

## **Contribution of History to the Understanding of Cultures and Civilizations**

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### **Abstract**

**Man's past condition is related to his present life and history means surveying the quality of the past activities whose traces remain in the present time. The main field of historical research is man's past life, the stages which have been put behind in the process of evolution and changes as well as progresses made in these stages. History is a means to provide human beings with a complete insight into the events under study. Also another subject matter of history is discovering the common relations between the events, but the reconstruction of common relations is an essential part of this subject.**

**History revives the forgotten events and by studying the cultural legacies we come to know about human past. History cannot properly play its cultural role in the form of event recording and mentioning wars and successes and only through philosophical perspective and understanding of causal relations it is possible to achieve historical goals. History is a science that studies human in the course of its evolution. And with developing connection and understanding of the causal relations of events it works with whys and states of events and by reconstructing the past cultural legacy, shows what had gone upon past inhabitants.**

**Culture and civilization and its course in the human history is the best presentation of human development and progress and is the truest part of human history in whose course of development all members of the society take part.**

**In the light of the above, the present article is an attempt to cast a quick look at the contribution of history to the understanding of cultures and civilizations.**

**Keywords: History, Cultural Heritage, Civilization , Man's Evolution, Philosophy of History**

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**Introduction**

First of all we should try to understand the reasons which underline the need for learning history. We learn history because it informs us about man's past life and the way he behaves. By going through the process of man's life we learn the differences between man and animal. Likewise, we garner knowledge about the formation of civilizations. Finally, history provides us with information about various aspects of man's life in different parts of the world. It is an undeniable fact that it is the faculty of thought – wisdom – which distinguishes man from other animals. Relying on his complex brain system, man proved that he is distinct from other animals.

Man by nature is inclined towards having a culture, but not all people are necessarily cultured in practice. Most people completely or partly belong to a civilization which possesses its own cultural norms and values. Nevertheless, there are certain communities which have not acquired this complexity and all the people of a civilization are not necessarily civilized, cultured or learned (Glyn, 1985: 12). It should be noted that the original subject matter of history is promotion and evolution of man from the state of basic savagery to civilization. History means knowing and study of cultures. Indeed, cultures are the most valuable treasures of history. The more man delves into them, the more he becomes curious

to know about them. He believes that history is the reservoir and protector of the past mysteries and all cultures respect its judgment. History corrects the information and like other sciences provides man with authentic documents. It also organizes the mutual connection between the given pieces of information by helping man to analyze them. Hence providing him with a complete insight into the events under study it must be noted that the main field for historical research is man's past life, the stages which have been put behind in the process of evolution and the changes and progresses made in these stages. Also another subject matter of history is discovering the common relation between the events and legal phenomena, but the reconstruction of common relations is the necessary part of this topic (Yef, 1981: 172) . It is obvious that the past is related to the present and History means surveying the quality of the past activities whose traces remain in the present time.

**Definition of the terms used**

First of all it is necessary to define two concepts used in this paper, namely, culture and civilization. Also the factors which have played a part in their development and the contribution of history to their recognition must be studied.

The word culture refers to science, knowledge, literature, wisdom, and scientific and literal achievements of a nation. According

to the Oxford dictionary, "Civilization means the process or the act of being civilized or condition or the situation, learning the tech of life and consequently being aware". It also means citizenship and getting used to become a citizen.

Civilization means cooperation of people with each other for the promotion of their life standards and improvement of their welfare.

Culture refers to away of life and thinking which is influenced by the past traditions and present customs. Culture is an atmosphere which a person makes around himself and consists of how he treats himself, his society and the world. It can be divided into two categories, material and spiritual. In fact, culture means the accumulation of ideas, belief, symbols, and social forms which are passed from one generation to another in any society. According to Tyler, culture is a complex accumulation which consists of knowledge, ideas, arts, ethics, rules, habits and other kinds of abilities which are gained by people who are members of a community (Tyler, 1958:1).

Culture is the public method of living within a group of people who share the cultural elements such as habits, traditions, beliefs and values. In other words, culture is thought through other human beings and the method of its teaching is acquired due to interaction among human beings. Therefore, culture is not instinctive and its transfer is not hereditary.

Some factors including information and existing knowledge, social relations and mass media play a crucial role in its formation.

In contrast, civilization, as Samuel Huntington defines it, "is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of what which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people" (Huntington, 1989: 243).

Civilization is the sum total of policies man thinks and applies to meet his material needs of life, respond to his sensual desires and fulfill collective objectives. In fact, a civilization refers to the material, social and visual aspect of man's life in the society, while culture man's all mental and intellectual manifestations which stem from man's intellectual conception.

