

Zydenbos vs. Rajaram: a Case Study in Aryan Invasion Polemic

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A primer in AIT polemic

For a case study in anti-AIT polemic, I have chosen the article “An obscurantist argument” by the Dutch-Canadian scholar Robert J. Zydenbos. (1) His bona fides is unquestionable, and he represents the majority of AIT-believing scholars in that he merely accepts the predominant opinion without having a political axe to grind, though this makes him susceptible to being influenced by AIT defenders who do have political motives. He is emphatically not a representative of the anti-Brahminism so prevalent among Western India-watchers, being in fact the author of an informed critique of this ideological distortion of much contemporary scholarship. (2) Some of the rhetoric in this article typifies the way in which certain AIT defenders in positions of authority tend to over-awe the public with references to overrated evidence, and to vilify spokesmen of the dissident non-AIT school. The piece is an attack on N. S. Rajaram, a scientist from Karnataka (in AIT parlance: a Dravidian, not an Aryan) working in the USA, who has contributed decisive insights to the AIT debate. (3) I disagree on some important points with Prof. Rajaram, most of all with his rejection of the linguistic reconstruction of an IE protolanguage; but that is no reason to dismiss his work as “a textbook example of the quasi-religious-cum-political obscurantism that is so popular among alienated Non-Resident Indians”, which is moreover “out of touch with what serious scholars both in India and abroad hold at present”, as Zydenbos alleges. “The linguistic evidence for the Indo-European origin of Sanskrit outside India is Overwhelming”, he claims, in almost verbatim agreement with Prof. Romila Thapar, whom he defends against Rajaram’s critique of her article “The Perennial Aryans”. (4) Neither in his nor in Prof. Thapar’s much lengthier article is even one item of this “overwhelming evidence” mentioned. However, Dr. Zydenbos can claim the merit of being one of the first (to my knowledge, the very first) among the defenders of the AIT to actually respond to the rising tide of anti-AIT argumentation.

Ethnically pure Aryans

Zydenbos starts his crescendo of allegations by stating something Rajaram never disputed: “No scholar seriously believes that there are any ‘ethnically pure’ Aryans in India today (and perhaps anywhere else, either). And why should anyone care?” Actually, Rajaram himself is among those who reject the notion of ‘ethnically pure Aryans’, not because of the obvious fact that countless inter-ethnic marriages have taken place, but because he rejects the use of “Aryan” as an ethnic term in the first place. As he and many others have argued time and again, the Sanskrit word Arya was not an ethnic term, it is Western scholars who have turned it into one. And it is the Western participant in this duel, Dr. Zydenbos, who, even after reading Prof. Rajaram, just continues to use “Aryan” as an ethnic and even as a racial term: “Those who called themselves ‘Aryan’ 1000 years ago were already very different from the various Aryan tribes that came over 3500 years ago (...) This too is historical fact. One only needs to learn Sanskrit to find this out.” I fear that there is something very wrong with Sanskrit courses if accomplished indologists can read Arya in a racial sense unattested in the

whole of Sanskrit literature. The anti-AIT authors may nonetheless be wrong in denying an ethnic meaning to Arya altogether. While Arya was definitely never a racial or linguistic concept, it may have had a precise ethnic usage at least in some circles in one specific period. As Shrikant Talageri has shown, in the Rg-Veda, the term Arya is exclusively applied to the Puru tribe, including the Bharata clan, the community which generated the Rg-Vedic texts. Thus, when something negative is said about “Arya” people, these turn out to be non-Bharata Purus; and when the merits of a non-Puru king or sage are extolled, he may be called any term of praise but never Arya. (5) Likewise, it seems that the Iranian Avesta uses Airya in referring to a specific community, the cultivators in the Oxus river basin, contrasting it with nomadic barbarians who were similar in race and equally Iranian-speaking (generically known as Shakas/Scythians), but who were not part of the sedentary Mazdean “Airya” world. (6) The matter must be studied more closely, after freeing ourselves from the AIT-related misconceptions. For now, I speculate that the term Arya spread over the Hindu world, which included many non-Vedic Indo-Aryan-speaking tribes (Aikshvaku, Yadava, Pramshava, etc.), along with the Vedic tradition which was originally the exclusively local tradition of the Paurava tribe and Bharata clan settled on the banks of the Saraswati river. And that it originally had an ethnic connotation, something like “the Puru tradition”, even when used as the name of a religious tradition and civilizational standard, viz. the Vedic culture, somewhat like the ethno-geographical term Roman came to mean “Catholic”. At any rate, in classical Sanskrit, Arya means “civilized”, specifically “following the norms of Vedic civilization”, and this might imply a reference to the ancient situation when Vedic culture typified the metropolis, the Saraswati region (well-attested as being the centre of both the Rg-Vedic world and Harappan civilization), which the provinces tried to emulate. In the ShAstras and in literary works, the term Arya typically takes the place which would nowadays be filled by the term Hindu, or of “the Hindu ideal”, Hindu in a normative rather than in a descriptive sense. It is in this (by that time definitely the usual) sense that the Buddha used the term Arya, as in the catvAri-Arya-satyAni, “the four noble truths”, and the Arya-ashtANgika-mArga, “the noble eightfold path”, meaning that his way (more than the petty magic with which many Veda-reciting priests made a living) fulfilled the old ideals of Vedic civilization. It is with a similar intention that the modern Veda revivalists of the Arya Samaj chose the name of their organization. While conceptions may differ concerning what the real essence of the Vedic worldview was, there has been a wide pan-Indian agreement for at least 3,000 years that Arya means a standard of civilization, regardless of language, race or even ethnicity.

