

The Culture and Civilization of Ancient World: The Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Culture and civilization are connected with each other in that culture is a prerequisite for developing civilization. Ancient civilizations placed the initial blocks for modern society, influencing everything from political systems. Cultural history revises and understands the record of human societies by indicate the different unique customs of living built up by a group of people. Indian culture is one of the most prominent customs in the world. Culture and Civilization coexist and are unstated concurrently. A change in culture or civilization leads to development in the other. The Ancient Rome culture has lent the Western Civilization a number of traits that have changed the world into what it is today

Key words: Culture, civilization, intellectual, humans, literature, evolution, society and customs

INTRODUCTION

Culture includes art, literature, values, ritual, customs, tradition and ways of life. Civilization signify an sophisticated stage of human social and cultural .The road to Athens is symbolic of the long journey man has undertaken through countless ages to emerge from a state of savagery to that of an organized and rational pattern of existence. The savage lived originally in the immediate present, blissfully oblivious of the next moment. He satisfied his needs, which were almost exclusively physical, by unconsciously obeying dictates of his instincts. The moment the idea, howsoever vague, of the future crept into his consciousness; he had parted company with unalloyed barbarism. He became a pioneer on the long and tortuous road to civilization and culture.

Civilizations are intimately associated with and often further defined by other socio-politico-economic characteristics, such as centralization, the domestication of both humans and other organisms, specialization of labour, culturally-ingrained ideologies of progress and supremacism, monumental architecture, taxation, societal dependence upon farming and expansionism Historically, "a civilization has often been understood as a larger and more advanced culture, in implied contrast to smaller, supposedly primitive cultures" (Ankerl, Guy 2000)

Instincts, pure and unbridled, govern the lives of animals and savages. Culture or civilization, on the other hand, consists primarily of the capacity to control and sublimate raw instincts. One of the primary instincts in all living beings, for instance, is the instinct of self-preservation. When a living organism follows this instinct blindly, the result is a fierce, brutal struggle for existence, a state of affairs which Tennyson picturesquely described as "nature red in tooth and claw". The moment a living being realizes the gross selfishness and vulgarity of this type of existence, he is well on the road to civilization. When a primitive man first decided to forgo a meal for the sake of his companion whose need was greater than his, he demonstrated the virtue of self-denial, sacrifice and service to one's fellow beings-virtues which from times immemorial have formed the bed-rock of the highest notions of culture and morality.

The dawn of reason in the consciousness of man is the first vital step towards civilization. And reason battles with instincts, corrects and sublimates them. The free play of instincts is a reflection of the true state of nature but reason finds that this state of existence is not conducive to organized peaceful living. A natural life is not an ideal life. This may appear to be a highly provocative assertion, especially in the face of the oft-repeated slogan "Go back to Nature". But the truth is that even the most enthusiastic advocates of this doctrine would not commend a return to the life of savages which, logically speaking, was strictly natural, civilized existence of any shape and variety cannot be natural, for civilization is essentially an artificial but very precious growth. "Civilization is the upward struggle of mankind, in which millions are trampled to death that thousands may mount on their bodies" (Balfour,)

And yet a life of reason is not altogether artificial, for reason, like instincts are also a gift of nature. And it is a gift which distinguishes man from the rest of the creation. Reason is the highest faculty bestowed on man by his Creator. The exercise of this divine faculty is not carried on in isolation. It is like the potter who shapes all the other human clay into beautiful and gracious shapes. In every state of civilized life, be it the Vedic age in India, the age of Pericles in Athens, the heyday of Roman and Egyptian glory or the Renaissance, reason has invariably been enthroned on a lofty pedestal. "The hungry savage," writes Clive Bell, "when he catches a rabbit, eats it there and then, or instinctively takes it home, as a fox might, to be eaten raw by his cub; the first who, all hungry though he was,

took it home and cooked it, was on the road to Athens.”(Chisholm, Jane; Anne Millard 1991)

Reason teaches man a good many things. It limits man's selfishness; it makes him think of the interests of his fellow beings. It enjoins a certain discipline and self-abnegation for the sake of others. This is how it lays the corner-stone for the foundation of culture, which, as Pandit Nehru puts it, “is restraint over oneself and consideration for others.” From this basic conception emerge all the noble ideals of heroism, sacrifice, chivalry, philanthropy, justice, peace and truth. Man emerges out of his narrow shell, breathes a freer air and comes to appreciate the wider loyalties to society, nation and finally to mankind as a whole. The arena of man's activities expands, his mental horizon grows spacious and his instincts are sublimated into noble emotions.

