

## Obstacles to Identifying the Origins of India's History and Culture

By

Malati J. Shendge

### ABSTRACT

The paper is provoked by Edmund Leach's paper entitled 'Aryan invasions over four millennia'. He boldly expresses his disbelief in the Indo-European (=I-E) construct of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> c. and particularly, would have liked it to have been scrapped on the discovery of the Indus civilization. This author agrees with this proposal, and thinks that as it is, the I-E construct is nullified at the Indian end. But she disagrees with Leach when he blames her for devoting her study to the thesis of how the Aryas obliterated the Indus civilization, which she shows is factually wrong. The study in question is 'The Civilized Demons: the Harappans in Rgveda (1977) aimed at establishing the human identity of the Asuras and their allies in the Rgveda. In the course of the paper she rejects Leach's argument that the Rgveda is a religious work and it cannot have historical element corresponding to the Indus civilization built by the Asuras. The Rgveda was composed by the Asura poets, describes their culture and practically knows nothing about the Aryas who came as refugees seeking asylum. Thus the foreign origin of the Aryas has been obtained correctly, but not beyond this. Her finding is that Sanskrit language has descended from the Harappan language viz Akkadian. Thus India's language and culture are of indigenous origin, the Aryas having accepted these in the process of acculturation.

Key words: *Arya, Indo-European, Indus civilization, Rgveda, rational, mythic, Sanskrit, Akkadian*

"Popper's philosophy ... could scarcely be more undogmatic, for it puts the greatest premium of all on boldness of imagination; and it holds that we never actually know that our approach to any and every situation or problem needs to be always such as to accommodate not merely unforeseeable contributions but the permanent possibility of a radical transformation of the whole conceptual scheme, with which, and even within which we are operating".

Bryan Magee, Popper, p.68.

How little modern studies of the Indian past help us to understand it was brought home to me in my first encounter with it. When as a young Buddhologist I began my work on Buddhist Tantrism (=Vajrayana), I faced absence of systemic knowledge and confusion. I waded through it for four years, never understanding Buddhist Tantrism. Continuing to study the same undauntedly, I worked on, and from Buddhism landed into the Rgveda and Vedic literature in pursuit of one single question. Who were the Asuras, Raksasas, Pisacas, Gandharvas and others, who people the Indian mythic world? Were they really the mythic beings, sons of evil or something else? That led me away from Buddhist Tantrism into wider field of Indology. (But I have not forsaken it, mind you, as I understand it better now!) I have pursued the problem and many more for more than thirty years, and I do not regret it!

This paper is provoked by Edmund Leach's 'Aryan Invasions over four millennia' first published in E. Ohnuki-Tierney (ed), 'Culture Through Time; Anthropological Approaches' and recently reproduced in N. Lahiri's 'The Decline and Fall of the Indus Civilization'. I have seen it for the first time now, and I am hastening to write this paper.

He has referred to my study 'The Civilized Demons : The Harappans in Rgveda'. He seems to be very critical (and rightly) of the Indo-European Theory (abbr. I-E T) and I cannot help agreeing with him. I share most of his criticism of this postulate, particularly after the discovery of the Indus civilization. As he puts it, "Indo-European scholars should have scrapped all their historical reconstructions and started again from scratch. But that is not what has happened. Vested interests and academic posts were involved." (Leach 2000 : 128) Yes, I agree with him fully and infact, even before reading this, I voiced this view in many of my publications, lectures, conversations etc. Since 1997 when my book 'The language of the Harappans : From Akkadian to Sanskrit came out. In fact, I think that the discovery of the Indus civilization has nullified the basic assumptions of the Indo-European postulate, viz about the absence of a component of civilization in the indigenous population before the arrival of the Aryas from outside. When a civilization of the stature of the Indus civilization was discovered on the Indian soil, the question of few refugees, as the Aryas were, bringing civilization to this land does not arise. The story that unfolded during my research is narrated below. However, a very deep distortion of Indian history and culture that has been perpetuated over the last eighty years, or so is the failure of Indological scholarship to give a coherent scientific account of the relationship between the Rgveda (abbr. RV) and the Indus civilization (abbr. IC) as the former is the oldest available literary anthology and the IC, the material component of a civilization, both found on the Indian soil. The question that should have been asked was that who were the legitimate builders of this civilization and whether they were known to the composers of the RV? It was left for us to pose and also answer this question, which has been done in the study, 'The Civilized Demons' (abbr. CD). It should also be borne in mind that this is purely academic and apolitical work. If Leach had studied my book carefully, he would have perhaps agreed with my matter-of-fact interpretation of the details of the Rgvedic poems. Actually I am doing what he wants Indologists to do : take an independent view. I find that broadly he is acquainted with the Indo-European postulate, but his knowledge of the RV independantly of the Indo-European postulate is too meagre, to offer a feasible critique. This is why I refute here only his main thesis. My study was motivated solely by a keen desire to know the truth about the beginning of Indian history and culture and to present a possible account, for the consideration of scholars. This gave its essential character viz. of interdisciplinary approach.

