

### *Friedrich Max Müller*

While in the Veda we may study the childhood, we may study in Kant's *Critique* the perfect manhood of the Aryan mind.

– Max Müller<sup>19</sup>

Max Müller (1823–1900) was a descendant of the Romantic movement and its longings for civilization's origins. He also made many influential contributions to linguistics and religious studies. Like Renan, his prolific writings reached a wide readership. For more than forty years, both the scholars worked with the concept of race, using the categories of Aryan and Semite.<sup>20</sup> But they differed in major ways. Max Müller took the position that no single culture had exclusively come up with monotheism, which was the common property of humanity, and that linguistic structures turned this into multiple religions, including both monotheistic and polytheistic forms.

Max Müller did not want to use the Indian civilization to introduce polytheism into the development of Christianity the way Renan wanted to. Nor did he go the other way and try to make the Aryans appear monotheistic the way Pictet did (discussed later). Instead, he emphasized linguistic differences to explain the divergent religious views. Müller wanted a science of religions to reveal the divine in all things. The use of comparative methods, the new discipline, like other natural sciences, should strive to reveal the providential unity underlying the variegated world of appearances. This providential order had been inscribed in nature at the beginning of time, and it was the task of comparative philology and mythology to find its traces in myths and religions, among which Christianity of course occupied a unique position.<sup>21</sup>

Max Müller served as a functionary for the colonialists and for Christian evangelists, while being deeply interested in ancient Indian texts. This orientation is reflected in one of his letters addressed to the duke of Orgoil, who was the British secretary of state for India. Müller wrote on 16 December 1868: 'The ancient religion of India is totally doomed and if Christianity doesn't step in whose fault will it

2. (Information Warfare Monitor and Shadowserver Foundation 2010, 43)
3. In fact, almost all nation states surrounding India have been listed as among the first 25 of the Failed State Index 2009 released by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Afghanistan is ranked 7; Pakistan 10; Burma 13; Bangladesh 19; Sri Lanka 22; Nepal 25.
4. Atrocity literature is a technical term referring to literature generated by Western interests, with the explicit goal to show that the target non-Western culture is committing atrocities on its own people, and hence in need of Western intervention. This will be elaborated in a later chapter.
5. (Oldenburg, 2002)
6. For example, see (Dirks, 2004)
7. (Digby, 1969, 33)
8. (Bagchi, 1984, 81)

### Chapter 3

1. (Jones, 1799)
2. (Schwab, 1984, 17)
3. This three-volume work published in London claimed to deal with the 'mythology, cosmogony, fests and festivals of the Gentoos' (a derogatory term derived from 'gentiles'). It was the main source of Voltaire's ideas on India.
4. In 1781-2, Herder and von Schlozer became the first to apply the term 'Semitic' to a group of languages. The term was named after Shem, son of Noah, as desired in Genesis 5:32.
5. For a detailed presentation of Renan's eulogizing of 'Aryan' virtues along with his preference for Christian monotheism, see (Katz, 1980, 136)
6. In Marxism, God's invisible hand became the dialectical process, an equally mystical notion that was used to justify European colonialism.
7. (Olender, 1992, 7)
8. Ronald Taylor lists various tropes that became Europeanized but were Indian in origin and inspiration, such as: poems with love of flowers and animals, the cult of lotus blossom, the sacred mystery of Ganges, magicians as agents of the supernatural and miraculous, and an overarching influx of moral philosophy.
9. See (A.L. Wilson, 1964)
10. Jones believed that all three linguistic families had descended from the three sons of Noah in the Middle East, from where they dispersed to the corners of the world. (Jones, *The Origin and Families of Nations* 1993).

