

Following is the article written by David Frawley in "The India Times" David Frawley, a well-known Vedic scholar, runs the American Institute of Vedic Studies in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is also a famed Ayurveda doctor. Those interested in this subject may refer to his book "Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization".

The Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India

By David Frawley

One of the main ideas used to interpret and generally devalue the ancient history of India is the theory of the Aryan invasion. According to this account, India was invaded and conquered by nomadic light-skinned Indo-European tribes from Central Asia around 1500-1000 BC, who overthrew an earlier and more advanced dark-skinned Dravidian civilization from which they took most of what later became Hindu culture. This so-called pre-Aryan civilization is said to be evidenced by the large urban ruins of what has been called the "**Indus valley culture**" (as most of its initial sites were on the Indus river). The war between the powers of light and darkness, a prevalent idea in ancient Aryan Vedic scriptures, was thus interpreted to refer to this war between light and dark-skinned peoples. The Aryan invasion theory thus turned the "**Vedas**", the original scriptures of ancient India and the Indo-Aryans, into little more than primitive poems of uncivilized plunderers.

This idea totally foreign to the history of India, whether north or south has become almost an unquestioned truth in the interpretation of ancient history. Today, after nearly all the reasons for its supposed validity have been refuted, even major Western scholars are at last beginning to call it in question.

In this article we will summarize the main points that have arisen. This is a complex subject that I have dealt with in depth in my book "**Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization**", for those interested in further examination of the subject.

The Indus valley culture was pronounced pre-Aryans for several reasons that were largely part of the cultural milieu of nineteenth-century European thinking. As scholars following Max Muller had decided that the Aryans came into India around 1500 BC, since the Indus valley culture was earlier than this, they concluded that it had to be pre-Aryan. Yet the rationale behind the late date for the Vedic culture given by Muller was totally speculative. Max Muller, like many of the Christian scholars of his era, believed in Biblical chronology. This placed the beginning of the world at 4000 BC and the flood around 2500 BC. Assuming to those two dates, it became difficult to get the Aryans in India before 1500 BC.

Muller therefore assumed that the five layers of the four '**Vedas**' & '**Upanishads**' were each composed in 200-year periods before the Buddha at 500 BC. However, there are more changes of

language in Vedic Sanskrit itself than there are in classical Sanskrit since Panini, also regarded as a figure of around 500 BC, or a period of 2500 years. Hence it is clear that each of these periods could have existed for any number of centuries and that the 200 year figure is totally arbitrary and is likely too short a figure.

It was assumed by these scholars many of whom were also Christian missionaries unsympathetic to the '**Vedas**' that the Vedic culture was that of primitive nomads from Central Asia. Hence they could not have founded any urban culture like that of the Indus valley. The only basis for this was a rather questionable interpretation of the '**Rig Veda**' that they made, ignoring the sophisticated nature of the culture presented within it.

Meanwhile, it was also pointed out that in the middle of the second millennium BC, a number of Indo-European invasions apparently occurred in the Middle East, wherein Indo-European peoples the Hittites, Mitanni and Kassites conquered and ruled Mesopotamia for some centuries. An Aryan invasion of India would have been another version of this same movement of Indo-European peoples. On top of this, excavators of the Indus valley culture, like Wheeler, thought they found evidence of destruction of the culture by an outside invasion confirming this.

The Vedic culture was thus said to be that of primitive nomads who came out of Central Asia with their horse-drawn chariots and iron weapons and overthrew the cities of the more advanced Indus valley culture, with their superior battle tactics. It was pointed out that no horses, chariots or iron was discovered in Indus valley sites.

This was how the Aryan invasion theory formed and has remained since then. Though little has been discovered that confirms this theory, there has been much hesitancy to question it, much less to give it up.

Further excavations discovered horses not only in Indus Valley sites but also in pre-Indus sites. The use of the horse has thus been proven for the whole range of ancient Indian history. Evidence of the wheel, and an Indus seal showing a spoked wheel as used in chariots, has also been found, suggesting the usage of chariots.

Moreover, the whole idea of nomads with chariots has been challenged. Chariots are not the vehicles of nomads. Their usage occurred only in ancient urban cultures with much flat land, of which the river plain of north India was the most suitable. Chariots are totally unsuitable for crossing mountains and deserts, as the so-called Aryan invasion required.

