

Locating Indic Civilization in its Knowledge Traditions

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India is unique in its composition and character. It belongs to an ancient and continuously surviving and thriving civilization known as Sindhu-Sarasvati or Indic Civilization. Once a part of a larger geographical land mass known as Jambudweep it has seen the dawn of human civilization in this part of the world. Being the oldest surviving civilization, India has evolved exceptional characteristics. It is not easy to define India in a single word or sentence. Historically, India existed even before the practice of recording human activities started.

There are intellectuals debating on the idea of India and its existence as a nation before the modern period or more precisely pre British. They argue that British empire was the first regime which joined different large and small principalities to form the present-day India. They follow the nation-state theory to define India as a nation. In this process, they ignore the fact that India existed even as a larger unit than the present one, much earlier than the western political theories came into existence. They argue that it cannot be proved due to diverse socio-cultural practices of the people, hundreds of language dialects and many more differences on a range of cultural grounds. But the fact is that India is still not a Nation State as per western theoretical parameters, but is definitely a Civilizational State.

The relationship between Knowledge and Civilization is vital. A civilization is defined in a geo-cultural space where it evolves and grows beyond political boundaries. Knowledge is always at the core of a civilization. Indian civilization has a great marker of pure Knowledge tradition which evolved and developed in this geo-cultural space.

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This knowledge reached us through the Vedic texts and other later Dharma centric texts. Indian civilization has had only knowledge texts, not any religious or sacred texts. These knowledge texts are basically discourses of cosmological explanations based on meditative practices. This experienced knowledge is the core of every Dharma practice and social formation of this civilization. So, the study of civilization based on knowledge traditions is a more viable practice. It helps to find a civilizational continuity without any major rupture.

Indian Civilization has a pluralistic and inclusive character acquired over the centuries. To perceive it, we have to look into the ancient texts that are part of our Itihaas and can be used as historical documents to find mention of various socio-cultural and geo-political events of the past. The historiographical practices we followed after the Independence of India imitated western methodologies to decide the tools and materials for writing history of India. Academic and popular narratives were prepared accordingly. Those practices frequently distorted the Indian way of seeing history as Itihaas. Moreover, the indigenous sources of Itihaas—Purana were ignored and sometimes deplored as mere myths and works of fiction. The irony is that they build their uncharitable formulations about India's ancient socio-cultural and political systems on the basis of the same ancient texts which they declared fictional. Some of their controversial approaches and narratives assert that authenticated history of India needs to begin only from the medieval times, contemptuously dismissing the ancient texts of Itihaas—Purana as fictional. They also claim that India has an orthodox tradition of caste, degrading practices of Sati, child marriage, etc. Above all, they promoted the theory of Aryan invasion which further tried to create south-north, Dravida-Arya divides.

Actually, where people must have migrated or moved, is not that important; all that matters is what behaviour they have adopted, and the culture they are practicing in a specific geo-cultural region. In that case the geo-cultural and civilizational space is more important for the growth of knowledge and further a socio-cultural value system. In the case of Sapt-sindhu as a part of Bharat, the Dharma centric value system is the root that forms the larger identity of Indic civilization. Sapt-Sindhu forms one of the geo-cultural and civilizational spaces where the knowledge system grew and got articulated, composed, expressed in the Sanskrit language. This ancient Vedic knowledge has had durable impact on the people of the land. They continue to practice largely common moral values based on the knowledge tradition.

It is necessary to reject the Arya-Dravidian divide that was created erroneously by some colonial scholars, and later blindly propagated by leftist historians. They ignored and undermined the reference to major rivers like Sarasvati because of its mention in the Rigveda as a location and part of Sapt-Sindhu region of the Indic civilization. It deflates the incorrect Aryan invasion theory (AIT) and consequently the Arya-Dravidian theory. There is no evidence till date found anywhere to support it. They merely claimed that Aryans were white skinned and Dravidians were dark skinned. It was propagated to create division among the North and the South Indians on imaginary grounds. The latest genome mapping of the skeletons, found from Rakhigarhi and other archeological sites on the ancient and dried river bed of Sarasvati's course, have shown the genetic similarities among the North and South Indian people. So, there is no evidence for saying that the Harappans were not Aryan or were Dravidian. Actually, it is not possible to ascertain the race and colour of a person from its skeleton that is over five thousand years old.

Here lies also a basic difference between history and itihaas. Earlier historians hastily rejected itihaas in favour of western historiography, under the influence of Euro-centric intellectual training and other ideological biases. Moreover, that was also a design of colonial power structure to demean indigenous knowledge, ideas, socio-cultural system and establish Western superiority to strengthen its control over the subjects of India. Colonial political biases were used by the left leaning scholars to rewrite Indian history even in the post-colonial period. As a result, educated Indians continued to lose pride in being one of the longest surviving civilizations. The Indic civilizational ethos is purely based on knowledge traditions formulated in its geo-cultural spaces, and it continues without any major rupture in its long history.

