence in the subcontinent. In this way, Halbfass understands the orthodox Vedic relationship to

63. Halbfass, India and Europe.
64. This includes such significant historical events such as the invasion of Alexander the Great in 326 BC and the Islamic Mughal period, lasting in the subcontinent from roughly the mid-16th till the mid-18th century.
the world outside dharmic India as ‘a tradition of silence and evasion’65, marked by ‘passive intolerance’ of the world beyond āryavārta.66

Instead, Vedic, upper-caste ontology is principally internally oriented. Here, the subcontinent as a territory is understood to uphold the sacredness of the Aryans, the progenitors of the Vedas. Staying within the geographical territory of āryāvarta meant upholding ones’ ritual status. The presence of mlecchas residing in āryāvarta was conversely seen to weaken the dharmic norm of the territory.

Strikingly, as the British were moulding their own ambivalent conceptions of who they were in relation to ‘the colonial other’, the Aryan Vedic world-view was oriented around the insularity and incomparable nature of its own tradition. The idea of connectedness; that there would be a shared civilisational link between Aryan Brahmans and British mlecchas through the idea of India-Europe Aryanism would presumably have seemed preposterous. This alerts us to the fundamental paradox of Aryanism in the late 18th century. The British articulated an ambivalent discourse of cultural respect, as part of a wider European discourse of India-Europe connection, all the while stopping short of invoking Aryanism as a concept. The pandits’ Vedantic tradition, however, centred the Aryan as a figure denoting unrivalled and exclusive cultural, scriptural and linguistic authority.

The Aryan and Its ‘Others’: Caste and Hierarchy in Pre-Colonial India

Exclusive cultural, linguistic and scriptural authority was not only enforced in upper-caste interpretations of the outside world; it was also reserved for its internal ‘others’. Prompted by interventions by prominent, critical scholars working on the material and ideational morphologies of caste,67 as well as those by scholars of India’s early modern period,68 this section considers a longer history of power and domination in the subcontinent. It asks specifically how Aryanism as a concept is connected with pre-colonial, upper-caste monopolisation of Sanskrit knowledge and knowledge production.

The idea of the Aryan is a core, constituting element of the upper-caste, Brahmanical Sanskrit cultural and religious order. After migrating from the north-west into the subcontinent, the Aryans’ central concern was to maintain their own ritual purity in a new homeland. This was to be done through language, ritual hierarchy, and a philosophical doctrine of exclusivity. The Aryans were foreigners; conquerors who saw the dāsyas, whose land they invaded, as outside their community.69

65. Halbfass, India and Europe, 182.
66. The geography of āryāvarta roughly maps onto present-day North India, with the Vindhya mountains in west-central India as its southern perimeter.
67. I draw particular inspiration from scholars such as G. Aloysius, Meena Dhanda, Guru Gopal, and Sharmila Rege.
68. Principally Sheldon Pollock and Romila Thapar.
69. Thapar, ‘The Theory of Aryan Race and India’; Romila Thapar, ‘The Image of the Barbarian in Early India’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 13, no. 4 (1971): 376–407.
Scholars argue that the institution of the caste system originated here, in the Vedic Aryans meeting with the dāsyas. The fourfold caste system with the Brahmin at the top designated the lower-caste śūdra to subservience. The avarna (now referred to as Dalits or ‘untouchables’) was considered completely outside of the varna system. The subcontinent’s history of caste hierarchy, divinely sanctioned though the Vedas, instituted, over thousands of years, a system of physical, ritual and epistemological violence. Aloysius alerts us to the particularly potent confluence between culture and power in the subcontinent. Here, the monopoly over knowledge production through the denial of Sanskrit literacy to the lower castes, as well as the monopolisation of Vedic rituals, were particularly striking features of this structure of domination.

Pollock suggests that the system of caste inequality in the subcontinent preceding British rule must be understood as an expression of what Edward Said considers the knowledge/power nexus. This is because of the way in which caste-based social stratification was so intimately tied to regimes of knowledge production, and control of these. Further, he argues that a more committed consideration of the continuities between a pre-colonial India and the British Company period would reveal a ‘process of hierarchising textualization, a regime of truth, in precolonial [India] comparable to that we find in the early Raj’.

Without going into more detailed discussions about potential analogies between British and Brahmanical power and domination, it is clear that, while British colonial rule in India would alter, and importantly codify, caste hierarchies, it did not constitute its inception in the subcontinent. Pollock argues that the pre-existence of a similar ideological system of hierarchy and control over knowledge production among indigenous and colonial elites may have been a significant, contributing factor to the effectiveness with which England consolidated and maintained its rule in India.