That the Vedic culture used iron & must hence date later than the introduction of iron around 1500 BC revolves around the meaning of the Vedic term "**ayas**", interpreted as iron. 'Ayas' in other Indo-European languages like Latin or German usually means copper, bronze or ore generally, not specially iron. There is no reason to insist that in such earlier Vedic times, 'ayas' meant iron, particularly since other metals are not mentioned in the '**Rig Veda**' (except gold that is much more commonly referred to than ayas). Moreover, the '**Atharva Veda**' and '**Yajur Veda**' speak of different colors of 'ayas'(such as red & black), showing that it was a generic term. Hence it is clear that 'ayas' generally meant metal and not specifically iron.

Moreover, the enemies of the Vedic people in the 'Rig Veda' also use *ayas*, even for making their cities, as do the Vedic people themselves. Hence there is nothing in Vedic literature to show that either the Vedic culture was an iron-based culture or that their enemies were not.

The '**Rig Veda**' describes its Gods as '*destroyers of cities*'. This was used also to regard the Vedic as a primitive non-urban culture that destroys cities and urban civilization. However, there are also many verses in the 'Rig Veda' that speak of the Aryans as having cities of their own and being protected by cities up to a hundred in number. Aryan Gods like Indra, Agni, Saraswati and the Adityas are praised as being like a city. Many ancient kings, including those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, had titles like destroyer or conquerer of cities. This does not turn them into nomads. Destruction of cities also happens in modern wars; this does not make those who do this nomads. Hence the idea of Vedic culture as destroying but not building the cities is based upon ignoring what the Vedas actually say about their own cities.

Further excavation revealed that the Indus Valley culture was not destroyed by outside invasion, but according to internal causes and, most likely, floods. Most recently a new set of cities has been found in India (like the Dwaraka and Bet Dwaraka sites by S.R. Rao and the National Institute of Oceanography in India) which are intermediate between those of the Indus culture and later ancient India as visited by the Greeks. This may eliminate the so-called dark age following the presumed Aryan invasion and shows a continuous urban occupation in India back to the beginning of the Indus culture.

The interpretation of the religion of the Indus Valley culture -made incidentally by scholars such as Wheeler who were not religious scholars much less students of Hinduism was that its religion was different than the Vedic and more likely the later Shaivite religion. However, further excavations both in Indus Valley site in Gujarat, like Lothal, and those in Rajasthan, like Kalibangan show large number of fire altars like those used in the Vedic religion, along with bones of oxen, potsherds, shell jewelry and other items used in the rituals described in the '**Vedic Brahmanas**'. Hence the Indus Valley culture evidences many Vedic practices that can not be merely coincidental. That some of its practices appeared non-Vedic to its excavators may also be attributed to their misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of Vedic and Hindu culture generally, wherein Vedism and Shaivism are the same basic tradition.

We must remember that ruins do not necessarily have one interpretation. Nor does the ability to discover ruins necessarily give the ability to interpret them correctly.

The Vedic people were thought to have been a fair-skinned race like the Europeans owing to the Vedic idea of a war between light and darkness, and the Vedic people being presented as children of light or children of the sun. Yet this idea of a war between light and darkness exists in most ancient cultures, including the Persian and the Egyptian. Why don't we interpret their scriptures as a war between light and dark-skinned people? It is purely a poetic metaphor, not a cultural statement. Moreover, no real traces of such a race are found in India.

Anthropologists have observed that the present population of Gujarat is composed of more or less the same ethnic groups as are noticed at Lothal in 2000 BC. Similarly, the present population of the Punjab is said to be ethnically the same as the population of Harappa and Rupa 4000

years ago. Linguistically the present day population of Gujrat and Punjab belongs to the Indo-Aryan language speaking group. The only inference that can be drawn from the anthropological and linguistic evidences adduced above is that the Harappan population in the Indus Valley and Gujrat in 2000 BC was composed of two or more groups, the more dominant among them having very close ethnic affinities with the present day Indo-Aryan speaking population of India.

In other words there is no racial evidence of any such Indo-Aryan invasion of India but only of a continuity of the same group of people who traditionally considered themselves to be Aryans.

There are many points in fact that prove the Vedic nature of the Indus Valley culture. Further excavation has shown that the great majority of the sites of the Indus Valley culture were east, not west of Indus. In fact, the largest concentration of sites appears in an area of Punjab and Rajsthan near the dry banks of ancient Saraswati and Drishadvati rivers. The Vedic culture was said to have been founded by the sage Manu between the banks of Saraswati and Drishadvati rivers. The Saraswati is lauded as the main river (naditama) in the 'Rig Veda' & is the most frequently mentioned in the text. It is said to be a great flood and to be wide, even endless in size. Saraswati is said to be "*pure in course from the mountains to the sea*". Hence the Vedic people were well acquainted with this river and regarded it as their immemorial hoemland.

