



## Culture, Civilization, Values and Human Destiny

### KEYWORDS

Culture, Civilization, Techniques, Values.

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### ABSTRACT

*Culture, civilization, technique and values are significant categories and domains of phenomena that have captured the attention of the thinkers analysing collective human seekings. The paper seeks to understand various influences on human destiny and points out that it is in the dialectics between culture, civilization, techniques and values that the issues concerning human destiny get crystalized.*

Culture in an important sense is an axiological phenomenon as it has a necessary reference to the realm of values. Cultural activity does not consist in mere reflecting the surroundings by human consciousness, nor in mere modifying the surroundings, rather it consists in the imaginative recreation of the world with a view to bring about a change in the existing state-of-affairs. It is this imaginative recreation that lies at the base of cultural activity which transforms mere biological behaviour into intentional cultural acts. What marks off cultural activity from mere organism's behaviour is the connection with contra-factuals. Cultural activity consists primarily in conceiving the contra-factuals, i.e. in positing some state-of-affair which is not the case as yet. Thus, cultural activity is necessarily related to the creation of values. Human beings not only create values rather they choose and seek values and work for their realisation also. In this sense various domains of culture may be considered to be an expression of the values being sought and realised.

It is in this sense that Berdyaev rightly points out that a culture is realisation of new values, and Danilevsky insists that each culture aims at the realisation of certain values in its own way. It is also in this sense that Spengler considered the central values of a culture to be its soul which is manifested in all the domains of that culture. He points out that all the aspects of a culture are in fact embodiments of these central values.

Toynbee's thought also underscores the importance of values in the cultural processes. He points out that whenever there is a challenge, the creative minority withdraws from the nitty-gritty and gluttony of every day life, contemplates on the issues pertaining to human destiny, and returns with a response –which is in the form of new values. He insists that cultures are born of spiritual necessities, though the form of challenge may sometimes be physical.

Thus values shape and inform the cultural reality in an important manner. Values impart sense, significance and meaning to the cultural domain. Cultures are creators as well as creations of values. There is a continuous dialectics between the values and the culture. Cultures must always perceive values qua values rather than perceiving them as facts. Values are different from facts and cannot be rooted in the facts of the world as world is ethically neutral in itself. As pointed out by Schweitzer, "we wanted to form a philosophy of life for ourselves out of items gathered from the world. But it is our destiny to live by means of convictions which are our inward necessity"(1968, 208) So, cultur-

al values cannot be derived from -nor can they be reduced to- the facts. When values are reduced to facts, or are perceived as facts, the culture loses dynamism and becomes stagnant. The next section proposes to elaborate on how cultural values are perceived as facts.

### Values and Civilization

Material creations and useful objects are important constituents of civilization but more often than not civilization is considered to be co-terminus with them. The notion of civilization that considers it to be consisting only of material goods and the technology that goes into their creation is rather misleading. It is true that civilization is primarily concerned with the well being of humans and consists of elements that are useful to human existence in the sense of being functional. But this includes not only objects and techniques, rather it also includes social and institutional framework into which humans enter in order to ensure survival of the group and to control the external conditions of their lives. It is in this sense that civilization corresponds to the domain of useful. In the moments of life that are considered to be part of civilization, we reach out to outer world -natural as well as social- in search of goods, techniques and institutional frameworks that fall in the domain of useful.

Civilization consists of techniques and physical as well as social arrangements that ensure survival and preservation of the human collectivity. It relates more to the useful aspects of human creations. Such creations pertain to both material as well ideational aspects of given social reality. It treats both of them as facts. Ideational aspects of a given social reality i.e. customs, norms, traditions and institutions that belong to civilization, manifest the values of the culture that informs that civilization. But when embodied and manifested these values are perceived as social facts. Thus civilization consists not only of material goods and techniques but also of social and institutional framework that embodies the values of the culture as social facts.

### Techniques, Values and Human Destiny

Culture and civilization refer to the domains of human creations that are dynamic and incessantly changing. Both culture as well as civilization are effected not only by their own constituent phenomena, but also by phenomena that are classified as constituents of other domains. An analysis of such dialectics is of utmost importance in comprehending the direction of human destiny. Let us begin by analysing the effects of most dynamic constituent of civilization i.e. technique on culture and civilization and its interplay

with cultural values to see how it effects human destiny.