Advanced knowledge, developed art and complicated organizations are the fruits of gradual development and progress of previous simpler stages. No stage of civilization is produced by itself; rather every stage arises from the previous stage and is dependent on it (Tylor, 1876: 20). In the beginning of nineteenth century, there occurred a thinking revolution in realization of history, although the past which considered history studying to be with no advantage for human beings and only

looked and focused to future and now, but from this time new stand point was introduced for history. New context was gained from history and this theory was found that history is an agent that passes a specific and particular flow and this motion continues based on constant social codes.

This belief that history revives the forgotten events and by studying the cultural legacies one can know about the past of human and this belief that history is known as life's teacher, resulted in a new standpoint for history and it became a part of human science that has special advantages, principals, and laws. The handicrafts, scientific knowledge, various religions and expansion of political organizations are necessary for the development of civilizations.

History has two basic meanings. First, history is a reservoir of past events (the occurrence of events). Second, history provides us with knowledge about the past events (recording the past events) (Yef, 1981: 3). History means an event which has taken place in the past. We should traverse the path of history to understand the ingredients of civilization.

Archeological discoveries indicate that man was created in the later stages of evolution and formation of the earth. The secret of the development of civilizations life in man's campaign for a better life through utilization of

his wisdom which led to the commencement of discoveries. Man's talent became activated to eliminate the hurdles which he faced in his road to perfection and thus innovations came to the fore. Man showed his talent by using skills and experiences and provided the civilized world with his excellent thought. Arnold Toynbee believes that civilizations did not prosper in two kinds of societies: one, the dry, landlocked ones which could not be attacked; and the other the society in which there are abundant wealth, so the inhabitants neither attacked each other nor did they challenge the natures (Toynbee, 1989: 10). Hence fighting the unfavorable natural phenomenon does not exist in any of these societies. Man has two cultures, that is, material and intellectual. Hence he formed his material culture by instrument making, and then he developed customs, traditions and art which formed his intellectual culture helping him to dominate the nature and develop his thought. The culture of every community has certain characteristics which distinguish them from other communities.

Nevertheless there is a number of common points among human communities. Adibi says "One is trained and formed in a cultural milieu." (Abidi, 1978: 12) Its different components intermingle and interact with each other and have mutual effects on one another.

Clearly, civilizations have been formed in the course of history.

This heritage led to the generation of new civilizations and cultures. In fact, culture and civilization introduced ethical order, customs and traditions which are based on intellectuality.

Likewise, social and political organizations as well as social institutions were formed in the course of the development of culture and civilization.

Majority of archeologists argue that the oriental countries have been the cradle of civilizations and the site of the emergence of most of the earlier civilizations.

The main components of a civilization are: economic and political institutions, customs, traditions, ethical traditions, etc. Culture is transmitted through language. If we consider a wide and general meaning of language, it can be said that culture refers to every sign by which a living creature can transmit the prevailing language (Khanlary, 1964)

Language is in fact the most important factor for cultural promotion and transformation. Culture and language have inextricable and unavoidable relations. Culture is meaningless without language because the political, economic, legal, literal, scientific and religious constructions are not formed without words. Hence, one of the main fault lines between human being and animal is the very word. When language takes a written form besides its spoken one, the process of growth of culture speeds up.

Civilizations are classified into two categories: pre-historical and historical ones. The Pre-historical civilization refers to the age when man had not yet evolved writing skill. The period which has written documents, is the historical period. It should be mentioned that man had become familiar with fire, animal husbandry, agriculture, weaving, and citizenship before evolving hand writing. According to H. G. Wells, language is the means of thinking; it records and registers the thought and enables man to think about complex thoughts (Wells, 1986: 145) Among the factors assisting the spread of language are paintings and verbal narratives which resulted in their development. Paintings did not have artistic aspects in the beginning and were considered the means of speaking, i.e., illustrated languages. They were not meant for decoration; rather for communication.

Man's culture has been preserved mainly by writing which is a means for displaying and recording, and exchange of thought and knowledge (Zuki, 1971: 16). The sounds in the frame of special phrases were only pre-thought of man before the evolution of writing. Then by illustrating the signs, and mark which introduced the word, man succeeded to evolve writing. Since the evolution of writing, the past history of man has been transferred with more precision and remained written and recorded. Writing was a new instrument which gave man

a plenty of possibilities to think and was a means which enabled man to record his thought for the coming generations.

Among the recorded types of writings one may mention invoices, letters, drug prescriptions, index of people's names (Wells, 1986: 253).

After man gradually discarded his nomadic life and settled in permanent houses, tamed animals, and cultivated seeds, he formed a new style in his life and so he put an end to his homelessness and give up a vagabond life. He therefore, set up villages and settled in secure areas, normally near water and cultivable lands. He also formed tribes and laid the bases of the society.

Religion came to existence as an order of belief in metaphysical power in evolutionary revolution. Primarily man found solace in super nature when he confronted insurmountable natural phenomena.

