CHAPTER - IV

HUMAN DESTINY : VALUES, CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

This chapter proposes to delineate the nature and concept of human destiny by undertaking a critical evaluation of Spengler’s concept of destiny. First section seeks to give a brief description of his conception of destiny. In the next section a critical appraisal of Spengler’s concept of destiny will be undertaken. This churning will be helpful in differentiating the concept of destiny from predestiny, which will be pursued in the subsequent section. Having done this the dialectics of relation between culture, civilization and values will be explored thoroughly as it is in such explorations that issues concerning human destiny will crystallize rather clearly.

Nature, History and Destiny

Oswald Spengler has perhaps been the first serious thinker studying the processes of history and culture to use the term destiny as an important category of analysis.\(^1\) He insisted that notion of destiny is applicable only to the thing-becoming as opposed to the thing-become. Hence it applies only to the domain of history as against the natural
realm which falls in the domain of causality. Reality or the world has been demarcated by him into two domains: world-as-history and world-as-nature. Nature and history are opposite extreme terms in human range of possibilities of picturing and representing the world. Nature is considered to be the sum of necessities imposed by the laws. In this domain every thing cognised is considered to be timeless—having neither past nor future—simply *there*, and hence permanently valid. He insists that in this sense law in the domain of nature is a-historic.

Spengler holds that pure becoming on the other hand is irreversible as every happening in this realm is unique and incapable of being repeated. Becoming lies beyond the domain of cause and effect, and law and measurement. He contends that although history is not pure becoming, but it does not deal with the thing-become. It is an image radiated from the waking consciousness in which becoming dominates the become. He points out that history is the image which humans intuitively, intrinsically and rationally create in order to comprehend the world in relation to their own life. Nature on the other hand is the image in which humans synthesis and interpret the impressions of their senses.
Spengler insists that world-as-nature follows the logic of space, whereas world-as-history follows the logic of time. Every culture is born in a particular space and time, and there is a deep relation between the two. Space is the extension from which a culture emerges. Time is the direction and destiny to which it points. Space is the thing-become and realised actuality; whereas time points to thing-becoming that has potentiality and has to fulfill itself as yet. Time cannot be thought of categorically but space can be so conceived. Time is a discovery which is made only after thinking. We create it as an idea and later on realise that we are time in as much as we live. Spengler points out that corresponding to space and time is the differentiation of nature and history; or the causality and destiny.

The cognition of world-as-nature refers to the totality of knowledge by systematic reasoning which seeks strict laws that are universal and a-historical. It deals with timeless and directionless thing-become. Whereas knowledge in the realm of world-as-history is based on concept of time. As such both these forms of knowing are different from one another. The reality known as nature can be categorised in terms of universal causal laws whereas the idea of history cannot be
laid down in terms of cause and effect. It points to something beyond -through the directionality of time to the idea of destiny. So time is the direction and destiny to which a culture points. Thus the idea of destiny is associated with the form of knowing the world-as-history and to the direction of time towards which a culture points. World-as-nature is independent of the idea of destiny and it aims only at formulating universal laws pertaining to the nature of external world. Form of knowing associated with world-as-nature seeks to discover truths that are considered to be universally valid whereas knowing associated with world-as-history aims to reveal facts that have a necessary relation with time and indicate a direction, a future and a destiny.

**Destiny, Metaphors and Pre-determination**

It is evident that in the works and thought of Oswald Spengler we find a serious effort to differentiate the notion of destiny from the concept of causality. But he doesn’t go far enough and fails to remove the traces of pre-determination from his conception of destiny as he retains the possibility of prediction of future phenomena. This has found expression in the very beginning of *The Decline of the West*. In the first
line of the introduction itself he writes: “in this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still untravelled stages in the destiny of a culture...”

The prediction of phenomena yet to come is usually and necessarily associated with the concept of causation and falls in the domain of causality primarily associated with natural phenomena. We have seen that Spengler differentiated between causation and destiny on the basis of difference in cognising nature and history. However in his thinking differentiation of history and nature is not always maintained, and based upon that the differentiation between two ways of comprehending the reality -i.e. the world-as-history and world-as-nature- is also demolished. He considers history to be primary, and forming the basis for knowing the world-as-nature. He argues that “No ‘Nature’ is pure -there is always something of history in it”3, as it is the same values, same soul or the prime-symbol that is manifested in all domains and realms of a culture.

