

# Sanskritization: A New Model of Language Development

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## The Current Indo-European Model: The Migration of the Proto-Indo-Europeans

The primary model used today for explaining the close relationships that exist between Indo-European languages is a migration theory. It proposes a Proto-Indo-European people who spread their language by a process of migration from an original primitive homeland. According to this view, as the Indo-European people moved in different directions, their language changed in predictable ways that can be traced back to their parent tongue, native culture and original environment.

The Proto-Indo-Europeans are usually defined racially as a European ethnic type, though not all scholars accept that they were of one race only. Their homeland-which is the subject of much debate-is placed in various regions including Eastern Europe, Anatolia, Central Asia and Western China, in short, at almost every point in the Indo-European world. From there, a migration is proposed over a period some centuries, if not millennia, to the parts of the world from India to Ireland where Indo-European languages came to be spoken by the first millennium BCE. The beginning of these migrations is proposed from as early as 7000-4000 BCE, reaching areas like India in 1500 BCE and Ireland as late as 500 BCE.

These migrating Indo-Europeans are often popularly called Aryans. However, we should recognize that this term does not reflect the original Sanskrit meaning of Arya, which has no racial or linguistic connotation but simply means noble or refined. These so-called Aryans were said to have taken their language with them, which explains the connections between Indo-European tongues like how the trunk of a tree creates various branches. The theory proposes that Indo-European languages share a substratum of common terms that reflect the conditions of their original homeland. Linguists have endeavored to recreate the original Indo-European language (PIE or Proto-Indo-European) spoken there. They find common words that indicate a homeland in a northern region of birch trees and salmon, far from any ocean. While it is impossible verify such a language, even dictionaries of it have been created as if it were a real language that was spoken once.

We can call this a "migration model" of language, with the migrants at a later time militant invaders, bringing their language with them and imposing it on existing populations.

## Flaws of the Existing Model

However, this migration model suffers from many flaws, of which I will mention the main ones.

Of course, many problems arise from the different opinions about the timing or place of these migrations. The original homeland is proposed for diverse places throughout the Indo-European world many thousands of miles apart. The inability to find anything like a single homeland naturally makes the entire theory questionable. The date of the proposed migrations from it are also a matter of much debate and vary by centuries, if not millennia. How linguists can be certain about a language but not about its time, place, or origin certainly casts doubts on the theory. This means that the theory, though popular, is vague in many respects and that its details are either not clear or are unconfirmed.

The attempts to connect Proto-Indo-European with a single race or ethnic group is particularly problematical given the spread of such languages through diverse ethnic groups by the first millennium BCE, particularly owing to the ethnic diversity of eastern Europe and Central Asia that are the main proposed homelands. However, I would like to raise more fundamental objections about the theory, including its linguistic basis.

First, in the primitive state of civilization, the rule is one of language diversity not of language uniformity, with languages changing quickly from region to region, often over short distances. For some examples, the languages of the Native Americans and Native Africans are quite diverse and change every few miles. This is particularly true of nomadic peoples. Such Proto-Indo-Europeans would not have been different. Their language would have changed every few miles and could not have had the consistency required of it to endure even at its place of origin.

Second, in the primitive state of language, languages change quickly over time as well, lacking a sophisticated culture or written traditions to sustain it. This process of time change would be faster for primitive groups that are migrating, whose travel exposes them to new cultural and environmental influences that require changes of vocabulary and which brings them into contact with other language groups. How such a Proto-Indo-European language could have maintained its continuity through the long time and vast migrations required is hard to explain.

This is particularly true when we consider that the Indo-Europeans are credited with spreading their language to many cultures that were both more sophisticated in civilization and larger in population, especially their spread to the subcontinent of India. Such primitive migrants usually lose their language into the existing more developed culture, under the general rule that more advanced cultures will maintain their language over primitive groups that come into contact with them. This is what occurred historically in India where many different invaders have been absorbed into the indigenous culture throughout the centuries. Why it should have been different in the second millennium BCE, the proposed time of the Aryan migration into India, after India had a long indigenous tradition and large population, does not make sense.