70. Thapar, ‘The Image of the Barbarian in Early India’; Doniger, *The Hindus - An Alternative History*; G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).
71. “the one and only dharma of the śūdra is obedience ( . . . ) Whatever wealth a śūdra has he should give it to the ārya ( . . . ) [a] śūdra even if capable must never have a surplus of wealth, for a śūdra with wealth will injure brahmans” (Pollock citing the dharmashastra in Breckenridge and Veer, *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament*, 100).
72. The term Dalit is a modern one, only used from the late colonial period onwards. In the Vedic period, they were referred to as avarna, literally meaning ‘without varna’.
73. B. R. Ambedkar, *Who Were The Shudras?* (vol. 53, 1946); B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, ed. S. Anand (London: Verso, 2016). B. R. Ambedkar, *Who Were the Shudras?* (New Delhi: New Delhi Samyak Prakashan, 2011).
74. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*.
75. Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*.
76. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Breckenridge and Veer, *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament*.
77. Pollock in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 100.
78. Dhanda, ‘Anti-Castism and Misplaced Nativism’; Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*. 
This genealogical reading of Aryanism as it was articulated in pre-colonial India reveals the ways in which ideas of hierarchy and difference were constitutive of the concept, also before the British arrived. By tracing the genealogy of Aryanism and its association with questions of temporal continuities of systems of domination and oppression in the subcontinent, we are confronted with the granular workings of knowledge production under different, yet similar, systems of domination. These considerations show how, when privileging the vantage point of India’s marginalised caste communities, it becomes possible to interrogate how pre-existing notions of hierarchy, and upper-caste monopolisation of knowledge production related to Aryan status, intersected with the emerging British colonial system of knowledge production.

The present discussion have wider purchase for on-going debates on temporality within postcolonial IR. Indeed, if we were to start the analytical clock at the moment where the West meets ‘the rest’, here through early British colonisation of the subcontinent, we would neglect Aryanism’s pre-colonial iterations, ignoring its longer history of domination in the subcontinent. A more entangled, temporally expansive examination of Aryanism reveals the interconnections between different ‘morphologies of domination’, expressly that of Sanskrit Brahmanism and British colonialism. These entanglements are vital to consider when we in the article’s last section turn our attention to contemporary links between a Hindu and a Western Right.

‘The Pure Descent of the Brahman’: Racialisation and Inter-Elite Consolidation Under the Raj

In order to make further sense of contemporary articulations of connections between Hindu nationalists and a Western Right, we now turn briefly to Aryanism as it was articulated in India’s later colonial period. Here, Aryanism, as a concept denoting connection between upper-caste Hindu elites and British colonialists, turned more overt and explicit. By the mid-19th century, the origins of the Aryans had shifted, in the European imagination, from India to Europe. In line with an increasingly rigid discourse of colonial, racial hierarchy, brought out as part of the legitimating discourse of the formal colonisation of India, Aryanism became European, and ‘white’. At the same time, particular sections of the Indian population; Brahmin, upper-caste Aryans, were increasingly considered ‘white’. How do we account for these paradoxical shifts in Aryanism’s conceptual articulations; its racialisation and its increasingly explicit association with upper-caste Hindus, and their ties to Europe?

79. Dipesh Chakrabarty, * Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

80. North America was equally seen as a territory of “hope” for the Aryan race in this time. For a discussion of Aryanism’s role in the evolution of the immigration policy regime of the United States, see Lopez, *White by Law.*
Without discounting the complex contingencies of these historical changes, I argue that there are two historical-political developments of particular relevance for our genealogical discussion of Aryanism in the years of formal colonisation. Considering Aryanism in the post 1857 years, we now focus on the consolidation of colonial knowledge production on India in 19th-century European universities, and the domination of Hindu elites within the colonial administration.

One of the most significant developments in the genealogy of Aryanism in the 19th century was the consolidation of the university as a key site of European knowledge production. Here, the emergence of the field of Indology within these institutions is of particular importance. Building on the amateur knowledge production of Company Orientalism as well as that of European missionary circles, British, French and German universities increasingly fused the previous century’s focus on comparative philology and religion with emerging 19th-century academic pursuits of ‘race science’. Nascent ideas of ‘race’, in previous centuries in Europe used to denote a wide range of community designations; culture, language, religion, now increasingly became cemented around binary, biological difference, ordered hierarchically with the ‘white’ European at the top.

