

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE IN THE VEDAS

Cultural and Historical Implications

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The Issue of History

It is a great honor to be speaking before the Indian Council of Historical Research for this important yearly lecture. I would like to thank the Council for the kind invitation, particularly the current director, Y.S. Rao, who is dedicated to bringing clarity and balance to how ancient India is presented. It is crucial that such history minded organizations as ICHR flourish and aid in creating a renaissance in India relating to its profound cultural heritage.

History remains a vital concern for all of us, far beyond any mere academic issues that may be involved. How a country views its history reflects how it views and understands itself. A wrong estimation of history can undermine the cultural ethos and soul of a country. It has been well said that those who forget their past may also forfeit their future.

Yet few Indians today seem to know or take pride in their historical heritage that is one of the oldest in the world. They seem to know more about western history and culture than their own. The youth are not taught extensively about ancient India in the educational system. India has probably

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had the greatest continuity of any civilization in the world, with temples and teachings of ancient humanity still alive after thousands of years, whereas the rest of the world, including the Greeks and Romans of Europe have long been cut off from their ancient spiritual and cultural roots.

While India is a civilization with a continuity of perhaps more than five thousand years, and has had a profound impact on the neighboring civilizations, extending to a majority of the peoples of the world in south and east Asia, its political independence remains less than a single century, now approaching a mere seventy years.

Modern India has been struggling to define itself both relative to its own ancient many-sided culture and relative to modern civilization with its European and American focus – which can be very different in values and goals than older India and its emphasis on dharma, with a different understanding of the human being and the meaning of history itself. The Indian or Bharatiya ethos has been more rooted in the eternal and the universal, whereas the western and modern ethos seems to becoming ever more aimed at the transient. Daily news that is forgotten tomorrow is of much greater attention than any enduring lessons of history for people today.

Many of the recognized historians of modern India, including a number who have been part of this institution of ICHR over the decades, have not followed India based models of culture and history, but have preferred western models that are usually more political, economic or mundane in nature. Yet even in the world today, it is the spiritual culture of India through Yoga, Vedanta, Buddhism and meditation that is honored and looked to as representing the essence of India's great civilization, a fact that we should always remember.

It seems that so far modern India has not yet found its historical and cultural bearings or created a proper understanding of its own civilizational values. We find some Indian academics denigrating their own traditions, from a superficial view that does not adequately understand the background or purpose of the older teachings.

We must remember that the India of previous historical eras was not the India of the last few centuries, which was contracted under foreign rule, but an earlier expansive culture with communication, trade and interchange in all directions by land and sea.

The Question of the Vedas

I am also very happy to be here in India, the land of the Vedas and speaking on the Vedas. I believe that the Vedas are one of the greatest gifts to humanity that India or the world has ever produced. I have spent over half of my life studying the Vedic literature and find that study to have been the most important activity I have ever undertaken. It has inspired me to write nearly fifty books on different aspects of Vedic teachings and to work with Vedic groups all over the world. This Vedic work has included translations of the Vedas and studies of the history of India. My books in the Vedic field can be consulted for more detail on the points raised in this talk.

Yet I must also state that the Vedas are not properly understood or honored. This starts in the Western world where the Vedas only gain a footnote in the literature of the world, are not seriously studied, and by my estimation are not available in accurate or well done translations.

Even here in India the Vedas are not always properly understood, though they are honored by an important segment of the population. A few Vedic mantras like the Gayatri mantra are commonly practiced and afforded great reverence, yet the rest of the ten thousand verses of the *Rigveda* are seldom examined or recited.

To me the Vedas are the great pyramids of the ancient mind and should be honored like the pyramids of Egypt as one of the greatest achievements of ancient humanity, with relevance for all time. The Vedas hold many keys about our spiritual origins as a species and hold for us the living voice of the ancient seers, sages and yogis, our spiritual ancestors, and allow us to connect with them in our minds and hearts.

The last portion of the Vedas or the *Upanishads*,

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summarized in the *Bhagavad Gita*, do have their rightful recognition as among the greatest philosophical, mystical and meditation based teachings of the world, and one of the oldest. Yet though the *Upanishads* honor and look back to the Vedic rishis and teachings, few scholars explore the ancient Vedic connection to Yoga and Vedanta, though the continuity was never broken.

The earlier Vedic mantras going back to the most ancient *Rigveda* remain obscured both by their antiquity and by modern misinterpretations. We seem to have forgotten how to understand the ancient mind that saw reality more in terms of symbols and images, as patterns of light and sound vibrations, what the Vedas called *svara*, rather than in abstract concepts or theological assertions, or mundane concerns of politics and economics.

Ancient people, living closer to the earth and with a greater awareness of nature, did not form concepts or language the way we do in our information based mentalities. We cannot use modern rules of language formation to understand the subtlety and depth of the ancient teachings, nor judge them according to our dialectical and logical rules of discourse, any more than we can understand poetry according to the rules of mechanics.

