

The Elusive Aryans

The Elusive Aryans:
Archaeological Search and Vedic Research;
The Origin of the Hindus

By

Pradhan S.V.

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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For Aparna and Niren

“We have been hitherto working naively, building on each other’s myths.”
—Colin Renfrew,
Archaeology and Language, p. 287.

“We see in large measure that our identity, or at least our sense of it, lies with our own pasts. We are what we have become. To understand this, and these processes, we need also to know, or at any rate to begin to understand, what we were and where we have come from.”
—Colin Renfrew, *Ibid.*

"Mistakes will be made, of course; but the attempt not only to describe but also to understand both language and life is imperative in our century. One thing is certain: the refusal to posit the good problem will never solve it."
—G. Bonfante,
"The Neolinguistic Position," *Language*, 23, (1947), p. 354.

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PREFACE

Though it was believed for a long time that the solution of the question of the origin of the Indo-Aryans depended on the discovery of a culture identifiable as “Aryan,” some of the archaeologists in recent times have questioned the very notion of the existence of Aryans in India. A review of proto-historic archaeology in the twentieth century shows that they are deeply divided over this question. While most of the archaeologists represented here see traces of Aryans in the Bronze Age central Asian artifacts discovered in the Borderland and in the Indian sub-continent, New Archaeologists are skeptical of such claims, reject the theory of Aryan migration as “colonial” and indeed, look upon the Aryans in India as a chimera or a myth. They are said to lack “archaeological visibility” since no culture has been unanimously identified as Aryan, and the Central Asian antiquities, which appear in a random manner, do not present the gradient of movement from Central Asia to India that would justify the notion of immigration from outside of India. Anthropological biologists put a “scientific” seal of approval on this judgment by pointing out that they had discovered no Aryan bones or skulls in India.

Vedic philology, which made a false start in keeping with the racist bias of the nineteenth century and discovered Aryans and Dravidians or aborigines in the *R̥gveda* in the epithets describing the hostile people as “noseless” and “black,” advanced textual evidence of the Aryan movement from the Northwest to the East (Muir (1860) 1874, 339-347). Though apparently convincing, the interpretation might seem to be inconclusive since the same evidence suggested to Pargiter that the Aryans moved from the East to the West (1922, 298), providing an early instance of the role of assumptions or presuppositions in discussions of the Aryan question.

One of the persuasive grounds for accepting the externality of the Aryans to India was the Indo-European nature of Old Indo Aryan (OIA) and its importance in the comparative study of Indo-European languages. Its Dravidian and Munda substrata too were undeniable, suggesting the existence of previous non-Aryan occupants in India. But it came to be argued that Dravidian words in OIA do not necessarily mean that they are a substratum or what remains of it after its displacement by OIA since

these words could have been borrowed from an adjacent Dravidian language or an ad stratum rather than a substratum language. It was also argued that Dravidian grammatical features such as gerunds, participles and retroflexes need not be a substratum phenomenon since they could have been an independent spontaneous development or a result of the convergence of the two languages. Bryant (2001) writes: “For decades, scholars have realized that the difficulties with linguistic evidence are considerable enough to make each and every conclusion [regarding the original home of the Aryans] based on it problematic” (156).¹ Therefore linguistic evidence cannot be used “in and of itself” as “a final arbitrator in the debate on Indo-Aryan origin” (Bryant, 107). Whatever be the merits of such abstract linguistic “difficulties” which are only abstract possibilities, it is clear that linguistics is no longer the star witness it was once considered to be in the nineteenth century.²

Another look at some of the major analysts of the archaeological data as well as at the cultures proposed to be Aryan brings to light certain facts which can modify one’s understanding of the Aryan puzzle. It becomes clear from this survey that there were two migrations of Aryans, one towards the beginning of the second millennium B.C., and another a few centuries later of several tribes of Ṛgvedic Aryans, some of which are mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*.³ The people whom the *Ṛgvedic* Aryans found in possession of the country are called “Dāsas” and “Asuras” in the *Ṛgveda* and *Yajurveda* saṁhitās respectively, and were considered to be their very opposites as “anindra,” “ayajvan,” and “asunvan,” though the epithet “mṛdhraṅvāk” (“of broken speech”) used to describe these earlier residents and the description of this speech in the Brāhmaṇas clearly reveal the

1 Aurobindo expressed similar skepticism regarding comparative mythology and comparative Indo-European linguistics in 1916 when he said: “These branches of learning are compelled to build upon scanty data, large and sweeping theories and supply the deficiency of sure indications by an excess of conjecture and hypothesis. They are full of brilliant beginnings but can come to no sure conclusion” (1956, *The Secret of the Veda*, p.30).