11. His teacher, possibly the only person in continental Europe who was capable of teaching Sanskrit at that time, was a Scot named Hamilton who had been captured by the French in India and was being held in Paris as a prisoner of war. The development of Schlegel's ideas about India have been traced in (Wichman, 2006, 28).
12. Neo-Classicism refers to certain movements in the decorative and visual arts, literature, theatre, music, and architecture that draw upon Western classical art and culture, usually that of ancient Greece or ancient Rome. These movements were dominant during the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century.
13. (Schlegel, 1860, 514)
14. (Schlegel, 1860, 509-11)
15. Sir H.S. Maine, 'The effects of observation of India on modern European thought', 1875 Rede lecture – quoted in (Trautman, Aryans and British India, 2004, 2)
16. This section on Renan draws heavily on (Olender, 1992, 53-4, 63-71, 73, 76-9)
17. (Olender, 1992, 66)
18. (Olender, 1992, 70)
19. As quoted in (Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* 1988, 133)
20. At the end of their lives, they cautioned readers about the dangers of racism brought by their fashionable comparative philology.
21. Max Müller opposed Darwinian theories to explain the origin of languages, which he felt were not of animal origin. He said famously that no process of natural selection will ever distill significant words out of the notes of birds or the cries of beasts. (Max Müller, 1869, 354)
22. (Müller, 1902, 346)
23. Pictet described the Aryan ancestors of European Christians as follows: 'In an epoch predating all historical records, cloaked in the darkness of time, a race destined by Providence one day to dominate the globe, slowly came of age in what was to be the training ground for its brilliant future. Outstripping all others in innate beauty and gifts of intelligence, nurtured by a grand but harsh natural setting that was generous but not lavish with its treasures, this race was destined from the first to conquer. . . . It was therefore quick to develop gifts of the mind, for planning, and energy, for execution. Once initial difficulties were overcome, it enjoyed the tranquil well-being of a patriarchal existence. While thus jubilantly growing in numbers and in prosperity, this fertile race forged itself a powerful tool, a language admirable for its richness, vigor, harmony, and

- perfection of form; a language that spontaneously reflected all the race's impressions, its tenderest emotions, its most naive admirations, but also its yearning for a higher world; a language full of images and intuitive ideas, bearing the seeds of future riches, of a magnificent outpouring of the noblest poetry and profoundest thought'. (Olender, 1992, 95-6)
24. Pictet explained the Semite/Aryan division of civilizational assets as follows: 'Faithful guardians of pure monotheism, the Hebrews had a magnificent part in the divine plan, but one wonders where the world would be today if they had remained the sole leaders of mankind. The fact is, while they religiously preserved the principle of truth from which a higher light would one day emanate, Providence had already singled out another race of men to lead the way to further progress. This was the race of Aryas, blessed from the beginning with the very qualities the Hebrews lacked to become the civilizers of the world. . . . The contrast between the two races is as stark as can be. The Hebrews possess the authority that preserves; the Aryas, the freedom that allows for development. The Hebrews display intolerance, which concentrates and isolates; the Aryas, receptivity, which extends and assimilates; the Hebrews direct their energy toward a single goal; the Aryas engage in incessant activity in all directions. On the one hand is a single compact nationality, on the other a vast race divided into a host of diverse peoples. In both we find exactly what was needed to accomplish the providential designs'. (Olender, 1992, 102). But Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) raised serious questions about Pictet's thesis, even though Pictet was his first intellectual guide. Saussure asked: 'Can one really rely on comparative linguistics to draw conclusions about race and the history of the Indo-European people, their homeland and their travels?' He opposed the idea of extrapolating prehistoric anthropology based on reconstructing a lost language.
25. (Olender, 1992, 103-4)
26. (Olender, 1992, 112)
27. (Caine and Slug, 2002, 87)
28. (Halbfass, 1988, 139)
29. (Halbfass, 1988, 139)
30. From Darwin's 1871 book, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Though this line by Darwin could have been used by eugenicists to give scientific credibility to their own movement, Darwin himself used the word 'races' to mean 'varieties' and not human races. (www.talkorigins.org, 2002) While there is no doubt that some of those who supported eugenics cited Darwin's theory of evolution as inspiration or justification, most enthusiastic promoters of the eugenics movement,