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Q4(b)

Critically compare Risley's and Sarkar's approaches to the classification of peoples of India.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Anthropology GS 2 · 15 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Critically compare H. H. Risley's and **S. S. Sarkar's** approaches to the classification of the peoples of India
- State each scheme, criteria, and political use
- Judge what is still usable

Revision summary

Risley used seven racial types and **nasal index**, tied to caste rank, in the 1901 census tradition.

Sarkar used fewer types, an Australoid tribal base, and more caution about language equals race.

Sarkar is better as a critique of colonial ranking, not as a final biology.

Guha's 1931 types are another typology.

Law now counts social backwardness, not racial census boxes.

Introduction

Herbert Hope Risley classified Indian peoples for the colonial census by anthropometry and caste rank. **S. S. Sarkar** classified them later as an Indian human biologist with more weight on tribes, language, and a simpler set of types. Both are racial typologies. Comparison is about method and politics, not about which race map is true forever.

Body

Risley's approach

- **Risley, in the 1901 census and The People of India, offered** seven types: Turko-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Scytho-Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian, Mongolo-Dravidian, Mongoloid, and Dravidian.
- The **nasal index** was his favourite measurement. He linked finer noses to higher caste rank.
- **The scheme served empire:** inequality looked like biology. Tribe and caste were placed on one racial ladder.

Sarkar's approach

- **S. S. Sarkar** proposed fewer types, commonly taught as **Australoid, Indo-Aryan, Irano-Scythian, Mundari** (or Mundari-Malayan), and **Mongolian**, with notes on possible

Negrito traces in southern hills.

- He treated many South and central Indian populations as having an Australoid base with later overlays, rather than one "Dravidian race" matched to a language family.
- He used morphology, some blood-group data as it appeared, prehistoric archaeology, and tribal ethnography. He rejected Risley's nose-to-varna ladder as the main story.

Comparison

- **Criteria:** Risley centred **nasal index** and caste; Sarkar centred broader morphology, tribes, and language as a separate map.
- **Number of types:** seven mixed labels versus a shorter list. Neither matches later genetics.
- **Politics:** Risley naturalised colonial hierarchy. Sarkar is post-colonial in mood and less useful for ranking jatis, but still boxes living people.
- **B. S. Guha's** 1931 types are a third typology often taught beside both. **People of India** (Anthropological Survey) later described communities as cultural units.

Critical judgement

- Sarkar is better than Risley because he weakens caste-as-race and takes Munda and other tribes seriously.
- Both fail as modern biology. **Clines, mixture, and endogamy** (later population genetics) replace types.
- Administration should use ST, SC, and OBC as legal-social lists, not Risley or Sarkar types. **Indra Sawhney** treats backwardness as social and educational.

Flow diagram

Risley -> Nasal index seven types
Risley -> Caste as race
Sarkar -> Fewer types tribes
Sarkar -> Language not equal biology
Genetics -> Clines mixture

Conclusion

Risley measured noses and mapped them onto caste for the census. Sarkar reduced types and separated language from a single Dravidian race. Sarkar is the less colonial of the two. Neither is a living scientific map of the peoples of India.

Facts & figures

Risley seven types

Turko-Iranian through Dravidian, built on anthropometry for the 1901 census narrative.

Nasal index

Risley's preferred ratio of nose width to height, wrongly treated as a key to caste rank.

S. S. Sarkar

Indian human biologist who classified populations with more weight on Australoid and Mundari groups and less on caste-as-race.

B. S. Guha

1931 census anthropologist whose racial types are often compared with Risley and Sarkar in Indian syllabi.

People of India

Anthropological Survey project that documented communities as cultural units rather than Risley races.

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