

# ***Thus Spake Professor Michael Witzel A Harvard University Case Study in Prejudice?***

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## **1.0 Background:**

We all generalize about people, about groups, about ideologies and so on in our lives. But when this generalization is judgmental, when it is not based on the complete set of evidence available to us and when we are unwilling to consider new or contrary data to revise our judgment, this generalization becomes a stereotype<sup>1</sup>. A stereotype is a highly exaggerated negative view of the reality. It is especially resorted to by people who are quick to condemn people different from themselves, or in other words, by people who are themselves intolerant. Prejudice<sup>2</sup> is rarely expressed explicitly. It is more often demonstrated through creation of stereotypes, through the creation of a hated or a disliked ‘other’, through an *excessive and obsessive focus on the negatives of this ‘other’, through half-truths, repeated and deliberate misrepresentation* and so on. Ethnocentrism<sup>3</sup> is a form of prejudice involving the belief that one’s own group’s values, practices or behavior are the best whereas those of the ‘other’ groups are inferior. Racism<sup>4</sup> is another dangerous variety of prejudice involving the belief that a perceived ‘racial difference is sufficient to value one person less than another’.

The reader should keep these definitions in mind constantly, while reading the text below, and judge for himself whether the activities and conduct of Professor Witzel could be termed a manifestation of prejudice in its various varieties.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Witzel, a tenured professor at the Harvard University, publicly engages in highly reprehensible activities. Below is a brief account of his statements appearing on internet forums and in print with a few illustrative examples each *but many more can be given*. Except for one example, we have not quoted his damning prolific posts left in secretive lists of Indologists not open to public, nor have we quoted his emails sent to individuals or to groups<sup>5</sup>. After all, Professor Witzel is entitled to the privacy of his personal views, no matter how obnoxious these views are.

## **2.0 Statements stereotyping Indian Americans**

### **2.1: Indian Americans are ‘lost’ and ‘abandoned’:**

Practically every month, Professor Witzel publishes a statement (in print or on the internet) that denigrates and stereotypes Indian Americans. We are a hard-working and law-abiding

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<sup>1</sup> Joel M. Charon. 2001. *Ten Questions, A Sociological Perspective*. Wadsworth Thompson Learning: Belmont (California), pp. 247-265

<sup>2</sup> The following study gives a multifaceted view on prejudice and discrimination –

Gordon W. Allport. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.: New York

<sup>3</sup> Claire M. Renzetti and Daniel Curran, ‘Living Sociology’, Allyn and Bacon, Needham Heights (MA, USA): 1998, p. 287

<sup>4</sup> Konrad Phillip Kottak, “*Cultural Anthropology*”, McGraw-Hill, Inc. : 1994, p. 79

<sup>5</sup> For example, in an email message sent to a group of 8 people in September 1999, Witzel remarked that “Many Indians still cannot read their texts critically. ....But Indian women are better than men”.

We have also completely ignored the scary information about him that comes from grapevines in various universities in the United States.

community that has contributed immensely to the United States and reject such characterizations as prejudiced and unscholarly. We give the latest example of his stereotypical statements<sup>6</sup>:

“Rajesh, I agree: The Hindus in North America (HINAs) are not just hiina, "lost, abandoned", but they (understandably) cling to their homeland in all manners they can come up with. "Reforming" our schoolbooks according to an imagined Golden Age (Ram Raj), hoary India is just one of the expressions we can observe.

They also tell their daughters to study Classical Indian dance (not exactly a highly regarded occupation back home), they build many temples and have Sunday schools (as many other ethnicities do). But, they hardly invest in Higher Education as other successful Asians have done. Nor allow their children to study items outside Law or Medicine, such as Indian Studies, --- the only way that members of their group could speak with real authority (for example, in school books).

However, as they are NRIs ("non returning Indians", as I just learned from a Hindi movie), they have begun ---as an old, very conservative US Brahmin friend pointed out to me already in 1994—building crematoria as well.

And see that they children marry within the local caste of origin (preferably, as per advertisement, of "fair" or "wheatish" color), if necessary imported out of India. (I have represented in court for one unfortunate victim of such a cross-cultural RNI-Indian marriage).

Or at least, they look for a spouse within the same general Indian caste (jaati), or worse, class (varna), or worst, among any Indians. They have seen too many of their children marry US people (whether of other Asian or of European descent; Blacks seem unthinkable). And loose their Hinduism, which second generation people just understand as "boaring rituals" (puja, etc.), temple visits and Indian (mythological) comic books ...

All such items add to the heady brew that we have seen emerging here...

Cheers, MW”

**Critique:** It is a completely wrong to suggest that learning dance is considered disreputable in India or amongst Hindus. We have dozens of festivals in which people of all genders and social strata indulge in dancing and singing. Thousands of families in India hire professional dance teachers to teach traditional dances to their children. Why is Professor Witzel annoyed at us for teaching our classical dances to our children when we are, in the process, also enriching American culture?

Also note that ‘Hina’, if pronounced with a particular phonetic stress (as done by Witzel in his transliteration ‘hiina’ above), means ‘deprived’, ‘lowly’ and ‘insecure’ amongst other negative things in many Indian languages. Such terms have been used in the past to denigrate Jewish minorities. Professor Witzel, a first generation German immigrant himself, could not have been unaware of these meanings.

Witzel does not cite any data to make the negative assertion that Indians do not invest in their children’s higher education. The over-representation of Indian American children and adults in Rhodes Scholarship lists and in institutes of higher learning gives a lie to his negative stereotyping. If he is referring to the view that Indians do not establish chairs in Universities, we should ask the question – ‘Why should Indians do so? To generate more Witzels that denigrate us as ‘hiinas’? Also, does Witzel know that the population of Indians in the United States has shot up only recently, from a bare 500,000 in 1980s to 1.7 million in 2000. Most Indians are still trying to settle down financially here, and are focusing more on their priorities – building institutions that involve their ‘living’ traditions, such as dance schools, temples, Gurudwaras and so on. But Witzel only focuses only on the negatives of our community.

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<sup>6</sup> Message number msg 2300 dt. 11/13/05, on [http://groups.yahoo.com/indo-urasian\\_research](http://groups.yahoo.com/indo-urasian_research)

What is wrong if Indians wish to build crematoria here in the United States. Does Witzel want to convert this country into something like Saudi Arabia where non-Muslims have to ship out their dead ones to their home-country for funerals?

Contrary to what Witzel alleges, there are several inter-caste and inter-nationality marriages involving Indians. Witzel of course offers no hard data to support his own prejudiced statement. For that matter, does not the marriage of couples from different phenotype (African American and Caucasian for instance) raise eyebrows in the respective American households even today? We have also come across cases where the couple were both Caucasians but their families created a ruckus just because the two belonged to different Christian denominations. But we do not go around creating stereotypes out of such instances.

Although Witzel seems to mock at the presence of Indian Americans in his midst, most Americans are not prejudiced as he is. Considering his prejudiced statements above, we do not think Indians or Hindus need his stamp of approval to “speak with real authority”.

Witzel has declared proudly on various Internet lists that he is a descendant of Martin Luther, the medieval German founder of Protestant Christianity, who also said that ‘music is the invention of Satan’. Is that why Witzel considers the learning of classical dance by Indian American girls as something disrespectful?<sup>7</sup>

## ***2.2: Indian American scholars are all chauvinists:***

Witzel has also repeatedly questioned the agency and intelligence of Indian Americans in defining and understanding their own culture. He tends to portray their interest in their heritage and history as singularly motivated by goals of what he terms as ‘chauvinism’ and ‘nationalism’. For instance, in criticizing an attempt at the decipherment of the Indus script by Natwar Jha (who lives in India) and Navaratna Rajaram (who left USA to live in India several years ago, much before Witzel wrote the article below), Witzel then goes on to lampoon entire Indian Americans as a group<sup>8</sup> -

“Given the scholarly inclinations among the expatriate communities in North America we may expect a slew of new interpretations, in fact, a whole new cottage industry. Their impact will appear especially on the internet. This fits in very well with some of their goals, --they have backed several nationalistic and even chauvinistic web sites-- the gaining of respect in their new and old homelands.”

Similar stereotypical remarks about Indian Americans are inserted deliberately by him whenever he writes negative reviews of books or articles authored by an Indian scholar, irrespective of

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, many cohorts of Witzel who signed on the ‘Witzel Petition’ (see later in this article) have Christian missionary links. Asko Parpola’s maternal grandfather was a Christian missionary in Japan. His wife Marjatta Parpola talks of ‘our Christian friend’ in her recent book on Kerala Brahmins (*Kerala Brahmins in Transition*, Finnish Oriental Society: Helsinki, 2000).

Jonathan Kenoyer’s father was the chief physician at a Mission hospital in Shillong (the hub of Christian evangelization even today).

Lars Martin Fosse contacted Father John Dayal, a right wing Christian leader from India, for help on the California textbook controversy issue.

James Heitzman (who formed the CRP committee with Witzel) seems to be a Christian miracle monger, if his writings are seen.

Many other Indologists such as Wilhelm Rau (whose writings are sacrosanct for Witzel) started his career as a Christian theologian and has many biographies of great Lutheran Christians to his credit.

Despite their Christian missionary links, no Indologist questions the objectivity of worth of their writings. On the other hand, on lists such as the ones moderated by likes of Witzel (e.g., the Indo-Eurasian\_Research Yahooogroup, or IER), aspersions are routinely cast on Hindus or Indians (or even South Asians in general) that the writings of these ‘natives’ are tainted by nationalism or pre-scientific religious viewpoints!

<sup>8</sup> See Section 6 at the webpage <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/R&J.htm>

whether that scholar lives in India or elsewhere. Clearly, according the Harvard Professor, Indian expats are wanting in a sense of discrimination and suffer from an identity crisis. The question is – where is all this crass and crude contempt for the Indian diaspora in the minds of ‘world class’ Indologists and scholars in ‘South Asian’ coming from?