2 The most confident expression of this faith in comparative Indo-European linguistics may be found in Max Muller’s *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*. He says that “the evidence of language is irrefragable” and goes on to add; “It is the only evidence worth listening with regard to ante-historical periods” (13). The words common to all Indo-European languages are “like the watchwords of sentinels” that identify the insider or member of the group or race.” This witness, he adds, is “not to be shaken by cross-examination” (13). “All must yield before facts furnished by language” (14).

3 Typifying the traditional orthodox response, Pargiter believed that the theory of “double invasion” of Aryans is “impossible in itself” (296).

Aryan linguistic background of the Dāsas and the Asuras. Once alerted to the possibility of two Aryan peoples speaking sister dialects, one looks for their traces in the Jhukar culture of 1800 B.C., and the later Cemetery H and Gandhar Grave cultures. The ethnographic parallels between customs and beliefs revealed by some of the ancient seals and figurines, and those of modern Indians show unmistakable cultural continuity. It may therefore be suggested that the role of the “final arbitrator” in the Aryan controversy can be played by Vedic philology, particularly since it alone can verify or support findings of archaeology and other disciplines. For that purpose it is important to read the *Rgveda* and the Upaniṣads chronologically rather than sequentially as arranged in modern editions of them.

Such a reading enables one to trace the pattern of Aryan advance in India and realize how the *Rgvedic* gods changed, how the rituals became more complicated, and how in the Upaniṣadic period the early Aryan system of beliefs was permeated by indigenous concepts and notions that had no analogues in the Family Books or in the *Avestā*. Non-chronological reading, on the other hand, can be misleading since one does not realize then that Indra, for instance, is a winter god in Book VI but a rain god in Book IV, that Vṛtra is a winter giant in Book VI but a demon of drought in Book IV, and that such a drastic change in their nature and functions calls for an explanation. For a chronological view, on the other hand, it is obvious that the change might have had something to do with the change of Aryan residence from one climatic zone to another.⁴ To take another example. Viṣṇu is not a fertility god in Book VI, but in Book VII he is a full-fledged fertility god. A chronological reading would try to account for this change and suggest that this development occurred with the movement of the Aryans from the saptasindhu into the Sarasvatī-Dr̥ṣadvatī Doab occupied by the Dāsas, who were “śiṣnadevāḥ” or had the “phallus for their god.” Or consider the question of the identity of the Sarasvatī of Book VI. On a chronological reading of the references to the Sarasvatī in the *Rgveda* it is obvious that in Book VI, unlike in other Books, the region is distinguished by frozen rivers, barricaded cows, and the presence of Panis, Bṛsayas, and the Pārāvatas. This complex of features helps one to locate the Sarasvatī to the west of the Indus. In short, a chronological reading helps one to take a logical and historical view of the gods and the rivers that yields a glimpse of various stages of Aryan life in India from the Western to the Eastern Sarasvatī and the Yamunā.

The question of the identity of the Sarasvatī did not arise for the orthodox tradition for which there was only the Vedic Sarasvatī of

4 For details, see below, “Indra.”

Kurukṣetra.⁵ However, the historically minded Roth suggested that it referred to the Indus as well as the Sarasvatī of Kurukṣetra, while Max Muller believed with the tradition that there was only one Sarasvatī – Sarasvatī of Kurukṣetra. What Roth and Max Muller did not take into account was the specific character of the Sarasvatī region of Book VI referred to above and the difference between it and the region of the Eastern Sarasvatī of the other Family Books. Thus Book III refers to the region of the Sarasvatī-Dr̥ṣadvatī Doab as “iḍyāspadam,” the “best place on earth for sacrifices,” and also to a non-Aryan tribe of “Kikātas” who offered no soma, and practiced the strange rite of offering as oblation heated milk that spilled from a bowl. The Sarasvatī of Book II has the “Śāṇḍikas” living on it who were defeated by the Bharatas. The Sarasvatī of Book VII also refers to iḍyāspadam where the harsh wintry conditions of Book VI do not obtain. And most importantly, this Sarasvatī is not “pārāvataḡhntī” anymore but the abode of the Pārāvatas who now offer sacrifices! The Sarasvatī of Book VI on which the Pārāvatas were killed was, therefore, a Northwestern river different from the Sarasvatī of Kurukṣetra which harboured the sacrificing Pārāvatas.

If the Bharatas and other Ṛgvedic Aryans came from beyond the Indus, were the Dāsas, whom they found prosperous and in possession of the country, an indigenous people? While the Bharatas recognized in the Purus and Turvaśas their Ṛgvedic predecessors whom they admired for their victories over the Dāsas, the identity of the latter has remained enigmatic since they are described in the *Ṛgveda* in terms of negative epithets only. Let us consider a few of them.⁶ If “mṛdhravāk” or “broken speech” suggests that they belonged to a different speech community, “anindra” (“without Indra”) and “anyavrata” (“of another faith”) show that their religion was different from that of the Aryas, and “kṛṣṇatvak” (black complexion) underlines their separate identity. Such expressions led Sāyaṇa to look upon them as “asura” in the sense of “demons,” and prompted scholars to look upon them as “savages,” “barbarians,” and “original inhabitants”(Macdonell, I 356) though there is no necessary connection between the negative epithets and the scholarly inference.

