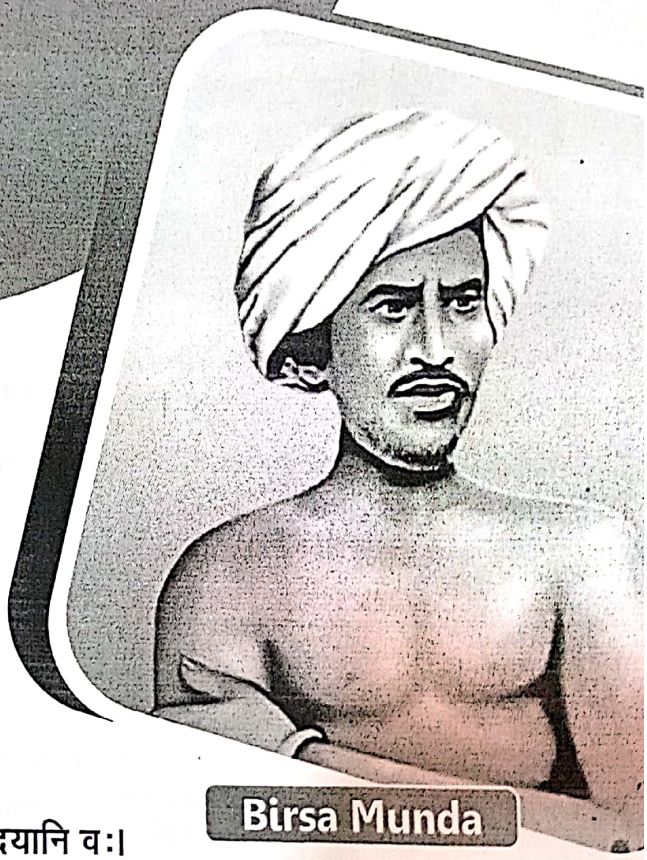
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Birsa Munda

समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः।
समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति।।

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AN IDENTITY OF CIVILIZATION STATE AND GLOBAL RISE OF INDIA

Prashant Shamrao Amrutkar

Post nineties "Civilization" is back at the forefront of global policy debates. India has been described as an example of a civilization state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has time and again stressed the civilizational identity of the nation in perspective of its past cultural achievements. In contrast with the 19th century that popularised the idea of the "nation-state", the 21st century could be the century of the "civilization state". Civilization state is a country that claims to represent not just a historic territory or a particular language or ethnic-group, but a distinctive civilization. The notion of the civilization state has distinct illiberal and exclusivist implications. It is an attempt to offer a one-sided definition of what constitutes the human rights or common democratic standards as each civilization needs political institutions that reflect its unique culture. Besides, the idea of a civilization state is also exclusive when it is centred only on specific people and culture and religion as being core. Minority groups and migrants may never fit in because they are not part of the core civilization. This paper examines why India is focused on its civilizational identity, what could be the consequences of this shift, and whether this civilizational identity will help the country's global rise. The paper also seeks to trace the connection between the narrative of civilization state and the sustenance that the political regime of the day derives from it.

Introduction:

"Civilization" is at the forefront of Indian Political Arena and also on global policy debates. In recent years, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stressed the civilizational identity in framing domestic and foreign policy platforms. He expressed his desire to preserve and promote Indian civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it both the foreigners as well as the native Indians who do not agree with the idea of 'Hindutva & Hindu nationalism'.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was an outright supporter of 'liberal Democracy' an essentially western concept in the eyes of his critiques. There is no arguing that Nehru was impressed by western political ideologies and western system of governance. Congress continued to follow Nehruvian idea until 1990s before being challenged by the BJP-led (NDA) government under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the person with strong RSS background that stands for the idea of Hindutva, Hinduism and Hindu nationalism.

Since 1980s India faced various terrorist attacks that it blamed on Pakistani Jihadi forces out to wage a holy war against the Hindus. By way of a counter-force to the Pakistani move, the idea of civilisation state was put in place. Indo-Pak conflict was now no longer a conflict between two nations over material issues but a clash between two different civilizations and ideologies over a matter of faith. For India, that marked a paradigm shift from "Nation-state" towards a "civilization state".