### **2.3: Indian/Hindu American groups are Hindu fundamentalists:**

Another incident where he unfairly accused groups of Hindu Americans may be discussed now. The State of California in the United States adopts new textbooks every six years. The adoption of these textbooks is preceded by a well laid out and a lengthy process of review in which members of different resident communities in the state also get a chance to participate and offer their comments on the contents of these textbooks. California is currently undergoing closure of one such cycle of textbook reviews. The textbooks that will be adopted in the next month will be then used in public schools for the next six years. Grade VI textbooks on history contain a long section on Ancient India, together with descriptions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

For several decades, Hindu Americans and Indian Americans have been dismayed at the slanted, erroneous and prejudiced descriptions of their heritage in these textbooks<sup>9</sup>. This time however, they organized themselves and approached the State Board of Education (SBE) in California to rectify these errors, before the textbooks were formally adopted and the text was frozen. These groups of Hindu Americans meticulously followed the procedures of the State Board in offering their comments, suggestions and edits to the texts that were submitted to the Board for reviews. However, just when these corrections were about to be accepted, a group of traditional India-bashers (e.g. Michael Witzel), non-scholars (e.g., astrophysicist Rajesh Kocchar<sup>10</sup>), Indian Marxists (e.g., D N Jha, Romila Thapar), non-specialists in ancient India (e.g. economist Sudha Shenoy, post-colonial studies scholar Homi Bhabha, comparative historian Steve Farmer), scholars alleged to have demonstrated Eurocentric bias in the past (e.g., M Tosi<sup>11</sup> of Italy), non-Indologists (e.g., S. Palaniappan, PhD in Road Transportation) and obscure linguists wrote an arrogant and pompous letter (on Harvard University letterhead, signed by Michael Witzel with endorsing signatures from 46 other ‘scholars’) to the State Board, addressing themselves as “all equally famous world class specialists” on ancient Indian history. The letter (henceforth referred to as ‘Witzel Petition’) alleged that all these Hindu groups proposing edits in the textbooks under review were dangerous Hindu nationalists who were somehow connected with the slaughter of

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<sup>9</sup> For examples of such distortions, see <http://www.india-forum.com/articles/60/1>. It is precisely these kinds of errors, slanted descriptions, prejudiced discussions and outdated information in the textbooks (as mentioned above by me) that alarmed the parents of the Indian American and Hindu American communities in California. And yet, Michael Witzel, Romila Thapar and other prejudiced ‘scholars’ launched a Goebbelsian blitzkrieg, labeling these California residents, apolitical parents who pay their taxes regularly and contribute to the US society immensely, as dangerous Hindu fundamentalists linked to murderers and what not.

<sup>10</sup> Amongst the crackpot theories of this protégé of Romila Thapar is the ingenious suggestion that not just the Rigvedic Saraswati, but even the Ganga and Yamuna mentioned in the Rigveda should be located in Afghanistan!

<sup>11</sup> For the anti-Indian bias of Maurizio Tosi, refer Dilip Chakrabarti’s *Colonial Indology* (1997), Munshiram Manoharlal: New Delhi, 167ff.

Chakrabarti has also cited several relevant examples from Tosi’s writings in the above book. For instance, in a 1992 paper [TOSI, M. 1992. “The Harappan Civilization beyond the Indian Subcontinent”, in Gregory L. Possehl ed., *Harappan Civilization*, Delhi, pp. 365-378], Tosi argues: “.....it is relevant to establish whether the investments in people and resources the Indus civilization would deserve should compare with those directed in the past to the study of ancient Mesopotamia and, more recently, pre-Columbian Meso-America.” If Tosi is so unconcerned about the Indian past, then why did he bother signing the Witzel letter in the first place?

It is not out of place to mention here that a week ago, Dr Kalyanaraman wrote an open letter to 47 signatories, including Tosi, who had urged the State Board to ignore the suggestions of Hindu groups. In response, Tosi sent a most shameless, xenophobic letter that one would not normally expect of a seasoned scholar.

1000 people in Gujarat, and whose friends in India routinely discriminate against millions of Indian minority members and Dalits!

Witzel and three other 'world class specialists' were invited by a panicked SBE to offer their own comments on the edits proposed by Hindu groups. In response, Witzel et al submitted 58 objections, many of which were clearly derogatory to Hindus. For instance, where the Hindu group proposed a correction of the statement that the 'Mahabharata was written earlier than Ramayana', Witzel and team remarked: "How does a sixth grade student care which text was 'written' earlier"! Understandably, one of the state commissioners Dr Metzenberg was appalled and said that this is offensive to Hindus because it obviously matters to them.<sup>12</sup>

The entire episode has caused a lot of consternation in the Hindu American and Indian American communities, and articles<sup>13</sup> and online petitions have been initiated to expose alleged prejudices<sup>14</sup>, faulty scholarship and political connections<sup>15</sup> of these scholars. It is still uncertain whether Witzel and his cohorts have even seen the disputed textbooks in the last 8 weeks. At least one does not see any evidence of his familiarity with them. In fact, the edits of the Vedic Foundation (one of the Hindu groups that approached) are not even public to this day and yet Witzel and Farmer have been maligning them on the basis of what they *may* have submitted!

#### **2.4 Rudeness towards Indian Americans and Indians:**

Many Indians, who have interacted with him for several years, have not failed to notice that in his discussions with Indians, Witzel routinely employs condescending remarks, sarcasms, put-downs, boorish and arrogant statements, and outright insults against them<sup>16</sup>. Such statements are too numerous to reproduce here and literally litter the Internet. While Witzel accuses Indians and Hindus of fundamentalism and nationalism on the fly, he never ever expresses his concern for Hindu victims of terrorism and bigotry perpetrated by followers of other religions.

### **3.0. Statements Stereotyping scholarship in India and Indians in general**

#### **3.1 Direct attacks by Witzel-**

In an adverse and abusive online review<sup>17</sup> of the work of an Indian scholar, Professor Witzel proceeds to make extraneous remarks characterizing entire Sanskrit scholarship in India:

"In sum, amusing reading, like so many of the decipherment books.

(More of them, and other Aryan fantasies, will be reviewed here, in due course). The only real surprise remaining then is this: M. Mishra (author of several Indo-Aryan grammars) was for many years the "Assistant and Deputy Director (academic) of the Rasthriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Delhi (1973-93)."

One would like to know what other cutting edge, innovative, thought provoking, seminal and trend setting research is carried out by academic (ex)members of this Government financed institution?"

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<sup>12</sup> "California School Board Accepts Most Hindu Changes to Sixth Grade Textbooks", *Hindu Press International*, ezine dated December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance the following article by Professor Ramesh Rao at [http://www.indiareacts.com/columns/full\\_column16.htm](http://www.indiareacts.com/columns/full_column16.htm)

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.petitiononline.com/stopIER/petition.html> Within four days, despite the holiday season, more than 1000 people have signed this petition, showing how widespread is the sentiment against Witzel.

<sup>15</sup> See for instance Dr S Kalyanraman's essay at <http://www.india-forum.com/articles/55/1/Harvard-professor-launches-anti-Hindu-Crusade>

<sup>16</sup> Ramesh Rao, 'Whose Religion is it Anyways' at [http://www.indiareacts.com/columns/full\\_column16.htm](http://www.indiareacts.com/columns/full_column16.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Witzel, Michael. 2001. "Little Words with Profound Meaning" at <http://northshore.shore.net/%7Eindia/ejvs/ejvs0701/ejvs0701.txt>

He has made similar derogatory remarks against other institutes of Sanskrit learning in India. And while India is acknowledged as an emerging technology power, one can do a quick google search to find numerous derogatory remarks made by Witzel against Indian science and engineering institutes, which could impact how Americans perceive the technical competence of the Indian American immigrant minority.

### ***3.2: Indians are uncomfortable with changing opinions:***

In criticizing a Greek scholar Nicholas Kazanas (!), Witzel cannot resist the temptation to make another side swipe at Indians. He says<sup>18</sup>:

"Of course, this is not really part of the Indian tradition or ethos: change of opinion often is regarded as "defeat." We want to learn from such conversations. There is a serious cultural difference here, usually not noted. But very important in our context. As one Indian colleague told me, some 20 years ago, proudly: "I never change my opinion". Well, good for him! "

So a grand-total of one data point is used to condemn and stereotype all Indians. Such behavior is quite typical of Witzel, and reflects poorly on how he has used textual data to draw his conclusions in his academic papers. In fact, it is Witzel who refused to 'change his opinion' and accept his mistranslation of a Vedic text. Instead, he went on to give several mutually conflicting explanations<sup>19</sup>, even blaming the editor of the book in question with creating that misprint! Perhaps Witzel would like to call it the polluting influence of '*hiina*' Indian Americans in his midst.

### ***3.3: Defending other ethnocentrics:***

Not only does Witzel denigrate Indians himself, he willingly and approvingly participates in internet discussions where Indians are stereotyped. Sometimes, he even defends others who have denigrated Indians. Let me give a few examples.

In his preface to a book by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer<sup>20</sup> (another signatory to Witzel petition), Richard Meadow (another signatory to the Witzel Petition) makes the following remark:

"This picture represents one man's view of the past informed by 23 years of archaeological and ethnographic research in Pakistan and India and by 18 years of growing up in India. But the paints, often applied with a broad brush necessarily in an impressionist manner, are tempered by Western academic skepticism. Thus we do not see those wild flights of fancy or long leaps of faith that characterize some literature of the region. What flights and leaps are there do not require a suspension of disbelief to entertain."

The statement by Meadow contrasts Indian scholarship unfavorably with Western scholarship stereotypically and clearly smacks of ethno-centrism. And yet, Witzel went on to defend Meadow quite openly and shamelessly by arguing that the word 'region' denotes not the geographic region of South Asia but rather the academic area of studies on Harappan culture!<sup>21</sup>

In the Indo-Eurasian\_Research (IER) group moderated by Witzel and Steve Farmer, the "western scholars", were contrasted favorably with the "natives" (a fall back on racist anthropology), and it is often alleged that the 'natives' are often swayed by nationalisms and other 'isms' which

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/Kazanas.htm>

<sup>19</sup> "The Aryan Migration Theory, Fabricating literary evidence" by Vishal Agarwal at <http://vishalagarwal.voiceofdharma.com/articles/indhistory/amt/index.htm>

<sup>20</sup> *Ancient Cities of the Indian Civilization*, Oxford University Press (Karachi), 1998

<sup>21</sup> Message 1848 dated Nov 11, 2000 on the IndicTraditions yahoo group

makes their research findings questionable, and less objective than those of respectable “western scholars”. In fact in the IndicTraditions yahogroup, Witzel’s close collaborator Steve Farmer has sometimes dismissed historical interpretations by Indians on the grounds that no “respectable western scholar” would accept them. I would leave it to the reader to decide what this means.

As another example, let us look at what happened on the Liverpool Indology list, there were 650 members, of which an overwhelming majority were Americans and Europeans. From March 1999 to April 2001, the moderator Dominik Wujastyk (another signatory of the Witzel Petition) expelled about 15 members, all of whom were Indians. This itself would be deemed as racism by the usual 4/5th rule in the United States. The Indians were expelled for any imaginable reason – rudeness, excessive posts, lengthy posts, advertising and what not. In fact, such flaws for which Indians were expelled, could be seen to a much greater extent demonstrably in the posts of European/American Indologists, notably Robert Zydenbos, Michael Witzel, Lars Martin Fosse (another signatory of Witzel petition) – their posts were often filled with abuses (‘fascist’. ‘liar’ etc. used for other list members) but these people were never touched; or mildly rebuked at the most. In contrast, Indians and others sympathetic to Hindus (e.g. Subhash Kak, Koenraad Elst for e.g.) were harassed so much by Western Indologists (many of them signatories to Witzel Petition) with the perfect connivance of Dominik for their views that they had to leave the list. These people had maintained their politeness till the end but the harassment and name-calling became unbearable. Moreover, Dominik tolerated 250 posts from Western Indologists deriding the level of science and engineering in India in a period of two months (this is strange because Indologists have little appreciation of science themselves!) in late 2000, another 250 posts using sarcastic and totally un-academic language on Indus script decipherment of Rajaram et al (who was not present to defend himself) but expelled Indians left and right when they protested against insults to Indians in general. Needless to say, Witzel was not found wanting and played a leading role in this fracas<sup>22</sup>.