5 Pargiter writes: “Indian tradition knows nothing of Aila or Aryan invasion of India from Afghanistan, nor of any general advance from thence eastwards” (196). For it there was only one Sarasvatī, the Sarasvatī of Kurukṣetra (299), irrespective of the maṇḍala in which it was noted, the region it flowed through, and its local character since it believed that the Aryans were indigenous, and the Vedas “apauruṣeya” or “revealed” and therefore beyond historical inquiry.

6 For details, see below “The Dāsas” in “Tribes in the *Ṛgveda*.”

But the *Ṛgveda* itself provides a source of information which throws doubt on this popular interpretation. Consider the evidence of the personal names of the Dāsas. As we shall see later, they are Aryan in structure and typically derive from Aryan roots with the addition of prefixes and suffixes.⁷ Since the names are Aryan in character, it is likely that the Dāsas spoke an Aryan dialect. It is not likely that the names were OIA translations of the original non-Aryan names since they are short and sound natural unlike the “equivalents” of original names. Besides, the names retain the phonetic peculiarities of the original dialect, which would not have been the case if they had been translations into OIA. To take only one example. Consider the name “Balbūtha.” If it were OIA, it would have been “Balabhūta.” But the deaspiration of the labial “bha,” the transfer of the aspiration to the final “ta” resulting in “tha,” and the syncope of “la” and ba” differentiate it from “Balabhūta.” These processes suggest the Iranian background of the name. It can be particularized as Indo-Iranian on the strength of the retention of the Indo-Iranian “sa” in the contemporary tribal name, “Bṛśaya,” which would have been “Bṛsaya” in OIA and “Brahaya” in Iranian.

That the Dāsas spoke an Aryan dialect is also suggested by the oldest *Tāṇḍya* Brāhmaṇa. It describes “mṛdhravāk” speech in a series of verbs which refer to its characteristics. Thus it is at once familiar and strange, partially intelligible, and gives one the impression of being “grathita” or “strung together.”⁸ These features suggest that the speech habits and speech rhythm of mṛdhravāk speakers were different from those of Ṛgvedic Aryans. It would seem that the Dāsas spoke an Aryan dialect which had grown away from the common Indo-Iranian as well as the OIA on account of its isolation from them, its independent development, and longer residence in the country leading to assimilation of different patterns of speech. Clearly, the Bharatas, Paṇis, Pārāvatas, Bṛśayas, and the Dāsas, to name only a few, were trans-Indus tribes from the Indo-Iranian home west of the Indus, and “mṛdhravāk” suggests what became of the Pre-Ṛgvedic Aryans in the course of several centuries since their arrival in India towards the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

It must be stressed, however, that the question of the original home of the Aryans and their migrations to India is only part of the problem of their “elusiveness.” Their subsequent fortunes, which include assimilation and nativization, also contributed to their elusive quality. The process of assimilation, which can be traced through a study of their gods, rituals, and

7 For the opposite view of the Dāsa names, see H.H.Hock, 1999, p. 169.

8 For details, see below “The Dāsas” in “Tribes in the *Ṛgveda*.”

philosophy, is perhaps the best witness to the transformation of their original identity revealed in the Family Books. The change in the character of Aryan thought and practice, for example, is unmistakable. By the time of the Brāhmaṇas the Ṛgvedic gods lost their primacy, some of them had changed their character and functions, and Indra was surrounded in the rituals by parvenu gods. The confident, life-affirming, and this-worldly spirit of the Family Books was no longer in evidence in the rituals which were marked by vague fears, dark forebodings, and obsession with “prāyaścitta” or “compensatory penance” for the slightest deviation from the formulated ritual. In the Upaniṣads the Ṛgvedic desire for a life of “śaradaḥ śatam” was replaced with a yearning for liberation from the eternal round of life and death. There were changes in the soma ritual which accommodated new gods and practices. Heterodox ideas such as “karma,” “punarjanma,” “saṃsāra,” and “mukti” appeared in the Upaniṣads without any preparation for them in the Family Books. Such changes and revaluation of values were not a logical outcome of the “internal development” of the “Aryan genius,” and must be said to point to the presence of non-Aryan traditions which have been ignored and have remained largely unacknowledged.

Though the Bharadvāja of Book VI might not have failed to see a fellow-Aryan in the Yājñavalkya of the Upaniṣads, he might have wondered at what had happened to the Ṛgvedic gods, would have been puzzled by the later ṛṣi’s abstract transcendental Brahman, and intrigued by the new strange rituals as well as the notions of karma, saṃsāra, and mukti. How the Aryans turned into what they did in India – “Continent of Circe” as Nirad Chaudhari would have it – is no less significant than the Yakṣa praśṅga (nagging question) of where they came from and their “indubitable” archaeological traces. The book seeks to address itself to both these questions, and for that purpose takes another look at some of the archaeological material, and Aryan gods, rituals, and thought as revealed in Vedic literature.

