

Composition of aryan society



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This project has been compiled in NALSAR University of Law. A brief study was done on the project. A number of sources of information were consulted such as books from the library, online encyclopedias and the World Wide Web in general. This project is purely doctrinal in nature as it is based on resources already generated previously and hence has no newfound facts or principles enunciated in it.

The researcher has perused data collected and drawn many conclusions from external sources. However, some of the researcher's own views and opinion, in relation to analysis of the information available, have been brought out. These are not necessarily correct and of firm and authoritative value.

Introduction

A series of migrations by Indo-European-speaking seminomads took place during the second millennium B. C. Known as Aryans, these preliterate pastoralists spoke an early form of Sanskrit, which has close philological similarities to other Indo-European languages, such as Avestan in Iran and ancient Greek and Latin. The term Aryan meant pure and implied the invaders' conscious attempts at retaining their tribal identity and roots while maintaining a social distance from earlier inhabitants.

They called themselves the " noble ones" or the " superior ones." Their names are lost; their tribal names are lost. But when they found themselves conquerors, they gave themselves the name " superior" or " noble."

They were a tribal and nomadic peoples living in the far reaches of Euro-Asia in hostile steppe lands barely scratching out a living. They were

unquestionably a tough people, and they were fierce and war-like. Their religion reflects it dominated as it is by a storm-god or sky-god that enjoins warfare and conquest. This god was called something like "Dyaus," a word related to "Zeus," "deus"[1], "deva" (the Sanskrit word for "god"), and, of course, the English word "divine." Their culture was oriented around warfare, and they were very good at it. They were superior on horseback and rushed into battle in chariots. They were a tribal people ruled over by a war-chief, or raja (the Latin word "rex" (king) comes from the same root word, along with the English "regal"). Somewhere in the early centuries of the second millennium BC, they began to migrate southwards in waves of steady conquest across the face of Persia and the lands of India.

There, they would take on the name "superior" or "noble" to distinguish themselves from the people they conquered. Their name is derived from the Indo-European root word, "ar," meaning "noble." In Sanskrit, they were the "Aryas"[2] but that root, "ar," would also serve as the foundation of the name of the conquered Persian territories, "Iran."

Composition Of Aryan Society

Although archaeology has not yielded proof of the identity of the Aryans, the evolution and spread of their culture across the Indo-Gangetic Plain is generally undisputed. Modern knowledge of the early stages of this process rests on a body of sacred texts: the four Vedas (collections of hymns, prayers, and liturgy), the Brahmanas and the Upanishads (commentaries on Vedic rituals and philosophical treatises), and the Puranas (traditional mythic-historical works). The sanctity accorded to these texts and the

manner of their preservation over several millennia — by an unbroken oral tradition — make them part of the living Hindu tradition.

These sacred texts offer guidance in piecing together Aryan beliefs and activities. The Aryans were a pantheistic people, following their tribal chieftain or raja, engaging in wars with each other or with other alien ethnic groups, and slowly becoming settled agriculturalists with consolidated territories and differentiated occupations. Their skills in using horse-drawn chariots and their knowledge of astronomy and mathematics gave them a military and technological advantage that led others to accept their social customs and religious beliefs. By around 1, 000 B. C., Aryan culture had spread over most of India north of the Vindhya Range and in the process assimilated much from other cultures that preceded it.

The Aryans brought with them a new language, a new pantheon of anthropomorphic gods, a patrilineal and patriarchal family system, and a new social order, built on the religious and philosophical rationales of varnashramadharma . Although precise translation into English is difficult, the concept varnashramadharma , the bedrock of Indian traditional social organization, is built on three fundamental notions: varna (originally, “ color,” but later taken to mean social class), ashrama (stages of life such as youth, family life, detachment from the material world, and renunciation), and dharma (duty, righteousness, or sacred cosmic law). The underlying belief is that present happiness and future salvation are contingent upon one’s ethical or moral conduct; therefore, both society and individuals are expected to pursue a diverse but righteous path deemed appropriate for everyone based on one’s birth, age, and station in life. The original three-

<https://assignbuster.com/composition-of-aryan-society/>

tiered society — Brahman (priest; see Glossary), Kshatriya (warrior), and Vaishya (commoner) — eventually expanded into four in order to absorb the subjugated people — Shudra (servant) — or even five, when the outcaste peoples are considered.