Western media treated terrorist attacks on India as a failure of democracy, governance and state system. Rachman argued that the idea of the "civilization state" might replace the nineteenth-century idea of "nation-state" as the organizing framework of world politics. He sees in such states the rejection of "universal human rights or common democratic standards," and the rise of exclusionary domestic politics.[1]

The idea of a civilizational state evokes Samuel

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Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis from the early 1990s. Huntington, regarded as an influential political scientist and also a controversial thinker, argued that conflicts between different cultural 'civilizations' were the greatest threat to world peace. He suggested that the world comprised not two opposite but eight diverse groups, based on religion, and how international cooperation between them would an effective safeguard against the war. Global events in the twenty-first century have proved Huntington's foreboding right. His provocative thesis that a struggle for supremacy among dominant cultures—like the Japanese, Chinese, Hindu and Islamic—is inevitable is turning into reality. In the end, people's decision to coexist or to make war in a complex, multipolar, multi-civilizational world will determine the course of humanity.[2]

Westphalia nation-state model

Treaty of Westphalia, considered to be the beginning of the modern international system, emphasised that external powers should avoid interfering in another country's domestic affairs. The backdrop of this was the previously held idea that Europe was supposed to be under the umbrella of a single Christian protectorate or empire, governed spiritually by the Pope, and temporally by one rightful emperor, such as that of the Holy Roman Empire. The then-emerging Reformation had undermined this as Protestant-controlled states were less willing to respect the "supra-authority" of both the Catholic Church and the Catholic-Habsburg led Emperor.

Recent scholarship has argued that the Westphalian treaties actually had little to do with the principles with which they were often associated: sovereignty, non-intervention, and the legal equality of states. For example, Andreas Osiander[3] writes that "the treaties confirm neither [France's or Sweden's] 'sovereignty' nor anybody else's; least of all do they contain anything about sovereignty as a principle." Others, such as Christoph Kampann and Johannes Paulmann, argue that the 1648 treaties, in fact, limited the sovereignty of numerous states within the Holy Roman Empire and that the Westphalian treaties did not present a coherent new state-system, although they were part of an ongoing change. Yet others, often post-colonialist scholars, point out the limited relevance of the 1648 system to the histories and state systems in the non-Western world. Nonetheless, "Westphalian sovereignty" continues to be used as a shorthand for the basic legal principles underlying the modern state system. The applicability and relevance of these principles have been questioned since the mid-20th century onward from a variety of viewpoints. Much of the debate has turned on the ideas of internationalism and globalization, which some say contradictory with Westphalian sovereignty.

Civilization state

A civilization state is a country that represents not just a historical territory, ethno linguistic group, or body of governance, but a unique civilization in its own right. It is distinguished from the concept of a nation-state by describing a country's dominant socio-political modes as constituting a category larger than a single nation. When classifying states as civilization states, emphasis is often placed on a country's historical continuity and cultural unity across a large geographic region. The term was first coined in the 1990s as a way to describe China, but has also been used to describe nations such as Egypt, Russia, India, Turkey, and the United States[4]

China as a Civilization State

The term "civilization-state" was first used by scholars in the 1990s to categorize China as having a distinct socio-political character, as opposed to viewing it as a nation state in the European model. The use of this new term implies that China was and still is an "empire state" with a unique political tradition and governmental structure, and its proponents asserted that the nation state model fails to properly describe the evolution of the Chinese state. Proponents of the label describe China as having a unique historical and cultural unity, derived from a continuous process of cultural syncretism. The term was further popularized by its use in *When China Rules the World* by Martin Jacques.

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According to Li Xing and Timothy Shaw, the central feature of analysing China as a civilization state is the view that the Chinese state derives its legitimacy from the continuation of a socio-political order which posits that the state maintains natural authority over its subjects, and that it is the "guardian" of both its citizens and their society, a view of the state that is completely distinct from the Westphalian nation-state model. Other scholars make the case that the key features of a civilization-state are the maintenance of an ethos of cultural unity despite displaying significant cultural diversity, across centuries of history and a large geographic space. Some specifically draw attention to the longevity of the Chinese writing system, or describe China's existence as being uniquely and inexorably tied to the past.

