



ANGLO-INDIANS QUA “VARIABLE POPULATIONS”:
CEDRIC DOVER AND THE VACUITY OF RACE IN COLONIAL INDIA*

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ABSTRACT

Debojoy Chanda makes an examination of the work of early twentieth century Anglo-Indian social scientist Cedric Dover. He posits that Dover’s anti-racist writing was a clarion call to Anglo-Indians and those interacting with them. Chanda argues that Dover identifies the supremacist nature of the British in their dealing with Anglo-Indians, based on their flawed racist thinking. Drawing on Dover, Chanda concludes with a more generalised and global call against racist thinking and the prejudice that accompanies it.

In this paper, I examine a teleology that Anglo-Indian anti-racism activist Cedric Dover had carved out for the emancipation of Anglo-Indians from white racial supremacy as manifested by the British in colonial India. The construction of this teleology was, Dover believed, a political necessity for Anglo-Indians, the British having projected an aura of supremacy upon themselves by carving Anglo-Indians as racially ‘lacking.’

What I find compelling about Dover’s teleology is that it sees discourses of Aryan supremacy informing British constructs of race in India. In other words, conceptions of Aryan supremacy may well have shaped the British othering of Anglo-Indians. Little

wonder that the telos Dover calls for, involves peoples of the world rising above the category of race.

Best known today as the initiator of a transnational anti-racism collective consisting of prominent African American Civil Rights activists, Cedric Dover was born of an English father and an Indian mother in Calcutta in 1904. As part of his activism, he produced a spate of treatises against racism. One of these treatises, *Hell in the Sunshine* (1943), was set against the backdrop of the Second World War. Part of Dover’s attempts to agglomerate an international collective of mixed races that could join the Allied efforts in the war against Nazi supremacy, *Hell in the Sunshine* critiqued “Nazi racialists” for their location of coloured races at different levels below the top of the “Aryan family tree” (Dover, 1943, p. 12). Dover proleptically explained in a 1939 treatise, *Know This of Race*, that by the “Aryan family tree,” he was referring to the Nazis’ self-projection in terms of racial supremacy—a supremacy founded on a stratification of ‘lesser’ bodies that were claimed to be ‘degenerate’ because intermixed (p. 31). Such a prejudice against intermixture tied up with the Nazi belief that Nordo-Semitic miscegenation produced bodies that were ‘less’ than those of German Aryans, the bodies in question being, of course, those of Jews. This belief found unsurprising expression in *Mein Kampf* [*My Struggle*], the 1925 autobiography of Adolf Hitler who claimed that the large-scale annihilation of Jews was necessary for an originalist reification of the racial supremacy of German Aryans, Jewish bodies having lost their supremacy, epitomizing intermixture between Aryans and ‘non-Aryans’ as they did. To quote a representative passage from *Mein Kampf*,

No more than Nature desires the mating of weaker with stronger individuals, even less does she desire the blending of a higher with a lower race, since, if she did, her whole work of higher breeding...might be ruined...[I]n every mingling of Aryan blood with that of lower peoples the result was the end of the...[Aryan race]. (Hitler, 1925)

Alluding to Hitler’s “Nordic Utopia” of supremacy that was opposed to intermixed bodies (1943, p. 12), Dover (1939) wrote in *Know This of Race* that “German and English imperialists” had conjunctively “taught the world to condemn [Anglo-Indians] above all others” (p. 31). This claim, however sweeping, finds tenable validation if we examine the above quote from *Mein Kampf* in tandem with, say, a passage from an anonymously written imperialist article published in the *Calcutta Review* in 1858. According to the article,

[t]he...hand of nature having separated and dissociated the black race from the white, terrible and portentous effects might be expected to flow from their unnatural union. It is feared that in the fatal *mélange* which would thus be produced, the European stock would shortly lose all its virtue and pre-eminence. (as cited in Mizutani, 2011, p. 31)

The “fatal *mélange*” refers to Anglo-Indians born of Indo-European unions.