The basic unit of Aryan society was the extended and patriarchal family. A cluster of related families constituted a village, while several villages formed a tribal unit. Child marriage, as practiced in later eras, was uncommon, but the partners' involvement in the selection of a mate and dowry and bride-price were customary. The birth of a son was welcome because he could later tend the herds, bring honor in battle, offer sacrifices to the gods, and inherit property and pass on the family name. Monogamy was widely accepted although polygamy was not unknown, and even polyandry is mentioned in later writings. Ritual suicide of widows was expected at a husband's death, and this might have been the beginning of the practice known as sati in later centuries, when the widow actually burnt herself on her husband's funeral pyre.

Permanent settlements and agriculture led to trade and other occupational differentiation. As lands along the Ganga (or Ganges) were cleared, the river became a trade route, the numerous settlements on its banks acting as markets. Trade was restricted initially to local areas, and barter was an essential component of trade, cattle being the unit of value in large-scale transactions, which further limited the geographical reach of the trader. Custom was law, and kings and chief priests were the arbiters, perhaps advised by certain elders of the community. An Aryan raja, or king, was primarily a military leader, who took a share from the booty after successful

cattle raids or battles. Although the rajas had managed to assert their authority, they scrupulously avoided conflicts with priests as a group, whose knowledge and austere religious life surpassed others in the community, and the rajas compromised their own interests with those of the priests.

Course Of Aryan Invasion

They swept over Persia with lightening speed, and spread across the northern river plains of India. Their nature as a warlike, conquering people are still preserved in Vedic religion, the foundation of Hinduism. In the Rig Veda, the collection of praises to the gods, the god Indra towers over the poetry as a conquering god, one that smashes cities and slays enemies. The invading Aryans were originally nomadic peoples, not agricultural. They penetrated India from the north-west, settling first in the Indus valley. Unlike the Harappans, however, they eventually concentrated their populations along the Ganges floodplain. The Ganges, unlike the Indus, is far milder and more predictable in its flooding. It must have been a paradise to a people from the dry steppes of central Asia and Iran, a paradise full of water and forest. When they arrived, the vast northern plains were almost certainly densely forested. Where now bare fields stretch to the horizon, when the Aryans arrived lush forests stretched to those very same horizons. Clearing the forests over the centuries was an epic project and one that is still preserved in Indian literature.

The Aryans, or Vedic civilization were a new start in Indian culture. Harappa was more or less a dead end (at least as far as we know); the Aryans adopted almost nothing of Harappan culture. They built no cities, no states, no granaries, and used no writing. Instead they were a warlike people that

organized themselves in individual tribal, kinship units, the jana. The jana was ruled over by a war-chief. These tribes spread quickly over northern India and the Deccan. In a process that we do not understand, the basic social unit of Aryan culture, the jana, slowly developed from an organization based on kinship to one based on geography. The jana became a janapada, or nation and the jana-rajya, or tribal kingdom, became the jana-rajyapada, or national kingdom. So powerfully ingrained into Indian culture is the janapada, that Indians still define themselves mainly by their territorial origins. All the major territories of modern India, with their separate cultures and separate languages, can be dated back to the early jana-padas of Vedic India.

The earliest history of the Aryans in India is called the Rigvedic Period (1700-1000 BC) after the religious praise poems that are the oldest pieces of literature in India. These poems, the Rig Veda, are believed to represent the most primitive layer of Indo-European religion and have many characteristics in common with Persian religion since the two peoples are closely related in time. In this early period, their population was restricted to the Punjab in the northern reaches of the Indus River and the Yamuna River near the Ganges. They maintained the Aryan tribal structure, with a raja ruling over the tribal group in tandem with a council. Each jana seems to have had a chief priest; the religion was focused almost entirely on a series of sacrifices to the gods. The Rigvedic peoples originally had only two social classes: nobles and commoners. Eventually, they added a third: Dasas, or "darks." These were, we presume, the darker-skinned people they had conquered. By the end of the Rigvedic period, social class had settled into four rigid castes: the

caturvarnas, or “ four colors.” At the top of the caturvarnas were the priests, or Brahmans. Below the priests were the warriors or nobles (Kshatriya), the craftspeople and merchants (Vaishya), and the servants (Shudra), who made up the bulk of society. These economic classes were legitimated by an elaborate religious system and would be eventually subdivided into a huge number of economic sub-classes which we call “ castes.” Social class by the end of the Rigvedic period became completely inflexible; there was no such thing as social mobility.

