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Racial Problems and the Indian Census Report, 1931\*

THE publication of the Report of the Census Commissioner for India in 1931 not only marks the completion of a stupendous undertaking; but also in its contents, which range far beyond the bare facts furnished by the enumerator, it serves as a reminder that whatever may befall in India in the course of the next generation—and it would be an act of extreme rashness to venture on prophecy—the contribution of the British official to the study of the peoples of India, their languages, their history, their customs and their institutions, will endure as a “monument more lasting than brass”. It little matters whether these studies were the outcome of a desire to satisfy intellectual curiosity in a country in which people, monuments and literature alike prompt inquiry into the past, or of the practical necessity for an understanding of the intricate ramifications of custom and religion in the administration of every-day affairs. It is enough that out of these inquiries there developed such great undertakings as the linguistic, archæological and epigraphic surveys of India, which became the work of government departments, or those remarkable compendia, the various provincial surveys of tribes and castes.

It was due to these interests that the Indian Census assumed its distinctive character. The organisation of the Census has been such as to include within its scope from time to time material which has given its reports an unequalled value as ethnographical documents, while the Commissioners have not failed to avail themselves on occasion of the opportunity for discussion of larger questions of scientific import affecting the peoples of India as a whole. Finally, it may be pointed out that these inquiries, or theories based upon them, have played no small part in determining the form of the political aspirations of the peoples of India, as well as in fostering the growth of a consciousness of national unity. Both the theory of Aryan supremacy and of the unity and indigenous origin of Indian culture have drawn largely for their intellectual support on racial theories founded on the research of European, and for the most part British, investigators.

The broad results of the Census of 1931 have already been considered in these columns (see NATURE, Jan. 28, p. 109); but it may not be out

\* Census of India, 1931. Vol. 1: India. Part 1: Report. By Dr. J. H. Hutton. To which is annexed an Actuarial Report by L. S. Vaidyanathan. Pp. xv+518+13 plates. (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1933.)

of place to recall some of the conditions which give the Census of India its unique character. The Census of 1931, the sixth of the enumerations which began in 1881, covered an area of 1,808,679 square miles, and a population of 353 millions. This area, as large as Europe excluding Russia, constitutes a sub-continent rather than a single country. It includes every variety of climate from tropical to temperate, and from arid, where the rainfall averages 5 inches, to humid, with an annual rainfall of 500 inches. Its inhabitants are as varied in their racial characters and their languages as in their environment. The census returns for 1931 show 225 languages, excluding dialects. Nearly three fourths of the population, however, speak Aryan tongues. In culture, the people show every phase from that of advanced Western civilisation to the primitive hunter and food-gatherer of the jungle.

In introducing his general report, Dr. J. H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner for 1931, who was seconded for this service from Assam, where his work in connexion with the ethnography of the hill tribes has conferred a lasting obligation on anthropological science, points to the difficulties which stand in the way of any general treatment of the mass of statistics resulting from the census enumeration. On the other hand, regional study, which in India obviously is of essential importance in its bearing upon a number of demographic questions, is precluded, except for restricted areas, in the provincial and State reports to which reference must be made for more detailed information, as the political and administrative boundaries do not coincide with, and indeed in many instances run counter to, the natural areas. Dr. Hutton has, therefore, confined his analysis and discussion of general questions to those relevant to the broad cultural unity of the India of to-day, such, for example, as the population problem, the interrelation and movement of rural and urban populations, migration, the distributions of age and sex, fertility, occupations, literacy and so forth.

Incidentally, reference is made to changes to be observed in Indian custom, which are not without importance in their bearing on the political future of India. Hinduism continues to gain strength through the absorption of the wild tribes, a feature to which reference is frequently made in relation to their future, but still more often in pressing the political claims of Hinduism. On the other hand, the changes affecting caste, especially in the

matter of personal contact in public places, are not regarded by Dr. Hutton as having the significance attached to them by some who profess to be in a position to judge. Although it would appear that a considerable proportion of the caste members now either take up subsidiary occupations or enter occupations other than those allotted to them by their caste, in all essentials caste is adjudged to be unchanged.

Important as these topics are in the study of Indian demography, they must be passed over here with no more than a brief mention in favour of what must be regarded as Dr. Hutton's specific contribution to the scientific study of the problems of Indian ethnology. This is contained in three chapters dealing with language, race and religion. They are of a speculative character, as the author admits. Opinions may vary as to whether a census report may be the most suitable vehicle for the discussion of such questions, which arise incidentally rather than directly out of the material of the report. In the present instance, in view of the line of argument followed, it is a question whether discussion may not be premature. On the other hand, Dr. Hutton has a noteworthy precedent in the theories on the racial and cultural dominance of the Arya in the composition of the Indian peoples, and on caste, put forward by Sir Herbert Risley in his census report thirty years ago. These have served as the starting point in Indian ethnological investigation ever since. Now, however, the time has come, in Dr. Hutton's opinion, for a restatement of the problem in the light of more recent research. It is evident, he points out, that there was much greater continuity in the development of the prehistoric civilisation of India than was once thought, nor did that development take place in the isolation which Risley postulated.

