

The Origin of Indian Civilization: Critical Analysis of the Contribution of Linguistics

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According to the mainstream theory in Western linguistics, Sanskrit is an Indo-European (IE) language, and the related Indian civilization originated somewhere in Europe. This theory is widely believed to be based on a rigorous scientific analysis of the linguistic evidence. (The theory is not supported by evidence outside linguistics, including from archaeology, palaeo-anthropology and genetics).

In this talk I shall review some of the key linguistic evidence which is usually believed to underpin this theory. I shall highlight a specific problem: there is significant published evidence contradicting the theory, but such evidence is usually 'explained away' through various justifications. For example, if a feature contradicts the expected 'laws' of language development, this is not regarded as counter-evidence: instead it might (for example) be assumed to have been borrowed from another language. Although these various explanations may be plausible in themselves, when taken together, they are able to 'explain away' almost any counter-evidence. I shall describe how such procedures undermine statistical significance and are rejected in other fields of study. This raises question about the reliability of the linguistic evidence on which the mainstream theory is founded.

In the past, the belief in the scientific nature of the IE theory has 'crowded out' other possible models regarding the origin of Indian civilization (including the thesis of a local origin). However, I shall argue that such alternative models should be considered on their merits, rather than merely rejected because they contradict the mainstream linguistic theory.