In the early centuries of Later Vedic Period or Brahmanic Period (1000-500 BC), the Aryans migrated across the Doab, which is a large plain which separates the Yamuna River from the Ganges. It was a difficult project, for the Doab was thickly forested; the Aryans slowly burned and settled the Doab until they reached the Ganges. While the Rig Veda represents the most primitive religion of the Aryans during the Rigvedic Period, the religion of the Later Vedic period is dominated by the Brahmanas, or priestly book, which was composed sometime between 1000 and 850 BC. Later Vedic society is dominated by the Brahmans and every aspect of Aryan life comes under the control of priestly rituals and spells. In history as the Indians understand it, the Later Vedic Period is the Epic Age; the great literary, heroic epics of Indian culture, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, though they were composed between 500 and 200 BC, were probably originally formulated and told in the Later Vedic Period. Both of these epics deal with heroes from this period and demonstrate how Aryan cultural values, as we can understand them from the Rig Veda , are being transformed by mixing with Indus cultures.

What did the Aryans do with their time? They seem to have had a well-developed musical culture, and song and dance dominated their society. They were not greatly invested in the visual arts, but their interest in lyric poetry was unmatched. They loved gambling. They did not, however, have much interest in writing even though they could have inherited a civilization and a writing system when they originally settled India. We do not know exactly when they became interested in writing, but it may have been at the end of the Brahmanic period somewhere between 650 and 500 BC. Still, there are no Aryan writings until the Mauryan period—from Harappa (2500-1750 BC) to Maurya (300 BC) is quite a long time. The script that the Mauryans used is called “Brahmi” script and was used to write not only the religious and literary language of the time, Sanskrit, but also the vernacular languages. This script, Brahmi, is the national alphabet of India.

The Vedic period, then, is a period of cultural mixing, not of conquest. Although the Aryans were a conquering people when they first spread into India, the culture of the Aryans would gradually mix with indigenous cultures, and the war-religion of the Aryans, still preserved in parts of the Rig Veda, slowly became more ritualized and more meditative. By 200 BC, this process of mixing and transforming was more or less complete and the culture we call “Indian” was fully formed.

Arguments for and against the Invasion Theory

Opponents of the invasion theory make a somewhat plausible case that the sacrificial rites and rituals described in some of the Vedic texts bear a resemblance to practices that may have been common during the Harappan period. The similarity of Harappan and Vedic altars is indeed intriguing. This

would bolster the argument that Brahmins of the Vedic age emerged from the Harappan priesthood, and not from any Aryan invasion. But a link between the Harappan priesthood and Vedic Brahminism does not preclude the possibility of an invasion or foreign migration since North Western India attracted a constant stream of migrants and invaders.

However, the mere possibility of what may have happened cannot be the basis of an all-encompassing theory such as the “Aryan Invasion Theory”. It must be grounded on more solid evidence to withstand critics who might describe such assertions as racially-tarred speculations.

Adolph Hitler and the Aryan/Dravidian Myth

Adolph Hitler twisted the theories of Gustaf Kossinna (1858-1931), to put forward the Aryans as a master race of Indo-Europeans, who were supposed to be Nordic in appearance and directly ancestral to the Germans. These Nordic invaders were defined as directly opposite to native south Asian peoples, called Dravidians, who were supposed to have been dark skinned people.

The problem is, most if not all of this story—“Aryans” as a cultural group, invasion from the arid steppes, Nordic appearance, the Indus Civilization being destroyed, and, certainly not least, the Germans being descended from them—may not be true at all.

Philological Analysis

Proponents of an invasion (or migration) theory feel quite strongly that the Indo-European linguistic commonality cannot be explained in any other way, and cite philological studies that appear to bolster their case.

