

# ARYANS

*By Frater F.*

To even suggest a division between Western and non Western civilizations is chauvinistic. Essentially, the notion of a continuous stream of history, extending from Greece, through Rome, to Europe, is a contrivance that resulted from specific trends in scholarship that sought to isolate Greece, among the ancient civilizations, as the ancestor of modern Europe. Effectively, it was Europe's military successes against the Ottoman Turks, and the beginning of colonialist's expansion, that gave rise to a new nationalistic spirit during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and which led to a need to create a specifically European version of history.

Essentially, European scholars sought to abandon the foreign versions of history they had acquired, and especially, the Jewish account of the Bible, and to instead create a European version of the past, by incorporating Greece and Rome into their history, by inventing for them a common ancestor, now known as the Aryan race. What is not commonly recognized, however, is that the theory of the Aryan race was influenced by occultism

As Europeans began to discover India, and as the ensuing popularity of the "wisdom" of its priests, the Brahmins, European Scholars and philosophers turned to it as the possible fount of all occult knowledge. Voltaire, the renowned Enlightenment philosopher, strove to demonstrate that Adam had taken over everything, even his name from India. He maintained "I am convinced that everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganges, astronomy, astrology, metaphysics, etc" The famous German Philosopher Kant placed the origin of mankind in Tibet, because "this is the highest country. No doubt it was inhabited before any other and could have been the site of all creation and all science. The culture of the Indians, as is known has almost certainly come from Tibet, just as our all our arts like agriculture, numbers, the game of chess, etc, seem to have come from India.

What is lesser known, however, is that the formulation of the Aryan myth was influenced by ideas circulating in the occult. The European esoteric tradition drew heavily from the Kabbalah, a branch of Jewish mysticism that had its origin in Babylon in the sixth century BC. The occult achieved a high degree of popularity during the Enlightenment, though, due to growing anti-Semitic tendencies, European occultists refused to acknowledge the Kabbalah's Jewish origin. Ultimately, borrowing from Kabbalistic legends, European scholars put forth the theory that Aryans were descendants of Cain, taught Kabbalah by the Sons of God of Genesis. Elaborating upon the myth first mentioned by Plato, the Aryans were believed to have inhabited the island of Atlantis. When that continent was submerged in a universal cataclysm, a number of Aryans escaped, and after landing in the mountains of Asia conquered most of the known world, imparting to the conquered peoples their knowledge of the Ancient Wisdom.

In 1799, Jean Bailly, famous astronomer and prominent occultist, concluded that Atlantis was Spitsbergen in the Arctic Ocean, which in ancient times had a warm climate, but its subsequent cooling made the Atlanteans migrate south to Mongolia. Eighteenth century German scholar Friedrich Schlegel, supposed that a new people had formed itself in northern India, swarmed towards the West motivated “by some impulse higher than the spur of necessity”, and, wishing to trace their origin back to Cain, theorizes, “must not this unknown anxiety of which I speak have pursued fugitive man, as told of the first murderer whom the Lord marked with a bloody sign, and have flung him to the ends of the earth.

One of the most influential promoters of the Aryan myth was Jacob Grimm famous compiler of Grimm’s Fairy Tales, a collection of folk-tales, such as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, which he thought represented the occult lore of the Aryan people. Grimm claimed that: All the peoples of Europe and, to begin with, those originally related and which gained supremacy at the cost of many wanderings and dangers, emigrated from Asia in the remote past. They were propelled from East to West by an irresistible instinct, the real cause which is unknown to us. The vocation and courage of those peoples, which were originally related and destined to rise to such heights, is shown by the fact that European history was almost entirely made by them

These ideas were carried to the rest of Europe, where finally, in England , Max Muller, one of the nineteenth century’s most influential scholars, stated: “ The Aryan nations who pursued a northwesterly direction, stand before us in history as the principal nations of northwestern Asia and Europe. They have been the prominent actors in the great drama of history, and have carried to the fullest growth all the elements of active life with which our nature is endowed. They have perfected society and morals; and we learn from their literature and works of art the elements of science, the laws of art, and the principles of philosophy. In a continual struggle with each other and with the Semitic and Taurian races, these Aryan nations have become the rulers of history. And it seems to be their mission to link all parts of the world together by chains of civilization, commerce and religion.