Professor Edmund Leach is a social anthropologist, a 'functionalist' and the purpose of the paper in his own words is : "...to take an anthropological look" at the motivations that have led such scholars( like me) to think about these matters in the way that they do. In discussing this theme, I shall use as my central example the Indo-Europeanists' doctrines concerning the Rgveda. I am well aware that for an outsider to attempt to bring about a shift in this entrenched paradigm is like trying to cut down a 300 year old oak tree with a pen-knife" (emphasis added; Leach 2000: 122)

This citation makes three points : 1) that he is an outsider to Indology, 2) that he tries to refute the I-E dogma in the RV and Aryan invasion and 3) that though he desires to bring about a paradigm shift is unable to do so.

His complaint about my study CD is that it is written on the theme that 'the Aryan invaders had completely obliterated the civilization of their Harappan predecessors'. I do not think I display so much concern for the Aryan 'invaders'. My main concern was to know the source of mythopoeic element in the otherwise, rational RV. While doing this, the conflict between the so-called mythic beings named above and the Aryas and other related themes including the transformation of human beings into mythic became the focus. Moreover the work was completely unplanned, from theme to its execution by interdisciplinary method, which evolved at a later stage. I did not take the theme of the Indus civilizations obliteration by the Aryas from Wheeler and Piggot (Leach 2000 : 129). The theme as stated above and in CD (Shendge 1977 : 2-9) was about the true identity of the Asuras and others. Why the Asuras, Raksases, Gandharvas, Yaksas and pisacas - all mentioned in the RV are considered mythic beings? Is there any inherent trait, linguistic,

iconic, conceptual or otherwise which makes them mythic? In trying to find a reply to this question, CD was born. I suspect however, that not much thought / study or even a perusal of my work, has gone into Leach's comment. Anyone reading that book (and many such persons, with and without professional background have noticed it) would have noticed the differences in the conception and execution of this piece of research. All through the pages of that study I have not allowed rationality and realism as sound tools for interpretation to be sacrificed. The result is that the RV so far considered to be belonging to the dizzy heights of mysticism and mythology, has been pinned down to earth!

To an Indologist like me there are so many questionable views and notions expressed in Leach's article, but it is not possible to deal with them for constraint of space.

It would be wrong to expect Indologists or other relevant disciplinarians not to study afresh ancient works along with modern discoveries, advances in knowledge, changed methods of study etc. with a view to gather more intimate and accurate knowledge of the past (which is useful to understand the present and plan the future). Such a process alone can bring us to truth. Thus old theories are bound to get outdated by new discoveries, and new theories based on them must emerge. This is the process through which knowledge grows. This happens very frequently in natural sciences. However, any talk of replacing I-E T is abhorred in many sections, Leach being an exception. Growth of knowledge need not be hindered by a false sense of pride.

'Intellectual inertia', noted by Leach is due to the compulsion of confirming to western views and theories as intellectual independence is not cherished, proving a hindrance in getting teaching assignments etc. It could also indicate lack of equipment to conduct innovative research or, evaluate new research. The vested interests do not want to scrap the I-E theory because of unwillingness to learn new things, lack of interest in knowing the truth, or offering genuine criticism.

Going back to 18th C. when Sir William Jones announced his discovery of close relationship between Sanskrit, Latin, German etc. which was clearly due to the then recent discovery of Sanskrit. However, it is clear that Jones did not study the RV and the Vedic literature thoroughly, and linguistics was yet to be born. Jones' Discourses (1788) go on repeating the same notions. His proposal was based on the correspondences between Sanskrit, and Greek, Latin etc. This left unstudied the RV in its details and also the Vedic literature. The Samhitas, the Brahmanas etc. studied later were perhaps not treated very seriously as they were considered ritualistic, bereft of historical elements. Also he depended on the help of the pundits which explains ignorance - or at least, difficulty- of the language coupled with the difficulty in communication with the pundits, and sparseness of information, and limited access to sources. Thus, the accuracy of this hypothesis was severely limited, cannot be overlooked. Also the Indus civilization was still unknown. But the reasoning that led to the assumption that the RV and Vedic literature, as well as the Sanskrit language and the Indian culture belonged to the Aryas, is still unknown. As Leach has shown it goes back to Max Muller's writings in 1850, which means after the formulation of I-E T . Be that as it may. But this Arya-postulate (Abrr. A-P) has been over stretched in attributing to the Aryas, the RV, Sanskrit language and the Vedic literature, and last but not the least, the whole of Indian culture! The impractical implications of this hypothesis did not for a moment create doubts about the validity. For example, if the RV was composed outside India, how did it survive the travels and travails of the composers? Why is it that the Arya composers do not speak of their country and land, language and culture that they left behind? Why does the RV speak about the Asuras, Raksases etc. so much whereas it refers to the Aryas cursorily only 36 times and does not furnish even the most essential details about themselves? On the whole, too many loose ends can be pointed out. Also to this must be added the limited know-how of research method etc. Further on, the colonial prejudice about a subject nation is predominantly reflected in the very assumption that a foreign tribe could bring over superior, highly developed culture and spread it here, in a no-man's land! All the

attention was focussed on the Aryas presumably coming from the west and related by the new theory of the west. To what extent the RV and Vedic literature was studied for their own sake with a view to understand their contents in an unprejudiced impartial manner, is doubtful. Due to all these limitations, it is no wonder that the result was a construct (I-E T inclusive of A-P) without much substance but many question marks in it, and yet it has ruled for more than two centuries!

