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AGHA IQRAR HAROON says that the latest move by a Hindu scholar to prove that the so-called Sarasvati culture (named after a past river) was superior to the Indus valley culture, is politically motivated. It has no basis in history

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A retired archaeologist from Aligarh Muslim University, in a study sponsored by Indian Council for Historical Research, has propounded the theory that the inhabitants of the Harappan civilisation were Aryans and not Dravidians. It may not be an important issue and significant development by those who are not interested in anthropology, history, archaeology and ethnology. However students and researchers of human society and history can understand that how deep and far reaching impacts can be if Indians fundamentalists win over this new theory. One immediate impact would be cultural only Muslims were intruders on this land not Berhamans (Aryans). Only Muslims were foreigners not top class Hindus. Moreover, Pakistan will lost its status among pre-historic places and societies.

The study done by Prof. M.D.N. Sahi, which has brought sharp reaction from established archaeologists and ancient Indian historians, states that the root of the Harappan civilisation lay in the region between the Ganga and the Saraswati - the Brahmarishidesh. By doing so he has questioned the existing proposition that the Harappan culture had its genesis near the Indus Valley.

Basing his analysis on excavations he carried out at various sites particularly in the Gangetic valley of Uttar Pradesh, Prof. Sahi claims that it was from this region that the earlier inhabitants of the Harappan civilisation moved westward towards the Indus Valley, where the mature stage of the civilisation emerged.

"It is normally believed that the Kot Diji culture (a place near the historic Mohenjodaro on Indus river in South Pakistan) gave rise to the mature Harappan culture and is termed as Early Harappan. But, this is not so. It had the least role to play in the growth of the Harappan culture, rather it was not conducive to its growth," Prof. Sahi told in one of his interviews to "The Hindu" last year.

"The study reveals that Gangetic basin OCP (Ochre Coloured Pottery) culture, in fact, represented the Early Harappan period. This is further confirmed by the fact that the graffiti marks on the potteries of sites of this area bore the characters of Harappan script," he said, adding: "The script was also associated with this culture from the initial stage."

Prof. Sahi said in the early stages, there existed two streams of culture in the region - the Kot Diji culture and the one between Ganga and Saraswati, which was real Harappan in its infancy. "This culture then spread westward and amalgamated and assimilated the Kot Diji culture. At times, they even conquered Kot Diji people. This is reflected in the pottery remains," he said.

The mature Harappan civilisation, he said, grew through a natural organic evolutionary process represented by four stages - infancy (3,500 BC to 3,100 BC), adolescence (3,100-2,700 BC) adulthood (2,700-2,500 BC) and mature urban phases (2,500-1,900 BC). "With this all doubts about the genesis and evolution of the Harappan civilisation is now cleared," Prof. Sahi said.

Prof. Sahi, who has two theories to his credit - use of iron in India started from the 16th Century BC and that there was no gap between the urbanisation of Harappan and Buddhist period - claimed that literary and archaeological evidences indicated that Harappans were the early Aryans, having their "indigenous origin" in the region between the Sarasvati and the Ganga in the first half of the fourth millennium BC.

As regards the popularly believed theory that the Aryans came from outside and conquered the Dravidians and people of the Harappan civilisation, Prof. Sahi said: "The dichotomy of Aryans and Dravidians is not justified. Both co-existed during the same period but in different regions. The Dravidians were not driven out by the Aryans."

This latest "Hindu move" is rejected by even sane elements within India and Prof. D.N. Jha of University of Delhi, has categorically rejected proposition of Prof. Sahi. Referring to the study which is funded by the ICHR, well-known ancient Indian historian, has alleged that this is only a part of a larger game plan of the fascist organisations like the RSS to prove that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of India and never came from outside."

Being a student of ethnology and history, I would like to go through the work of top Indian historians including Ram Sharan Sharma former Chairman, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi, S.P. Gupta, V.N. Misra, R. C. Thakran and B. B. Lal who are considered as authorities on the pre-historic Indo-Pak history by world renowned historians for exploring roots of Harappan Civilisation.

Some archaeologists consider India to be the original, which they place in the Sarasvati basin. According to S. P. Gupta, formerly of the National Museum, New Delhi, "the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation represents one very important aspect of the developed Vedic civilisation." He adds that the Harappan culture was "the gift of both the rivers and perhaps more of the latter (Sarasvati)." He thinks in terms of the Indus versus the Sarasvati and India versus Pakistan. In his view, the existence of more than 700 Harappan sites on the Sarasvati and its tributaries,

