ARYAN PAST AND POST-COLONIAL PRESENT

The polemics and politics of indigenous Aryanism

*Lars Martin Fosse*

It is legitimate to search for the Indo-Europeans on protohistoric ground, but this is a prolongation of the hypothesis, not a verification of it. The truth of the idea of “Indo-European” lies in the language and the religion, not in archaeology.

(Bernard Sergent)\(^1\)

On October 16, 1996, the Indian newspaper *The Economic Times* published an article, quoted on the Internet, about a conference entitled “Indologists discount Aryan influx theory.” The first paragraph reads:

A conference of over 300 Indologists here has rejected the Aryan Invasion Theory.

The conference on “Revisiting Indus-Saraswati Age and Ancient India,” attended by scholars all over the world, was aimed at correcting the “distorted Hindu history,” according to Ms Reeta Singh, one of the organisers.

“Recent archaeological discoveries have fully established that there was a continuous evolution of civilization on the Indian subcontinent from about 5000 BC, which remained uninterrupted through 1000 BC. This leaves no scope whatsoever to support an Aryan invasion theory,” a resolution at the conference said.

It explained that the term Arya in Indian literature has no racial or linguistic connotations. It was used in the noble sense.

(*The Economic Times*, October 16, 1996)

This remarkable plebiscite shows to what degree the question of Indo-Aryan origins has become politicized. Normally scholarly questions are not made the subject of popular vote. But then the conference was sponsored by various American Hindu organizations, among which we find the Vishwa Hindu Parishad Atlanta Chapter and the Arya Samaj Chicago, both branches of important Indian
Hindu revivalist organizations. According to Ms Singh, “the main challenge in front of us is to get the leadership in the hands of next generation of American Hindus.” Apparently, the intention is to influence their views on India’s ancient history. Indigenous Aryanism would indeed seem to be part of the identity building deemed necessary for expatriate Indians.

I shall therefore take a closer look at Indigenist Aryanism as an expression of Indian nationalism, and with a particularly close reference to the Hindutva movement while paying a short visit to some of the proponents of the theory. This is relevant because Hindutva has adopted Indigenous Aryanism as a part of its ideology, thereby making it an explicitly political matter as well as a scholarly problem. Although indigenism is supported by Indians who are otherwise not connected to the Hindutva movement, and also by some Western scholars with no connection to the same movement – along with some personalities who would seem to be part and parcel of it – it is important to see what it means to the nationalists and how they proceed to express their views. I shall mainly concentrate upon books produced by amateur scholars whose polemics may not carry much scholarly weight, but who play an important part in India’s public debate on the Aryan question. For practical reasons, I shall distinguish between amateur scholars referred to as polemicists and professional academics. The latter may of course also act in a polemical capacity, but their training sets them apart from the laymen.

13.1 The indictment of Western Indology

In 1997 the Cambridge archaeologist Dilip K. Chakrabarti published a book called *Colonial Indology. Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past*. It contains an acrimonious attack on Western Indology, accusing it of racism at its worst and paternalism at its best. The vituperative rhetoric and wholesale rejection of Western Indology seem astounding at first sight. But both fit seamlessly into a kind of discourse often associated with Hindu nationalism, where pugnacious and derisive rhetoric frequently is used as a rallying technique while concealing a lack of intellectual substance. Chakrabarti’s book differs from the other literature considered in this chapter insofar as the author is a professional academic, able to avoid the intellectual awkwardness that often characterizes the writing of the polemicists discussed later, who have little or no professional training in any of the subjects they argue about so passionately. But Chakrabarti’s fundamental message is not much different from the message of the amateurs.

Chakrabarti’s book purports to explore the underlying theoretical premises of the Western study of ancient India, premises which the author claims developed in response to the colonial need to manipulate the Indian’s perception of the past. In this context gradually an elaborate racist framework emerged, in which the interrelationship between race, language, and culture was a key element. There is more than a grain of truth in this, although it doesn’t work as a complete explanation for nineteenth-century Western interest in India. What is more surprising,
however, is the claim that “this framework is still in place, and implicitly accepted not merely by Western Indologists but also by their Indian counterparts.” This is often the working assumption of indigenist polemists, but few express it so clearly as Chakrabarti. In fact, he suggests that “one of the underlying assumptions of Western Indology is a feeling of superiority in relation to India, especially modern India and Indians.” Western Indologists are portrayed as patronizing and arrogant.

Chakrabarti sees Western Indology as essentially a by-product of the establishment of Western dominance in India. It would seem that this view is based primarily on the history of British dominance in the subcontinent. While the connection between German nationalism and Indology is discussed, French and Italian Indology appear to be almost entirely beyond Chakrabarti’s horizon. He is equally critical of mainstream Indian scholars, making short shrift of people who have “toed the Western line.” These scholars apparently have no noble motives for maintaining the views they hold but are motivated by a self-serving endeavor to obtain scholarships and other material advantages. “Mainstream” scholars are in polemical indigenist literature almost invariably identified with the political left and usually designated as “Marxists,” and Chakrabarti conforms, in this respect too, with traditional Hindutva discourse on the subject. Thus, Chakrabarti, like many populist indigenist polemists active in the debate, targets the “Westernized” intellectual elites at Indian universities. The alleged “leftist” character of these elites gives Chakrabarti’s critique unequivocal political connotations.

The same applies to his critique of nineteenth-century Indology. No one would deny that most Western scholars in this period had opinions and attitudes that were both racist and prejudiced. What is at stake is not Chakrabarti’s description and documentation of racism and discrimination, but how he uses this repugnant material as a ploy to delegitimize views of Indian history that are not in line with the politics of modern Indian nationalism. Thus, having given a scathing – and perfectly appropriate – critique of James Mill’s view of Indian civilizations, Chakrabarti proceeds in the following manner:

…Mill’s contempt for ancient India extends to the other Asian civilizations as well and…much of Mill’s framework has survived in the colonial and post-colonial Indology. For instance, his idea that the history of ancient India, like the history of other barbarous nations, has been the history of mutually warring small states, only occasionally relieved by some larger political entities established by the will of some particularly ambitious and competent individuals has remained with us in various forms till today.

(1997: 94)

This critique is thematically related to Chakrabarti’s criticism of Rothermund and Kulke’s description of the Mauryan empire. Based on the outer distribution of Ashokan edicts, these scholars dispute that Ashoka’s empire included the whole of the subcontinent except its southernmost part. Chakrabarti, however, argues
that the Mauryan empire had its sway over the whole of South Asia from the southern flank of the Hindukush to the Chittagong coast on the one hand and the southernmost tip of the peninsula on the other. He concludes:

...Indians would certainly try to understand the fact that for more than a hundred years in the late fourth, third and early second centuries BC, there was a state which controlled the entire natural geographical domain of south Asia. Not even the British controlled such a large area for such a long period. This fact should in any case be one of the answers to the notion that there have only been divisive tendencies in the political history of India.

(Ibid.: 206)

What is crucial here, is that the description of India as a conglomerate of small, unstable states militates against the romantic notion of Indian civilization that is propagated by the Hindu nationalists. In this political discourse, India’s golden past is projected upon the present as a technical device used to prevent the crumbling and disintegration of the Indian state. It is a case of using the past to build the future, and there is no room for a past that does not serve this purpose. The views expressed by Rothermund and Kulke may be disputed for scholarly reasons, but that is not the point here. Right or wrong, their description of India’s past has to be discarded by Chakrabarti because it is functionally pernicious. And from a rhetorical point of view, sowing doubts about the motives and attitudes of an opponent is more efficient in the context of mass communication than a difficult and often inconclusive professional discussion. Therefore, in the scheme of things, the moral disqualification of Western Indology is crucial, and the attempt to bring about this disqualification runs like a red thread through much of the indigenist literature I am about to consider. Let me state quite clearly that there is nothing innocent about this rhetoric. It is not due to a lack of insight into how “proper” academic discussions are to be conducted. The same kind of rhetoric reverberates in the political discourse of the Organiser and other Hindutva publications. Hindu nationalist rhetoric is simply a practical expedient. But it is also, to some extent, a reaction to and the mirror image of the anti-Indian rhetoric of the colonial era.

13.2 The pitfalls of inferred history

The description of India’s earliest history is pieced together on the basis of scraps of information culled from ancient literatures, languages, and archaeology. In the Western academic tradition, the spread of Indo-Aryan languages to South Asia is one of the several cases where the presumed migration of Indo-Europeans lead to the dissemination of Indo-European languages in the Eurasian area. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the origin of these peoples was thought to be in India or somewhere in Asia, but later the cradle land was moved to somewhere in Eurasia and has since then led a rather vagrant existence. Since there are no
historical documents giving exact information about the geographical focal point of the Indo-Europeans, this focal point has to be inferred on the basis of incomplete and sometimes highly inadequate data sets which often permit more than one interpretation.

The epistemological complications caused by the nature of the evidence opens up a vast argumentative space which is able to accommodate a large number of hypotheses based on probabilistic and analogical thinking of various kinds. While not all hypotheses are permitted within the perimeter of this space, several contradictory hypotheses are often admissible. Thus, the argumentative space easily lends itself to the creation of a rhetorical discourse where emotional arguments and contentious assertions compensate for the lack of certainty produced by the data. It is a test of professional scholarship that this rhetorical discourse is avoided and that uncertainties are not hidden behind assertive and pugnacious language.

The impressions of the first part of this chapter are based on a close reading of books by four indigenist polemicists: K. D. Sethna, Bhagwan Singh, Navaratna S. Rajaram, and Shrikant Talageri. These writers are not only concerned with the homeland of the Aryans, but also with the divisions of Indian society caused by the “little” nationalisms of the subcontinent and India’s import in the context of global culture. None of them seem to be familiar with other ancient Indo-European languages than Sanskrit, and are therefore often forced to quote Western authorities in support of their views rather than developing their own scholarly and technical arguments based on first-hand knowledge of the sources. Central to their project is a critical analysis of the inferential logic used by the Western scholars in their configuration of the available data. Here, they sometimes score points, as the logic they criticize is not always beyond reproach. The literature quoted by the polemicists is largely in English. German Indology seems to be mostly unknown, and French Indology is hardly mentioned at all, in spite of the important contributions from such people as Louis Renou, Georges Dumézil, and J. Filliozat. Consequently, all the works considered here are in various degrees underinformed, all the more so because the English sources have not been fully exploited either. The result is a critique that is largely neglected by Western scholars because it is regarded as incompetent, but which due to its rhetorical force and potential impact in an Indian polemical context cannot be entirely ignored.

