

Rise and fall of
civilization is
inevitable



It is a cardinal truth that the term 'civilization' hardly expresses any particular meaning. The Oxford English Dictionary defines civilization as "an advanced stage or a system of social development". But, the definition is clearly not specific and lacks clarity. There is always a doubt – 'development' or 'advanced' with respect to what else? However, in any attempt to define the term 'civilization', we can insist that the former is a comprehensive affair – an all round development in social, political and economic spheres and also a spirit of creativity in art, literature, science, sculpture, education, architecture etc.

Such a large scale revolution can hardly be implemented in a single day. As a matter of stark reality, the actual origin and the causes of downfall of almost all the ancient civilizations are still a mystery to us. The word 'rise' is often used in connection with the term 'civilization'. This is, however, not quite unlikely. As the sun slowly rises in the eastern sky or as a bud gradually blooms into a flower, so also a civilization gradually reaches the pinnacle of glory.

Such a multifarious development can never be an event of a day; it requires a long span of time – some hundreds or thousands of years. The civilization begins slowly and almost imperceptibly, and continues for a long time until the zenith is reached. Thus, a 'growth' or 'rise' always involves a time-process. Similarly, there is a fall of civilizations. As it gradually grows, it also starts declining at a particular juncture and soon perishes due to multifarious reasons. The decay and destruction of the civilization can be regarded as its 'fall'.

The reasons of a fall may be internal and external – foreign aggressions, climatic changes, flood, infertility of land, natural calamities, wrought, civil war, epidemic diseases and so on. Similar to ‘rise’, the ‘fall’ of a civilization is also not an event of a short course of time – several factors accumulate and contribute together to the downfall. A few examples, as provided hereunder, will make the point crystal clear: Rise and Fall of Byzantine civilization As the beginning of the fourth century A. D. , a new civilization grew up around Byzantine, the new capital of the Roman Empire.

It was the most stable civilization during the medieval period. Under Constantine and his successors, the city Byzantine, renamed as Constantinople, went on expanding and growing stronger with the addition of prosperous harbor, aqueducts, walls and fortifications. Its army became powerful enough to safeguard its territorial integrity and the government’s revenue immensely increased by the trades with Asia-minor, Syria and Egypt. Moreover, a massive development was performed in the field of law. During the time of Justinian, laws were codified and harmonized in order to established order in chaos.

Thus, a civilization, based upon economic affluence, political tranquility and military strength, grew up near the frontier of the Danube and Syria. But, more remarkable aspect of the civilization lay in the prosperity in art, literature and education. For example, “ Paintings in mosaic made of glass-cubes, made a great progress during this time”. In the literary aspect also, this civilization had a remarkable contribution. Its importance has highlighted by its patronage of Greek language and literature. Justinian, one of the able rulers of the Empire, did much to prove Latin as the official language.

A University was also founded for the spread of higher education. Other rulers also immensely patronized architecture and fine arts. They continuously encouraged learning, literature and science. Many outstanding works of philosophy and science came out during this time and a number of schools were established for rapid spread of education. The scholars did not confine their works only to the copying of manuscripts – they rather wrote thousands of books on history, science, medicine, biography, theology and so on. Thus, the Byzantine civilization enriched the fund of human knowledge in a unique manner.

However, the glory of the byzantine civilization gradually ruined and finally came to an end during the early middle ages. As Wells opines, “ the roman empire, decaying socially and disintegrating morally, faced the barbarian attacks” . In the year 1453, the empire fell to the Ottoman Turks after two months of continuous invasions from the later. The foreign aggressions ultimately destroyed the most outstanding reflection of civilized society of the Western Europeans. The rise and fall of Indus Valley civilization may, for example, be cited in this connection.

It grew up in India during the pre-Aryan era. In the year 1875, the British archeologist, Alexander Cunningham discovered in Harappa a seal with an unknown inscription. It has established that the Indian civilization is as old as the earliest civilization of the world. The most important feature of the Harappa civilization is the well-planned cities and municipal system of modern type. It also proves that agricultural system also reached a significant height and they wisely utilized the enormous natural resource that India provides. Trade and commerce also flourished.

Even in those early days, they came into close contact with the foreign countries as a result of extensive overseas trade and commerce. But, after a time, it too came to an end. It is often questioned why the glorious Indus civilization faced its destruction after a long span of time. Historians have given us a different interpretation of the story – it implies divergent views, but the fact is that the civilization faded away at a juncture of history. Some say that the Indus valley was initially enriched by sufficient rainfall. But, after a time, with the loss of rainfall, the land became arid and dry.

The growing drying up of the land led to the crisis in cultivation and, hence, people migrated elsewhere. Some other historians have pointed out that successive floods swept over the valley and destroyed the old civilization. Some of them also believed that the degeneration of civic life was the root cause of the downfall of this civilization. Agricultural system deteriorated. Some scholars have opined that the people had a conservative outlook and they failed to adapt themselves to the new circumstances. Above all, the situation drifted from bad to worse with the appearance of the Aryans.