Spengler considers cultures to be like organisms. And like organisms, argues Spengler, they have their souls as well. As soul, every culture has its own prime-symbol which
is a set of values that are central to it. These values define a culture’s attitude towards space and time and constitute the world image of that culture. It is expressed symbolically in all manifestations of the culture and distinguishes it from other cultures. He points out that prime-symbol of a culture “is operative through the form-sense of every man, every community, age and epoch and it dictates the style of every life-expression. It is inherent in the form of state, the religious myths and cults, the ethical ideals, the form of painting and music and poetry, the fundamental notions of each science”.4

Thus each culture is like an organism and prime-symbol is like its soul. The prime-symbol, like soul has its inherent potentialities, and like a soul a culture sets out in the course of its life to fulfill and actualize its potentialities. It can be seen from these metaphorical expressions that culture according to Spengler refers both to its potentialities as well as embodiments of these potentialities. The actual aspects and potentialities together constitute the body and soul of the culture.

It can be seen that in order to understand phenomena related to culture Spengler is making extensive use of
metaphors. Culture is an area where metaphors are so commonly used that more often than not our thinking becomes a prisoner of metaphors. It needs to be stressed that thinking in terms of metaphors is extremely dangerous as it deludes us sometimes with false difficulties and at others, with false solutions.

Lipson has pointed out three principal types of metaphors that have constituted the frame of reference for most of the writings aimed at understanding processes related to culture—the are biological, geophysical and geometrical. The metaphors of biological sort interpret a culture or civilization “as an organism and, once that is decided, traces its supposed life cycles”. Geophysical type, on the other hand, “conceives of our subject in terms of the earth’s motion either during the day or through the year”. Lipson points out that both these types of metaphors focus on the passage of culture or civilization through time, whereas in case of metaphors pertaining to geometrical sort, changes are illustrated by figures in space such as the circle, the spiral and the line. He argues that both biological and geophysical types have the same flaw as they imply that change in certain predetermined direction is inevitable and
that it proceeds through the same stages, in the same sequence. Thus it is necessary for *birth* to be succeeded by *growth, maturity, decay, and death*. Similarly *dawn* starts a process that must continue on to the *darkness*, as *spring* must eventually lead to *winter*.

It would be pertinent to note that Spengler’s thought contains almost all these elements. Even in the passage partly quoted in Chapter-III from *The Decline of the West* “A Culture ... in the grave”⁷, we find many such metaphorical expressions being used for culture, e.g. *age phase of individual man, childhood, youth, manhood and old age, morning, noon, day light, darkness, plant wise, decaying branches, spring, ripening, sweetness of late October days, dawn*, etc. It can be seen that Spengler uses both, the biological as well as geophysical metaphors, and hence his thought contains the above mentioned flaws associated with the use of metaphors. Like any other idea or thought based on metaphors, they infact are oversimplifications, and as such, fail to do justice to the phenomena that they are supposed to comprehend. The phenomena of culture and civilization are far more complex and it is not possible to subsume them under any pre-decided, compartmentalised,
prefabricated schemata of *a-priori* categories. The metaphorical interpretations fail to comprehend the true nature of subject-matter as they amount to cognizing them as *something* which they infact are not. As Lipson has put it rather elegantly, to treat human society, culture and civilization “as if it were organism or a geophysical process ... is a mistaken starting point that cannot lead to other than distorted conclusions”.

It seems reasonable to conclude that it is due to use of metaphors that despite an effort to differentiate the concept of destiny from the concept of causation, Spengler fails to dissociate destiny from the idea of pre-destination as *a-priori* conceptualisation is detrimental to comprehension of true nature of the phenomena.