I have undertaken to refute the views of Professor Leach because his article has been cited by 'Saffron' historians in support of their distortions of early Indian history. (Lal M. 2001 : 92) But I fully agree with him (i.e. Professor Leach) that I-E T should be scrapped, with the proviso that early Indian history needs to be studied in an objective, impartial, scientific manner, and be based on available material in the RV, Vedic literature, archaeology and linguistics, with proper documentation etc. It is not wrong to use the ritual literature, as even this type reflects the contemporaneous concerns. The rituals and historical details can be differentiated. Moreover it should not be forgotten that reconstruction of history cannot wait to find more reliable source material which should stand the modern day scrutiny as well as standards. Indian scholarship should undertake to do this.

Now I examine below the general argument of Leach that : the I-E T's hypothesis that a people called the Aryas could have come from outside cannot be historically true. That it is a myth in a religious book. He tries to show that the RV which is basically a religious work is without any historical references and therefore, the Arya invasions to northern India cannot be a historical fact. I refute this argument in the light of my recent work and understanding of the problem generated during it.

(i) His title 'Aryan invasions etc' : In the fresh examination of the RV done by me, I do not find any justification for the use of the word 'invasion' implying thousands of persons armed with weapons, etc overrunning a country and its inhabitants. In fact, only two Aryas are mentioned prominently by name viz. Indra and Vishnu and in that particularly Indra is called Indra, the Arya (RV VII.18.7, V.34.6). Indra's fondness for soma ( RV IV. 18.12 X.119, VIII. 67. 5, 6 )and loot to be obtained from local inhabitants are the predominant traits mentioned very frequently. (Shendge 1977 : 345 ; RV VIII. 24.5) Both are human weaknesses! Vishnu's human body, tall and lanky, a boy on the brink of manhood, is clearly described. (CD : 69-71) So it is clear that the RV composers knew them as human beings. This establishes their humanhood as well as their Arya origin distinctly and differing from that of the poets. Nowhere do the poems refer to the number of the Arya members, whereas the Asura warriors are described to be thousands in numbers.(RV IX. 16.13) In the RV it is mainly Indra, assisted by his aide Vishnu ,fights individual Asuras, who were prominent and were assisted by standing armies. (CD : 49-69). This indicates their probable status in the political organization. At best, the Arya journey, their unknown homeland (Shendge 1977 : 35-40; 51-65) can be described as a refugee trek over difficult terrain probably thickly wooded, as an encounter with a bear (RV VIII. 24.2) suggests and crossing of a river which both are referred to as kind deeds of Indra. If it had been a nomad horde these need not be found very difficult obstacles. Thus no evidence can be produced to support an 'invasion' or 'hordes'. In the RV, Indra's heroic deeds are praised consisting of battles against the individual Asuras, who were powerful. (CD : 56-64)

It is not necessary to derive the Arya trek from extraneous circumstances (Leach 2000 : 135) for the convenience of the formulation of Indo-European postulate. It is to be found in the RV itself. (Shendge 1996 : 11-45) Although their foreignness is emphasized, the homeland left behind by them or their language is not mentioned. In some places, the differences in their culture and that of the Asuras are pointed out. (CD : 94-97) This means that to the poets they were unknown foreigners.

(2) The differences between myth and history: The concepts of myth and history, especially the latter have differed according to ages. Leach (2000: 119) defines history to mean 'Written history, a fixed text that explicitly claims to record what happened in the

past in potentially datable sequence'.

This is a very narrow definition of history. Studies of ancient man reveal his desire to preserve and transmit to later generations his earlier experiences, significant events, names of rulers, countries, the accumulated knowledge which would make their life easier etc, which really constitutes tradition. The desire to preserve the events, etc. is at the root of history writing. There is ample evidence in the ancient cultures indicating this. (Shendge 1990 : 7-22) The oral vehicle was the earliest available to man and only when writing became a reliable enough instrument that man started making use of this. But this period is comparatively short. In the oral tradition versified compositions are commoner because of the ease with which they lent themselves to memorization. Thus, most of the earliest works have taken poetic form, one can not be too fastidious about the form of preservation though the interpolations and additions have to be cautioned against. Myth, I think, characteristically displays traits which are irrational and fantastic and in fact hinder application of rationality in their analysis.