The Depths of the Ancient Literature

I wish to state categorically that today we have not yet recovered even a quarter of the deeper meaning of the Vedic mantras, much less find the Vedic mantras explained in a meaningful way in most academic circles. The mantras of the great rishis are largely reduced to primitive nature worship and remained an unopened secret treasure. Here I am reflecting what Sri Aurobindo said a hundred years ago and can state that the situation has not fundamentally changed, though alternative views can be found.

I would extend this statement not only to the Vedas but to the great teachings of the ancient world from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* to the *I Ching* of China among others. There is much higher knowledge hidden in the lore of the ancient seers

and sages that we find honored throughout the world. Yet little of it has been reclaimed.

It is curious that the very cultures modern academia attributes the founding of civilization to, whether those in Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, China, Mexico or Peru, look back to many great cultures before them and to an earlier ancient age of light and spiritual wisdom from which the present humanity has not so much progressed as fallen.

We see this clearly stated in traditional Indian texts with the idea of five Manus, twenty eight Vyasas and long periods of yugas over thousands of years, during which civilization rises and falls at various levels, and that our current civilization, though advanced materially, remains spiritually unevolved.

Modern science notes that our current human species is likely more than 200,000 years old but only has a historical time line of five thousand to perhaps ten thousand years total for what we regard as civilization. The remaining much longer period before is a matter of speculation and may yet hold much more than we might consider possible.

Reclaiming our ancient spiritual heritage, particularly through the Vedas, our best preserved ancient texts, is crucial for understanding the origins and capacities of our species. These do not simply reside in knowing the facts about the outer material or physical world but understanding the inner realm of conscious that requires yoga and meditation.

In this talk we will examine both the historical and spiritual dimensions of the Vedic literature, though we must remember that the Vedas are primarily spiritual texts and cover historical factors only in an incidental manner. The older generally western view that arose in the colonial era regarded the Vedas as dating from after 1500 BCE and as indicating a primitive nomadic culture, foreign or intrusive to India, with martial traits rather than any deeper spiritual focus.

The spiritual and cultural estimation of the Vedas from colonial scholars, which remains dominant in the West today, was that it represented a corresponding primitive polytheistic form of nature worship to nomadic groups from Central Asia. Such a view is a polar opposite to the traditional view of the

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Vedas as the scriptures of a great Rishi vision of cosmic reality.

When an extensive ancient civilization was discovered in north India along the Indus river in the early twentieth century, instead of connecting it to the Vedic or to any continuity of civilization in India, it was largely dismissed as pre-Vedic and little effort was made to connect it with Vedic literature.

However, new studies of ancient India, particularly combining the archaeological evidence of the ancient Harappan or Indus civilization and the geological studies of the Sarasvati River, now indicate that historically the Vedic culture likely represents this great civilization in ancient India, including its extensive urban sites.

In addition to this discussion of outer aspects of history I wish to emphasize that on a spiritual and cultural level, the Vedic literature back to the *Rigveda* indicates a yogic rishi culture with knowledge of the mind and access to higher states of consciousness that modern physics is just beginning to suspect.

I will not address in detail the archaeological, linguistic or genetic issues, as there are other authors in the field who have covered this better and these issues would make our presentation too long. I would recommend specifically the work of Prof. B.B. Lal for the archaeological perspective that complements this literary perspective. He has an entire series of book on ancient India. The Geological Survey of India and Dr. S. Kalyanaraman have done important work on the location of the Sarasvati River and its Vedic connections that are very detailed.

How to Better View Vedic Literature

Vedic literature has not been properly analyzed in its own right. It has largely been filtered through modern disciplines that are peripheral and interpretative in nature and bring to their views on the Vedas their own modern ideas or biases that may have little relevance to what the Vedas actually teach. Traditional sources of interpretation, ancient and modern from India, though detailed in nature and sustained

since Vedic times, particularly of a spiritual nature, have been ignored, including the Vedic studies of great modern Indian teachers like Sri Aurobindo, which you will rarely find mentioned in modern academic studies of the Vedas.

Rather than studying the Vedas and finding out what these ancient texts actually say according to their own language and mentality, the texts are dissected for special unusual words that they may have or for suggestions of what they do not actually make explicit. The tools of modern academia in looking at the Vedas - namely comparative mythology, linguistics, Freudian psychology or Marxist economic theory - likely tell us more about the scholar interpreting the Vedas rather than reveal the essence of the Vedas. These disciplines may have their relevance from outer angles but do not address the deeper dimensions of Vedic thought.

Traditional methods of Yoga, mantra and meditation should not be ignored in studying teachings ascribed to seers, rishis, kavis, vipras and having hidden meanings of our or seven levels for the initiate. Yet most academic accounts of the Vedas do not look into such mystical and poetic implications and are usually content with one level of meaning of an outer nature only.

