



A Historical Review of the Aryan Culture in India

Raj Kumar

Assistant Professor in History, Government Girls College, Rewari, Haryana, India.

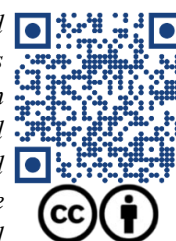
E-mail: rksuhag2004@gmail.com

Received: 26 Mar 2026; Received in revised form: 21 Apr 2026; Accepted: 25 Apr 2026; Available online: 30 Apr 2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— The term “Aryan” originally denotes an ancient self-identification in ethno-cultural terms used by Indo-Iranian countries, which means noble man. In historical terms, it denotes nomadic populations speaking Indo-Iranian languages that settled down on the Iranian Plateau and in northern India, which paved the way for the blossoming of the Vedic and Iranian civilizations. According to a theory that appeared in the middle of the 19th century, the Aryans were light-skinned people who inhabited ancient Iran and northern India about 1500 BCE. A number of scholars agree with the fact that the Aryans crossed into the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent through Iran from Central Asia. This fact has been supported by many historians. According to the results of historical and genetic studies, the population has its beginnings in the Eurasian Steppes, where tribes came from Central Asia and traveled across the Iranian Plateau before reaching the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. Nonetheless, today’s studies don’t support the former claims about the military invasion. In the present time, it is evident that the process was slow in the form of cultural diffusion; their writings and beliefs brought much influence to the cultural development of India. Like other ancient cultures, the Aryans believed in many Gods and deities; they practiced polytheism. It is agreed by many scholars that numerous verses of the Rigveda mention the encounters of the Aryans and the native population of the Indian subcontinent. The Aryans are called “dasyu”, a servant or a slave in this ancient Indian piece of literature. The Rigveda describes how Indra, the main Hindu God, destroyed the settlements of the Dasyu. Besides, in hymns to Agni, the God of fire, it is stated that the Aryans advanced in their movements and burned forests to expand their territorial and economic occupations. Moreover, the Aryans gave a hierarchical society dividing the population into four Varnas, which became the social system and turned into castes and subcastes. The present research paper makes a review of the Aryan culture focusing on the impacts of this culture on religion, society, languages, philosophy etc. in India.



Keywords— Hinduism, Rigveda, Sanskrit, Culture, Society, Varnas, Religion, Dasyu, Dard Aryans.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today “Aryans” in India refer to nomadic tribes, probably from the Steppes of Central Asia, who came into the Indian continent sometime from 1500 to 1000 BCE. The emergence of Vedic culture, which became very influential in the further development of Hinduism and the establishment of the caste division, is connected to this migration. The Aryans probably first settled in the fertile area of the Indus River after they had either succeeded the previous inhabitants of the Harappan Civilization or lived alongside them. A number of scholars who are the

supporters of the Aryans invasion theory, mention linguistic links between Indo-European languages, physical difference between the Aryans and local communities, and archaeological evidence in support of their point of view. Many contemporary Indologists challenge the notion of invasion in favor of a more nuanced understanding of the intricate culture and language interactions that could have occurred in the past, proposing the hypothesis of coexistence and cultural exchange between the Aryans and Harappans opposed to the conqueror-conquered relationship. The present debate sheds light on broader

questions in historiography and cultural identity in the South Asian region.

Today some of the historians and scholars seem to admit the fact that the period that followed the year 2000 BCE was a phase of immense transition and fusion in the Indian context, where the Aryans and the Dravidians were expanding, agriculture was flourishing, and rice was being introduced. Then several centuries later, when states emerged along the Ganges River banks, Dravidians were merging with and influencing Aryans communities, a process that must, however, have taken a long time. The Dravidian and Aryans were then rapidly spreading all across the Indian subcontinent until very recently when the Dravidian and Aryans have already become part of the whole nation as well as its lower social classes. During this emergence of a new epoch in different spheres, which included the ones where two groups of people fused genetically known as ANI (Ancestral North Indian) and ASI (Ancestral South Indian), a wave of migration from the Indus Valley region to the Ganges Valley and beyond began; in some areas the ANI group got mingled not only with ASI but also with Southeast Asian genetic groups.

