

Questioning the Aryan Invasion Theory and Revising Ancient Indian History¹

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NB. The footnotes for this article are linked to a separate [footnote](#) page.

Introduction

Tacitus, the classical Roman writer, claimed to have described past events and personalities in his works *sine ira et studio*, free from hostility and bias. This motto has guided serious historians through the ages, and it became their highest ambition to write history 'objectively', distancing themselves from opinions held by interested parties.

The ideal was not always followed, as we know. We have seen twentieth century governments commissioning re-writings of the histories of their countries from the standpoint of their own ideologies. Like the court-chroniclers of former times, some contemporary academic historians wrote unashamedly biased accounts of events and redesigned the past accordingly.

When, in the wake of World War II the nations of Asia and Africa gained independence, their intellectuals became aware of the fact that their histories had been written by representatives of the colonial powers which they had opposed. More often than not they discovered that all traditional accounts of their own past had been brushed aside by the 'official' historians as so much myth and fairytale. Often lacking their own academically trained historians-or worse, only possessing native historians who had taken over the views of the colonial masters-the discontent with existing histories of their countries expressed itself often in vernacular works that lacked the academic credentials necessary to make an impact on professional historians.

The situation is slowly changing. A new generation of scholars who grew up in post-colonial times and who do not share the former biases, scholars in command of the tools of the trade-intimacy with the languages involved, familiarity with the culture of their countries, respect for the indigenous traditions-are rewriting the histories of their countries.

Nowhere is this more evident than in India. India had a tradition of learning and scholarship much older and vaster than the European countries that, from the sixteenth century onwards, became its political masters. Indian scholars are rewriting the history of India today.

The Aryan Invasion Theory and the Old Chronology

One of the major points of revision concerns the so called 'Aryan invasion theory', often referred to as 'colonial-missionary', implying that it was the brainchild of conquerors of foreign colonies who could not but imagine that all higher culture had to come from outside 'backward' India, and who likewise assumed that a religion could only spread through a politically supported missionary effort.

While not buying into the more sinister version of this revision, which accuses the inventors of the Aryan invasion theory of malice and cynicism, there is no doubt that early European attempts to explain the presence of Indians in India had much to do with the commonly held Biblical belief that humankind originated from one pair of humans- Adam and Eve to be precise (their common birth date was believed to be c.4005 BCE)-and that all peoples on earth descended from one of the sons of Noah, the only human to survive the Great Flood (dated at 2500 BCE). The only problem seemed to be to connect peoples not mentioned in Chapter 10 of Genesis ['The Peopling of the Earth'] with one of the Biblical genealogical lists.

One such example of a Christian historian attempting to explain the presence of Indians in India is the famous Abbé Dubois (1770-1848), whose long sojourn in India (1792-1823) enabled him to collect a large amount of interesting materials concerning the customs and traditions of the Hindus. His (French) manuscript was bought by the British East India Company and appeared in an English translation under the title *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* in 1897 with a Prefatory Note by the Right Hon. F. Max Müller.² Abbé Dubois, loath 'to oppose [his] conjectures to [the Indians'] absurd fables' categorically stated:

It is practically admitted that India was inhabited very soon after the Deluge, which made a desert of the whole world. The fact that it was so close to the plains of Sennaar, where Noah's descendants remained stationary so long, as well as its good climate and the fertility of the country, soon led to its settlement.

Rejecting other scholars' opinions which linked the Indians to Egyptian or Arabic origins, he ventured to suggest them 'to be descendents not of Shem, as many argue, but of Japhet'. He explains: 'According to my theory they reached India from the north, and I should place the first abode of their ancestors in the neighbourhood of the Caucasus.'³ The reasons he provides to substantiate his theory are utterly unconvincing-but he goes on to build the rest of his migration theory (not yet an 'Aryan' migration theory) on this shaky foundation.

Max Müller (1823-1903), who was largely responsible for the 'Aryan invasion theory' and the 'old chronology', was too close in spirit and time to this kind of thinking, not to have adopted it fairly unquestioningly. In his Prefatory Note he praises the work of Abbé Dubois as a 'trustworthy authority. . . which will always retain its value.'