Rajaram vs. Hitler

Next, Zydenbos attacks Rajaram’s reading of Romila Thapar’s article, esp. her insinuation (uttered much more explicitly elsewhere by other Marxist authors in India) (7) that the anti-AIT case is motivated by some kind of Hitlerian vision of Aryanism: “Romila Thapar does not ‘obviously refer to Nazi Germany’ when she speaks of the fantasy of an ‘Aryan nation’, but to the new Indian tendency among obscurantists towards creating something parallel.” So, alleging that someone wants to “create something parallel to Nazi Germany” does not imply a reference to Nazi Germany? In that case, we might perhaps focus on the implied allegation that those Indians who question the AIT are entertaining a fantasy of creating an “Aryan nation”. I challenge Prof. Thapar and Dr. Zydenbos to produce any publication of any Indian scholar presently questioning the AIT which contains even a hint of this “fantasy”. And I reprimand them both for using the term Arya(n) uncritically, i.e. without explicitating that it has two distinct meanings, viz. “Hindu” for Hindus, and “of Nordic race” for the Nazis. If that distinction is made, the

alleged connection between Rajaram and Hitler (through the “common” term Aryan) vanishes, and this seems to go against the AIT defenders’ intentions. In the current opinion climate, accusing someone of Nazi connections is the single gravest allegation possible. I don’t think that in an academic forum, one can simply get away with such extremely serious allegations; one has to offer evidence, - or apologies. If even scholars of Zydenbos’s rank entertain the confusion between Aryan/Nordic-racist and Arya/Hindu, it is no surprise that this confusion vitiates much journalistic reporting on Hinduism and Hindu nationalism. Thus, the French monthly *Le Choc du Mois* once commented that the “sulphurous” BJP takes inspiration from “Bharat, the first Aryan prince in North India”. By all accounts, Bharata, patriarch of the Vedic Bharata clan, came later than many other Aryans in North India: Manu, Ikshvaku, Mandhata, Yayati, Bharat’s own ancestor Puru, et al. Anyway, here is the key to Hindu political thought: “The basis of the ‘Hindu nation’ will therefore be Aryanity, a warlike and conquering Aryanity which owes its imperial territory only to an unceasing struggle on the side of the gods.” (8) This mixes a projection of stereotypes concerning Islamic fundamentalism onto its Hindu “counterpart” with the AIT-based Aryan lore. But seriously: are Hindu scholars, if only just a few of them, thinking along the lines of “Aryan” racism? Apart from reading the works of the Indian scholars concerned, I have also privately talked with most of them, and I feel certain that no such “fantasy” is at the back of the anti-AIT polemic. In fact, what they reject in Western scholarship is precisely the creation of the conceptual framework which has made the racist misuse of the term “Aryan” possible: “Indian Marxists in particular are singularly touchy about the whole thing and hate to be reminded that their pet dogma of the non-indigenous origin of the Vedic Aryan civilization is an offshoot of the same race theories that gave rise to Nazism.” (9)