The tragic end of the Indus civilization came about 1500 B. C. when the Aryans invaded the Indian towns and established their supremacy. Thus, a new civilization took away the old and, thereby, marked a new chapter in the Indian history. Thousands of years ago, the present rain forest of Guatemala had once been the land of the glorious Maya civilization which flourished there and reached its pinnacle during the 900 A. D. The large cities, the huge walls, the ornate temples and the great pyramids proved beyond doubt about the glory of the civilization.

The density of the population, being more than 2000 inhabitants per square miles in the cities, can easily be compared to any other modern cities of today's world. The classical civilization continued its growth for more than 600 years. But, finally, due to some unknown reasons, it collapsed completely. A change in climatic conditions, deforestation, erosion of soils, decreasing fertility of lands, lack of rain fall, drought, warfare, deadly epidemic diseases and so on are some of the possible causes over which the historians still debate regarding the downfall of such a glorious civilization.

Whatever the case might be, the cause of the downfall of such a highly developed civilization is still unknown to us. Around the year 1438 A. D. , one of the most prosperous civilizations grew up surrounding the lands of Cuzco which became their capital city. The South American civilization, better known as the Inca civilization, continued its expansion for nearly 100 years and occupied a huge territory comprising of the present-day Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and several other parts Argentina, Chili and so on.

The civilization comprised of more than 12, 000, 000 people who could speak more than 20 different languages. The Incas made major advancements towards education, science, engineering, architecture, textiles, agriculture, ironworks, and so on. The city was immensely modernized through the highly structured transport and communication system. But above all, as a matter of stark reality, the Incas were enormously prosperous and possessed huge stock of gold and silver. It is believed that the wealth they possessed had changed the entire economy of Europe in subsequent periods.

Most strangely, the Inca civilization lasted for only one hundred year. As a curse of history, the fabulous possessions of wealth finally brought about the downfall of the Inca civilization in the sixteenth century when the Spanish invaded them; looted their wealth and destroyed them mercilessly – the Inca civilization had ceased to exist. The Egyptian civilization, regarded as one of the oldest and yet the most mysterious civilizations of the ancient times.

The extremely fertile alluvial soils across the banks of the river Nile contributed much to the development of the glorious civilization of the Middle-East during the third century B. C. The gigantic pyramids, still regarded as one of the seventh wonder of ancient times, proved beyond doubt about the highly developed architectural skills and immense wealth which exceeds more than that of the society's survival needs. The art of preservation of dead bodies (mummies) miraculously for hundreds of years proves the excellence of the scientific skills of the Egyptians.

However, such a prosperous civilization too, had to come to an end for some unknown reasons. As life and death are 'inevitable', similarly, history reveals that a rise of a civilization, however rich and prosperous, had sooner or later followed by the decay and fall of the former. In that sense, it clearly supports the doctrine of the inevitability of the downfall of civilization. The civilizations in Indus Valley, Byzantine, Egypt, Maya, Inca, Mesopotamia, Huang He etc. are now the records of the past.

At a particular juncture, they reached the zenith of glory, but, the waves of history have ruined them at later times. But, one fact remains as an invaluable lesson. One civilization paves the path to the other, but the earlier

civilization does not totally die away. The successor often adapts some elements from the predecessor and this process of assimilation continues for ever. For an example, the “Hinduism, a gift of Aryan civilization was indebted to a great extent to the Indus Valley culture”.

Thus, there is an organic relationship between the ancient culture of the Indus Valley and today’s Hinduism. Though every civilization, known to us, has decayed after a particular time, it is, in most cases, not very clear that why and how the destruction came about. Often the decay has emanated from internal crisis like civil wars, racial clashes, cultural collapses etc. , but perhaps, natural calamities like earthquake, floods, deforestation, soil-erosion, and other geographic changes have contributed much to its downfall.

However, foreign invasions are regarded as one of the most fatal causes for the downfall of several civilizations during the ancient and medieval periods. Obviously, in our time, science and technology have advanced in a miraculous way and hence, much of the natural calamities, epidemic diseases etc. can now be averted by human endeavor. Moreover, the governmental structure is now far better compared to that of the ancient times and, resultantly, most of the states can strongly and effectively prevent any minor onslaught from outside and internal troubles civil wars, ethnic clashes etc.

However, it would be a folly to say that we are secured enough and our civilization will last forever. Natural calamities can harm any civilization even today. Science has only minimized the destruction of human life caused due

to fatal diseases, but yet not eliminated it completely. Above all, the worse of aggression and political conflicts still continues and can hardly be averted. Two World Wars have broken out within a span of only 20 years and we are now living under the clouds of any future Global War.

It is beyond any iota of doubt that the development of science has increased to the destructiveness of such wars so alarmingly that if such a war is ever breaks out, it will totally annihilate human civilization from this planet. In fact, with the passage of time, science has 'gifted' us with deadly weapons and bombs - a few of which are sufficient enough to eliminate the existence of human life from the world. History proves that every civilization is amenable to a historical fact - it grows up and, after a time, withers away. This is why, it is highly doubtful whether a civilization can be maintained and protected for all time to come.

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