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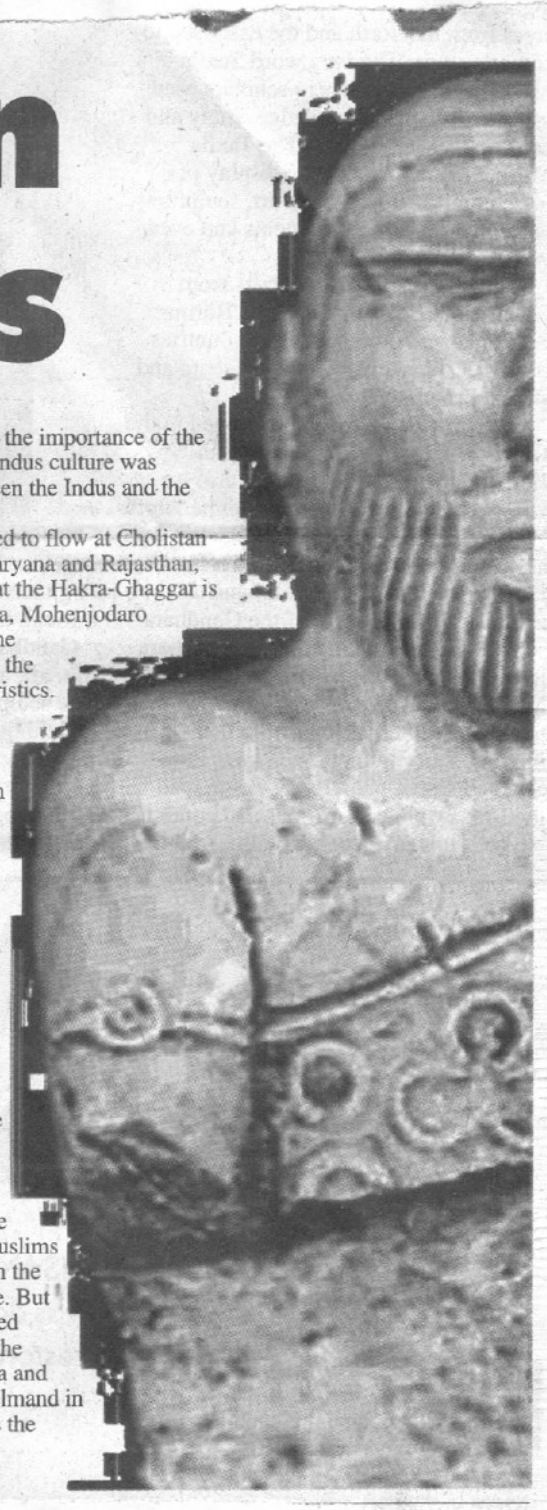

in contrast to not even 100 Harappan sites on the Indus and its tributaries, underlines the importance of the Sarasvati. V. N. Misra of the Deccan College, Pune, also supports the view that the Indus culture was Sarasvati-based. But we cannot gloss over the other aspects of the comparison between the Indus and the Sarasvati.

To begin with, the Sarasvati is identified with the Ghaggar or the Hakra, which used to flow at Cholistan and Indian desert and then lost forever. The river is called the Ghaggar in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, and the Hakra beyond the Indian border in Pakistan. It must be clearly understood that the Hakra-Ghaggar is a tributary of the Indus. Further, none of the major Harappan sites, including Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Dholavira, is located on the Hakra or the Ghaggar; only Kalibangan is close to the Ghaggar. Banawali in Hissar district is not as important as Kalibangan, and Kunal in the same district cannot be taken as a Harappan site because of its own distinct characteristics. No Harappan settlements appear in Ambala and Sirsa districts where the Ghaggar is important. This is the finding of R. C. Thakran of Delhi University who has surveyed the Harappan sites in Haryana. According to him, the dry bed of the Ghaggar (Hakra) has 55 pre-Harappan or early Harappan sites, 117 mature Harappan sites and 581 late Harappan sites. A similar survey made in the Hakra area in the Cholistan desert (Bahawalpur) in Pakistan by the Pakistani archaeologist M. R. Mughal shows 40 early Harappan, 174 mature Harappan and 50 late Harappan sites. Thakran's survey shows that a good many people from decaying towns in the south-west migrated towards the north-east and settled in the Ghaggar area in the late Harappan phase.

The Hakra or the Ghaggar basin is only one of several areas which show the earliest elements of the Harappan culture. Kot Diji (KD) and 72 Kot Diji Phase sites, located in the central Indus Valley region, are far more important. The KD phase clearly was critical in the development of the Harappan phase, or the Indus Valley civilisation. Several sites in Balochistan also reveal some elements of the Harappan culture. Hence the Sarasvati can neither be called a major contributor to the Harappan culture nor equated with the Indus in this respect. However, if in future the Sarasvati sites reveal Harappan cultural contents that surpass those of the well-known Harappan sites outside the Hakra and the Ghaggar zone, the Sarasvati will certainly get far more credit.

Religious fundamentalists want to establish the superiority of the Sarasvati over the Indus. In the Harappan context, they think that after partition the Indus belongs to Muslims and only the Sarasvati remains with Hindus. The Sarasvati receives much attention in the Rag Veda and several suktas are devoted to it; so they want to use it for their purpose. But it seems that there are several Sarasvatis, and the earliest Sarasvati cannot be identified with the Hakra and the Ghaggar. In the Rag Veda, the Sarasvati is called the best of the rivers (naditama). It seems to have been a great river with perennial water. The Hakra and the Ghaggar cannot match it. The earliest Sarasvati seems to be identical with the Helmand in Afghanistan, which is called Harkhwati in the Avesta. In the Avesta H is the same as the Sanskrit S. As the Vedic people expanded, they took this name

See page 3