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Babylonian Pythagoras' Theorem, the Early History of Zero and a Polemic on the Study of the History of Science

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A difference between fancy and fact is that fancies may be as you please but facts are as the universe pleases. Robert Kaplan, *The Nothing that is* { A natural history of zero.

Introduction

An irksome feature in the study of the history of science, mathematics, and society formation is encountering 'Eurocentrism' at practically every level. The notion that everything 'civilised' originated in Europe is an enterprise which began around two hundred years ago, at a time when the world was divided into the 'dark' continents and their 'enlightened' colonial masters. Besides strengthening the view that the 'dark' continents were indeed pitch dark, Eurocentrism was a reflex of the colonizers quest for legitimacy as the font of all things civilised. Many sociologists find in this Eurocentrism the seed which later bore the bitter fruit of Hitler's Aryan supremacy theory. Lately, however, historians cutting across the North-South and East-West divides have come to realize the folly of Eurocentrism and the ways it has hindered the development and a critical study of history, be it of science or otherwise¹.

Unfortunately, some of us in India have not learned from these mistakes, and stubbornly continue to engage in an 'Indocentric' view of science, mathematics, society, language, etc. Thus we are told that 'Sanskrit is the mother of all languages', 'Indus valley civilisation is Vedic in origin', 'India gave the world zero', or more

¹ Bernal [1] gives a detailed account of this fabrication of Eurocentrism.

Keywords

Babylonian Pythagoras' theorem, history of zero.