13.3 The problem of Aryan origins: K. D. Sethna’s response to the theories of Asko Parpola

In 1988 the Finnish Indologist Asko Parpola published a paper called “The coming of the Aryans to Iran and India and the cultural and ethnic identity of the Dāsas.” The paper is a brilliant example of inferred history. The author brings together a large number of textual, linguistic, and archaeological data and configures them in such a manner as to present a rational and complex narrative of the Indo-Aryan penetration of India. Parpola’s presentation differs considerably from the older and more simplistic theories of an Aryan invasion. Instead of a massive onslaught, he
presents a complicated set of migrations that over several centuries lead to an Aryanization of the northwestern part of the continent. He proposes that the Dāsas, Dasyus, and Panis mentioned by the Rigveda were the dominant élite of the recently discovered Bronze Age culture of Margiana and Bactria, and that they were the first to introduce the Aryan languages into India around 2000 BC. Around 1800 BC the first wave of Aryan speakers in Greater Iran and in India would seem to have been overlaid by a second wave of Aryans coming from the northern steppes, which eventually leads to the emergence of the syncretistic religions and cultures of the Veda and the Avesta, and of the Mitanni dynasty in the Near East.

K. D. Sethna in an appendix to his book *The Problem of Aryan Origins From an Indian Point of View* presents a critique of Parpola’s views. Sethna’s rebuttal comprises almost 200 pages of meticulous argumentation, covering a large number of problems. Unlike the other polemicists considered here, he writes without rancour in a polished and courteous style which does not divert attention from his arguments. It is impossible to do justice to Sethna’s work here, and I shall have to confine myself to a few points.

The first has to do with the horse question. Parpola states that “a major reason against assuming that the Harappans spoke an Indo-European language is that the horse is not represented among the many realistically depicted animals of the Harappan seals and figurines.” He points to the fact that comprehensive bone analyses “by one of the best experts” have yielded the conclusion that there is no clear osteological evidence of the horse in the Indian subcontinent prior to c.2000 BC. Sethna counters by attacking Parpola’s expert witness. Based on Indian archaeological excavations he introduces the counterclaim that the horse was indeed present prior to the assumed arrival of the Aryans. This is certainly admissible from a methodological point of view, but at the same time, it highlights some of the more fundamental problems of the debate. In his book *Decipherment of the Indus Script* from 1994, Parpola refers to such counterclaims by maintaining that they are not sufficiently documented. Thus we have an intellectual stalemate: if the contenders swear by different authorities in a matter that is crucial to the debate, there can be no progress toward a consensus.

As expected, Sethna disputes Parpola’s evidence for an entry into India. He claims that the evidence which according to Parpola indicates colonization at Pirak may be explained by cultural contacts, since there are no “intrusive necropoles.” Sethna thereby touches upon a general problem in Indo-European archaeology, where diffusion of artifacts and cultural features without the movement of people have been suggested as an alternative to models based on migrations or invasions not only in the East but also in Western Europe. Sethna furthermore rejects Parpola’s suggestion that Rigvedic Aryans entered the Swat valley in 1600–1400 BC. He points out that the presence of the horse may indicate Aryanism in the Swat region, but cannot make the Aryanism Rigvedic on the sole strength of that presence. Instead, he claims that a number of archaeological items rule out a Rigvedic entry in this period. Such items are brickfaced altars dug into the earth and containing a round fireplace with a central cavity. These
structures definitely indicate Aryanism, according to Sethna, yet they cannot be related to the Rigveda.

Parpola mentions certain silver objects or objects ornamented with silver in connection with the traits of the Namazga V culture assumed to be Aryan. Here Sethna objects on the basis of the fact that silver is not mentioned in the Rigveda. Thus, on this score the Rigveda according to Sethna goes out of the chronological framework within which Parpola speaks of Aryanism in India or in Greater Iran. Sethna also tries to build a more elaborate argument for assuming that the Rigveda did not in fact know silver. His conclusion is clear: “There cannot be the slightest suspicion of silver in the Rgveda’s period.” Consequently, the Rigveda must be dated as pre-Harappan. The weakness of this argument is that we have no reason to believe that the Rigveda gives us a complete breakdown of Indo-Aryan material culture. Gold, silver, and copper have in fact been known since 4000 BCE, and to assume that the Rigvedic Aryans knew gold but not silver is counterintuitive. Arguments ex silentio are inherently weak, and Sethna would need much stronger indications than the rather feeble ones he presents to convince. He quotes the Encyclopaedia Britannica (EB) on the subject, but with less precision than could be wished for. In its chapter on the history of silver, the EB states that “silver was discovered after gold and copper about 4000 BC,” but in its chapter on gold, it says that “the history of gold extends back at least 6,000 years, the earliest identifiable, realistically dated finds having been made in Egypt and Mesopotamia c.4000 BC.” Thus, the chronological difference between the discovery of the two metals may not necessarily be great.

In a similar manner, Sethna argues that the use of cotton was widespread in the Indus Valley civilization, whereas the use of cotton is unknown in the Rigveda. Cotton only turns up in the sūtras, which again would seem to indicate an extremely old age for the Rigveda. However, this does not necessarily follow either. First of all, this is another argument ex silentio and does not prove that the Aryans were indeed ignorant of cotton. Second, if the Aryans actually were ignorant of cotton, this may be explained by other reasons than hoary age. In fact, much of Sethna’s argument in the final analysis hinges on the presumed date of the Veda, which is crucial to the argument presented by many indigenists. I shall have occasion to discuss this problem later in the chapter.

As would be expected, Sethna wants to identify the language of the Harappan culture with Sanskrit, at least in the sense that “it is akin to, if not quite identical with, Rigvedic Sanskrit.” If this identification is correct, then there would be no problem dating the Rigveda as pre-Harappan. Here he draws on the views of the archaeologist J. G. Shaffer, who emphasizes the strong continuities linking the Harappan civilization to its antecedents. The problem with this line of argument is of course that material culture and language are not necessarily strongly correlated, so that any arguments for linguistic continuity based on archaeological remains are open to doubt.

An interesting controversy emerges in the analysis of the nature of the Dāsas or Dasyus. Here, Sethna attempts to reject Parpola’s view that these are partly
mythological, partly human. This concept may seem strange to modern man, but in the Vedic period the border between humans and supernatural beings was fluid. Gods such as Indra or Vishnu had the power of metamorphosis and could change their shape at will, whereas the shape of humans could be changed by supernatural beings. No one denies that some Dāsas are supernatural beings, but most Indologists readily accept that some of them are also human and see no difficult hurdle in this double nature. As enemies, they would naturally qualify as demons. Sethna, however, claims that all Dāsas are nonphysical, nonhuman beings.29 This is of course a simpler solution than assuming a mixed identity, because as Sethna points out, “if after granting the obviously demoniac character of a good number of named Dāsa–Dasyus, one still opts for the human character of many of them, one is rather at a loss how to demarcate the latter.”30 This is undoubtedly correct, but then many of the problems connected with the interpretation of the Vedas are caused precisely by the ambiguity of the material, which to confound things even more, was often intentional. Nevertheless, Sethna finds arbitrary the whole picture of the Rigvedics conquering human Dāsas.31 His own interpretation, which sees the Dāsas and Dasyus as representatives of evil, is instead influenced by his guru Sri Aurobindo, whose views on Vedic hermeneutics are at loggerheads with western philological method.32 The consequence of the spiritual interpretation, however, is clear: if the Dāsas are metaphors of evil, then identifying them with historical peoples is a futile exercise, and they cannot serve as players in a migration scenario. Thus the rejection of Parpola’s interpretation of the Dāsas strengthens the Indigenist position by removing the possibility of a Vedic connection with historical migrations.

Sethna’s work is both methodical and thoughtful, and where he departs from the traditional academic interpretations this is usually due to a fundamentally different vision of how the arguments are to be weighted rather than due to the ignorance of the arguments used by his opponents. However, his symbolic interpretation of the Vedas in line with Sri Aurobindo’s reading creates an unbridgeable gap between the Western interpretations that he criticizes and his own interpretation. Everybody would agree that the Rigveda contains symbolic and allegorical material, but most academic scholars would also see a substantial amount of concrete references in the texts, although the exact nature and meaning of these may be difficult to penetrate more than 3,000 years after they were created. And what Sethna regards as strong evidence would by many academic scholars be regarded as weak or inconsequential, consequently there is little scope for reaching a consensus. These factors imply that his critique, generally speaking, lacks the necessary force to make an impact on the traditional Western academic hermeneutics even if some of his arguments may have a certain relevance within a limited context.

13.4 Bhagwan Singh’s theory about Aryan society
Of the writers considered here, Bhagwan Singh33 would at the outset seem to be the best informed. His bibliography comprises an impressive number of about
600 items, covering a vast field of scholarship. However, Singh’s obvious lack of scholarly training robs him of the ability to use his reading to his advantage, and the views presented on the 500 pages of his book fail dismally to convince. I shall take a closer look at his construction of Aryan society and his use of etymologies. According to Singh,

traditional commentators, working in an age when the social position of merchants had been seriously undermined, could hardly visualize a past when merchants had played a hegemonistic role. Western translators could not get reconciled to the fact that a civilization we meet in the descriptions of the Rgveda could have prospered at such an early period. They thereafter started with reductive interpretations – a mistake which was not rectified even after the discovery of the Harappan Civilization. (1995: xvii)

Singh sees the Aryan culture as a merchant culture, claiming that the first Aryans to turn up in Turkey were traders. He also – somewhat surprisingly – claims it to be generally admitted that the chief divinities – Indra, Agni, Parjanya, the Maruts, and Visnu – are agricultural gods. However, by the time of the Rigveda they had acquired an additional role of guarding the cargo and the members of the caravan from robbers and pirates in addition to “conducting them through safe routes undisturbed by wild beasts and natural calamities.” Singh proceeds to claim that the maritime activities depicted in the Rigveda contradict the idea that the Aryans were pastoralists. Instead, they were economically far advanced in comparison to their backward neighbors “who were still in pastoral or gathering stage.”