A detailed empirical survey of the effects of development of technique on growth and decline of civilization has been undertaken by Tonybee. He finds that "there is no correlation between progress in techniques and progress in civilization"(1947,173-174). Contrary to prevalent view, he argues that civilizational growth does not consist in, nor is it due to technological progress. Against this uncritical view, he showed on empirical evidence that when over-specialised technique becomes an end-in-itself, it effects growth of civilization in an inverse manner. He terms the process of over-specialised technique becoming an end-in-itself as the idolization of technique. He points out the destiny of Viking of Sweden, Nomads of Transoxania, and Ottomans of Turkey fell pray to such over-specialisation of techniques. In his analysis of petrified civilizations he points out that they all fell pray to the idolisation of technique. Based on empirical study of petrified and arrested civilizations, he shows that growth of techniques instead of resulting in civilizational growth, is rather associated with arrested growth, and in some cases even with death of civilizations. Thus technical growth is not a correlate of growth of civilization. Rather over emphasis on techniques shows a correlation with stagnation and retardation in the path of civilization. Toynbee points out that lack of correlation between progress and techniques, and progress and civilization is apparent in all cases in which techniques have improved while civilization have remained stationary or suffered setbacks.

Supremacy of technique is in a way sign of degradation and it has to be kept at a subordinate place for culture and civilization to grow. It is good as means only. When it become an end, the whole purpose of using it is defeated and it leads to dehumanisation and mechanisation. Toynbee elaborates this point by analysing the states-of-affair in the western world where increasing technological supremacy resulted in the loss of inner sense of joy. The victims of technique's supremacy -surrounded by rigid uniformity of industry- are reduced to monotonous life of a machine like repetitiveness.

Spengler reached a similar conclusion regarding the supremacy of technique and cultural degradation, but from a different path. As has been noted earlier, according to him every culture has its possibilities. It actualises its possibilities and dies down. When the inner possibilities of a culture are fulfilled, it turns into a civilization. He insists that the "civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, ... death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and stone-built, petrifying world city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Goethe. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again"(1961,48).

It is with the end of cultural cycle i.e. with civilization that Spengler associates supremacy of technique that marks the phase of cultural degradation. He insists that the western world, where supremacy of technique rules, is in fact declining. He contends that it is erroneous to associate supremacy of technique, and positivistic attitude with modern western civilization only. He rather insists that all cultures in their decadence undergo similar state-of-affairs when technique rules and values are in disarray. In such times of decadence, life degenerates into soulless mechanism and civilization assumes the character of undifferentiated

monotony and repetition. Schweitzer, whose conception of civilization is primarily ethical, stresses a similar point and insists that a lack of ethical foundation makes civilization collapse even if creative and intellectual forces of the strongest nature are at work in other directions. Even control over forces of nature through technology resulting in material progress does not augur well for human destiny in the absence of strong foundation provided by the values(1964,xii).

Thus it seems plausible to say that the phases of history where technique rules supreme and becomes an end-in-itself spells doom for the future of culture and civilization. But if technique is kept in a subordinate position and values guide the technical development -i.e. if technology is treated as means rather than an end-in-itself- human destiny acquires a positive direction.

It would be pertinent to note here that just like idolization of technique, there may occur an idolisation of some institutionalised value. This idolisation is also detrimental to human destiny. To avoid this, values should be pursued authentically qua values and not as facts. Now we propose to discuss this dialectics associated with value.

### **Culture, Civilization, Values and Human Destiny**

Cultural realm is essentially a realm of values where values are pursued in an authentic, creative and impersonal manner, with the detached concern of a vairagi. Values expand the sphere of human consciousness by opening up new horizons which are non-existent before the conception of those values. The cultural values so created are in the form of potentialities to be actualized by the civilization. Value apprehension and value realization, the terms used by Dayaji(1947,19), are better suited to analyse and comprehend the dynamics of values in relation to the domains of culture and civilization. It may be said that apprehension of new values falls in the domain of culture whereas realisation of those values falls in the domain of civilization. In other words value apprehension is a cultural pursuit and value realisation is the pursuit of civilization. History of culture may be seen as the history of value apprehension whereas history of civilization may be seen as the history of value realisation. Since actualization of values requires both, the institutional framework as well as technology, the history of civilization includes a study of both these aspects.