Charles Collier (1981:150) considers the true objects of historical research and inquiry to be understood as intended communication. He even considers 'systematic properties... more or less enduring of the process of articulation' as the historical elements. (Ibid : 150) Amongst these cultural attempts at self-expression are some that 'deserve' to last a long time and there are others which merely 'happen' to last. Some of the ancient monuments, by men to communicate their achievements have withstood the test of time. Such monuments which pass down the ages testify their enduring worth and continued acceptance as permanent monuments to a culture's self-understanding. (Shendge 1990)

The Rgvedic poems as traditionally interpreted express the ordinary experience which is rational and communicable except in two respects: one, the Asuras are said to have traits like four legs, horns, or were born out of eggs, making hissing noises like the serpents and so on. But these have been shown by me to arise from grammatical self-conscious misinterpretations of certain terms at a later stage, but not so in the original compositions. (CD: 49ff) Second trait consists of deification of Indra, the Arya hero, originally a human being. Besides this others like Varuna, Mitra, Pusan, Savitr, etc. were also considered gods. This latter group was essentially of Asura origin, but were divine on cosmic plane as natural phenomena and these divines were represented by human beings on terrestrial plane mainly as homologues of sun and other natural phenomena. Only some like the Asvinas and the Maruts had some role in the incidents in the Indra-Asura conflict. These two were actually the traitors. When Indra was deified, Asuras as his enemies, became representatives of cosmic evil, the demoniac powers.

This mythic irrational element was not present in the original compositions, as the substitution of grammatically correct sense restored the original rational meaning. (CD: 11 ff) It is important to note that except these irrational elements no real mythology is found in the RV.

The RV, it seems to me, was not a religious text originally. All the poems, 1028 in number, were not composed simultaneously, but over years and even generations. The topics they cover are of a wide range, from agricultural implements, to political organization, the nature of governance, and its distribution and organization of power, nature of polity, character of ministers and the functions of their departments, cosmogony, (Shendge 1977 : 289 - 300, Shendge : 2000, 2002; Shendge, Forthcoming) accounts of wars, conflicts and host of other topics etc. In addition to this, poems are addressed exclusively to Agni (fire) and Soma (whole of IXth Mandala). Moreover the present arrangement of the poem displays artificiality in that the poems occur in a definite sequence - first come poems addressed to Agni, Indra, and then others (so-called Asura gods). Concrete incidents occur even in poems addressed to Agni, especially references to the use made by the Aryas in their conflict with the Asuras. The precedence of Agni-poems over others create the impression of its being a religious work. But in contents it is not.

The date of at least some of these compositions must be quite early, that is soon after the Asura-Arya conflict and the defeat of the Asuras. (CD : 49-87) But they were composed over a stretch of time at least a millennium. Besides this large number of other poems may have been available which were probably collected into Atharvaveda or were lost. They appear to be older than the RV, and their contents are of different nature. The language is even more archaic and obscure, and seems really to be older than that of the RV. Yajurveda probably represents the religious practices of the indigenous people. (Shendge 1987 : 20 ff) On the whole, this literature has nothing to do with the Aryas and neither was it composed nor carried over by them.

Thus in the RV, poems referring to actual concrete events, are present. The condition of Leach for the events to be historical viz. that it should be written is, in the earliest ages of mankind even after the invention of writing, cannot be expected to be fulfilled as writing was not such an efficient instrument even after its beginning and also the concept of history has differed from time to time. However as said above, the desire to preserve some events, names, etc. and transmit them to later generations has been displayed, and carried through. With these humble and imperfect beginnings, today's concept of documented history has evolved. (Shendge 1991)

It is true that the RV was preserved orally and special methods of memorization were invented by ancient Indians which display the desire to preserve the text of the RV accurately and in scientific manner. Samhita is the continuous text. Padapatha is the paraphrase, each word occurring is shown separately. Kramapatha is the sequence of every two words, which is recited back and forth. Ghanapatha is the sequence of every three words recited back and forth. The RV and Vedic literature was committed to writing in the 14th c. A.D. by Sayanacharya and commented upon. Earlier commentaries also existed. But it is not correct to attribute the date of 4th c B.C. to the RV as done by Leach. (Leach 2000 : 124) All the literature from the RV, into Samhitas and Brahmanas and even Upanisads have the memory of the Asura-Arya conflict as my study shows. Strangely enough the Mahabharata as a history speaks about the Asuras and nothing about the Aryas. (Shendge 1991) .. If Asuras were mere mythic beings, a work calling itself history need not talk about them. (Shendge 1991 : 153 ff) But it does and it omits, the Arya episode altogether! It means to the Mahabharata, the Asuras were a part of history. (Shendge 1991)

The language of the RV and the Vedic literature is clearly related to the spoken language and both borrow from each other freely. This is on the testimony of Yaska, (Rajwade (ed) 1940 : 30) the first etymologist of the world. Thus as assumed by Leach ( 2000: 134-35) the language of the RV was nothing special but the spoken form of these days. The reason is that the language has evolved from the Rgvedic language to classical Sanskrit.

It is obvious from the manner, in which the mythic traits disappear into thin air by the touch of grammatical explanation giving way to rational sense, that this was intentional change introduced at a later date and was not present originally. The poems expressed experience of ordinary nature. The moment of the self-conscious change must be much later i.e. later than the composition of the Brahmanas which describe the original rational incidents in the background narrative of the rites. (CD : 56-79) Thus, when the sacrificial system was created the interpretation of the RV was changed to make it look like religious.

My study gives a matter-of-fact rational explanation of the RV through a method universally applicable to the RV in the context of Asura-Arya conflict. The rest of the RV is without mythic element. What is the reaction to this?