These theories continue to be maintained by modern historians, where not only are “Indo-Europeans” still believed to be the ancestors of modern Europeans, but of Indian civilizations as well.

We have to examine Indian written history and the Vedas to begin to understand who and what the term Aryan means who became the ruling class that held power in Northern India.

It is through the historical record that we shall explore what and who the Aryans were. It is doubtful whether the term arya was ever used in an ethnic sense, writes Romila Thapar, doyenne of ancient India’s historians. What she calls the “Aryan problem; or myth is now regarded as perhaps the biggest red herring that was dragged across the path of India’s historians. The authenticity of all Sanskrit literary compositions remains undisputed so does their seminal importance in India’s social, cultural and religious development. But whether those who composed them were anything more than a proud minority self consciously endeavoring to retain their mainly linguistic identity amongst a diverse, industrious, and probably indifferent local population is questionable.

For Hindus, of course, the traditions of Sanskrit literature are still sacrosanct. Vedic prayers are still said; televised serializations of the Sanskrit epics can bring the entire Indian nation to a hushed standstill. The compositions of the ancient arya are not just history; they are the nearest thing to revelation. The arya themselves though, are not revered and never have been. In no sense are they seen as a divinely “chosen people”. Individual priests, heroes, sages, and deities are cherished but their ethnic affinity is nether emphasized nor invariable this is unsurprising since in Sanskrit the word arya is usually adjectival.

Certain people or classes once used it to distinguish themselves from others; it was clearly a good thing to be. But like many words, its meaning changed over the centuries and the original is now hard to pin down.

In English it is variously rendered as “pure”, “respectable”, “moral”, “noble” or “wealthy” By the time it had traveled to south India and thence on to what is now Indonesia it simply became a respectful term of address, like Sahib or Master.

Aryans, on the other hand, as the generic title of a distinct race of people to which this arya adjective exclusively applied, nowhere feature in Sanskrit literature. They only appeared when Europeans got to work on Sanskrit. And it was not the literature which so inspired Europe’s scholars, but the language itself.

That some words in Sanskrit bore a strange similarity to their Greek and Latin equivalents had long been noted. Then in 1785 Sir William Jones, an English polymath and truly “one of the most enlightened sons of men” (as an admiring Dr Johnson described him), began studying Sanskrit. A year later he announced his preliminary verdict on the language. It was “of wonderful structure “he declared, more perfect than Greek, more copious than Latin “yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and forms of grammar, than can possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all without believing them to have sprung from one common source, which perhaps no longer exists.

This being case, most north Indian languages, which derive from Sanskrit, were related to most of Europe’s which derive from Latin. Jones rightly added that the Germanic and Celtic languages also probably belonged to this linguistic family, and likewise ancient Persia (Avestan) But, personally more enamored of Sanskrit’s literature than its language, he did not pursue the common source and chart its distribution This was left to others who recognized in Jones’s insights not only a specific challenge to discover the “common source” and chart its distribution- but also the means by which to do so. For Jones had shown that the study of language, or philosophy, could serve the historian much as does archaeology. Given a reasonable mound of literature, the philologist could delve in the syntax and sift through the syllables so as to record the changing forms of words and grammar. Identifying shared roots, typical word forms, new structures and extraneous influences, he could establish rules about how language has developed and spread, and so to formulate, as it were, sequence of strata whereby tentative dates could be assigned to any particular text purely on the basis of language.

Using and developing this new discipline, scholars at first called the elusive “commons source” language (and family of languages which derived from it) “Indo-Germanic” or Indo-European. This changed to “Indo-Aryan”, or simply “Aryan” , after it was realized that the ancient Persians had indeed used their arya word in an ethnic sense; they called themselves the “Ariana(whence derives the modern Iran) Numerous writers continued to warn against the assumption that a shared language meant a shared ethnicity . Yet the idea of a single race sowing the seeds of civilization from Bengal to Donegal proved intensely exciting, and ultimately irresistible. To Frederick Max Muller, the distinguished German Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford in the mid nineteenth century, it seemed that the Aryans had a mission to link all parts of the world together.