This is particularly true of the *Rigveda*, the oldest Vedic text, which has the greatest complexity of symbolism. While it is not wrong to look for confirmation of other interpretations or types of data in the *Rigveda*, it remains crucial to determine what the *Rigveda* actually states apart from these. The Vedas reflect a vast universe, a great culture, and a pursuit of higher awareness beyond the ordinary realm of time and space.

Yet even at an outer level of interpretation, the obvious is often missed. For example, the *Rigveda* mentions the term *samudra*, which commonly means ocean, over a hundred times, including rivers flowing into the sea and ships upon the sea. These include rivers like Sarasvati and Sindhu in India that reached the sea. Vedic cosmology of the worlds is of a series of oceans, earthly, atmospheric and heavenly, with the Sun itself as a ship on the cosmic sea. Vedic deities and rishis are connected to the sea. The main Vedic story is of its supreme

deity Indra slaying the obstructive serpent Vritra at the foot of the mountains and releasing the seen rivers to flow into the sea.

The maritime image of the *Rigveda* is clear. One can hold to the belief that the Vedic people did not know of the ocean and therefore the term samudra meant any big body of water or something else. But we cannot construe such manipulations of words as evidence or proof of anything. We can construe that as a means of discrediting what the *Rigveda* says by recourse to other types of proposed information.

Yet if the meaning of a term in the *Rigveda* like samudra makes perfect sense according to its generally accepted meaning, we need not reject that because it may contradict what views about the Vedic people we may subscribe to based on considerations outside the literature. This is particularly true when we recognize that the Vedas mention the Sarasvati River and place it in the Haryana region, where it was a dominant river of India flowing to the sea before 2000 BCE.

In this talk we will examine what the *Rigveda* actually states and how the tradition has interpreted these statements, as well as how these may compare with current interpretations.

Historical Issues: Vedic Literature and the Archaeological Record Must Be Aligned

Vedic literary evidence is the largest, best preserved and most complete that remains from the early ancient world. Its thousands of well-preserved teachings and commentaries are much more extensive than anything comparable from the rest of the world.

This vast Vedic literature reflects a great compilation over a very long period of time by several kingdoms and dynasties, carefully developed and sustained through several layers over many centuries. Such a vast literature cannot exist without a great civilization to produce and sustain it for such a very long period of time. It can neither arise nor be sustained in an historical or cultural vacuum. We are not speaking of one text only but of numerous detailed texts.

Ancient India meanwhile has one of the largest, oldest and most continual cultures in the world demonstrated by the extensive archaeological evidence of Harappan and Pre-Harappan remains. Harappan culture covers a vast region from Afghanistan to the Ganga and from the coast of Iran nearly as far as Mumbai.

Such a vast and enduring civilization needs a literature to go with it, particularly when by the seals it has shown that it was likely a literate culture. Yet in the views of many modern Vedic scholars, no continuity between the vast Harappan ruins of ancient India and the vast literary record of the Vedas is generally accepted. We cannot ignore the likely connections between the literature and archaeology of ancient India, particularly when both are vast and extensive and reflect the same region of the world and the same river systems.

We need to combine both the literary and archaeological evidence. This solves mystery of a civilization without a literature and a literature without a civilization.

The Sanskrit Language Itself is Evidence of Great Civilization

The Sanskrit language, extending to Vedic Sanskrit, is a highly refined sophisticated poetic language that appears connected to both the courts of kings and to great religious teachings and festivals. The Vedic language is called Chhandas or meter. Each meter has its numerical basis from the Gayatri at 24 syllables to Jagati at 48 syllables.

The very sophisticated nature of Vedic Sanskrit also requires a great civilization to support it. The tendency among modern scholars has been to honor the Sanskrit of Panini as sophisticated but regard the Sanskrit of the *Rigveda* as primitive. Yet the two are closely related and Paninian Sanskrit relies heavily on the Vedic for its background structure and depth. If Paninian Sanskrit reflects a profound intelligence in the culture, so must the Vedic.

Yet as Vedic literature is itself diverse and has many layers, we cannot necessarily identify it with only period of ancient India. It likely spans Pre-Harappan and Harappan eras

and we know it endured into the Post-Harappan era as well. As India is a vast area there may have been other types of peoples or literature there as well. The Vedic though obviously important need not be regarded as the only one involved.

Vedic texts are compilations and have many layers and overlap, like *Puranas* or Bible. They can span long historical periods, with much difference in time between initial material and final redaction. The Vedic literature consists of a number of texts of which the *Rigveda* is not only the oldest and largest, but may reflect the most extensive period of time for its compilation. The *Puranas* indicate that the compilation of the Vedas that we have, that of Krishna Dvaipayana is the last of a set of twenty-eight, which could give it a very extensive antiquity.

