Fixing History
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ARCHAEOLOGY

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B.B. Lal's book buries the Aryan Invasion myth by exhuming India's true antiquity

The outstanding feature of Professor Lal's book," says famed historian Shiva G. Bajpai, "is that in one volume you have the most comprehensive and up-to-date treatment of all the major archaeological sites of the Indus-Saraswati civilization." Lal's book, The Earliest Civilization of South Asia, delineates in 300 pages of readable text, as well as abundant photographs of excavated sights and artifacts, an extensive and engaging account of the Indus Valley Civilization's chronology, economy, religion, socio-political stratification, script as well as causes of decline and legacy. Hinduism Today correspondent, Archana Dongre interviewed the learned author and seasoned archaeologist, now 76, both in Los Angeles and in Delhi.

On the Aryan Invasion theory

The Indus civilization came to a peak from 2600 bce to 1900 bce. Marauding Aryans [war-like tribes from central Asia, central to an invasion theory long believed by Western Indologists] can no longer be held responsible for the destruction of the Harappan civilization. Perhaps climactic

changes, environmental degradation and a steep fall in trade robbed the civilization of its affluence.

On why the Aryan Invasion is still taught

No overnight change is possible for many teachers and scholars. Let them first realize that there was no evidence of Aryan invasion. Also let them understand that the geography of the Rig Veda coincides with that of Harappan civilization. The equation of Harappans being Dravidians [that is, the present residents of South India who speak Tamil, Telugu and related Dravidian languages] does not exist. Max Muller's theory that the Harappans were driven away to the south by marauding Aryans does not hold true, also because we do not have a single Harappan site in South India, south of the river Godavari [as would be expected if the Harappans were pushed to the South].

On who lived in Indus Valley

The flourishing trade, affluence, social order and a lifestyle of luxury had attracted to Indus Valley, the earliest civilization of South Asia, people from varied races and regions, even outside of the continent. Skeletons excavated indicate that the population comprised Mediterraneans, Caucasoids, Armenoids, Alpines, Australoids and Mongoloids [meaning people from as far away as China and Europe were living in Indus Valley].

On yajna fire worship

Fire altars [which figure prominently in the ancient Vedic texts] have been found in Banawali, Lothal and Kalibangan cities of the Indus Valley. They are found in houses and also in public places. In Kalibangan, a row of seven fire altars has been found in the southern half of the "Citadel," major part of the city. My chapter on religion in The Earliest Civilization of South Asia deals extensively with fire altars, built in such a way that the worshipper can sit facing the east [an important point, for the fire altars described in the Vedas all allow the worshipper to face east].

On the date of the Vedas

The river Saraswati was a major river both in the Vedas and in the Harappan civilization, flowing from the Himalayan mountains to the Bay of Bengal. [Long thought mythical, it was recently rediscovered in the deserts of Rajasthan from satellite images]. The sites at Kalibangan were ruined around 1900 bce due to the drying up of Saraswati [caused by massive climatic changes and shifts in the Earth's surface]. The Vedas must date before that. Sanskrit probably existed 2000 years before 1900 bce [putting the origin of Sanskrit before 4000 bce]. It can easily take two millenniums for a language to originate and develop to the level of versifying and compositions in meters.

On Natwar Jha's Indus seal translations

I have not evaluated his book [see page 32, in which Jha claims to have translated the seals]. When it came out, my book was

already in print. But I have devoted an entire chapter to the "Script and Language" in my book, and I have shown how the methodology of various scholars, the ones who are trying to read Sanskrit in it, and others who want to read Proto-Dravidian in it, have gone wrong. The simple test is that there should be uniformity. Whatever value you give to a symbol it should be uniform throughout.

On the nature of the script

The Harappan script is neither logographic, that is, comprised of pictures which corresponded to words, nor alphabetic, that is comprised of letters which formed words. It may have been at some transitional stage between the logographic and the alphabetic, perhaps nearer the latter [a conclusion also reached by Jha].

On his personal religious beliefs

I do not believe in external rituals like havana (fire worship) or puja, but in the constant search for the ultimate truth through one's own experience, swanubhava. I was initiated many years ago by Gurudeva R. D. Ranade, who was a professor of philosophy and later vice chancellor of the Allahabad University. I also believe in meditation and yoga. Meditation and yoga practices enable one to have a tensionless, quiet mind. The mental energy is conserved. I believe in unconditional, complete surrender to the God's wish. Then you are free from problems.

PROF. B.B. LAL, F-7 HAUZ KHAS ENCLAVE, NEW DELHI 110016 INDIA. THE EARLIEST CIVILIZATION OF SOUTH ASIA IS AVAILABLE FROM ARYAN BOOKS INTERNATIONAL, 4378/4B POOJA APARTMENTS, 4, ANSARI ROAD, DARYA GANJ, NEW DELHI 110002 INDIA.