



INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR INDIA'S HERITAGE

Instructional Quality Commission

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Dear Sir / Madam:

I am an author and scholar of ancient India, guest professor at Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, and member of Indian Council of Historical Research. I would like to briefly comment on the following paragraph currently under consideration by the Commission, and apologize if this comes late in the day:

P. 211: "Indian history then entered the Vedic period (ca. 1500-500 BCE), an era named for the Vedas, Sanskrit religious texts passed on for generations through a complex oral tradition. In that period, people speaking Indic languages, which are part of the larger Indo-European family of languages, entered South Asia, probably by way of Iran. Gradually, Indic languages, including Sanskrit, spread across northern India. They included the ancestors of such modern languages as Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali. The early Indic speakers were most likely animal herders. They may have arrived in India in scattered bands, later intermarrying with populations perhaps ancestral to those who speak Dravidian languages, such as Tamil and Telugu in southern India and Sri Lanka today. In the same era, nomads who spoke Indo-Iranian languages moved into Persia. Indic, Iranian, and most European languages are related. There is another point of view that suggests that the language was indigenous to India and spread northward, but it is a minority position."

This paragraph is simplistic and does not take into account the complexity of the issues revolving around (1) the origins of Indo-European languages; (2) the origins of Dravidian languages; (3) the origins of Vedic culture. These issues can only be regarded as solved if some degree of convergence has been achieved

between disciplines such as linguistics, archaeology, bioanthropology, genetics, archaeoagriculture and archaeoastronomy. We are still quite far from such a convergence, which is why a scholarly consensus has remained elusive, as well illustrated in works such as:

Bryant, Edwin, *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture: The Indo-Aryan Migration Debate*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001

Bryant, Edwin F., & Patton, Laurie L., (eds), *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, Routledge, London & New York, 2005

Danino, Michel, *The Lost River: On the Trail of the Sarasvati*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2010

Lal, B.B., *The Rigvedic People: 'Invaders'?/'Immigrants'? or Indigenous? Evidence of Archaeology and Literature*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 2015

Trautmann, Thomas R., (ed.), *The Aryan Debate*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005

In particular, I would like to remark that:

1. There is no consensus on the **date of the Vedic period**. There is considerable evidence that the Sarasvati River, identified and located by generations of Europeans Indologists, geographers and geologists since the 1850s, dried up in its central basin around 1900 BCE (since all the Harappan sites located there were found abandoned, with no Late Harappan phase). Since the river is extolled in the Rig-Veda, which precisely locates it between the Yamuna and the Sutlej, this implies that the Rig-Veda must have been composed before the 2nd millennium BCE. Other elements of the same text — such as the absence of mention of cities, ruins, bricks, rice, cotton — militate in favour of a date in the Early Harappan phase (4th millennium BCE). There are, of course, counter-arguments, which have in turn been challenged. To cite just one instance, the mainstream German Sanskritist Moritz Winternitz argued in 1907 that to account for the evolution of the whole corpus of Sanskrit literature, the conventional chronology (which the above paragraph reflects) was impossibly short and the date for the Rig-Veda should be taken to be between 2500 and 2000 BCE. To present only one side of the picture is inaccurate as well as unscholarly.

2. There is no consensus on the **supposed arrival of Indo-European speakers**, either as regards the date of the event or the route. For instance, in his well-known *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (Penguin Books, London, 1989), Prof. Colin Renfrew, noted British archaeologist, argued that the date should be around 7000 BCE, and Mehrgarh, a Neolithic site in Baluchistan, was set up by them. Other scholars (such as the late British archaeologist R. Allchin) have proposed an arrival in several waves, the first of them during the Mature Harappan phase (3rd millennium BCE). I must stress here that there is strictly no archaeological evidence for the arrival of the Indo-Aryans, which is why most archaeologists have rejected the theory of a migration. Similarly, as established by leading bioanthropologists (such as the late Prof. Kenneth A.R. Kennedy), there is no biophysical discontinuity at the time of the supposed arrival. (Genetic studies have confirmed this view.) For these reasons and several more, to present the said arrival as an established fact in time and space is completely unfair to the scholarly debate.
3. The view that **Dravidian languages** were spoken **in northwest India** in the 2nd millennium BCE is no more than a conjecture. It implies that the Harappans and Late Harappans spoke a proto-Dravidian language, but all attempts, some of them very systematic and thorough, to decipher the Harappan script along Dravidian lines have failed. Besides, there is no archaeological evidence of a migration of Dravidian speakers southward across the Deccan Plateau in the 2nd millennium BCE. In fact, there is now considerable linguistic evidence (especially arising from agricultural terms) that Dravidian languages first evolved in South India. The linguistic scenario reflected in the above note is simplistic and outdated.
4. In fact, the main problem with the paragraph is that it presents a linguistic consensus which, in reality, does not exist. Mainstream linguists have presented very different opinions as regards not only the location and date of a Proto-Indo-European language, but also whether such a language ever existed at all. While many linguists want PIE to originate in southern Russia around 4000 BCE, others (e.g. Gray and Atkinsons) prefer 7000 BCE out of Anatolia. N.S. Trubetskoy, one of the founders of modern linguistics, proposed in the 1930s a model based on convergence, rather than divergence as implied in the tree model: "The

idea of an Indo-European protolanguage is not absurd, but it is not necessary, and we can do very well without it." This is echoed by Italian linguist Prof. Angela Marcantonio: "Data contradicting the IE theory ... are ignored, minimalized, or justified at any cost ... It is time to call into question the validity of the IE theory, because ... it has not been scientifically founded – contrary to common belief." (2013) Linguists April McMahon & Robert McMahon even asserted in 2005: "The very idea of an 'Indo-European' language family on which Indology is based is scientifically indefensible. IE linguists ignore vast amounts of data that do not fit with their classification. ... Indology as a discipline can be useful if it frees itself from the yoke of IEL."

The view the above paragraph presents is therefore inadequate and outdated. I urge you to consider a balanced, fair and academically sound formulation that is faithful to the complexity of the issue and to the latest research in all the disciplines involved.

With regards,



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