The importance of being white

Dr. Zydenbos continues: “This includes the endorsement of blatant racism by certain Indian scholarly personalities. Thus, the archaeologist S. R. Rao, who also figures in Rajaram’s article, said at a recent seminar in Mysore in response to a student’s question about the Aryans that we should not listen to what ‘white people’ say.” I don’t know how Hitler would have felt about this slur on white people, but Zydenbos is quite mistaken when he infers that there is any “racism” behind Prof. Rao’s remark. Rao obviously did not mean that whiteness makes one unfit for researching the question of the “Aryans”. What he meant was, of course, that at present, Westerners in general are still basing their opinions about this question on theories rendered outdated by the recent findings of Indian scholars like himself, and of some paleface scholars as well, - but the latter have so far not carried Western or “white” opinion in general with them. Dr. Zydenbos, who is described editorially as a European indological scholar living in Mysore, must have found out for himself that being “white” still connotes authority and reliability for most Indians. (10) In heated debates like the one on the Aryan question, reference to Western opinion is still treated as a trump card. Often, this reference is used as a “circular argument of authority”: first Western India-watchers borrow their opinions from the *Times of India* or the *Economic and Political Weekly*, then they express these opinions in the *New York Times* or the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, and finally, these same opinions are quoted in the same Indian media as authoritative endorsements by “independent” Westerners of their own positions. If a student has been over-awed by the apparent Western consensus in favour of the AIT, Prof. Rao was right to break the spell and to put the student with his feet back on the solid ground of self-reliance, esp. in a field where. Western indological opinion happens to be out of touch with the latest

research. Indeed, in his article, Dr. Zydenbos himself unwittingly plays the same game of over-awing the Indians with references to Western indologists, viz. to K. V. Zvelebil, H. Kulke and D. Rothermund, as sheer arguments of authority. (11) Zydenbos refers to Zvelebil to support this statement: "That the Indus Valley people were Dravidians is an unproven hypothesis; but the real, as yet undeciphered writings of that civilization give more support to this hypothesis than to any other." In fact, the scholars working from the Dravidian hypothesis have, after decades of intensive labour, not conclusively deciphered a single line of the Indus writings, and Zvelebil admits as much: "[The Soviet scholars] have not convincingly deciphered even one single short Harappan description, and they have not been able to offer a verifiable reading of any Harappan text." (12) Of the other teams working on the decipherment, Zvelebil has no hard results to quote either, though he praises their (and the Soviet scholars') merits in structural analysis, preparing concordances etc. He does not mention a single definite and positive (non-circular) indication that the language on the Harappan seals is Dravidian. In Kulke and Rothermund's book *A History of India* "can be found in detail the up-to-date view concerning the Aryan migration, and confirming it", according to Zydenbos. In fact, their book does not confirm (with independent research findings) but merely restates the AIT, without refuting or even taking into account the research findings on which Prof. Rajaram and Prof. Rao base their case.

Nehru's testimony

Dr. Zydenbos sums up "a few interesting questions", starting with: "Why should leading, respected Indian scholars (and even Nehru, who can hardly be accused of being politically naive or a colonial collaborator) accept the idea of the migration, if it is as patently false as our author claims it is?" We forego the occasion of preparing a list of factual reasons why "leading, respected scholars" have been found to defend the wrong position on numerous occasions in history. The interesting term in the question is "colonial collaborator", which Nehru is claimed not to have been. In fact, while politically an anti-colonial campaigner, Jawaharlal Nehru was culturally the archetypal "collaborator" with colonialism and with the colonial view of India. Free India's first Prime Minister never properly mastered his native Hindustani language and like his father, he demanded from his relatives that they speak only English at the dinner table. He was in most cultural respects a typical colonial Englishman ("India's last Viceroy"), fully equipped with the concomitant disdain for Indian and particularly Hindu culture, of which he was 100% ignorant. About the Sanskrit traditions which provide the information relevant to the Aryan question, he knew strictly nothing (in spite of his hereditary caste title Pandit), and he could not possibly have written anything about it except what he had read in the standard English textbooks. This can easily be verified in his book 'The Discovery of India', which reads like the history chapter of a tourist guidebook, but which according to Dr. Zydenbos "in essence still holds good" in its picturesque description of the Aryan invasion. (13) Nehru shared with many contemporary establishment academics an ideological reason to welcome the AIT. Just as the British liked to flatter themselves with the idea that they had "created" India as a political unit, so Congress politicians liked to see Nehru as the "maker of India". (14) In this view, prior to Queen Victoria and Jawaharlal Nehru, no such cultural entity as "India" ever existed, merely a hunting-ground for ever new waves of invaders, starting with the Aryans. Nehru didn't mind such a past for India, because as a Leftist utopianist, he believed that a great future could be built on any national past, even a very depressing one. It must be said to his credit that from a vision of a fragmented and invasion-ridden India of the past, he did

