



World History

Aryan Migration

Name:

Section:

Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the following passages from “The Aryan Debate in the India Context” by Rebecca Aranha and then answer the questions. We will do the first passage as a class.

Passage 1: Focus Topic

The Aryan debate, ancient Indian history’s very own case of ‘who done it’, has been raging in books, newspapers, and public forums of India for the last decade or so. It examines the following question: did the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans enter from the north-west in about 1500 BC, or were they indigenous to India and identical to the people of the Indus Civilization of 2600-1900 BC? This question is central to the debate that has shaped Indian history writing, and has been strongly contested in public discussions for over a decade.

Question 1: What is the main question that is being debated with regards to the Aryans?

Passage 2: Differing views of Aryan Origins

The first position, the immigrant Aryan position that the Aryans came to India from outside in about 1500 BC, is called the *standard view* because it is the interpretation that has prevailed in schools and university textbooks and in academic journals and books. The second position, the indigenous Aryan position that the Aryans were the makers of Indus Civilization, is called the *alternate view*, because it is challenging the established, standard view.

Question 2: *What are the two views and what are their ideas about the Aryans?*

Passage 3: Impact of topic on Modern India

The debate over how ‘Aryanism’ was to be interpreted provides us insight into the political agendas of the groups who used it. These groups were involved in seeking identities from the past and in countering each other’s claims to these identities as well as choosing a homeland and working out a national culture. The interpretation therefore hinged on specific ideological needs. The primary concern in establishing an Indian identity was the need to define the rightful inheritors of the land. Here the question of origins and affirmations of common descent was central to nation-building. It is thus important to consider modern ideological underpinnings of this debate in India as different forces compete over the construction of national identity.

Question 3: *Why is this question about the Aryans so important to modern India?*

Passage 4: Christian Missionaries use of the Theory

Devendraswarup, a historian of the colonial period, finds the scholarly work of missionary intellectuals to be readily presenting the Brahmins as foreigners who had imposed their Vedic language and texts onto the aboriginals of India. The idea in this case was to create a sense of alienation from Brahmanical religion among the lower castes, thereby preparing them for exposure and conversion to Christianity.

Question 4: *What were Christian missionaries trying to gain by proving that Brahmins (Aryan priests) were foreigners?*

Passage 5: British Colonial Uses of the Theory

The colonial view would endorse the idea that the progress of India was dependent on the return of the Aryan in the guise of the British. The British presence in the subcontinent could now be cast as a rerun several millennia later of a similar script, but a script that hoped to have a different ending. The British could now present themselves as a second wave of Aryans, again bringing a superior language and civilization to the racial descendants of the same natives their forefathers had attempted to elevate so many centuries earlier.

Question 5: How were the British attempting to use the theory of Aryan Migration to their political advantage?

Passage 6: Indian views of Historical Interpretationsⁱ

Supporters of the migration theory are now faced with several accusations. The major one is that the British Raj from the 19th century to the present day promoted the Aryan invasion hypothesis in support of Eurocentric notions of white supremacy. Assertions that the highly advanced proto-Hindu Vedic culture could not have had its roots in India are seen as attempts to bolster European ideas of dominance.

Question 6: How do modern Indian scholars now view the British theory?

Aranha, Rebecca. "The Aryan Debate in the Indian Context." InPEC: International Politics, Energy & Culture, 13 Oct. 2011. Web. 17 Aug. 2013.