It is obvious that Singh’s construction of the Aryans as merchants and agriculturalists with maritime activities is fitted to the Harappan civilization as we know it from the archaeological remains. It can hardly be justified on the basis of the Vedic texts as traditionally interpreted. It is therefore not surprising that he rejects Marshall’s arguments against identifying the Harappans with the Aryans. Marshall musters cultural data from the Veda only to conclude that they differ significantly from what we know about the Harappans. Singh’s book is a protest against precisely such conclusions. It deals predominantly with material culture and tries to relate data from the Vedas to archaeological material from the Harappans’ civilization.

Singh rejects not only the idea that the Aryans migrated into India, he also denies any migrations out of India. Instead, Aryan culture allegedly dissipated through the spread of traders and religious missionaries who had “culturally and linguistically transformed vast areas within an incredibly short period of time.” This is a staggering vision, which would seem to need very solid documentation. However, Singh brings no material that credibly demonstrates the activities of his traders and missionaries. At the same time, he rejects the idea that the Vedic people were “semi-barbarous nomads” since it would be absurd to assume that such people could be found “meditating on philosophical problems.”
Singh assumes that abstract thinking and philosophizing need certain material conditions that could not be met within a more or less nomadic society. This is hardly a cogent idea, since even nomadic peoples have religion and consequently also at least a rudimentary philosophy.

Like so many indigenists, Singh offers a discussion of the horse problem. As already mentioned, the horse has not been identified among the cultural artifacts of the Indus Valley culture, and this has been used as an argument for claiming that the Indus Valley culture was not Indo-Aryan. Trying to establish the presence of the horse in India at an early date has therefore become a preoccupation with many indigenists who overlook the fact that it is not really the presence of the horse as such that is of interest, but rather the religious role – or lack of such a role – that it has in the Indus Valley religion. In principle, horses could have been imported to India before the Aryans made their entrance in the arena, but proving this to be the case would not really have much impact on the horse argument.

Singh claims that the Aryans domesticated the ass before the horse, and that this animal was called “horse” or asva (Prakrit assa). He goes on to elaborate this hypothesis with a surprising display of warped linguistics and historical ignorance that for most informed readers immediately condemns his book to obscurity, since the rest of his arguments concerning other problems must be assumed to be tainted with the same lack of critical insight and elementary knowledge of method.

Singh makes the mistake of comparing Old English assa/assen, Gothic asilus, Latin asinus etc. with aśva, which is assumed to be their origin. This is, of course, impossible, since Sanskrit aśva itself is a later derivative of proto-Indo-European *ekwos. It is remarkable, however, that Singh is aware of the cognates for horse and quotes them correctly on page 67. According to Singh, “[w]e find Indo-Aryan (IA) ‘ś’ preserved as ‘s’ in the East European languages while it is replaced by ‘h’/‘k’/‘q’/‘g’ in the dialects of Central and Western Europe which received the linguistic impulse from the Anatolian region.” Singh has in other words invented a new set of sound laws where Indo-Aryan “ś” is treated as the proto-consonant which somehow produces the results quoted earlier, and he has introduced these sound laws without giving any linguistic arguments to demonstrate that this rewriting of standard historical phonology has a logical basis. It does not disturb Singh that Vedic also has a separate word for ass, rāsabha. To the contrary, the “Rgveda suggests that at an early stage either the distinction between an ass and a horse was so thin that the word aśva was applied to both horse and ass, or they knew only the ass as attested by Aśvins, deified ‘horsemen’, whose vehicle was ass-driven (I.116.2; AB iv.9; KB xviii.1).” The last remark is revealing for Singh’s treatment of the Vedic texts. It is in fact true that the Aśvins sometimes use an ass to drive their chariot. So does Indra on occasion (e.g. RV 3.53.5). However, the Aśvins also use horses and birds. The case of AB iv.9 is particularly interesting: here we have an etiological myth the purpose of which is to explain why the ass is the slowest of the traction animals. According to the Brāhmaṇa, this is because the Aśvins won a race against Agni, Uṣas, and Indra with it, thus expending most
of its speed and energy for ever. This story hardly tallies with the idea that āśva and rāsabha are the same animals.

Singh’s explanation of the English word horse is no better: “Old English hors, Old High German hros, German ross, Icelandic hross, Latin Equus [!], Greek hippo, probably an onomatopoeic [!] term derived from hreṣā – neighing of a horse expressing its satisfaction.”41 The fact that these words superficially look alike – although the presence of equus and hippos in this company defies phonological justification even according to Singh’s standards – does not mean that they are related in any way. It is, for one thing, impossible that Sanskrit “h” in hreṣā should correspond to a Germanic “h”.42 As for equus and hippos, they belong etymologically with āśva, not with horse. Nevertheless, Singh insists that “the earliest domesticated animal known to the so-called Proto-Indo-Europeans as āśva was not horse but ‘ass’, which is exactly the Prakritic form of āśva and appears to have gone from the land of Prakrits to the Indo-European field.”43 This argument is based on the idea that the Prakrits are older than Sanskrit which Singh presents more or less as an artificial language. Only later the term is allegedly transferred to the horse exclusively leaving words such as khura, rāsabha, and gardabha for the ass. This is, of course, nonsense, and a perusal of other parts of the book does little to redeem the author.

However, Singh’s creation of folk etymologies is not untypical for indigenist literature. The practice sometimes serves political or ideological purposes. A quote from M. S. Golwalkar shows this in a revealing manner: “Our epics and our ‘puranas’ also present us with the same expansive image of our motherland. Afghanistan was our ancient Upaganasthan [my emphasis]; Shalya of the Mahabharata came from there.”44 The invention of false etymologies is therefore not an entirely innocent matter. It can be used to support irredentist policies, particularly when it is accompanied by an uncritical and “historical” reading of ancient epics and scripture. At the same time, such folk etymologies have a long history on the subcontinent, going back to the period of the Brāhmaṇas and beyond. The approach to language they represent is therefore deeply embedded in the Hindu intellectual tradition.

13.5 The polemics of Navaratna S. Rajaram

In the Organiser of April 18, 1999, N. S. Rajaram,45 a mathematician and a computer scientist, expressed the following view on Indological method:

Western Indology treated Vedic India as a dead civilization such as Egypt and Babylon, and tried to reconstruct the whole thing from scratch. This ignored a large body of existing literary and cultural traditions continuing to the present. The result of this fallacious approach was fantasies like the Aryan Invasion Theory and the idea that the Harappan language and script were “proto-Dravidian,” an imaginary language. The correct approach is to relate archaeological discoveries to Indian literature and tradition. This gives an alternative approach, combining Indian tradition and modern science [my emphasis], which several of us including
Dr. Jha, David Frawley, K. D. Sethna and others have been pursuing. The “establishment” scholars, however, seem stuck in the old groove following Western Indology, which is a colonial-missionary construct with no scientific or historical basis.

(Organiser, April 18, 1999)

Rajaram’s description contains factual errors, as Western Indologists became acquainted quite early with India’s traditional theories of knowledge and interpretation. To suggest that archaeological data were not related to Indian literature and tradition is not correct, either. However, the most important part of Rajaram’s statement comes at the end of the paragraph: *Western Indology is a colonial-missionary construct with no scientific basis.* To Rajaram, the linguistics that has so dominated Indology is a pseudo-science, “the crown jewel of which is the Aryan Invasion Theory.”

This parochial view overlooks the fact that linguistics is based on the study of a vast number of languages on a global basis and has a number of far more important concerns than the Aryan invasion theory. Instead, Rajaram describes philology and the linguistic approach to history as the hodgepodge mix of amateur biology, discredited race theories, and defensive reaction to the emergence of archaeology as an empirical science. Applied to the Aryan invasion theory, linguistic analysis was according to Rajaram a new and unproved methodology “used to determine one of the most important issues of human history – how peoples of the largest language family in the world came to be related. Its methodology was assumed to be valid though it had never proved itself in any historical interpretation.”

This level of insight into the world of philology and linguistics is highlighted by a factual blunder a few sentences later, where the author apparently ascribes knowledge of glottochronology to Max Müller who died half a century before the method was invented.

Rajaram’s attack centers upon the inadequacy of philology and linguistics as tools for discussing India’s most ancient past. But his critique is in a curious manner directed against these branches of scholarship such as they were in the nineteenth century. The Indological scholarship of that century was allegedly unscientific to a degree that is scarcely comprehensible today. It was riddled with superstitions like belief in the Biblical Creation and the story of Noah and the Flood. The other creation of the period, the “Race Science,” is presented as a further testimony to the profound scientific ignorance of nineteenth-century Indologists.

This is in spite of the fact that the race science of the last century was the creation of Darwinian biology and a fledgling physical anthropology rather than by philology and linguistics. Although Rajaram is aware of modern work in the Indological field, he uses an extraordinary amount of space discussing the views and personality of Max Müller, who, as far as Western Indology is concerned, has been dead in every possible sense of the word for a century. This is of course due to the position that Max Müller enjoys in India where he still is able to arouse passionate anger and controversy. Many of the other Indologists of the period are rejected as mere dilettantes, mainly missionaries and bureaucrats, who succeeded in making a mark
simply because they had the support of the ruling authorities. No trust can be placed in their methods, which are claimed to be totally haphazard and display almost complete ignorance of science and scientific method. According to Rajaram,

Western Indology today suffers from a weak scholarly base, and is in the main little more than a continuation of nineteenth century trends. The standard of Sanskrit scholarship in Europe and America is not high, and Indologists for the most part are repackaging nineteenth century translations using academic fashions of the moment like Marxism and Freudian analysis.