That a great deal of early British Indology was motivated by Christian missionary considerations, is no secret. The famous and important Boden Chair for Sanskrit at the University of Oxford was founded by Colonel Boden in 1811 with the explicit object 'to promote the translation of the Scriptures into Sanskrit, so as to enable his countrymen to proceed in the conversion of the natives of India to the Christian Religion'.⁴ Max Müller, in a letter to his wife wrote in 1886: 'The translation of the Veda will hereafter tell to a great extent on the fate of India and on the growth of millions of souls in that country. It is the root of their religion, and to show them what the root is, I feel sure, is the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3 000 years.'⁵

When the affinity between many European languages and Sanskrit became a commonly accepted notion, scholars almost automatically concluded that the Sanskrit speaking ancestors of the present day Indians were to be found somewhere halfway between India and the Western borders of Europe-Northern Germany, Scandinavia, Southern Russia, the Pamir-from which they invaded the Punjab. (It is also worth noting that the early armchair scholars who conceived these grandiose migration theories, had no actual knowledge of the terrain their 'Aryan invaders' were supposed to have transversed, the passes they were supposed to have crossed, or the various climates they were believed to have been living in). Assuming that the Vedic Indians were semi-nomadic warriors and cattle-breeders, it fitted the picture, when Mohenjo Daro and Harappa were discovered, to also assume that these were the cities the Aryan invaders destroyed under the leadership of their god Indra, the 'city-destroyer', and that the dark-skinned indigenous people were the ones on whom they imposed their religion and their caste system.

Western scholars decided to apply their own methodologies and, in the absence of reliable evidence, postulated a timeframe for Indian history on the basis of conjectures. Considering the traditional dates for the life of Gautama, the Buddha, as fairly well established in the sixth century BCE, supposedly pre-Buddhist Indian records were placed in a sequence that seemed

plausible to philologists. Accepting on linguistic grounds the traditional claims that the Rigveda was the oldest Indian literary document, Max Müller allowing a time-span of two hundred years each for the formation of every class of Vedic literature, and assuming that the Vedic period had come to an end by the time of the Buddha, established the following sequence that was widely accepted:

Rigveda c. 1200 BCE
Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda, c. 1000 BCE
Brahmanas, c. 800 BCE
Aranyakas, Upanishads, c. 600 BCE

Max Müller himself conceded the purely conjectural nature of the Vedic chronology, and in the last work published shortly before his death, *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, admitted: 'Whatever may be the date of the Vedic hymns, whether 1500 or 15 000 BCE, they have their own unique place and stand by themselves in the literature of the world' (p.35). There were, even in Max Müller's time, Western and Indian scholars, such as Moriz Winternitz and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who disagreed with his chronology and postulated a much higher age for the *Rigveda*.

Indian scholars pointed out all along that there was no reference in the Veda of a migration from outside India, that all the geographical features mentioned in the *Rigveda* are those of north-western India and that there was no archaeological evidence whatsoever for the Aryan invasion theory. On the other side there were references to constellations in Vedic works whose timeframe could be calculated. The dates arrived at, however, 4500 BCE for one observation in the *Rigveda*, 3200 BCE for a date in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, seemed far too remote to be acceptable, especially if one assumed—as many nineteenth century scholars did, that the world was only about 6 000 years old and that the flood had taken place only 4 500 years ago.

Debunking the Aryan Invasion Theory: The New Chronology

Contemporary Indian scholars, admittedly motivated not only by academic interests, vehemently reject what they call the 'colonial-missionary Aryan invasion theory'. They accuse its originators of superimposing—for a reason—the purpose and process of the colonial conquest of India by the Western powers in modern times onto the beginnings of Indian civilisation: as the Europeans came to India as bearers of a supposedly superior civilisation and a higher religion, so the original Aryans were assumed to have invaded a country on which they imposed their culture and their religion.