**Destiny sans Predetermination**

It has been seen that *a-priori* conceptualisation is detrimental to true and valid comprehension of phenomena belonging to the domain of history, culture and civilization. Being caught in the web of *a-priori* schemetas we become prisoners of those prefabricated structures and fail to look at the phenomena as they actually are. But it is equally true that history is not an illusion as it is not a figment of our
imagination. It does not study a realm in which anything goes or that can be magically transformed for which all that we have to do is to switch over to a mode of consciousness which believes that the world is governed by our will only. It is in this sense that phenomena related to human destiny have a necessary relation with the present as well as past of the culture and civilization. Phenomena related to human destiny have a necessary linkage with history whereas phenomena governed by causation do not have any such necessary relation as they are about mere happenings. As Prof. Goel has put it rather elegantly, “history deals with events. But by itself an event is not history”. Events studied by history are not without past and future as in the domain of culture past merges into present, and present merges into future. Unlike causal phenomena of nature human destiny is directed towards future. It has its seeds in the present and roots in the past. Underlying any conception of history one can always decipher a perspective that forms the backdrop of studies as history is great deal more than a mere recording of dead events by a machine. It involves acts of human interpretation, which is an activity of a different class as compared to mere recording or picturing.
It seems plausible to say that it is possible to discern some logic in the course of history as this course is not capricious, laden with chaos and disorder. But it needs to be stressed that this logic does not belong to the realm of *a-priori* conceptualisation. Thus a perspective of human destiny that is not connected to the idea of coercive pre-determination through the relation of entailment or conjunction is possible to be conceived. Such a conception recognises the prime importance of reflexive character of human activities based on the idea of freewill, and does not brush aside the idea of human freedom in search of uniformities in the historical phenomena. It seeks to discern some pattern in the historical course *not despite* human freewill, *but through* acts based on the freewill. This conception rules out the possibility of listing in advance a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that entail or determine the direction of history. But it accepts that there are certain necessary conditions that must be fulfilled if a certain course of history is to be sought, or a particular direction is to be pursued as destiny. But such a course is only suggestive and tentative as no set of sufficient conditions can elicit any pre-determination in this domain.
Such factors rather than being determinants of historical course are of the nature of influences that effect human destiny. More often than not actual actors remain oblivious of such influences, the existence of which can only be found by rigorous analysis.

Thus it can be said that although there are no predetermined universal uniformities in human history, but since human affairs are governed by similar kinds of factors, history has patterns and it is possible to decipher the tentative course of human destiny. Kroeber –who responded by giving a categorical no as answer to the question of inferring any must with respect to all activities appearing regularly in all civilisations– insists that absence of such uniformity does not mean that there are no patterns. He suggests that “turning to the field of culture as a whole we may say with assurance that clearly some patterns productive of high values have been developed with astonishing rapidity and that there have been others in which such productivity fell off and ceased with equal rapidity”.10

So, there are patterns which influence human destiny in a positive direction, whereas certain other patterns
influence human destiny in a negative way. The reflexive nature of human consciousness makes it possible for humans to intervene meaningfully in such processes and imbibe creatively on signboards on the road leading to the future—towards human destiny. There are no sentences or words pre-imbibed on the inscription of time. These inscriptions are to be created by the humans themselves.

The signboards pointing the direction of human destiny get created in the interplay of values with culture and civilization. Now we propose to take up that exploration.

**Values and Culture**

Culture in an important sense is an axiological phenomenon as it has a necessary reference to the realm of values. Cultural activity does not consist in *mere* reflecting the surroundings by human consciousness, *nor* in *mere* modifying the surroundings, *rather* it consists in the imaginative recreation of the world with a view to bring about a change in the existing state-of-affairs. It is this imaginative recreation that lies at the base of cultural activity which transforms mere biological behaviour into intentional cultural acts. What marks off cultural activity from mere organism’s
behaviour is the connection with contra-factuals. Cultural activity consists primarily in conceiving the contra-factuals, i.e. in positing some state-of-affair which is not the case as yet. Thus, cultural activity is necessarily related to the creation of values. Human beings not only create values rather they choose and seek values and work for their realization also. In this sense various domains of culture may be considered to be an expression of the values being sought and realised.

It is in this sense that Berdyaev rightly points out that a culture is realisation of new values, and Danilevsky insists that each culture aims at the realisation of certain values in its own way. It is also in this sense that Spengler considered the central values of a culture to be its soul which is manifested in all the domains of that culture. He points out that all the aspects of a culture are infact embodiments of these central values.

Toynbee’s thought also underscores the importance of values in the cultural processes. He points out that whenever there is a challenge, the creative minority withdraws from the nitty-gritty and gluttony of every day life, contemplates on the issues pertaining to human destiny, and returns with a
response—which is in the form of new values. He insists that cultures are born of spiritual necessities, though the form of challenge may sometimes be physical.

Thus values shape and inform the cultural reality in an important manner. Values impart sense, significance and meaning to the cultural domain. Cultures are creators as well as creations of values. There is a continues dialectics between the values and the culture. Cultures must always perceive values *qua* values rather than perceiving them as facts. Values are different from facts and cannot be rooted in the facts of the world as world is ethically neutral in itself. As pointed out by Schweitzer, “we wanted to form a philosophy of life for ourselves out of items gathered from the world. But it is our destiny to live by means of convictions which are our inward necessity”.\(^{11}\) So, cultural values cannot be derived from -nor can they be reduced to- the facts. When values are reduced to facts, or are perceived as facts, the culture looses dynamism and becomes stagnant. The next section proposes to elaborate on how cultural values are perceived as facts.