Before he holds fast to religion, man had faith in magic which had its roots in his fear of nature and natural powers. He tried to control the world with magic. As long as man felt that he could dominate the forces of nature, he resorted to magic, but after successive failures, his respect for supernatural forces dwindled and he did not fear these forces any more. This idea affected all aspects of human life.

Religion had collective aspects. It is one of the oldest human institutions. Man has always

held ceremonies and offered prayers sacrifice and performed other religious ceremonies. Wells says that fear of the older was at first social wisdom (Ibid, 148). Fear of the older and respect for him and what he wants was extended even to the period after his death which caused social wisdom. This fear gradually gave its place to the lord of tribe.

After relieving from the hazards of securing food, man gained an opportunity to think about other things. He had new idea for filling his time and making necessary changes which were important for his evolution. Therefore, the bases of great civilizations were formed. Peace and security were provided with the guidance of fortune-tellers, magicians and nobles and by enacting the law as well as setting armies to protect the settlements. The palace of kings provided a motive for the development of Architecture. Likewise, the use of valuable metals in temples and palaces prospered the artists and architectures.

Human being is a multi-dimensional creature who had first challenged the nature in the process of his evolution and made it obey him to take his requirements from it. Then he changed the battlefield of challenges from nature to the society by forming societies which gave birth to social stratification. History has recorded all these challenges and variations and has proved that human being is an animal who has created culture. The significance of man lies

in the creation of culture; a culture which has taught him to learn. It must be noted that man affects his culture and is also influenced by it. So, it is necessary to establish fruitful and logical relations with other cultures.

History studies the past account of man and by studying archeological monuments, recreates cultures and is inspired by his access to these monuments. Toynbee considers the philosophy of history as a reflection of the divine plan to create man and so argues that history is a container in which the ultimate plan of the creation of man is implemented as was perceived by the creator Lord. Therefore, history is responsible for implementing the ultimate divine plan of the world and man.

Historical information is one of the most important complementary components of social culture and by lack of this complementary component human training cannot be completed in any way. By acquiring this information one can speak more reasonably. In fact, by studying history, man tries to make the future clear which relies on the past and present. Therefore, history as a mass of human experiences is necessary for solving present problems (Toynbee, 1989: 10). Achieving reliable and precise events is a duty of history that indeed is only possible through methodological study of history and events inspecting in accordance with original resources. It is obvious that in order to achieve the historical truth one should

have reliable data and by making a connection between them, gain historical testimonials which are documented facts.

Because of inability to directly accept the historical data like eye witness experiences related to non existence of eye witness validity in history, therefore the task of historian is to achieve reliable proofs which is only possible though criticizing of scientific resources.

In fact, the study of culture is the study of human social behavior and history as a social knowledge will accomplish its task when it expresses the cause of events with logical inference, if not so, history is nothing but recording events, although some know the knowledge of precise history to be more important from rightful assessment of historical events but one should know that such recording is obviously not history and it has no name but journalism. "History is a container in which the ultimate design of human creation occurs as it has once gone in the mind of God and therefore history is the one responsible for developing the world and human ultimate spiritual design. History includes the sure facts; this fact exists in different forms as historical sources (Ibid).

Ibn-i-Khaldoun in this regard says: "There is a method for historical technique that not everyone can gain and for that method there are many advantages and an honorable objective and requires many resources and different sciences (Ibn-e-Khaldoun, 1957).

The comparison that E. H. Carr. gives between the historian and the historical fact, says: "Historian and historical fact go hand in hand and without fact, historian is vain and non-routed and also without the historian the fact is dead and meaningless (Carr, 1970: 44). For realizing the basics of history, the four historical principals should be mentioned which include place, time, the conditions of occurrence and the language of occurrence.

History is exclusively connected to human; it is mental, not empirical and is not predictable as Kar wires, history is the continual act of influence between historian and facts, and it is the eternal dialogue between past and presence. Past is only understandable in the light of presence and presence is completely understandable only in light of past. Giving the capability of past society understanding to human beings and increasing its domination on present society are the dual tasks of history (Ibid, 45). After humanism and human oriented, academies of humanism, the stand point towards history was that, the people make the history, like the histories that narrate wars and fate of rulers, epics, newspapers and etc. Historical description of the past is also mentioned as a part of social history.

Any way, maybe one can know history as a move towards future, which is the creator of the state of human, because of this, history with

such precise and great task which have done and does its task with such care, cannot be considered as useless and accidental and unduly and casual and with no visible unity and scientific truth.

And through recognition of historical evolution course of different societies and comparison and study of them and deduction of rules of life and history motion as a living natural fact that has a beginning and therefore has an end and a course and different stages of life and logical rules and what fortifies and weakens it and its illness and health and the causes of progress and failure and causes of its revolution and evolution and halts, one can achieve wise prediction of history and even conscious intervene into it.