II. WHO WERE ARYANS?

The name “*Aryans*” originating from the Sanskrit word “*arya*” meaning noble, is an indication of pastoral tribes that spoke Indo-Iranian language and came to the northern part of India about 1500 BCE. It is said that Aryans’ cultural practices laid down the base of Vedic age influencing the language of classical India, social structure, and philosophy. Many historians agree that Aryans culture in India emerged via slow Indo-Aryan migration from Central Asia, between 1800-1500 BCE. The Aryans are believed to have stayed first somewhere in the Steppes from Russia to Central Asia. The lifestyle of Aryans is mainly concentrated on pastoral life style and agriculture as a main occupation. It was a real male-dominated society as men had dominated the Aryans culture. The horse was the main animal of the Aryans. After being in India Aryans appeared in Central Asia and Iran where Indo-Iranians would live for a long time. The horse-drawn chariots served to be the major reason for Aryans being successful in Indo-Europe. In all probability, the Aryans were the first people to introduce the concept of the spoked wheel to India. The Aryan fighters also wore their protective gear (called *varman*) and were equipped with bronze weapons. Their special weapons were custom-built ax-heads, daggers, and swords found in northwestern parts of India. The Rigveda provides details about the events of their life in India. The term “*Arya*” which implies a certain community, is used in the Rigveda 36 times.

One must understand that while the Aryans may have migrated from somewhere outside of India (as might other groups too, possibly including the Dravidians), they very quickly became part of the local culture, making their Central Asian origins less relevant in importance. This process usually does not take much time. Take, for example, Babur, the Turko-Mongol founder of the Mughal Empire in India, who felt very uncomfortable in India; in stark contrast, his grandson Akbar became fully integrated into the local culture. The various rituals and icons in Hinduism reflect local influences, spirituality, and gods, as well as aspects of the tropics (such as worshiping coconuts and bananas); many of the main ideas in Hinduism and Buddhism, like reincarnation and karma, are either undeveloped or missing in the early Vedic tradition altogether. The language Sanskrit begins to show more and more signs of Dravidian influence and borrowing – e.g. the use of retroflex consonants (which are very common in India) and the frequent use of left-branching features of an otherwise different language, which have moved the subject of the sentence to the end position. Thus, regardless of their origins, the Dravidians and Aryans settled in India and developed their civilization there.

III. ADVENT OF ARYANS

According to the Aryans invasion theory, the Indo-Aryans invaded northwestern India in several waves thereby overpowering the natives of the region. It is believed that they occupied the regions around the pristine banks of the Indus River (originally called *Sindhu*) that flows down from Hindu Kush Mountain in the north to the Arabian Sea, not far from modern Karachi after receiving the waters of the five rivers in Punjab. Eventually, the Indo-Aryans moved towards the southeast and northeast. Those who spoke the Indo-Aryan language crossed the northwestern mountain ranges and became established in the northwestern part of Punjab and then in the Ganges plain. They were called Aryans or Indo-Aryans. Their spoken language was the Indo-Iranian, the Indo-European, or Sanskrit. The Aryans origin is still uncertain, and scholars have different opinions on that. As per the sources, the Aryans inhabited the country east of the Alps (Eurasia), Central Asia, Arctic, Germany, and Southern Russia. It is admitted by many scholars that the Aryans originally denoted a group believed to have spoken an early language of Indo-European nature and supposed to have settled in ancient Iran and northern India in pre-history times. The Aryans came to India during early Vedic times, which is known as *Saptasindhu*, meaning the land of seven rivers: *Jhelum*, *Chenab*, *Ravi*, *Beas*, *Sutlej*, *Indus*, and *Saraswati*. Meanwhile, some facts established about Aryans culture are:

> The Aryans entered India about 1500 BCE and came to be known as Indo-Aryans. They spoke the Indo-Aryan language “Sanskrit”.

