

Sri Michel Danino

A noted Historian

Sri Michel Danino is a noted historian, a writer and an educator. From the age of fifteen Michel was drawn to India, to some of her great yogis, and soon to Sri Aurobindo and Mother and their view of evolution which gives a new meaning to our existence on this earth. In 1977, dissatisfied after four years of higher scientific studies, he left France for India, where he has since been living.

He studied India's culture and ancient history in the light of both Sri Aurobindo's pioneering work and archaeological research; and in 1996 Michel Danino authored *The Invasion That Never Was*, a brief study of the Aryan invasion theory. A second, extensively revised and enlarged edition was brought out in 2000. Over the last few years, he has given lectures at various official, academic and cultural forums on issues confronting Indian culture and civilization in today's world; some of them have been published under the titles *Sri Aurobindo and Indian Civilization* (1999), *The Indian Mind Then and Now* (2000), *Is Indian Culture Obsolete?* (2000) and *Kali Yuga or the Age of Confusion* (2001).

Glimpses of Indus-Sarasvati Civilization; Harappan-Gangetic Continuity

19th February 2010

Most of us have heard of the ancient Indus valley civilization but very few of us are aware that it is now referred to as the Indus-Sarasvati civilization covering a vast geographical expanse. On 19th February, Sri Michel Danino delivered two insightful lectures revealing some of the most intriguing and astounding aspects of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization and its connection with the Gangetic civilization. Also, the question that has perplexed Indian historians for long as to whether there was any Aryan invasion was addressed.

Initially, this civilization was named after the river Indus as the first major settlements, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, were found along that river and its tributary, the Ravi. However, excavations on both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border have revealed hundreds of Harappan sites along the dry bed of a huge river in the Ghaggar-Hakra valley. This lost river has been recognized as the Sarasvati which also finds mention in the Rig-Veda. Michel also showed a satellite image revealing the course of the Sarasvati.

Besides Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, Lothal (Gujarat), Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Mehrgarh and Dholavira (Gujarat) are some of the other interesting and important Harappan sites. He showed several slides revealing the marvels of architecture, arts and crafts, trade, agriculture and technology of the Harappans. One marvels that this so-called ancient civilization has so much to teach to our modern civilization.

Michel also highlighted some facts which indicate the '**Indianness**' of this civilization such as the absence of royal iconography, decentralization, etc.

The sudden disappearance of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization is still an enigma and remains a subject of debate. Some archeologists attribute it to the Aryan invasions while some think it could have been because of droughts or economic collapse. This has also raised a big question mark over the relationship of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization with the later Indian civilization.

In his second lecture titled '**Continuity of Harappan-Gangetic civilization**', he expounded how Harappans sowed the seeds of India's classical civilization thus falsifying the theory of the Aryan invasion. Most of us were surprised to learn that the Aryan invasion theory is no longer accepted due to lack of archeological evidence. The elements of Harappan life were passed on to the Gangetic civilization via the river Sarasvati. He presented several archeological findings that suggest a Harappan-Gangetic continuity, such as the Indus seal with a 3-faced god in a yogic posture, a broken seal depicting a trishul, some figurines in asanas, a linga found in Kalibangan, etc.

Early Landmarks of Science and Technology in India: Rediscovering Indian Scientific Temper

20th February 2010

It has generally been assumed that scientific temper was lacking in ancient India. Whatever scientific temper evolved later was borrowed from the west. But according to Sri Michel Danino, 'Contrary to the beliefs of many, there wasn't any dearth of exploration of scientific roots and evolution of scientific ideas in ancient India. Rather, there was a continuous dialogue among the scientists of that time. For instance, Aryabhata's insightful concepts of astronomy were harshly criticized by another great scientist of the Siddhantic era, Brahmbhat'. He highlighted the achievements of many great savants like Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, Bhaskara II, Mahavira and Nilakantha. Starting from Harappan times to the Kerala school of Mathematics several remarkable

advances made by ancient and medieval India in fields of astronomy, mathematics and science were traced. In corroboration ample archeological evidence was presented.

Indeed, it was India's knowledge in mathematics and astronomy which reached Europe through the Arabs that helped in their progress. Regrettably, most young Indians are unaware of this important aspect of their heritage. However, the most shocking revelation was that only **7% of the 12, 244 science manuscripts** that have been found in the 400 repositories of Kerala and Tamil Nadu are available in print. Science historians do not know anything about the remaining 93%.

This lecture conveyed a very strong message that Indian scientific minds need to rediscover the lost scientific roots and find answers to the many unresolved riddles of our past. Most of us who attended this informative lecture would surely agree with Michel that 'History of Science' must be offered as a separate discipline in mainstream education in India as it is offered in the west.