

We have not yet found a transitional zone from pre to protohistory with any degree of clarity in Sri Lanka. Based on the excavations carried out at the citadel at Anuradhapura, protohistory in Sri Lanka begins at 900 BC. Early protohistoric period begins at 900 BC and lasts till 600 BC and the later protohistoric period begins at 600 BC and lasts till 250 BC. The distinguishing features of the early protohistoric period are the appearance of the iron technology, rice

cultivation, domestic horse and cattle, and pottery. Iron Age culture of Sri Lanka had many stylistic and technological parallels with Iron Age cultures of India.

We are still at a loss to identify who those Iron Age humans were. But these champions of civilization were on the island well before the arrival of the Indo-Aryan speaking Sinhala people as mentioned in the historical chronicles.

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## THE MYTH OF ARYANISM

**A**ryanism is much in vogue just now. The whole edifice of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is built round the racial superiority of the Aryan Germanic race. The following definition of Aryanism is from the *Penguin Political Dictionary* compiled by Walter Theimer:

Aryans, a term originating in the science of languages and erroneously applied to the field of racial and national questions. The word "Arya" is Sanskrit, and is the name by which a warlike northern Indian people is described in ancient Indian scripts about 3000 B.C. The name means "lord." It became usual in philological science to speak of an inter-related group of Indian languages as "Aryan". A German scholar, Friedrich Max Muller, who lived at Oxford from 1848 until his death in 1900, invented the theory that the mythological Aryans had not only spoken the primitive Indo-European language from which all present languages of this family (ranging from Hindustani to English) derived their origin, but had even been the Aryan or Indo-European "Urvolk," primitive race. Nationalist and romantic writers in Germany and also England seized upon this idea, and a myth arose of this Aryan descending from the snow-clad peaks of the Pamir and spreading not only over all India and Persia but, more important, across the wide Russian steppes into all Europe to lay the foundation for all future civilization. It was claimed that all speakers of Indo-European languages were descendants of this "Aryan race," to whom extraordinary qualities were attributed. Later research has proved beyond doubt that the Indo-Persian groups of languages, the "Aryan" group in the philological sense, is not the eldest or primitive Indo-European language. Nobody knows what the people who first spoke a language of the family were like, where they lived (except that it was somewhere in Asia) and whether they bore any resemblance to any of the races inhabiting Europe at present. There is no historical proof of any "Aryan" people coming from India to Europe. The Aryan Languages may as well have come to India from Europe, and generally speaking, languages may migrate without a corresponding racial migration. The Romanic elements in the English language were not introduced by a Romanic People but by the purely Teutonic Normans. The people or peoples who brought the Indo-European languages to Europe, wherever their cradle may have stood, need in no wise have been of Indo-European "Aryan" race. Recent studies on the Aryan language of the biblical Hittites have even suggested the idea that the Aryan-speaking Urvolk was Semitic, long nosed and black haired.

Muller recognized his error in later years and wrote a good deal to repeal it. He emphasized that "Aryan" was only a philological term, and meant neither blood nor bones, nor hair, nor skull. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as an Aryan in Europe. The myth, however, has survived its creator and become the principal weapon of Anti-Semitism. Thus, "Aryan" is often merely synonymous with "non-Jewish."

[Courtesy "Kesari" *People's Weekly* of Wednesday 2 July, 1941]

This small essay which appeared in a weekly published in 1941 has, I feel, relevance even today. When going through a few of the contemporary discourses in the publications and letters to the editors, one finds that concepts such as Aryan and Dravidian are used politically and sometimes culturally with disastrous consequences. In this connection I want to take up an issue that was in mind for a long time.

I am somehow intrigued by the fact that intellectuals and university lecturers and others use the word "Dravida" to refer to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. I have been told by knowledgeable sources that the term "Dravida" connotes respect and is used in written Sinhala language as the word "Demala" has connotations of disrespect. I was all the more intrigued when I realized that when referring to Tamils in the English language, "Dravida" is not used but the word "Tamils" is used by the very same people.

Does the word Demala have a history in Sri Lanka?  
Has it connotations of otherness?  
Has it connotations of racial inferiority?

Strangely it is only in Sri Lanka and only among the Sinhalese that the word "Dravida" is used to refer to the Tamils. Dravidian means a group of languages. If the usage is extended to refer to a linguistic groups of people then it should include all those who speak that group of languages such as Malayala, Telugu and Canarese etc.

Tamil is a Dravidian language. Tamils are not Dravidians but speak a Dravidian language.

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