<https://assignbuster.com/composition-of-aryan-society/>

However, some opponents of the invasion theory argue that the observed commonality of the Indo-European group of languages could have been achieved without an Aryan invasion. They observe that the Harappan civilization had extensive trade and commercial ties with Babylon as well as with civilizations to the further West. There is a remarkable similarity in seals and cultural artifacts found in Harappan India, Babylon and even the early civilizations of the Mediterranean such as Crete. Hence, they argue that a linguistic commonality may have developed quite early through trade and cultural contacts and that this common linguistic structure may have subsequently moved from South to North. Since Mediterranean Europe and the Middle Eastern civilizations developed well before the civilizations of Northern Europe, such a possibility is not altogether inconceivable.

But such a hypothesis does not preclude the possibility that invading or migrating clans may have also introduced non-Indian words into the existing Indian languages - leading to a composite language stream that incorporated both Indo-European and indigenous features[3].

Since much of the Indo-European linguistic commonality appears to correspond to the basic vocabulary of a pastoral nomadic population, intrusions by patriarchal warrior clans from Central Asia cannot be ruled out. Authors such as Gimbutas[4] present a reasonably convincing model of how the older matriarchal order in Europe was gradually broken down by migrants/conquerors who spoke a language that might account for certain common elements of the Indo-European group of languages. However, it would be inappropriate to mechanically apply the same conclusions to India, (notwithstanding some of the linguistic and philological arguments in favor

of such a theory) because other explanations for the linguistic similarities are now being illuminated through very recent DNA studies.

It must be emphasized that while there are both similarities and differences amongst the various Indo-European languages, our essay on Indian Languages shows quite convincingly that the differences outnumber the similarities. The essay shows how the primary and dominant motive force for the development of Indian languages, (including the so-called Indo-European languages of the North) especially during the written period was indigenous. Far too often, historians (and philologists) have tended to downplay (or ignore) the contributions of the Adivasi and Tamil language streams in the development of the Indic languages. A more objective and balanced philological analysis of the Indian languages points to rather limited Indo-European links, but to a considerably greater degree of independent indigenous development. Moreover, just as South Indian languages have absorbed Sanskrit words, North Indian languages have also absorbed words from Tamil and languages related to it.

Another criticism of the invasion theory lies in the interpretation of the word "Arya" to mean race, nationality or even linguistic group. Critics suggest that the word Arya as used in the Rig Veda and other texts is better translated as one who was noble in character (or noble in deed) or perhaps hailing from a noble (or royal) background. Hence, to use the term "Aryan" to describe the racial or national characteristics of an invading clan or clans would naturally be erroneous.

The Horse and Chariot Theories

Notably, historians favoring the invasion theory have based many of their arguments on postulates connecting the introduction of the horse and chariot in India to invading (or migrating) “ Aryans”. They also point to the balladic character of some of the verses in the Rig Veda with references to armed cattle raids and warriors on horse-driven chariots who appear to portray a race or a group of clans of pastoral nomadic warriors. The imagery fits particularly well with artifacts found in Babylon and Ancient Persia (and other regions near the Caspian Sea) that depict warriors riding on horse-driven chariots. Other literary evidence from the Rig Veda also appears to connect the authors of these Rig Veda verses to the “ Aryan” identified civilization of ancient Persia.

However such historians have failed to notice that there are drawings of horse and horse-drawn vehicles (tangas) in the caves of Bhimbhetka and other sites that counter the notion that the horse was unknown in India till an “ Aryan Invasion/Migration”. This would then suggest that the chariots described in the Rig Veda could have simply been an evolution of the Indian tanga. And while there is little tangible evidence of warrior clans in the numerous urban settlements that comprise the Harappan civilization, it is not unlikely that as settled civilization developed in India, and as urbanization spread to new areas, warrior clans may have emerged entirely due to indigenous processes.

Aryans and Dravidians – A controversial issue

The most basic division of the Indian society is of Aryans and Dravidians. According to this division, nearly 72% of Indians are Aryans and 28% are

<https://assignbuster.com/composition-of-aryan-society/>

Dravidians. The north Indians are the descendants of Aryans and the south Indians are Dravidians. The languages spoken in five states of south India are considered Dravidian languages and most of the languages spoken in the north are considered Aryan languages. The general script of the Aryan languages is different from the general script of Dravidian languages. The Indians also distinguish themselves by the general north Indian accent and general south Indian accent.