(Rajaram and Frawley 1995: 41)

The role of race and prejudice in the debate of the last century is well-known, and there is good reason to take exception to it, but the biased rejection of scientific methods that proved highly successful in other studies than Indology, such as in the decipherment of Akkadian, Sumerian, and Egyptian, drains Rajaram’s own competence and sincerity of credibility at the very outset. However, his rejection of philology and linguistics has an inherent bearing on Vedic interpretation. The liberation of the Vedas from philology and comparative linguistics means that they can be interpreted ahistorically and therefore in harmony with the needs of the moment. Instead of philology’s contextualization of the Vedas as part of a distant civilization, they are returned to their original place of honor in the infinite continuum beyond space-time, from whence they can be recalled and invoked at need to invest new socio-religious phenomena with divine legitimacy. Knowing what the Vedas actually say is not important. Being able to invest them with an appropriate and functional meaning is the heart of the matter. Here the specific methodological requirements of philology and linguistics are the major stumbling blocks.

Rajaram’s own arguments center upon four mainstays: archaeology, the river ecology of the ancient North-West, astronomy, and Vedic mathematics. Like most nationalists, Rajaram rejects the idea that the word “Aryan” has an ethnic or racial meaning. It is entirely an honorific. Having dismissed the invasion theory, he sums up: “the real problems are the chronology of Vedic India and the origin and spread of Indo-European languages.”

Rajaram’s focus on chronology, which is highly significant in a Hindutva context, leads to an attack upon Max Müller’s tentative approach to the same problem. Müller by common sense reckoning regarded the year 1000 BCE as the lower limit for the composition of the Rigvedic hymns, although he made it clear that this was a conjecture. This, however, does not deter Rajaram from using a fair amount of ink trying to discredit Müller’s dating. This dating is claimed to be determined by Biblical chronology and therefore a product of superstition. Since modern Indologists tend to date the composition of the Vedic hymns to roughly the same period as Müller, we must assume that they are guilty of the same primitive motives.

Like Chakrabarti, Rajaram also attacks “the current Indian intellectual scene,” which “with its continued attachment to the Aryan invasion theory is little more
than a prolongation of the old colonial policies.”55 Their achievement consists of recasting Indian history along Marxist lines. As for many indigenists, important counterarguments are the facts that the “invasion” is unmentioned in the Vedas, and that there are no archaeological traces of the invading Aryans.

Like so many conclusions drawn by both Western scholars and indigenists alike, these views rest upon assumptions that have not been verified. The fact that the invasion is not mentioned in the Vedas is of no consequence to academic scholarship, since a number of peoples do not remember their original homelands, or do not mention them in extant sources. The Hittites have left no memory of their origins, and like other Indo-European peoples of western Asia, their material cultures are purely Asiatic.56 The Romans had no remembrance of how they entered Italy, they had to invent a Trojan connection. As for archaeology, as important a political event as the Roman conquest of Sicily is impossible to detect in the contemporary habitation sites and tombs.57 In many cases, the invaders may share the same material culture as the invaded, or look exactly like them. Anthropologically, we need not assume that the migrating Aryans were substantially different from the peoples of the Indus civilization.58 Thus, both the silence of the early textual sources and the archaeological remains carry less weight in the discussion than assumed by some debaters. They are essentially arguments *ex silentio* and may be explained in a number of ways.

The last part of Rajaram’s book deals with India as the source of civilization. He proposes that the presence of Indo-European speakers from India to Ireland going back to prehistoric times may be ascribed to a combination of political and ecological disturbances in the Rigvedic heartland that seem to have taken place at the beginning in the fifth millennium BCE.59 His evidence presumably suggests that the Rigveda belongs to an earlier layer of civilization that preceded the rise of Egypt, Sumeria, and the Indus Valley.60 Rajaram emphasizes that the Vedic civilization was predominantly an indigenous evolution, an important point also to Chakrabarti and to nationalists in general. But bolder than Chakrabarti, Rajaram pushes the age of the Rigveda back to the remotest antiquity, almost to the end of the last Ice Age.61 Going through various kinds of evidence he concludes:

…on the basis of archaeology, satellite photography, metallurgy and ancient mathematics, it is now clear that there existed a great civilization – a mainly spiritual civilization perhaps – before the rise of Egypt, Sumeria and the Indus Valley. The heartland of this ancient world was the region from the Indus to the Ganga – the land of the Vedic Aryans.

(Ibid.: 247)

Here as not infrequently elsewhere, Rajaram rallies the alleged support of modern *scientific* methods to show that the ancient Indians were part of a great civilization that flourished at the beginning of history. The picture presented by natural science is thus far removed from the one found in history books that place the “Cradle of Civilizations” in the river valleys of Mesopotamia. And the mystery of the Indo-European speakers has finally found a solution: *They were part of a civilization*
that flourished before the dawn of civilizations.62 This is India’s golden past, this is India as a mother of civilizations, this is the Hindu version of India’s history which says that Hindu civilization was the dominant civilization of the world for several millennia before the birth of Christ, the same way as Western civilization has been dominant since the nineteenth century.63 In a sense, the legitimacy of India’s Aryan culture rests upon this historical vision because it pushes the Vedas far back into proto-history, back to the origo of human culture, thereby making them the point of departure for other religions as well. Here the Indian perception that the legitimacy and authority of ideas increase with their antiquity clashes with the modern western rejection of yesterday’s ideas and the constant search for new and better truths.

13.6 Shrikant Talageri’s reinvention of linguistics and philology

One of the consequences of the rejection of Western linguistics and philology is that these branches of scholarship have to be reinvented, and perhaps the most ambitious attempt of such a reinvention in polemicist literature is the work of Shrikant Talageri,64 a Bombay literateur with a wide range of scholarly and cultural interests. In 1993, Talageri published two books65 where he takes on the whole complex of problems related to the Aryan Invasion Theory with great vigor. In the preface to one of his books he receives both recognition and support from S. R. Rao,66 one of India’s most outstanding archaeologists. The fact that Talageri is thus embraced by a leading Indian scholar implies that his work deserves more attention than would otherwise be the case for a dilettante.

Talageri starts his exposition with the geographical distribution of modern languages, continues with a systematic critique of the evidence pointing to South Russia as the original homeland and then proceeds to a discussion of arguments based on the study of Sanskrit, such as the cerebrals in Vedic Sanskrit, and assumed Austric and Dravidian loanwords in Sanskrit and Vedic Sanskrit versus later Indo-Aryan. His program ends with the racial evidence and a consideration of the evidence in Sanskrit texts. It is a complete and ambitious philologico-linguistic project with physical anthropology thrown in for good measure. At the same time, he develops his own theory of Indo-European history, which of course differs fundamentally from the traditional Western version.

A curious aspect of Talageri’s work is the limited number of sources upon which it is based. His bibliography contains some 40 items, the Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology being his most important source on matters of Indo-European religion. His description of the traditional “invasion theory” is fair, although incomplete and partly obsolete. But in spite of the paucity of material at his disposal, he has no qualms about presenting a new, or at least repackaged, version of Indo-European prehistory. Unfortunately, this new version is not supported by fresh material, and the old material is treated in a highly selective manner. Within the limited space of a medium-sized book, problems of immense complexity are dismissed in a few paragraphs, whereas sweeping statements
replace the detailed and painstaking analysis that would be expected from a professional scholar.

Talageri’s reinvention of comparative philology is among other things flawed by the fact that he has not understood the principle of sound laws, which makes comparative phonology something of a hard science.67 This is a shortcoming he shares with other writers such as Rajaram and Bhagwan Singh, both of whom have extremely fanciful views on comparative philology and etymology. The consequence of this lack of technical competence is that Talageri’s arguments, devised to reject the traditional academic positions, usually collapse because they are methodologically unsound. However, occasionally he reaches the same conclusions as some Western scholars. This is the case with his discussion of the Brahui language. Talageri rejects the theory that the Brahuis were invading Aryans who adopted the language of the natives as well as the theory that the Brahuis were local Dravidians. Instead, following Grierson, he claims that the Brahuis were Dravidian immigrants from the South. Here he gets support from modern scholars as well.68 What is remarkable, however, is Talageri’s formulation of the chain of events:

The most likely and logical explanation […] is that the Brahuis are the survivors of a group of Dravidian immigrants from the south who retained their linguistic identity although their racial identity got completely submerged into that of the native Aryan-speaking population.

(1993b: 122)

This is important to him, since he does not want to accept the presence of Dravidians in the North-West in the Harappan period. There is, however, more than a touch of irony in the fact that he solves his problem by accepting a migration solution that is almost the mirror image of the assumed Aryan migration into India.

If we turn to Talageri’s own view of the homeland problem, we find the following presentation:

The original Indo-European language, which we will here call “proto/proto-Indo-European” to distinguish it from the hypothetical language (proto-Indo-European) reconstructed by European linguists, was spoken in interior North India; but in very ancient times it had spread out and covered a large area extending to Afghanistan, and had developed a number of dialects, which may be classified as follows:

Outer Indo-European dialects: Spoken in Afghanistan and northern Kashmir and the adjoining north Himalayan region.
Central Indo-European dialects: Spoken in what we may call the “Punjab region” and in southern Kashmir.
Inner Indo-European dialects: Spoken in the expanse of northern India from the Gangetic region to Maharashtra and from Punjab to Orissa and Bengal.