As has been noted earlier, it is through the institutional framework that values become available to the community and masses as social facts. It is in this sense that civilization may be seen as a depository of the cultural activity. Non-material or ideational aspects of civilization may in a way be considered to be the realisation of apprehended values in the form of institutionalised behaviour. In this manner civilization may be regarded as that form of culture which has been made available to the masses at large. Thus civilization in its broadest connotations may be seen as a systematization and objectification of cultural creations. And as N.K. Devraj rightly points out "Civilization in fact in any advanced form neither come to exist nor continue to exist without disinterested pursuit of values which constitute culture"(1963,119). The customs, laws, institutions etc. which embody modes of civilized behaviour, owed their first appearance to the creative cultural impulse seeking to visualise new and more satisfactory forms of human relationships.

Once embodied into institutions, customs, laws, traditions,

etc., the values tend to be pursued as facts -though social facts, but facts nevertheless. Just like idolization of technique discussed earlier, there occurs an idolization of institutional framework as well, and as a result customs, laws, traditions, rituals, etc. become almost ends-in-themselves. They are pursued as given facts, almost at par with natural facts. The values that they embody, and whose manifestations they are supposed to be, are relegated to secondary status. In such circumstances civilizations become victims of these over-specialised and rigid institutional frameworks that become ends-in-themselves. They chain the spirit of freedom of individuals who are part of those frameworks. As a result they tend to operate as conservative forces creating hindrance for the cultural advancement. They may spell direction of doom for human destiny. There is a shift of emphasis and energy gets transferred to the lower sphere of mechanical imitation and memesis. Institutionalised behaviours are reduced to the status of mindless and meaningless rituals. In such cases when any justification is sought the prompt answer given is 'I don't know, but this is what people do, the response clearly exhibiting that it has become an end-in-itself.

The loss of justification means that it has lost all the creative and cultural significance as well as meaning, and has become almost a dead log in the civilizational web. An element of inauthenticity creeps in to the extent that institutional frameworks are idolized as given, and by the same stroke of inauthenticity, values are devalued as facts. Thus civilization as objectification and systematization of cultural creations is both fulfilling and frustrating : fulfilling as it makes available the fruits of cultural progress to the people in general; and frustrating as it hinders further cultural creations by acting as a sort of conservative force. It is true that we cannot live without norms, customs and traditions constituting the institutional framework, but it is equally true that we can progress only by transcending these systematisations and frameworks. The onward journey of humankind towards writing its own destiny is governed by contrary requirements of systematisation and its transcendence.

Culture exploits new opportunities provided by civilization and also tires to rise to the challenges being faced by the civilization. But supremacy of civilizational pursuits tends to hinder the smooth march of cultural pursuits. They are required to be kept in a subordinate position as compared to the cultural pursuits for human destiny to have a positive direction. Civilization may promote material progress but it tends to hinder creation of new values thereby promoting a status quo and acting as a conservative force. Cultural consciousness on the other hand seeks to transcend the given institutions in pursuit of creation of new values thereby acting as a harbinger of change. Thus values pursued by civilization infact tend to act as a barrier to further change, the seeking of values as cultural pursuit is essential for a better future of humankind.

The dialectics of values between culture and civilization goes in such a manner that cultural consciousness apprehends new values that enter everyday life through the institutional framework of civilization. The realisation and actualisation of these values requires the support of techniques also. Human destiny has a positive direction if techniques and institutional frameworks are kept in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the values. But more often than not, there occurs an idolization of techniques or institutional framework that effects human destiny in a negative manner, as it hinders the further expansion of human consciousness. If culture exploits the opportunities as well as challenges provided by civilizational development and creates new value consciousness, or discovers new dimensions of existing values, then only can it give a positive boost to human destiny.

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