The parallels between the passage from the *Calcutta Review* and the quote from *Mein Kampf* are unmistakable to the careful reader. Additionally, the year of the publication of the article in the *Calcutta Review* is significant: 1858 was the imperialist annus miserabilis that saw the British officially disown Anglo-Indians and disaffiliate them from claims to white European stock because they, unlike the British, were apparently ‘degenerate,’ thanks to the Indo-European intermixture determining their bodies (Hawes, 1996, p. 1-20). In other words, if Jews were the intermixed and tautologically ‘degenerate’ canker in a Germany overdetermined by Aryanism, Anglo-Indians occupied a similar position in British India; both were accordingly disowned by their racially ‘pure’ European counterparts. While this is a reasonable elucidation of Dover’s statement about German and English imperialists coming together to teach the world to condemn Anglo-Indians, it only begins to take historical value when one examines three moments of discursive exchange between the British and the Germans. The three moments I speak of hinge on notions of racialization and bodily supremacy.

The first such moment sees British Orientalist philology forging the colonial study of Sanskrit texts to ‘know’ Hindu law, religion, and historiography in colonial India. In this moment, thus, philology becomes a means for the British to exercise power/knowledge over the default Hindu colonized subject. The British viewed such an exercise as necessary because Sanskrit texts helped them ‘traditionalize’ the colonized subject into ‘backwardness,’ thus justifying the white man’s burden in India (Pollock, 1993, p. 97). This philological project, inaugurated in the eighteenth century, involved figures such as Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed and, most importantly, William Jones who classified Sanskrit as the mother language that bore out affinities between Greek, Latin, Gothic, Celtic, and Old Persian (Trautmann, 1997, p. 38). According to Jones, these affinities proved the languages to be co-descendants of an originalist Proto-Indo-European language—a language whose speakers could therefore be said to bear racial kinship. Jones, in short, made language a lens to

racialize bodies, the supreme among these bodies being, of course, those of the British (Trautmann, 1997, p. 35-38).

It is important to note that German romanticist Friedrich von Schlegel and his brother, August Wilhelm, came under the sway of this British branch of philology circa 1803-04 (Pollock, 1993, p. 80-81). Borrowing the notion of Sanskrit as a mother language proving racial kinship, multiple German philologists subsequently propounded the theory that Aryans qua the originalist Caucasian speakers of the Proto-Indo-European language, had divided themselves into two groups. One group lived in Northwestern Europe, while the other group travelled to settle near the Indus river circa the second millennium BCE (Sugirtharajah, 2003, p. 52). This narrative of the splitting of Aryans into two groups assumed eugenic proportions among multiple German philologists, the most prominent of these philologists having been Indologist and Sanskrit scholar Max Muller. According to Muller, judging by factors of linguistic commonality, the Aryans who had headed in the direction of the Indus had vanquished the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. This defeat, argued Muller, was not too difficult to accomplish: the original inhabitants resembled the “Negro” in physical and intellectual type, being therefore ‘savage’ and, by extension, bodily ‘degenerate’ (Trautmann, 1997, p. 175). In Muller’s position, as in British philology, we thus find an alignment of language and racialization—except that this alignment now develops an ominous proto-eugenic shadow. The shadow expresses itself most pronouncedly in Muller’s 1859 treatise *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*. In this treatise, Muller (1859) suggests that language helps locate racial supremacy in opposition to ‘degeneracy;’ ergo, the Proto-Indo-European language can retrospectively situate and laud ‘pure’ Aryans as the group that “civilised the whole of Europe” thanks to its racial superiority (p. 12). However, asserts Muller, the Aryans who had travelled to the Indian subcontinent from Northwestern Europe had bred bodies that were ‘less’ than those of their German kinsmen. Such an outcome apparently resulted because these ‘lesser’ bodies had been born of the Aryans’ interracial copulation with the original “uncivilised” inhabitants of the subcontinent, being thus defined by intermixture and, tautologically, by the “degradation” of Aryan bodies (Muller, 1859, p. 17). In a second moment of discursive exchange, then, German Orientalist philology, via Muller, added a eugenic padding to the pre-existing linkage between language and race, with the British inheriting this linkage.

