



Svastika : of good fortune; from Sanskrit *su* (well) and *asti* (being)

“I do not like the use of the word Svastika outside India. It is a word of Indian origin, and has its history and definite meaning in India. ...

The mischief arising from the promiscuous use of technical terms is very great.”

-Letter from Max Müller to Heinrich Schliemann

[from Schliemann’s *Ilios*, London 1880, p.346]

by Brian W. Kuhar

The Swastika. ...

For the most recent seven decades of its 12,000-year history - since it was adopted as Hitler’s National-Socialist flag in 1920 - it has been a symbol of racism and anti-Semitism. Even as early as the 19th century, Aryanists were trying to prove a connection between the swastika and the Aryan culture as a means of race identification.

What is the real origin and meaning behind this symbol? The emblem has been found to have been carved into Mammoth ivory dating from 10,000 B.C. in what is now the Ukraine. The source and significance of this ancient symbol has been obfuscated for centuries, and the correct answers may not exist as of yet.

In 1894, Count Goblet D’Alviella wrote of the swastika that “there is hardly a symbol which has given rise to more varied interpretations.” [D’Alviella, *op cit.*, p.45]

The most common interpretation among Indians is that the swastika symbolizes the movement and power of the Sun. As a ritualistic sign, the swastika is one of the most ancient symbols, sun-worship being the most ancient of religions.

According to Hindu astronomy, the auspicious form of the Swastika represents the celestial change of the Sun to the Tropic of Capricorn and is regarded as a male.

“In the ancient scriptures, the right-handed Swastika is associated with the Sun, and hence an emblem of the Vedic cosmic possession and evolution thereof, around a fixed centre. The left-handed Swastika, which moves anti-clockwise, represents the Sun during the Autumn and Winter, and is regarded as female and inauspicious.

“According to the 19th-century scholar Sir G.C.M. Birdwood, ‘the right-handed Swastika symbolises Ganesha, and the left one personifies goddess Kali or stands for night and destruction.’ [Chatterjee, Gautam, *Sacred Hindu Symbols*, New Delhi, 1996, p.40].

The swastika is also used to adorn the walls and doors of buildings “to protect them from the wrath of evil spirits or furies of nature.” [Nathan, R.S., *Symbolism in Hinduism*, Bombay, 1983, p.93] Ganesha, guardian of the gates to the Sun, might use the powers of the swastika to protect his mother’s abode from unwanted visitors like Shiva.

But this is all legend. How did the subject of harmless stories and

philosophical interpretations get twisted into a larger-than-life symbol of terror? How did the swastika get to Europe, and specifically to Germany?

To tackle this question, the Rev. Norman Walker, in his book *The Real History of the Swastika*, suggests that the symbol was migratory. “In the sixth and seventh cities of Troy very few swastikas were found, but in the third, fourth and fifth cities they were found in hundreds,” he wrote. “That is to say, the swastika came in with the Hittites, and went out with the coming of the Aryans. ... Wherever the Aryans migrated and destroyed the older civilization, the use of the swastika died out - it seems to be specially associated with the pig-tail wearing, hook-nosed and beardless Hittites, the early Elamites, Machus, Huns, and American Indians.”

Chatterjee wrote: “Swastika, the graphic symbol, is found in almost every ancient and primitive cult all over the world. The most ancient Swastikas have been found in the Harappan Civilisation in India, Susa in Persia, and Sammara in Mesopotamia. This symbol is frequented upon in ancient Greece, Cyprus, Crete and Rhodes. According to Leonary Von Matt, it was a favourite symbol on the coins