

The Origin of the *Rig Veda* and India's Relation with Egypt, Babylon, and the Biblical Old Testament–I

GOPAL STAVIG

The Aryan Invasion Myth and Migration

Swami Vivekananda, an avid reader of history, was one of the first persons to vehemently oppose the 'Aryan Invasion of India Hypotheses,' which were widely accepted by the European historians at that time. Back in 1897, Vivekananda told his audience in India, 'As for the truth of these theories, there is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryan ever came from anywhere outside of India, and in ancient India was included Afghanistan.' He later stressed among other things,

And what your European Pundits say about the Aryans swooping down from some foreign land, snatching away the lands of the aborigines and settling in India by exterminating them, is all pure nonsense, foolish talk! Strange, that our Indian scholars, too, say amen to them and all these monstrous lies are being taught to our boys! This is very bad indeed.... I strongly protested against these ideas at the Paris Congress [International Congress of the History of Religions, 1900]. I have been talking with the Indian and European savants on the subject, and hope to raise many objections to this theory in detail, when time permits.... In what Veda, in what Sukta, do you find that the Aryans came into India from a foreign country? Where

do you get the idea that they slaughtered the wild aborigines? What do you gain by talking such nonsense? Vain has been your study of the *Ramayana*; why manufacture a big fine story out of it?¹

Today, with more evidence available, the intellectual community has rejected this idea. According to an Internet source, 'This "Aryan Invasion Theory" is not supported by the archeological and genetic data, and is not representative of the "Indo-Aryan migration theory".... The term "invasion" does not any longer reflect the scholarly understanding of the Indo-Aryan migrations, and is now generally regarded as polemical, distracting and unscholarly.'² The predominant Western hypothesis at this time is, 'The idea of an "invasion" has been discarded in mainstream scholarship since the 1980s, and replaced by the "Indo-Aryan migration theory."' It posits the introduction of Indo-Aryan languages into South Asia through migrations of Indo-European-speaking people from their Urheimat (original homeland) in the Pontic Steppes [Southern Russia between the northern area of the Black Sea and the northern shores of the Caspian Sea] via the Central European Corded ware culture, and Eastern European/Central Asian Sintashta culture, through Central Asia into the Levant (Mitanni), south Asia, and Inner Asia (Wusun and Yuezhi). It

is part of the Kurgan-hypothesis/Revised Steppe Theory, which further describes the spread of Indo-European languages into Western Europe via migrations of Indo-European speaking people.’ These migrants were not soldiers but engaged in other occupations like herdsmen. According to their Indo-Aryan migration theory widely held by many Westerners, the Indo-Aryans entered northwestern India at about 1500 B.C. Sanskrit first appeared in the *Rig Veda*, composed between 1500 B.C. and 1200 B.C.³

The problem with this contemporary theory is that the *Rig Veda*, which is indigenous to India, was composed long before 1500 B.C. and therefore predates this migration. In opposition to this hypothesis which is based on limited evidence, Swami Vivekananda stated in London in 1896, when quoting the *Rig Veda*, ‘Whom they call Indra, Mitra, Varuna—That which exists is One; sages call It by various names,’ ‘It was written, nobody knows at what date, it may be 8,000 years ago, in spite of all modern scholars may say, it may be 9,000 years ago.’⁴ Four years later he wrote, ‘There are books, etc., of a far earlier date, which one cannot find in any other country. Pandit Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) has brought evidence to show that the Vedas of the Hindus existed in the present form at least five thousand years before the Christian era.’⁵

The Indian *Rig Veda* and the Iranian Avesta do not mention an external homeland that these Westerners speak of. Outside of India there is nothing comparable to the lofty teachings of the *Upanishads* before the time of Plato. It is possible the *Rig Veda* was written down before 1500 B.C. since according to archaeological discoveries the earliest known writing was invented in 3400 B.C. in Sumer near the Persian Gulf (now

mostly modern Iraq which borders Iran then one with India). Another source tells us, based on archeological findings of cuneiform tablets from southern Mesopotamia, the invention of writing goes back to 3200 B.C.⁶ Also to be considered is the fact that oral tradition preceded the writing down of these scriptures.