> The Aryans first settled in a part of Asia called “The Land of Five Rivers,” which refers to river Sindhu and its five tributaries mentioned in the Rigveda.

> The Sindhu river refers to the Indus river; Sindhu river was unique for the Aryans.

> The river Saraswati is referred to as Naditarna; meaning the greatest river in Rigveda. It means the same river called Ghaggar-Hakra channel in Haryana and Rajasthan.

IV. ARYAN CULTURE IN VEDIC ERA

The term “*Veda*” derives from its root verb “to know” or “knowledge”. The four most important Vedas are:

Rigveda: The Rigveda has 10 parts which contain 1028 hymns dedicated to the gods. The Mandalas two to seven are referred to as family books as they describe the sages who were legends among families such as: Gritsamada, Vishvamitra, Bama-deva, Agnimitra, Bharadvaj, and Vasistha.

Yajurveda: The Yajurveda describes the political, social, and administrative structures to be kept in mind; it is further divided into two parts: Krishna Yajurveda and Shukla Yajurveda.

Samaveda: This book has many verses and constitutes chants and prayers in 1810 hymns.

Atharvaveda: This Veda comprises hymns, traditional dances, and medicinal practices.

4.1. Brahmanas

This refers to the prayers and sacrifices included in the second category of Vedas. The Tandyamaha Brahmana is considered to be the oldest and has several legends about it. The legends say about the ritual known as Vratyasoma which is said to change a non-Aryan into an Aryan. The most famous and significant Brahmana is Satapatha Brahman, which is rich in information regarding philosophy, religion, behavior, and all customary traditions. The last chapter of Brahmanas is known as Aranyakas. The two Brahmanas which are related to Rigveda are: Aitareya and Kausitaki.

4.2. The Upanishadas

The Upanishadas are rich in philosophy and soul, there are actually 108 types of Upanishads. The foremost and well-known Upanishads are: Brihadarnayaka and Chandogya. It is mentioned in the Mundaka Upanishad that “*Satyamev Jayate*”.

V. ARYANS CONFLICTS IN INDIA

It is agreed by many historians and scholars that around 1500 BC, Aryans were the first to invade India; they came into conflict with the local tribes, such as the Dashas, who were defeated without much violence. However, the term “Dashahatiya” is mentioned in Rigveda as the massacre of Dravidians. The figure of Indra comes in the Rigveda as Purandara, which means ‘the one who destroys fortresses’. The mention of forts, which existed before the Aryans, could refer to Harappan settlements as well. As we know that the Aryans had access to more advanced weapons and chariots, making it easier to defeat the local tribes. The Aryans fought with the natives as well as among themselves; they were divided into five tribes known as Panchajanas, sometimes seeking help from non-Aryans. The Aryan colonels were known as Bharata and Tritsu, and the priest Vasishtha was helping them. Accordingly, the name Bharatvarsha comes from the king Bharat.

5.1. The Aryans & Tribal Conflicts

The Aryans were not only in conflict with the former inhabitants of the land but also among themselves. The natives were referred to as Dasa and Dasayu. The Dashas might have been descendants of the early Aryans. The Dashu’s presented in Rigveda may point to the original settlers of the land. The Aryan general, Tranadasa is said to have vanquished the Dasayu. Today, Dashas are also present in some parts of Iran. The word “*Dashatiya*” which means killing Dash has been used quite often in Rigveda. The Aryans are said to have been divided into five tribes, which were called Panchajana. Meantime the Bharats and Trits were the main Aryan clans represented by the priest Vasishtha. India derived its name Bharatvarsha after the Bharat tribe, which was named in Rigveda.

