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DIALECTICS OF POWER AND CIVILIZATION

Knowledge Centered Indian Civilization

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I am sceptical of all attempts to present any civilization as one whose origin lies within itself, as self-generating and sui generis, for I feel persuaded that all civilizations are born out of interaction with and absorb the influences of others and are shaped by power with its forces like economic, technological, political, linguistic, etc. There is thematic continuity at the very basis of Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, Indocentrism, Sinocentrism and other kinds of centrisms, all of which relate the history of the civilization concerned from that of others and can not credit its achievements to its own genius. Civilization, *civitas*, means city or city-state, urbanized, with citizens, institutions- educational, economic, scientific, technological, etc. Civilized vs barbarians "those who babble", i.e. those who speak unintelligible languages. or primitive. "Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilisation." (A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*).

There are dual opinions within society: one regarding **civilization** as purely **material** and another regarding **civilization** as both **ethical** and material and that it "is the sum total of all progress made by man in every sphere of action and from every point of view in so far as the progress helps towards the spiritual perfecting of individuals as the progress of all progress." (Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, 1923)

Indian civilization emerged and developed out of Contact, Conflict and Confluence- Indian civilization was in contact with the Greeks, the Mongols, the Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Babylonia as well as Persia, long before the Persian empire extended into India in the days of Cyrus (558-530 BC.). It also came in contact with the Jewish religion, Christianity (A.D.54), Zoroastrianism (A.D.6th century), Islam and Sufism (A.D.12th century) and in 20th century, with Tibetan Buddhism the Bahai's Faith. There have been dialectical unity and struggle of inter-faith and intra – faith. Initially it lead to quantitative changes which gradually got transformed into qualitative change.

The Civilizational dictum: *Rg Veda* says that *Aano bhadrah kritavo yantu visvatah* or 'let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere', and *ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*, truth os one but wise people call it differently.

Continuity and Plurality are the most operative terms of Indian Civilization

The cognitive, connotative and normative aspects of civilizations and the conventions should not be treated solely as given. **Actors use them purposively, by breaking, reinterpreting or using them as a weapon against adversaries and thus creating Institutional hierarchies.**

There are historical evidences to the use of military-economic-technological superiority to suppress/ subordinate the adversaries. Beneath the façade of civilizations, there is an underlying power asymmetry.

One definitely faces the problem of contact, conflict and confluence of cultural horizons. This situation will inevitably transform each nation, the people who now hold power, and those whose labor creates all value.

Civilizations experience cycles of birth, life, decline, and death, often supplanted by a new **civilization** with a potent new culture, formed around a compelling new cultural symbol.

[Arnold J. Toynbee](#) in *A Study of History*, (1924) traced the rise and, in most cases, the decline of 21 civilizations and five "arrested civilizations". Civilizations generally declined and fell because of the failure of a "creative minority", through moral or religious decline, to meet some important challenge, rather than mere economic or environmental causes.

Civilization has been spread by [religious conversion](#), [invasion](#), [colonization](#), the extension of [bureaucratic control](#) and [trade](#), and by introducing science/ technology vis-a-vis urban/ industrial life and writing to non-literate peoples. Some non-civilized people may willingly adapt to civilized behaviour. But **civilization** is also spread by the technical, material and social dominance that **civilization** engenders.

Extensive trade routes, the [Silk Road](#) through [Central Asia](#) including Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran and Afghanistan and [Indian Ocean](#) sea routes linking the [Roman Empire](#), [Persian Empire](#), [India](#), and [China](#), were well established 2000 years ago.

The corresponding institutions of cultural, linguistic, technological, economic, political, or military-diplomatic – are the **key indicators** in determining the extent of a civilization.

1. **The relationship between power and civilization is a top–down model that conceives of power as a monolithic force imposed by dominant political – economic, social-cultural and civilizational groups.**
2. **Power is in terms of various articulations of force circulating throughout the social – civilizational bodies/ institutions and shaping people's knowledge/ understandings of themselves and their relations to the world in which they act.**
3. **Power is a force, not a substance—a force that is fluid and productive, and not merely coercive.**

4. Power cannot be conceived except in terms of its relations, relations that range from the microphysical to the global and that can be traced in terms of the strategies, techniques and practices within which such relations are enacted.
5. A dominant civilization explains macro outcomes by aggregating a large set of civilizational concepts which are under domination.
6. The individual civilizational preferences and plans are explained by dominant civilizational background.

This perspective has not been taken into account in *Origin of Indian Civilization*.

In addition, we have to make the text relevant to the present millennium, which have the following requirements:

- 1) Advanced scientific knowledge with technology which is the most capable and sophisticated, micro-soft with knowledge and information.
- 2) But do we have wisdom to make use of all these on civilizational achievements?
- 3) One of the features of human history has been that people, resources, ideas, consciousness and above all civilizations move from one place to another and in the era of globalization, these are moving all too fast with the help of technology and resisting transformations or getting transformed gradually.
- 4) The question arises – what exactly is that basic feature of Indian civilization through which it can be identified even after so many upheavals and transformations? The answer is – it is the knowledge centered civilization with two basic features: continuity and plurality which are dialectically operating in Indian civilization and it is with reference to power that it becomes hierarchical.
- 5) Globalization- Universalization, Internationalization, Liberalization, Westernization and Deterritorization, with contending advocates like Neo-Liberals who want that the market force should determine the course of globalization, the Reformists put the public policy where as the Radicals want to de-globalize or to bring the society to pre-global status quo ante. Finally the Revolutionaries try to take globalization to the post-capitalist stage.
- 6) Multiculturalism- Multiculturalism and fusion of Cultural horizons: Recognition of plurality of culture by the State in terms of citizenship, right to property and settlement, marriage and inheritance, so that members of each cultural community should become the valid participant in the civil and democratic life. No culture is perfect and complete, one culture requires another culture to help it understand itself better, expand its moral horizon, save it from narcissism ...