(1993a: 145)
Here Talageri may have been inspired by Grierson’s theory about two sets of Indo-Aryan dialects – one the language of the Midland, and the other the group of dialects forming what Grierson called the Outer sub-branch. Unfortunately, Talageri’s model is not closely argued in terms of linguistic data and cultural elements, it is rather stated *tout court*, as if the rejection of the invasion theory is sufficient support for it. He then proceeds to discuss a number of arguments that have been used to support the invasion theory, such as the development of retroflexes or cerebrals in Sanskrit. Talageri rejects the traditional theory which sees these sounds as due to the influence of Dravidian speakers, who in one view of the Indus culture were the original people inhabiting the North-West of India. In this matter, however, he receives a modicum of support from some Western scholars who are not convinced that Dravidian is the cause of the retroflexes. But if it may be doubted that Dravidian languages were responsible for the development of retroflexes in Sanskrit, it is generally accepted that there was a mutual influence between Indo-Aryan languages and Dravidian languages at a later stage, a phenomenon studied within the context of area linguistics. As Dixon points out, if two languages are in contact, and some of the speakers of each have a degree of competence in the other, then they are likely to borrow lexemes, grammatical categories and techniques, and some grammatical forms (in at least one direction, often in both directions). Thus, they gradually become more similar. Every geographical area in which more than one language is spoken, becomes a linguistic area to a greater or lesser extent, and India has been defined as such an area.

However, the similarities between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages cannot be due to Dravidian influence, according to Talageri, “since such a circumstance would be linguistically unnatural.” This view is based on a statement by Bhadriraju Krishnamurti, who points to the fact that borrowing into Dravidian languages is mostly lexical, whereas Indo-Aryan languages mostly borrow structural features. Krishnamurti suggests that transfer of morphological features “is expected to follow at a more advanced state of language contact, *necessarily presupposing extensive lexical borrowing.*” From this statement Talageri extracts an ironclad linguistic law: “Linguistic borrowing always starts out with vocabulary, and it is only at an ‘advanced stage’ of ‘extensive lexical borrowing’ that phonological structural features are borrowed; and only later that morphological and syntactic features are borrowed. This is the case everywhere.” Unfortunately, it is not. As Dixon shows, “in some contact situations, we find – for a variety of reasons – that lexemes are scarcely borrowed, whereas in other situations they are freely borrowed.” Talageri, who is unaware of this, concludes that unless “the normal linguistic laws are to be treated as invalid just in order to accommodate the invasion theorists’ insistence that the linguistic structure of Indo-Aryan is borrowed from Dravidian, it will have to be accepted that the linguistic structure of Indo-Aryan cannot possibly be ‘borrowed’ from Dravidian.” Thus, he avoids the conclusion that Middle Indo-Aryan and New Indo-Aryan have been built
on a Dravidian substratum. Instead,

The correct explanation for the structural similarity between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages is that the similar structure is not “borrowed” by any one of the two from the other. It cannot have been borrowed by the Dravidian languages, since there is no evidence to show that this was the original pan-Indo-European linguistic structure; and it cannot have been borrowed by the Indo-Aryan languages since there is no evidence of the “extensive lexical borrowing” which should precede any structural borrowing.

“Indian Aryandom and Dravidiandom are one” simply because the Indo-Aryan languages and the Dravidian languages developed this common linguistic structure conjointly. It is an “Indian” linguistic structure, and not an “Indo-Aryan” or a “Dravidian” one.

(Ibid.: 189)

Strange as it may seem, this is also a political statement. In the final analysis, it may be regarded as a strategy to bridge the chasm that opened up between Tamil Brahmins and non-Brahmins at the turn of the century. This issue also concerned Sri Aurobindo, who wrote: “The distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan, on which so much has been built, seems on the mass of the evidence to indicate a cultural rather than a racial difference.”78 As we have seen already, Sri Aurobindo did not regard the Rigveda’s non-Aryan Dâsas or Dasyus as human foes of a different race but as supernatural beings of a demoniac darkness who oppose the inner spiritual adventure of the Rishis. This kind of hermeneutics is one of the several possible strategies undertaken by Hindu nationalists to defuse potentially problematic material in the Vedas.

13.7 The Aryan–Dravidian divide

In India the problem of Aryan origins has not only a bearing on the remote past. It also has a relevance to the immediate present. Ever since Western historians pronounced, and the historians of our country concurred, that a Dravidian India had been invaded by the Aryans of the Rigveda in the second millenium B.C. there has been a ferment of antagonism, time and again, between the North and the South.

The Northerners, figuring in their own eyes as Aryan conquerors, have occasionally felt a general superiority to the Southerners who have come to be designated Dravidiads. The people of the South have often resented those of the North as being, historically, intruders upon their indigenous rights. An unhealthy movement has arisen in Tamil lands, sometimes erupting in violent strength and otherwise flowing as a subtle pervasive undercurrent which tends to make for a touchy and suspicious relationship between the two parts of our subcontinent, in spite of a broad unifying sense of nationhood.

(Sethna 1992: 1)
This subdued description by K. D. Sethna graphically depicts what is a pivotal concern in the debates on Aryanism. It is also a concern to Shrikant Talageri, whose language is more hardhitting: “A certain section of die-hard Leftists in the extreme south had decided, well before 1947, to make political and ideological capital out of the very first premise of the Aryan invasion theory, namely, that Aryans invaded India and drove the Dravidians south. Starting under the name ‘Justice Party’, this section floated the ‘Dravida Kalagam’ (DK), claiming to represent a movement of, by, and for the ‘Dravidians’, to liberate them from ‘Aryan dominance’.” This philosophy today constitutes the dominant political current in Tamil Nadu, with the DMK and the AIADMK, linear descendants of the DK, dominating the political scene. Hatred for Brahmins, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Hinduism, forms the main plank of this “Dravidian Movement.” To understand the background, we shall have to go back to the end of the nineteenth century and the formation of the non-Brahmin or Dravidian movement.

In the nineteenth century, Brahmins all across India had gained tangible advantages under colonial rule. Tamil-speaking Brahmins had especially reaped rich rewards. Barely 3 percent of the population, they disproportionately dominated the bureaucracy and various professions such as education, journalism, law, and medicine, as well as associational politics, into the 1920s, primarily by getting a head start in English and university education. Because Brahmin domination was ensured by a colonial legal culture which institutionalized Brahmanical social theory as the very foundations of the Raj, all caste Hindus in the south who were not Brahmin were unilaterally considered “Shudra.” That amounted to almost three-fourths of the populace of the Madras Presidency and had a very provocative impact on non-Brahmins. The Vellalas in particular were eager to shed the Shudra designation. In addition, Brahmins often combined economic power derived from land ownership with religious authority and further separated themselves from the lower castes while increasing their control over them. Thus, the position of the Brahmins engendered suspicion, if not hatred, in the mind of the non-Brahmin.

Eugene F. Irschick has shown how the colonial authorities in conjunction with local interests tried to influence the settlement pattern of parts of the Tamil population using among other things the reconstruction of a glorious Dravidian past as a means to put an end to the geographical mobility of these population segments. Perhaps even more important in the construction of a Tamil identity was the linguistic work produced by missionaries such as Roberto Di Nobili (1577–1656) and Constantius Beschi (1680–1743), but, above all, of the Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819–91), who in addition to his pioneering work on Tamil and Dravidian linguistics also had ideas about Tamil culture and history that were conducive to the development of a strong national identity among Tamil-speakers. This ethnonationalism was strongly anti-Brahmin. Brahmins were regarded as representatives of an Aryan invasion and held responsible for corrupting the original Dravidian religion, while the Shaiva scriptures were presented as superior to the Vedas. Brahmins were also accused of introducing the caste system into
South India. At the same time, Tamil culture was described as unconnected with 
the north and northern settlers, and the Tamils allegedly never derived their let-
ters or arts or civilization from the Aryans. Thus, the Dravidian nationalists and 
particularly the Tamils proceeded to reconstruct a history from scanty sources and 
conjecture which recalled an antiquity dating from the Indus civilization to the 
powerful Tamil kingdoms of the South. The political and social consequences for 
the Brahmins were considerable. Anti-Brahminism was riding high on a tide of 
reforms directed toward the betterment of the non-Brahmin majority of Madras. 
These reforms included the establishment of quotas based on caste and religion 
for civil service posts, ensuring the rights of non-Brahmins in seeking govern-
ment office. By 1921, the opportunities for Brahmins in the civil service had 
been considerably reduced, and Brahmins had to take to other professions. The 
hatred for Brahmins that had been whipped up in the population also led to acts 
of violence; it is therefore hardly surprising that Brahmins felt the need to 
respond to the historical picture presented by the Dravidianists.

It is an interesting aspect of the ensuing debate that both Dravidianists and 
neo-Hindus were able to extract separate narratives of their respective pasts from 
colonial Indology, and to rewrite these narratives in such a manner that they suited 
the practical purposes of the two contending groups. If Caldwell had glorified the 
Dravidian past, other writers saw the religion of the Dravidians as “gross 
demonolatry” contrasting with the “subtle philosophies” of the Aryan Brahmins. 
Thus, the neo-Hindus had a basis in colonial Indology upon which to build, and 
just like the colonial historians, they tended to regard India and Indian culture as 
coextensive with Hinduism. In many a neo-Hindu narrative, the progressive 
admixture of aboriginal Dravidians had caused the “fall” of Hinduism from its 
glorious Aryan beginnings, a decline that was only further exacerbated by the 
invasions of the Muslims.

In one of the early Brahmin counterattacks on the Dravidianists, Srinivas 
Aiyangar tried to reconquer Tamil as part of the Brahmin heritage claiming that 
“...the earliest grammarians of Tamil were Brahmans, their first spiritual instruc-
tors were Brahmans, and their first teachers of philosophy were also 
Brahmans.” A Brahmin scholar, R. Swaminatha Iyer, took up the argument from 
the philological point of view. Evidence showed, he claimed, that “what are 
known as Dravidian languages are in all their present essential features a creation 
of Aryan and Aryanised immigrants from the North.” It therefore followed that 
the tradition about Agastya’s immigration to the south was not merely a myth, and 
that the Dravidian civilization of the South was merely the civilization of these 
Aryan and Aryanised immigrants. Many Brahmins joined the Varnashrama 
Dharma movement, which tried to promote Brahmin ideals. According to a reso-
lation passed by a conference of this organization, the “Vedas and the Smritis had 
for their sole object the preservation of the Brahmana race without any admixture 
of other blood, so that the Vedas may be preserved by a set of qualified people 
and bred up in a purely Vaidic atmosphere.” The movement tried to cajole the 
non-Brahmins into joining the Brahmins. They too, the reasoning went, were
“noble Aryans,” and they must “firmly believe that the truly orthodox Brahmin is
your real friend and Saviour, both for the life here and for the life beyond.”93 This
statement was made in 1918 and in the spirit of Aurobindo and Dayānanda repre-
sents an early attempt to co-opt non-Brahmins back into the traditional caste
system by presenting them as noble Aryans. This idea of co-Aryanness is still
very much alive and forms an important part of Hindutva ideology. So is the
rejection of the theory that Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages are unrelated.