not deduce the impossibility of creating a united and prosperous India in the future, unlike contemporary casteists and separatists. It must also be admitted that other Indian leaders have accepted the idea of an Aryan invasion without being any the less patriotic for it. Congress leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak (*Arctic Home in the Vedas*, 1903) and Hindu Mahasabha ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (*Hindutva*, 1923) had also interiorized the AIT, simply because it seemed hard to refute. To most English-educated Indians of their time, the prestige of Western scholarship was so overwhelming that it seemed quixotic to go against it. But it was not hard for them to combine patriotism with a belief in a fragmented and conflictual origin of their nation, 3,500 years ago. After all, most nations in the world are younger than that. The USA was built on broken treaties, slavery and genocide, only a few centuries ago, yet there exists a heartfelt and legitimate American patriotism. The strange thing is not that Tilak, Nehru and Savarkar could be Indian patriots all while believing in the AIT, but that Marxists and missionaries question the legitimacy of Indian nationhood on the basis of a theory pertaining to events thousands of years in the past.

From Harappa to Ayodhya

Dr. Zydenbos summons Prof. Rajaram to own up some responsibility for India's communal conflict: "Does he really not see the parallel between Nazi attacks on synagogues in the 1930s and what happened in Ayodhya on December 6th?" We would not have believed it, but it is there in cold print: an academic tries to score against a fellow academic by arbitrarily linking him with an event which had not yet taken place when the latter's paper was published, and with which he had strictly nothing to do, viz. the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992. In a later paper, Prof. Rajaram has accepted the challenge: 'From Harappa to Ayodhya', read at the Indian institute of World Culture in Bangalore (4 September 1997), discusses the parallels between the historians' debates on the Indus-Saraswati civilization and on the temple/mosque in Ayodhya. He argues that "what the history establishment has done through the models it has proposed for both the ancient and the medieval periods is to exactly reverse the historical picture". (15) Most importantly, for the ancient period, Indian Marxist and other anti-Hindu historians posit a massive conflict (between Aryan invaders and natives) in spite of the total absence of either textual or archaeological evidence for such conflict; while for the medieval period, they wax eloquent about an idyllic "composite culture" and deny a massive conflict spanning centuries (viz. between Muslim invaders and Hindu natives), against the copiously available evidence for this conflict, both textual and archaeological. This observation is entirely correct: both ancient and medieval history have been rewritten in the sense of belittling and blackening Hindu civilization and extolling its enemies. As a Westerner I may add that in both cases, there has been a wholesale, painfully naive endorsement of the Indian Marxist line by Western India-watchers in academe as well as journalism. There are exceptions, mostly in the past, e.g. Fernand Braudel who described Muslim India as a "colonial experiment" which was "extremely violent". (16) Braudel explained: "India survived only by virtue of its patience, its superhuman power and its immense size. The levies it had to pay were so crushing that one catastrophic harvest was enough to unleash famines and epidemics capable of killing a million people at a time. Appalling poverty was the constant counterpart of the conquerors' opulence. (...) The Muslims (...) could not rule the country except by systematic terror. Cruelty was the norm, burnings, summary executions, crucifixions or impalements, inventive tortures. Hindu temples were destroyed to make way for mosques. On occasion there were forced conversions. If ever

there were an uprising, it was instantly and savagely repressed: houses were burned, the countryside was laid waste, men were slaughtered and women were taken as slaves.” (17) Braudel was not a Hindu chauvinist, just a scholarly observer, but in today’s climate, he would be blacklisted. While there is solid evidence that the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya had been built in forcible replacement of a Hindu temple, rubble of which was used in the Masjid’s construction, this fact has been denounced as “Hindu chauvinist propaganda”, and an entirely fictional claim was upheld that the Masjid had been built on an uncontroversial site, so that there was of course no trace of evidence for a preceding temple demolition. (18) Indian Marxists could reasonably have taken the position that while the temple demolition was a historical fact, this was no reason for a counter-demolition today. However, inebriated by their power position, they went farther and denied the temple destruction altogether, against the evidence, thinking they could get away with it. As usual, they could count on their Western contacts to cover them: to my knowledge, not a single Western academic has critically examined the Indian Marxist claim that the historical temple demolition at the Babri Masjid site was Hindu chauvinist fiction. All of those who have actually written about the Ayodhya affair, have acted as amplifiers to the Indian Marxist propaganda, explicitly or implicitly defaming those Indian colleagues who stuck to the evidence that a Hindu temple at the controversial site had indeed been destroyed. One of these was Prof. B. B. Lal, one of the greatest living archaeologists, who has been attacked for his expert testimony about the demolished temple at the Babri Masjid site (e.g. in an editorial in the Marxist-controlled paper *The Hindu*) (19) as well as for his progressively more determined support to the identity or close kinship of Vedic and Harappan culture. (20) Indeed, on both sides in the Ayodhya debate and in the AIT debate, both in academic and journalistic platforms, we find the same names. Without conspicuous exception, those who fight for the AIT have also fought for the Ayodhya no-temple thesis (and more generally for the view that the Islamic occupation of India was benign), and those who fought for the demolished-temple thesis are now fighting for the Vedic-Harappan kinship. So, Dr. Zydenbos is right in positing a parallel between the Ayodhya and AIT debates, though perhaps it is not the parallel he intended.