Guang Xia pushes back on the idea of the uniqueness of a Chinese civilization-state. Xia argues that civilization-state discourse in China studies is an important and positive development, as it allows for characteristics of the modern Chinese state to be properly analysed in the context of their history. However, Xia concludes that ultimately, all civilizations must reinvent themselves in the context of their history, and that it is a mistake to view China as a static entity or to portray it as being more tied to its past than the rest of the world.[5]

India; Proposed Civilization State

India has been proposed as an example of a civilization state, with political commentators arguing that a shared Indian identity predates British colonization and Islamic invasions.[6] India's Prime Minster Narendra Modi, has frequently invoked his country's ancient civilizational achievements in foreign policy speeches.[7]

The debate over civilizations is highly polarized, and despite supposedly drawing on historical claims, only reflects a short-term consideration of unfolding events, often driven by concerns for regime survival. This short-term outlook neglects or distorts both historical complexities and contemporary realities. Most importantly, it downplays the internal diversity of civilizations. And, regardless, the impulse to create a civilization state is constrained by strategic and economic realities.

The use of civilization to build a national identity and foreign policy is neither new nor exceptional to non-Western countries. Civilizational identity has almost always been part of the foreign policy of postcolonial states. The civilizational turn for these states was a conscious reaction to centuries of outright colonial rule or Western domination that used a racist, classist political "standard of civilization" criteria to exclude and marginalize the colonized populations. Among those that were dominated and exploited were two of the world's oldest and most advanced civilizations, China and India. As they entered the international arena facing a deeply unequal political playing field, the leaders of postcolonial states often resorted to their country's classical past to justify independence and project a new identity and voice in world politics.[8]

In the mid-twentieth century, as India's nationalist leaders fought for independence from British rule, they drew on the legacy of the country's ancient civilization to make the case for national liberation. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, though often regarded as a beacon for liberal internationalism, did not hesitate to invoke civilizational history when it suited a political purpose.[9]

In a bid to justify India's independence from Britain and to convince United States who were concerned that an independent India might not be able to stand on its own feet, he wrote the following in an article in Foreign Affairs in 1938, seven years before becoming prime minister:

[While] most Americans . . . sympathize with India's struggle for independence . . . they are . . . wondering whether it is possible to build a united and progressive nation out of the seemingly infinite diversity that makes up the fabric of Indian life. [Though] India was divided and conquered many times in history . . . always the idea of the political unity of India persisted . . . . Five to six thousand years ago the Indus Valley civilization flourished all over

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northern India and probably extended to the south also. Since that early dawn of history innumerable peoples, conquerors and settlers, pilgrims and students, have trekked into the Indian plains from the highlands of Asia and have influenced Indian life and culture and art, but always they have been absorbed and assimilated. India was changed by these contacts and yet she remained essentially her own old self."[10]

Though not shy about referencing India's past glory, Nehru was cautious about invoking civilization, as he put it, "We are a conservative people, not over-fond of change, always trying to forget our present misery and degradation in vague fancies of our glorious past and immortal civilisation. But the past is dead and gone and our immortal civilisation does not help us greatly in solving the problems of today"[11]

Today, the government of Narendra Modi is pursuing a Hindu-nationalist agenda that relies on a vision of India as an ancient Hindu civilization, and that his critics blame for policies such as revoking the special status of Kashmir and enacting a citizenship law that discriminates against Muslim immigrants to India. Yet he faces serious domestic opposition, from both Hindu and Muslim communities, and his hold on power is already beginning to wane after a series of losses in state elections. As will be discussed below, the emergence of the civilization state is closely tied to the regime politics of the ruling party of the day and should therefore not be taken for granted as a permanent phenomenon.[12]

Modi's Civilization State & Its consequences

As already discussed, Nehru was not dismissive of civilizational state, despite his predilections to western ideas of liberalism and socialism. He understood the importance of "glorifying" of the ancient Indian civilisation that would serve as an expanded umbrella under which a motley Indian population could be united for the cause of nationalist movement. After independence, however, Nehru tended to forget about it and came back to his liberal ideas that would provide a unified framework for the divergent people of India to become a vibrant nation. His dream, as enshrined in the constitution, was equal status, equal opportunity and absence of discrimination in respect of every citizen, irrespective of their faith, culture and beliefs.