Vedic Literature Reflects Great Kingdoms and the Idea/ Apparatus of a State

This vast Vedic literature was sustained by several related kingdoms and dynasties over a long period of time, with names of kings and dynasties in great number and antiquity detailed in Vedic and Puranic texts. The Greek traveler to India Megasthenes in the fourth century BCE in his *Indika* records a tradition of over 150 kings extending back over 6400 years previously, for example.

The Vedic teaching eventually influenced every part of the Indian subcontinent both in terms of culture and language. Before the time of the Buddha, Sanskrit based languages had spread as far as Sri Lanka, and to Indonesia not much later. The main impetus behind this was largely the spiritual, religious and cultural sophistication of these languages and their traditions.

The extent of the Vedic literature shows that the Vedic kingdoms were large kingdoms that covered much of north India, and endured over long periods of time. Puranic and Vedic records contain lists of well over a hundred rulers before the time of the Buddha. The *Aitareya Brahmana*, among other Vedic and Puranic texts, indicates several Vedic kings as world-rulers who conquered the earth on every side. Let us

take an example of the kings mentioned.

Aitareya Brahmana Viii. 21-23

Purohita and Great Kings

Tura Kavasheya and Janamejaya Parikshit of the Kurus

Chyavana Bhargava and Sharyata Manava, generally placed in Gujarat

Indra Somasushman Vajaratnayana Shatakika Satrajita

Indra Parvata and Narada Kanva and Ambastya

Indra Parvata and Narada Kanva and Yudhamshrausti Augrasainya

Indra Kashyapa and Vishvakarman Bhauvana

Indra Vasishta and Sudas Paijavana, an Ikshvaku king prominent in *Rigveda*

Indra Samvarta Angirasa and Marutta Avikshita

Indra Udamaya Atreya and Anga

Indra Dirghatamas Mamateya and Bharata Daushanti, a Puru king

Indra Brihaduktha (Vamadevya) and Durmukha Panchala

Indra Vasishta Satyahavya and Atyarati Janamtapi

Failed to conquer the Uttara Kuru land of the Gods

Aitareya Brahmana viii.14 mentions as the northern quarter the lands of Uttara Kurus and Uttara Madras beyond the Himalaya, where we know various Indo-Iranian peoples existed in ancient times. Clearly the horizon of Vedic kingdoms was quite extensive.

A number of these kings mentioned are prominent in *Rigveda* like King Sudas in the seventh mandala, but some of the others are not, though most of the rishis are. This suggests that there was a broader horizon for the Vedic teachings than the kings mentioned in the *Rigveda*.

Kingdoms, Peoples and Battles

The *Rigveda* contains clear depictions of different

geographical regions and groups of peoples. It places the main Rigvedic people the Puru-Bharatas, in the central Sarasvati-Drishadvati region of North India later known as Kurukshetra, with related peoples around them.

Of the five groups of Vedic peoples, the Purus in the *Puranas* are related to the central region of north India, the Anus to the north in Panjab, the Druhyus to the west, the Yadus to the southwest into Gujarat and the Turvashas to the southeast towards Andhra Pradesh. This is where they appear in Vedic and Puranic literature. This agrees well with their depictions in the *Rigveda*.

While the *Rigveda* does not contain any complete king lists, a number of kings mentioned in the *Rigveda* occur among the Puranic king lists in a prominent manner, like Mandhata, Purukutsa, Trasadasyu, Divodasa and Sudas. The *Rigveda* has longer lists of Rishis and their families, which are also reflected in later Puranic literature. This is probably owing to the fact that the *Rigveda* is a more spiritual and religious document, in which the rishi is more important than the king. Vedic rishis and their families or gotras are famous throughout India.

Some scholars have proposed that the battles mentioned in the *Rigveda* are between light and dark skinned peoples, meaning the incoming Aryans and indigenous Dravidians. If we examine these carefully, they are only conflicts within the same groups of five related Vedic peoples (Purus, Anus, Druhyus, Turvashas and Yadus), which are called good or evil, Aryan or Dasyu according to their behavior.

For example, the famous battle of the ten Kings (Dasarajna) shows the Vedic king Sudas (*Rigveda* VII.19) facing enemies on all sides, stated to be from among the Anus, Druhyus and Turvashas, even some Purus, or from the same five Vedic peoples, reminding one of a Mahabharata type civil war, not reflecting any invasion or migration into India from the outside.

Terms for inimical peoples in the *Rigveda* like dasa or dasyu, and later asura and mlecha are given in Vedic literature to the same groups of Vedic peoples when their behavior is considered hostile to the main Vedic people or the Puru-

Bharatas. It extends to some conflicting groups within the Puru-Bharatas, as just noted.