The denial of history

As for an Indian counterpart to the Nazi attacks on synagogues, any Hindu worth his salt will definitely welcome the simile. The demolition of literally hundreds of thousands of Hindu places of worship (often along with their personnel and customers) by Muslims, from the first Arab invasion in AD 636 to the destruction of hundreds of temples in Pakistan and Bangladesh and the vandalization of twenty-odd Hindu temples in Britain in “retaliation” for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, is often described in Hindu pamphlets as a “Holocaust”. I disapprove of the ease with which every crime is nowadays likened with the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes; but in the present debate, it is Dr. Zydenbos who has uninvitedly introduced Nazi references. While the erratic and violent manner in which the Babri Masjid was disposed of is certainly deplorable, there is something badly disproportionate in the holy indignation of so many India-watchers about the Ayodhya demolition, when you notice how it is combined with a stark indifference to the vastly larger and longer record of Islamic destruction in India (including a million Hindus killed by the Pakistani Army in East Bengal as late as 1971), often even with a negationist denial of that very record of Islam in India. Here again there is a parallel: informed Hindus are pained by the denial of their centuries of suffering at the hands of Islam, and are likewise pained by the denial of their millennia of civilization-building, a denial which

goes by the name of Aryan Invasion Theory. There may yet be another point to Zydenbos's comparison between Nazi attacks on synagogues and the attacks on places of worship in India. The Islamic swordsmen considered Pagan temples as monuments of Jahiliyya, the Age of Ignorance, and they wanted to destroy them in order to stamp out this evil superstition of Paganism and all reminders of its history. In Islamic countries with a great pre-Islamic past, history courses in schools start with Mohammed, and pay minimal (if at all any) attention to the long and fascinating history of the Pharaohs, the Achaemenids or Mohenjodaro; the intention is to deny an unwanted, "impure" part of history. As recently as 1992, this rejection of history led to raids to the ruins of Buddhist temples in Afghanistan to deface any remaining Buddha statues; and in 1992 and 1997, bomb attacks were committed against the pharaonic temples of Karnak. One could arguably hold it against the demolishers of the Babri mosque that they too have tried to wipe out an unwanted chapter of Indian history embodied in the Islamic architecture of the temple building. Bad enough, but its relevance for our topic is this: for Indians, the AIT likewise implies the denial of a long stretch of Indian history. The AIT denies principally the history of the Solar and Lunar dynasties and other tribes living in Aryavarta (the area from Sindh to Bihar and from the Vindhya to Kashmir), as covered in the Flu for a period from the dawn of proto-history to the 1st millennium BC. The major motifs (epics, artistic standards, schools of philosophy) of Indian civilization are embedded in that history, which is simply denied in its long pre-1500 BC phase, and vilified as merely the cultural superstructure of an ethnic subjugation of pre-Aryans by Aryans in its post-1500 BC phase.