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Words are inadequate to acknowledge what I owe Dr. Shruti Pradhan, who taught me Vedic Sanskrit and introduced me to Vedic interpretation, though, of course, I alone am responsible for the translation of the ॠs attempted here. I am also grateful to my childhood friend, Prof. Kitayun Marre, for a critical look at the manuscript, her helpful suggestions, and moral support. I remember on this occasion my intellectual debt to my departed friends, Prof. Kenneth James Hughes (formerly of Manitoba) and Rashid Ahmad Riyaz Hussain Syed (a London-based clinical psychologist) whose broad intellectual interests and unconventional modes of thinking provided the stimulus without which this book would not have been written.

Pradhan S.V.

ABBREVIATIONS

RV	<i>Ṛgveda</i>
<i>Yaju.</i>	<i>Yajurveda</i>
<i>Vaj.Sam.</i>	<i>Mādhyandina Vājasaneyī Samhitā</i>
<i>Mait.Sam.</i>	<i>Maitrāyaṇīya Samhitā</i>
<i>Tai.Br.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>Sat.Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>Jai.Br.</i>	<i>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>Br.</i>	<i>Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Ch.</i>	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Ai.</i>	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Tai.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Kau.</i>	<i>Kauṣītakī Upaniṣad</i>
<i>AP SS</i>	<i>Āpastambha Śrauta Sūtra</i>
<i>ASV SS</i>	<i>Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra</i>
<i>KSS</i>	<i>Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra</i>
<i>Anu.</i>	<i>Anuśāsana parva, Mahābhārata</i>

INTRODUCTION

DIGGING AROUND THE CONCEPT OF ARYA

1. The Politics of Aryan Identity

When Sir Herbert Grierson (1903) reminded his readers that philology is a “European science” (*LSI* 6, 38), he had in mind Indian readers, who had inferred their Aryan identity from the fact that they spoke Indo-Aryan languages. What he was suggesting politely was that the European science demanded a certain rigour, discipline and respect for evidence which came easily to the Europeans. Without being offensive, he warned against “the unholy alliance” of ethnology and linguistics (*Ibid.*, 1, 28-29) that gave rise to this inference and popularized it in India and abroad. What the English thought of the unwarranted inference may be guessed from the ironic reference of one of Forster’s “colonial characters” to “the Aryan brother in topi and spats” at the “Bridge party” given by the Collector (*A Passage to India*, 39).

In order to realize how this caution was justified, one may take into consideration the history of Nahali, an Indo-Aryan dialect of Nimar in Madhya Pradesh. Though regarded as an Indo-Aryan dialect today, its substrata are clearly derived from other families of languages. According to Grierson (*LSI* 4), the speakers of Nahali originally spoke a Munda dialect akin to Kurku, though later they came under the influence of a Dravidian dialect, and the resultant dialect was subjected to an Aryan tongue (185-187). It has also been pointed out that it has a large vocabulary which cannot be assigned to any known family of languages and which therefore is considered to have been derived from the earliest language spoken in this region, probably, negrito (S Bhattacharya, “Field Notes on Nahali,” *IJDL* 17 (1955-56), 245-257, p.257). It may thus be seen that an Indo-Aryan dialect of today records the primitive past of this region in the form of substrata, which attest to different families of languages.

If one were to generalize from the present Indo-Aryan character of Nahali and project it into the past and consider the speakers of Nahali to be of Aryan origin (though such a claim has not been made by them or on

their behalf since they are “tribals” still), it might well please the popular Nahali imagination in the next century, if by then they lose their tribal odour as a result of economic and social development and consequent improvement of their ritual status. But would this not violate both common sense and logic? While it is clear that languages may present an Indo-Aryan character, it does not necessarily reflect the racial identity of the speakers. I would like to submit that what is true of Nahali might well be true of the thousand year old New Indo-Aryan languages. And this can be ascertained by a close study of their substrata and grammatical structure. One is therefore justified in suspecting that the popularly assumed Aryan origin of the speakers of major Indo-Aryan languages may be as certain as the putative Aryan origin which speakers of Nahali may, hopefully, claim in a few hundred years as “Educated Indians.”