If reason broadens and mellows our self-centredness into cosmopolitanism, it also emancipates us from the bondage of the immediate present. We begin “to look before and after and pine for what is not.” The birth of discontent with the present is not simply an incurable heartache as the poet would have us believe; no, it is the sole incentive for work and progress. Contentment, it has been well said, is the virtue of an ass. If man remained satisfied with the present, with what he had, he would have lost all zest for living. There would be no point in his life, if there were no races to be run, no goals to be reached. Man has learnt to sacrifice the immediate present with its simple, even crude, comforts and pleasures for the sake of a future which holds forth the prospects of subtler and intense satisfactions. The history of civilization is a story of man's dreams and ideals. So often individuals have been captured by a flaming idea to which they dedicated their whole lives, suffered neglect, calumny, privation and even death. Men may die, but ideas once born live forever. The original dreamer of dreams may not live to witness the actualization of his dreams, but sooner or later the dreams come true.

Science, religion, philosophy-all these owe their origin and growth to this incorrigible vice of dreaming dreams, A Christ dies at the Cross, a Gandhi falls before the bullets of an assassin, a Giordano Bruno is burnt at the stake, a Galileo suffers incarceration in a dungeon, a Socrates drinks hemlock. Why? Because each has been inspired by an ideal, each has caught a glimpse of Truth which he wants to propagate. The benighted fellow-beings jeer at and persecute these prophets and pioneers but they can neither extinguish the flame of truth nor silence the voice of reason. “Civilizations are organized densely-populated settlements divided into hierarchical social classes with ruling elite and subordinate urban and rural populations, which engage in intensive agriculture, mining, small-scale manufacture and trade. Civilization concentrates power, extending human control over the rest of nature, including over other human beings” (Bolesti, Maria 2013)

The savage was primarily concerned with the feeding of his body. The man of culture cannot, of course, neglect his body, but he is alive to claims other than those of the body. The Bible reminds us that man does not live by bread alone. For a full and wholesome existence, he requires a varied fare. Man is aware of higher needs, e.g., food for thought, culture of his motions, love of the beautiful. If man thinks, he is equally anxious to express and communicate his thoughts to others. That is the origin of language and literature. Language is a supple instrument in man's hands, which he moulds to create lovely shapes and forms. All literature is an endeavour to give a beautiful expression to beautiful thoughts and emotions. Literature is at once self-expression and creation of beauty. It provides both intellectual food and spiritual satisfaction. No wonder that one of the hallmarks of culture is the capacity to create and appreciate literature. The most glorious ages of human civilization have been replete with the production of the highest types of literature which “neither age can wither nor custom stale.”

Literature is only one of the many ways in which the highly elusive and indefinable substance, culture, manifests itself. The other significant forms of its expression are the fine arts of painting, music, sculpture and architecture. Athens and Rome are still regarded as the cradle for subsequent western civilizations because its people attained an unsurpassable watermark Rome, the statue of Laocoon in Vatican, the sculptured figure of in all the fine arts. The Parthenon of Athens, the Colosseum of Venus de Milo, the painting of Pallas Athena on a vase-these are some of the imperishable glories of Greek and Roman art and architecture. They bespeak of the greatness of their culture and civilization no less than do the philosophical discourses of Plato, the plays of Euripides, the epics of Homer and Virgil or the orations of Pericles and Demosthenes.