Blood and soil

Dr. Zydenbos continues: "Why should it be so important that the Aryans, or the extremely remote ancestors of anyone in India for that matter, have been in the subcontinent since all eternity? That would come close to the Blut und Boden [blood and soil] ideology of Nazism, with its Aryan rhetoric. Why the xenophobia?" Accusing Prof. Rajaram of something "close to" Nazi ideology looks like an old trick to associate someone with Nazism without taking the responsibility for calling him a Nazi outright and risking a frontal rebuttal if not a court case. I wonder: how would he fare if he accused a Western colleague in the same vein in a Western paper, considering the extreme importance which academics attach to reputation? There, slurs against a colleague's scholarly integrity are normally made to backfire on the slanderer himself. At any rate, AIT defenders display a tendency to exceed the topic of debate and launch unwarranted attacks ad hominem. Favouring the idea that the "Aryan" ancestors of the contemporary Indians have lived in the subcontinent "since all eternity" is what Zydenbos dubs "xenophobic" and "close to the Blut und Boden ideology of Nazism with its Aryan rhetoric". Actually, the historians in the SS research department were inclined to embrace the theory that the Nordic Aryans originated in Atlantis, whence they had fled to northern Europe after the inundation of their homeland. Hitler's attachment was not to the German territory but to the German race, which was free to wander and colonize other lands. Then again, most ordinary Nazis who cared, tended to accept some variation of the European Urheimat Theory, locating their own Aryan ancestors in Germany itself or nearby, "just as" Hindus nowadays locate their Urheimat in or near India itself. However, it is not Rajaram's school of thought which has given political implications to the question of the geographical provenance of India's population. As we have seen, it is precisely the AIT which has been used systematically as a xenophobic political argument against those groups considered as the progeny of the "Aryan

invaders". Even most AIT opponents subscribe to the prevalent theory that mankind probably originated in Africa, so that all Indians, like all Europeans, are ultimately immigrants. The ridiculous argument of doubting the legitimacy of a community's presence in India on the basis of an ancestral immigration of 3500 years ago has been launched in all seriousness by interest groups wielding the AIT as their major intellectual weapon, not by the critics of the AIT.

Nazis in India

As for the Nazi connection, let us at any rate be clear about an easily verifiable fact: in so far as the Nazis cared about Indian history, they favoured the AIT. On the AIT, not Rajaram but Zydenbos is in the same camp with Hitler. The only avowed Nazis in India, the Bengali scholar Dr. Asit Krishna Mukherji (ca. 1898-1977) and his French-Greek wife Dr. Maximiani Portas (Lyon 1905-Sible Hedingham, Essex, 1982) alias Savitri Devi Mukherji, had made the AIT itself the alpha and omega of their philosophy. (21) The one Indian who interpreted the AIT explanation of the Hindu caste system in Hitlerian terms, i.e. as a positive realization of the natural hierarchy between the races achieved by the conquering Nordic Aryans and imposed on the dark-skinned natives, was Asit Krishna Mukherji, "Brahmin conscious of his distant Nordic roots"(22) who published a pro-Hitler paper, the New Mercury, "the only truly Hitlerian paper ever to have appeared in India"(23), from 1935 until the British closed it down in 1937. He was instrumental in establishing the links between the Axis representatives and the leftist Congress leader Subhas Chandra Bose, who formed an Indian National Army (1943-45) under Japanese tutelage. His wife Savitri Devi cited with approval B. G. Tilak's version of the AIT, viz. that the Aryan tribes had come from the Arctic where they had composed the Rg-Veda. This erratic theory is inordinately popular among Western racists for providing "independent" Indian confirmation to a North-European Homeland Theory (in reality, Tilak had tried to bend the Vedic evidence, often ludicrously, to bring it in conformity with fashionable Western theories). (24) She also repeated the usual AIT annexe that the upper castes are Aryan immigrants, that the lower castes are largely and the tribals purely "aboriginals", a theory implicitly endorsed (see next para) by Dr. Zydenbos in this very article. (25) In fact, after reading her autobiography, "Memories and Reflexions of an Aryan Lady", there is not the slightest doubt left that for her and her husband, their belief in the AIT, along with their distortive reinterpretation of Hindu tradition in terms of the AIT, was the direct cause of their enthusiasm for Hitler. If Zydenbos shuns theories with Hitlerian connotations, he should drop the AIT at once. Indeed, the AIT happens to have the same historical roots as the race theories centred on white superiority which culminated in Nazi racism. In the 19th-century race theories, Indian civilization had to be the work of white people, who, like the modern Europeans, had colonized India by subjugating the dark natives; later, the mixing of the white Aryans (in spite of a belated attempt to preserve their purity through the caste system) with the dark natives caused the decline and "feminization" of the conquering Aryan culture, which invited a new conquest by Europeans taking up the "white man's burden" of bringing order and enlightenment to the dark-skinned people living in social, intellectual and spiritual darkness. The AIT was an essential part of this view, and Nazism a slight radicalization. While we let the topic of Nazism rest, we have to mention another "blood and soil" movement which has emerged in India, and again its basis was not Rajaram's denial of the AIT, but Zydenbos's AIT itself. The Dravidian movement, started with colonial and missionary funding and aid in 1916 (founding of the Justice Party in Madras, later renamed as Dravida Kazhagam) to counter the Freedom Movement, was based precisely on the AIT notion that the North Indians as well as the South Indian Brahmins