### ***3.4 Indians and dogs are not allowed:***

Likewise, on the Indology Yahooogroup, in behavior reminiscent of colonial signs reading “Indians and Dogs are not allowed”, some Indologists proposed using languages (such as French and German) in which Indians are normally not proficient for their internet discussion. To prevent Indians not knowing German and French from participating in discussions, German Indologist Roland Steiner<sup>23</sup> started his posts in German. This was approved by Lars Martin Fosse<sup>24</sup> and of course by Michael Witzel<sup>25</sup>.

## **4.0. Statements lampooning scholars with different opinions**

Witzel’s critics have shown that he has written adverse reviews and comments on their books even without reading them! <sup>26</sup> Obviously, Witzel will be even more vindictive and vicious when he actually reviews their works after reading them.

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<sup>22</sup> While people holding a particular set of opinions were derided as Hindu fanatics, all other varieties of ideologues like Dravidian Nationalists, Islamists, Marxists were given total freedom and even encouragement by some [For instance Zydenbos said that he advocated the splitting up of India into several nations!]. Eventually, the list became an Indian vs non-Indian mudslinging group and had to be closed on April 14, 2001. The list was re-opened after a few months but with new requirements that effectively eliminated the Indian membership. This new list was moderated by a committee of about 10 scholars now, none of whom is Indian.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/INDOLOGY/message/1029>

<sup>24</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/INDOLOGY/message/1030>

<sup>25</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/INDOLOGY/message/1032>

<sup>26</sup> See for instance pp. 430-432 in Shrikant Talageri, *The Rigveda, a Historical Analysis*. Aditya Prakashan: New Delhi (2000). Also available online at <http://voiceofdharma.org/books/rig/ch9.htm>

#### ***4.1 Loutish and unscholarly behavior in academic journals-***

The following is only a brief sample of the irrelevant and inappropriate remarks that permeate just one published paper<sup>27</sup> of Michael Witzel.

**Page. 107, fn. 2:** “Or, as Kazanas suggests – since he seems secretly proud of the “revisionist” label....”

**Page 108:** “Hardly by coincidence, this makes the RV the oldest text in the world – a doctrine routinely expressed in Hindu fundamentalist circles, but not one accepted by any serious scholar. Kazanas is hardly the first (or best-known) “revisionist” in recent decades to revive these views of Indo-European and South Asian history, which can be found with trivial modifications in the works of Elst, Danino, Frawley, Kak, Klostermaier, S. S. Misra, Rajaram, Sethna, and so on. Kazanas’ arguments are even less subtle than those of most of his predecessors....”

**Page 109:** “Kazanas’ claim about a fourth millennium (or earlier!) Rgveda, which is again repeated in Indian fundamentalist circles...”

**Page 109, fn. 5:** “In the fundamentalist/nationalistic circles from, which Kazanas draws support – despite his pretense of political naivete....”

**Page 110, fn. 7:** “...thus copied with the consistent misspelling introduced by another “specialist” of Ancient India, the former Manila ADB Bank employee S. Kalyanaraman.”

**Page 111:** “The spiritual center, Omilos Meleton, that Kazanas runs in Athens derives its inspiration “from numerous spiritual traditions of mankind – Indian, ancient Greek, Buddhist, Christian Gnostic, and so on” – all dumped in one New Age basket. Views like this put Kazanas in the same class as his better known confrère David Frawley (aka Pandit Vamadeva Shastri), whose Vedic Institute in New Mexico offers correspondence courses in Vedic Astrology..”

**Page 112:** “All this is the mark of a zealot neo-convert clinging to firmly held beliefs – which, despite his claims, can be connected both to fundamentalist Hindu views and associated political movements in India.”

**Page 115:** “But resources like this which are indispensable in Vedic scholarship, are not part of Kazanas’ repertoire...Again we find that Kazanas is guided by the methodology of the courtroom lawyer or scholastic disputant...”

**Page 117:** “But these are, of course, mere empirical data, which cannot stand against Kazanas’ neo-convert’s faith.”

**Page 120:** “Maybe Kazanas has an English debating club or an assembly of medieval disputers in mind. But in this case at hand, one would hope that a verdict would rest on more than the horse sense of an English gentleman or the disputational skills of a medieval pandit.”

**Page 122:** “Kazanas’ other uses of “historical records” are no less absurd. Manifold contradictions show up in his paper, adopted wholesale from earlier mythologizers of Indian history..The theater of the absurd of Kazanas and his forerunners could be best dismissed with laughter, if it were not for the serious damage that accompanies these black comedies...”

“It is not necessary to dwell on Kazanas’ motives in producing his work, beyond pointing to his obvious affinities to other South Asian and Western writers linked to Indian fundamentalist movements.”

**Page 126:** “Other writers in Kazanas’ class, including D. Frawley, K. Elst, and N. S. Rajaram, have already caused significant damage to linguistics, philology, Indology, archaeology, and history. This damage is especially evident in Indian universities, where researchers are increasingly being pushed to embrace mythological approaches to writing Indian history.”

**Page 127:** “The only lasting value in Kazanas’ work is in the material that his work and that of his colleagues will provide future Ph.D. students interested in the ties between so-called “revisionist” history and fundamentalist/political movements in twenty-first century India.”

**Page 134:** “If Kazanas had done some comparative research...”

**Page 147:** “Talageri is a bank employee and may be excused; the Sanskritist Kazanas cannot.”

**Page 152:** “...his fellow “revisionist” K. Elst...”

#### ***4.2 Slander in his own cottage journals (co-edited by other Witzel Petition signatories)***

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Ein Fremdling im Rgveda’ (*Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1-2: pp.107-185, 2003)

Or let us consider another example where he wrote a ‘review’<sup>28</sup> of a dissenting scholar Shrikant Talageri’s book<sup>29</sup>. Nearly every paragraph of Witzel’s article contains references to things that Talageri does not “know” (although they are “well known” “since the 19<sup>th</sup> century” to everybody, “but not to Talageri”), do not “mention”, do not “discuss”, do not “acknowledge”, do not “refer” to, do not “reveal”, am “unaware” of or “oblivious” to, “miss” out on, do not “bother” about, do not “point out”, etc. etc.

The things Talageri is “ignorant” of, according to Witzel, include -

“Sanskrit—let alone... the obscure Old Vedic forms of the RV”, “any modern scholarly language besides English”, “Old Vedic, Old Iranian, and other ancient Indo-European languages”, “archaic forms of Sanskrit (Old Vedic) and closely related languages”, “Old Vedic”, “Linguistics”, “pre-pANinean grammar and ... disputed Rgvedic words”, “linguistic evidence”, “philological knowledge”, “scholarly linguistic and philological skills”, “linguistic and dialectical variants, meters, substrate words, grammatical innovations, linguistic archaisms and so on,” “myriad well-known linguistic, zoological and archaeological data”, “historical, technological, zoological and archaeological details”, “requisite language skills, scholarly acumen, or historical and political objectivity”, “linguistic rigor, independence from purANic-like worldviews... political integrity”, “climate”, “geography”, “geographical facts such as the nature of Panjab rivers”, “zoological details”, “critical zoological and archaeological evidence, horse and two-wheeled chariot... river dolphins in the Indus”, “the habitat of the Gangetic dolphins”, “South Asian zoological facts”, “archaeology”, “the evidence of archaeology”, “comparative Indo-European mythology”, “realia of the RV period ... workings of tribal societies, early states”, “social questions... vast comparative literature on semi-nomadic peoples”, “semi-nomadic transhumance life or the workings of early pre-state tribal societies”, “standard scholarly research”, “all the detailed work that has been conducted over the past 200 years”, (and) “discussed for more than a hundred years, although T. is not apparently aware of the discussions”, “any of the vast scholarly literature from the past 150 years”, “over a century and a half of research”, “known details regarding the redaction history of the family books”, “known complications in the codification of the RV ascribed to zAkalya” “the redaction of the RV”, “RV stratigraphy”, “well-known structural details in the nucleus of the RV”, “the redaction history of the RV” which is “well-known”, a long list of books and authors about whom I “do not leave a clue” that “I am aware that these works exist”, including “Oldenberg (1888)... Macdonell (1886) and Scheftelowitz (1922) ... Tokunaga (1997)”, “KF Geldner (1951...) L. Renou (1955-1969..) and .... T. Elizarenkova (1989-99)” “K.R. Potdar (1945)... van den Bosch (1985)”, etc. etc. etc.

Consequently, Talageri’s book is, among countless other things –

“imaginary”, “a patriotic or chauvinistic, ultimately pre-enlightenment enterprise”, “garbage in, garbage out”, “like his old one...a purANa-like fantasy”, etc. – containing “frustrating contradictions”, “amateurish errors”, things “haphazardly draw(n) from a handful of... works” (without “anything approaching a serious grasp of the subject”) “scholarly pretensions”, “myriad of factual errors”, “undisciplined etymologizing”, “most ridiculous claims”, “impossible chronological ideas”, “obvious anachronisms”, “historical fantasies”, “purANa-inspired fictions”, “Hindutva fantasies”, “fantastic claims”, “hodge-podge of linguistic facts and fictions”, “familiar Hindutva myths”, “absurdities”, “morass of unverified charts and lists”, “intellectual detours”, “countless examples of methodological laxness”, etc. etc. etc.

The overflowing chaff in Witzel’s ‘review’ appears to be intended to serve three distinct purposes:

- a) To make the “review article” look voluminous and detailed.
- b) To give vent to Witzel’s spite.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://nautilus.shore.net/~india/ejvs/ejvs0702/ejvs0702article.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Shrikant Talageri, *The Rigveda a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan: New Delhi (2000)

c) To deeply prejudice the readers, or simply numb their senses, by a continuous barrage of assertions and comments about my ignorance and incompetence on the one hand, and his motives, ideological predilections and professional ethics on the other.

Such ‘scholarly’ behavior is actually quite typical of the Harvard Professor.

#### ***4.3 Commissioner Metzenberg is a ‘budding politician’:***

He does not even spare honest government officials who question his Aryan fantasies. On December 02, 2005, the State Board of Education of California met to discuss the fate of the petition<sup>30</sup> that Witzel and 46 other supporters (referring to themselves as “all equally famous”, “world class specialists” on ancient India!) that advocated rejection of the suggestions of Californian Hindus that descriptions and acceptance the of Aryan invasion theory in proposed grade VI textbooks should be deleted. Witzel’s collaborator Dr Heitzmann of University of California at Davis pleaded that at least the ‘Aryan Migration Theory’ should be retained. One of the board members, Dr S Metzenberg, himself a biologist, however refused to entertain such ideas. He said that having seen the genetic evidence himself, he did not believe that there is any proof for any Aryan invasion or migration, and that it is merely a theory subscribed to by some historians.