The Saraswati, as modern land studies now reveal, was indeed one of the largest, if not the largest river in India. In early ancient and pre-historic times, it once drained the Sutlej, Yamuna and the Ganges, whose courses were much different than they are today. However, the Saraswati river went dry at the end of the Indus Valley culture and before the so-called Aryan invasion or before 1500 BC. In fact this may have caused the ending of the Indus culture. How could the Vedic Aryans know of this river and establish their culture on its banks if it dried up before they arrived? Indeed the Saraswati as described in the 'Rig Veda' appears to more accurately show it as it was prior to the Indus Valley culture as in the Indus era it was already in decline.

Vedic and late Vedic texts also contain interesting astronomical lore. The Vedic calender was based upon astronomical sightings of the equinoxes and solstices. Such texts as '*Vedanga Jyotish*' speak of a time when the vernal equinox was in the middle of the Nakshtra Aslesha (or about 23 degrees 20 minutes Cancer). This gives a date of 1300 BC. The 'Yajur Veda' and 'Atharva Veda' speak of the vernal equinox in the Krittikas (Pleiades; early Taurus) and the summer solstice (ayana) in Magha (early Leo). This gives a date about 2400 BC. Yet earlier eras are mentioned but these two have numerous references to substantiate them. They prove that the Vedic culture existed at these periods and already had a sophisticated system of astronomy. Such references were merely ignored or pronounced unintelligible by Western scholars because they yielded too early a date for the 'Vedas' than what they presumed, not because such references did not exist.

Vedic texts like '*Shatapatha Brahmana*' and '*Aitereya Brahmana*' that mention these astronomical references list a group of 11 Vedic Kings, including a number of figures of the 'Rig Veda', said to have conquered the region of India from 'sea to sea'. Lands of the Aryans are mentioned in them from Gandhara (Afganistan) in the west to Videha (Nepal) in the east, and south to Vidarbha (Maharashtra). Hence the Vedic people were in these regions by the Krittika equinox or before 2400 BC. These passages were also ignored by Western scholars and it was

said by them that the 'Vedas' had no evidence of large empires in India in Vedic times. Hence a pattern of ignoring literary evidence or misinterpreting them to suit the Aryan invasion idea became prevalent, even to the point of changing the meaning of Vedic words to suit this theory.

According to this theory, the Vedic people were nomads in the Punjab, coming down from Central Asia. However, the 'Rig Veda' itself has nearly 100 references to ocean (samudra), as well as dozens of references to ships, and to rivers flowing in to the sea. Vedic ancestors like Manu, Turvasha, Yadu and Bhujyu are flood figures, saved from across the sea. The Vedic God of the sea, Varuna, is the father of many Vedic seers and seer families like Vasishta, Agastya and the Bhrigu seers. To preserve the Aryan invasion idea it was assumed that the Vedic (and later Sanskrit) term for ocean, samudra, originally did not mean the ocean but any large body of water, especially the Indus river in Punjab. Here the clear meaning of a term in 'Rig Veda' and later times verified by rivers like Saraswati mentioned by name as flowing into the sea was altered to make the Aryan invasion theory fit. Yet if we look at the index to translation of the 'Rig Veda' by Griffith for example, who held to this idea that samudra didn't really mean the ocean, we find over 70 references to ocean or sea. If samudra does not mean ocean why was it translated as such? It is therefore without basis to locate Vedic kings in Central Asia far from any ocean or from the massive Saraswati river, which form the background of their land and the symbolism of their hymns.

One of the latest archeological ideas is that the Vedic culture is evidenced by Painted Grey Ware pottery in north India, which appears to date around 1000 BC and comes from the same region between the Ganges and Yamuna as later Vedic culture is related to. It is thought to be an inferior grade of pottery and to be associated with the use of iron that the 'Vedas' are thought to mention. However it is associated with a pig and rice culture, not the cow and barley culture of the 'Vedas'. Moreover it is now found to be an organic development of indigenous pottery, not an introduction of invaders.

