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Editorial

Origin of the Vedic Civilization in South Asia: Anthropological Perspective

Anthropology, the science of humans, has been divided into four sub-branches, namely, the Biological (Physical), Socio-cultural, Archaeological and Linguistic Anthropology. The subject grew out of multidisciplinary methodologies pursued for the study of human beings. In other words, the total approach is conjunctive in order to gain a holistic understanding of human kind at a definite space and time. Human beings reached a biological condition, which made them behave in a way that led to their survival and evolution to the present stage. Knowledge is the key factor for development of human beings. With evolution, knowledge increased in every generation, which is subsequently stored by the humans. For a pretty long time, it was orally passed on through generations until the discovery of scripts. Prehistoric Archaeology, also known as Archaeological Anthropology, covers the major time span in the development of humans, both biologically and socio-culturally. Prehistory in Anthropology refers to that period of development of human beings when scripts were not discovered and written records were not kept for the posterity. A new terminology 'Protohistory' was coined especially for the Harappan culture because although scripts were present during that time, these were not indisputably deciphered and generally accepted (Agrawal and Chakrabarti, 1979). Admittedly, all aspects of human origin and development need to be scientifically reconstructed with logical interpretation on the basis of scientific evidences.

The discipline of Anthropology vis-a-vis Prehistory developed in India with the British colonialism. Euro-centrism was at its peak in the academic world of the time. In this context, the Aryan invasion theory put forward by Sir Mortimer Wheeler for the decline of Indus Valley civilization and rise of Vedic Civilization in Ganga valley is discussed, in the light of discoveries made by scholars from all the sub branches of Anthropology and other sciences in the several of last decades.

The discovery of the sites, Harappa in 1921 and Mohenjodaro in 1922 by Rakhaldas Bandyopadhya in the undivided India, gave birth to the study of Indus Valley Civilization. Till then, comparable evidences of civilization were already discovered in the Near and Middle East in Nile and Tigris River valleys respectively (Childe, 1993).

Although scholars had examined the theory of Aryan invasion in detail and with considerable misgivings (Bhattacharya, 2014: 219-251; Dhavalikar, 2007), yet the myth of Aryans as a race who migrated into India from Central Asia and established the Vedic civilization is not discarded by many of the scholars. In fact there are two groups of academicians; one group is considered as anti-colonials, who prefers India as the homeland of Vedic civilization and the others who prefer the Aryan migration theory (Edwin, 2001).

Swami Vivekananda (1993) and Sri Aurobindo had their doubts in the theory which stated that the great Hindu religion, philosophy, culture and Vedic civilization were transported in India from outside. Sri Aurobindo wrote … *"it is indeed coming to be doubted whether the whole story of an Aryan invasion through the Punjab is not a myth of the philologists" (*Sri Aurobindo, 1956:166).

The present day moribund River Ghaggar-Hakra was discovered as the remnant of the mighty River Saraswati of the past. Description of River Saraswati is found in Rig Veda. It is also well established at present by the geographers, geologists and astrophysicists that the decline of Indo- Saraswati civilization started with tectonic movement that took place near the hilly tracts of Aravalli region in 1900 BCE (Puri and Verma, 1998; Furenstein *et al* 2004; Dhavalikar, 2007; Danino 2011; Kalyanraman 2018). The river Saraswati lost its earlier navigability and gradually there was a change in the life of the contemporary people and their economy. Population movement slowly took place towards east into the Ganga Valley. Recent joint works carried out by the archaeologists and the geologists has well established the fact that Ganga valley civilization developed out of the migration of people from Indus-Saraswati Valley (Jayaswal *et al*. 2016). It took a long time for the growth and development of the urban centres and the city of Varansi.

It was Wheeler (1953) who had brought in the Aryan invasion theory for the decline of Indus Valley Civilization and the subsequent rise of Vedic civilization in the Ganga Valley. The reason for the assumption lied largely on the lack of explanations of many of the findings and that the scripts were not properly deciphered. Mueller was given the task of translating Rig Veda by the French scholar Buffon. Mueller, however, had misconstrued the term *Arya* as that of a race instead of its connotation as a form of address (Fuerenstein *et al*. 2004: 45-60) While translating Veda Mueller found that Vedic people addressed each other as *Arya* similar to the present address as "Mister". Example may be sited from present day Bali, Indonesia, where Hindu culture prevailed for a long time; people still address a male person as *Arya* and a woman as *Ayusmati*. Wheeler conceded that he had proposed the Aryan invasion theory on the basis of the massacre

scene at Mohenjadaro and on the mythology of *Indra*, as the conqueror of the forts (Wheeler, 1953:92).

However, several decades of work by anthropologists and archaeologists both in the subcontinent and abroad provided with clear evidences for the decline and have established that the Indus Valley Civilization had grown in the Indian subcontinent out of indigenous cultural elements (Lal, 2017). The decline was due to natural causes. Anthropologists, geologists, archaeologists and linguistics have worked together and strongly establish that there never was a race, who may be called, the Aryans. Mueller came across the word *Arya* while translating the Rig Veda (Mueller,1883; 1913). The word *Arya* in reality was a form of address. However, there is need for more philological studies to find out the origin of the word in Sanskrit and Proto Indo-European languages. The Aryan invasion and massacre theory is disproved by bio-archaeological investigations. Works were done on the skeletal remains, excavated by Wheeler and preserved with the Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta. No sign of trauma or violence was found in the skeletal remains, which were supposed by wheeler as victims of massacre by the Aryans. In fact those were washed out of graves and deposited at various times due to frequent flood in Indus (Robbin Schug et al, 2012). Dr. Srini Kalyanraman, Chairperson of Taksha Indic-Saraswati-Sindhu Civilization (TISSC), is working relentlessly on the problem. He had worked with the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) to trace the tract of the ancient River Saraswati and could decipher scripts from the Indus seals. He concluded that the Indus scripts, as derived from the seals, are a pictographic accounting system used by the Harappans for trade. So far the Anthropologists and Archaeologists could clear the mist around the myth of Aryan invasion and massacre theory. The Rigveda describes an environment and particularly river systems that prevailed before 1900 BCE and later Vedic literature shows a shift of people from now dried up Saraswati river system to the Ganga Valley. There are evidences gathered from archaeological, geological, astronomical and space science (ISRO) sources, that due to tectonic movement, a branch of Saraswati entered through a gap and joined Ganga and Jamuna near Prayag at Triveni Sangam (Puri and Verma, 1998). All the evidences and anthropological researches confirm the fact that the Vedic civilization had developed in the soil of India. Yet, the debate continues. It is time to come to a definite conclusion so that the dispute is settled once for all at the textual level for the benefit of general pupils and scholars of the present day and of future.

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