A recent major work offers 'seventeen arguments: why the Aryan invasion never happened'.⁶ It may be worthwhile summarising and analysing them briefly:

1. The Aryan invasion model is largely based on linguistic conjectures which are unjustified (and wrong). Languages develop much more slowly than assumed by nineteenth century scholars. According to Renfrew speakers of Indo-European languages may have lived in Anatolia as early as 7000 BCE
2. The supposed large-scale migrations of Aryan people in the second millennium BCE first into Western Asia and then into northern India (by 1500 BCE) cannot be maintained in view of the fact that the Hittites were in Anatolia already by 2200 BCE and the Kassites and Mitanni had kings and dynasties by 1600 BCE
3. There is no memory of an invasion or of large-scale migration in the records of Ancient India—neither in the Vedas, Buddhist or Jain writings, nor in Tamil literature. The fauna and flora, the geography and the climate described in the *Rigveda* are that of Northern India.

4. There is a striking cultural continuity between the archaeological artefacts of the Indus-Saraswati civilisation and subsequent Indian society and culture: a continuity of religious ideas, arts, crafts, architecture, system of weights and measures.
5. The archaeological finds of Mehrgarh (copper, cattle, barley) reveal a culture similar to that of the Vedic Indians. Contrary to former interpretations, the *Rigveda* shows not a nomadic but an urban culture (purusa as derived from pur vasa = town-dweller).
6. The Aryan invasion theory was based on the assumption that a nomadic people in possession of horses and chariots defeated an urban civilisation that did not know horses, and that horses are depicted only from the middle of the second millennium onwards. Meanwhile archaeological evidence for horses has been found in Harappan and pre-Harappan sites; drawings of horses have been found in paleolithic caves in India; drawings of riders on horses dated c. 4300 BCE have been found in Ukraina. Horses-drawn war chariots are not typical for nomadic breeders but for urban civilisations.
7. The racial diversity found in skeletons in the cities of the Indus civilisation is the same as in India today; there is no evidence of the coming of a new race.
8. The *Rigveda* describes a river system in North India that is pre-1900 BCE in the case of the Saraswati river, and pre-2600 BCE in the case of the Drishadvati river. Vedic literature shows a population shift from the Saraswati (*Rigveda*) to the Ganges (*Brahmanas* and *Puranas*), also evidenced by archaeological finds.
9. The astronomical references in the *Rigveda* are based on a Pleiades-Krittika (Taurean) calendar of c. 2500 BCE when Vedic astronomy and mathematics were well-developed sciences (again, not a feature of a nomadic people).
10. The Indus cities were not destroyed by invaders but deserted by their inhabitants because of desertification of the area. Strabo (*Geography* XV.1.19) reports that Aristobulos had seen thousands of villages and towns deserted because the Indus had changed its course.
11. The battles described in the *Rigveda* were not fought between invaders and natives but between people belonging to the same culture.
12. Excavations in Dwaraka have led to the discovery of a site larger than Mohenjodaro, dated c. 1500 BCE with architectural structures, use of iron, a script halfway between Harappan and Brahmi. Dwarka has been associated with Krishna and the end of the Vedic period.
13. A continuity in the morphology of scripts: Harappan, Brahmi, Devanagari.
14. Vedic ayas, formerly translated as 'iron,' probably meant copper or bronze. Iron was found in India before 1500 BCE in Kashmir and Dwaraka.
15. The Puranic dynastic lists with over 120 kings in one Vedic dynasty alone, fit well into the 'new chronology'. They date back to the third millennium BCE. Greek accounts tell of Indian royal lists going back to the seventh millennium BCE.
16. The *Rigveda* itself shows an advanced and sophisticated culture, the product of a long development, 'a civilisation that could not have been delivered to India on horseback' (p.160).
17. Painted Gray Ware culture in the western Gangetic plains, dated ca 1100 BCE has been found connected to (earlier) Black and Red Ware etc.