Nevertheless, the centrality of the Aryan concept to Indian thought and life since the times of the *R̥gveda* cannot be denied. However, it is clear from the epics that whatever the early Aryan phenotype, “dark” people too belonged to the Aryan fold, which prompts one to suggest that in old times “Aryan” did not refer exclusively to a physical type alone, if indeed it ever did. In fact, it would seem that it did not have such a referent in the times of the Brāhmaṇas at all since it is clear from the genealogy of several ṛ̥ṣis that their background was manifestly non-Aryan, though they had become the pillars of orthodoxy. However, the expression “Aryan” took on a new significance in the nineteenth century that it did not have in India. The early European Indologists believed that it referred to a race which they, like Jehovah, created in their own image, and for which they found “evidence” in the *R̥gveda* that was unassailed for the next hundred years. A people with such a foreign physiognomy and pigmentation, it was obvious, could not but have been conquerors or immigrants in a black country like India. The island of Circe must have lurked in the minds of classical Indologists as they pieced together the history of the progress of this “race” through the vast tropical country inhabited by savages and barbarians.

That this view of the Aryan people which is based on identification of language and race, though repudiated by Max Muller more than once in later years, should have enjoyed immortality in India is not difficult to understand.¹ It gave Her Majesty’s “poor Indian,” humiliated by more than a century of British contempt and government, a status of racial equality

¹ See section 3, “Pre-Indus Indology,” below.

with the ruler.² “Science” granted him in theory what the white man denied him in practice, which was no small victory. The warm reception of this theory by the Indian intelligentsia, as well as its subsequent transformation into an article of faith with the educated, is a subject for a separate sociological inquiry. What may be noted here is that in a land of disparate people divided by mutually unintelligible languages, the notion that the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages were of a common Aryan origin since their languages derived from same Old Indo-Aryan gave the people the feeling of being a homogeneous entity. Its implication that they therefore shared a common ancestry must have touched a vital chord in a nation where ancestor worship is as important as in China, and therefore possessed a not mean unifying potential. In the colonial atmosphere in which the British politicians and propagandists stressed the heterogeneity of the people and the diversity of their languages with a view to minimizing the significance of the nascent nationalist movement, the idea of a common Aryan origin was more than a scientific theory. It had the potential of a powerful political mantra, an aggressive ideology.

The vast illiterate, “depressed” majority did not remain out of the magic brotherhood for a long time. Within half a century, the śūdras or the Harijans of India marked their coming of political age with B.R. Ambedkar’s D.Lit thesis, *Who Were the Shudras?*, which claimed that they were originally “Aryans,” though later degraded to the present mean status by the Brahmanical conspiracy which deprived them of the right to initiation and kept them out of the Aryan fold of the “twice-born.” It is significant that a Harijan who was deprived of his birthright (the right to initiation) did not, as an outsider, reject the unholy Aryan brotherhood, as one might have expected a radical thinker to do. Instead, he accepted the ideology of the “touchables” and argued for a rightful place of pride for his people in the Aryan brotherhood!

The theory, right or wrong, put forward by European science in a fit of absent-mindedness, as it were, had an unexpected fall-out. What united the Hindus politically set them apart from the Muslims, who claimed a separate Semitic identity for themselves. Whereas the Hindus and the

² Vivekananda noted the popular perception of the linguistic hypothesis in his *Memoirs of European Travel*. “Nowadays we hear it from the lips of people of all castes in India that they are all full-blooded Aryans. Only there is some difference of opinion amongst them about the exact percentage of Aryan blood in their veins...And it is also reported that they and the English race belong to the same stock –that they are cousins-german to each other, and that they are not “natives.” And they have come to this country out of humanitarian principles – like the English” (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* VII, 318-319).

Muslims had inhabited the same geographical space in some sort of uneasy harmony for a thousand years, sharing common manners, customs, festivals, superstitions, cuisine and whores, though not food, there developed now two separate camps, more separate from each other than castes, and one of them demanded exclusive space for itself for the first time in the history of the sub-continent. This new development was partly a consequence, I would suggest, of the Aryan identity the Hindus claimed for themselves and what it implied for the largest "Semitic" minority that felt threatened in a free India. Not surprisingly, two newly discovered identities, the modern Aryans and the Islamic Semites, carved out of India two separate nations for themselves in a world of nation-states.

If the Muslim reaction was inevitable, and as the popular tradition has it, instigated by the British rulers, the reaction which was perhaps least expected came from the politically more placid southern India, hitherto considered to be the centre of Hindu orthodoxy and regarded more or less as an appendage of northern India. It took roots in the post-independence period in the form of the ideology of the Dravid Munnetra Kazagam, popularly known as DMK. It was a political manifestation of the Dravidian theory, which precisely like the Aryan, conjured out of speakers of Dravidian languages an abstraction called "Dravidians" and endowed them with a history and culture of their own, the pioneering work in this direction having been done by Bishop Robert Caldwell, who wrote the first comparative grammar of Dravidian languages (1856). Besides the Islamic Semitic identity, now there was one more identity to contend with, namely, the Dravidian, which too aspired for its own homeland. Whatever the fortunes of that political movement for a separate homeland in India, it is interesting that the idea had its more successful repercussions in Ceylon where the "liberation struggle" for "Tamil Eelam" threatened to divide it like India.