In fact, throughout the ancient world, whether in Europe, the Middle East or India, we naturally find considerable linguistic diversity such as the more primitive state of culture and communication would require. India was not the only region in which the Indo-European speakers existed along with those of other linguistic groups. It happened everywhere in the Indo-European world, including in the proposed Indo-European homeland in Central Asia. In Europe we find groups like the Basques, Etruscans and Finns that did not speak Indo-European tongues. In Central Asia there were many Turkish and Mongolian tribes as well as Europeans and Iranians. Mesopotamia shows Semitic, Indo-European, Caucasian and other language groups like the Sumerians. India has its Dravidian and Munda speakers. We do not find the Indo-European language groups existing alone without other language groups anywhere. We do not find a pure Indo-European region from which there was a spread to regions of different language groups. We find mixed linguistic regions

everywhere and from the earliest period. With an interaction with diverse peoples and language groups, primitive Indo-Europeans would have witnessed a quick deterioration of their original pure tongue, whatever it might have been, unless they had some powerful culture to sustain it.

Specifically, the region of Central Asia and Eastern Europe of the proposed Proto-Indo-European homeland is a transitional area—a kind of way station containing various populations, races and cultures on the move and constantly interacting with one another. Historically, it has witnessed the movements of Mongols, Turks, Huns, Germans, Slavs, Celts, Scythians, Hungarians, and other peoples, both Indo-European in language and not. The development of a stable linguistic culture in such a borderless region is difficult to explain, much less maintaining its purity through its spread beyond it.

There have been various attempts to identify the Proto-Indo-Europeans with archaeological remains, like the Kurgan culture. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the language a people speak by their ruins or by their artifacts. The movement of such populations west and south has also been highlighted as a movement of the Indo-Europeans. That people move through and out of Central Asia to the west and south has occurred many times historically with different groups. This reflects the instability and difficult circumstances of life in the dry and cold region of Central Asia, as compared to the warmer and wetter climates of the south and west. To try to identify one such group as the Indo-Europeans because of such a geographical spread proves nothing.

There are many other factors against this migration theory as well, to highlight a few. There is no genetic influence of such a migration into India, the land that has the oldest continuous Indo-European language and culture. There is no real archaeological evidence of such a migration into India, where no ruins or artifacts of the migrating/invading Indo-Europeans has been found apart from the existing culture. The coming of the Indo-Europeans is also difficult to trace in Europe and the Middle East, where the date of their entry is being continually pushed back.

Another major problem with the reconstruction of a Proto-Indo-European language is that primitive languages are usually not specific in their terminology. For example, primitive people may have a word for 'fish' or 'tree', but it may not always mean a 'salmon' or a 'birch'. The word 'mriga', which in Sanskrit means a 'deer', in closely related Persian means a 'bird', as the original meaning of the term is a fast moving animal. Even the Vedic word 'vrika', which means a 'wolf', in other Vedic contexts means a 'plow', or something that tears things up.[1] Such an adjectival, general or descriptive use of words precedes the existence of specific nouns. The kind of specific reconstructions that are used to identify the PIE homeland reflect a later stage of language than what such primitive people would have spoken anyway!

Yet the main objection to this Proto-Indo-European model is our first point: It is contrary to the main trends of language development. Languages spread more by culture than by migration. Linguistic uniformity increases with the development of civilization, while linguistic diversity characterizes the primitive state of culture.

## Cultural Elite Dominance

The main way that languages have spread historically is through a process of what one could call Cultural Elite Dominance or cultural diffusion. We can see how the English language is spreading throughout the world today, even in regions where the number of people of English ancestry is small. This 'Anglicization' of languages reflects the dominance of American and British cultural influences, particularly in science, technology and communication. It even

extends to familial terms, with people all over the world calling their parents 'mommy and daddy'.

Many of the connections between Indo-European languages in Europe reflect a process of 'Latinization', the effect of the dominant Roman culture in ancient times. The Romance family of languages (French, Spanish, Italian and Romanian) arose through this Roman cultural influence, not by the migration of a primitive Roman race. Even Romania, which was only under Roman rule for a short period, had its language Latinized. This process of Latinization strongly affected English and had its influence on German as well.

In India, this process of cultural diffusion is called Sanskritization, from Sanskrit meaning what is cultured or refined. It involves new populations taking up Hindu culture mainly through the elite language of Sanskrit that is its basis. The process of Sanskritization is evident not only in the languages of North India that appear to derive from it, but also in the many Sanskrit loan words found in Dravidian languages, including Tamil.

Based on this model, I would propose an original dominant Indo-European culture and elite that spread the language more by diffusion than migration. One notes that Indo-European peoples share many cultural traits including religious and political factors. They have the same basic gods, the same basic tripartite social system and common concepts of kingship. Their connections are not simply limited to primitive traits or familial relations. There should be some dominant culture behind the Indo-European languages to explain these broader and more sophisticated connections.