Thus, the events, described in the RV could have taken place. They are described in the past, ordinary every day time. They were sung about repeatedly but the conflict did not recur. The generations of poets have sung about it. This may have been a social custom. For example to date even after 3-4 centuries the Maratha King Shivaji is being commemorated in ballads or martial songs.

Hopefully specialists in disciplines other than Indology do not expect that no fresh attempt should be made to understand the contents of the RV and Vedic literature. Indo-European postulate at least at the Indian end has been nullified by the discovery of the Indus civilization and we must have a fresh alternative, proposition, based on the totality of the now-available material: archaeological, literary or textual, linguistic and so on. Some of the Indologists believe that last word has been said in the 19th C. and no such fresh study is called for. May they live long submerged in their pride of the past (exploded) theories!

(3) The third and most significant point is the assertion of Leach in which he rejects the view that the RV can have any historical information of the cultural details having parallels in excavations of archaeologists. Leach asserts: "The crux of my argument is that whatever the date of the Rgveda text may be, absolutely no grounds exist for supposing that it refers to events that actually happened in 'real' historical time. Equally, I consider it futile to suppose that the cultural environment that seems to be postulated by the Rgvedan texts might be identified with any 'real' cultural environment that might be reflected in the excavations of archaeologists working in northern India."

This is reduced to a mere assertion because he has not shown that the correlations I have established between the RV and the IC do not exist. If he had treated even some major findings giving counter-evidence, the assertion would be meaningful.

Leach seems to have overlooked the assertion of Burrow: "Whereas for the Indus civilization archaeology is the only source of our knowledge, information concerning the Vedic Aryans depends entirely on literary texts which were handed down by oral tradition. These do not provide any proper historical account, since that is not their concern, but a good deal of incidental information of a historical or semi-historical character emerges, and also a fairly clear and consistent picture of the life and civilization of the period." (Burrow 1975: 26) Leach describes Burrow "as a Sanskritist of great distinction", (Leach 2000 : 128) but does not take him at his word. It is rather strange that he thinks : "Texts of this sort (i.e. like the Rgveda) cannot possibly be interpreted ... unless we have independent knowledge of the cultural background ..." (Leach 2000 : 129) I would rather think that the knowledge must emerge from the texts and should be checked against another source like archaeology / linguistics / any other discipline as the case may be.

Of course, Burrow being an Indo-Europeanist treats the RV as an Arya document with which I do not agree. To me the poems are composed by the Asura poets who know their own civilization intimately; their names have parallels in Akkadian (Shendge 1997: 207 - 212) and they know nothing about the Aryas or their background. Thus, we know hardly anything about the Aryas from the RV. (Shendge 1996)

As the RV stands at the moment, it associates fortresses with the Asuras, the chief and leading opponents of the Aryas. (CD : 53-56), (CD : 80-81), the dam on the confluence of Sindhu and its tributaries, (CD : 80-81; 20-53) the use of fire, (CD : 82-92) the acquisition of weapons from treacherous Asura adviser Usanas (CD : 74-80), the floods (CD : 82) , and siege (CD : 80-81) referred to in the RV, and above all the strategy adopted by the Aryas who were no doubt small in number. (CD: 69-90) The last item was most unexpected as I was not looking for this. The acropolis or citadels, fortified urban settlements of the IC referred to in the RV as puras, are a significant architectural phenomenon of the IC which cannot be overlooked. Also the Vedic literature associates wheel-thrown baked pottery, built houses, burial rites with funerary, furniture with the Asuras. (CD: 94-98) The religion of the Asuras was sacrifice to fire as they considered fire as the representative on the earth of the sun their chief god known as Asura. (CD: 86 ff) For them he represented the creative power in the universe. (CD: 11-22) The IC pottery is pointed with sun-drawings- linear, with pipal leaves, with animal heads and so on. Floods are recorded in the latest stratum at the sites of Mohenjo-daro, Amri etc. (CD : 242-55 ; Shendge 1990) I have given great many details of archaeological correspondences in Part II of the study 'The Civilized Demons'.

The RV clearly associates Asuras and dasas as the population living in the land of

Sapta-Sindhu. (RV VII. 24.27) It attributes the puras, urban settlements to the Asuras. Thus, just as pointed out above the time of the Rgveda poems is ordinary time and not mythic or eternal similarly the space where the events take place is earthly, specifically the Indus valley, and the Asura settlements called puras. The Aryas (Shendge 1996) are called foreign (RV X.124.2), no information except their tribe name is given, quite simply because the RV poets were of Asura origin, inhabitants of this land. No details about language, homeland, culture were known to them or were available in the RV. The cultural, details given in the RV are not those of the Arya culture, but they are of the Asura culture.

All these details given above blend in a harmonious picture of the then condition, and leave no doubt on their historicity. They are not the imaginary outbursts of the poets.