From a nationalist point of view, it is clear that the concept of an
Aryan–Dravidian divide is pernicious to the unity of the Hindu state, and an
important aim for Hindutva and neo-Hindu scholarship is therefore to introduce
a counter-narrative to the one presented by Western academic scholarship.
Navaratna Rajaram strongly objects to the idea that Dravidian languages are a
family unrelated to Sanskrit. According to him, “empirical data provides no sup-
port for the existence of Dravidian languages independent of Sanskrit.”94 Quite to
the contrary, no trace of any Dravidian language free from the influence of
Sanskrit has ever been found. The proto-languages inferred by Western scholars
are rejected as imaginary languages created by modern linguists to fill gaps in
their theory. Rajaram presents his own views on the subject in the Organiser:

The term Dravida refers simply to a geographical region whereas Arya
is a cultural term. Just as the nineteenth century scholars confused race
and language in their misuse of the word Arya the same people confused
geography, language and culture in the case of the word Dravida.
The Aryan–Dravidian divide is essentially a political fraud, the result of
colonial-missionary mischief.

(Rajaram 1997)

According to Rajaram, no well-informed scholar today takes either the Aryan
invasion or the notion of the foreign origin of the Vedas and the Vedic civilization
seriously. Furthermore, he claims that the Aryan–Dravidian divide was created
by the colonial rulers, just as they created the Hindu–Muslim divide.95 Even
today the field of Dravidian studies is allegedly dominated by “missionary scholars”
like Kamil Zvelebil. Although Zvelebil’s scholarship is dubious according to
Rajaram, “through a combination of inflated pretensions and the unwillingness of
other scholars to expose him, Zvelebil has successfully interposed himself as an
arbiter of Dravidian scholarship, and even the Indus script and language!” It is
interesting to note that while Rajaram rejects proto-Dravidian as a scholarly phan-
tasy, Talageri elsewhere invokes the same theory to prove a point!96 Indigenist
polemics, like the Western scholars they decry, are equally unable to come up
with a unified theory of the Indo-European or Aryan past.

A slightly more sophisticated attempt at getting around the linguistic differences
between Dravidian and Indo-Aryan languages has been made by Subhash Kak. In
his paper “On the Classification of Indic Languages” he deals with Indo-
European and Dravidian. Here he argues that “based on genetic classification,
both the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages have had common parents and these languages share many typological categories." This he tries to justify by referring to the Nostratic theory, which assumes a linkage of language families—Indo-European, Uralic, Turkic, Mongolian, Tungusic, Dravidian, South Caucasian (Kartvelian), and perhaps Afroasiatic. Kak claims that speakers of these languages interacted strongly resulting in many shared characteristics among the languages. The relationship among the Nostratic languages is ascribed to proximity about eight thousand years ago. Kak suggests the following scenario:

Around 7000 B.C. the Indo-Europeans were located in the Indus-Sarasvati valleys, northern Iran, and southern Russia; the Afro-Asiatics were in West Asia; and the Dravidians were located just south of the Indo-Europeans in a belt stretching from South India to southern Iran. There existed many trading links between the groups. The Vedic period is to be seen as following a long interactive era between the Indo-Aryans and the Dravidians. The proof of this comes in many Dravidian features of the Vedic language. (1994: 192)

Kak’s paper is strangely poor on details. At the end, he claims that “attested migrations of the Indo-Iranians into Europe explains the presence of several Dravidian features in the European languages.” It is typical that he does not mention which features he regards as Dravidian. Nor is his general model well argued with reference to specific archaeological or linguistic material. Yet for all its shortcomings, his paper is probably the best attempt to save a modicum of Indo-European and Dravidian commonality in the incipient phase of these languages. The main problem is that the idea of a Nostratic superfamily, contrary to Kak’s contention on page 188, has not been increasingly accepted in recent years. According to Dixon, there is no reputable historical linguist anywhere in the world who accepts the claims of the Nostraticists. The reasons are lack of rigor in the methods applied, as well as the fact that several of the language families that are supposed to be related are still in dire need of research. The presumed Altaic family may not exist at all. Thus Kak is really clutching at straws.

It is clear that the opposition to the Aryan invasion theory has a predominantly Brahmin background. But it is interesting that a political leader from the lower part of the social ladder also opposed the theory. B. R. Ambedkar in his book Who were the Shudras? took strong exception to it. His reasons for doing so are enlightening:

The Aryan race theory is so absurd that it ought to have been dead long ago. But far from being dead, the theory has a considerable hold upon people. There are two explanations which account for this phenomenon. The first explanation is to be found in the support which the theory receives from the Brahmin scholars. This is a very strange phenomenon. As Hindus, they should ordinarily show a dislike for the Aryan theory with its express avowal of the superiority of the European races over the Asiatic races. But the
Brahmin scholar has not only no such aversion but he most willingly hails [sic]. The reasons are obvious. The Brahmin believes in the two-nation theory. He claims to be the representative of the Aryan race and he regards the rest of the Hindus as descendants of the non-Aryans. The theory helps him to establish his kinship with the European races and share their arrogance and superiority. He likes particularly that part of the theory which makes the Aryan an invader and a conqueror of the non-Aryan native races. For it helps him to maintain and justify his overlordship over the non-Brahmins.

(Chakrabarti 1997: 228)

Ambedkar’s statement shows to what extent the interpretation of history depends upon present needs. The southern Brahmins rejected the invasion theory because it was used to their disadvantage, and Ambedkar rejects it for precisely the same reason, but from a low-caste perspective. In both cases, history is a potent weapon that has to be defused.

13.8 Indigenist rhetoric and the anguish of India

In her book on ethnicity, security, and separatism in India, Maya Chadda comments upon the heavy hand of history on the collective consciousness of the Sikhs. In this connection she quotes Robin Jeffrey who shows how Sikh politicians found it necessary to invoke the past – and to portray past events in a way that did not correspond to any documentary evidence Jeffrey had seen. Jeffrey distinguishes between what he calls the academic history and the rhetorical history of Punjab. It was clear that Sikh politicians were using the imagined past to justify the present and to reconstruct their identities in the context of new developments. In a similar manner, competing versions of the past are found in Kashmir and on Sri Lanka. The phenomenon is not restricted to ethnic nationalism, we also find it in connection with caste history.

The heated polemics against Western Indology may carry an emotional impact that quickly blunts the response of a Western scholar, but there is a strain of sadness in these noisy assertions that is brought out well by Bhagwan Singh, also deploring the moral decrepitude of Western Indology:

All these aberrations create doubts about the probity of those who disinherit the Vedic Aryans from the legacy of the Harappan civilization even though their’s is the only tradition which bemoans its lost glories and has fondly preserved whatever could be preserved as part of its own traditional history. Deprive them of the Harappan inheritance and there shall be nothing left to make the Aryans feel proud of, whether in India or abroad. [my emphasis] Indian Aryans are known to be the moving super-computers of history when it comes to loading the bulk of the text in their mind, but they are rejected as halfwits when it comes to recognition of their tradition about which they were so crazy.

(1995: 11)
The cultural anguish so eloquently expressed by Singh reverberates through the Internet. It echoes the sentiments of a complaint made by Golwalkar:

Our history is for the most part occupied by the Muslim period and, later, the British period. If this is how we teach our children — that they had nothing great in the past, that they have been a beaten people always, that it was only after the advent of Moghuls and, later the English, that this nation began to look forward — in short, that they had no past worthy of pride and no ancestors worthy of emulation, can we expect anything worthwhile from them?

(1992: 55)

India, at the end of the twentieth century, with an immense population of nearly one billion people squeezed in on a territory smaller than the United States and staggering on the brink of a social, environmental, and economic disaster, has reason to agonize. Yet I believe that the psychological roots of this cultural Angst are to be found in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, when India first found itself elevated to cultural stardom by such men as Voltaire, William Jones, and Friedrich Schlegel, only to find itself mocked, rejected, and degraded at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indians not only had to deal with a colonial power which had effective control over their territory, but they also had to face the immensely powerful and terrifying onslaught of modernization and the arrogant will of the British to redefine them through British education and Christian mission, thus threatening to supersede the traditional ways of self-imaging and self-definition. Such organizations as the Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj were reactions to this colonial mind-game, and the subsequent counter-narratives of primeval grandeur, being reflections of an indo-phobic Indology now obsolete in the West, became part of India’s political discourse and strategies for self-definition. Nineteenth-century Indology survives in Indian debates because its narratives became ingrained in India’s visceral intellectual life, the school system, and in the creation of political categories. Although much indigenist rhetoric can be related explicitly to high-caste interests, there is a more general background which cannot simply be explained as right-wing politics. At the end of the colonial era, India was not merely a colony emerging from the political oppression and material exploitation of the past. It was also a wounded civilization looking for a new and regenerated self-assurance. To begin with, other ideological and political preferences prevailed. Now, with the loss of intellectual credibility experienced by the Left after the collapse of Communism and Congress in moral disintegration, this self-assurance has to be sought elsewhere.