The dominant factor in Indian archaeological and ethnological studies in the last decade has been the discovery of the prehistoric civilisation of the Indus Valley, which by some has been held to confirm and consolidate the position of those, especially among Indian theorists, who attach an outstanding importance to the Dravidian, as opposed to the Aryan, element in Indian cultural history. This theory has indeed been used in political argument to advance the claims of Hinduism to paramount consideration as representative of the traditional India as a whole. On the other hand, the exact relation of the Indus Valley civilisation to the stream of Indian culture

and to that of the early Near and Middle East has still to be determined, even though discovery is rapidly making it more clear almost day by day.

As the result of an analysis of the archaeological, linguistic and ethnological evidence, Dr. Hutton arrives at the conclusion that the Indus civilisation is to be assigned to a Dravidian-speaking branch of the Mediterranean race, with possibly some Armenoid admixture, and in an acute study of Hinduism in which he assigns its contribution in that composite whole to each of the racial elements in the Hindu peoples, the prepotent and most characteristic features are assigned to the Mediterranean rather than the Aryan. It is significant, however, that he regards this whole as having been 'built up' locally.

We cannot enter now upon a consideration of the scientific bases of Dr. Hutton's conclusions. There can be no question, however, that discussion of his views hereafter will not be spared. In their practical aspect, which in India, where religion is the unifying political influence, is never far away, it may be said that the bearing of his theories is summed up in this sentence, in which he states: "it is not difficult to understand the claim of certain politicians that the term Hinduism should cover all religions having their origin in India, even though we hold that the original impulse came from the Mediterranean or Asia Minor".

#### The 24-Hour System of Time Reckoning

THE present method of counting longitudes east and west from a prime or zero meridian passing through the centre of the transit instrument at the Observatory of Greenwich, was decided upon at a conference held in Washington in October 1884 at which twenty-five countries were represented. The adoption, by international agreement, of a prime meridian passing through Greenwich, made possible the standard or zone system of reckoning time for civil purposes, which almost every country has adopted.

The Washington Conference in 1884 made other recommendations which did not secure such general acceptance. It expressed the hope that as soon as might be practicable, the astronomical and nautical days would be arranged everywhere to begin at mean midnight. This recommendation met with much opposition from astronomers, particularly from Prof. Simon Newcomb, whose name carried great weight. It was not until after the War that it was possible to secure agreement to this change, which was introduced at the beginning

of 1925; the principal national ephemerides for the year 1925 and subsequent years have used an astronomical day beginning at mean midnight. A third recommendation of the Conference was in favour of counting the hours of the day from zero up to twenty-four hours. This system of counting, which avoids the necessity for 'a.m.' and 'p.m.', and the ambiguity which results if these are omitted, has been adopted in railway time-tables and for other purposes in all Continental countries, in Canada, the United States, India and elsewhere, but it has never come into general use in Great Britain.

The 24-hour system of reckoning time has been permanently adopted in Great Britain by the Army, Navy and Air Force. It is not without significance that the three defence departments of the country have all adopted the system which eliminates the possibility of errors likely to arise when the hours are counted from 1 to 12 twice a day. The advisability of adopting the 24-hour system for official and other purposes was considered in 1919 by a Home Office Committee, presided over by Lord Stonehaven. The Committee went into the matter thoroughly, found no objection to it and unanimously recommended its adoption by the Post Office and railway companies. But although no legislative action was required, no steps were taken to adopt the recommendation. The matter has been raised on a number of occasions in the House of Lords without definite result. It will come up again for discussion on December 7, when a motion, to be introduced by Lord Newton, urging the adoption of the recommendations of the Stonehaven Committee, will be discussed.

On various occasions there has been correspondence in the *Times* and other daily papers on the subject of this reform. Opinion in favour of the change has largely preponderated, and it has been significant that those who have opposed it have been those having no experience of it, whilst those who have had experience of it have strongly favoured it. The railway companies intimated in 1931 and again in 1932 that they were prepared to adopt the 24-hour system if the Government would give the lead. When the matter was discussed in the House of Lords in 1932, the Earl of Lucan, speaking as the representative of the Home Office, stated that "The view of the Government is that so far the public has not shown that it wants the change". A weaker argument could not have been put forward,