So what was Witzel’s judgment on Dr. S Metzenberg? Witzel derisively referred to him as a “budding politician”!<sup>31</sup> Apparently, when somebody refuses to see Aryan genes, it touches a raw nerve in Michael Witzel, and the intolerant and fascist streak in his character shows up clearly.

### **5.0 Statements making personal attacks on other individuals**

In disputing with his academic opponents, Witzel tends to get very emotional, personal and vindictive. His responses to their academic arguments are marked by a total lack of proportion, and he even uses diametrically opposite arguments to dumb down different opponents to suit immediate political needs. In particular, he will not even stop at using tenuous and tortuous chains of association to club them with various real or imaginary groups of fundamentalists and fascists. He makes totally inappropriate and irrelevant remarks – personal attacks, sarcasms, abuses, taunts, bluffs, setting up straw-men, diversionary tactics, false accusations, calumny by association and what not. Such cheap behavior has become quite typical of Witzel in recent years, and many of his recent publications are full of such remarks.

Witzel frequently alleges, without basis, that people who dissent with him on academic matters are receiving money from politicians. We give two examples.

#### ***5.1 Slander on public lists<sup>32</sup>***

“Steve,

\* for your amusement : see what Elst, Frawdley are doing....

YOU MISSED THEM!!!!

also: bharat-nir-bhaya seems to be a group which calls itself "India - without - fear" !!

\* and see our old friend Sam Garg, at the bottom...

\* I wonder how our friend Agarwal finds so much time? Recently, he mentioned that school has started.... Doesn't he work any more? And who pays him then? (Malhotra?? BJP ?? -- his VHP uncles???)

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<sup>30</sup> Referred to as the ‘Witzel Petition’ in this article elsewhere.

<sup>31</sup> Message 2563 dt. 15 December 2005 available at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Urasian\\_research/message/2563](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Urasian_research/message/2563)

<sup>32</sup> Message number 7805 dt. 22 July 2001 on the ‘IndianCivilization’ yahoo group

Didn't get around to send you the booklet yesterday; Will do so tomorrow....  
M>”

**Comment:** Note that he has mis-spelt ‘Frawley’ as ‘Frawdley’ deliberately and has alleged that ‘Agarwal’ receives money from politicians. This is quite typical of his behavior. Perhaps an inkling into his own sources of income? One may rather, in a Witzellian manner, ask how Steve Farmer survives in his Portola Valley home when he has no job? Does Witzel pay him on the pretext of various conferences in USA and Japan organized by none other than Witzel?

### **5.2 Slander on secretive Indology lists:**

This example is from a closed and secretive list<sup>33</sup> started by Lars Martin Fosse (another signatory of the Witzel Petition) where the following ‘scholarly’ discussion took place. It may be noted that the scholar maligned by Witzel and Fosse lives in abject poverty and cannot pay his own medical bills:

>>At 10:07 pm -0500 7/2/03, Michael Witzel wrote:  
>>  
>>>.... One wonders how he survives with 4 children...  
>>(just his Indian >>>book sales??),  
>>>since he doesn't do astrology like Pt Frawley (who has now switched off his  
>>>consultations page -- I noticed due to Steve's report-- and now points to a  
>>>NM colleague!! Criticism can move things ... a bit)  
>

>> Dear Scholarly Colleagues  
>>  
>>Surely this list is intended to be a place for us to discuss freely  
>>among ourselves, without constantly having to defend our existence as  
>>Indologists. It does not seem appropriate, therefore, to use it as a  
>>place to discuss the private lives of third parties, especially their  
>>children.  
>>  
>>Dr Valerie J Roebuck  
>>Manchester, UK

Michael Witzel replied:

> Obviously, the point is not Elst's private life or his unnamed children.  
> Rather, his financing. Which is a mystery. We know that he is financed by  
> some Indian publishers and that he gives lectures here and there. But there  
> must be other sources.  
> And his financing is of \*some\* interest, given the various VERY political  
> stances he takes. This is not an ivory tower scholar, but a rather public  
> figure, and we thus can take interest in his financial dealings, like those  
> of -- ahem, much better known politicians, say Rev. Jackson or Mrs. Blair  
> or of our great leaders here.  
> Thus: curious... about the politics behind this.  
> Why : to start with, obvious extremist right wing politics apart, Elst et  
> al., are giving Indology a bad name. We have \*some\* social responsibility.  
>> In this sense.  
> Don't want to psychoanalyze too much here, yet take a look at the Belgian  
> (Flemish) scene, the invited (!) Muslim (Moroccan etc.) immigration there  
> starting in the Sixties, and the Flemish right wing response ("first

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<sup>33</sup> Yahooogroup called ‘scholarlyservices’. Membership is only by invitation of Dr Fosse. The list has an unwritten rule that Indians and dogs are not allowed, although a certain type of Indian that is servile is allowed.

- > wronged by French speaking Belgians, now by Muslims"...) echoed by Elst:
- > he has often written about that as well, with predictable wording.
- > One thing is sure though: Elst sees himself wronged by the Belgian
- > Indological 'establishment' (long story), complains about opportunities
- > denied do him, etc.>MW

### **5.3 Labelling dissenting scholars:**

California is a progressive state and the educators here cherish a diversity of opinions. This is also stated in the guiding principles of the education policy of the State. However, Professor Witzel and some other signatories are not in favor of giving a voice to divergent opinions. For instance, he labels (without basis) sarcastically, the editors of a recent text<sup>34</sup> for airing divergent opinions on the Aryan Invasion of Indian theory as 'post modernists' for "whom the matter would of course always remain inconclusive"<sup>35</sup>. Little wonder then that Witzel often displays the dead surety of a Bible thumping preacher in proposing his Aryan theories!

### **5.4 Persecution complex/mania of Prof. Witzel? Offense is the best defense!**

If one examines the chronology of 'who abuse whom' in Witzel's writings, it is clear that he has been abusing and lampooning dissenting scholars for almost fifteen years now, without any provocation. Most scholars have silently ignored this abuse, others have recently started paying back in the same coin. However, Witzel tends to paint of picture in which he is the victim of abuse by others.

For instance, he alleged that in a conference held in Bangalore in early 2001, Shrikant Talageri called him a "Germa-centric racist"<sup>36</sup>. However, Talageri openly denied having said anything remotely similar, and three other participants in the conference also stated in public lists (Indiaincivilization yahoo group) that Talageri had never made anything of that sort. On the other hand, Witzel's anonymous informant who supposedly told Witzel about this slur by Talageri failed to materialize and support Witzel's allegation.

## **6.0. Indology's 'Creationism': 'Intelligent Design' of the Master Aryan race:**

### **6.1 The genetic clones of Aryan Invasion Theory:**

The Aryan Invasion theory (AIT) that a group of virile, fair, blue-eyed, horse riding, chariot driving master race called the Aryans invaded India from across the Khyber, and destroyed and conquered the original Indian inhabitants is a fiction of colonial and racist ideologies from the 19th century. Such theories have led to great human tragedies in the last century<sup>37</sup>, including the Holocaust caused by the Nazis. Therefore, it is no longer fashionable to uphold the Aryan invasion theory in its more crude forms today, although Indologists such as Asko Parpola, Stanley Wolpert and some other Indologists do not care for political correctness even today. However, 'progressive' Indologists such as Michael Witzel have come up with numerous 'different', and 'nuanced' scenarios.

And what are these 'new' path-breaking state-of-art explanations?

### **6.2 Aryan Panzers launch a Blitzkrieg into India:**

<sup>34</sup> Bryant, Edwin and Laurie Patton. 2005. *The Indo-Aryan Controversy*. New York: Routledge

<sup>35</sup> Message 2213 dt. Nov 5, 2005 by Michael Witzel available online at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian\\_research/message/2213](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/message/2213)

<sup>36</sup> See for instance: <http://users.primushost.com/~india/ejvs/ejvs0702/ejvs0702a.txt>

<sup>37</sup> Poliakov, Leon. 1974. *The Aryan Myth, a History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe*. New York: Basic Books

Let us see how Witzel today describes the movement of Aryan speakers into India. He compares the ‘migration’ of Indo-Aryans into India with the ‘migration’ of Normans into England and with the ‘arrival’ of Huns, Scythians etc., into India<sup>38</sup> –

“The immigrating group(s) may have been relatively small one(s), such as Normans who came to England in 1066 and who nearly turned England into French speaking country- while they originally had been Scandinavians, speaking N. Germanic. This may supply a model for the Indo-Aryan immigration as well.....However, the introduction of the horse and especially of the horse-drawn chariot was a powerful weapon in the hands of the Indo-Aryans. It must have helped to secure military and political dominance even if some of the local elite were indeed quick to introduce the new cattle-based economy and the weapon, the horse drawn chariot, - just as the Near Eastern peoples did on a much larger and planned scale.”

Everyone knows that Normans did not merely ‘come’ to England, they invaded.

Elsewhere, Witzel elaborates on the role played by the chariot (‘Vedic tank’) and the horse in enabling the Aryans secure elite domination over the descendants of Harappans<sup>39</sup>:

“The first appearance of thundering chariots must have stricken the local population with a terror, similar to that experienced by the Aztecs and Incas upon the arrival of the iron-clad, horse riding Spaniards.”

One wonders if Witzel seriously thinks that the ‘Vedic tanks’ (see next quote) were capable of cross the Afghani mountain ranges when even American tanks can do so today.

He elaborates further<sup>40</sup> –

“Something of this fear of the horse and of the thundering chariot, the "tank" of the 2nd millennium B.C. is transparent in the famous horse 'Dadhikra' of the Puru king Trasadasya ("Tremble enemy" in RV 4.38.8) .....The first appearance of thundering chariots must have stricken the local population with terror similar to that experienced by the Aztecs and the Incas upon the arrival of the iron-clad, horse riding Spaniards.”

Witzel draws also an analogy from Japan, where a few ‘aggressive horse riders’ from Northern China were able to influence the Japanese culture dramatically<sup>41</sup> .

### **6.3 Indian natives appropriate Aryanism:**

In such a scenario, it was possible that the locals were quick to adopt the use of the horse and the chariot and thus outsmart the Aryan migrants. However, while doing so, the locals also supposedly ‘appropriated’ the Indo-Aryan language and culture as their own, becoming Aryans themselves<sup>42</sup> –

“Not only the language, but also the culture of the newly arrived elite was appropriated, including the 'Vedic Tank' the horse drawn chariot.”

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<sup>38</sup> See page xxii, note 54 in Witzel, Michael; Lubotsky, A; M. S. Oort, M. S. (Eds.); 1997; *F. B. J. Kuiper- Selected Writings on Indian Linguistics and Philology*; Rodopi; Amsterdam/Atlanta (Note: The introduction to the text, which alone is cited in this webpage, has Witzel as the sole author).