According to general Indian legend, the Aryans arrived in north India somewhere from Iran and southern Russia at around 1500 BC. Before the Aryans, the Dravidian people resided in India. The Aryans disregarded the local cultures. They began conquering and taking control over regions in north India and at the same time pushed the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India. According to this historical fact the general division of Indian society is made. North Indians are Aryans and south Indians are Dravidians. But this division isn't proper because of many reasons.

Many Indians immigrated from one part of India to other parts of India and not all local people of north India were pushed southwards by the Aryans. Some stayed and served the Aryans and others moved to live in the forests and the jungles of north India. Before the arrival of the Aryans there were also other communities in India like Sino-Mongoloids and Austroloids. There were also other foreign immigrations and invaders who arrived in India, from time to time.

There are many that completely doubt that there was ever any Aryan invasion in India. This skepticism is based on the dating of the Aryan invasion of India and the fact that Hinduism and the caste system are believed to have been established as the result of the meetings between the intruding Aryans and original residents of India, the Dravidians.

The caste system is believed to have been established by the Aryans. The fair skinned Aryans who occupied parts of India established the caste system, which allowed only them to be the priests (Brahman), aristocracy (Kshatria) and the businessmen (Vaisia) of the society. Below them in hierarchy were the Sudras who consisted of two communities. One community was of the locals who were subdued by the Aryans and the other were the descendants of Aryans with locals. In Hindu religious stories there are many wars between the good Aryans and the dark skinned demons and devils. The different Gods also have dark skinned slaves. There are stories of demon women trying to seduce good Aryan men in deceptive ways. There were also marriages between Aryan heroes and demon women. Many believe that these incidences really occurred in which, the gods and the positive heroes were people of Aryan origin. And the demons, the devils and the dark skinned slaves were in fact the original residence of India whom the Aryans coined as monsters, devil, demons and slaves. Normally the date given to Aryan invasion is around 1500 BC. But according to Hinduism experts some of the events in Hinduism occurred much earlier. Some of the events like the great war in the Mahabharata epic is believed to have occurred (based on astronomical research) 7000 years ago.

According to this Hindu experts the word Aryan is a misinterpretation of the original Sanskrit word, Arya. Arya means pure or good in Sanskrit. In the holy Vedas the good people were called Arya. Some of the European scholars of Indian culture in the 19th century were Germans. These German scholars who found that Swastika was also a holy symbol among the Hindus distorted, the word Arya to Aryan.

Commonalities of Vedic Gods with the Middle East

Other evidence to bolster the “ Aryan Invasion Theory” lies in certain common names/references and features of some Vedic Gods that appear to be pan-West Asian. While this might suggest a certain ancient link between the North Indian nobility and the nobility of Persia and Western Asia, it does not substantiate the claim that the “ Aryans” were Europeans or Caucasians. Moreover, there are many different ways in which such commonalities may have developed.

Since there are references in the Manusmriti to ruling clans who were clearly of non-Indian origin, there is no doubt that various foreign tribes/clans must have entered India as migrants or invaders. There are references to Greeks, Persians as well as to Chinese amongst India’s ruling “ Aryan” families. But there are also references to South Indian or “ Dravidian” “ Aryan” clans. To conflate these royals “ Aryans” exclusively with European invaders would be clearly inappropriate. Moreover, to identify the timing of such an invasion with the period of the Rig Veda would also be entirely speculative.

This is not to say that India could have never been invaded by Caucasian or other clans, but rather that even if such invasions may have taken place,

these invasions would have been neither unique nor decisive in shaping Indian history.

While it is not inconceivable that some of the ruling clans described in the Rig Veda may have entered India as invaders, the notion that the “ Aryans” were exclusively outsiders, and that too European, and brought with them the entire text of the Vedas, and hence, laid the foundations of Indian civilization is what is most untenable, and is easily exposed if developments in Indian culture and philosophy are adequately studied in depth and with unbiased eyes.

As Indian critics of the Aryan invasion theory have demonstrated, (apart from the few common gods that are also referenced outside India) much of the imagery of the Vedas is indigenous. To many Indians - the references to plants and animals, and the climactic and geographical descriptions suggest a connection to Indian soil. Some of the spiritual values (and cultural mores and traditions) that emerge from the Rig Ved seem to have a distinctly Indian sources that many Indians can identify with intuitively and instinctively.

