

THE MYTH OF ARYAN INVASIONS OF INDIA

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The often perceived and frequently quoted racial division in India between the fairer Aryan North and the darker Dravidian South is pernicious and dangerous. The British gave currency to this view of racial divide in India. It was part of their “divide and rule” strategy. The Northern people in India got especially sucked into this interpretation of history because it made the “Aryan” northerners appear racially closer to the white races of Europe. This viewpoint is also popular in Sri Lanka, where the Singhalese believe that they are descendants of Aryans from the North of India and that Tamils of Sri Lanka are not.

New interpretations of ancient Indian history cast a serious doubt that Aryans entered India from the outside. New information rejects the notion that the Dravidian people were the conquered races, or that the Dravidians were pushed down south by the invading Aryans.

Sri Aurobindo, the great light that blazed across India during the first half of the twentieth century (1872-1950), debunked this theory of the North-South racial divide. He was a historian, philosopher, a poet, a mystic and a yogi. Sri Aurobindo has written commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Indian society. Therefore, when Sri Aurobindo speaks, we listen.

For anyone who seriously wishes to pursue the topic of north-south division in India in the light of Sri Aurobindo, I recommend K. D. Sethna’s *The Problem of Aryan Origins*, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1980 and 1992. Also recommended are the following two titles. Francois Gautier’s *Rewriting Indian History*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1996, and *The Invasion That Never Was* by Michael Danino and Sujata Nahar, published by Mira Aditi, 1996.

It is commonly believed that the languages of the North and South in India are unrelated. This is not true. Sri Aurobindo’s study of the Tamil led him to discover that the original connection between the Sanskrit and Tamil languages was “far closer and more extensive than is usually supposed” and that they were “two divergent families derived from one lost primitive tongue.” And, “My first study of Tamil words had brought me to what seemed a clue to the very origins and structure of the ancient Sanskrit tongue.” –See Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, V 10, the Centenary Edition, p 36, 46. It is also noted that a large part of the vocabulary of the South Indian languages (Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam) is common with Sanskrit.

Hindus collectively have no memory of an Aryan invasion of India that supposedly took place around 1,500 B.C. Hindu epics do not mention any such invasion. Surely, the extensive Hindu literature would describe the Aryan invasions if such had indeed taken place.

Some people misread Ramayana as describing an invasion of the South by a Northern prince. The Indian epic Ramayana narrates Rama's tale, who invaded the Island of Lanka to rescue his wife Sita. Sita had been forcibly abducted by Ravana to the island of Lanka. Nowhere does Ramayana characterize Ravana as belonging to an alien or an inferior race. Ravana was a scholar of the Vedas and was called a Chaturvedi, a knower of the four Vedas. Ravana belonged to the same cultural stock as the victorious Rama.

People who give credence to an Aryan invasion of India cite archeological evidence as proof. Among the thousands of clay seals that have been found in the region of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro (the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization, supposedly the home originally of the Dravidian people), no seals depict the horse or the wheel. In contrast, Aryans were known to have the horse and the chariot. From this evidence it is concluded that the Aryans conquered the people of the Indus valley through the use of the chariot and the horse. K. D. Sethna disputes this evidence. Some seals depicting the wheel have indeed been discovered at the Harappan archeological sites. The wheel was known to the people of the Indus Valley.

Francois Gautier cites recent research which indicates that the script on the Indus seals is of Sanskrit lineage. This proves that the people of Harappa belonged to a much older Vedic age.

The recent discovery of the dried-up Saraswati river further negates the Aryan invasion theory. Satellite photography from outer space shows the existence of a dried-up river bed in Northern India. The archeological evidence indicates that the river dried up several thousand years ago, much before 1,500 B.C., the date ascribed to Aryan invasions. Saraswati is mentioned numerous times in the Vedic scriptures of the Aryans, indicating that these people lived in India during very ancient times.

An invasion of India from the outside around 1,500 B. C. did not occur. Recent scholarship does not deny that the people in India had relations with other Indo-European people in Asia and Europe. There was a belt stretching from India to the Mediterranean inhabited by a people who spoke related languages, known as the Indo-European languages. Sanskrit is the oldest known language in this family and may appropriately be called as the Mother of Indo-European languages.

Those who seek to foster the unity of India need to emphasize its unity, not its division. In the great cultural and religious history of India, important contributions have come forth from every region in the nation. The vast Ganga-Jamuna plain in the North of India is

indeed the ancient heartland of Hinduism. This is the seat of Ayodhya (Bihar), Mathura and Vrindavan (UP), Kurukshetra (Haryana), and Indraprasatha (Delhi). The Great Mahabharata war was fought in the northern plains.

The 8th to the 13th century revival in Hinduism originated in the South. Sankaracharya from Kerala laid the foundation of modern day Hinduism. Sankara traveled to many parts of India and established centers of teaching and learning in various parts of the country. Sankara wrote extensive commentaries on Brahma Sutras, Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, which are standard texts for Hindus. Ramanuja from Tamilnad and Madhava from Karnataka initiated the Bhakti movement, which spread to many parts of the country, both North and South. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu from Bengal, Mirabai from Rajasthan, Tulsidas from U.P, Nanak from Punjab, Jnaneshwar from Maharashtra, Jaideva (author of Gita Govinda) from Orissa, have all contributed to Hindu religion.

The four Hindu holy places and pilgrimage sites (Tirathas and Dhams) at Badri Nath, Rameshwaram, Puri, and Dwarka are located in four corners of India: north, south, east and west. Every pious Hindu aspires to visit the four Dhams in one's lifetime.

Some people equate Sanskrit with Hindi language and the Devanagri script. According to Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of Arsha Vidya Gurukulum in Pennsylvania and a Sanskrit scholar, Sanskrit language originally did not have its own script. It was written in a variety of local scripts. The writing of Sanskrit in the Devanagri script is a later development in history.

An Aryan invasion of India from the outside around 1,500 B. C. did not occur. People of North and South India have lived together in peace as two branches of one family since antiquity. People who talk of an Aryan conquest of India parrot the 19th century British viewpoint and do disservice to the cause of unity of India.