Moreover, the first noticeable Indo-European groups that occur in the Middle East, like the Hittites, Mittani and Kassites appear as ruling elites, not as primitive nomads. Early Greeks, Hindus, Persians and Celts have a strong concept of nobility, often expressed as the term Arya. We could, therefore, also call this process of Sanskritization as Aryanization. Early Indo-Europeans were conscious of a great culture beyond them and an elite status for their peoples.

Such elite predominance occurs in other language families like the diffusion of Mandarin in China or Arabic in the Islamic world. An early and sustained elite dominance of an Indo-European culture is necessary to explain the Indo-European family of languages. Given the spiritual nature of ancient and of Vedic culture, it would not have simply been a military elite but more a religious elite.

## A Galactic Model of Language

I would propose a model of language development like that of the formation of the galaxy, an organic development from a primal field. By this view, there was an original primordial cloud of language potentials in humanity, with different groups making expressions based upon various internal and external factors from the shape of their faces to the influences of their food or climate. This cloud of sound-expressions gradually coalesced into certain centers or islands that emerged over time as specific languages, just as the stars arose out the primordial nebula. As these language centers emerged, the stronger ones, by a kind of gravitational pull, influenced and absorbed the weaker ones, just as the Sun's gravitational pull drew planets to revolve around it. The more that culture and civilization developed the larger these centers became. This resulted in certain large islands or even continents of language being formed that over time became language families. Eventually, many of the languages that served as intermediates between these different language groups disappeared, making them appear separate or unique. This means that the linguistic uniformity that we find arose only at a later stage of language development and a later stage of history.

This is what we see in history: Linguistic uniformity is primarily a product of civilization. Civilization, along with communication, trade, urbanization and religion requires a standardization of language. This restrains the basic human tendency towards linguistic diversity and results in the formation of set languages and language families.

This is the basic point to note in history: The human tendency is towards linguistic diversity, not uniformity. A strong civilization is necessary to bring about linguistic uniformity. This uniformity is often only an upper crust as with Greek in the Eastern Roman Empire and English in India, while a multitude of vernaculars were used by the common people. Even in the Islamic world, Arabic has not succeeded in replacing existing languages from Berber in North Africa to Bengali in Bangladesh. People for the most part continue speaking the languages they always did, modified according to needs and changes.

### The Indo-Europeanization of Language-Sanskritization

This process of elite dominance has occurred many times with different waves of civilization. There have been many waves of Indo-European linguistic dominance. There have been many periods in which Indo-European language groups have exerted a strong and extensive cultural sway. English, Spanish, Portuguese and French languages have done this in the colonial and modern eras. In the late ancient period and Middle Ages in Europe a process of Latinization went on, as did a diffusion of Greek through Greek culture at an earlier period. The Persians spread their language as well. An older wave of Indo-European peoples in the second millennium BC occurred with the Hittites, Kassites and Mittani. Perhaps yet earlier waves existed as well.

In some instances, Aryan groups were rearyanized. When the Celts came to Europe they already found Indo-European groups as the Thracians and Phrygians and Aryanized them further. In other instances, the Indo-European influence affected the culture but did not change the language. For example, the Finns and Hungarians in Europe, like the Dravidians in India, share a common culture with dominant Indo-European speakers but have retained their own different language on a common level.

Some scholars see the German language as an Indo-Europeanization or Aryanization of a population originally speaking a Finno-Ugrian language. This means that the Germans, thought to be a major or original Aryan group, might not have been Aryans at all originally in terms of race or ethnicity. In fact, the spread of Indo-European languages is so broad through different populations that it was probably never the expression of a single race or ethnic group, which is what the process of Sanskritization provides us.

The spread of Indo-European languages requires a sophisticated and enduring early ancient culture to promote it and to sustain it, not a group of nomadic invaders but a cultural elite. Harappan India, the world's largest urban civilization of its time, from 3300-1900 BCE, could have produced an earlier wave of cultural influence, or several such waves, which would not have required a massive movement of people to bring about.

### Prakritization: The Development of Common Languages

A dominant cultural elite seeks to elevate the language through noble forms of expression such as art, religion and culture, as well as through terms of trade and politics. At the same time, there is an opposite movement to create a common language that is easier to speak, reflecting the needs of the less educated or non-elite of the culture. This process of an elite language breaking down into popular tongues can be called Prakritization from Prakrit, the Sanskrit term for common languages.