<sup>39</sup> Page 114 in Michael Witzel. 1995; ‘Early Indian History: Linguistic and Textual Parameters’; in George Erdosy (ed.), *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia*: 85-125; Walter de Gruyter; Berlin

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, footnote 74

<sup>41</sup> IndicTraditions Yahoogroup (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/indictraditions/>) on 11 December 2000, message # 2735

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, page 109

And what is the proof of all this? The proof is that ‘Thus spake the Lord (Witzel)’. **The Lord said, ‘Let there be Aryans, and Lo! There were Aryans!’ QED!**

#### **6.4 You’ve got the ‘Aryan’ look**

Witzel even speculates<sup>43</sup> how these Aryans may have looked like:

“If they had resided and intermarried with the local population of the northern borderlands of Iran (the so called Bactro-Margiana archaeological complex) for some centuries, the immigrating Indo-Aryan clans and tribes may originally have looked like Bactrians, Afghanis or Kashmiris, and must have been racially submerged quickly in the population of the Punjab, just like later immigrants whose staging area was in Bactria as well: the Saka, Kusana, Huns, etc.”

Since when did Huns, Shakas and Kushanas merely become ‘immigrants’. Didn’t they INVADE India?

Victor Mair (a recent collaborator of Witzel), a doyen of Indo-European studies, is not content with these partial European looks of migrating Aryans, and he suggests<sup>44</sup> that they even had light eyes, skin and hair –

“There may be instances in world history where a dominant or highly influential elite who were few in number were nonetheless able to impose their language on a subject population. (I suspect that could have happened where the conquered population was also small in number and ravaged by war, disease, and the like. But then, would they have survived at all?). North India, Pakistan and Afghanistan 3500 years ago have been suggested as examples of such a scenario, with a relatively small number of Aryan warriors supposedly being able to impose Indic languages upon the native population. In light of the above discussion, I find this to be an unconvincing explanation of how IE languages entered the subcontinent. The fact that a **significant portion of the population in these countries possesses blue eyes, fair skin, and brown or even blond hair** (where the environment makes these traits which are more suited to northern latitudes disadvantageous from the standpoint of survival) would seem to indicate that sizeable numbers of IE speakers actually did intrude upon the subcontinent and have left not only their linguistic but their genetic imprint upon it as well.” [Emphasis added by us]

One wonders how Mair concluded that a ‘significant’ proportion of the population of north India etc., have blue eyes. Most of the compilers of this case study have lived for several years in India and Pakistan and yet we have not seen a ‘significant’ number of people who have the Aryan looks (blond hair and blue eyes). Anyway, a laudatory review of the conference whose published proceedings contain the above claim, has been written by Witzel<sup>45</sup>.

We do not see how these scenarios are essentially different from the 19th century myths about Aryans. It is nothing but colonial myths couched with currently trendy lingo.

#### **6.5 Anti-Aryanism is a ‘Hindu Conspiracy’:**

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<sup>43</sup> See page xxii, note 54 in Witzel, Michael; Lubotsky, A; M. S. Oort, M. S. (Eds.); 1997; *F. B. J. Kuiper- Selected Writings on Indian Linguistics and Philology*; Rodopi; Amsterdam/Atlanta (Note: The introduction to the text, which alone is cited in this webpage, has Witzel as the sole author).

<sup>44</sup> pp. 14-15 in Mair, Victor; 1998; ‘Priorities’; pg. 4-41 in *The Bronze Age and Early Iron Age Peoples of Eastern Central Asia*, vol. I (ed. Victor Mair); The Institute for the Study of Man, Washington D.C. (in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania Museum Publications, Philadelphia); 1998 (Journal of the Indo-European Studies Monograph No. 26)

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/mt26i.html> In fact the webpage of the conference itself is maintained by Witzel.

Although no proof credible archaeological, genetic, anthropological, literary or other proof exists that Aryans invaded/migrated/aculturated/diffused/osmosized into India around 1500 BCE, the theory must always be retained as the default explanation of ancient Indian history and the genesis of Hinduism in Indology textbooks, or even grade VI textbooks per Witzel. The theory is inferred using most tendentious logic from the soft evidence of historical linguistics. Although most linguists today have no connection with racist ideologies, it is a fact that in the past, many of them were at the service of Nazism<sup>46</sup> and so on.

Another interesting example where Witzel and his cohorts on the IER list are defending the AIT is the attack on a BBC website<sup>47</sup> by some signatories of Witzel Petition. It is being alleged on the Indology and IER yahoo groups that the content of the website is motivated by Hindutva interpretations of ancient Indian history! The website lists clear reasons as to why the Aryan invasion theory is rejected, and how it demeans Indian heritage and intelligence. One wonders why these Indologists are planning to attack the BBC now if they do not uphold the AIT? Are these people still using AIT as a bargaining point, in the hope that their opponents will at least concede the equally baseless Aryan migration theory as a compromise? What exactly is so offensive on this webpage? The webpage does not even replace AIT with the opposite indigenous Aryan theory. So why are these Indologists so peeved?

Those who want to see proof for the validity of this theory will of course see it, even if it is invented, or 'discovered' by none other than themselves. Just as Creationists insist on the inclusion of intelligent design in school textbooks, Indologists insist on the validity of their Creationist theory of the 'intelligent design of Aryan invaders/migrants etc., into India around 1500 BCE'. Any attempts to remove this theory or even any attempt to demote this 'fact' into a 'theory' in textbooks is branded by Indologist Creationists as a 'right wing Hindu conspiracy'.

### **6.6 Inventing evidence for Aryan invasions:**

Witzel offers the following 'proof'<sup>48</sup>,

“Taking a look at the data relating to the immigration of the Indo-Aryans into South Asia, one is stuck by the number of vague reminiscences of foreign localities and tribes in the Rgveda, in spite repeated assertions to the contrary in the secondary literature. Then, there is the following direct statement contained in (the admittedly much later) BSS (=Baudhayana Shrauta Sutra) 18.44:397.9 sqq which has once again been overlooked, not having been translated yet: "Ayu went eastwards. His (people) are the Kuru Panchala and the Kasi-Videha. This is the Ayava (migration). (His other people) stayed at home. His people are the Gandhari, Parsu and Aratta. This is the Amavasava (group)"

When it was pointed out that this proof was a mistranslation that violated rules of Sanskrit grammar, comparison with parallel textual passages in Vedic literature and so on, Witzel tried to wiggle out by giving numerous mutually contradictory excuses, including the allegation that the editor of that publication George Erdosy was actually responsible for what Witzel called a misrepresentation of his views! This entire controversy would have been very funny had it not

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<sup>46</sup> See the following book in this regard: Christopher Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich, Mother-Tongue Facism, Race and the Science of Language*, Routledge, New York (1999)

<sup>47</sup> The page, which may soon disappear as a result of these 'scholarly' pressures is currently available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history5.shtml>

<sup>48</sup> pg. 320-321 of Witzel, M.; Rgvedic History: Poets, Chieftains and Politics; in *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia* ed. by Erdosy, George (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin); 1995

been so pathetic, and Witzel's explanations are compiled on a webpage available for all to see<sup>49</sup>. Some scholars have openly alleged that Witzel's 'mistranslation' defies all principles of ethics and is willful<sup>50</sup>.

### **6.7 Bluffs as evidence for Aryan invasion:**

The notion that Aryans introduced iron into the Indian subcontinent, using the metal to make formidable weapons for conquering the native Indians (and also fabricate axes to clear the jungles on Ganga plains) was a core dogma of the Aryan invasion theory. But unfortunately, archaeology has unearthed some iron artefacts in the subcontinent, dating to Harappan times. So Witzel bluffs that iron that is occasionally found in India and surroundings before 1200/100 BCE is meteoric iron!<sup>51</sup> In reality, there are no available chemical analysis results showing that this is indeed the case.<sup>52</sup> In fact, Gregory Possehl<sup>53</sup> notes very clearly that the iron artifacts predating 1000 BCE from various sites in South Asia have not been analyzed to ascertain whether it is meteoric iron or not.

### **6.8 Aryan Templar knights on the Holy Grail of the Pure Aryan gene:**

Witzel is also on a frantic hunt for the Aryan gene. Numerous genetic studies have been published recently, with diametrically opposite conclusions. But Witzel promotes only those studies which announce the discovery of Aryan genes and 'prove' the Aryan invasion theory. Witzel<sup>54</sup> is very hopeful that genetic studies will eventually unveil the genetic tracks of Aryan immigrants to India, even though a Witzel Petition cosignatory Shereen Ratnagar has recently termed all such studies as a backdoor entry of racism in the journal 'Man and Environment'.

Witzel cites several recent articles, notes that they do suffer from some deficiencies, but concludes nevertheless that –

“Recent work by Bamshad, Majumder, Underhill, Sells, and many others has uncovered preliminary evidence that not only points to prehistorical movements into India from Africa and the Middle East, but movements in later periods as well from Central and even East Asia.”

This paper is obviously cited by Witzel<sup>55</sup> approvingly. The cited paper, Bamshad et al<sup>56</sup> [2001] really seems to have revived the sagging hopes of invasionists and crypto-Aryan invasionists.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See, Vishal Agarwal, “The Aryan Migration Theory: Fabricating Literary Evidence”, available online at <http://vishalagarwal.voiceofdharma.com/articles/indhistory/amt/index.htm>

<sup>50</sup> See B B Lal's write up “Should one give up all ethics to promote one's theory”, contained in his recent (2005) book : *“The Homeland of the Aryans, Evidence of Rigvedic Flora and Fauna & Archaeology”* by B.B. Lal (with contributions by K.S. Saraswat), New Delhi: Aryan Books International

<sup>51</sup> Michael Witzel's 'Ein Fremdling im Rgveda' (*Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1-2: pp.107-185, 2003), pp. 174-175, fn. 112

<sup>52</sup> Meteoric iron has a higher nickel content. None of the standard works on Archaeometallurgy of ancient India, including recent ones by Vibha Tripathi [2001], and by D. P. Agrawal [2000], contain any such information which enables to decide if these ancient iron artifacts in a bronze age context are derived from meteoric iron or not.

<sup>53</sup> Gregory Possehl. 2002. *The Indus Civilization*. Walnut Creek (California): Alta Mira Press, p. 93

<sup>54</sup> Michael Witzel's 'Ein Fremdling im Rgveda' (*Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1-2: pp.107-185, 2003), pp. 152-153

<sup>55</sup> Michael Witzel's 'Ein Fremdling im Rgveda' (*Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1-2: pp.107-185, 2003), page 152, fn. 72

<sup>56</sup> Michael Bamshad et al. 2001. Genetic Evidence on the Origins of Indian Caste Populations. In *Genome Research*, vol. 11, pages 994-1004

<sup>57</sup> The American journal *Archaeology* [September/October 2001:13] summarizes the results of BAMSHAD *et al* and says - ‘**DNA does tell tales**, according to researchers who studied from the genetic data of 250 unrelated men from the eight social castes of southern India. Y-chromosome analysis, which identifies the genetic material passed along the paternal line, reveals that members of the upper castes are more genetically similar to Europeans, while lower

So as an illustration, let us examine how sound the conclusions and methodology used by Bamshad *et al* are. We observe –

1. The sample size is very small, and restricted to one district in coastal south India, to where migration of upper-castes from North India is attested even by Vedic texts (for instance the legend in Aitareya Brahmana mentioning that descendants of Visvamitras moved east and south to become Pundras, Sabaras, Andhras and so on). No statistical justification is given by the authors for what is *prima-facie* an insufficient sample size.
2. The authors do not take into account the mobility of caste and sub-caste groups in social hierarchy. They just assume that present day Ksatriyas were Ksatriyas in 1500 BCE as well.
3. The European-ness of Ksatriyas, per the data in that paper, is greater than that of Brahmins, which is odd. If we adhere to invasionist scenarios, Brahmins should resemble the ‘Europeans’ most closely.<sup>58</sup>
4. The genetic distance tables actually show that the ‘genetic distance’ between Indians as a group, and East Europeans is LESS than that between East Europeans and South Europeans. This puts a question mark on the very basis of the ‘genetic’ category ‘European’ employed by Bamshad *et al*.
5. The paper is silent on *when* these ‘Eurogenes’ entered the various castes of India. These genes could have well come during Shaka, Greek and Persian invasions and thus have nothing to do with the Aryans at all. The authors of the paper however assume that these genes were brought in by Aryans around 1500 BC.