One source suggests that the Aryan invasion theory was a powerful and convenient ideological tool supporting the legitimacy of British rule in India. The Northern Europeans were portrayed as a highly advanced and culturally superior people who invaded or migrated to India civilizing the indigenous people. This is not likely since Northern European civilization developed after that of the Middle East and the Mediterranean area.⁷

In *Aryatarangini: The Saga of the Indo-Aryans* (1969), Ayyaswami Kalyanaraman (b. 1903) made the wonderful discovery of the identity of some of the leading Egyptian and Babylonian deities with those of India. These deities existed long before 1500 B.C. when the Westerners think the *Rig Veda* was written.⁸

There are several Near Eastern deities with names and functions similar to those of Indian deities. The difference in spelling is mainly due to the differences in the manner in which they were pronounced in each language. The many religious similarities are too detailed to result from chance alone.⁹

Kalyanaraman equates the Egyptian Ptah the chief deity, creator and father with the Indian *Pitar*, the sun god, Hathor with *Savitār*, Nephty with *Nakta*, the Spirit of the night, Seb with Shiva, and Ima with *Umā*.¹⁰

India and Egypt and Babylon

Swami Vivekananda was a diffusionist stating, ‘There is not one single instance of any civilisation being spontaneous. There

was not a race in the world which became civilised unless another civilised race came and mingled with that race. The origin of civilisation must have belonged, so to say, to one or two races who went abroad, spread their ideas, and intermingled with other races and thus civilisation spread.¹¹ He also stated, 'That branch of the Aryan race which spoke the Sanskrit language was the first to become civilized and the first to begin to write books and literature. So they went on for thousands of years. How many thousands of years they wrote no one knows. There are various guesses—from 3000 B.C. to 8000 B.C. but all of these dates are more or less uncertain.'¹² So the *Rig Veda* was written not later than 3000 B.C. and possibly much earlier. This opens up the possibility of an Indian influence on Egypt and Babylon.

There are many similarities between the religions of ancient India and Egypt. In the political and social realm the first man and lawgiver was the Indian Manu (Manush) while Meni (Gr. Menes) (c. 3200-2850 B.C.) was the earliest political and legal ruler of a united Egypt. Other lawgivers such as the Cretan Minos (c. 1900 B.C.) and the Hebrew Mosheh (Moses) (13th-12th century B.C.) have similar sounding names. Many outstanding kings and heroes in India were looked upon as children of the sun (Sk. *Suryavansha*), including the Avatara Sri Rama. Likewise, the pharaohs referred to themselves as 'sons of Ra' the sun god. Both societies had a social organization composed of four castes consisting of priests, rulers and warriors, artisans and traders, and laborers.¹³

The religion of both India and Egypt had four deities (Sk. *loka-pālas*) who guarded and protected each of the four cardinal directions of the world. In India the seven sages (Sk. *saptarshi*) are the mind-born

sons of the creator God Brahmā, while in Egypt seven divine sages (Tchaasu VII) aided Thoth in planning the construction of the world, and presided over writing and painting. Ptah, the Egyptian god, is depicted as a mummy, has a bull named Apis, and a lion-goddess consort. Similarly, Shiva in India has a form as *Shava* the corpse, and is sometimes accompanied by *Nandi* the bull, and has a consort who rides a lion. The Egyptian Sun god Ra and the Indian creator deity Prajāpati shed the tears from which all creatures came into existence. Ra and Brahmā both emerged out of chaos as from a golden egg. Horus and Brahmā were each born from a lotus. Deities of good fortune in both Egypt and India were worshipped in order to gain health, happiness, and wealth, and to fulfil a variety of desires. The deities shared the common religious symbols of a cobra, bull, large birds (an eagle in India and a falcon in Egypt), crescent moon, lotus, and triangles. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484-425 B.C.), the Egyptians (like the Indians) at special festivals carried images of their deities on four-wheel carriages. The Egyptians believed, after dying, the soul was escorted to Osiris the god of Justice. In India the deceased person was taken to the scribe Chitragupta who read off a full account of his or her earthly deeds. In both religions a balance is used that weighs the persons' good and bad deeds, determining whether they will receive future rewards or punishment.¹⁴

According to the hieroglyphic dictionary, ancient Egyptians referred to India as Hentui, which is a cognate of the Hebrew Hoddu an abbreviation of Honadu (Old Testament, Book of Esther 1:1; 8:9), and the Persian word Hindu since for them India was located on the Eastern side of the Sindhu (modern Indus) River. The country

was called India in Greek and Latin. The original word referred to the country and the people and only later became the name of the religion (Hindu). Additional names for India were Hindu (Iran-Avesta), Sindhu (Babylonian), Hindi (Arabic), and Indoi, Indu (Greek) from which the name India is derived. What historical factors led to these nations having a similar name for the Indians? The Old Testament alludes to the Ionian Greeks as Javan (Genesis 10:2) which equates with the Indian Sanskrit *Yavanas*. For the word Ionian Klein's etymological dictionary gives Yavanah (Indian), Yawan (Hebrew), and Yevana (Egyptian). What kind of historical contact did the Indians, Hebrews in *Genesis*, and Egyptians have that resulted in their similar name for the Greek Ionians? The word Hindu appeared later in Indian Gaudiya Vaishnava texts and in 17th century Maharashtra. Possibly the oldest Indian language use of the term 'Hindu' first appeared in 1323 in an Andhra inscription. It would have been derived from Muslim sources, possibly Persian.¹⁵

Since Sumer and Babylon bordered Iran on their east side and the west side of Babylon bordered Egypt, the similarities between their religions is not surprising. Though they shared common borders they spoke different languages. India and Iran were originally one country but they

eventually split in two before the time of Zarathustra. After they divided, the Iranians and people in many other countries of the West considered India to be East of the Indus River, hence the modern words like Hindus and India.