One great mistake linguistics have made is to look at all languages as Prakrits or common dialects and to try to determine their rate of change accordingly. They fail to note that such refined or Sanskritic tongues are meant to exist for centuries and to stand above these changes, just as Latin endured with few changes throughout the Middle Ages.

Sanskritization aims at creating a pure but artificial language that transcends local language variations and which can endure over time, thus sustaining an enduring civilization. At the same time, local influences break down these purer but more artificial forms into simpler but less elegant forms. Common dialects develop with their own logic as well as their interaction with the elite language of the culture.

Classical Sanskrit, for example, has taken in some Prakrit words, while the Prakrits of India, north and south, have many borrowings from Sanskrit. Common dialects can enrich elite languages, which can otherwise become artificial or sterile, while the influence of elite languages can bring continuity and depth to common tongues.

The process of Sanskritization is thus not always complete. It may not always change the common language or Prakrit of the people. A Latin or Sanskrit elite, for example, existed in groups like the Hungarians or Dravidians that do not have an Indo-European language. It is also possible that a Prakritization of a language that occurred at an early period could over time lose any traceable connection with its parent. It is possible, for example, that Dravidian languages developed from Prakrits of Sanskrit or from an earlier ancestor of Sanskrit but at such an early period that their connection has been lost. As an elite language develops common forms of expression, it ceases to resemble its parent. With languages of many thousand years ago, it can be difficult to trace the connection between elite and common forms of expression.

Such Prakrits can develop their own culture or refinement, just as we now have English or German literature while in the Middle Ages such literature would have been only in Latin. Such elite Prakrits can become Sanskrits or new elite languages and have similar such influences.

### Three Forms of Elite Predominance

We can propose three forms of elite predominance based upon the nature of ancient civilizations and their social stratification. These would be cultural diffusion through the priests or sages (Brahmins), the nobility or kings (Kshatriya), or the merchants and farmers (Vaishya). Let us start with the last.

Merchants traveled throughout the ancient world as a necessary part of trade. They set up trading colonies in different, sometimes far away places. The most evident example of this was the Phoenicians, mainly a sea-faring people, whose various trading communities were spread far and wide. Harappan India, as the largest civilization in the third millennium

BCE, would have had the largest and most extensive set of trading influences that could have facilitated language changes.

Kings, aristocrats and armies traveled as well. Some influence was by intermarriage. We note an extensive intermarriage in the royal families of north India as recorded in ancient records like the Puranas. Some intermarriage outside this sphere, perhaps as far as Mesopotamia and Egypt, would be probable. Sometimes bands of warriors traveled. The main Indo-European groups that appear in the Near East in the second millennium BCE like the Hittites, Kassites and Mittani appear mainly as bands of warrior elites that ruled a mass of people speaking a different language and having different customs. We see strong such warrior traditions in early Indo-Europeans like the Greeks, Celts and Persians. The very term Arya among the Persians, Celts and Hindus seems to reflect primarily a warrior type of aristocracy. Such groups could have been responsible for such an elite predominance stimulating cultural and linguistic changes.

However, the third and most important group was the priests and sages, the Brahmins and rishis. Ancient India was a rishi culture, a culture dominated by the influence of various families of great sages like the Angirasas, Bhrigus, Kashyapas and their diversifications as other Vedic families. Great rishis like Vasishtha and Vishvamisra and their families had a stature and an influence that was much more important than any king or dynasty. In the struggles between kings and rishis in ancient India, it was the rishi that usually won. A king without the sanction of a great rishi was regarded as illegitimate and was often removed from power.

The Vedic rishis were something like missionaries in spreading their spiritual culture as we have noted elsewhere in the book. The rishis traveled far and wide, bringing their teachings to all types of people and setting up new cultures. In this process, their language would have spread as well.

Of course, there is an occult or fantastical side of the rishi idea, such as we find among sages and prophets in the ancient world. They were attributed with superhuman powers of body and mind and were regarded as capable of achieving great longevity. Some of this can be explained by the practice of yoga and the mastery of prana (the vital force) that was always part of the rishi tradition. However, given the spiritual nature of ancient cultures, with their Gods and sense of the sacred everywhere, we can understand how religious and spiritual ideas would have the greatest impact on cultures and languages.

The rishis would have the strongest and most conscious influence on culture. They would educate and train new people in traditions of chanting, rituals and other daily customs, perhaps giving them new names. The Vedic rishi language or Proto-Sanskrit could have been the basis of many such language and cultural changes in the ancient world. The Vedic rishi was famous as a loka-krit or maker of culture.