**Values and Civilization**

Material creations and useful objects are important constituents of civilization but more often than not
civilization is considered to be co-terminus with them. The notion of civilization that considers it to be consisting only of material goods and the technology that goes into their creation is rather misleading. It is true, as has been noted in chapter-II, that civilization is primarily concerned with the well being of humans and consists of elements that are useful to human existence in the sense of being functional. But this includes not only objects and techniques, rather it also includes social and institutional framework into which humans enter in order to ensure survival of the group and to control the external conditions of their lives. It is in this sense that civilization corresponds to the domain of useful. In the moments of life that are considered to be part of civilization, we reach out to outer world -natural as well as social- in search of goods, techniques and institutional frameworks that fall in the domain of useful.

Civilization consists of techniques and physical as well as social arrangements that ensure survival and preservation of the human collectivity. It relates more to the useful aspects of human creations. Such creations pertain to both material as well ideational aspects of given social reality. It treats both of them as facts. Ideational aspects of a given social reality
i.e. customs, norms, traditions and institutions that belong to civilization, manifest the values of the culture that informs that civilization. But when embodied and manifested these values are perceived as social facts. Thus civilization consists not only of material goods and techniques but also of social and institutional framework that embodies the values of the culture as social facts.

Human destiny is influenced by the interplay of values with techniques as well as with culture and civilization. The interplay of technique and values will be studied in the next section, whereas the subsequent section aims at exploring the dialectics between values, culture and civilization.

**Techniques, Values and Human Destiny**

Culture and civilization refer to the domains of human creations that are dynamic and incessantly changing. Both culture as well as civilization are effected not only by their own constituent phenomena, but also by phenomena that are classified as constituents of other domains. An analysis of such dialectics is of utmost importance in comprehending the direction of human destiny. Let us begin by analysing the effects of most dynamic constituent of civilization i.e.
technique on culture and civilization and its interplay with cultural values to see how it effects human destiny.

A detailed empirical survey of the effects of development of technique on growth and decline of civilization has been undertaken by Tonybee. He finds that “there is no correlation between progress in techniques and progress in civilization”.¹² contrary to prevalent view, he argues that civilizational growth does not consist in, nor is it due to technological progress. Against this uncritical view, he showed on empirical evidence that when over-specialised technique becomes an end-in-itself, it effects growth of civilization in an inverse manner. He terms the process of over-specialised technique becoming an end-in-itself as the idolization of technique. He points out the destiny of Viking of Sweden, Nomads of Transoxania, and Ottomans of Turkey fell pray to such over-specialisation of techniques. In his analysis of petrified civilizations he points out that they all fell pray to the idolisation of technique. Based on empirical study of petrified and arrested civilizations, he shows that growth of techniques instead of resulting in civilizational growth, is rather associated with arrested growth, and in some cases even with death of civilizations. Thus technical
growth is not a correlate of growth of civilization. Rather over emphasis on techniques shows a correlation with stagnation and retardation in the path of civilization. Toynbee points out that lack of correlation between progress and techniques, and progress and civilization is apparent in all cases in which techniques have improved while civilization have remained stationary or suffered setbacks.

Supremacy of technique is in a way sign of degradation and it has to be kept at a subordinate place for culture and civilization to grow. It is good as means only. When it become an end, the whole purpose of using it is defeated and it leads to dehumanisation and mechanisation. Toynbee elaborates this point by analysing the states-of-affair in the western world where increasing technological supremacy resulted in the loss of inner sense of joy. The victims of technique’s supremacy -surrounded by rigid uniformity of industry- are reduced to monotonous life of a machine like repetitiveness.

Spengler reached a similar conclusion regarding the supremacy of technique and cultural degradation, but from a different path. As has been noted earlier, according to him every culture has its possibilities. It actualises its possibilities and dies down. When the inner possibilities of a culture are
fulfilled, it turns into a civilization. He insists that the “civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, ... death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and stone-built, petrifying world city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Goethe. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again”.13

It is with the end of cultural cycle i.e. with civilization that Spengler associates supremacy of technique that marks the phase of cultural degradation. He insists that the western world, where supremacy of technique rules, is in fact declining. He contends that it is erroneous to associate supremacy of technique, and positivistic attitude with modern western civilization only. He rather insists that all cultures in their decadence undergo similar state-of-affairs when technique rules and values are in disarray. In such times of decadence, life degenerates into soulless mechanism and civilization assumes the character of undifferentiated monotony and repetition.