Let us consider some of these arguments in some detail. As often remarked, there is no hint in the Veda of a migration of the people that considered it its own sacred tradition. It would be strange indeed if the Vedic Indians had lost all recollection of such a momentous event in supposedly relatively recent times- much more recent, for instance, than the migration of Abraham and his people which is well attested and frequently referred to in the Bible. In addition, as has been established recently through satellite photography and geological investigations, the Saraswati, the mightiest river known to the Rigvedic Indians, along whose

banks they established numerous major settlements, had dried out completely by 1900 BCE-four centuries before the Aryans were supposed to have invaded India. One can hardly argue for the establishment of Aryan villages along a dry river bed.

When the first remnants of the ruins of the so-called Indus civilisation came to light in the early part of our century, the proponents of the Aryan invasion theory believed they had found the missing archaeological evidence: here were the 'mighty forts' and the 'great cities' which the war-like Indra of the *Rigveda* was said to have conquered and destroyed. Then it emerged that nobody had destroyed these cities and no evidence of wars of conquest came to light: floods and droughts had made it impossible to sustain large populations in the area and the people of Mohenjo Daro, Harappa and other places had migrated to more hospitable areas. Ongoing archaeological research has not only extended the area of the Indus-civilisation but has also shown a transition of its later phases to the Gangetic culture. Archeo-geographers have established that a drought lasting two to three hundred years devastated a wide belt of land from Anatolia through Mesopotamia to Northern India around 2300 BCE to 2000 BCE.

Based on this type of evidence and extrapolating from the Vedic texts, a new story of the origins of Hinduism is emerging that reflects the self-consciousness of Hindus and which attempts to replace the 'colonial-missionary Aryan invasion theory' by a vision of 'India as the Cradle of Civilisation.' This new theory considers the Indus-civilisation as a late Vedic phenomenon and pushes the (inner-Indian) beginnings of the Vedic age back by several thousands of years. One of the reasons for considering the Indus civilisation 'Vedic' is the evidence of town-planning and architectural design that required a fairly advanced algebraic geometry-of the type preserved in the Vedic *Shulvasutras*. The widely respected historian of mathematics A. Seidenberg came to the conclusion, after studying the geometry used in building the Egyptian pyramids and the Mesopotamian citadels, that it reflected a derivative geometry-a geometry derived from the Vedic *Shulva-sutras*. If that is so, then the knowledge ('Veda') on which the construction of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro is based, cannot be later than that civilisation itself.⁷

While the *Rigveda* has always been held to be the oldest literary document of India and was considered to have preserved the oldest form of Sanskrit, Indians have not taken it to be the source for their early history. The *Itihasa-Purana* served that purpose. The language of these works is more recent than that of the Vedas and the time of their final redaction is much later than the fixation of the Vedic canon. However, they contain detailed information about ancient events and personalities that form part of Indian history. The Ancients, like Herodotus, the father of Greek histo-riography, did not separate story from history. Nor did they question their sources but tended to juxtapose various pieces of evidence without critically sifting it. Thus we cannot read *Itihasa-Purana* as the equivalent of a modern textbook of Indian history but rather as a storybook containing information with interpretation, facts and fiction. Indians, however, always took genealogies quite seriously and we can presume that the Puranic lists of dynasties, like the lists of *paramparas* in the *Upanishads* relate the names of real rulers in the correct sequence. On these assumptions we can tentatively reconstruct Indian history to a time around 4500 BCE.

A key element in the revision of Ancient Indian History was the recent discovery of Mehrgarh, a settlement in the Hindukush area, that was continuously inhabited for several thousand years from c. 7000 BCE onwards. This discovery has extended Indian history for several thousands of years before the fairly well dateable Indus civilisation.⁸

New Chronologies

Pulling together available archaeological evidence as it is available today, the American

anthropologist James G. Schaffer developed the following chronology of early Indian civilisation:

1. Early food-producing era (c. 6500-5000 BCE): no pottery.
2. Regionalisation era (5000-2600 BCE): distinct regional styles of pottery and other artefacts.
3. Integration era (2600-1900 BCE) : cultural homogeneity and emergence of urban centres like Mohenjo daro and Harappa.
4. Localisation era (1900-1300 BCE) blending of patterns from the integration era with regional ceramic styles.