Let us see what Stanley Wolpert, who formed a second review committee (together with Witzel and James Heitzman) to look at California textbooks has to say<sup>59</sup> about this Aryan gene:

“The final wave of tribal invasions may have come some centuries after the first Aryans started over the northwest passes. This was the most important invasion in all of India’s history, since the Aryans brought with their Caucasian genes a new language – Sanskrit...”

So this is how Indology creationists explain the intelligent design of the superior Aryans with perfect Caucasian genes!

But, anyone who questions Witzel's Aryan fantasies is immediately smeared with his barrage of verbal abuses. Employing reckless free association, Witzel immediately pontificates that his academic dissenter is on the pay of some politician, or that he is linked to some fundamentalist ideology. This of course begs the question - is Witzel too motivated by similar considerations in propagating his Aryan theories? Numerous scholars have alleged that he uses inappropriate and non-academic techniques in promoting his theories. A collection of these critiques (by no means

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caste members share more genetic similarities with Asians. The study, by researchers from the University of Utah, Louisiana State University, and Andhra University, India, confirms literary and archaeological evidence for a Vedic invasion of the subcontinent from the northwest between 3,5000 and 3,000 years ago. This “new” population is generally considered to have occupied higher positions within India’s caste system.”

<sup>58</sup> There is a view however, proposed by Marxist historian D D Kosambi, and accepted by a few other scholars, that the Aryans co-opted with indigenous priest-hood, that became the Brahmana caste, while the invading Aryans themselves became the Ksatriyas, Vaisyas (and also supplied some Brahmanical genes). I think that the study by Bamshad *et al* is just too ‘quickie’ to be of any academic use.

<sup>59</sup> Stanley Wolpert, ‘*A New History of India*’, Oxford University Press: New York (2000), page 27

exhaustive) may be accessed by scrolling down at the following website <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/indology.html> (scroll down and see under 'Michael Witzel').

## **7.0. What Would Witzel Do (WWWD)?- A Satire**

According to Witzel, anyone who opposes his Aryan theories is a dangerous Hindu nationalist, Hindutva-vaadi, a revisionist, a chauvinist, a supporter of 'Bharata ueber alles' or an Indocentric<sup>60</sup>. Anyway, let us examine how Witzel himself would fare, when his own mud-sliding tactics are applied to his own self.

### ***7.1 Witzel as a supporter of Pan-German ideology?:***

Starting from his online Curriculum Vitae<sup>61</sup> accessible via his homepage (checked on December 28, 2005), we learn that he was born in 1943 in "Schwiebus (Germany)". This is interesting, because the town of Schwiebus was in Germany till the fall of Nazism, and was awarded to Poland in 1945. Now, the last some of us checked the Indian passports of our pre-1947 born relatives, their birthplace was listed as 'Karachi, Pakistan', or 'Sylhet, Bangladesh' and so on. Apparently, Witzel's family belonged to the German population of Schwiebus that was expelled in the years 1945-1947 after the town was awarded to Poland by the Allies. But, convention demands that he should have stated his birthplace as 'Schwiebus, Poland'.

In contrast, Witzel's webpage also says that he studied at 'University of Tuebingen (Germany)', 'Erlangen (Germany)' in the following decades (1960s and 70s). He should have either used 'West Germany' or "East Germany". But everything is Germany as long as it belonged to the Fatherland in Third Reich!

If I were Witzel, I would argue that Witzel is a sympathizer of the 'pan-German' movement that formed a precursor to the National Socialism ideology.

### ***7.2 An apologia for absconding Nazi war criminals?***

The unprecedented horrors of Nazi Germany are too well known to detail here. There is also no need to point to dozens of publications that describe how a very large proportion of the German population (not restricted to membership of the Nazi party) were willing (actively or passively) accomplices in the perpetration of atrocities such as the Jewish Holocaust. So let us see what Witzel has to say about post Nazi Germany.

During an internet discussion, an Indian discussant argued that the draconian TADA law (under which anyone could be picked up by law enforcement agencies on suspicion of terrorist activities without any legal procedures) in India is worse than the de-Nazification campaign of the Allies.

But Witzel differed. He lamented<sup>62</sup> –

“WRONG, as usual. The Allied Forces had a program of several years of "denazification" where every party member (enforced by the Nazis for Govt. officials at \*all\* levels), and even lowly members of (enforced) membership in low-level organizations, were investigated by a long series of questions ("Der Fragebogen") and had to show that they were 'clean'.....”

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<sup>60</sup> See his recent publication, the title of which itself is quite revealing: Indocentrism: Autochthonous visions of ancient India. In: *The Indo-Aryan controversy : evidence and inference in Indian history* /edited by Edwin F. Bryant and Laurie L. Patton. London ; New York : Routledge, 2005

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~7Ewitzel/mwcv.htm>

<sup>62</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IndianCivilization/message/8585>

Witzel also complained, as an example, how his anti-Nazi teacher Paul Thieme was wrongly imprisoned because he was confused for another person by the same name. But the Indian discussant disagreed and responded<sup>63</sup> –

“Allied action was reasonable and expected, somewhat more civilized than India's TADA act which can lock up any suspect. The cultural cleansing mentioned by your partner magazine is a communist term meant to eliminate any suspect, or get them eliminated by the party red guards or whoever.”

Witzel then went on to make a strange comment<sup>64</sup> –

“Obviously, my correction only dealt with the misinformation about Allied action in Germany and Austria after 1945.

No one would object to persecuting Nazis; the stupidity of the Allies was to expand that to all German/Austrians, thereby creating some sympathy of, and even active help by common citizens in avoiding such persecution.

All of which would not have happened if only the active Nazis and their active collaborators had been persecuted... The effect of all of this frequently was the opposite of what was intended.”

Of course, Witzel did not try to defend the indefensible Nazi ideology. But he seems to mitigate the monstrosity of the acts of fellow Germans in helping Nazi war criminals escape! It is strange that considering the horrendous nature of the Nazi regime, Witzel is so sensitive to the detoxification of the German society that was justifiably carried out by the Allies.

Now, if I were Witzel, I would say that his statement that the heavy-handedness of Allies caused some Germans to conceal Nazi war criminals smacks of negationist sympathies.

Anyhow, one cannot help noticing that whereas on one hand, Witzel is very careful in distinguishing guilty Germans from non-guilty Germans, on the other hand he often does not consider it necessary in hedging his sweeping negative stereotypical remarks about Indian Americans with words such as ‘some’ or ‘few’. He taints all of them with labels and denigrates all of them with stereotypical statements in some of his stereotypical remarks.

### **7.3 Quoting Nazi Indologists:**

While some Indologists such as Johannes Hertel<sup>65</sup> were supporters of the Nazi National Socialist party, other Indologists such as Walther Wust<sup>66</sup> (author of a celebrated book on Rgvedic chronology besides numerous other works on Indo-Iranian linguistics) actually actively engaged in enriching Nazi 'Aryan mysticism'! In any respectable field, works of these scholars would be anathema. But not so in Indology, where they are still cited with approval. For instance, Witzel

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<sup>63</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IndianCivilization/message/8587>

<sup>64</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IndianCivilization/message/8628>

<sup>65</sup> For Hertel, see Frank Neubert, “Innovation Amid Controversy: Indology at Leipzig, 1841-1958”, oo. 173-196 in Douglas T. McGetchin et al (eds.), ‘Sanskrit and ‘Orientalism’, *Indology and Comparative Linguistics in German, 1750-1958*, Manohar Books: New Delhi (2004)

<sup>66</sup> A simple google search will reveal Wust’s deep Nazi connections. For general information on the Nazi affiliations of Indologists, the following publication is useful: Pollock, Sheldon. “Deep Orientalism?: Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj”. In: *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, 77-133. South Asia Seminar Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

There are not many publications on this important subject, and when Pollock was writing the above article, only some German Indologists were willing to help him. See <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/INDOLOGY/message/919> for this revelation.

quotes Wust as a former scholar approvingly in one his own publications<sup>67</sup>. After all, Indology has just not a prejudiced past, but also a prejudiced present!

Considering that Witzel and his assistant Steve Farmer got about tainting perfectly apolitical Indologists such as Malati Shengde and Nicholas Kazanas as handmaidens of Hindu Nationalists just because their views are remotely similar to those of Hindutva ideologues, what should we call Witzel considering that he even cites Nazi Indologists ?

#### ***7.4 Proud descendant of Martin Luther, the first Nazi?***

Witzel has proudly stated on lists (such as the Indic tradition list, in late 2000) that he has the habit of dissenting ('family tradition') because he belongs to the lineage of Martin Luther, the founder of Protestant Christianity in Germany. In his later life, Martin Luther wrote a virulently anti-Jewish book called "On the Jews and Their Lies" in which he accused them of distorting the Bible, and advocated that Christians should burn their synagogues and expel them. Little wonder then that Luther has been called the first Nazi<sup>68</sup>. Has Witzel inherited this 'family tradition' also?

Obviously, we do not mean to be serious. Our only intent is to show that if we follow Witzel's habit of smearing others by reckless free association, then by the same methods, he would emerge as a dangerous Nazi.

### **8.0. Politician or Academic? Witzel's ties with Indian Communists:**

#### ***8.1 Writing for a multi-millionaire Marxist:***

Witzel's first significant article denouncing the opposing views on the origin of Indo-Aryans appeared in a biweekly Indian news-magazine named *Frontline* (issue dt. 13 October 2000). The owner and editor of this magazine namely N. Ram is a self-professed supporter of India's communist political parties and his magazine frequently defends the Chinese rule in Tibet<sup>69</sup>, North Korea's communist regime and Fidel Castro's rule.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Witzel's *Frontline* magazine article appeared in a Hindi translation<sup>71</sup> in a booklet published by SAHMAT<sup>72</sup>, another Indian organization whose office was located right inside the headquarters of the Communist Party of India at New Delhi.<sup>73</sup> The article also promptly appeared in websites of Indian communists (and their violent groups), Christian right-wing, Islamist and Dalitist<sup>74</sup> groups (the last set of websites are more likely maintained by some non-Indian extremist and groups and are banned in India).