The Indian story of the creation of the world described in the Laws of Manu (LM 1:5-46) shows many similarities with the Babylonian version as presented in the Enuma Elish (EE). Both Indians and the Babylonians mention seven prominent gods (LM 1:19, 36, 63; EE 6:81), had a Trinity of deities, venerated a mountain that rises to heaven (Sk. *Meru*; Bab. Mashu), and taught that the world was created out of eternally existing matter. Another striking similarity is between the Indian and Babylonian conception of a world cycle. Berossos (3rd century B.C.) taught that ten Babylonian kings ruled before the Flood for a period of 432,000 years, which is also the same time length as the Indian Kali Yuga. The period that preceded the Flood is, like the Kali Yuga, an age of calamities and unrighteousness. They both believed a world cycle begins and ends when the planets are in conjunction. An Indian world cycle is 4,320,000 years in length (Sk. *mahāyuga*), while the Babylonians divided this period into two subcycles each 2,160,000 years in length.¹⁶ ■

(To be continued)

REFERENCES

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 <i>Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda</i> (hereafter <i>CW</i>), III, p. 293; V, pp. 534-35.</p> <p>2 Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Aryan_migrations</p> <p>3 Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Aryanism</p> <p>4 <i>CW</i>, I, p. 349; VIII, p. 21.</p> | <p>5 <i>CW</i>, VII, p. 366.</p> <p>6 Web: www.getty.edu/news/where-did-writing-come-from; www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/wrtg/hd_wrtg.htm</p> <p>7 Web: www.archaeologyonline.net/artifacts/aryan-invasion-theories; has many interesting things to say, but the</p> |
|--|---|

Aryans were the Indians and Iranians not the foreign invaders as they state. Ancient India was known as Aryavarta (land of the Aryans) and the word Iran is a cognate of Aryan.

- 8 A. Kalyanaraman, *Aryatarangini* (New York, Asia Publishing House, 1969), vol. I, pp. 70-74, 101-06. Many of the Indian deities are mentioned in: John Dowson, *Hindu Mythology and Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LD, 1968); Ralph Griffith, tr., *Hymns of the Rgveda* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963), I. pp. 673-704; II, pp. 637-69. Many Asian-European deities are discussed in: Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (3 vols., New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962); Frank Bray, *The World of Myth* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1942); Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-European_religion; www.mythologydictionary.com/satan-mythology.html
- 9 Gopal Stavig, 'Historical Contacts Between Ancient India and Babylon,' *Journal of Indian History* (Platinum Jubilee Volume) (2001), pp. 6-7, 11-12, located at Web: http://www.vedantawritings.com
- 10 Kalyanaraman (1969), pp. 30, 70-71, 73.
- 11 *CW*, II, p. 28.
- 12 *CW*, IX, p. 251.
- 13 Gopal Stavig, 'Historical Contacts Between India and Egypt Before 300 A.D.,' *Journal of Indian History* (1989-92), pp. 1-22, located at Web: http://www.vedantawritings.com
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yona; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionians; www.hinduwebsite.info/hinduism/h_meaning.asp; *CW*, III:228;

VII:357-58; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Elsevier, 1971), p. 386; Monier-Williams, Monier, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); E. A. Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (London: John Murray, 1960), pp. 960, 992, 1012; James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), Appendix, pp. 32, 48, 97; Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1955), p. 513. Gopal Stavig, 'India and the Pentateuch,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 80 (1999), p. 87, located at Web: www.vedantawritings.com. Pānini an ancient Sanskrit grammarian (not later than fourth century B.C.) used the word Yavana (Greek) in his composition.

- 16 For more details see Stavig (2001), which is on the Internet at Web: http://www.vedantawritings.com. It is now known there was a definite Mesopotamian (Akkad, Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria) influence on Egyptian architecture, technology, and weaponry, accompanied by imported products, and a possible transfer of writing from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The most important period of cultural influence, consisting in the transfer of Mesopotamian imagery, symbols, and technology to Egypt probably lasted about 250 years, during the Naqada II (3600-3350 B.C.) period. The magnitude of the exchanges indicates that the contacts between Egypt and Mesopotamia were often direct, not only through trade (Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt-Mesopotamia_relations).

* A serious scholar and author of repute, Dr Gopal Stavig is a member of the Vedanta Society of South California.