were “Aryan invaders” who had stolen the land from the Dravidian natives. Militants of this movement roughed up Brahmins and Hindi-speaking people, and its leader Ramaswamy Naicker gained notoriety with statements like: “We will do with the Brahmins what Hitler did with the Jews.” When the Chinese invasion of 1962 made Indians aware of the need for national unity, the demand for a separate Dravidian state was abandoned, and the anti-Brahmin drive lost its edge as Brahmin predominance in public office diminished. Meanwhile, the AIT-related doctrines of this movement have started a second life in a section of the Dalit (ex-Untouchable) movement, which attacks upper-caste people as “Aryan invaders”, a notion which they could have borrowed directly from Dr. Zydenbos’s article. Here again, slurs of “Nazism” against the supposed “Aryans” mask a vision of Indian society directly rooted in the very views which generated Nazism itself.

Aryans vs. Indians

The closing paragraph of “An obscurantist argument” reiterates the outdated notion that India’s upper castes are the progeny of the “Aryan invaders” and pride themselves on it: “We can briefly sum up the ‘Aryan problem’ and the interest it creates among certain people as follows. Whatever problem is there, will not be solved by constructing a new bit of mythology on the theme of the evil foreign hand and the Indian academic community that is supposed to have no mind of its own. This has no basis in fact. Only certain people in certain castes who identify themselves strongly with the Aryans and pride themselves on being ‘Aryan’ rather than Indian, and thereby stress their difference from (and assume superiority to) other Indians, have a problem. As soon as the author [= N. S. Rajaram], and people of his ilk, make up their minds as to whether they are Indian or not, and whether they want to identify themselves with India and other Indians or not, the problem is solved.” That the Indian academic community “has no mind of its own” has the following basis in fact: India has only just begun to decolonize at the intellectual level, and the view of Indian history instilled in the pupils of India’s elite schools is still strictly the view inherited from colonial historiography. In another sense, however, the anglicized academic establishment certainly has a mind of its own: while the colonial British still had a condescending sympathy for native culture, the new elite is waging a war against it as a matter of cultural self-exorcism and of political class interest. It knows its own mind very well and has concluded that the AIT serves its interests better than a version of history which would boost native Indian self-respect. Of course, India is not the Soviet Union of Stalin’s and Lysenko’s days, so when the international academic opinion shifts away from the AIT, the Indian establishment will have to follow suit; but as long as the matter is in the balance, it throws its entire weight on the side of the AIT. If certain people in certain castes “pride themselves on being ‘Aryan’ rather than Indian”, it means they have accepted the AIT, which posits the initial non-Indianness of the “Aryans” and identifies them with the upper castes. Of course, this view has no takers among traditionalist upper-caste Hindus, who pride themselves on being the progeny of the Vedic poets and epic heroes revered as the sources of Indian civilization. For them, it is not “Aryan rather than Indian”, but “Arya, or Indian par excellence”. Prof. Rajaram “and people of his ilk” have long made up their minds about whether they are Indian or not. That is why they feel strongly about the divisive effect to which the AIT has been used, first by interested outside forces (Zydenbos’s sarcastic “evil foreign hand”) who have tried to stress the difference- of the “Aryans” from other Indians as a weapon against native self-reassertion, and subsequently by sectional interest groups in India. Their first motive for arguing against the AIT is the sound

academic consideration that it seems to be contradicted by the evidence. And this evidence is not nullified at all by their secondary, political motive: the desire to stop the pernicious influence of the AIT on India's unity and integrity.

Footnotes:

1. Indian Express, 12-12-1993, in reply to a piece on a lecture by Prof. N. S. Rajaram, Indian Express, 14-11-1993, of which an expanded version constitutes the first chapter of Rajaram's book: *Aryan Invasion of India, the Myth and the Truth*, Voice of India, Delhi 1994.

2. Robert J. Zydenbos: "Virashaivism, caste, revolution, etc." , *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1997, p. 525-535, a review of the very Christian (and anti-Brahminical) look at the Virashaiva sect by Rev. J. P. Schouten: *Revolution of the Mystics: On the Social Aspects of Virashaivism*, Kok/Pharos, Kampen (Netherlands) 1991.