In all three instances of elite predominance, small groups could effect major changes on cultures without requiring a major migration of people. Such an influence would be stronger on groups that did not have a large population or set traditions of their own. This explains how Indo-European languages and culture could spread through Central Asia and Europe, which was a sparsely populated area. It explains why such groups could influence Mesopotamia, which had its own larger populations and older traditions, but not become the dominant culture over time. More importantly, it explains why ancient India could not have been Aryanized the same way. Ancient India had a significant population and old traditions that could not be easily changed down to a mass level by a process of elite predominance from Iran or Central Asia.

I would propose that the ancient Europeans were gradually Aryanized by a combination of these factors of elite predominance. No doubt some peoples did migrate out of the Indian cultural domain, which in ancient times included Afghanistan, if not portions of Central Asia and Iran. These were probably mainly Kshatriya or warrior people but must have included other groups with priests, merchants and servants as part of their retinue. Merchants, of course, traveled on their own. Overland trails like the Silk Trail were probably in operation by that time.

But, most importantly, the rishis traveled. They came into new cultures and molded them along Vedic lines. Let us note that the Vedic model of religion is more culturally based and is not simply a belief or label change as is the case with missionary religion. Therefore, the rishi would have had a deeper and more sensitive impact on native cultures. As the rishis traveled, the rishi culture became modified according to local influences. New rishi cultures were produced, like the Druidic culture of the Celts that continued a process of Aryanization in a slightly different form. This process of Aryanization on different levels of merchants, aristocrats and rishi, taking new forms in new cultures, easily explains the linguistic connections between Indo-European groups as well as other cultural connections in the ancient world.

As an extension of the idea of Sanskritization, I would propose a process of Aryanization mainly based on the rishi model, but also considering the influence of the aristocracy and trade.

### Limitations of Any Linguistic Model

We should, however, not push the language model of culture too far. The limitation of any linguistic model is that culture is always more than language, however important language may be. Culture also has an important place for religion, technology and commerce as well as the other aspects of civilization and cannot be reduced to language alone. The spread of culture does not always include the spread of language. Groups that share the same culture may speak diverse languages. The best example of this is Mesopotamia. There is a cultural continuity between the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians of the region, extending to Hittites and Kassites without a corresponding dominant elite language shared by all.

If we look at cultural diffusion through language alone, we can make many mistakes. It is also possible that a dominant cultural elite can impose much of its culture but not its language. Beyond the spread of language is a more general spread of culture that may not proceed through language but through religion, technology, agriculture or other factors, in which language may not be dominant. For example, Indian civilization spread to Indonesia without turning the local language into an Indo-European tongue, though many common and place names became Sanskritic.

Isolating language and looking at its development apart from the rest of culture can be misleading. A purely linguistic approach to history is dangerous. Linguistic data, particularly that surmised or reconstructed, must be brought into harmony with more solid archaeological and other forms of evidence. Otherwise, it can cause more confusion than clarification.

One main piece of evidence that is proposed is the division of Indo-European languages into kentum and shatam divisions, based upon 'sh' and 'k' pronunciation. However, in north India, traditional Vedic pronunciation (the Shukla Yajur Veda tradition) of the Vedic word Purusha, has always been Purukha, showing that such proposed divisions are not rigid at all. This 'sh' was pronounced as a 'kh'. So linguistic boundaries are often not as rigid as supposed.

## Conclusions

A migration theory, particularly of a primitive people, cannot explain complex connections between languages, or the existence of language families such as the Indo-European. More diverse cultural interactions are required for this.

We cannot speak of an original Indo-European language but only of the emergence of an Indo-European language family over time through a long process of cultural development, with migration playing a secondary role. It is possible that some existing Indo-European languages were Aryanized at a later time, rather than being Indo-European at their origin.

It is probably better not to speak of language families at all but only of language affinities, not by a common ancestry but by a process of communication or interaction. Just as individuals can have various affinities without being members of the same family, so can languages.

The Indo-European group of languages does not reflect the spread of a single group of people or speakers of an original Proto-Indo-European tongue. It is a construct that arose through history by the interaction of various cultural and linguistic influences, dominated by groups that spoke mainly Indo-European tongues.

We cannot speak of an original Indo-European homeland but only of the region where an Indo-European cultural influence first arose. We cannot speak of an original Indo-European people but only of the oldest people that spoke such a type of language, and even this group may not have been uniform in its ethnicity.

We must discriminate between common dialects that change quickly over time and more enduring courtly or priestly languages that can exist for centuries with little change. We cannot apply the same rates of language change to each.