They were the rulers of history. Muller, too warned against drawing any simplistic conclusions about race, but already Aryan descent was popularly seen as a mark, if not yet of a master race, at least of ethnic distinction. Gratified by their discovery of their proud historical pedigree, India’s aspiring nationalists embraced the Aryans as readily as did Europe’s cultural supremacists.

Given the vast spread of the Indo Aryan languages, an Aryan homeland was soon being sought somewhere in the middle of the Eurasian landmass. Most scholars favoured the steppes of southern Russia and the Ukraine, or the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Nomadic pastoralists, the Aryans need plenty of room. Thence, in a series of sweeping migrations spread over many centuries, in which they supposedly took their language, plus their gods, their horses and their herds , to Iran and Syria, Anatolia and Greece, Eastern Europe and Northern India.

India’s Aryans were therefore originally immigrants, and to judge their exploits as recorded in the Vedas, highly combative ones. Aided and encouraged by deities like the fire breathing Agni and the thunderbolt throwing Indra, the Aryan conquistadors were seen as having hurtled down the passes from Afghanistan too career across the plains of the Punjab. Dealing death and destruction from fleets of horse drawn Chariots, they subdued the indigenous peoples and appropriated their herds. As *dasa* or *dasyu*, these indigenes or aborigines were characterized as dark, flat-nosed, uncouth, incomprehensible and generally inferior. The Aryans, on the hand, were finer featured, fairer, taller, favoured above others by the excellence of their gods, their horses and their ritual magic, and altogether a very superior people.

Like pastoralists the world over, the Aryans lived an itinerant outdoor life. Exposed to the elements, they may have been inclined to discover divine powers, in the forces of nature and to assume a ready communion with these powers. The names of their gods predate arrival in India, many (e.g. Indra, Agni, Varuna) being almost synonymous with their counterparts in Persian, Greek and Latin mythology, but their attributes and achievements relate to the Indian environment.

They initially settled in the Punjab and astride what is now the Indo-Pakistan frontier is clear from the reference in the Rig Veda to the *Sapta-Sindhu*, “The Land of the Seven Rivers”. Each of these rivers has been identified, and most were tributaries of the Indus. They are mentioned frequently, and must have been therefore familiar to the arya. (although the most important, the *Saraswati*, has since dried up) On the other

hand, there is only one mention of the mighty Ganga, and that in what is thought to be the latest of Rig Vedic compositions. Subsequent works, like the Brahmanas and Upanisads (c900-600 B.C), confirm a shift in geographical focus to the east and specifically to the Doab, the crescent of land between the Jumuna and the Ganga (immediately east of Delhi), as the setting for the Mahabharata, the Doab became the arya-varta. The land of the arya. If one accepts c950 B.C, as the probable date of the Bharata war, this migration, or colonisation, may therefore have occurred c.1100-1000 B.C... It would be followed by a further move into the valley of the Ganga itself, before the arya, much changed in the interim, began founding states, building cities and rediscovering the trail of civilization the Harappans of Mohenjo-Daro had trodden two thousand years earlier.

As to when the arya made their initial debut in India there remains grave doubt. Nearly two hundred years ago Mountstuart Elphinstone, one of the most outstanding scholar-administrators in the employ of the English East India Company, headed the first mission into Afghanistan. He failed to reach Kabul but got a good look at the Khyber Pass and formed some idea of the harsh lands whence the Aryans supposedly came. To Elphinstone it was quite incredible that Aryans could have made the transition from mountain desert to monsoonal paradise and yet failed to record it. He also noted that, throughout the ages, civilisations had more commonly spread from east to west than vice versa. Perhaps the Aryans had originated in India.

