

Nationalism and empire: john stuart mill and mahatma gandhi essay sample

[History](#), [Empires](#)



Introduction

A human society comprising of cultural, social and political components impregnated on its complex and interlinking institutions is the exact defining characteristics of a civilization. The concept of civilization has evolved from time to time, from the synonymous idea of empire or kingdom to a more sophisticated and intangible definitions of social and cultural components are involved. Among the promulgators of civilization theories and discussion are John Stuart Mill and Mahatma Gandhi. John Stuart Mill has combined the ideology of colonialism and the aspects of international law in order to demonstrate his theory of civilization where civilized people settle. The popular ideas of Mill in relation to civilization theories are the propositions of the two components of civilizations and the rule of civilized settlers. However, Mill's definition of civilization has also been confronted with several critiques and arguments by the modernistic views of civilization. Meanwhile, Mahatma Gandhi has utilized the idea of primitive and conservative components of civilization with his main components, specifically people, economy, morality and setting, which defines civilization in a simplistic and naturalistic perspective. The historical characters have greatly influenced the evolution of political nationalism and empirical concepts with their understanding and theoretical propositions of civilization and its defining characteristics.

Discussion

John Stuart Mill's Civilization

According to the idea of John Stuart Mill, civilization comprises a dense population with dwelling inhabitants that are largely collected together in towns and villages, and with a highly developed level of agriculture, commerce and manufacturing industry (Keene 2002 112). Mill emphasizes the idea of human beings' interdependency with each other manifested in his idea of civilization wherein settlers are aimed towards one common goal and purpose. Civilization comprises a population of inhabitants enjoying the social intercourse with arranged social powers that maintain and protect the affairs of the state, national properties and the subordinates under its umbrella. The illustration of Mill involves the comparison of savagery and barbarism against the civilized and morally defined nature of civilization. According to Peters (2005), the idea of Mill's civilization actually characterizes the rise of the bourgeoisie, the printing press, popular education and the political ideology of democracy (124).

According to Habibi (2001), Mill has utilized two concepts with his essay, *Civilization*. Mill's first observation in the aspects of civilization is the characteristics of human societal evolution, technological advancement and human improvement.

“ We are accustomed to call a country more civilized if we think it more improved; more eminent in the best characteristics of Man and society; farther advanced in the road to perfection; happier, nobler, wiser (Mill 1836).”

In this notion, Mill forms the attribute of the first dimension that defines a civilization, which is the *physical dimension* of civilization, in order to form a distinction on the most common distinction of men towards the formation of civilized society. In this argument, Mill argues that most commonly recognized aspect of civilization is whenever a nation possesses distinct improvements in the aspect of economic, political and social institutions to further the regulation of national and/or state affairs. In addition, it is the material improvement and cooperation that settles the modernistic, economically revolutionized, technologically advanced society apart from the primitive origins of men; although, such component has been considered a generalized perspective and narrow consideration of the defining features of civilization (Habibi 2001 194).

Despite of the materialistic nature of Mill's first notion of civilization, his second dimension concerns the higher sense of civilization, which is *moral dimension*. Mill specifies the attributes that do not officially exist in savage and barbaric groups of people. Considering Mill's intense emphasis on moral dimensions, Mill has been critiqued to have been inclined to his being profoundly ambivalent towards the recession of pain and redirection towards *moral effeminacy* (Peters 2005 125). The moral component of society characterizes the moral improvement, concept of individualism, education and the cultivation of tastes, skills and abilities of its subordinates in order to foster feelings of commitment and cooperation towards the political and social community. Moral improvement somehow links the component of human growth in the society wherein civilized people strive towards the idea

of Mill, “ *the road to perfection* ” as a lifetime pursuit. In addition to Mill’s concept are his two practical distinctions of civilizations, particularly the ideas of civilized progressive camp and the non-progressive civilized community. For Mill, the progressive civilized camp demonstrates dynamic, innovative, energetic and developing nations, while the non-progressive camps are those stagnant to primitive characters, such as those refined by colonialism.

Mahatma Gandhi’s Civilization

From Gandhi’s point of view, civilization is derived from villages, handicraft economy and on simple religiosity grounded in a fundamentalist morality. The perspective of Gandhi recognizes the simplistic yet non-primitive version of civilization. According to De Bary (2004), Gandhi’s perspective of civilization embraces their Indian forefathers’ view wherein large cities are considered as “ a snare and useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them” due to the arousal of deviant behaviors and production of deviant members of society (42). Gandhi recognizes the value of setting-up a small village as the basic illustration of his ideal civilization. For Gandhi, the traditional value of the “ *path of duty* ” is the significant component of civilization, which he also integrates fundamentalistic morality as the ground-basis of his small –village context of civilization. Performance of duty and observance of morality are considered as convertible terms (De Bary 2004 43). The most efficient means of attaining mastery over duties and passions of mind in terms of morality is through the sense of self-development.

Gandhi's concept of civilization comprises of four most important components, particularly the people, the settlement, the simple economic resource and the governing religion. The version of Gandhi's civilization is more inclined to the traditional and conservative sense; hence, critiques (Mondal 2003 82) have inferred the potential loss of materialistic or physical improvement of society if such conditions are followed. Although, others (De Bary 2004; Johnson 2005) argue that the concept of Gandhi relates to the purest sense of civilization, which is the reign of morals and core values defining the structural forms of civilization than mere economic gains.

Gandhi's civilization has despised the ideas of modernity, cultural expansion/acculturation and materialistic culture and traditions. In terms of Gandhi's arguments on modern civilization, he rationalizes the acceptance or incorporation of such ideology to society can only trigger violence, which he considers *war of culture*. As for Gandhi, the contents of modernity comprise the race for materialistic gains, degeneration of morals and the introduction of irreligion. As supported by Johnsons (2005), Gandhi asserts that the extremists have been intoxicated by the wretched modern civilization not only because most are adherents of different Western ideologies (230). On the other hand, Gandhi also negates the introduction of foreign influence in order to maintain the purest ideologies being implemented in a particular society. In Gandhi's view, the introduction of new concept causes the principles and beliefs of society to evolve and progress; hence, potentiating the possibility of modernization.

Conclusion

In comparison of Gandhi's and Mill's views on civilization, the valuing of morality and the recognition of basic features of civilization are most recognized similarities. Mill's civilization recognizes the value of society's moral component in his moral dimension. Morality is considered as the higher sense of civilization, which is the defining component that regulates the improvement and development of society's subordinates. Meanwhile, Gandhi recognizes the value of morality in maintaining the non-violent character of his ideal civilization. In terms of composition, Mill's civilization also comprises the basic units similar to Gandhi's, such as inhabitants, and setting or place of settlement. On the other hand, the differences of two ideologies coincide in the arguments of modernity versus traditionalism. Mill considers the importance of having commercially and economically stable and progressing components that ensure the civilized character of a civilization. Such idea relates to the proposition of modernized society that forms a significant line between barbarism or unrefined society and the modernized and civilized form of society, which Mill considers as the ideal form of civilization. Meanwhile, Gandhi despises the idea of modernization through his reasoning that such evolution only triggers violence among members of society. As for Gandhi, the traditional components aside from people and place, particularly a simple economic resource and a guiding religion, are the core values of the ideal civilization. Materialism and commercialism only triggers conflict and argument of possession, such as the war of culture.

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