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<sup>67</sup> For instance, see page 312 in "Rgvedic history: poets, chieftains and politics". in: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity. *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia*, ed. G. Erdosy, (Indian Philology and South Asian Studies, ed. Albrecht Wezler and Michael Witzel, Vol. 1) Berlin/New York (de Gruyter) 1995, 307-352

<sup>68</sup> Steigmann-Gall, Richard: *The Holy Reich, Nazi conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945*, p. 266

<sup>69</sup> The issue immediately previous to the one in which Witzel/Farmer's first article appeared, carried a cover story by the communist editor N. Ram, in which he narrated his experiences from a recent trip to Tibet. The story termed the Dalai Lama as 'obscurantist', and hailed the Chinese rule in Tibet, which according to the magazine, was a sheer blessing to the Tibetan people, and the best thing that could have happened to them. At least on one occasion, N. Ram has been greeted in the US by Tibetan protestors holding placards when he has come to address conferences here in the past.

<sup>70</sup> For *Frontline's* Marxist and Communist affiliations, refer also Koenraad Elst's article "*The Politics of the Aryan Invasion Debate*" (2003) available online at <http://koenraadelst.voiceofdharma.com/articles/aid/aryanpolitics.html>

<sup>71</sup> With Witzel's permission of course, as revealed by his collaborator Steve Farmer on the IndianCivilization yahoo group.

<sup>72</sup> SAHMAT = Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust. It is named after a Safdar Hashmi, a young Communist leader of India who was murdered by political opponents several years ago.

<sup>73</sup> See the on-line article 'CPI(M), SAHMAT left Homeless', in *The Hindu*, 06 February 2002, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/02/06/stories/2002020606000100.htm>

<sup>74</sup> See for instance the propagandist website <http://www.dalitstan.org/holocaust/negation/witzel/piltdown.html> which reproduces a similar article by Witzel in another left-of-center magazine 'Outlook India'.

## **8.2 Defending and Parroting Indian Marxist historians:**

Witzel also publicly supports historians such as D. N. Jha, R. S. Sharma, Romila Thapar etc., who are quoted as Marxist historians in a Harvard University publication<sup>75</sup>. To raise the bogey of ‘fundamentalist and right wing forces’<sup>76</sup> against anyone (such as the Greek scholar Nicholas Kazanas) who calls a Marxist as a Marxist is dishonest and negationist on the part of Witzel. If scholars like Kazanas become right wing Hindus just because their views on the question of AIT tally with those of *some* Hindutva organizations, then can we label Witzel as a Marxist or a Communist (or even a ‘Maoist-Stalinist’) because he publishes in Marxist publications and defends Marxist and Communist historians?

Witzel signed a petition in support of K N Panikkar, who is a self professed Marxist<sup>77</sup>. It may be noted that the Communist state government of the Indian state of Kerala forcibly appointed Panikkar as the Vice Chancellor (administrative chief) of the Kaladi Sanskrit University despite heavy opposition from its faculty (and also political groups)<sup>78</sup> who were worried that the Hindu hating professor would harm the institute. The inevitable happened, and the University soon came to a stand still, obviously due to the well thought out strategy of Communist politicians and their academic supporters.

Witzel has also openly supported D N Jha, a self-professed Marxist historian. In an earlier interview, Witzel supported Jha’s book on beef eating in ancient India and said<sup>79</sup> –

“Indeed, until the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power (sic!), said Michael Witzel, a professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University, much of the history Mr. Jha records was taught in Indian schools.”

Witzel also parroted Jha’s persecution mania-like claims that the Indian government had ‘banned’ his book<sup>80</sup>. The reality was that certain aggrieved Hindu and Jain groups approached the courts of law, and got a stay order on its publication through perfectly legal means. Clearly, Witzel wants to propagate the incorrect version that he and his Marxist Indian historian cohorts are facing persecution, when the truth is quite the opposite.

## **8.3 Attack critics of Indian Marxist historians-**

This claim that that the historiography of Marxist historians like Jha and Thapar is universal and objective truth is curious indeed because it is an open secret in India that these historians only write sectarian interpretations of history to suit the leftist political agenda in India. In fact, Witzel even excoriates those Indians who dare to called these Marxist historians as Marxists, and says that we should call them ‘Delhi historians’, and their work as ‘recent Indian historiography’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Thapar, Jha and Sharma are quoted Marxist historians in the entry 'Hinduism' of 'A Dictionary of The Marxist Thought' (Tom BOTTOMORE et al, 1983, Harvard University Press, p. 204). Ronald INDEN, in his *Imagining India* [1990:pp. 154-156, 197] clearly refers to Thapar as a Marxist historian. According to Witzel’s characterizations, Inden and Bottomore would also be ‘Right Wing Hindu Fundamentalists’!

<sup>76</sup> Michael Witzel’s ‘Ein Fremdling im Rgveda’ (*Journal of Indo-European Studies*, Vol. 31, No.1-2: pp.107-185, 2003), page 125, fn. 27

<sup>77</sup> See his interview at <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/mar/19panik.htm>

<sup>78</sup> <http://indiabroad.rediff.com/news/2003/jun/18iype.htm>

<sup>79</sup> “Holy Cow a Myth? An Indian Finds the Kick is Real”, by Emily Eakin, in The New York Times, dt. 17 August 2002

<sup>80</sup> See a response to Michael Witzel on the Indo\_Iranian yahooogroup, dt. January 5, 2005 at

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/indo\\_iranian/message/735](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/indo_iranian/message/735)

<sup>81</sup> See p. 77 of Michael Witzel, “Authochthonous Aryans” (2001)

<http://users.primushost.com/~india/ejvs/ejvs0703/ejvs0703article.pdf>

(contrasted with the opposing ‘revisionist’ and ‘nationalistic’ writings) as if a new nomenclature can change the underlying reality! One wonders why Witzel would deny the Marxist affiliations of Marxist historians when they themselves refer to each other as Marxists?<sup>82</sup>

In fact, the Marxist professors whom Witzel supports so staunchly have for years stalled the academic teaching of Sanskrit as a classical language at their Mecca, the Jawaharlal Nehru University, whose Center of Historical Studies was founded by Romila Thapar<sup>83</sup> amongst others. Perhaps the reason is that these scholars, Witzel included, would want to study the heritage of India and Hindus only as a dead museum object, but have a problem engaging its living adherents.

#### ***8.4 Collaborate with Yankee Comrades and Indian communists-***

It is not surprising then that the letter from the anonymous ‘Arun Vajpayee’ exhorting Professor Witzel and ‘Professor’ Steve Farmer to write to the California state board of education (SBE) to reject proposed textbook edits was rapidly reproduced on the discussion lists of ‘Federation of Inquilabi<sup>84</sup> (earlier ‘Indian’) Leftists’ (FOIL) and appeals were made to support Witzel<sup>85</sup>. And then, as soon as Witzel and his cohorts wrote to the SBE urging them to reject the edits proposed by Hindu groups in California<sup>86</sup>, an article<sup>87</sup> in support of his efforts by Nalini Taneja, a Marxist professor at the Delhi University, appeared on the web on the internet magazine of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)!

Finally, as revealed by his assistant Steve Farmer<sup>88</sup>, Witzel was also instrumental in exhorting a group of 100 Indian American professors of presumably Marxist and Leftist persuasion (Yankee Comrades such as Anjana Chatterjee, Vijay Pershad etc., as evident from articles in *India Abroad* etc.) to send a supporting petition to SBE during the CA textbook controversy. One wonders why Witzel supports Marxist and Leftist Professors on such Indian and Hindu matters when these folks have absolutely no use of Hindus or Hinduism except when they need a whipping boy.

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<sup>82</sup> In an interview to the New Delhi edition of the *Times of India* (dt. 16 February 2002), Bipan Chandra, an ‘Eminent Historian’ himself, refers to Jha and R. S. Sharma as Marxist historians.

<sup>83</sup> In a talk at UC Berkeley in November 2002, Thapar said sarcastically that there was no need to teach Sanskrit at JNU because ‘there were so many mutts and peeths around’. She has made similar remarks in taped interviews to scholars such as Yvette Rosser. On August 2, 2002, Rajiv Malhotra left a message on the Sulekha.com forum revealing that a Sanskrit department was finally started at JNU by Dr Kapil Kapoor after several years of opposition from entrenched Marxists on the campus, who regarded Sanskrit as the language of ‘evil Brahmins’, and warned Kapoor of academic marginalization if he persisted with his lobbying for a Sanskrit Dept. at the University. Dr Kapoor was promised rewards such as ‘foreign trips’ if he gave up his support for Sanskrit and restricted himself to teaching of English at JNU.

It may be noted that JNU has been teaching non-Indian classical languages on the campus for several decades now!

<sup>84</sup> This word means ‘Revolutionary’ that reminds one of the violence perpetrated by various groups of ‘Maoists’, ‘Leninists’, ‘Naxalites’ and other Leftist groups proliferating India and other countries these days.

<sup>85</sup> See the website <http://saag.org/BB/view.asp?msgID=23884> where a FOIL member is quoted urging fellow comrades to support Professor Witzel and Steve Farmer.

<sup>86</sup> To get an idea of exactly what Witzel and his team were opposing, see the copious extracts from these textbooks available at <http://www.india-forum.com/articles/60/1>

<sup>87</sup> See “RSS now targets California Textbooks” by Nalini Taneja, on CPI(M) ezine ‘*People’s Democracy*’, Vol. 29, No. 49, dt. 04 December 2005, available online at [http://pd.cpim.org/2005/1204/12042005\\_nalini.htm](http://pd.cpim.org/2005/1204/12042005_nalini.htm)

<sup>88</sup> [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian\\_research/message/2544](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/message/2544) by Steve Farmer, dt. 09 December 2005

And even today, it is the anarchist and ultra-Leftist websites<sup>89</sup> with tangible links to Islamists who are exhorting their ideologue followers to write to various newspapers in support of Witzel's bigoted and anti-Hindu recommendations to the California board of education.

### **8.5 Idolizing Karl Marx -**

It is also interesting to note, as revealed on public list in September 2000, that Farmer has put up a portrait of Karl Marx on his wall<sup>90</sup> and that he was very fond of it. Another post reveals that the portrait is on the wall behind his desk. Is this to provide Farmer with inspiration for his writings? What does Witzel think of this behavior of his very close friend?

### **8.6 A Comrade in arms?**

Anyway, with such impeccable political connections and support, it seems somewhat hypocritical that Witzel should allege that his academic opponents are guided by political ideologies. I am not arguing that Witzel is not entitled to his political preferences and affiliation, but at least he should not be hypocritical about his own symbiotic relationship with some, often violent, Communist political groups.

