

Origin of the Vedic Culture

NVC SWAMY

The Indian History

There is much truth in the maxim: 'The history of a country is written by its conquerors.' In no instance is this truer than in the case of India. India's ancient culture has a vast legacy, but not in the sense of what is known today as 'history'. There appears to have been over-modesty on the part of our great writers, about whom we hardly know anything. It is only from the time of the Muslim rulers that we find chroniclers recording events as they unfolded. This continued on to the British period. But, all these recordings were from the point of view of the conquering rulers, never from the point of view of the subject country. It is this history of ancient India that is still being taught to our school children.

Almost all our textbooks on Indian History prescribed for students of schools and colleges commence with the famous, or probably infamous, 'Aryan Invasion Theory'. This was the product of the fertile imagination of Friedrich Maximilian Mueller (popularly known as Max Muller). Though born and brought up in Prussia, he had his education in Paris, and later became the Professor of Oriental Philosophy at Oxford University, England. He became well-known for his translation of the Rig-Veda, and as the Editor of *Sacred Books of the East*, the monumental

50-volume set of English translations of Asian religious writings series.

Aryan Invasion Theory

What is this 'Aryan Invasion Theory'? The theory says: Once upon a time, around 4000 years ago, there lived a group of fair-skinned people in Central Asia, or maybe in Persia, or maybe even in Russia. For some unknown reason, they left their homeland, crossed the Himalayas and landed in Punjab, where there were fertile valleys watered by big rivers. The local inhabitants looked like savages, dark in color. The Aryans could easily conquer them because of their superior might, and drove them away to the south. These tribes settled down in the South of India, and became the Dravidians! A very neat classification indeed, but absolutely baseless. It is still the favorite theory of historians with a Marxist bent of mind.

Modern Developments

What, then, is the truth about Aryans? During the last century, many new facts have come to light. Because of them we have now a better idea of what really might have happened. The first was the discovery of the ancient ruins in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, in the western part of our country, during the early part of the last century. This was



Dr. N.V.C. Swamy, former Director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, is currently the Dean of Academic Courses at the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, a Deemed University in Bangalore.

the work, basically of John Marshall, the Director-General of the newly established Archaeological Survey of India in Kolkata, and his officer, Rakhil Das Banerjee. There was an intense debate whether these ruins represented the destroyed cities of the Dravidians. The debate raged on till India gained its independence. The colonial powers were no longer there to bias any new discoveries to suit their limited ends.

In the 1970s, the Government of India launched a project of bringing the latest technologies to the villages, by providing them with TV sets for community viewing. This was the famous SITE, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment, which provided not only News, but also weather bulletins based on satellite imagery. Normally, in any pictures taken by a geo-satellite, warm terrain on the earth is indicated by red color, and cool terrain, including water masses, is shown as blue or green. In these pictures, the area of Rajasthan was shown as predominantly red, with streaks of blue, indicating the river Sindhu and its tributaries. But, slightly to its east was seen another wide blue patch, which could only be another bigger river! But this seemed impossible, since there are no other rivers flowing through Rajasthan and its border with Pakistan.

This was indeed grist to the mill of scholars. Experts from several diverse disciplines jumped into the fray. There were satellite technologists, metallurgists, computer scientists, archaeologists, Vedic scholars and even mathematicians. Their joint efforts finally provided a scenario, which appears highly plausible.

River Saraswati

The blue patch is the trace of a sunken river flowing below the surface. But, 'seeing is

believing', as the saying goes. In order to check it out, Dr. Wakankar of the Archaeological Survey led an expedition along the track of the sunken river. He conducted diggings at several places and found clear potable water at depths ranging from 100 meters to a kilometer! It was at this stage that Vedic scholars came into the picture. They expressed the opinion that this sunken river must be the river Saraswati, which is described in the Rig-Veda and about which there is a Sukta also.

If this were indeed the river Saraswati, why did it sink underground? Scholars have given several reasons for it. The one hypothesis that has found common acceptance is that it was due to a massive earthquake leading to the source of the river being blocked. This caused the river to dry up and become the small stream, now known as Ghaggar.

The Saraswati was the giant river on whose banks the Vedic culture flourished. The Vedic civilization was indigenous to the soil of India and was not imported from elsewhere. The Vedic people were so grateful to the river that they deified it as a Goddess. She is worshipped even today as the 'giver of knowledge' and as the Shakti or power of Brahma the Creator.

The Vedic people inhabited both the banks of the river. The river itself was so wide that, to cross it from one bank to another, they needed big boats. That the Vedic people were aware of boat-building is attested to by several ruins of dockyards along the path of the river, especially at places like Dhaulavira. They were adventurous enough to venture out to the sea, and establish their culture at far-off places like Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia. Though some historians have disputed these facts, one cannot ignore them. The pity is that these latest findings have not found their proper place in Indian history textbooks!

Origins of the River Saraswati

How did the river Saraswati come into existence? It is a well-established fact that the magnetic field of the earth undergoes periodic reversals. The normal axis of this field is aligned with the axis of the earth, both the north poles pointing in the same direction. But, sometimes, the magnetic field reverses its polarity, its north now aligned with the south pole of the Earth. The entire weather pattern now undergoes a radical transformation, with ice accumulating in the tropical and sub-tropical regions, and the north and south poles completely bereft of all ice. This heralds what is known as the 'Ice Age'. When the magnetic field aligns itself once again with the axis of the earth, the weather pattern again changes, with the tropical regions again becoming warm and the poles cold. This is known as the 'End of the Ice Age'.