The eugenic baggage that German philology added, threw the British into a quandary: as originalist inhabitants of Northwestern Europe like the Germans, if they, as with the Indian subjects they had colonized, were of Aryan descent, "the same blood was running in [the English soldier's] veins and in the veins of the dark Bengalese," as Muller pointed out (1859, p. 13). The British in India perceived Muller's argument as a political threat to their continued colonization of the country: after all, if, thanks to their common descent, the colonized subject began to view himself at par with his colonizer, racial difference as the discursive bedrock of British colonialism could totter. In this setting of racial difference, the British viewed Anglo-Indians as a hazard: Anglo-Indian bodies, after all, proved Muller's postulate that the same blood *could* run in the veins of both British Aryans and 'other' subjects (Sinha, 1995, p. 20; Figueira, 2002, p. 141). As if pre-empting this danger, the British had begun portraying Anglo-Indians as 'degenerate' years before the publication of Muller's *History*. This portrayal reduced Anglo-Indians to an overwhelming question—the Eurasian Question, as Dover (1930) points out (p. 115).

With the British largely viewing them as having been born out of wedlock via a "system of concubinage" that was practiced by the white European militia in India, Anglo-Indians, since at least 1818, found themselves sweepingly deemed as the offspring of syphilitic Indian prostitutes—a point that Dover (1939) hints at when speaking of the Eurasian Question (p. 31). In keeping with this belief, the British declared Anglo-Indians to possess 'degenerate'/hypersexual bodies defined by lack—the lack of whiteness. That Anglo-Indians were not white enough was twisted into producing the paradigm that they not 'British' enough to possess the imperialist spirit of India's colonizers (Ballhatchet, 1980, p. 34-35; Mallampalli, 2011, p. 190-94; Hawes, 1996, p. 8; Mizutani, 2011, p. 120). Once the First War of Indian Independence broke out in 1857 and was quelled in 1858, the British decided to take no more chances that could jeopardize their political standing founded on racial difference in India: using the paradigm of white=British, they disowned Anglo-Indians' claims to Britishness and, by extension, to racial supremacy in India (Mizutani, 2011, p. 19). This disownment, interestingly, came a year *before* Muller suggested that the Aryan settlers in India had given birth to an intermixed race defined by "degradation." Did the British disaffiliation of Anglo-Indians, then, inform Muller's theorization of eugenically 'degenerate' Aryan

bodies? If so, we can perhaps locate a third moment of discursive exchange between the British and the Germans—an exchange that yet again centered upon notions of bodily supremacy. In this third moment, British colonialism, having helped produce German Orientalist philology, perhaps consolidated it by disenfranchising Anglo-Indians. *This* would then be the decisive moment of German and English imperialists coming together to condemn Anglo-Indian bodies. By this logic, Anglo-Indians perhaps embodied the birth pangs of Jews as the intermixed canker in Nazi Germany. Such, I would suggest, was the backdrop against which Dover aligned Anglo-Indians and Jews as victims of Aryanism and its eugenic trappings.

Dover’s initial anti-racist literary output ironically saw in him a votary of eugenics and thus of a ‘pure’/‘white’/Aryan race, even as he was simultaneously struggling to dispel the shadow of Aryanism. In his first noteworthy book *Cimmerii, or Eurasians and Their Future* (1929), Dover, among other things, conducted a forced misreading of Indian statistician and anthropometrist Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis’ 1927 paper “Analysis of Race-Mixture in Bengal” to reductively prove that Anglo-Indians were “a more competent vehicle of humanity”—a vehicle that could not be claimed to be ‘degenerate’ because “there [was] little to choose between them and Europeans” (p. 34). The paradox inherent to this claim, reeking of discourses of racial supremacy, was perhaps not lost upon a Dover cleft in twain: unsurprisingly, *Cimmerii* also saw Dover (1929) disclaiming philology as a eugenic prism by arguing that “barriers of language and [consequent] prejudice” needed to be broken down (p. 14). Ultimately, proclaimed Dover (1929) in *Cimmerii*, though the Eurasian Question molded Anglo-Indians as ‘degenerate’ “outcasts” born sans wedlock and whiteness, the fact remained that outcasts “exist in all countries” (p. 20). By my reading, Dover’s “outcast” was homophonically the ‘out-caste’ as a universal figure: like peoples inhabiting all countries of the world, the Anglo-Indian was an out-caste in that he was not of ‘full caste’ qua ‘pure’ race. As Dover would go on to famously write in 1939 in *Know This of Race*, “there are no half-castes because there are no full castes” (p. 31). This conclusion and the need to rise above the limiting and misleading category of race dawned on Dover in 1935 when he realized how dangerously eugenics via Mendelian genetics contributed to perceptions of racially associated traits as “dominant” or “recessive”—or, to put it differently, as ‘supreme’ or ‘degenerate’ (Huxley and Haddon, 1935, p. 65; Slate, 2014, p. 15). Grasping how such perceptions consolidated