Painted Grey Ware culture represents an indigenous cultural development and does not reflect any cultural intrusion from the West i.e. an Indo-Aryan invasion. Therefore, there is no archeological evidence corroborating the fact of an Indo-Aryan invasion.

In addition, the Aryans in the Middle East, most notably the Hittites, have now been found to have been in that region at least as early as 2200 BC, wherein they are already mentioned. Hence the idea of an Aryan invasion into the Middle East has been pushed back some centuries, though the evidence so far is that the people of the mountain regions of the Middle East were Indo-Europeans as far as recorded history can prove.

The Aryan Kassites of the ancient Middle East worshipped Vedic Gods like Surya and the Maruts, as well as one named Himalaya. The Aryan Hittites and Mittani signed a treaty with the name of the Vedic Gods Indra, Mitra, Varuna and Nasatya around 1400 BC. The Hittites have a treatise on chariot racing written in almost pure Sanskrit. The IndoEuropeans of the ancient Middle East thus spoke Indo-Aryan, not Indo-Iranian languages and thereby show a Vedic culture in that region of the world as well.

The Indus Valley culture had a form of writing, as evidenced by numerous seals found in the ruins. It was also assumed to be non-Vedic and probably Dravidian, though this was never proved. Now it has been shown that the majority of the late Indus signs are identical with those of later Hindu Brahmi and that there is an organic development between the two scripts. Prevalent models now suggest an Indo-European base for that language.

It was also assumed that the Indus Valley culture derived its civilization from the Middle East, probably Sumeria, as antecedents for it were not found in India. Recent French excavations at Mehrgarh have shown that all the antecedents of the Indus Valley culture can be found within the subcontinent and going back before 6000 BC.

In short, some Western scholars are beginning to reject the Aryan invasion or any outside origin for Hindu civilization.

Current archeological data do not support the existence of an Indo Aryan or European invasion into South Asia at any time in the preor protohistoric periods. Instead, it is possible to document archeologically a series of cultural changes reflecting indigenous cultural development from prehistoric to historic periods. The early Vedic literature describes not a human invasion into the area, but a fundamental restructuring of indigenous society. The Indo-Aryan invasion as an academic concept in 18th and 19th century Europe reflected the cultural milieu of the period. Linguistic data were used to validate the concept that in turn was used to interpret archeological and anthropological data.

In other words, Vedic literature was interpreted on the assumption that there was an Aryan invasion. Then archeological evidence was interpreted by the same assumption. And both interpretations were then used to justify each other. It is nothing but a tautology, an exercise in circular thinking that only proves that if assuming something is true, it is found to be true!

Another modern Western scholar, Colin Renfrew, places the IndoEuropeans in Greece as early as 6000 BC. He also suggests such a possible early date for their entry into India.

As far as I can see there is nothing in the Hymns of the 'Rig Veda' which demonstrates that the Vedic-speaking population was intrusive to the area: this comes rather from a historical assumption of the 'coming of the Indo-Europeans.

When Wheeler speaks of 'the Aryan invasion of the land of the 7 rivers, the Punjab', he has no warrenty at all, so far as I can see. If one checks the dozen references in the 'Rig Veda' to the 7 rivers, there is nothing in them that to me implies invasion: the land of the 7 rivers is the land of the 'Rig Veda', the scene of action. Nor is it implied that the inhabitants of the walled cities (including the Dasyus) were any more aboriginal than the Aryans themselves.

Despite Wheeler's comments, it is difficult to see what is particularly non-Aryan about the Indus Valley civilization. Hence Renfrew suggests that the Indus Valley civilization was in fact Indo-Aryan even prior to the Indus Valley era:

This hypothesis that early Indo-European languages were spoken in North India with Pakistan and on the Iranian plateau at the 6th millennium BC has the merit of harmonizing symmetrically with the theory for the origin of the Indo-European languages in Europe. It also emphasizes the continuity in the Indus Valley and adjacent areas from the early neolithic through to the flourish of the Indus Valley civilization.

This is not to say that such scholars appreciate or understand the 'Vedas' their work leaves much to be desired in this respect but that it is clear that the whole edifice built around the Aryan invasion is beginning to tumble on all sides. In addition, it does not mean that the 'Rig Veda' dates from the Indus Valley era. The Indus Valley culture resembles that of the 'Yajur Veda' and they reflect the pre-Indus period in India, when the Saraswati river was more prominent.