The *Aitareya Brahmana* vii.18 relates the Dasyus or inimical peoples mainly to the descendants of Vishvamitra. "These are those, the Andhras, Pundras, Shabharas, Pulindas and Mutibas who live in large numbers beyond the borders, most of the Dasyus are descendants of Vishvamitra." Note that these are the people to the south and east of India. We also know that the term Dasyu was used for various Iranian groups. Such inimical peoples are not regarded as non-Aryans or indigenous people apart from the Vedic people, but as simply hostile kings and warriors within the same culture.

Even terms like *mleccha* that occur later in the *Brahmanas* and *Mahabharata* for hostile or anaryan people were used for certain northern and western Vedic people, mainly of the Anus, peoples of Sindh, Panjab and Afghanistan to the west like Sindhus and Sauviras, not indigenous non-Vedic people but to related Indic or Iranian peoples. We must remember that in the Bhagavad Gita, even Krishna said that Arjuna would be doing something unaryan if he decided not to fight in the war. Buddha also called his teachings "Arya Dharma" and his four noble truths the four Aryan truths.

The term Aryan in *Rigveda* is mainly a general term of nobility and respect and has no connotation of race, ethnicity or immigrant populations. It is also used relative to natural phenomena. "Generating the sacred knowledge, the cow, horse, plants, trees, earth, mountains and waters, raising the Sun in heaven, the deities spread the Aryan laws over the world." (*brahma gam asvam janayanta osadhir vanaspatin prthivim parvatam apah, suryam divi rohayantah sudanava arya vrata visrjanto adhi kshami, Rigveda* X.65.11)

Vedic literature extending to the *Rigveda* suggests the idea and apparatus of a state, not simply religious leaders. Terms for kings and emperors are there as *raja*, *samrat*, *svarat*, etc. The idea of a *rajasuya* and *ashwamedha* or vast kingly rituals are also mentioned. There is quite a variety of religious leaders and different types of priests as well, up to sixteen in all, suggesting large public rituals and events.

There are indications of a system of both religious and secular laws as *ritam* and *dharma*. The Sun Gods or *Adityas*, notably *Mitra* and *Varuna*, represent the kings or the *Kshatriya* and their principle of *dharma*.

Vedic literature speaks of a city with a thousand doors (*sahasra dvara*) by the sea, perhaps suggesting cities like *Krishna's Dwaraka*, which existed for a long time before him under different names. The *Rishi Vasishta* states:

Brhantam manam varuna svadhavah sahasradvaram jagama grham te, Rigveda VII.88.5

"Divine *Varuna*, I have come to your vast temple, your home with a thousand doors." Such were likely major port or capital cities.

The *Rigveda* also speaks of a temple with a thousand pillars. (*sahasrasthuna Rigveda V.62.6*). Such pillar temples to *Mitra* and *Varuna*, who are often regarded as the great kings or *Kshatriyas* among the Vedic deities, reflect this overriding concept of *Dharma* and may indicate some capital cities or ruling palaces as well.

Other Aryan groups or Indic and Iranian peoples such as the later *Mittani*, *Medes* and *Persians* likely carried with them this Vedic idea of a state and rule of law. Indeed the Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan peoples that we find in Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, including the *Scythians*, seem mainly *Kshatriya* people with an idea of state power or empire.

I would suggest that the movement of Indo-Iranian peoples like the *Persians*, *Medes*, *Shakas* and many others came from this diffusion of Vedic peoples and cultures to the west. This diffusion of Vedic culture north and west by land complemented its spread south and east by land and by sea to places like *Sri Lanka* and *Indonesia*.

The Vedic Geographical Horizon in the *Rigveda*

Vedic texts have a wide geographical horizon, speaking of oceans, rivers, mountains and deserts. "Eight summits of the Earth, three shore or desert regions, seven rivers." (*asthau vyakhyat kakubhah prthivyam tri dhanva yojana sapta sindhun RV.I.35.8*). They are the product of a sophisticated

civilization extensively engaged in trade and travel with a variety of neighboring countries and regions.

The Vedic land is a land of the seven rivers flowing into the ocean. It encompasses North India from Gandhara to Videha (or Afghanistan to Bihar and Bengal) and to the ocean, with some expansion beyond. The Sarasvati, flowing from the Himalayas to the Rann of Kachchh was the central most river, not the eastern most as some scholars would maintain.

As the central region, the Vedic influence must extend east and west from the Sarasvati River, not as the eastern most Vedic river as some scholars indicate. The Vedic region is that of seven rivers of which the Sarasvati is the central most and which flow to the sea.

Within the Sarasvati region the primary area was the Sarasvati-Drishadvati area, which is very similar to the region of Kurukshetra. Other important Rigvedic rivers are Yamuna, Ganga and Sarayu to the east and such western rivers as Parushni (Ravi), Vipas (Beas), Sutudri (Sutlej) and Sindhu, including some rivers of Gandhara like Kubha and Krumu. An extensive list is found in *Rigveda* X.75, while these rivers are mentioned here and there throughout the *Rigveda*. The ocean region was very important as well.