The ‘biologisation’ of racial difference had a profound impact on the emerging academic field of Indology. Specifically, this meant that the lingering emphasis on the ‘immutability of language’, so prominent in 18th-century colonial knowledge production on India, and associated with figures like William Jones, became increasingly tied to an idea of a racial connection between Aryan Europeans and Aryan Indians. The German Indologist Max Müller was most notable for his coining of the term ‘Aryan race’. Referring to his linguistic research in 1853, he wrote about the enduring, yet paradoxical, connected nature of language and ‘race’: ‘Though the historian may shake his head, though the physiologist may doubt, and the poet scorn the idea, all must yield before the facts furnished by language’. The entanglements of ‘race’ and language were now increasingly a fact, with Aryanism as its most prominent example.

Despite their increasing emphasis on Europe-India connections articulated as an Aryan race, it was clear to prominent Indologists such as Müller, E.B. Cowell and Monier Williams that the category of the Indian Aryan did not include all Indians. Indeed, the Indian Aryans were the Brahmin Hindu: ‘while the Hindus are the lineal descendents [sic] of the Aryan conquerors, and no flaw as far back as tradition extends has ever sullied the pure descent of the [sic] of a B(r)ahman’.

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81. It is important to note that while this article focuses on the role of ‘race science’ as the emerging consensus of European, colonial racism in the 19th century, it was by far the only stream of thought associated with understanding human, hierarchical difference. For example, conceptions of environmental differences and its relationship to ‘race’ was also influential in this period, having a significant impact on 19th century ideas of Aryanism. For more on this, see Ashutosh, ‘Mapping Race and Environment’.
82. Olender, The Languages of Paradise.
83. Joan Leopold, ‘British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870’, The English Historical Review 89, no. 352 (1974): 580.
84. Leopold, ‘British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870’, 580.
85. Thapar, ‘The Theory of Aryan Race and India’.
86. E. B. Cowell in Leopold, ‘British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870’, 584.
These scholarly debates in Indology departments at central European universities had a significant, if ambivalent, impact on British public discourse. While the concept was little used in official reports and in minutes taken from debates in Parliament, discussions on Aryanism as India-Europe connection had, by the mid-19th century, moved into mainstream, public debate both in India and in Britain.87

It seems that, claims made by the emerging academic discipline of European Indology made explicit what had until then been more implicit: the exclusive connection between upper caste Hindus, and white Europeans.88 As opposed to the period of Company Orientalism where the connection was imagined without the explicit invocation of Aryanism, the idea of hierarchical interconnection now increasingly solidified clearly as exactly that; as Aryanism. With British colonialism now being an institutional fact, it was now a concept in use among British and Hindu elites, precisely because it more comfortably stratified a particular section of the Indian population.

New Vocabularies of Hierarchy

So far we’ve seen how European institutions of academic knowledge production increasingly stabilised the notion of an Aryan connection expressly between Hindu, upper-caste elites and Aryan Europeans. In the post 1857 Raj years, Aryanism became a potent political currency also for Hindu elites in India, navigating their own position in a country now formally colonised by the British. Here, the entanglement between the racialisation of Aryanism in Europe through academic knowledge production, and their own internally elevated position in a caste system increasingly codified and formalised through colonial rule,89 provided a new vocabulary of power. In parallel with the racialisation and simultaneous stratification of the upper-caste Brahmin as Aryan, Aryanism in its post 1857 iterations needs to be understood as intimately tied to the assimilationist, political efforts of Hindu elites. Here, the Aryan race denoted an upper-caste Hindu elite’s connection to a Europe increasingly understood as ‘white’.

These new, overtly racialised conceptions of an India-Europe, inter-elite Aryan race were however not fixed or straightforward. Because British colonialism by its very nature never allowed for equality between colonial ‘master’ and ‘subject’, new Indian groups of exclusion were needed in order for upper-caste Hindus to leverage the concept for material and symbolic gain. To them, the adoption of the Aryan race as a narrative of inter-elite connection with the British seemed a convenient strategy through which to negotiate the division of inter-communal power within Indian, colonial society.90 As the 19th century drew to a close, it was in particular upper-caste anxieties connected to the growing political mobilisation of various groups of subalterns; notably Muslims and Dalits, that contributed to the consolidation of their interests. In this period, Aryanism enabled a convenient bifurcation for these elites, where proximity with the British was

87. Leopold, ‘British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870’.
88. Poliakov, The Aryan Myth.
89. Jaffrelot, _India’s Silent Revolution_; Anupama Rao, _The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India_ (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).
90. Leopold, ‘British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870’.
sought in tandem with efforts to increasingly construct Muslims and Dalits as ‘outsiders’ to the Indian, colonial state.\(^91\)

The present discussion has shown how a centuries’ long Vedic, upper-caste tradition of disinterest in the outside world changed as the imperial relationship with Britain became more formalised. By the early decades of the 20th century, ideas of caste hierarchy and the idea of Aryan, racial supremacy had congealed into the nascent, ideological project of Hindu nationalism.\(^92\) Dominated by Hindu upper-castes, this political movement for Hindu supremacy has in the last century established itself as the dominant political force in India. While the explanations for its ascendency are manifold,\(^93\) the present genealogy have shown how key features of its political formation is tied to Aryanism. Albeit in ambivalent ways, cross-civilisational ideas of connection with Europe provided legitimacy to Hindu nationalism’s ideas of linguistic, cultural and racial supremacy.