13.9 The Hindutva dilemma: Indigenous Aryanism as a political tool

If we turn to the Hindu nationalists at the beginning of this century, we find that Indigenous Aryanism had not yet become integrated into the ideology of the religious Right, at least not in its modern form. Dayānanda Saraswati described the
Aryans of the Vedic era as a chosen people that some time after Creation came down from Tibet into Āryāvarta and then became the “sovereign lords of the earth.” However, he also states: “This country is called Āryāvarta because it has been the abode of the Aryas from the very dawn of Creation.” The Aryans were in fact the first to settle Āryāvarta, and Dayānanda rejected the Western Orientalist idea that the Aryans came from the Middle East into a country already settled by savages. Bāl Gangādhār Tilak, however, thought that the Aryans had their original homeland in the Arctic region. The German scholar Hans-Joachim Klimkeit suggests that this view may be due to the fact that Tilak was a Chitpavan Brahmin, and that the Chitpavan Brahmans had a myth of origin to the effect that their ancestors had come from the North somewhere outside India. Vināyak Damodar Sāvarkar also accepted the possibility of a non-Indian Aryan extraction. It was Mahādev Sadasīvrao Golwalkar, founder of the Rashtrīya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who in political terms settled the matter by claiming that “Hindus came into this land from nowhere, but are indigenous children of the soil always, from times immemorial.” It has been pointed out several times that Golwalkar’s view is the natural consequence of an ideology that regards the Muslims and Christians as intruders. By the same token, the Aryans would be intruders too, and we have seen that they were indeed decried as such in Tamil Nadu. But it is also proper to see indigenism as a constructive tool within the context of Hindutva organicism.

In Golwalkar’s thinking, the Hindus – and thereby the Aryans – were autochthonous to the land of India:

The origin of our people, the date from which we have been living here as a civilised entity, is unknown to the scholars of history. In a way we are anadi, without a beginning. To define such a people is impossible.

We existed when there was no necessity for any name. We were the good, the enlightened people. We were the people who knew about the laws of Nature and the laws of the Spirit. We built a great civilisation, a great culture and a unique social order. We had brought into actual life almost everything that was beneficial to mankind. The rest of humanity were just bipeds and so no distinctive name was given to us. Sometimes, in trying to distinguish our people from others, we were called “the enlightened” – the Aryas – and the rest Mlecchas.

(1992: 16f)

In Golwalkar’s narrative these sons of the sacred mother Bharat have an almost Messianic mission in the world. The term anadi has distinct religious overtones and would seem to link the Aryans with the Vedic puruṣa or cosmic giant that is also the origin of the varna system which makes the Indian social order so unique. H. V. Seshadri, present General Secretary of the RSS, contrasts two types of national cohesion, mechanical or organic. The mechanical version has unity at the structural and functional level. The other kind is the cohesion of a living organism. No part of it is joined to it from outside. Whereas mechanical cohesion
causes inherent friction, the organic pattern produces harmony. Here, social norms and conventions evolve in tune with the basic motivation of mutual love and co-operation. This harmonious society is comparable to a living organism, and the various limbs and organs co-operate spontaneously with one another and with the entire body. In Seshadri’s words, “the founding fathers of our society had, in fact, conceived of it as Virata Purusha with thousands of heads, eyes, hands, feet and so on, but with one heart, throbbing all through. That was the kind of living, organic unity sought to be established in the society.”

Seshadri’s reference to the Rigveda is significant because through the Vedic varna system it gives the organicist view of society as divine sanction. If Indian nationalism is founded on European nationalism, as social scientists are wont to claim, the modalities of this nationalism are at least in part arch-Indian. It is obvious that Aryans cannot have been extraneous to this societal body at the sacred beginning of Cosmic time. Indian society, modeled on the cosmic giant who is also identical with the sacrifice and in the post-vedic period with the god Viṣṇu, is a model for social harmony, which is one of the fundamental ideological purposes of the caste system: a hierarchical harmony where duties or dharmas are distributed among the several castes which are burdened with unequal shares of purity and impurity. The sanctity of this vision breaks down if the Aryans are treated as barbaric intruders.

Arvind Rajagopal has suggested that there is a muted but persistent upper caste, brahmin-dominated identity emerging as the dominant, if not the hegemonic, national identity of India. There is much material to document such a claim, and the social vision delineated above is certainly Brahmin in spirit. But this is not the only attempt in India’s modern history to create an ideological basis for a unified nation. From the beginning, modern India had to face and absorb a number of ethnonationalisms. Therefore, the Indian nationalists had to create an inclusive interpretation of history – the opposite of what the ethnonationalists were trying to prove. In his construction of Indian history, Jawaharlal Nehru also tried to extract unifying principles that would give India inner cohesion. And for all his democratic principles, he made no bones about using the armed forces in order to integrate the more recalcitrant elements of colonial India. The Hindutva approach differs in method rather than in purpose.

According to Sita Ram Goel, the Nehruvian version of history which has been “sold as secularist in post-independence India” is “no more than a mix of the imperialist versions [of history].” Nehru’s vision was of a multi-cultured India, and it was tolerant of the different creeds that were established on India’s territory. This vision of multiple separate entities joined in one nation is in the background when Talageri presents the “first principle of Leftist propaganda” as the idea that India is not a nation, but a conglomerate of nations. And the main motive for projecting this “multinational India” theory is to sow the seeds for the eventual breakup of India into its “constituent nations,” the alleged rationale behind this being that if India breaks up into small “nations,” these would be easier for the Leftists to gobble up one by one. But in Talageri’s view a deeper reason for this Leftist attitude is “hatred and contempt for one’s own nation, culture, historical ethos and identity” which is “manifested in
a psychopathic hatred and contempt for Hinduism, Hindu Nationalism and Hindu culture.” It would therefore seem that the general antipathy toward the Left is strongly influenced by the social critique of the Left, which not only threatens traditional views but also high-caste interests. Since academic scholars often share this critical attitude toward India’s social system, their scholarly methods are equally branded as Marxist. It is overlooked that the methods applied by India’s mainstream academics, by and large, are the same methods that are applied all over the democratic, industrialized world, not only in Indology but also in other disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. This identification of modern methods with “Leftism” thus serves to alienate Hindutva scholarship from the rest of the academic world. At the same time, ironically the Hindu nationalist stance betrays them as true inheritors of the British Raj, perhaps even more so than the Congress nationalists that preceded them.

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, both J. G. Herder and Friedrich Schlegel had presented India as the cradle of humanity. In Schlegel’s view, Sanskrit was the mother of languages. This Romantic notion of India as the Urheimat would seem to have become the destination of the Hindu nationalists’ intellectual trajectory toward a more gratifying view on India’s past. The rejection of almost 200 years of linguistic and philological scholarship has the result that polemicist arguments often acquire a curiously creaky and distant quality, as if being carried across the expanse of a vast time gap. Even if they occasionally make good points when discussing the logical coherence of some arguments concerning aspects of the migration theory, they are unable to create a convincing counter-model that in a satisfactory manner accounts for the data we do happen to know. What they provide, however, is a highly efficient rhetoric with a mobilization potential which serves to promote a new Hindu identity as well as Hindu nationalist policies.

**Acknowledgments**

This chapter was made possible by substantial grants from The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture and the Benneche Foundation. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to Wolfson College, Oxford, which accepted me as Visiting Scholar for the Trinity term of 1999, thus giving me the working conditions and stimuli that I needed to see the work through. Special thanks to Raoul Martens, who supplied me with useful material, although we disagree on most accounts, and to Edwin Bryant who read a draft of this chapter and supplied me with a valuable critique. I have also received valuable comments from Luis Gonzalez-Reimann and Kathinka Froystad. In addition, thanks to a large number of Internet friends who have given me far more input than I could possibly use, and to Ruth Schmidt who improved my English.

This chapter was finished before the arrival of India’s present government, and it would be too complicated to rewrite the relevant paragraphs of the article to harmonize them with the current political situation.
Notes

1 “Il est légitime de chercher les Indo-Européens sur le terrain protohistorique, mais il s’agit là d’un prolongement de l’hypothèse, non de sa vérification. La vérité de la notion d’‘Indo-Européen’est dans la langue et dans la religion, elle n’est pas dans l’archéologie” (Sergent 1995: 394).

2 Important persons here would be the astrologer and amateur Indologist David Frawley, the Yoga specialist Georg Feuerstein, and the linguist Koenrad Elst.

3 Chakrabarti does not define “Indology” directly, but in the first sentence of his preface, he refers to the “Western study of ancient India” (p. ix). This would seem to be a fairly adequate definition of Indology as understood in its narrow sense, and particularly related to Sanskrit studies, but at the same time even early Indologists studied contemporary Indian vernaculars, religion and culture. In a modern context, the term Indology would refer to the study of ancient and modern Indic languages as well as the culture, history and religions of India in general. In a number of places, Indology has been replaced by the term “South Asian studies.”

4 Chakrabarti 1997: ix.

5 Ibid.: 1.

6 Ibid.: 7.

7 Mill, James (1773–1836). Scottish philosopher, historian, and economist and a prominent representative of Utilitarianism. Mill wrote a History of British India, 3 vol. (1817). The History’s severe Utilitarian analysis of Indian civilization also popularized among European readers an image of the subcontinent as perpetually backward and undeveloped.


8 The German historians H. Kulke and D. Rothermund published their A History of India in 1986. They discuss the Mauryan empire on pp. 61–70.

9 Chakrabarti 1997: 201.

10 The question of the extent of the Mauryan empire is a classical case of historical inference based on insufficient data. Whether the view of Chakrabarti nor the view of Rothermund and Kulke can be proved, and Chakrabarti may therefore opt for an interpretation that is more satisfactory seen from a nationalist point of view without having to twist the data. However, his own interpretation is equally open to criticism, and the non liquet remains.

11 Talageri 1993a,b; Rajaram 1993, 1995; Singh 1995; and Sethna 1992.

12 Parpola compares these names with the Iranian ethnic names daha, dahyu, and parnoi.


14 K. D. Sethna has since 1949 been the editor of Mother India, a Review of Culture. He was educated at St Xavier’s School and College in Bombay and at Bombay University with degrees in philosophy and English. During his MA studies he joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram of Integral Yoga at Pondicherry. His interests are in literature, philosophy, mystical and spiritual as well as scientific thought and ancient Indian history. He has published extensively on a number of subjects.