The wind of harmless, heuristic concepts of ur-language and its corollary, ur-home, then, was sown by earnest European linguists; the whirlwind, however, is being reaped by the people whose languages they analyzed with passion and diligence, though it must be said to their credit that the transition from ur-home to a *separate* home here and now represents pure native genius and not an "Orientalist conspiracy." Similarly, it is the Indian genius that kept alive what Europe rejected, namely, the early identification of language with race in the nineteenth century. To put it in simple terms, an illogical unscientific inference has divided us effectively. On the other hand, Europe, which too speaks mutually unintelligible languages that belong to the Indo-European family, and to which India was often compared for her linguistic and cultural

diversity by British bureaucrats and politicians in their memoirs and Parliamentary reports, boasts a political, economic and cultural unity enshrined in the European Community. The question that forces itself on us then is this: Must we continue to be guided by a scientific error? Shall we continue to follow the “deception of the thrush?”

2. Intellectuals and Aryan identity

How did we come to such a pass? Did this happen because we lack a “sense of history?” as has been suggested several times? According to H.D.Sankalia, archaeology and historiography never developed in India. “There was not even [the] simple curiosity to know the past.” This lack of interest, he thinks, was a result of mass illiteracy, poverty, lack of social awareness, and most importantly, the “apathy of the intellectual classes to things of the past” (*Prehistory and Protohistory of India*, 1975, xvii-xviii). For instance, the discovery of Stone Age tools in India by Meadows Taylor, Foote, Wynne, Cockburn and Hackett in the nineteenth century stimulated no research by Indians. According to Sankalia, “these early discoveries did not take root” because “the political, social and cultural atmosphere which had manifested itself in Europe was completely absent in India (Ibid., xvi).” The source of the great European interest in history in the Age of Enlightenment, according to Warsaae, may be found in the French Revolution. “With a greater respect for the political rights of the people [brought about by the Revolution], there awakened in the nations themselves a deeper interest in their own history, languages and nationality” (quoted by Sankalia, p. xii). If one remembers that the French Revolution is synonymous with the abolition of feudalism, establishment of capitalism, disintegration of the Christian dogma, and the consequent promotion of freedom of the individual, free trade, and free, rational, scientific inquiry unhampered by received opinion or ideology, one realizes that the European sense of history was a mental habit that developed in an egalitarian society that respected human rights and human dignity. The Purāṇas, court chronicles, and histories of castes and clans illustrate the kind of history Indians could produce in their kind of feudal ethos. The sense of history in the European sense of the term had to wait for more propitious conditions.

And when the “more propitious conditions” did arrive in some measure in the nineteenth century, the only rational and credible narrative or “story” of India available then was the one put together by British scholars. Indian history as reconstructed by them was an unexpected gift to a people who had only “itihāsa” (iti+ha+āsa = thus it was) but no history.

We received a comprehensive, rational narrative prefaced with a critical discussion of sources, based on an analytical study of the relevant materials, and complete with historiographical concepts like the “Golden Age,” and the “Dark Ages.” This methodological baggage was also accompanied by ideas which, unfortunately, laid hold of the Indian psyche far more than the former.³ Aryans as the source of civilization in India, dispossession and banishment of tribals to the hills and forests, and the racial divide between their “successors” and the tribals are some of the ideas that, though unknown to the orthodox Indian tradition, still enjoy favour with us.⁴ As we shall see, we are still caught within the intellectual framework designed by the British. Consider, for instance, what our most distinguished archaeologist, H.D.Sankalia, says: “Within India, there are even now thickly forested and hilly regions where primitive aboriginal tribes are concentrated. It is believed that these people have been driven thither as refugees by the advancing civilization from outside, from more favourable areas which they once occupied during the Stone Ages.”⁵ It may be noted that he makes this statement in spite of Allchin, who points out that “there is no evidence to show that these hill tribes were refugees from the Great Plains” (Quoted by Sankalia, p. iv). If the passive voice (“it is believed”) should give one the impression that Sankalia too, like Allchin, does not share the popular view, he makes it clear that it has to be determined archaeologically “whether they had settled in the forested and hilly regions since prehistoric times” (p. iii), as though he believed with some of his colonial teachers that they came from the agricultural zone outside the hilly region!

3 Of course, this is not to deny our mastery of Western historiographical concepts. One learns of a “Renaissance” in Bengal in the nineteenth century, and of a “reformation” in Maharashtra in the seventeenth. Indian Communists detected a Leninist “Bourgeois Democratic Revolution” in the Freedom, Partition and carnage of 1947.

4 The stubborn attribution of the Indus Valley Civilization to the Aryans as in the works of K.D. Sethna is part of the syndrome referred to here (cf. *Karpasa in Pre-historic India: A Chronological and Cultural Clue* 1981).