History is a science that studies society and social man in the process of its evolution and his past life (Yef, 187).

Karl Jaspers believes that history is an event which has withdrawn the time and reaches to eternity (Jaspers, 1984: 312); He also says that it is the basic characteristic of history. History is evolution; what is not continuous is not related to history. Every continuation is the matter and means of history. Therefore, this picture is illustrated in mind that there will be a time when it will be the end of history and end of humanity and as a time was the beginning of history but both beginning and neglect are not intangible forces, above all a standard comes

and of them which shades everything (Ibid, 328).

It must be noted that it has been the communication and interaction that have caused various culture to be drawn toward unity. It is not so that all cultures have stemmed from a united source (Ibid, 340). It is necessary to mention that the knowledge of earlier communities is as important for the individual as recording the past events in the memory for a historian. It has occupied an outstanding position in the works of historians. A historian is not merely interested in collecting and recording the facts, but he is also keen to seek and narrate the valuable experiences to his contemporaries (Yef, 33). History is considered a guide for man to study the society. The fruit of this guidance is material and intellectual evolution and promotion. History is a chain of important events nations have saved for gaining experience.

### **Conclusion**

History has gained a credit in our era and narrative of past is not only the remembrance of the past but it has become a devise or instrument of life in the new era.

Today, history writing is so important that one can judge the people who own the history by looking at it, it means that if people properly understand their own and other races' history, they gain other capabilities too, and if they are

helpless in history writing, they gain an infirmity whose impact is easily noticed in all facets of life including social, economic, politic, and culture.

Historical notion was fortified in 18<sup>th</sup> century and has impacted the history writing greatly. If the historical notion had not been immersed, history would not have such extent and importance, but one should mention that there is a connection between historical philosophies and if this connection is weak, philosophy will not play its role properly and history researchers and the history writing will not gain context and strength.

History cannot properly play its cultural role in the form of event recording and mentioning wars and successes and only through philosophical perspective and understanding of causal relations it is possible to achieve historical goals. History is a science that studies human in the course of its evolution. And with developing connection and understanding of the causal relations of events it works with whys and states of events and by reconstructing the past cultural legacy, shows what had gone upon past inhabitants.

Culture and civilization and its course in the human history is the best presentation of human development and progress and is the truest part of human history in whose course of development all members of the society take part.

History is in fact a collection of various topics and useful guidance which remains for us to use for the future experiences.

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## نقش تاریخ در فهم فرهنگ‌ها و تمدن‌ها

مژگان اسماعیلی<sup>۱</sup>

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وضعیت گذشته بشر به زندگی امروز او مرتبط است و تاریخ یعنی بررسی کیفیت فعالیت‌های گذشته‌ای که آثار آنان تا کنون باقی مانده است. حوزه اصلی تحقیقات تاریخی عبارت از زندگی گذشته بشر و مراحل طی شده در فرایند تکامل، تغییرات و پیشرفت‌های به دست آمده در این مراحل است. تاریخ دیدی کامل نسبت به مسائل گذشته در اختیار انسان قرار می‌دهد، از موضوعات مورد مطالعه تاریخ می‌توان از کشف روابط مشترک بین حوادث نام برد و بازسازی این روابط نیز از موضوعات تاریخ است.

تاریخ حوادث فراموش شده را احیا می‌کند و ما با مطالعه میراث فرهنگی به گذشته انسان پی می‌بریم. تاریخ صرفاً ثبت حوادث نیست بلکه به ما کمک می‌کند که از بررسی حوادث به یک درک علمی برسیم.

تاریخ نمی‌تواند نقش فرهنگی خود را به خوبی ایفا کند اگر خود را به ثبت حوادث و ذکر جنگ‌ها و پیروزی‌ها محدود کند. دسترسی به اهداف تاریخی از طریق رویکرد فلسفی و درک علمی از پدیده‌های تاریخی ممکن می‌گردد. تاریخ انسان را در فرایند تکاملی اش مورد مطالعه قرار می‌دهد و از طریق ایجاد رابطه علمی و معلولی بین رخدادها تلاش می‌کند که "چرایی" و "چگونگی" رخدادها را کشف و با بازسازی میراث فرهنگی، گذشته بشر را بازنمایی کند.

بررسی فرایند فرهنگ و تمدن در تاریخ بهترین وسیله معرفی روند پیشرفت و ترقی بشر است چرا که این فرایند شاید واقعی‌ترین بخش تاریخ باشد که در روند آن انسان‌ها مشارکت داشته‌اند. با توجه به آنچه ذکر شد، مقاله حاضر تلاشی در جهت ارزیابی مجمل از نقش تاریخ در فهم فرهنگ‌ها و تمدن‌هاست.

واژگان کلیدی: تاریخ، میراث فرهنگی، تمدن، تکامل، فلسفه تاریخ

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