**Contemporary Aryan Entanglements**

Postcolonial India, once the ‘Jewel in the Crown’ of the British Empire, is, under the current leadership of the Hindu nationalist party the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), increasingly described as an imperial power in its own right. Its sanctioning of mob lynchings and persecution of the country’s Muslims and lower caste populations,\(^94\) as well as its escalation of the historic, military occupation of India’s only majority Muslim state, Jammu & Kashmir, and its attacks on Indian universities,\(^95\) has increasingly been seen by Indian dissidents to exude all the markings of authoritarian

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91. Jaffrelot, *India’s Silent Revolution*; Javed Majeed, *Nation and Region in Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India*, Routledge (London/New York: Routledge, 2018); Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*.
92. Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*.
93. Subrata Chattopadhyay Banerjee, ‘Brahmo Samaj As An Actor in the Dissemination of Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT) in India’, *International Journal of Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2016): 19–59; Mark Singleton, ‘Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century’, *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 2 (2007): 613–27; Benjamin Zachariah, ‘The Invention of Hinduism for National Use’, in *Playing the Nation Game* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2011); Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*.
94. Shakuntala Banaji and Ramnath Bhat, ‘WhatsApp Vigilantes: An Exploration of Citizen Reception and Circulation of WhatsApp Misinformation Linked to Mob Violence in India’, *LSE Media & Communication* (London, 2020). Available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/projects/WhatsApp-Misinformation-Report.pdf; Arundhati Roy, ‘India: Intimations of an Ending: The Rise of Modi and the Hindu Far Right’, *The Nation*, 22 November 2019. Available at: https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/arundhati-roy-assam-modi/.
95. Akanksha Mehta, ‘Pedagogy and Violence: Mapping the Everyday Politics of Hindutva’, *The Polis Project*, 7 February 2020. Available at: https://thepolisproject.com/pedagogy-and-violence-mapping-the-everyday-politics-of-hindutva/#.X6rRsWgzbIU.
Simultaneously, the international dimensions of these domestic developments are becoming increasingly apparent. The growing intellectual and material exchanges between Western far-right parties and movements, and the Hindu nationalist government and larger ideological project of *Hindutva* (*Hinduness*) fascism is of mounting academic interest. This literature, while gesturing towards historical and ideological inter-connections, is still in the process of grappling fully with the historical and ideational roots of these contemporary entanglements. In the final part of this article, I offer two reflections for further thinking about these questions.

First, drawing on my arguments about Aryanism as inter-elite entanglement, I argue that there is scope to further analyse in which ways these contemporary manifestations of cooperation between a Hindu and Western Right are not, as often assumed, merely strategic or instrumental from the side of the Hindu Right. Neither can these connections be understood as simple appropriation of Hindu ideas and ideology by a Western Right. Examining the historical and ideational lineages of these contemporary entanglements reveals the tension between connection and rejection; a prolonged state of mixed feelings, running through the history of this relationship. How can racial and casteist hierarchies be imagined as commensurate? And how do distinct systems of reactionary thought, often insisting on their own parochial supremacy, develop notions of solidarity? Aryanism has continuously brought these questions to the fore; in Vedic India, in the British colonial period, and again now, at a global historical moment of reactionary, political resurgence.

Aryanism remains a key metaphor for ideas of racial connection in contemporary, global formations of the Right. The fact that a key concept of ‘whiteness’, in historical as well as current, racial ideology, originated outside of ‘white’ Europe points to one of the key paradoxes of Aryanism. This article has attempted to understand important aspects of this paradox, yet more discussion and collective thinking is needed to grapple with these questions more comprehensively.

When the connections discussed in this article seem perplexing to us as IR scholars, it might be because of a need for the discipline to take even more seriously the entangled dynamics of knowledge production on political concepts, and material and ideational connections, produced in and through the colonial encounter. These entangled, historical confrontations and interconnections are not the result of uni-directional, epistemic influence travelling from the colonial metropole to the colonial periphery. Rather, they are processes fundamentally influenced by political dynamics and, in the case of Aryanism,
forms of hierarchy that preceded that of British colonialism. By offering a more granular account of these historic connections, contemporary entanglements of reactionary solidarity and identification between political forces in the Global North and Global South might not seem so perplexing after all.

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