20 Ibid.: 233.

23 Ibid.: 244.
24 Ibid.: 264.
28 Ibid.: 263.
29 Ibid.: 330.
30 Ibid.: 333.
31 Ibid.: 335.
33 Bhagwan Singh has published a number of works in Hindi, partly of a literary, partly of a philological character.
36 Ibid.: 8.
37 Ibid.: 12.
38 Ibid.: 50.
41 Ibid.
42 It is demonstrable that Germanic h is derived from I-E *k, whereas this *k becomes ś in Skt. Skt h is usually derived from I-E *gh.
45 N. S. Rajaram has a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering from the B. M. S. College in Bangalore and a PhD in mathematics from Indiana University in Bloomington, USA. He has more than twenty years’ experience in teaching and research at several universities in the United States. His areas of research have included probability theory and statistics, artificial intelligence and robotics, and industrial automation.
48 Rajaram and Frawley 1995: 50. Models for the application of linguistic analysis to demic diffusion were in fact readily available in the shape of historical data on language and cultural diffusion. The nineteenth-century scholars who devised the invasion theories had the most impressive models right in front of them: Since the time of Columbus, Western Europeans had invaded and colonized North America, Meso-America, South America, and Australia. Huge population movements had taken place, and indigenous populations were heavily decimated, partly because of European brutality, partly because of the spread of new diseases. The conquest of Costa Rica almost entirely replaced the indigenous population with Spanish speakers. In Mexico a substantial Spanish element was injected into the population without the indigenous population being annihilated, and with an ongoing genetic and cultural amalgamation as a result (King 1981: 151). The same process applies to the Andean region of South America. In North America the native Americans were chased away from their traditional areas under constant pressure from European settlers. In Russia, there was a substantial annexation of areas in Asia, both to the south and to the east with a concomitant spread of the Russian language and Russian culture. A literary reflex of this expansion was Jules Verne’s book Michael Strogoff: The Courier of the Czar. One can also mention a large number of colonies with small, but powerful European populations ruling over the natives. But not only that: European scholars
had been raised in a school system where Greek and Roman history was an integral part of the curriculum. This history offered an assorted selection of barbaric migrations, particularly at the end of the Roman empire, which could serve as models for the expansion of the Indo-Europeans. It is therefore hardly surprising that the migration model has come under revision only recently. This has come about by the analysis of language and culture diffusion, where we now are able to see that there are several models available. Invasion – or migration – is only one such model. Japan, for instance, offers a model for cultural diffusion without a concomitant genetic diffusion. The history of the English language in Ireland shows us how a language can spread without a large-scale invasion. During the seventeenth century, a new English-speaking ruling class was settled in Ireland, and the mercantile and professional classes in towns became predominantly English-speaking. By the eighteenth century, the Irish language was confined to the poorer rural people. After 1745 this effect was also evident in Gaelic Scotland. These populous and impoverished communities were ravaged by economic failure in the nineteenth century, and survivors began a rapid shift to English. In 1700, four/fifths of the Irish population spoke Irish, and the English spoken in Ireland was not different from the English spoken in Britain. Three hundred years later, only one/seventh of the Irish population speak Irish, and the English spoken in Ireland is substantially different from the English of Britain (Pokorny 1968 [1936]: 180).

The method was proposed by Morris Swadesh in 1951 and is based on studies of the lexicon, which undergoes gradual changes so that an assumed specific percentage of the core vocabulary is lost with time. The method is controversial for several reasons and does not play a major role in modern linguistics. When used, it is usually because other methods are unavailable. For a short description, see Lehmann 1993: 35ff.


Ibid.: 52.

See for instance Trautmann (1997), who gives a better and more balanced picture of the situation than Chakrabarti.


Ibid.: 21.

Ibid.: 42.

Hencken 1955: 2.

Ibid.: 32.

See for instance chapter VI of Sergent 1997.

Rajaram and Frawley 1995: 205.

Ibid.: 206.

Ibid.: 209.

Ibid.: 248. The emphasis is mine. Rajaram ascribes the end of the Indus culture to an ecological disaster. His chronology looks like this: 8000 – ending of the last Ice Age; 3750 – ending of the Rigvedic Age; 3100 – ending of the Vedic Age; the Mahābhārata war; 3000 – beginning of the Harappa-Sūtra period; 2700–2200 – high Harappan–Sumerian civilization; c.2350 – founding of the Akkadian empire by Sargon of Akkad; 2200 – Drought begins: the beginning of the end of the Harappan and Akkadian civilizations; 2200–1900 – end of the ancient world. All dates BCE.

Sita Ram Goel in the preface to Talageri 1993: v.

Shrikant G. Talageri was educated in Bombay where he lives and works. He has been interested in wildlife, comparative music, religion and philosophy, history and culture, and linguistics. He has made a special study of the Konkani language, his mother tongue.

Talageri 1993a,b. The two books are partly identical, as they have much text in common, and the reappraisal of the Aryan invasion theory would seem to be a remake of the Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian nationalism.
The author of the present book, Shrikant G. Talageri, has taken great pains to examine the archaeological, literary, linguistic and anthropological evidence both for and against the Aryan invasion and non-Indian home of the Aryans and come to the reasonable conclusion that the Indo-Aryans lived in the Indus Valley and neighbouring countries long before the European Aryan speakers in Central Asia. I am sure his findings based on comprehensive study research will put an end to much publicized Aryan invasion theory.”

Thus, he for instance tries to derive the word gaja, “elephant” from the Sanskrit root garj- “to roar,” which is phonetically impossible (Talageri 1993a: 170). A derivation from garj- would have given garjaka- or garjiki. Nor could gaja- have gone through a Prakrit language, which would have given gajja- with a heavy first syllable. Bhagwan Singh simply rejects the relevance of sound laws: “…to talk of the laws governing an entire linguistic area is absurd. There is no language in the world which has perfect grammatical rules. Not even Sanskrit. How can we talk of phonetic laws governing such a large number of dialects and what sense is there in taking the assumed PIE roots seriously when we can not reconstruct old English by comparison of English spoken in the commonwealth countries?” (Singh 1995: 330).


See Chakrabarti 1997: 130. Chakrabarti refers to this as the “Outer Band.” Grierson uses the terms “Inner sub-branch” and “Outer sub-branch” of Indo-Aryan languages, see *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. 1, Part 1 (1927), p. 117.

Retroflexes do not occur in any other ancient Indo-European languages, but are for instance well known in modern East Norwegian and Swedish.

See for instance (Hock 1996) and (Sergent 1997: 137). Based on physical anthropological material, Sergent rejects the idea that the Harappans were Dravidians, and instead classifies them as Indo-Afghan. In Sergent’s opinion, only the southernmost part of the Indus Valley culture was populated by Dravidians. This fits nicely with Hock’s view that retroflexes may be explained as an internal development in Indo-Aryan languages.

Dixon 1997: 15.

Ibid.: 16.

Talageri 1993a: 186.

Ibid.: 186f.

Dixon 1997: 27.


Quoted in Sethna 1992: 175. According to Sethna, Aurobindo argues that “there is nothing in the present ethnological features of the country” to prove the common theory that there was, from outside India, a penetration of “a small body of fair-skinned barbarians into a civilized Dravidian peninsula.” The quotation from Aurobindo is from *The Secret of the Veda*, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1971. According to Patricia M. Greer (pers. comm.), Sri Aurobindo’s various writings on the Veda and his translations of some of the hymns, originally published in the “Arya” (a periodical in which Sri Aurobindo serialized many of his major works) between August 1914 and 1920, were brought together and published in book-form in 1956 under the general title “On the Veda.” The title of the volume, however, was later changed to the more significant “The Secret of the Veda.” That re-titling took place for the 1972 “Centenary Edition” of Sri Aurobindo’s works. Sri Aurobindo died in 1950. In recent years, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives have published many unpublished translations and chapters on the Vedas found among Sri Aurobindo’s papers.

Talageri 1993b: 38. DMK and AIADMK are the acronyms for the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam respectively.

Ramaswamy 1997: 27.
1 AR YAN P AST AND POST-COLONIAL PRESENT

82 Hardgrave 1965: 11.
83 Irschick 1994.
84 Irschick 1969: 279.
85 Ibid.: 294.
86 Ibid.: 291f.
89 Irschick 1969: 298.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.: 298f.
92 Ibid.: 299f.
93 Ibid.: 300.
95 Rajaram 1997.
96 Talageri 1993a: 163.
99 Kak here clashes with Talageri who argues strongly to prove that there was no Dravidian influence on Vedic. As far as academic linguistics is concerned, Kak seems very superficially informed.
100 Kak 1994: 193.
101 Dixon 1997: 44.
102 Chadda 1997: 54.
103 Ibid.: 49ff.
104 Thomas Trautmann has coined the phrases *indomania* and *indophobia* for these two extremes. For the French and German reactions to India, see Figueira (1994).
105 “The Aryans of the Vedic era are described as a chosen people to whom ‘the formless God revealed perfect knowledge of the Veda’. Some time after Creation, they came down from Tibet into Aryavarta – a virgin territory between the Himalayas and Vindhya mountains, the Indus and the Brahmaputra – and then became the ‘sovereign lords of the Earth’, whose inhabitants they instructed in Sanskrit, the ‘mother of all languages’” (Jaffrelot 1996: 16). Jaffrelot refers to Dayānanda’s book *The Light of Truth*, pp. 248, 277–9, and 341–5. In fact, the word that Dayānanda uses for Tibet, Trīvis-apa, may also mean Heaven, and it is unclear which meaning he had in mind. A difference in meaning may not have existed for him (Ashok Aklujkar, pers. comm.).
106 Saraswati 1975 [1849: 729]. I am grateful to Luis Gonzalez-Reimann for this reference.
109 The quotation is from “We, or our nationhood defined,” p. 37, quoted in Jaffrelot 1996: 55.
110 The publication mentioned here is a selection of writings from Golwalkar’s 700 page *magnum opus* with the same name.
112 Ibid.: 19.
113 Rajagopal 1996: 112.
114 The high-caste background and bias of the Sangh parivar is discussed in Jaffrelot 1998.
115 Chadda 1997: 27.
116 Ibid.: 28f.
117 Talageri 1993b: v.
118 Ibid.: 9.
References