The Indian archaeologist S.P. Gupta proposed this cultural sequencing:

1. Pre-ceramic Neolithic (8000-6000 BCE)
2. Ceramic Neolithic (6000-5000 BCE)
3. Chalcolithic (5000-3000 BCE)
4. Early Bronze Age (3000-1900 BCE)
5. Late Bronze Age (1900-1200 BCE)
6. Early Iron Age (1200-800 BCE)
7. Late Iron cultures

According to these specialists, there is no break in the cultural development from 8000 BCE onwards, no indication of a major change, as an invasion from outside would certainly be.

A more detailed 'New Chronology' of Ancient India, locating names of kings and tribes mentioned in the Vedas and Puranas, according to Rajarama⁹ looks somewhat like this:

- 4500 BCE: Mandhatri's victory over the Droyus, alluded to in the Puranas.
- 4000 BCE Rigveda (excepting books 1 and 10)
- 3700 BCE Battle of Ten Kings (referred to in the Rigveda) Beginning of Puranic dynastic lists: Agastya, the messenger of Vedic religion in the Dravida country. Vasistha, his younger brother, author of Vedic works. Rama and *Ramayana*.
- 3600 BCE *Yajur-*, *Sama-*, *Atharvaveda*: Completion of Vedic Canon.
- 3100 BCE Age of Krishna and Vyasa. Mahabharata War. Early Mahabharata.
- 3000 BCE *Shatapathabrahmana*, *Shulvasutras*, *Yajnavalkyasutra*, Panini, author of the *Ashtadhyayi*, Yaska, author of the *Nirukta*.
- 2900 BCE Rise of the civilisations of Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus-Sarasvati doab.
- 2200 BCE beginning of large-scale drought: decline of Harappa.
- 2000 BCE End of Vedic age.
- 1900 BCE Sarasvati completely dried out: end of Harappa.

Texts like the *Rigveda*, the *Shatapathabrahmana* and others contain references to eclipses as well as to sidereal markers of the beginning of seasons, which allow us by backward calculation, to determine the time of their composition. Experts assure us that to falsify these dates would have been impossible before the computer age.

Old verses new? Or scientists verses philologists?

We are left, at present, with two widely differing versions of Ancient Indian History, with two radically divergent sets of chronology and with a great deal of polemic from both sides. Those who defend the Aryan invasion theory and the chronology associated with it accuse the proponents of the 'New Chronology' of indulging in Hindu chauvinism. The latter suspect the

former of entertaining 'colonial-missionary' prejudices and denying originality to the indigenous Indians. The new element that has entered the debate is scientific investigations. While the older theory rested on exclusively philological arguments, the new theory includes astronomical, geological, mathematical and archaeological evidence. On the whole, the latter seems to rest on better foundations. Not only were the philological arguments from the very beginning based more on strong assertions and bold guesses, civilisations both ancient and contemporary comprise more than literature alone. In addition, purely philologically trained scholars-namely grammarians-are not able to make sense of technical language and of scientific information contained even in the texts they study.

Consider today's scientific literature. It abounds with Greek and Latin technical terms, it contains an abundance of formulae composed of Greek and Hebrew letters. If scholars with a background in the classical languages were to read such works, they might be able to come up with some acceptable translations of technical terms into modern English but they would hardly be able to really make sense of most of what they read and they certainly would not extract the information which the authors of these works wished to convey to people trained in their specialities. The situation is not too different with regard to ancient Indian texts. The admission of some of the best scholars (like Geldner, who in his translation of the Rigveda, considered the best so far, declares many passages 'darker than the darkest oracle' or Gonda, who considered the Rigveda basically untranslatable) of being unable to make sense of a great many texts-and the refusal of most to go beyond a grammatical and etymological analysis of these-indicates a deeper problem. The Ancients were not only poets and litterateurs, but they also had their sciences and their technical skills, their secrets and their conventions that are not self-evident to someone not sharing their world. Some progress has been made in deciphering medical and astronomical literature of a later age, in reading architectural and arts-related materials. However, much of the technical meaning of the oldest Vedic literature still eludes us.