Finally, in order to know the language of the Asuras as the important section of the Harappan population, the hypothesis on their language being Akkadian was put forth (of course the use of other languages along with this cannot be ruled out, though so far no indications are found). It has been possible to find cognates between Sanskrit as the first known language of India, and Akkadian, the earliest known Semitic language. Thus it seems that Sanskrit has descended from the language of the Harappans. It is not the language brought over by the Aryas. The names of poets Asuras, priests, gods, and so on have parallels in Akkadian both phonologically and semantically. Besides this many other words are also paralleled. About 350 words are listed in my recent study, 'The language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit'. It must be observed that had the hypothesis been wrong in identifying the Asuras as the human beings with historical existence as the element of the Indus population, the search for linguistic data would not have succeeded.

The confirmation of this relationship is proved by the linguistic data and vice-versa. Thus, this is the scientific proof of the correctness of our hypothesis.

Further the Satapatha Brahmana (III - 2.1.18.24) in ritualistic style tells us that the language of the Asuras was purified in the fire and became Sanskrita and made their own by the devas (i.e. the Aryas). It simply means that the Aryas adopted the Asura language after some changes and also the Asura culture, and merged in the local population, which is a sociological phenomenon observable even today. Social anthropologists agree that a minority group living in an alien majority always adopts that language and culture of the majority around them. So this is what has happened to the Aryas (I have discussed all the details in my study on the language).

Thus the Arya can not be considered a linguistic entity or a concept, but it was no doubt a foreign tribe, that trekked to the Indus valley looking for a new home. The discovery of new linguistic material covering words considered to be of I-E origin and also borrowings into Sanskrit, found together in Akkadian simply means that they are native to Akkadian. The last stronghold of Indo-European postulate viz. the linguistic material also is now questionable.

This means the Arya trek to the Indus valley is correctly observed by the Aryan postulate. However, attribution of the RV, Sanskrit language, and the Indian culture to them is not correct. These items have nothing to do with the Aryas. They belong to the Indus civilization, an indigenous cultural phenomena. The present population culturally, linguistically and ethnically goes back to the Indus civilization. The Aryas have made no difference in this.

The Arya trek took place only once and was not repeated again, at least this is neither talked of in the RV nor proved. In the archaeological material, the Jhukar culture found on the Harappan floors, identified as a foreign one by Piggott and Wheeler is to be considered identical with that brought over by the Aryas. (Piggott 1950 : 221 - 26; Shendge 1996 : 51-84); The Aryas were foreigners according to the RV as well as archaeologically Jhukar culture provides the corresponding material culture. Since, the very concept of Arya as a tribe is found in the RV, the details found there needed to be given due weightage without overstepping them. Moreover the archaeological findings confirm the textual details. The other postulates like the dam-and-lake theory, tectonic changes or

weathering of the landscape have not withstood criticism, and even attempt to manipulate the data in the recent excavations at Jhukar has not gone unnoticed. The Arya refugee trek is thus a historical event. But the A-P has to stop here.

Frankly speaking the Arya use of horse, iron or light spoke-wheeled chariots are not the issues at all. The Arya strategy is found in the RV is discussed which makes this clear. (CD : 40-92) The horse was also domesticated in the Indus valley (Shendge 1991 ; 1997 : 271-290) and is frequently mentioned in the RV in the Asura context. Similarly the chariot, with the spoked wheel was also in use in the IC. (I. Mahadevan 1977 : 32-42) The word for horse is a Sumerian word borrowed into Akkadian. Similarly the words Skt. ratha, chariot and sarathi, chariotteer have cognates in Akkadian. (Shendge 1997 : 227-228) The Aryas did not know the use of iron whereas the Indus people knew meteorite iron, and used extensively copper and bronze. A piece of 'snarling iron' is recorded at Chanhudaro. (Yule 1988) The use of these items as criteria was invented by the Indo-Europeanists to prove the superiority of the Arya culture and is not confirmed by the RV or the IC which both know the use of horse. (Mackay 1943 : pl. LXXVII. 11, Rao 197:pl. XXIII. A; Shendge 1997 : figs. 1 - 16).

Another point mentioned by Leach (2000:123) is about symbolism. In order to go to the root cause of the mythopoeic element symbolism used by the myth-makers had to be pointed out and is discussed in detail by me. In fact this is one of the most interesting features in the process of transformation of human beings into mythic beings.

Finally, a point raised by Leach must be dealt with. He asks: "What then is the mythical significance of the Rgveda within India? (2000 : 136) First of all, despite all the modern research since 19th c. and a vast amount of literature written in English, the RV has remained a book to be revered as 'our vedas', but a closed book even to the highly learned, because of its archaic language and want of literal translations easily accessible to layman. However, to this author's greatest surprise, presently through her work the RV is no more a closed book. It is accessible to them. And more important, the layman finds the present proposition of interest and of circumstances feasible.

As per the findings of CD, the philosophical and religions development in the RV is concerned, it lays greatest emphasis on the concept of cosmic and moral order (rta) as a way of life. To it, the god is one but called by many names. The concept of moksa or liberation from the cycle of birth and death had not yet come into existence. It is only the upanisads which begin this quest as well as provide an answer. (Ranade R.D. 1926) These coupled with the psychic experiences of the founders and followers of Jainism and Buddhism in the 5-4 c. B.C. which brought about a religious revolution and charted out a different course for the aspiring ones. They showed them a path away from sacrificial system aimed at realising this worldly desires and goals, to psychic transformation and achievement of everlasting peace and joy.