There are extensive textual references to the ocean or samudra, higher and lower, eastern and western – over a hundred in *Rigveda* alone. Ships are also commonly mentioned including ships with a hundred oars (sataritram, *Rigveda* I.116.6). Vasishta, the greatest of the Vedic rishis speaks of ocean travel (*Rigveda* VII.88). Maritime trade and travel occurs in Vedic texts.

The Vedas have a maritime cosmology of heavenly, atmospheric and earthly ocean, with the Sun as boat traveling in the sky. Oceanic deities prevail, Varuna, Indra, Agni, Soma all have ocean forms. Many Vedic Rishis connected to the sea, Bhrigu and Varuna, Agastya and Vasishta and Varuna. Manu and the Flood Myth occur in Vedic texts, with possible southern connections, such as the Matsya Purana that places Manu in Kerala. Yet few Vedic scholars in the academic field bother to look into such obvious oceanic connections.

Aryan Controversy

It is time to put the Aryan controversy to rest. There is no evidence in the Vedic texts of any Aryan invasion or migration but only of the development of a great civilization from the Sarasvati region to the sea.

Aryan is term of respect and nobility. Even Buddhism and Jainism called their teachings Aryan. Anyone who departed from dharma could be called unarian regardless of ancestry.

We will take a quick look at the language issue here. The predomination of certain linguistic groups reflects usually some predominant culture. Culture is usually religious, political, or economic in nature.

Behind the spread of major Indo-European linguistic groups has usually been a dominant culture. Note the following dominant cultures and lingua francas in older IE languages Latin, Greek, Persian, Sanskrit, and possibly Scythian. Many of these groups called their culture Aryan and their enemies unarian. But some of these groups called unarian by others may have considered themselves to be Aryan.

Cultural Sophistication

There is a very extensive cultural sophistication in Vedic texts extending to language, poetry, music, urban sites, temples and fire altars, mathematics and astronomy, medicine and herbology. We will not have time to examine all of these in this particular talk.

Such cultural, religious and social aspects of Vedic cultures influenced, if not dominated the culture of the subcontinent and surrounding regions from the Vedic period to modern times.

Astronomy and Mathematics

A new discipline of Archaeoastronomy helps us date ancient texts according to their astronomical references. The Vedas contain a number of references to solstices, equinoxes, calendars, and the positions of various Nakshatras or

constellations. I will just highlight a few factors that need further exploration.

The late Vedic astronomical text Vedanga Jyotish and later the famous astronomer Varaha Mihira in his *Brihat Samhita* speak of a tradition of the summer solstice in the middle of the Nakshatra Aslesha or around 23 20 degrees Cancer, a date of around 1400 BCE.

Krittika Nakshatra (Pleiades/Taurus) equinox references occur in later Vedic texts. Notably the Atharva Veda XIX begins its Nakshatra list with Krittika or the Pleiades and Magha (early Leo) ayana or solstice in *Atharvaveda* circa 2500 BCE. There are yet earlier suggestions in earlier Vedic texts.

The idea of various yugas, time cycles or world ages can also be found in Vedic texts. Megasthenes of the Greeks in his *Indika* mentions in the fourth century BCE, there was a history of 153 kings going back over 6400 years, suggesting a possible 3600 year cycle from 6700-3100, followed by the 3600 year cycle of Aryabhatta that ended around 500 AD. 28 yugas are mentioned from Manu to Vyasa in *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. Kings related to Treta Yuga and Dwapara Yuga are mentioned in *Puranas*. A 12,000 year cycle occurs in *Atharvaveda* and Manu.

Mathematics is an area in which extensive research is necessary. The decimal system occurs in the Vedas, with the *Yajurveda* having names for numbers starting with 1 ending with 1 followed by twelve zeroes.

Many interesting cosmic numbers are there in the Vedas including 360, 720, and 108. The Vedic fire altar reflects many astronomical numbers in the placing of its bricks. Note the work of Subhash Kak on these topics. Vedic meters from 24 to 48 syllables, show a possible mathematical and astronomical code within the Vedic hymns. Note the statement of the Vedic bull:

Four horns, three feet, two heads and seven hands.
(catvari sringa trayo asya pada dve sirse sapta hastaso asya, *Rigveda* IV.58.3)

This suggests the Yuga number or cosmic age of 4,320,000,000 years.

PART II: SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF THE *Rigveda*

We have briefly examined the historical nature of the Vedic culture. Yet we must always remember that Vedic literature is primarily of a spiritual nature and historical references are incidental, secondary and incomplete, except in the king lists of the *Puranas* in which they are dealt with in detail. Unfortunately those who look into the historical side of the Vedas often fail to give attention to its spiritual dimension and cultural secrets.

