

## SCIENCE NOT IDEOLOGY: PARADIGMS FOR PREHISTORY

*Advances in natural history and related fields suggest that ideologies should make way to science in the study of the ancient world and its prehistory.*

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### ABSTRACT

Reacting to the work of some scientifically trained workers using natural history and genetics in the study of the Vedic civilization, a European scholar recently observed: "...I find many methods and arguments proposed in this book [on origins of Indian civilization] incompatible with the epistemology of post-Enlightenment humanistic disciplines." This to a scientist at least is puzzling: why should researchers defer to a belief system called post-Enlightenment epistemology in interpreting data and events that predate the Enlightenment Age by many millennia?

Looking past this isolated complaint, it highlights an important point about the study of ancient non-European civilization in the past two centuries and more. It has been driven more by ideologies than the scientific method—to fit the sources to preconceived ideas. First it was Christian theology and its baggage of Creation in 4004 BC, followed more or less in order by race theories based on the Aryan myth, the White Man's Burden, palaeo-linguistics (following the collapse of the Third Reich) and Marxism. This 'post-Enlightenment epistemology' seems to be the latest ideological entrant.

Since human imagination is virtually without limit, one can expect other ideologies to lay claim to interpreting the past, none of which can objectively be proved or even refuted (being based on no evidence). This suggests that a more rigorous methodology needs to be developed. Fortunately, recent gains in the knowledge about the ancient world in fields as diverse as ecology, natural history, genetics and related subjects hold promise for such a methodology.

The presentation will briefly survey the role of various ideologies and their motivations, and present a framework for building methodologies based on continuing scientific advances. It will highlight the fact that methodologies in history and prehistory need also to change to keep pace with changes in our knowledge of science.

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