The Rigveda-a code?

The computer scientist and Indologist Subhash Kak believes he has rediscovered the 'Vedic Code' which allows him to extract from the structure, as well as the words and sentences of the Rigveda, and the considerable astronomical information which its authors supposedly embedded in it.¹⁰ The assumption of such encoded scientific knowledge would make it understandable why there was such insistence on the preservation of every letter of the text in precisely the sequence the original author had set down. One can take certain liberties with a story, or even a poem, changing words, transposing lines, adding explanatory matter, shortening it, if necessary, and still communicate the intentions and ideas of the author. However, one has to remember and reproduce a scientific formula in precisely the same way it has been set down by the scientist or it would not make sense at all. While the scientific community can arbitrarily adopt certain letter equivalents for physical units or processes, once it has agreed on their use, one must obey the conventions for the sake of meaningful communication.

Even a non-specialist reader of ancient Indian literature will notice the effort to link macrocosm and microcosm, astronomical and physiological processes, to find correspondences between the various realms of beings and to order the universe by establishing broad classifications. Vedic sacrifices-the central act of Vedic culture- were to be offered on precisely built geometrically constructed altars and to be performed at astronomically exactly established times. It sounds plausible to expect a correlation between the numbers of bricks prescribed for a particular altar and the distances between stars observed whose movement determined the time of the offerings to be made. Subhash Kak has advanced a great deal of fascinating detail in that connection in his essays on the 'Astronomy of the Vedic Altar'. He believes that while the Vedic Indians possessed extensive astronomical knowledge, which they encoded in the text of the Rigveda,

the code was lost in later times and the Vedic tradition was interrupted.[11](#)

India, the cradle of (world-) civilisation?

Based on the early dating of the *Rigveda* (c. 4000 BCE) and on the strength of the argument that Vedic astronomy and geometry predates that of the other known Ancient civilisations, some scholars, like N.S. Rajaram, George Feuerstein, Subhash Kak and David Frawley, have made the daring suggestion that India was the 'cradle of civilisation'. They link the recently discovered early European civilisation (which predates Ancient Sumeria and Ancient Egypt by over a millennium) to waves of populations moving out or driven out from north-west India. Later migrations, caused either by climatic changes or by military events, would have brought the Hittites to Western Asia, the Iranians to Afghanistan and Iran and many others to other parts of Eurasia. Such a scenario would require a complete rewriting of Ancient World History- especially if we add the claims, apparently substantiated by some material evidence, that Vedic Indians had established trade links with Central America and Eastern Africa before 2500 BCE. It is no wonder that the 'New Chronology' arouses not only scholarly controversy but emotional excitement as well. Much more hard evidence will be required to fully establish it, and many claims may have to be withdrawn. But there is no doubt that the 'old chronology' has been discredited and that much surprise is in store for the students not only of Ancient India, but also of the Ancient World as a whole.

Sorting out the questions:

The 'Revision of Ancient Indian History' responds to several separate, but interlocking questions that are often confused.

1. The (emotionally) most important question is that of the original home of Vedic civilisation, identified with the question: where was the (*Rig-*)*Veda* composed? India's indigenous answer to that question had always been 'India', more precisely 'the Punjab'. The European, 'colonial missionary' assumption, was 'outside India'.
2. The next question, not often explicitly asked, is: where did the pre-Vedic people, the 'Aryans' come from? This is a problem for archeo-anthropologists rather than for historians. The racial history of India shows influences from many quarters.
3. A related, but separate question concerns the 'cradle of civilisation', to which several ancient cultures have laid claim: Sumeria, Egypt, India (possibly also China could be mentioned, which considered itself for a long time the only truly civilised country). Depending on what answer we receive, the major expansion of population/civilisation would be from west to east, or from east to west. The famous *lux ex oriente* has often been applied to the spread of culture in the ancient world. India was as far as the 'Orient' would go.
4. It is rather strange that the defenders of the 'Aryan invasion theory', who have neither archaeological nor literary documents to prove their assumption, demand detailed proof for the non-invasion and refuse to admit the evidence available. Similarly, they feel entitled to declare 'mythical' whatever the sources (*Rigveda*, *Puranas*) say that does not agree with their preconceived notions of Vedic India.