Along with this, Sanskrit was projected as a language of the elite and of the Brahmin caste that were in the

profession of knowledge. None of such historians tried to support the claims from any credible sources. But the contrary sources they rejected as fictional or mythical. They projected Brahmins as the writers of all the Vedic and later ancient Indian text without trying to ascertain the name of any writer. It is well known, however, that the first knowledge text available in the world is Rigveda and it is called *apauruseya* (अपौरुषेय) which means a creation whose creator is not known. It does not mean that Rigveda was written by some divine power, but that the knowledge contained in the text is not authored by a single writer. It is a knowledge accumulated over hundreds of years and known to the sages who uttered it in the forms of Mantras, and collected it in a textual corpus. To reflect about it, one must understand the practices of ancient Indian knowledge structure. But those not interested in finding real history of ancient India, pass judgements based on their ideological biases. That further targets the knowledge practices and texts such as Ramayana and other Dharmic granths.

Basically, their object was to discredit Indian knowledge tradition carried forward by *Vedas, Brahmins and Sanskrit*. If we take into account these three elements of the knowledge system as text, practitioner of knowledge and language, we can easily unravel the ploy to attack and demean Indian civilization. Indian history cannot be properly assessed without studying the Vedic texts composed in Sanskrit and mostly maintained and brought to present time by the intellectual class, then called *Brahmins*. Modern time historians will-fully targeted Indian knowledge systems with a political ideology to promote what they believed as borderless socialism. It contributed to damage our ancient and culturally rich civilizational identity.

It is pertinent to underline the core element of Indian civilization, that is Indian knowledge tradition. We call it a core element because the knowledge system created and developed in this geo-cultural space is unique in the world. The Indian knowledge tradition has long back conceptualised the system of creation, i.e. question of existence, so logically and argumentatively that till today it has not been challenged successfully. Moreover, modern science is moving closer to the cosmological explanations given in the Vedic texts.

Knowledge texts explain the Cosmology, Anthropology and Sociology of the world and the relationship between these principal elements of creation. Nothing has been propagated as some revealed words of a higher power or a God. Indian knowledge tradition, based on Vedantic tradition, does not believe in a God. It believes in a self-generated system of creation where the creator and the creation are One and remain in Oneness. This knowledge propagates the idea of self-realization, of this Oneness

of the Creator and its creation. This idea and sense of connectivity creates an intangible relationship between all the beings and creates a sense of harmony and brotherhood. Whereas Religion (not Dharma) explains the cosmological idea in a different way. It believes in an existence of a higher power, a creator, who is formless but has attributes since it has created humanity and controls the sociology by his dictates propagated through some Prophets. So, there is a mediator between the creator and the creation, and mankind must follow the dictates of Prophets as the orders of God. As Spinoza observed, the Hebraic God is an angry God because it punishes those who do not obey or follow the Orders. So, the relationship between God and Man is not of oneness with God, as explained in dharmic sacred texts. Religions follow some holy book which is sacred but Indian Civilization follows the texts containing pure knowledge, and no political doctrine as such.

Indian knowledge tradition has taken shape from the long quest for the ultimate truth (परम सत्य) of reality. This Vedic knowledge as present in the oldest knowledge text Rigveda dealt with reality and the core concerns of human existence. It defined the very system of creation as 'Brahman' (ब्रह्मन्). That every living being and non-living being has taken shape from the Brahman and also is part of the system and existence. The Brahman, as creator of existence is defined as a self-contained system and the system can only be defined, cannot be seen or felt. Its existence is seen as world itself in which living beings experience the reality of life. Here the creator itself is creation also and the creation is a complete Unity that can be experienced and seen as creator. So, the relationship between creator and creation is non-dual. The only difference between the creator and creation is the latter's temporal/timed material existence in the material world. That way the created world and created being are false in terms of temporal existence where people take birth and die, no one can stay timelessly. In other words, the reality we live in is nothing but temporal existence that will change with time and vanish. As per Vedic knowledge there is a system of creation that existed before the existence of time and space, and that is the Ultimate truth of reality. Everything takes birth through that order and goes back to its original timeless form. This system of birth and death is true and continued to be true from the very beginning of the Universe. This idea of all existence and the relationship of being and reality (world) with ultimate reality (Brahman) is the core of our Indian knowledge tradition.

The knowledge, 'Gyan,' is but a realisation of the ultimate reality (परमसत्ता) that is creator and creation. Our knowledge tradition has given the idea to perceive reality