5 Chakravarty points out in his *Colonial Indology* that the notion that the usurping Aryans pushed the aboriginals into forests was put forward by Brian Hodgson (p. 230). Incidentally, Edward Sapir noted that “there has been far too much ‘driving’ of conquered peoples into mountain fastnesses and land’s end in our histories” (*Language* 210 fn). What really happened, according to him, was that the victors “simply intermingled with them and imposed their rule and language on them” (Ibid.).

Or consider how a well-known Indian historian views the question of Aryans and tribals in ancient history. R.S.Sharma's reconstruction (*Śudras in Ancient India* 1980) of the history of the Aryans makes fascinating reading. The Aryans came to India in large numbers (p. 29) and not as a minority (p. 27), though the priests and the warriors who led the tribe (called "viśa" and which included the third varṇa of vaiśyas) were in "a small minority" (p. 29). They engaged in regular warfare with the Harappans (p. 12) and other black enemies, on whom they eventually imposed themselves, completely swamping the pre-Aryans of North India who did not retain their language. Though they came to India with three varṇas of the Indo-Europeans and the Indo-Iranians, they developed the fourth one of śudras around 1000 B.C. to accommodate the aborigines who were assimilated and the fellow Aryans who were degraded and impoverished. All the four varṇas, he believes, spoke Sanskrit, which now naturally contained a significant number of Munda and Dravidian words. What is remarkable about this fluent narrative is that it bristles with received colonial assumptions and simplistic notions. Thus he believes that North India, where mostly New Indo-Aryan languages are spoken, is "Aryan," and the southern peninsula, where only Dravidian languages are spoken, is "Dravidian." However, since the concepts that he employs in his discussion of the people, namely, "Munda" and "Dravidian," refer, in fact, to language families, not to their *speakers*, it is a gratuitous assumption to regard language as a marker of racial identity. Thus his neat division of India into racial/linguistic zones such as Aryan and Dravidian, though endorsed by colonial Indology, has little evidence to recommend it. Indeed, one learns from a historical study of Munda, Dravidian, and Aryan languages that their speakers once spoke different languages since Munda has a Negrito substratum, Dravidian has Munda and Negrito substrata, and Indo-Aryan has all the three. By turning linguistic categories into racial compartments and using them to describe people, Sharma has lapsed from scientific rigour into popular science.

If Sankalia and Sharma are apt pupils of their British teachers, Nirad Chaudhary, who considered himself to be the very antithesis of the Western-educated Indian and spent his lifetime "unlearning" what he had been taught, is their "brother-in-arms" (brother-in-books?) in many respects. He voices what one may believe to be the "educated" Indian sentiment when he declares in his *Continent of Circe* that the Aryans were "the first civilized people to settle in India proper" (45). Though, unlike his teachers, he believes that the primitives always lived in "the hilly and wooded regions of Central India and the Deccan" (46), his perception of the relation between the primitives and the educated people is that of most

“educated Indians,” including Sankalia. According to him, the opposition between the tribals and the cultivated people of India is “the basic ethnic pattern of India” (55) and “absolutely basic to the ethnography of India” (45). When three equally distinguished scholars of different persuasions agree on the “cleavage” basic to Indian society, one suspects that they might well be the “children” of the same illustrious parent. It would seem that the notion of the “twain,” the civilized and the tribals, that never met and mingled or the “basic cleavage” which has not been “obliterated” (45) is an important part of the Indian sense of history and identity, notwithstanding the fact that Aryanisation of natives and nativization of Aryans, as we shall see, has been the basic process that gave rise to modern Hindus.

It is clear that a heavy shadow of “tribals” falls across ancient Indian history as narrated by British and Indian historians. It may be recalled that our three scholars owe their understanding of the shadowy tribals, who haunt our imagination and history books, to Thurston, who summed up the wisdom of generations of researchers in his monumental *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. According to him, there are three broad divisions of the Indian people, namely, the Aryans, the Dravidians, and the Munda. The Dravidians, apparently, were autochthonous to India and “no doubt, confined to south India” by the Mundas, who were themselves believed to represent a pre-Aryan invasion of India by the northwest or northeast routes. But the “invading Aryans” (I, 152-153) pushed the Munda to the hills, deserts, and forests of Rajasthan, Central India, and the Chhota Nagpur plateau. Thus came into existence the Aryan north, the Dravidian south, and the Munda central belt we have already encountered in Sharma --a historical half-truth that haunts scholars as well as popular imagination--and still dominates our understanding of ourselves.

The view regarding the relationship between the Aryans and the tribals that we have encountered in Sankalia, Sharma and Chaudhari who between them represent Aryavarta or North India is also prevalent in the final bastion as it were of Indo-Aryan languages, namely, Maharashtra. To complicate matters, it would receive assent as much from the “civilized Hindus” of the north as from the Dravidian speaking Brahmins of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala. The corollary of the view common to the “Aryan” North and the “Dravidian” Brahmin south is that civilization in India began with the Aryans, and that its carriers are their descendants, the Hindus of the north and the south.

