



## INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR INDIA'S HERITAGE

Coimbatore, 19 November 2015

### **Comments on the note "South Asia Studies Faculty Review of Proposed California Curriculum Framework"**

The 22-page note is an exercise in special pleading which relies on a claimed "mainstream of current scholarship" or "current, scientific, and scholarly consensus" rather than on a sound and objective academic discussion. Time is lacking to point out all its factual and methodological flaws. I will only make a few brief comments here.

- **p. 12: "we recommend changing "India" to South Asia. Most references to India before 1947 should be changed to South Asia"**

This is quite contrary to the scholarly practice and convention of using the term "India" to designate the Indian subcontinent all the way to 1947. All Indological studies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did so, and with good reason. The intention to erase the special identity of India's classical civilization is transparent.

- **Appendix 1 (pp. 14-15)**

It misrepresents the current state of genetic research, the vast majority of which have rejected the possibility of a major addition to India's gene pool. (I attach a recent survey of mine with detailed references.) The few studies which still claim to endorse an Indo-European migration in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE have been shown to be based on circular evidence, as they assume a migration in the first place. Finally, the so-called division between ANI and ASI is an excellent example of defective "scientific" research: as I have shown in my attached paper, the samples are woefully inadequate to claim proper representation, with large parts of India completely missing. Also, again, the concepts of ANI and ASI are based on circular evidence since they assume such a division in the

first place (why not a division between Ancestral Eastern Indians and Ancestral Western Indians?). In 2014, the respected Indian geneticist Dr. B.M. Reddy recently termed the concepts of ANI and ASI “ill-conceived and untenable as units of study”. The authors of the note under consideration have not studied the issue and content themselves with “quoting from authority”, even if the said authority has been shown to be flawed.

The authors also completely pass under silence the enormous work done by respected Indian and U.S. bioanthropologists (e.g., S.R. Walimbe, B.E. Hemphill, J.R. Lukacs, K.A.R. Kennedy) who have categorically ruled out the arrival of new populations in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE and have emphasized the bioanthropological continuity between Harappans and people of historical times. The late Prof. Kennedy of Cornell University, in particular, was particular scathing on the Aryan migration theory, relegating it to the world of myth. So did, even more scathingly, the noted British anthropologist Edmund Leach, whose work on the Aryan theory the note’s authors carefully avoid citing.

It is only by eclipsing such important studies from reputed academics (I emphasize here Western ones, since in the note Indian dissenters are labelled “Nationalist”, in a fairly typical exercise of demonization) that the note’s authors succeed in creating the mirage of a “scientific and scholarly consensus”.

- **Appendix 2 (pp. 16-17)**

As I have shown in my letter of 18 November (annexed herewith), the linguistic issue is misrepresented and treated simplistically, omitting all dissenting *professional* linguists who have critiqued the concept of Proto-Indo-European and the theories of its spread. There is, strictly speaking, no consensus in the linguistic world, despite the note’s endeavour to conjure one up. Besides the points in my letter, the note ignores the views of several linguists (such as Johanna Nichols) who have presented models of language that do not rely on actual migration (most are adaptations of the former “wave” model). There are simply too many problems with the old migrationist model of linguistic transmission in the case of the Indo-European family of languages, whose archaeology has failed to document either in India, or in central Asia, Iran and Europe. The Appendix, by completely ignoring the archaeological invisibility of the supposedly migrating Indo-Europeans over their entire landscape (many

archaeologists have called them “elusive”, while the late Prof. Kennedy termed them “illusivive”) does no justice to the issue.

- **Appendices 2 & 3 (pp. 17-18)**

The discussion of the Sarasvati river is replete with gross misrepresentations and selective citations, omitting all the work done since 1855, when the river was first identified with the Ghaggar-Hakra — an identification which was accepted by generations of French, British and German Indologists, geographers and geologists, and later numerous archaeologists from Marc Aurel Stein (1917) to Mortimer Wheeler (1968), Raymond Allchin, Gregory Possehl, J.M. Kenoyer (all three in the 1990s and 2000s), and their many Indian colleagues.

The note cites Lawler, who is not a scientist but a journalist, and misrepresents a recent study by Giosan et al, 2012 (whose name it misspells), which shows that the river, though certainly on the decline in Harappan times (as archaeological evidence had already established) was still possibly perennial. In a now recognizable pattern, it completely omits the views of Indian geologists such as K.S. Valdiya. My attached paper (unpublished), “Discovering the Sarasvati, from 1855 to 2014”, gives an honest picture of the current state of geological research on the river.

If there was ever a consensus on the Sarasvati, it has been that the Ghaggar-Hakra is undoubtedly its relic, as it is found precisely in the location mentioned in the Rig-Veda. There has also been a consensus that the Sarasvati’s drying up must have been a major contributory factor in the decline of the Harappan civilization (see the works of Raymond Allchin, Gregory Possehl, J.M. Kenoyer and many Indian archaeologists such as B.B. Lal, V.N. Misra).

- **Linguistics vs. Archaeology**

The note (e.g. p. 16: “historical linguistic evidence is in fact the only relevant type of evidence”) generally fails to highlight the divergence between these two disciplines and to state clearly that the Indo-European issue will only be regarded as resolved when a solution can account for all the evidence — mainly linguistic and archaeological, but also cultural, archaeoastronomical, bioanthropological. It is because many archaeologists have pointed out to the utter lack of evidence of migrations by Indo-European speakers that they have

rejected the migration (and earlier invasion) theory. Some linguists may stick to it out of convenience, but to portray linguistics and archaeology as speaking in one voice on this issue is a serious misrepresentation.

Many such defective arguments made in the note could be disputed and challenged with the work of respected scholars. My main problem with the note is its systematic refusal to accept that complex archaeological or linguistic issues can be approached — and have been approached — from more than one perspective. This is contrary to all sound academic practice.

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## INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR INDIA'S HERITAGE

Instructional Quality Commission

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Coimbatore, 18 November 2015

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 (4<sup>th</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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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