The spread of Indo-European languages requires an early dominant culture. Prior to Anglicization, Latinization and historical diffusions of Indo-European languages must have been earlier waves into the third millennium BCE and earlier.

We can at best speak of an original dominant Indo-European culture that I would identify with Vedic/Harappan India. So far, it is the oldest significant Indo-European culture that could give the basis for such a vast and enduring cultural diffusion, including language. It would also require a large population growing out of a fertile region like India to seed so many cultures in different parts of the world. This would not be easy in steppe-nomadic region, especially in ancient times, which could only support small populations leading a precarious existence. Throughout history, more Indians have migrated out of India than have come in. This is still the case today.

To explain the Indo-European connections, we need an advanced culture, with a dominant Indo-European language, before 3000 BCE, which was able to sustain its influence into the second millennium BCE. Vedic/Harappan India, which included parts of Afghanistan, alone can fit this need.

## Ancient India

The Rig Veda, the oldest Indian text, shows a dominant religious, political and merchant (Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya) culture that Sanskritized the region of north India and then areas beyond. This is mainly the influence of the Bharata and Ikshvaku kings and rishis. Yet earlier forms of Sanskrit probably existed that had already started the process, such as probably existed at a much earlier period like that of King Yayati. Manu himself probably represents the earliest phase of the Sanskritization process, particularly as the name of his daughter Ila means speech and probably refers to both the spiritual culture and elite language that his influence initiated. Classical India under the Mauryas and Guptas had another phase of Sanskritization when the ruling elite spoke classical Sanskrit as in the plays of Kalidasa.

The process of Sanskritization goes on today. It is most evident in Dravidian languages that have a greater percentage of Sanskrit words. We also note that South Indians have more classically Sanskrit surnames.

Perhaps there were earlier forms of language like a Proto-Sanskrit that had more commonalities with Dravidian or Semitic languages as we move more back into the primordial linguistic field.

In any case, an Aryan invasion/migration model is not necessary to explain the existence of Indo-European languages in

India. Such an invasion/migration raises more questions than it answers. To replace it, we must look to a process of Sanskritization and Aryanization that is more spiritual and cultural in form, rather than a crude shift of populations.

## The Place of the Sanskrit Language

This model of elite predominance means not only that there was no PIE per se behind all Indo-European languages, but also that Rig Vedic Sanskrit is not the mother of all languages either. The oldest form of Sanskrit, Vedic Sanskrit, is already a highly evolved elite language and not the first stage of language at all, much less a commonly spoken tongue. Its original name was 'chhandas', meaning meter or poetry. It possesses a complex metrical form, a sophisticated system of inflections, many synonyms, and a long sense of its own history.

The Rig Veda represents a synthesis of many Gods and of many rishi traditions, uniting the different modes of worship throughout the region. Similarly, it presents a synthetic poetic/religious language that has taken various elements from the different languages of the region, including those that modern linguists might not define as Indo-European. That would explain why the language has so many synonyms, particularly for religious terms, and why for more special cultural aspects, like names of different grains, it has so few terms. Rig Vedic Sanskrit was a synthetic religious language—a kind of all India religious language—that also included contributions from communities speaking Munda and Dravidian dialects, as well as those we might recognize as more Indo-European. Our modern compartmentalization of language should not be confused with a compartmentalization of culture. It may indicate more how we perceive language than how ancient cultures, which had considerable linguistic diversity, organized themselves or perceived their cultural boundaries.

Vedic Sanskrit is probably not the earliest Indo-European tongue or that responsible for the earliest diffusion of this group of languages, though it is probably the oldest Indo-European language that has survived. Vedic Sanskrit represents the elite language of the Vedic culture and was probably finalized during its later period. Earlier forms of Sanskrit and related Prakrits would have been spoken in the region previously, simpler in form, and these would have better represented the earliest diffusion of Indo-European languages. They would also probably contain elements of Dravidian and Munda languages. Their languages would have had more diversity as well as more interchanges with other languages.

The closest thing to any original language for humanity would be a language of root sounds, not inflected, and reflecting a range of meanings depending upon manner and intonation of expression. This is much like the language of bija or seed mantras.

In any case, we should look to culture to explain language and interpret language as part of culture. History can explain language, but language cannot explain history. The more dominant the language or language family, the stronger the culture needed to create and sustain it over time. This does not mean that migration and ethnicity play no role in the spread of language but that they should not be made into the prime determinative factors.

[1] RV VIII 22.6