3. Apart from other works by Rajaram mentioned elsewhere, note also N. S. Rajaram: *From Saraswati River to Indus Script*, Diganta Sahitya, Mangalore 1998, an elaboration on the Sanskrit-based decipherment of the Indus script by N. Jha: *Vedic Glossary on Indus Seals*, Ganga Kaveri Publ. , Varanasi 1996.

4. Romila Thapar: "The Perennial Aryans", Seminar# 400 (1992).

5. Shrikant Talageri: *The Rg-Veda, a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan, Delhi, forthcoming.

6. It is as yet unclear whether in this consideration we should include the self-description of the Kalash Kafirs, the last semi-Vedic Pagans in the Hindu Kush mountains (unaffected by all the later developments in the Indian plains which now constitute Hinduism), as Arya-e-Koh, "Aryas of the mountains". Rather than authentic testimony, this could be the result of interiorizing theories learned from Western visitors.

7. E.g. Yoginder Sikand: "Exploding the Aryan myth", *Observer of Business and Politics*, 30-10-1993, discussed below.

8. Olivier Trandum: "Inde: le réveil identitaire de la droite", *Le Choc du Mois*, Sep. 1992.

9. N.S.Rajaram: *The Politics of History*, p. 98.

10. It is one of Mahatma Gandhi's achievements that "he made India safe for the white man", as the Indian Communists used to say around the time of Independence. Fact is that he must take credit for the friendly character of the decolonization of India, which led to the situation that Westerners who feel a strong hostility in countries like China and Malaysia, feel like honoured guests in India.

11. K. V. Zvelebil: *Dravidian Linguistics: An Introduction*, Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, 1990; and H. Kulke and D. Rothermund: *A History of India*, Rupa, Delhi 1991.

12. K. Zvelebil: *Dravidian Linguistics*, p. 90.

13. Dr. Zydenbos's use of Nehru as an argument of authority, along with his use of Indian English, has raised questions. A source inside the Indian Express office suspected that he had merely lent his name to an article by an Indian author. Zydenbos denied this when I asked him personally about it.

14. See e.g. M. J. Akbar: *Nehru, the Making of India*, Penguin 1992.

15. N. S. Rajaram: *From Harappa to Ayodhya*, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, Bangalore 1997, p. 6; emphasis in the original.

16. Fernand Braudel: *A History of Civilizations*, Penguin 1988 (1963), p. 236.

17. Fernand Braudel: *A History of Civilizations*, p. 232.

18. See K. Elst: "The Ayodhya debate", in G. Pollet, ed. : *Indian Epic Values*, Peeters, Leuven 1995, p-21-42; and K. Elst: "The Ayodhya demolition: an evaluation", in Swapan Dasgupta et al. : *The Ayodhya Reference*, Voice of India, Delhi 1995, p. 123-154.

19. "Tampering with history", editorial in *The Hindu*, 12-6-1998. B. B. Lal wrote a reply: "Facts of history cannot be altered", *The Hindu*, 1-7-1998.

20. B. B. Lal: *New Light on the Indus Civilization*, Aryan Books International, Delhi 1997.

21. About Savitri Devi and her husband, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke: *Hitler's Priestess. Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism*, New York University Press, 1998, a book full of details but suffering from the same basic misconceptions as Dr. Zydenbos' article and most Western writing on the "Hindu-Aryan" connection. Also see K. Elst: *The Saffron Swastika*, Voice of India, Delhi 1999.

22. Savitri Devi Mukherji: *Souvenirs et Réflexions d'une Arjenne*, Delhi 1976, p. 41.

23. Savitri Devi Mukherji: *Souvenirs et Réflexions*, p. 41.

24. Savitri Devi Mukherji: *Souvenirs et Réflexions*, p. 27 and p. 272, with reference to B. G. Tilak & Hermann Jacobi: *Arctic Home in the Vedas*, Pune 1903. Tilak and Jacobi had met after separately concluding that astronomical data in the Rg-Veda indicated its time of composition as ca. 4000 BC, see B. G. Tilak: *Orion, or Researches into the Antiquity of the Vedas*, Pune 1893. A detailed and convincing refutation of Tilak's arguments for the polar homeland is given by N. R. Waradpande: "The Home of the Aryans: an Astronomical Approach", in S. B. Deo & Suryanath Kamath: *The Aryan Problem*, Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana Samiti, Pune 1993, p. 123-134, and in Shrikant Talageri: *The Rg-Veda, a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan, New Delhi, forthcoming.

25. Savitri Devi Mukherji: *Souvenirs et Réflexions*, p. 157.