## **9.0. Trivialization of the heritage of Hindus and Indians**

### ***9.1 Example of denigration of Hindu texts:***

"Dan,

Many short mantras (the later bija mantras) like om have humble origins the Veda.  
Him (hiM) is used in the Veda to call your goat .. and your wife. Cheers,

Michael(Witzel)"

and then Steve Farmer replies:

What if you want to call your goat and your wife \_simultaneously\_, Michael? :^)  
Steve"

And then in a subsequent post with follow up conversation, Steve Farmer states that 'I will try it on my girlfriend tonight'<sup>91</sup>. On a list of the Indian diaspora members spread all over the world, a member later joked if Steve Farmer's girlfriend is a goat!

I would like the readers to ponder if in a multicultural environment, could we afford such people with a contempt towards sacred chants of minority faiths to decide what school going children should study or not study? Time and again, many of the signatories including Professor Witzel have demonstrated a lack of sensitivity towards the culture and heritage of Hindus and Indians, when such a behavior forms the bed-rock of a multi-cultural society.

In another article, Witzel accuses Navaratna Rajaram of morphing or deliberately doctoring an Indus seal to prove fraudulently that it depicted a horse, whereas it actually depicted a unicorn bull. Witzel then remarks sarcastically<sup>92</sup> –

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<sup>89</sup> <http://www.friendsofsouthasia.org/textbook/> See in particular the exhortation at <http://www.friendsofsouthasia.org/textbook/Letter%20Alert.doc> repeating verbatim the propaganda by Farmer and Witzel.

<sup>90</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IndianCivilization/message/810>

<sup>91</sup> Message number 2165 dt. November 01, 2005 available on the Indo-Eurasian Yahoogroup at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian\\_research/message/2164](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/message/2164)

"This certainly is better than to find, with Rajaram et al., horses (or "fire altars") all over the early subcontinent (see Frontline, Oct./Nov. 2000). Such writers see horses everywhere, just as some see Krishna everywhere: "He who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me..." (Bhagavad-Gita 6. 30) Or at least, Rajaram did so...."

The verse of Gita cited by him, as any devout Hindu or any scholar of Hinduism would know, refers to the over-powering, overwhelming and all-encompassing Gnostic vision of the Divine as discussed in Hindu spirituality. Therefore, the misuse of this verse from a very important and sacred Hindu text in such a derisive context by Witzel betrays his insensitivity, to put it very euphemistically.

## **9.2 India is just a cultural 'cul-de-sac'!**

Even the Indian-ness of Buddhism is being questioned by Witzel and his cohorts. For instance, on various yahoogroups such as 'Indo\_Iranian', they are arguing that 'shaakya' the name of Gautama Buddha's lineage, is derived from the names of Shakas (Scythians) and that the practice of raising Stupas over the remains of the Buddha is derived from the practice of Scythian burial mounds. Even certain Buddhist doctrines, not to mention Upanishadic doctrines, are being derived from more Western (Scythian or Greek) sources. All this is being of course couched in a 'scholarly' garb, but it is strongly reminiscent of 19<sup>th</sup> century Indology that traced all developments in India (art, literature, architecture, political institutions etc) to some Western stimulus pouring into a passive recipient India.

Hindus and Indians are bound to be wary then, when Witzel now openly states, that India is just a 'cul-de-sac'<sup>93</sup> in terms of human migrations and also cultural aspects. Witzel's hate object David Frawley aptly comments (*ibid*)-

"Witzel quotes favourably a statement at the beginning of this rather long article about India's role as "the cultural diffusion cul-de-sac of Asia" (p.1), an idea that has "kept me occupied on and off over the past few years." This sums up Witzel's view of Indian civilisation — it is the cultural backwater and dead end of Asia, where wandering nomads can go no further, with no real civilisation of its own.

Not surprisingly Witzel has little appreciation for the Vedas, Vedanta, Yoga, Buddhism or anything else India has produced. His extensive bibliographies on ancient India seldom refer to any Indian scholars, and certainly avoid mentioning any yogis like Aurobindo who have different views. You would never find Witzel chanting Om, practicing Yoga or in any other way honouring the great traditions of the region. His anti-India views reflect those of the colonial era which he is continuing. For this reason Witzel is mainly honoured by Marxists in India whose political agenda favours rejecting anything great not only in the Vedas but in Indian civilisation as a whole, which many Marxists following Marx himself see as an invention of the British. However, no one who really studies and loves the Vedas will be fooled by such theatrics. There is much more to the Vedas than Witzel's philology. For my more detailed response to Witzel, please note the web site, <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/indology/ReplytoWitzel.html>"

If an Aryan invasion of India was not sufficient, he is now proposing even a Dravidian invasion! Even the Munda languages are said to have arrived from South East Asia. Anything but India! Witzel must be totally ignorant of India's contributions to the culture of a large part of humanity outside the Indian subcontinent to make such stupid comments.

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<sup>92</sup> Full uncut text of: "Answer to Nagaswamy, by Michael Witzel (assisted by Richard Meadow): Horses, logic, and evidence" in THE HINDU, OPEN PAGE 3/21/02, available online at <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/Har-veda.htm>

<sup>93</sup> See the relevant quote in David Frawley's article at <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/op/2002/08/20/stories/2002082000120200.htm>

### **9.3 Modern Indian languages are not scholarly -**

In a publication, Witzel implies<sup>94</sup> that the literature in Indian languages is not scholarly when it comes to interpreting the Rigveda. He says –

“But Talageri, who cannot read any modern scholarly language besides English, does not leave a clue that he is aware that these works exist.”

Readers will recall that in the 1830's, when colonialism and European imperialism was gaining ground in Asia and Africa, a British administrator named Lord Macaulay had made a similar remark to the effect that the languages of India and Arabia have not produced any worthwhile literature in comparison with European languages. Witzel is merely echoing Macaulay's Eurocentric and racist remarks with respect to the state of Vedic studies in India. While Macaulay's prejudice can be blamed on the white-supremacist worldview of Imperialists and on the prevalent notions of his era of Colonialism, Witzel's clearly sounds repugnant in this “post enlightenment” age.

### **9.4 Obsession with negative interpretations of Hindu heritage -**

And if Indians or Hindus are justifiably proud of some incident mentioned in ancient texts, that incident is explained otherwise by Witzel. Consider for instance the narrative in the spiritual text of Brihadaranyaka Upanishad III.3, where a lady Sage Gargi represents all male Sages to dispute with the great Sage Yajnavalkya. Hindus are justifiably proud of the fact that although Gargi lost, the incident gives an example where several male Sages accepted her leadership and that she was defeated only by the best. But, Witzel has his own take on the issue. He says<sup>95</sup> –

“\* we should not read these texts as statements of actual facts, historical records but employ a bit of philological scepticism....

\* the loss of Gargi may be just a literary trick (as mentioned before). In addition, women do not usually attend such meetings as the middle Vedic text say (see before)....”

Now what exactly is the proof that the inclusion of Gargi here is fictional and that she did not really attend this philosophical assembly? The proof is that Harvard Professor Witzel has said so. Thus spake the Lord (= Witzel). Hallelujah! No additional proof is needed to convert his opinion to fact!

## **10.0 Concluding Remarks:**

The quotes given above are merely the tip of the iceberg. There is much more that lies beneath, including the attitudes and the world view that motivates him to make such reprehensible remarks. His detractors point out that he polarizes groups of people unnecessarily and injects politics into everything, complicating simple situations. They point to the allegation that he has a long history of promoting discord, chaos and conflict in his own Sanskrit department (where he threatened his own students with lawsuits), as discussed in a 1995 report published in Harvard University paper<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Pag 3 of Michael Witzel's Review Article titled “WESTWARD HO! The Incredible Wanderlust of the Rgvedic Tribes Exposed by S. Talageri” of my book “The Rigveda – A Historical Analysis”, [EJVS, Vol. 7 (2001), Issue 2 (march 31)] <http://northshore.shore.net/%7Eindia/ejvs/ejvs0702/ejvs0702article.pdf>

<sup>95</sup> Message dated 15 November 2005 at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian\\_research/message/2363](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/message/2363)

<sup>96</sup> *Sanskrit Dept. in Disarray, Students, Officials Say*; Published On Wednesday, June 07, 1995; By Jonathan A. Lewin available online at <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=500579>

Meanwhile, a group of Indian Americans have initiated an Internet petition urging the Harvard University to take action against what they term as racist behavior on the part of Dr. Witzel<sup>97</sup>.

The controversy over alleged hatred of Witzel towards Hindus has spilled out overseas from the USA. A mainstream Indian newspaper, Hindustan Times, carried an article<sup>98</sup> where numerous interviewees all over India and the USA were quite outright in condemning what they thought was his racist and hatemongering attitude towards Hindus. Jagan Mohan from Pondicherry for instance alleged-

“The Witzel group is trying to maintain the status quo by showing India as a backward, cultural inferior civilisation by taking refuge behind the anti-Hindutva facade.”

A second article by a political commentator in another mainstream newspaper<sup>99</sup> was actually titled ‘Harvard don denigrates Hindus’ and noted his boorish attitude towards Hindu discussants amongst many other aspects of his behavior. It calls him a mere linguist who promotes theories of Indian leftists and refers to his statements on Hindus, Indian Americans and Indians as ‘Witzel unprintables’. Numerous articles in Indian American newspapers were along similar lines.

With regard to the allegations made by members of the Hindu American and Indian American communities, Witzel thinks that he is being mis-characterized. In a recent interview<sup>100</sup> he says—

“I always get misrepresented that I am a Hindu-hater, but I am not. I hate people who misrepresent history.”

Concerning other allegations against his insulting behavior towards Indians, Witzel remarks<sup>101</sup> –

"I, for one, do not mind to be called pompous, indeed I am --- to people who deserve it. I do not suffer fools gladly."

**What does the reader think**, in the light of the definitions of prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism that were stated at the beginning of this compilation?

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**DISCLAIMER: This case study, modeled after Harvard Business School case studies, is a compilation done by several concerned netizens opposed to racism, for the purpose of discussion only. All attempts have been made to check the original sources. The compilers are not responsible for the opinions and statements of Dr Witzel stated in this study. We acknowledge the immensely useful material cut and paste (with slight modification) from several public websites. We hope the authors of these websites will not object, and that the discussants of this case study will verify the veracity of our citations directly.**  
28/12/05.

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<sup>97</sup> “End Harvard Association of Hate Groups” at <http://www.petitiononline.com/stopIER/petition.html>

<sup>98</sup> “Stop this anti-Hindu tirade”, *Hindustan Times*, Internet edn. dt. 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 05’

<sup>99</sup> Kanchan Gupta, *The Daily Pioneer*, 25<sup>th</sup> Dec 05’, available at [http://www.dailypioneer.com/indexn12.asp?main\\_variable=front%5Fpage&file\\_name=story1%2Etxt&counter\\_img=1](http://www.dailypioneer.com/indexn12.asp?main_variable=front%5Fpage&file_name=story1%2Etxt&counter_img=1)

<sup>100</sup> *India Abroad*: December 16, 2005

<sup>101</sup> Michael Witzel’s post dated 20 December 2005 available on the internet at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian\\_research/message/2629](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Indo-Eurasian_research/message/2629)