from two point of views that is *Satt* and *Ritt*, where *Satt* (सत्) is ultimate truth i.e. Brahman which is formless and beyond time, and *Ritt* (ऋत) is untrue or just the temporal manifestation of Brahman that does not live beyond time and form. Vedantic knowledge has explained the 'Samsara' as the relation between *Jeeva* and *Jagata*. *Jeeva* and *Jagata* both are the manifestation of formless (निराकार) and without attributes (निर्गुण) 'Brahman' (ब्रह्मन्), a system of creation or an omnipresent (timeless, beyond time) Order. So, the 'Brahman' (ब्रह्मन्) is the reason and effect of *Jeeva* and *Jagat* in time and space with a form (आकार) and qualities or attributes (गुण). The order of creative manifestation is in the binary of *Satt* (सत्) and *Ritt* (ऋत). Here *Satt* (सत्) is permanent phenomenon that exist beyond the measure of time. This order is true in the temporal (सामयिक) term as it was true in the past (beginning of the time), present (in time) and the future (to the infinity). As expressed in the famous: आदि सच, जुगादि सच, है भी सच, नानक होसी भी सच. So *Satt* is the phenomenon of permanence and the *Ritt* is impermanence. It exists and operates in temporal measure which means it has a beginning and an end. Whatever is born, lives and dies, is nothing but the manifestation of *Satt* as *Ritt* or *Jeeva* and *Jagat*. Both *Jeeva* and *Jagat* are temporal existence of impermanent nature. This manifestation of 'Brahman' is also termed as 'Maya' in which mankind is born, lives and dies with three *guna* (attributes). The realisation of this 'Order' as an existence in an impermanence world is the essence of *Param-Satt* (Brahman-Gyan) or the knowledge of creative system. Living in the Samsara, while experiencing the relationship between *Jeeva* and *Jagat* is called life (जीवन) and death (मृत्यु), and observing it as in the state of being as formless and attribute-less energised matter without any temporal identity. This paradigm of true knowledge relates each and every matter/element present on this earth to its very beginning from where it gets detached during the grand creative event. All the elements that constitute the *Jeeva* and *Jagat* are in existence from then, be it light, sound, air or other organic, non-organic elements. Our body is the composition of various elements in varied forms and different proportions. It does not survive on any other element that exists beyond this earth. When life goes into death, with ageing, the body composed of these elements get decomposed again. And this cycle goes on and on.

That's why the sense of time or *Kala-chetna* (काल-चेतना) is cyclic not linear in the Indian tradition. Everything that comes, also goes. So, this order is cyclic as reflected in the concepts of *Rit'*, as also in *Ritu* (ऋतु), *Reeti* (रीति), ritual, etc. But the rule/principle or the order of this system of creation remains as timeless. This is the core Vedantic idea about the system of creation and the creator. We consider *Rigveda* as the first knowledge text and the latest is *Sri*

Guru Granth Sahib, compiled in the sixteenth century, following the same *dharmik* Vedantic idea and philosophy (दर्शन) about the *Param-Satt* (अकाल पुरुख) *Brahman*.

Accordingly, the Vedic knowledge defines the cosmological structure and its relation with our anthropological and sociological structures. Further exists a concept of the four goals of mankind called *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (society, wealth), *Kama* (desire), *Moksha* (liberation). As living with the impact and characteristics of the Indian Civilization, we practice and intend to do everything within this structure of living. When we start or plan to do something we have a motive or a goal (*Moksha*) and we also have some working directives (*Dharma*). Whatever we do in this life or world, it is either about our world or external space (*Artha*) or about our inner world or space (*Kama*) since *Arthachar* or working for livelihood happens outside our body and mind whereas desires (*Kama*) exist inside. These *Purusharthas* or goals of life suggest us to do things of inner or outside kinds with the right moral conduct (*Dharma*) that will lead us to fulfilment in all respects (*Moksha*). This structure is true as a sociological order also to conduct our life and every day livelihood chores. It is the simplest structure to explain the conduct of social system. Even in the present times we practice this social conduct, but try to define it in complicated Western terminologies. Our ancient knowledge system has defined the society and social structure in simple and concrete forms.

Every Western theoretical idea can be rendered uncomplicated by putting them in this epistemological structure which has evolved over hundreds of years of experience and meditation. All the disciplines and social sciences and humanities can be made uncomplicated and

easy to understand with this. Presently all the Western theoretical ideas in social-sciences are invested in creating fragments and divisions in the name of analysis and study of society and culture, be it Marxism, Structuralism, Post Structuralism, Modernism, Post Modernism, Subaltern Studies, Feminism, etc. These theories have provided sharp and precision tools for dissection of society on every ground, but lack the idea or goal of creating a Unifying idea for human beings. Indian knowledge tradition teaches us to focus on unifying all beings in Oneness of Ultimate reality (*Brahman*). According to it, every being goes in and unites in *Ekatam*. Contemporary intellectuals do not presently value this knowledge as compared to the Western knowledge because they consider the Indian terminology as spiritual and good for meditation only. Whereas, in fact every word, term or concept used in the Indian knowledge tradition has deep practical impact and relevance in all walks of life since it considers *Jeeva* and *Jagata* as manifestation (forms of *Maya*) of *Brahman*.

In conclusion, I wish to submit that the Indian knowledge system has deep roots in the idea of the system of creation of this cosmos. Its definition influences and operates in all the branches of the intellectual disciplines. Indian knowledge tradition has developed a remarkable *Dharma*-centric socio-cultural value system. So, the effects of this knowledge tradition can be seen in the living Indian civilization in its geo-cultural space. The *Dharma*-centric social order based on its evolved knowledge tradition has an exceptional structure. It can be traced in the history of a larger geo-cultural space where the societies are still practicing, despite distortions or lack of proper teaching, a *Dharma*-centric socio-cultural order based on this great knowledge tradition.