5.2. The War of Dasarajan

The War of Dasarajan is the term given to the war that took place between the Bharata dynasty and ten other kings. The Bharata dynasty was an Aryan dynasty that had five Aryans and five non-Aryan kings. The Dasarajan War took place on the river Parushani, also known as Ravi. The Sudas were successful in this battle and later formed an alliance with the Purus to give rise to the Kurus. Then, during the later Vedic era, the Kurus and the Panchalas emerged as major political powers in the upper Gangetic plains region. It is a historically agreed fact that most of the wars were fought for the sake of cows in the past as the term “*gavishta*” means war and literally translates to searching for cows.

VI. THE IMPACTS OF ARYAN INVADERS

The invasion of Aryans was not a military conquest, but rather a cultural migration around 1500 BCE in the Indus

Valley. At that time, they were nomadic warriors. They later moved to the region around the Ganges river and then to the Deccan Plateau. Most of what we know about the Aryans comes from the Vedas, which are a set of texts that contain the prayers, hymns, and other writings of the Aryans. The Aryans brought the Indo-European language, Sanskrit, and their culture. Today, languages like English, German, and Spanish belong to the Indo-European language family. Like other ancient civilizations, the Aryans were religious, and they believed in many gods, such as Indra, the god of war. There were also gods associated with nature, such as the sky, air, and water, and the Brahmins, the priests of the Aryans, sacrificed to them. Later, people worshiped one god, called Brahman. The Aryans distributed the entire population into the four major castes, which were further subdivided into thousands of subcastes. Then, over a period of time, the Aryan culture along with the caste system spread throughout a wide area of the Indian subcontinent. The Aryan civilization developed in some places, primarily on the vast fertile plains of the Ganga river. The impact of the arrival of Aryans in India is as follows:

6.1. The Philosophy of Hinduism

The Vedas, sacred books of Hinduism, were written after the advent of the Aryans in India. Some of the interesting features of the idea of dharma found in the Vedic texts were adopted in Indian religions like Jainism and Buddhism as well. A number of scholars agree with the fact that Hinduism was non-existent before the Aryans came to India. Their arrival brought the fusion of ideas of religions of the Aryans and the native people of the Indus Valley (Dravidians), giving rise to the earliest forms of Hinduism. The emergent form of Hinduism contained more Aryan religious features and developed into what we have now. The Aryans migration brought in a hybrid religion and culture to later India. Nevertheless, most of the scholars uphold the position that it was mainly the impact of Aryans that prevailed.

6.2. Impact on Languages

The Aryans spoke Sanskrit. After coming to India, they were able to culturally and socially take over Dravidians. As a result, the natives of India started using Sanskrit, which was mixed with local languages leading to the linguistic picture of the Indian subcontinent. Today there are many languages of the Indo-Aryan family in India, the most of which are derivatives of Sanskrit.

6.3. The Rise of Caste System

As we know, the caste system of India is one of those old features that create barriers amongst people based on race, tribe, religion, gender, class, language, etc. The invasion of Aryans into India gave a hierarchical society or rise to a social system that impacted Indian culture immensely. They

sorted the people into four “*Varnas*” (caste) maintaining the ritual purity. In other words we can say that the caste system divided the population into four large castes, which were further divided into countless sub-castes. The caste system defines the occupation as well as social standing of people. Non-caste people were called untouchables, predominantly native Indians who were conquered by the Aryans.

6.4. War and Conflicts

A number of scholars admit the fact that the people of that era lived in harmony and were not prone to armed disputes or divisions. However, this scenario changed completely when the Aryans came to the scene, and employed their violent and warlike approach, leading to the transformation of the peaceful environment of India into a battlefield until they completely subjugated the natives.