Some conclusions:

If I were to judge the strength of the arguments for revising Ancient Indian History in the direction of 'India as Cradle of Civilisation' I would rate Seidenberg's findings concerning the Shulvasutra geometry (applied in the Indus civilisation; Babylonian and Egyptian geometry derivative to it) highest. Next would be the archeo-astronomical determination of astronomical data in Vedic and post-Vedic texts. Third is the satellite photography based dating of the drying out of the Saraswati and the archeo-geographical finding of a centuries long drought in the belt reaching from Anatolia through Mesopotamia and Northern India. Geological research has

uncovered major tectonic changes in the Punjab and the foothills of the Himalayas. At one point a section rose about sixty metres within the past 2 000 years.

'Vasishtha's Head', a bronze head found near Delhi, was dated through radio-carbon testing to around 3700 BCE- the time when, according to Hicks and Anderson, the Battle of the Ten Kings took place (Vasishtha, mentioned in the *Rigveda*, was the advisor to King Sudas). A further factor speaking for the 'Vedic' character of the Indus civilisation is the occurrence of (Vedic) altars in many sites. Fairly important is also the absence of a memory of a migration from outside India in all of ancient Indian literature: the Veda, the Brahmanas, the Epics and the Puranas. Granting that the Vedic Samhitas were ritual manuals rather than historic records, further progress in revising Ancient Indian History could be expected from a study of *Itihasa-Purana*, rather than from an analysis of the *Rigveda* (by way of parallel, what kind of reconstruction of Ancient Israel's History could be done on the basis of a study of the Psalms, leaving out Genesis and Kings? Or what reconstruction of European History could be based on a study of the earliest *Rituale Romanum*?)

An afterword:

Hinduism today is not just a development of Vedic religion and culture but a synthesis of many diverse elements. There is no doubt a Vedic basis. It is evident in the caste-structure of Hindu society, in the rituals which almost every Hindu still undergoes (especially initiation, marriage and last rites), in traditional notions of ritual purity and pollution, and in the respect which the Veda still commands. There is a large area of Hindu worship and religious practice for which the Veda provides little or no basis: temple-building, image worship, pilgrimages, vows and prayers to gods and goddesses not mentioned in the Veda, beliefs like transmigration, world-pictures containing numerous heavens and hells and much more which appear to have been taken over from non-Vedic indigenous cultures. There have been historic developments that led to the developments of numerous schools of thought, sects and communities differing from each other in scriptures, interpretations, customs, beliefs.

Apart from its Vedic origins Hinduism was never one in either administration, doctrine or practice. It does not possess a commonly accepted authority, does not have a single centre and does not have a common history. Unlike the histories of other religions, which rely on one founder and one scripture, the history of Hinduism is a bundle of parallel histories of traditions that were loosely defined from the very beginning, that went through a number of fissions and fusions, and that do not feel any need to seek their identity in conforming to a specific historic realisation. While incredibly conservative in some of its expressions, Hinduism is very open to change and development under the influence of charismatic personalities. From early times great latitude was given to Hindus to interpret their traditional scriptures in a great many different ways. The ease with which Hindus have always identified persons that impressed them with manifestations of God has led to many parallel traditions within Hinduism, making it impossible to chronicle a development of Hinduism along one line. The presentation of a history of Hinduism will be a record of several mainstream Hindu traditions that developed along individual lines; only very rarely do these lines meet in conflict or merge to generate new branches of the still vigorously growing banyan tree to which Hinduism has been often compared.