Certain characteristics of the archaeological, historical, and literary discourses discussed above stand out: transformation of linguistic concepts into empirical categories, simplistic dichotomy of the people of India into

Aryans and tribals, and ahistorical and undialectical understanding of the processes that led to the emergence of modern people. It would seem that these ubiquitous convictions are evidence of how English education not only led to the mastery of the disciplines it introduced but also to the internalization of the assumptions of the imperialist construction of history. Such discourses promote a peculiar view of history in as much as they encourage the belief that India's pre-history was the work of her primitives, and her history proper the handiwork of the civilized, the Aryans, and their descendants, the Hindus. The colonial apartheid and the Hindu internal apartheid have, it would seem, moulded our very perception of ourselves and our history.

3. Limitations of pre-Indus Indology

The final step which led to the separation of Aryans from the "healthy manliness of Western nations" brought them from the northwest to the Indus and the Punjab between 1500 and 1000 B.C. They "mixed with the dark-skinned primitives of India and acquired more and more the characteristics of the Hindus." They became slack under the enervating tropical climate "not congenial to their likes," and their "slackness" was aggravated by the tropical fecundity as well as "easy victories over their unequal opponents." "Absence of great challenges, harsh sufferings and grim necessities of life" encouraged "passivity" on their part. As a result, not only were their intellectual creations marked by passivity, they also failed to "plumb the farthest depths of reality" or express "joyful vigour" (Oldenberg 1988, 1-2; 1991, 2-3). Such is the brief history of the Aryans in India as seen by the Orientalists.⁶

This Orientalist theory presents the pre-Indus colonial view of India's prehistory and suggests that in the beginning there were "dark-skinned primitives" in India who were brought into the ambit of history by "fair" Westerners who were the first to conquer, colonize, and absorb them. It gave rise to the notion among some historians that Indian history could be seen as a struggle between them or between Aryan and Dravidian

⁶ This view, which was first elaborated by James Grant in a Parliamentary paper in 1798, received a historical dimension in James Mill's *History of India*, and philosophical respectability from John Stuart Mill (Pradhan 1976, 5-22). It was popularized by Macaulay in his essay on Clive, adopted by the Indian Civil Service, and retailed by bureaucrats and Memsahibs in their pert and testy memoirs.

temperaments⁷. It had repercussions in linguistics also in as much as hybridization of the Aryans came to be seen as a key to the growth of New Indo-Aryan languages, which were considered to be different linguistic forms that had evolved from Old Indo Aryan.

Given these “facts,” it was obvious to Oldenberg that the Hindu religion is a mixture of the Aryan and the primitive. If it is a mixture of Aryan forms, primitive cults, customs, rituals and taboos, is it not possible that Indian philosophies, Yoga and asceticism also might owe something to this “dark primitive” source? Even if the dark primitives were not advanced enough to develop the idealistic notions of Brahman, Ātman and identity of the two, did the R̥gvedic Aryans, who possessed no such notions in the Family Books of the *R̥gveda*, develop them on their own in India? Could the Aryans, who in the older *R̥gveda* had no notion of tapas, renunciation, transmigration or saṃsāra, and implored gods for temporal benefits, have developed the philosophy of withdrawal from the world from nothing? Aryan authorship of these ideas and practices is universally taken for granted since all the philosophical and yogic texts handed down to us begin by acknowledging the primacy and paramountcy of the Veda. The crowning glory of ancient India--its philosophy and the Yoga--was considered to be a contribution of the Aryans, albeit hybridized.

The discovery of the Indus Valley seal with the figure of a man in the posture of a yogi and of a number of terracotta figurines depicting yogic poses suggested for the first time that Yoga and the philosophy of Sāṃkhya underlying it had a time depth which reached far beyond the *R̥gveda* into pre-history.⁸ The suggestion was strengthened with the discovery in the early Indus stratum of a kamandalu (a cylindrical bowl with a lid and a handle), the *sine qua non* of the later yogi.⁹ What is true of Yoga and Sāṃkhya might well have been true of the philosophy of Ātman and Brahman too. This possibility raises a number of questions such as who mediated the native lore to the Aryans, how, and when?

7 This view is vividly expressed by Marshall (1931): “In Greece, as in India, it was the happy fusion of the southern and northern races and the intermingling of their widely divergent talents that led to the splendid outburst of classical thought and art” (I, Introduction, p. vii).

8 According to Marshall (1931, 54), the famous male statue at Mohenjo-daro with eyes concentrated on the tip of the nose is the earliest representation of the attitude of a yogi. He believed that Yoga had its origin among the pre-Aryan population (1931, 54).

9 See Khan, F.A., “Excavations at Kot Diji,” *Pakistan Archaeology*, Number 2, 1-90. Also see, Pradhan S.V., “The Indus Valley Cones, Cakes, and Archaeologists,” *The Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 80 (1999), 43-51.