On the contrary, policies and programmes of Modi government are pro Hindu. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other sister organizations are vociferous advocates of Hindutva, Hindu Rashtra, and Hindu nationalism and tend to exclude those who do not subscribe to their view. Their concept of civilization state means non-Hindus are outsiders.

The Modi government recently passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.The Act has amended the Citizenship Act, 1955 to give eligibility for Indian citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and who entered India on or before 31 December 2014. The Act does not mention Muslims.

Government's decision to revoke special status or autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir under article 370 of Indian Constitution, has been at the centre of heated debates because after all J&K is a Muslim-majority province.[13]

It is being observed that countries identified as civilization states are showing increasing tendency toward religious intolerance and political repression. Indian experience is not exception to this. A.K. Advani's rath yatra and demolition of Babri Masjid were highly polarising events helping to setup a pro-BJP mind-set in India that built a secure Hindu vote-bank in north India, leading to acquisition of power by BJP in 2014. BJP's important narrative consisted in accusing the Congress of practising pseudo secularism, meaning promoting Muslims at the expense of Hindus. Hindus largely bought in the argument. As the majority-minority rift continues to widen under the influence of communally-charged and vindictive politics, there have been increasing incidences of violent attacks against minority and other vulnerable groups. Cases of mob lynching of Muslims, for instance, have been periodically reported most of which occurred in the BJP-ruled states. The

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pattern of hate politics is seen to be inundating the mainstream Indian politics, making the minorities and the migrant groups insecure. The Congress leader Shashi Tharoor criticized that "over the last seven years in India, the persecution of Muslims has been gradually normalized, and Indians have become increasingly inured to it. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party are entirely to blame"[14]

History and culture can be a double-edged sword in the domestic politics; while an authoritarian regime may use them to bolster political control, its opponents can use the very same idea to challenge it. This contradiction lies at the heart of the civilization state. A regime invoking civilization to justify authoritarianism may invite countermoves by its domestic opponents, who may use similar tactics but draw on alternative historical and cultural strands to justify their opposition. After all, states and regimes do not have a monopoly of civilizational ideas. Intellectuals and civil society actors regularly invoke them when justifying their positions and campaigns. For example, intellectuals often invoke the religious tolerance of Ashoka to challenge Hindu nationalism.

The civilization-state discourse not only obscures many of the universal values of non-western civilizations such as openness, inclusion, and tolerance, but also the possibility of building common ground between their values and those of the West. Having said that, just because a regime selectively invokes its country's civilization as a way to counter western dominance does not mean the non-Western cultures do not offer universal humanistic values that the West can learn from.[15]

Conclusion

It would incorrect to say that only the western values and systems are ideal. The Eastern and Asian values, history and philosophy have proven worth in promoting global peace, cooperation, and brotherhood, universal values of diversity, pride, innovativeness, adaptability, harmony, and modesty. If India can dream to be the "Jagat Guru" (Universal Teacher) for the betterment of mankind, it has a solid reason in its amazing civilization. The Bhagwan Gautama Buddha, Bhagwan Mahaveer, The Bhagwat Geeta, to name a few from a plethora of the great philosophers and the philosophies that India produced could serve as a beacon of hope to the mankind. The upcoming world is a multi-civilizational and one can no longer understand global affairs in terms of the dominance of Western civilization. Indian civilizational values could come in handy to promote liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, and cooperation through coexistence. Promoting hatred between the communities and polarizing them for the short-term political gains does not figure in the teachings of Indian civilization.

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