Even some scholars today arguing for a greater continuity of the material culture from the Vedas to later India, do not always look into or even necessarily support a spiritual continuity from Vedic to later times.

I would propose here that just as there is a significant continuity of the outer material culture in historical terms, there is a similar significant continuity of the inner spiritual culture of India, its dharmic culture. Beyond this point, I would propose that most of what is characteristically Indian or Bharatiya in terms of spiritual culture, namely yoga, mantra, meditation, karma and rebirth theories and a dharmic view of life can be found at least in seed form in the oldest *Rigveda* itself, and do not require any outside pre-vedic or non-vedic origin.

The main type of person lauded in the *Rigveda* is of course the rishi or seer, said to be a kavi or poet, and enlightened or vipra. The rishi has the means to invoke the Devas or Divine powers into our life and into our consciousness. The rishi is identified with the main Vedic deities. The main concern in the Vedas is the worship of the Divine, both outwardly and inwardly, in the form of various Devatas or powers of light, truth, consciousness and bliss.

There is an entire set of traditional means of interpreting Vedic texts which show the different levels and dimensions of Vedic interpretation outer and inner:

These include:

Adhibhuta or relative to the elements and material world

Adhidaiva or relative to the cosmic and divine powers

Adhyatma or relative to psychological and meditational principles

Adhiyajna or relative to worship both outer as ritual and inner as yoga and meditation

History or Itihasa-Purana comes in at a secondary level

These traditional means of interpretation extend to both the Four Upavedas and Six Vedangas. *Upavedas* and *Vedangas* include factors of etymology and grammar such as in Yaska's *Nighantu* and *Nirukta*. They include music (*Gandharvaveda*), architecture (*Sthapatyaveda*), Ayurvedic medicine, Vedic mathematics and astronomy (*Jyotisha*).

Vedic teachings formed the basis of the culture of later India extending to the arts, sciences and social disciplines as well as spiritual and religious matters. Even non-Vedic groups like the Buddhist and Jains accepted and contributed to Ayurvedic medicine, Vedic astrology/astronomy, mathematics, art, poetry, dance and philosophy.

Most important is the Adhyatmic angle which suggests a spiritual and psychological meaning to Vedic deities, not merely an outer nature form.

The *Rigveda* states: "He who does not know the imperishable syllable (akshara) of the chant in the supreme ether, what can he do with the Vedas?" *Rigveda* I.164.39

Yet you will find few Vedic scholars and academics today who recognize, much less contemplate the Vedic chant as rooted in the supreme ether or supreme space of higher consciousness.

Inner Meaning of Vedic Deities

Vedic deities are not simply primitive forms of nature worship but are part of yogic understanding of the forces of nature as extensions of the power of consciousness. Let us take a snapshot of Agni, the main Vedic deity and representative of the sacred fire. Agni has many levels of meaning as a spiritual and cosmic principle.

Agni as the elemental fire on earth.

Agni as Jatavedas, the soul or life-fire in the atmosphere.

Agni as Vaishvanara, the universal soul or solar principle in heaven.

Agni as the ritualistic fire or Yajna.

Agni as the digestive fire or Jatharagni of Ayurvedic medicine.

Agni as the Pranagni or fire of Prana.

Agni as Vak or speech, particularly the Divine word that invokes the Devas.

Agni as Jiva, Ayus or Jivataman, the indwelling soul or angushta matra Purusha of the Upanishads.

Agni as the Yogagni or fire of Yoga, as mentioned in Svetasvatara Upanishad chapter 2.

Many of the terms used in the *Rigveda* for describing Agni are for a higher cosmic or divine power of light, intelligence and consciousness and indicate a psychological or Adhyatmic dimension to Agni:

kavi, rishi, vipra, prachetas, vichetas, kratu, daksha, medha, manisha, dhira, sat, satya, ritam, akshara, amrita, amartya, deva

There is a famous *Rigveda* verse relating to Yoga that occurs in the *Shukla Yajurveda* and in the description of Yoga practices in the second chapter of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*.

Seers of the vast illumined Seer yogically controlled their minds and their intellects. *Rigveda* V.82.1

(Yunjante manasa uta yunjante dhiyo vipra viprasya brhato vipascitta)

The idea of Yoga as control of the mind or chitta, such as we find the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is firmly rooted in Rigvedic ideas as we note here.

Modern Vedic Yoga Traditions

There are a number of modern traditions of esoteric and

yogic interpretation of the Vedas. There are several important modern schools of interpreting the *Rigveda* in terms of higher Yoga practices.