prejudices against intermixed figures such as African Americans, Jews, and, of course, Anglo-Indians, Dover wrote in his 1937 book *Half-Caste* that Anglo-Indians were one of countless "variable populations...in which innumerable original features remain as heritable units, which may reappear in later generations, or be fortuitously recombined to produce new types" (p. 20). Ergo, the "genetic segregation" of the 'Aryan' kind in no way ensured that a 'purebred' Aryan would not grow woolly hair, perhaps proving his "Negro" descent in the process (Dover, 1937, p. 20). Dover (1937) thus indicated that observable physical characteristics such as whiteness, claimed to be indicative of a 'pure' race, were not commensurate with an individual's genetic makeup (p. 20-21). The argument helped Dover render 'race' a category in a state of deferral. Pushing this position further, Dover (1939) wrote in *Know This of Race* that because "all races are mixed races...you cannot draw the line where a race begins or ends" (p. 17). This conclusion, Dover (1939) stated, reduced "all men [to] mongrels" (p. 17). The "mongrel," of course, recalls the 'out-caste' as a universal figure.

Once the Second World War broke out and the German Aryan marginalization and extermination of Jews became visible, Dover took his thought a step further in *Hell in the Sunshine* (1943), mapping all mankind as an ethical totality. This totality that Dover (1943) termed "mongrelism," was founded on his conception of the "mongrel" as a universal figure (p. 136). Mongrelism, indicated Dover, was bound by the fact that "all races are mixed races," making it impossible to differentiate racial 'purity' from intermixture (1939, p. 17; 1943, p. 136). It was, Dover (1943) indicated, necessary to recognize mongrelism not only as a totality but also perhaps as a political movement because "[t]wo thousand million people create...the unity and diversity, of human life...Three quarters of them are not white. They are...middlings" (p. 11). The "middlings" pushed Dover into abjuring the category of race: contending that "[r]ace and mongrelism [a]re irreconcilable terms," Dover (1943) sarcastically said that "[a]t a time when leading [British] statesmen [in India] [a]re...reiterating the inherited virtues of the 'British race'," it would do well to remember that there was no 'pure' race against which an intermixed group could be deemed lacking (p. 136). Dover's suggestion in *Hell in the Sunshine* was that to take a stand against Aryanism and its excesses, communities across the world would have to recognize each other's bodies as kindred by the common feature of intermixture (1943, p. 136).

What demanded mongrelism, Dover (1943) stated, was that any production of difference that led to the laudation of some notion of a ‘pure’ race, was ultimately a socioeconomic construct that facilitated the oppression of some for the gain of others (p. 11). Dover (1943) accordingly contended that with the out-caste or the mongrel as a universal figure proving that *all* bodies were intermixed beyond determinability, ‘degenerate’ bodies were evidently fictions politically intended to “make another world within the world—an oppressed world of poverty, pestilence and misery” (p. 11). Referring to this “oppressed world of poverty” Dover (1930) harked back to the British East India Company’s disenfranchisement of Anglo-Indians in 1858 (p. 115). This disenfranchisement, after all, prevented the employment of Anglo-Indians in the Company’s covenanted civil service, eroding Anglo-Indian financial autonomy and leading many Anglo-Indians into impoverishment (Hawes, 1996, p. 8). Accordingly, writing back to the “White World” of India’s British Aryans against the fiction of ‘degenerate’ Anglo-Indians, Dover said,

[y]ou have brought...[Anglo-Indians] into being. Yet you have treated [them] with indifference, usually with contempt, often with cruelty...You did this because you were afraid, afraid that your own progeny would usurp your supremacy...You can take an active interest in [the Anglo-Indians’] uphill climb...But...this you can never do until you realise...that there is no more evil thing than race prejudice. (Dover, 1929, p. 74-75)

Dover’s words against race prejudice and his call to rise above race ring true even today as we witness the rise of a Neo-Nazism in the United States of America (Ryan, 2018). The world could evidently do worse than brush aside Dover’s thoughts on intermixture at a time when white supremacy needs to be challenged yet again.

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