Links between Harappan and Vedic Civilization

In fact, there is some compelling circumstantial evidence linking the settlers of the Gangetic plain to earlier Harappan settlements. For instance, emerging geological evidence pointing to ancient river systems drying up and changing course, and the excavation of numerous settlements along the banks of these ancient river systems (such as the Saraswati basin that ran in

parallel to the Indus) lends credence to the argument that the settlers of the Gangetic plain must have been predominantly domestic migrants.

Finds of Shatranj (chess) pieces, dice and terracotta animal and goddess figurines also point to connections between Harappan and later civilizations. It is also quite remarkable how the ornamentation of some temples in Rajasthan and Western Madhya Pradesh appears to derive from some of the excavated jewelry from Harappan sites in Northern India. And remarkably, there are no parallels to such motifs outside India.

Some scholars also see a continuity between the Sulva Sutras and the Harappan civilization which owing to its material advance must have very likely developed a level of arithmetic and ritual and abstract philosophy concomitant with its achievements in urban planning and agricultural management. The evidence for decimal weights and measures in the Harappan civilization, and the later perfection of a decimal numeral system in India lends further substance to such claims.

Relevance of the Aryans

All this suggests that there is a much greater degree of continuity in Indian civilization than previously realized, and further examination of the Indian historical record will demonstrate that the numerous developments in philosophy and culture that have taken place in India cannot be attributed to "Aryan" invaders. In fact, the main significance of the invasion theory lies not in the determination of whether such an invasion took place or not, but rather in how much of a debt Indian civilization might owe to such an invasion.

For instance, prior to the series of Islamic invasions, and long after the “Aryan” period of Indian history, there have been numerous other invasions that had an impact on the subcontinent. Yet it is only the “Aryan” invasion that attracts popular and scholarly attention. This is primarily because of the importance ascribed to the “Aryan” invasion by British colonial historians.

Before the invention of the “exalted” Aryan (of European origin) by British (and other European and Western) ideologues, few Indians had any conscious memory of an “Aryan” warrior past since later ruling families in India had long since expanded and diversified from what may have been the ruling “Aryan” clans of the time of the Mahabharatha or even the Manusmriti. Not only had the “Kshatriya” caste expanded to accommodate several new clans, many of India’s most illustrious Northern rulers (such as the Nandas, the Mauryas and the Guptas) were non-Kshatriyas.

Prior to any supposed “Aryan” invasion, India already had a relatively advanced settled-agriculture based urban civilization. And within a few centuries after their possible “imported” introduction in India, some of the “Aryan”-identified gods described in the Rig Veda ceased to be worshipped and gradually faded from mainstream Indian consciousness. Brahmin gotra (clan) names mentioned in the Rig Veda also lost their import and the vast majority of Brahmin gotra (clan) names that came into common use could not have had any “Aryan”-invasion connection. As Kosambi convincingly points out in his Introduction to Indian History, many of India’s Brahmins rose from ‘Hinduised’ tribes that earlier practised animism or totem worship, or prayed to various fertility gods and/or goddesses, or revered fertility symbols such as the linga (phallus) or the yoni (vagina). A majority of these Hinduised

tribes retained many elements of their older forms of worship, and several Brahmin gotra (clan) names are derived from non-Aryan clan totems and other tribal associations.

For instance, one of the most popular gods in the Indian pantheon - Shiva - appears to have no connection with any possible "Aryan" invasion, and may in fact have its prototype in the fertility god of the Harappans. Similarly, Hanuman, Ganesh, Kali or Durga, or Maharashtra's Vithoba - none could have any external "Aryan" connection, since they don't even find any mention in the Rig Veda. Whether in matters of popular religion or in matters of high philosophy, there is little contribution of note that can be traced directly to a supposed "Aryan invasion".

Conclusion

It turns out that there are serious problems with this argument. There are no references to an invasion in the Vedic manuscripts; and the Sanskrit word "Aryas" means "noble", not a superior cultural group. Secondly, recent archaeological evidence suggests that the Indus civilization was shut down by droughts combined with a devastating flood, not a violent confrontation.

Recent