Mature Harappan, date from about 2600 to about 1700 BCE, after urbanism slowly peters out. The Rig Veda is generally dated to the period after the decline of urbanism and would therefore date from about 1500 BCE or a couple of centuries later. The subsequent Vedas – the Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda – relating also to the Ganga plain are dated to the early first millennium BCE.

Placing the Vedas
However there are those who differ and would like to date the Rig Veda to 3000 BCE or even earlier and identify its culture with the Harappan cities. They maintain that the Aryans are indigenous and there was therefore not even a migration of any kind, let alone any invasion as was thought in the nineteenth century. To maintain this position it is even said that the Rig Veda is prior to the Harappa Culture or that the authors of the Harappa Culture were Rigvedic Aryans. These views have become a matter of rather extensive controversy to say the least. This latter chronology, apart from not being able to muster firm evidence, creates huge problems for the historian. The discrepancy between Harappan urbanism and Rigvedic agro-pastoralism negates equivalence. Such an early chronology for the Rig Veda would, for example, create a gap of at least 1,500 years between the Rig Veda and the other Vedas and therefore break what is known to be the continuity between the four Vedas. Taking it back to the third millennium BCE creates major problems of parallels and correlations with archaeological evidence. It leads to a long chronological hiatus between the first and the later three Vedas – the Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda – as the dating of these to the first millennium BC remains firm.

The insistence that the Aryans were a distinct people and that they were indigenous to the territory of British India is to impose present-day borders on the remote past, which makes the statement anachronistic. Concepts such as ‘indigenous’ and ‘alien’ have to be precisely defined, which they are not in this case, and the definition has to conform to the time context for when it is being used.

Extracted with permission from Aleph