

The Dawn of Civilization

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There are two viewpoints regarding the creation of the universe. Generally speaking, oriental thinkers have viewed the universe as the creation of God. As early as at least the second millennium B.C., Vedic thinkers held that this systematic universe, together with its eternal physical laws, was created by the eternal design of the greatest Architect i.e. God.¹

But the modern theory views the earth and the life on it as products of evolution². According to the theory of evolution, more than four billion years ago there was no earth and no solar system; there was a giant star instead³. As a consequence of a violent disruption of this virgin star, the Earth, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, Jupiter, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto were born⁴. The residual core of that giant star remained and constituted our Sun⁵.

The period from the disruption of the sun star to the relative completion of the nuclear core of the earth, including the formation of its first oceans, is known as cosmic time⁶. This period may have lasted two billion years; but there exists no direct geological record of it⁷. Geological time began with the deposition of sedimentary rocks, the first of which were laid down some two and a half billion years ago⁸. This span of time has been divided by modern geologists into five eras, each named according to its most characteristic forms of life⁹.

It is most probable that life made its first appearance upon the earth soon after the beginning of geological time about 2700 million years ago¹⁰. According to the theory of evolution, the human being is the most highly and most recently developed product of a billion and a half years of organic evolution¹¹.

It is held that our species i.e. *Homo Sapiens* emerged into full humanity during the Pleistocene Age, the last major period of geological time¹², which began about one million years ago¹³. The evolutionary theory believes that man, the unique animal, belongs to the order of the primates; he is so similar to the living apes and monkeys in such a multitude of specific traits that he must be closely related to them in point of origin¹⁴. It holds that man is a mammal and has a common ancestry with other mammals; he is a vertebrate animal having a common ancestry with other vertebrates¹⁵. Many scholars favour Africa as the land of man's origin; but it is not impossible that the cradle of man was one part or another of Southern Eurasia¹⁶. The prehistory of

human culture is characterized by the use of stone tools. The major sequences of the history of human culture are the Eolith Age, the Palaeolithic Age, the Mesolithic or the Miolithic Age, the Neolithic Age, the Bronze Age and Iron Age¹⁷.

For the better part of a million years man concentrated on the basic problem of keeping himself alive and producing and rearing his offspring¹⁸. Grubbing and hunting for food, sex-life and childcare took up most of his time and effort¹⁹. Gradually, man learnt to speak, build simple stone tools and make and use fire²⁰. Speech, tools and fire were the great achievements of the Early Stone Age or the Palaeolithic Age²¹, which has been roughly placed between 250000 and 20000 B.C. or even to still more remote times²².

The Later Stone Age (Later Palaeolithic Age) which has been hypothetically placed in 20000-8000 B.C. and 17000-7000 B.C.²³ witnessed the revelation of man's latent potentialities. At the end of this period, he was still a hunter²², but hunter with varied skills, which produced a versatile array of tools and weapons²⁵. By the end of the Old Stone Age mankind had completed his long apprenticeship and was ready to launch out on the venture of becoming fully human by exploiting the possibilities of culture in all its ramifications²⁶.

The end of the Palaeolithic Age meant the dawn of the Mesolithic Age or the Middle Stone Age. This period is characterized by microliths, i.e. miniature stone implements provided with wooden handles²⁷. Primitive artistic inclinations of the people of this age found expression in stone and bone sculptures²⁸.

The Mesolithic Age, which did not know anything of the Potter's art, nor how to build houses, being content with wicker huts, seems to take us back to 7000-5000 B.C.²⁹

The Neolithic Age or the New Stone Age, which followed the Mesolithic Age, opened a new chapter in the history of human civilization. This age started around 5000 B.C.³⁰. The birth place of the Neolithic Age was in the lands lying east of the Mediterranean; from this centre it spread into Africa and Europe³¹. The Neolithic Age was a entirely a new era. It was a revolution, which ushered in the age of settled farming and villages³². The practice of farming and life in settled hamlets can be accepted as the first mark of the full Neolithic revolution³³. There is no serious doubt that the earliest centres for both agriculture and stock-raising lay in South-West Asia³⁴.

Along with the domestication of plants and animals came writing, the hallmark of civilization, full development of pottery making, the weaving of cloth, the

manufacture of boats and the building of houses; religion burgeoned and the basic forms of social organization, as we see them among contemporary primitive communities, took shape³⁵.

The oldest and most valuable human civilizations arose mainly in the regions of the great rivers because plentiful waters and a warm southern climate proved helpful in starting prosperous farming and, consequently offered favourable conditions for founding large settlements, hamlets, cities and states³⁶. The Egyptian civilization arose in the valley of the Nile in North Africa³⁷. In western Asia, in the broad Tigris-Euphrates valley developed the Sumero-Babylonian civilization, which, subsequently, influenced the whole of Near East³⁸. In Elam, lying east of Babylonia (the territory of the ancient Sumer and Akkad, latter called Babylonia and now Iraq), arose the Elam civilization, famous particularly for its highly developed pottery³⁹. In India, the original proto-Indian culture developed in the valley of the Indus⁴⁰. One of the earliest civilizations developed in the valley of the Hoang-Ho river in China^{40A}. In a short time, probably in the fifth millennium B.C., the Neolithic Age in the Near East passed into the so-called Eneolithic Period, when metals, particularly copper, appeared for the first time, in addition to the polished Neolithic tools⁴¹.

Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin. Its discovery or invention ushered in the ages of metallurgy⁴². The Bronze Age, which probably began about 3000 B.C., had run its course at the opening of the first millennium before Christ⁴³. During its span it gave rise to many rich and vigorous civilizations, i.e. Minos in Crete, Mycene in Greece, Indus Valley Civilization or Harppan Civilization in India and the early dynasties of Egypt and Babylonia⁴⁴.

The Iron Age, which followed the Bronze Age, was well under way in Egypt and the Near East by 1500 B.C.⁴⁵. Writing had its tentative beginning in the Mesolithic Age⁴⁶. It was about 3200 B.C. or 3300 B.C. that the invention of the most ancient writing, i.e. Sumerian picture writing took place⁴⁷. The origin of the Egyptian writing can be assigned to the year 3000 B.C. and the Chinese script was probably initiated in the first half of the second millennium B.C.⁴⁸. The earliest examples of the Indus Valley script that have yet been found date to about 2400 B.C.⁴⁹.

In many civilized cultures of the Iron Age, written records were inscribed not only on tablets of rock and clay or on walls and monuments, but were carried or parchment scrolls and papyrus too⁵⁰. They speak to the modern scholar in the very

words of the people who wrote them⁵¹. They are infinitely better raw materials for cultural history than the meagre archaeological treasures of the anthropologist⁵².

The Bronze Age forms the bridge by which we leave prehistory and enter the historic era of man's existence⁵³. There is a perfect continuity from the Old Stone Age to the present historic era through the New Stone Age and the Ages of Bronze and Iron⁵⁴.

The dawn of civilization came at the end of the Neolithic Age⁵⁵. The major effect of the Neolithic Age was the urban revolution - a new way of life, which was to set the basic pattern for all subsequent ages⁵⁶. The urban revolution first occurred in the Middle East and South Asia; from there it subsequently spread to other parts of the world⁵⁷.

Culture is a product of social invention. Man possesses ability to invent new behaviour patterns. Culture is the sum total of integrated behaviour patterns of the members of a society. It manifests itself in the behaviour, beliefs, attitudes and way of life of the individuals constituting a particular society. Every separate society has its distinctive culture. It is a product of evolution and is maintained and transmitted through communication and learning.

Culture is different from civilization. Civilization is material. But culture is non-material. Culture is sometimes described as material and non-material. It, in fact, is nonmaterial. It is the sum total of thoughts, beliefs and behaviour patterns of a society. Culture is way of life.

Archaeological excavations have unearthed huge materials, which bear eloquent testimony to the hoary antiquity of Indian civilization and culture. As a result of archaeological excavations conducted in the winter months of 1921 at Harappa in the Punjab (Pakistan), the remains of a five thousand years old city came to light⁵⁸. Subsequently, nearly 1500 sites related to this civilization, formerly called the Indus Valley Civilization and, presently called the Harppan Civilization, or the Indus-Sarasvatī Civilization by some scholars, have come to light⁵⁹.

The Indus-Sarasvatī Civilization represents the most ancient phase of Indian culture; it goes back to the fourth millennium B.C.⁶⁰ This civilization was, therefore, nearly as old as the mature Mesopotamian civilization⁶¹. In the present state of our knowledge, the earliest remains of this civilization can be assigned to 3500 B.C.⁶² Though the exact relationship of this culture with the pre-existing culture in the Indian subcontinent, sometimes called Indo-Pakistan subcontinent too, has not been established

so far, its emergence as a result of a West Asian stimulus is being widely discounted now⁶³. It is now regarded as an indigenous development among peoples of mixed origin and diverse racial types, who had resided in the Indus Valley for long⁶⁴.

The sites related to the Indus-Sarasvatī Civilization found so far extend for more than 1600 km from north to south and equally so from east to west, covering an area of about 2.5 million square km⁶⁵. The northern most of these sites is Manda, located on the Beas river near Jammu; the southern most site is Bhagatrav on the Tapti river in Maharashtra; the eastern most sites are Alamgirpur, located on the Hindon river near Delhi, Mandoli, located near Nandanagari in east Delhi and, Bhorgarh near Narela in north Delhi; the western most site is Sutkagendor, located on the ancient shore of the Arabian Sea, near the eastern border of Iran⁶⁶.

The Indus-Sarasvatī civilization of India was, therefore, nearly four times more extensive than other contemporary civilizations, including the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia⁶⁷. It was a highly developed urban civilization. The Indus-Sarasvatī people developed a highly adaptive civilization; its amazing variety excelled all contemporary civilizations, including the civilizations developed in Egypt and Mesopotamia⁶⁸. This civilization was a product of a long indigenous development, which started around 3500 B.C. if not earlier⁶⁹.

In 1859, Max Muller put forth the view that the Āryans came to India from outside around 1500 B.C., and that the *R̥gveda* was compiled around 1200 B.C.⁷⁰ His view was stoutly challenged by many Indian and foreign scholars⁷¹. As a result of the facts brought to light by recent researches on the subject, many scholars now hold that the Indo-Āryans or Vedic Āryans were indigenous people⁷².

Some scholars are firm in their conviction that the Vedic Āryans and the people of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilization were not ethnically different people who lived in India in different periods and practiced different cultures⁷³. They hold that in spite of some socio-cultural dissimilarities, the *R̥gvedic* Āryans and the people of the Indus-Sarasvatī civilization were parts of a bigger social complex⁷⁴.

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