The last Ice Age is considered to have ended around 12,000 years ago, in 10,000 BCE. The tropical ice then started melting and flooding the land. This is estimated to have lasted for 2000 years, giving rise to the oceans, seas and rivers. The memory of this flood has been recorded by ancient cultures in the form of legends. *Srimad Bhagavatam* refers to Lord Vishnu assuming the form of a giant fish and towing the boat of Manu and Satarupa during the flood. The Old Testament talks of Noah and his Ark.

By 8000 BCE, the floods had subsided and the giant river systems had emerged, on the banks of which various world cultures developed. The Mississippi and Missouri complex was the home of the 'Red Indian Culture', the Amazon that of the Incas, Mayans and Aztecs, the Nile that of the Egyptians, the Volga-Danube that of the Druids, the Euphrates-Tigris that of the Middle East cultures, the Yangtze-Kiang that of the Chinese and the Saraswati that of the Vedic people. This was the setting in which our scriptures came into

existence. These are hard facts, established by science, and not the fertile imaginings of a human brain.

Drying up of the River

The river Saraswati is estimated to have dried up around 4000 years ago, around 2000 BCE, giving rise to the current deserts of Rajasthan. The people living on both the banks migrated. The eastward immigrants settled down in the Ganga-Yamuna plains, the two rivers now becoming big, having received the waters received earlier by Saraswati. This is where Puranas, the great Hindu epics, along with the various mythologies, came into existence. The westward immigrants settled down in Persia. They were the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, whose descendants returned home after Persia became Iran, an Islamic state. They are the modern Parsis of India, for whom fire is the holiest icon. One section of these Persians migrated further west, interacting with the other cultures on their way. The Mithraic culture of the Middle East considered the Sun, Mithras, as their main deity. Incidentally, Mitra is a name of the sun in Sanskrit, and is the first name to be mentioned during Surya Namaskara, *Om Mitraya Namaha!* Is it any wonder that scholars are discovering connections among all ancient cultures?

The strangest of all these is the newly established fact that one of the tribes of the Native Cultures of the North American continent, the Hopi Indians, consider their ancestors to have migrated from India long ago. As proof they cite the fact that their main deity is the 'Elephant-headed God', Ganapati. They claim to have been the discoverers of Kundalini and even of Yoga! Interestingly, there are three short peaks on the edge of the Grand Canyon called Brahma, Vishnu and

Mahesh! That should give us enough food for thought. It appears that the Vedic people hit the nail on the head when they declared- *Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti*, and in later literature, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. Apparently, it is only this still extant culture in India that continues to subscribe to this philosophy, as world history has repeatedly shown.

The Vedic Culture

What were the basic characteristics of this culture? Many scholars have found the Rig-Veda and the Atharva Veda to be rich sources for getting an idea of the way the Vedic people had organized their lives. It was basically an agrarian way of life, with the cow as a sort of currency. For example, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda there is the story of King Janaka offering to the best scholar of his time an award of 1000 cows with gilded horns. The cow was an indicator of prosperity and was held in deep respect. Society was divided into four groups or Varnas, depending upon the character of one's profession. This is what degenerated later into the much-maligned caste system.

There were many kings as rulers, living on both the banks, who used to have occasional wars. There is a description in the Rig-Veda of a major war in which ten kings were involved. But, their participation in wars was of a very peculiar nature. No one other than the Kshatriyas would participate in the war. Normal life was not disturbed, because the battle used to be confined to certain fields. It would be fought only between dawn and sunset. It is the infringement of this code during the Mahabharata war that is considered to be the onset of Kaliyuga or the age of lawlessness.

Conclusion

Today, thanks to the efforts of several experts from diverse fields, we are in a position to understand and appreciate our ancient culture much better. Shorn of all later superstitious encrustations, it shines forth as a grand testimony to human endeavor to understand the truth of Aryan culture. This culture influenced the growth of practically all other ancient cultures around the world. The rest of the world is slowly accepting and appreciating the role played by the Vedic

culture in the evolution of world culture. Even Christianity is now inclined to accept that the teachings of Jesus the Christ, again shorn of all distortions, reflecting the influence of Vedantic thoughts on Jesus the Christ. This was the message that Swami Vivekananda had for the West, which he so eloquently and forcefully put forth in his talks and addresses abroad. In the 150th anniversary year of Swami Vivekananda's birth can there be a more appropriate homage? □



Bibliography

In Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India by Georg Feuerstein, Subhash Kak, and David Frawley, Reprinted in 2005 by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi.

The Indian Mind

Some of these old temples of Southern India and those like Somnath of Gujarat will teach you volumes of wisdom, will give you a keener insight into the history of the race than any amount of books. Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and a hundred regenerations, continually destroyed and continually springing up out of the ruins, rejuvenated and strong as ever! That is the national mind, that is the national life-current. Follow it and it leads to glory. Give it up and you die; death will be the only result, annihilation the only effect, the moment you step beyond that life - current. I do not mean to say that other things are not necessary. I do not mean to say that political or social improvements are not necessary, but what I mean is this, and I want you to bear it in mind, that they are secondary here and that religion is primary. The Indian mind is first religious, then anything else.

—Swami Vivekananda, CW, 3:289