- Sri Aurobindo school, Kapali Shastri, MP Pandit, RL Kashyap
- Ganapati Muni School, Brahmarshi Daivarata
- Swami Veda Bharati of Swami Rama Sadhaka Gram Rishikesh
- Arya Samaj School, many scholars

Vedic Yoga: Rishi as Yogi

I have recently released a new book called *Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi* that deals with this topics. It aims to explain the Vedic mantras, going back to the *Rigveda* according to the practice of Yoga and meditation. It shows how the main Yogic paths of Jnana, Bhakti and Karma are there in the *Rigveda*, including much of both Raja and Hatha Yoga traditions.

Its main point is that Yoga is rooted in Om, Pranava and Mantra Yoga. Mantra Yoga in turn is rooted in the Sanskrit language and in the Vedic texts. The Vedas are the language of mantra and the language of Yoga. But to understand this we must look at the Vedic hymns as mantras, not simply as nature worship.

- Agni in the Vedas is the flame of awareness (Chidagni), Jivatman, Paramatman.
- Soma indicates the power of Ananda or bliss and the yogic state of samadhi.
- Indra-Vayu indicates secret knowledge of Prana.
- Surya, the Sun, is the enlightened mind or Universal light and consciousness.

Yoga is the antaryaga or inner sacrifice found in all the Vedic texts and relating to the subtle body, such as Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni has indicated. This may at first seem a leap of faith in terms of Vedic teaching, but once we understand the inner psychological function of the Vedic deities like Agni, we can easily see such higher indications.

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- Soma, Moon and the head, mind, meditation, samadhi
- Agni/Fire speech, mantra and earth or body
- Indra/Vidyut/Lightning as drishti, inner vision
- Surya/Sun as the heart, Prana, Atman

Let us examine the Vedic Hamsa mantra in closing. *Rigveda* IV.40.10

Hamsa sucisad – the hamsa or Sun bird in the region of light or heaven

Vasur anatarikhsasad – the pervasive wind in the atmosphere

Hota vedisad – the invoking fire at the earth altar

Atithi duronasad – the timeless guest in the house

Nrsad – he dwells in the human being

Varasad – he dwells in the supreme

Rtasad – he dwells in truth

Vyomasad – he dwells in space

Abja – he is born of the waters

Goja – he is born of light

Rtaja – he is born of truth

Adrija – he is born of the mountains

Rtam – he is the supreme truth

We see in this Vedic verse, also quoted in the *Upanishads*, that the Vedic rishi had a vision of the Divine or Supreme Self both within the mind and as pervading all of nature. His language was mantric and symbolic but his vision was Vedantic.

Conclusion

The literary evidence of the Vedas is of a sophisticated spiritual and material culture in India, covering most of the north and west of the country, with its roots going back to the

origins of agriculture. No other culture in the world has preserved such an important record for all humanity. It provides us a new window on our history and our human potential.

There is a need for an extensive new Vedic study and research in India, including considering the mantric and yogic dimensions of Vedic knowledge. This is one of the most important intellectual considerations for the coming century, not only for India but for the world as a whole. We hope that ICHR will take this issue up in a serious manner and produce a comprehensive and enlightened view of the Vedas. Above all a new time line of ancient India should be created in which both the outer evidence and Vedic literary evidence are adequately considered. In the process many important secrets of ancient civilization are bound to be revealed for the benefit of historians and thinkers everywhere.

Note on the Author

David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri) is an American Vedic teacher and author of more than thirty-five books on Vedic subjects published in more than twenty languages worldwide, including extensively in India. His fields of expertise include Yoga, Ayurveda, Vedanta, Vedic astrology and the Vedic texts. He is the director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies (www.vedanet.com), which is affiliated with several Vedic organizations worldwide. He has a D.Litt from S-VYASA and a Padma Bhushan (2015) award from the government of India. He is one of the founding advisors of the National Ayurvedic Medical Association in the United States, which has given him a lifetime achievement award in Ayurveda.

The goal of his work is to promote the cause of "Vedic Education," which recommends the teaching of Yoga, meditation and Ayurveda in schools, ashrams and temples. It includes developing a more accurate post-colonial and post-Marxist view of the history of India, particularly relative to the Vedic period, which is also aware of the spiritual dimensions of the Vedas through such great Vedic teachers in modern India as Sri Aurobindo, Ganapati Muni and Sri Sivananda Murty.

Relevant books of author – David Frawley

- *Gods, Sages, and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization*, 1991, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin – Motilal Banarsidass, India
- *Hidden Horizons: Unearthing 10,000 Years of Indian Culture*, 2006, Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Amdavad, India
- *Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India*, 1994, Voice of India, New Delhi, India
- *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization*, (with Feuerstein and Kak), 1995, Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois – Motilal Banarsidass, India.
- *Rig Veda and the History of India*, 2001, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, India
- *Soma in Yoga and Ayurveda: The Power of Rejuvenation and Immortality*, 2012, Lotus Press, Twin Lakes, Wisconsin – Motilal Banarsidass, India
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