As pointed out already, the Rgvedic poems were most probably not conceived as religious poems, as much as they were not mythical. Both these elements did not originally exist in the poems. They were introduced later in about 4-5 centuries. The Yajurveda represents the real religion of the Indus people and also the details of their civilization and culture.

The Asuras' religion consisted of a fire-cult and a mother goddess cult, and the observances in daily life specially in the context of sun and moon. The idea of sacrificial system based in the events of the Asura-Arya conflict may have originated in the Asura priesthood, with a view to preserve the details of the conflict. The concept of the conflict on moral level between good and evil was already familiar to them. (CD: 196-98) In this context were produced texts like Taittiriya-samhita of the Yajurveda and the Brahmana literature. Due to the rigidity of the system and its exploitation by a social class, as well as the changed concept and function of religion itself, as an instrument for attaining inner peace reflected especially in the Upanisads, the Vedic religion became defunct and its place was taken over by Buddhism which became the more popular creed for the centuries to come. Also along with this, Shiva cult (Shendge 1996) a godhead whose name

and concept has parallels in Akkadian (Shendge 1991 : 214) and has a place in the Yajurveda, (Santavalekar (ed) 1937 : Chapter 16) became a popular cult. Some of the observances like caturmasyam (Ibid : Chapter 3) still continue but in a changed form. Asvamedha (referred to by Leach 2000 : 136), Vajapeya, Rajasuya etc. grand sacrifices are described in Yajurveda. (Ibid : Chaps 22, 9) These have nothing to do with the Aryas. Besides this in 5/4th c. B.C. or even a little earlier Visnu and Krsna cults developed. But the sacrificial religion either due to its social rejection by Buddhism and more importantly because of a viable alternative aim of Liberation leading to Peace and Joy withdrew gradually almost disappearing completely. For the Vedas are something to be revered as a source of the Hindu religion, but the contents of the Vedas are hardly known.

Despite the fact that many areas of disagreement are there in Leach's formulation and my fresh assessment of Vedic literature, still his article is to be valued for his recorded rebellion against the I-E postulate. I-E P at least at the Indian end is disproved and needs to be replaced by a comprehensive modern statement such as mine.

The historicity of the Arya refugee trek cannot be denied.

The historical picture that emerges from my fresh look at the RV and the Vedic literature is as follows : The Indus valley (Septasindhu) was inhabited by the five tribes viz. Asura, Raksas, Pisaca, Gandharva, Yaksa and others. The god of the Asuras was a solar deity called Asura, which was considered by them as the creative force in the universe. The principle of order (rta) which was cosmic and terrestrial / moral order, governed their lives. Ordinary people were known as dasyus, the dasas were sailors, or fishermen. The panis were tradesmen and moneylenders, wholesale merchants. The Asuras were the rulers and the elite class. All these belonged to the same race. The Raksases were the police force of the empire, the Pisacas were the carvers in stone, wood etc. The Gandharvas were musicians and entertainers. The Yaksa was name of a tribe, opposing Indra. This population was ethnically mixed. They were agriculturists and were well acquainted with the processes involved in successful agricultural operations. Similarly they were highly skilled civil engineers who built fortresses and fortified settlements. They used baked bricks, sundried bricks, timber and stone as building materials. They were acquainted with metal-gold, silver, copper or bronze. They maintained armies equipped with bows and arrows, spears for defense purposes.

Their polity was headed by an emperor (Varuna) and Mitra was his co-ruler and Exchequer General of Contracts. Varuna as the ultimate seat of power held all the judicial, executive and administrative powers. He also took care of irrigation system and had built a dam on the seven rivers and used the water for agricultural irrigation. He was assisted by a Minister of intelligence (Surya), a Mnister for collection and redistribution (Savitri) of revenue, well-fare ministers (The Asvinas), a Minister for road-survey and building (Pusan), and so on. (CD: Part III) with department covering all the requirements of an empire. The political organization was four tiered, is my finding. (Shendge 1977, 1982, 2000, 2002; forthcoming) The Asura polity was the first attempt at the unification of northern India in the cultural and political organization. Incidentally when looked at in this fashion the whole of the Rgvedic world presents itself as a unity and no particular level divine, human etc. remains. The Asuras brought within one political organization all the sections of the existing population belonging to different linguistic and ethnic stocks thus laying the foundation of multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, pluralistic open society with its tremendous capacity to accomodate everything and everybody.

The tenor of this life was disturbed by the arrival of refugees called Arya, defeated in their country and driven out. Many battles ensued and every time the refugees were defeated and thrown out. On one such occasion, they beg for a piece of land to stay on which was granted to them. With this foothold, the refugees work out a strategy consisting of several steps. First of all a survey of the Asura territory is undertaken by Visnu, the young assistant of the leader known as Indra, who was a strong young man. Visnu makes three rounds of the territory under disguise. He notices the feuds between the various chiefs of the Asuras and taking advantage of that assists one against the other. He grants

some favours to Usanas, the advisor of the Asuras and obtains better weapons from him like vajra, thunderbolt, a meteorite iron mace. The culminating point came when Indra kills the dam guard Vrtra and takes possession of the dam. He lets out water and creates untimely floods leading to loss of life and property. Population flees in different directions. He also lays siege. Varuna concludes a treaty with Indra, when Indra invites him to be the joint ruler.