The acceptance of such views would create a revolution in our view of history as shattering as that in science caused by Einstein's theory of relativity. It would make ancient India perhaps the oldest, largest and most central of ancient cultures. It would mean that the Vedic literary record already the largest and oldest of the ancient world even at a 1500 BC date would be the record of teachings some centuries or thousands of years before that. It would mean that the 'Vedas' are our most authentic record of the ancient world. It would also tend to validate the Vedic view that the Indo-Europeans and other Aryan peoples were migrants from India, not that the Indo-Aryans were invaders into India. Moreover, it would affirm the Hindu tradition that the Dravidians were early offshoots of the Vedic people through the seer Agastya, and not unarian peoples.

In closing, it is important to examine the social and political implications of the Aryan invasion idea:

- First, it **served to divide** India into a *northern Aryan* and *southern Dravidian culture* which were made hostile to each other. This kept the Hindus divided and is still a source of social tension.
- Second, it gave the British an excuse in their conquest of India. They could claim to be doing only what the Aryan ancestors of the Hindus had previously done millennia ago.
- Third, it served to make Vedic culture later than and possibly derived from Middle Eastern cultures. With the proximity and relationship of the latter with the Bible and Christianity, this kept the Hindu religion as a sidelight to the development of religion and civilization to the West.
- Fourth, it allowed the sciences of India to be given a Greek basis, as any Vedic basis was largely disqualified by the primitive nature of the Vedic culture.

This discredited not only the 'Vedas' but the genealogies of the 'Puranas' and their long list of the kings before the Buddha or Krishna were left without any historical basis. The '**Mahabharata**', instead of a civil war in which all the main kings of India participated as it is described, became a local skirmish among petty princes that was later exaggerated by poets. In short, it discredited the most of the Hindu tradition and almost all its ancient literature. It turned its scriptures and sages into fantasies and exaggerations.

This served a social, political and economical purpose of domination, proving the superiority of Western culture and religion. It made the Hindus feel that their culture was not the great thing

that their sages and ancestors had said it was. It made Hindus feel ashamed of their culture that its basis was neither historical nor scientific. It made them feel that the main line of civilization was developed first in the Middle East and then in Europe and that the culture of India was peripheral and secondary to the real development of world culture.

Such a view is not good scholarship or archeology but merely cultural imperialism. The Western Vedic scholars did in the intellectual sphere what the British army did in the political realm discredit, divide and conquer the Hindus. In short, the compelling reasons for the Aryan invasion theory were neither literary nor archeological but political and religious that is to say, not scholarship but prejudice. Such prejudice may not have been intentional but deep-seated political and religious views easily cloud and blur our thinking.

It is unfortunate that this this approach has not been questioned more, particularly by Hindus. Even though Indian Vedic scholars like Dayananda saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Arobindo rejected it, most Hindus today passively accept it. They allow Western, generally Christian, scholars to interpret their history for them and quite naturally Hinduism is kept in a reduced role. Many Hindus still accept, read or even honor the translations of the 'Vedas' done by such Christian missionary scholars as Max Muller, Griffith, MonierWilliams and H. H. Wilson. Would modern Christians accept an interpretation of the Bible or Biblical history done by Hindus aimed at converting them to Hinduism? Universities in India also use the Western history books and Western Vedic translations that propound such views that denigrate their own culture and country.

The modern Western academic world is sensitive to criticisms of cultural and social biases. For scholars to take a stand against this biased interpretation of the 'Vedas' would indeed cause a reexamination of many of these historical ideas that can not stand objective scrutiny. But if Hindu scholars are silent or passively accept the misinterpretation of their own culture, it will undoubtedly continue, but they will have no one to blame but themselves. It is not an issue to be taken lightly, because how a culture is defined historically creates the perspective from which it is viewed in the modern social and intellectual context. Tolerance is not in allowing a false view of one's own culture and religion to be propagated without question. That is merely self-betrayal.

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However it is now recognized by scholars that the Aryan invasion theory of India is a myth that owes more to European politics than anything in Indian records or archaeology. (The politics of History, The Hindustan Times, Nov. 28 1993).^Â These discoveries should help put an end to all speculation regarding the Aryan invasion as the cause of breakup of the Harappan civilization. On the other hand we now know that the Vedic civilization far from coming into existence after the Harappan, in fact ended with it; the mature Harappan civilization was the last glow of the Vedic age. This recognition has brought about a fundamental change in perspective in the history and chronology of not only ancient India, but also nearly all ancient civilizations.