Although this idea derives no credibility from its aggressive repetition in Hindu Nationalist publications, and although it is flatly denied by the arya's familiarity with horses (typically central Asian) and their ignorance of Elephants (typically Indian), it is certainly curious that the Vedas say nothing of life in central Asia, nor of an epic journey thence through the mountains, nor of arriving in a different environment of the subcontinent. The usual explanation is that, by the time the Vedas were composed, this migration was so remote that all memory of it had faded and on this basis a tentative chronology is proposed. Allowing then, first for a major time lapse (say two hundred years) between the late Harappan phase and the Aryan arrival in India, and then for a plausible memory gap (say another two hundred years) between the arrival and the composition of the earliest Vedas, it looks as if the arya must have entered India some time between 1500 BC and 1300 BC. Most authorities now suppose several waves of migration rather than a single mass movement. These waves probably consisted of different tribes and, on linguistic evidence, may have spread over centuries. So possibly the entire period was one of Aryan incursion

As to whether all or any of these incursions constituted invasions rather than migrations it is impossible to say. We may though, speculate Considered in the light of later incursions into north -west India by Alexander the Great and a host of other intruders, including those afire with the spirit of Islam, the Aryan coming has traditionally been seen as a full scale invasion. The indigenous people, naturally resisted the newcomers, and a fierce and protracted struggle ensued.

In a standard textbook on ancient India, R.C. Majumdar goes on to identify the indigenous resistance as coming from the "Dravidians", the assumption being that the indigenous people spoke Dravidian, as opposed to a Sanskrit language. It was not a merely a struggle between two nationalities. The Dravidians had to fight for their very existence... But all in vain....The Dravidians put up a brave fight, and laid down their

lives in hundreds and thousands on various battlefields, but ultimately had to succumb to the attacks of the invaders. The Aryans destroyed their castles and cities, burnt their houses, and reduced a large number of them to slavery.

Recent theories of multiple migrations have somewhat softened the picture. Perhaps some of the Aryan clans were invited into India as allies, mercenaries or traders, the indigenous people may not have been Dravidian but earlier Indo-Aryan arrivals, there is nothing to suggest that they ever constructed “castles and cities; and the archaeological evidence, being entirely ceramic, gives no hint of sudden change one would expect of conquest and suppression of an entire nationality.

Arguably this process of Aryanisation by which arya culture spread to non-arya peoples continued throughout the subcontinent's history, indeed is still going on to this day. In little frequented enclaves of central and north eastern India tribal communities of “adivasi”, or aboriginal people may be found in various stages of Aryanisation (or Sanskritisation).

An Aryan society may be defined as one in which primacy is accorded to a particular language (Sanskrit), to an authoritative priesthood (Brahmins) and to hierarchical social structure

(Caste). To establish these three pillars of Aryanisation in say Kerala or Java no sizeable relocation of people would have been necessary. The process appears simply to have been one of gradual acculturation requiring neither mass migration nor enforced concurrence.

A small admixture of fortune-seekers, traders or teachers who happened to be in possession of a superior technology and a persuasive ideology could and did, if prepared to compromise with existing custom, create a convincing and lasting Aryanisation without apparently antagonizing anyone.

Admittedly, indeed on their own admission, the arya cattle rustlers of Rig Veda did antagonize the dasa. But they also compromised with them, adopting dasa technology, dasa cults, and dasa vocabulary, and inducting dasa clans and leaders into their society. Despite the importance attached to the purity of Sanskrit, there is even a hint of dasa-arya bilingualism. With the horse and the chariot as a mesmerising technology. And with the subtleties of ritual sacrifice as a mesmerising ideology, the arya may have secured recognition of their superiority by a process no more deliberate and menacing than social attraction and cultural osmosis; thus the Aryan invasion and conquest of India could be as much a myth and a red herring as the existence of the Aryan Race.

It should however, be emphasized that in the second millennium B.C. The familiar traits of Aryanisation, those three pillars of language, priesthood and social hierarchy, were only just beginning to emerge. All are evident in the Vedas, but they are underdeveloped. They only assume definition and primacy in the context of contact between arya and the various indigenous peoples. Quite possibly the latter contributed to, or participated in, the formulation of these pillars. Arya culture may itself have been a hybrid, and may therefore be a misnomer.

Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India- David Frawley  
India A History-John Key