It is sometimes contended that culture is synonymous with only things intellectual and artistic. The argument is elaborated by adding that if it is so, culture will be confined to a small coterie, a handful of people who have leisure, money and artistic talent. The common runs of people have neither the capacity to create art nor the time and means to enjoy and appreciate it. Thus the so-called cultured people from a privileged class, a sort of intellectual and aesthetic aristocracy of a nation. Samuel P. Huntington defines civilization as “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species”. Huntington's theories about civilizations are discussed below”(Huntington, Samuel P. 1997)

In the first place, it is misleading to identify culture with the fine arts alone and, secondly, it is equally erroneous that the cultivation of arts is the special privilege of a limited class. We may take up the second point first. It should be conceded at the very outset that every member of a nation cannot blossom into a first rate poet or artist. But

that is not the same thing as saying that everybody cannot enjoy the fine arts. Art is a reflection of life-not necessarily an escape from it. And even escapist art is not altogether divorced from life. The desire to escape from the hurly-burly of common life is an aspect of life itself. It is only an expression of man's eternal discontent with life as it is. All of us have a feeling embedded somewhere in our consciousness "to shatter the scheme of things entire and remold them nearer the heart's desire." (Wilkinson, David Fall 1987)

Thus whether art is palpably realistic or romantic-that is, escapist-it is an expression of the universal thoughts and aspirations of man. Dull must he be of soul, if he cannot respond to its appeal. The fact is that literature and art are successful only when they can evoke a response from the most unsophisticated heart. The poet or the artist does not reflect purely personal or individualistic emotions. His creations are of an order which touches a sympathetic chord in every human heart. No great art can come into existence unless the people themselves clamour for it. Art no less than literature is a reflection of the spirit of the age? It is a compendious exhibition of what people as a whole think and feel. That's why it is not every age which produces great art and literature. We have only one Kalidas, one Tagore and one Shakespeare. So it is not correct to hold that art is inspired, created and appreciated by a small privileged class of people alone.

To come to the second point: culture cannot be dissociated from things intellectual and artistic, though it is not confined to these things alone. The reason is not far to seek, if culture epitomizes the highest stage of man's growth the creation and enjoyment of art and literature must form its important and inseparable part. The best and highest expression of human thought and sensibility constitutes art and literature. These things lift man into a nobler region where the purely material aspects of life lose their significance. Not that the fine arts are a sort of intoxication, an opiate which deadens man's sensitiveness to the practical aspect of things. This intoxication, if it is intoxication at all, is a fever of a higher variety, which presents a glowing and consecrating vision of things so that the ordinary man also reads a never meaning and higher purpose even in the humdrum activities of his daily life.

It has been stressed that art and literature represent the highest aspects of human life and if culture fosters their growth it also ennobles life as a whole. To put it differently, culture permeates the whole of our life, not merely its intellectual or artistic aspect. To think new thoughts and to give beautiful expression to them in language, colour, bronze or stone is not an isolated phenomenon. This activity has and should have a profound effect on human conduct as a whole. The cult of the true and the beautiful should govern our day-to-day existence no less than our creation of art and literature. Hence a truly cultured people are as much solicitous about their conduct

as intellectual or aesthetic pleasure. Life as a whole should be balanced and beautiful.

If we analyze the deeper implications of this version of culture, we will find that it will lead not only to intellectual and aesthetic refinement but also to moral and spiritual regeneration. A man of culture will instinctively regard injustice, cruelty, inconsiderateness of as essentially ugly and vulgar sentiments. To prize the noble emotion of love, charity and kindness which all good literature and art foster would automatically bring about a rejection of all that is crude, harsh and inartistic. Anti-social acts, national aggressiveness, economic or imperial exploitation-all these will not be only immoral and wicked but exceedingly lacking in beauty and refinement. Thus a cultivation of the arts inevitably imports a sense of the beautiful in other spheres. And in the widest sense, there is a very faint line between the beautiful and the true: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' - that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"(Carniero, R.L. 1967) Civilizations have more complicated cultures, as well as literature, professional art, architecture, controlled religion, and complex traditions.

CONCLUSION

Thus culture brings about a fine amalgam of the beautiful and the true. And if one learns how to fuse these two, he has learnt the true, the real significance of a civilized and cultured existence. This need for civilizations to import ever more resources, he argues, stems from their over-exploitation and diminution of their own local resources. Therefore, civilizations inherently adopt imperialist and expansionist policies and, to maintain these, highly militarized, hierarchically structured, and coercion-based cultures and lifestyles.

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