6.5. Impact on Ladakh Region

The tribal people of Jammu and Kashmir's Ladakh region are known for their open-minded practices and colourful avatars. They have appealed to the authorities to do something and help maintain their cultural diversity. Experts believe that the Dard Aryans' wealth of heritage is in danger due to civilization, immigration and religious conversion. The Dard Aryans live in the Dar, Kanu, Bhima, Darchik and Garkhon villages of Leh and Kargil districts. The cluster is commonly known as the “*Aryan Valley*”. The people of this region are quite different from those who live elsewhere in Ladakh. The Dard Aryans are believed to consume only milk and meat from goats and sheeps; they follow the solar calendar in their religious festivals and agricultural practices. The Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (INGCA) reports that the ‘Ladakhi Aryans’, or ‘Blokpa’ in their language, were involved in Alexander the Great's campaigns and settled in their area more than 2,500 years ago. Today, this tribe is considered endangered due to the reduction in their population from 20,000 many years ago to only about 4,000 people today. The Dard Aryans are engaged in agriculture; they do not have education and live in poverty. The Dard Aryans did not document their history and passed down their culture orally. The majority of the Dard Aryans are Muslims or Buddhists, and modernization has a detrimental impact on their traditions.

A scholar named Virendra Bangloo, researcher at IGNCA, says that the word “Dard” has been derived from the Sanskrit word “Daradas”, which literally means people living in hills. According to him, the community has a high value of its genetic heritage, it prohibits marriages with outsiders.. According to the community members, there are only three secondary schools in the village, which provides very limited opportunities for the people of the tribe because they live in a remote area with harsh climate. Therefore, they demand to change the current situation; they claim that

their government has to create a tribal reserve in the region and to declare the Aryan Valley a heritage village, which will help to attract tourists.

VII. CONCLUSION

Now we can conclude that when the Aryans came to live in the Indus and Ganges plains, they brought along Vedic traditions, the most ancient Sanskrit texts like Rigveda and other aspects which exerted an impact on the religion and culture of India. They divided the society into four Varnas. Today a number of scholars assume the fact that the Aryans played an important role in the lives of the various ethnicities they entered into contact with. At the same time, it should be noted that the Aryans felt superior because they knew a lot about culture that was totally different from that practiced by the local people. The adherents of Rigveda think that those who did not follow the system of sacrifices have to be destroyed and their wealth is to be shared out. In addition to this, the Aryans were also stronger in military terms and this point explains their free movement in separate territories of India. Thus, one can assume that the Aryans were not indigenous people of India, because the artefacts connected to them are not the oldest ones. By way of example, in the case of the Rigvedic pantheon, the religion of the Indus Valley civilization essentially featured worship of the male gods whereas it could be argued that the worship of either Mother Goddess or the female gods predominated. Nevertheless, the solving of the Indo-European problem in general and the Aryan problem in particular is significant in the comprehensive understanding of the progression of the history of mankind.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, D. (2012). "The Historiography of the Medieval in South Asia". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume-22(1).
- [2] Arendt, H. (2018). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Franklin Classics Trade Press, New York.
- [3] Avari, B. (2016). *India: The Ancient Past: A History of the Indian Subcontinent*. Routledge, London.
- [4] Bryant, Edward. (2001). *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- [5] Chattopadhyaya, B. D. (2012). *The Making of Early Medieval India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [6] Erdosy, George. ed. (1995). *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture, and Ethnicity*. Walter De Gruyter, New York.
- [7] Guha, S. (2015). *Artefacts of History: Archaeology, Historiography and Indian Pasts*. Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- [8] Koller, J. M. (2007). *Asian Philosophies*. Prentice Hall7, New York.
- [9] Kulke, H. & Rothermund, D. A. (1995). *History of India*. Noble Books, Mumbai.
- [10] Long, J. D. (2010). *Historical Dictionary of Hinduism*. Littlefield Publishers, UK.
- [11] Mallory, J. P. (1989). *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology, and Myth*. Thames and Hudson, New York.
- [12] Manian, Padma. (1998). "Harappāns and Aryans: Old and New Perspectives of Ancient Indian History." *The History Teacher*, Volume-32.
- [13] Oppert, G. S. (1988). *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsa or India: The Dravidians*. Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.
- [14] Trautmann, Thomas R. (1997). *Aryans and British India*. University of California Press, Berkeley.