This is the story that unfolded itself. It is reconstructed from events described in a scattered manner and it may be that many more details be found. However, in general the picture is reasonable, realistic and consistent. The events can take place and there is no reason to think otherwise or mythic.

Thus the Aryas did come from outside to the Indus valley and later adopted the language and culture of the local people and became a part of that society without making any impress on it. According to the latest archaeological findings the Harappan culture in its latest phase continued till 1300 B.C. But by no stretch of imagination can it ever be called Aryan, as it is done, by the 'Saffron' archaeologists, as it is clearly identifiable as 'Harappan'.

I must confess that in 1970 when I began work or even after 1977, when CD came out, it was assumed that the Aryas came from outside India and that Sanskrit was their language and the RV was made of their compositions, yet the dynamics of inner force of the hypothesis about the Asuras and allies was such that it threw up new linguistic evidence contrary to I-E T, and the relationship between Akkadian and Sanskrit, and also the Asura authorship of the Rgvedic poems. Thus it has brought to light the truth and therefore, there is no harm in thinking that this is correct within the limits of presently available source material.

To conclude, Leach is unhappy that a penknife cannot pull down the 300 year old oak tree! But a sharp axe of reasoned, rational analysis, bringing out the realism of the RV can bring about the desired effect on the hollowed, and once nullified, speculation, riddled puzzle of Indo-Europeanism, at least at the Indian end.

The proposed interpretation of the RV is the materialistic interpretation, and as said already it brings down the RV from the dizzy heights of mysticism and mythology to a secular, rational compositional level composed by known human poets. This has not been tried before and therefore, the results are very refreshing. According to this viewpoint, the Aryas were a foreign refugee group which trekked to the Indus valley already inhabited by the Asuras and others. They clashed and the political power of the Asuras received a serious jolt (1850 B.C.) but they continued to rule even upto 1300 B.C. The Aryas became acculturated in the Asura culture and language. The Asura language Sumero-Akkadian changed to the language of Rgveda by about 1500 B.C. The Rgveda, other Vedas and Vedic literature as well as the Indus civilization are the creations of the Asuras and their allies and as much represent the indigenous genius and effort. The Indus civilization is the matrix of Indian culture, and India's history begins with the Indus civilization, the Rgveda representing its literary creativity.

The discovery of the linguistic data on the language of the Harappans is also something new and should be extremely useful for throwing light on many a linguistic puzzle. Thus Sanskrit, as per this view point, has descended from Sumero-Akkadian, a mixed language. It follows logically from this that the ancestors of Greeks and the Romans may have been in touch with the Sumero-Akkadian speaking population to which the similarities between these languages should be traced. And instead of a hypothetical construct like the proto-Indo-European, a real language like Akkadian mixed with Sumerian may be considered a parent. This should possibly help to dissolve the many intriguing difficulties. It is worth a trial. If found unworkable, it can be abandoned at any stage which will fix the limit of this postulate. However, in a scientific pursuit, it is necessary to try new alternatives.

Since the formulation of I-E T in the 19th c., the most important discovery is that of the IC, which created the question of the relationship between the RV as the earliest

compositions, of whatever type is not the question, and IC. But as already pointed out the first time it was tackled in such details is in CD. Reaction to CD in some quarters is almost hostile as it was seen as a threat to I-E T. Thus it has never been openly criticized for whatever faults it has or has not. (But many assertions otherwise illfitting in the context tell a different story.) The main concern which seems to have moved many was survival of I-E T. Therefore, Professor Leach's bold and frank stand needs to be taken seriously coupled with the concrete findings in this direction in CD. By discarding the I-E T, the humanities will display scientific interest in knowing past. The Rgvedic civilization has corroborated the IC and not the Aryan culture. Once this is acceptable the agonizing chaos that goes under the name of I-E T will end. The I-E T is after all a hypothetical construct. The sum-total of knowledge on history, linguistics, archaeology etc. has made tremendous strides and older theories have to be revised in view of the new discoveries is the most obvious principle for growth of knowledge and an indication for excellence of the scientific open mindedness.

Once the logic of the discovery of the IC is applied the only thing is to start looking at Indian History and culture afresh from the IC's stand point. It cannot be ignored. The RV has to be treated as of indigenous origin, and not as an Aryan (=foreign) work.

In order to appreciate these findings a highly unprejudiced, open minded, outlook of the relevant material is called for. It is not that a particular postulate or hypothesis that is important; the hypothesis that gives harmonious, rational picture of the happenings stands the best chance.

Indian people do want to understand their culture and want to know their correct origins and history, without bias or prejudice. To this end, our researches should be directed. Let neither prejudice nor pride hamper our perception of truth.

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