Schweitzer, whose conception of civilization is primarily ethical, stresses a similar point and insists that a lack of
ethical foundation makes civilization collapse even if creative and intellectual forces of the strongest nature are at work in other directions. Even control over forces of nature through technology resulting in material progress does not augur well for human destiny in the absence of strong foundation provided by the values.¹⁴

Thus it seems plausible to say that the phases of history where technique rules supreme and becomes an end-in-itself spells doom for the future of culture and civilization. But if technique is kept in a subordinate position and values guide the technical development - i.e. if technology is treated as means rather than an end-in-itself- human destiny acquires a positive direction.

It would be pertinent to note here that just like idolization of technique, there may occur an idolisation of some institutionalised value. This idolisation is also detrimental to human destiny. To avoid this, values should be pursued authentically qua values and not as facts. Now we propose to discuss this dialectics associated with value.

**Culture, Civilization, Values and Human Destiny**

Cultural realm is essentially a realm of values where values are pursued in an authentic, creative and impersonal
manner, with the detached concern of a *vairagi*. Values expand the sphere of human consciousness by opening up new horizons which are non existent before the conception of those values. The cultural values so created are in the form of potentialities to be actualized by the civilization. Value apprehension and value realization, the terms used by Dayaji\textsuperscript{15}, are better suited to analyse and comprehend the dynamics of values in relation to the domains of culture and civilization. It may be said that apprehension of new values falls in the domain of culture whereas realisation of those values falls in the domain of civilization. In other words value apprehension is a cultural pursuit and value realisation is the pursuit of civilization. History of culture may be seen as the history of value apprehension whereas history of civilization my be seen as the history of value realisation. Since actualization of values requires both, the institutional framework as well as technology, the history of civilization includes a study of both these aspects.

As has been noted earlier, it is through the institutional framework that values become available to the community and masses as *social facts*. It is in this sense that civilization may be seen as a depository of the cultural activity.
Non-material or ideational aspects of civilization may in a way be considered to be the realisation of apprehended values in the form of institutionalised behaviour. In this manner civilization may be regarded as that form of culture which has been made available to the masses at large. Thus civilization in its broadest connotations may be seen as a systematization and objectification of cultural creations. And as N.K. Devraj rightly points out “Civilization in fact in any advanced form neither come to exist nor continue to exist without disinterested pursuit of values which constitute culture”. The customs, laws, institutions etc. which embody modes of civilized behaviour, owed their first appearance to the creative cultural impulse seeking to visualise new and more satisfactory forms of human relationships.

Once embodied into institutions, customs, laws, traditions, etc., the values tend to be pursued as facts—though *social facts*, but facts nevertheless. Just like idolization of technique discussed earlier, there occurs an *idolization of institutional framework* as well, and as a result customs, laws, traditions, rituals, etc. become almost ends-in-themselves. They are pursued as given facts, almost at par with natural facts. The values that they embody, and
whose manifestations they are supposed to be, are relegated to secondary status. In such circumstances civilizations become victims of these over-specialised and rigid institutional frameworks that become ends-in-themselves. They chain the spirit of freedom of individuals who are part of those frameworks. As a result they tend to operate as conservative forces creating hindrance for the cultural advancement. They may spell direction of doom for human destiny. There is a shift of emphasis and energy gets transferred to the lower sphere of mechanical imitation and memesis. Institutionalised behaviours are reduced to the status of mindless and meaningless rituals. In such cases when any justification is sought the prompt answer given is “भैं तू र्मीं धर्म, धर तिक दुस्पर देन” (I don’t know, but this is what people do), the response clearly exhibiting that it has become an end-in-itself.

The loss of justification means that it has lost all the creative and cultural significance as well as meaning, and has become almost a dead log in the civilizational web. An element of inauthenticity creeps in to the extent that institutional frameworks are idolized as given, and by the same stroke of inauthenticity, values are devalued as facts.
Thus civilization as objectification and systematization of cultural creations is both fulfilling and frustrating: fulfilling as it makes available the fruits of cultural progress to the people in general; and frustrating as it hinders further cultural creations by acting as a sort of conservative force. It is true that we cannot live without norms, customs and traditions constituting the institutional framework, but it is equally true that we can progress only by transcending these systematisations and frameworks. The onward journey of humankind towards writing its own destiny is governed by contrary requirements of systematisation and its transcendence.

Culture exploits new opportunities provided by civilization and also tires to rise to the challenges being faced by the civilization. But supremacy of civilizational pursuits tends to hinder the smooth march of cultural pursuits. They are required to be kept in a subordinate position as compared to the cultural pursuits for human destiny to have a positive direction. Civilization may promote material progress but it tends to hinder creation of new values thereby promoting a status quo and acting as a conservative force. Cultural consciousness on the other hand seeks to transcend
the given institutions in pursuit of creation of new values thereby acting as a harbinger of change. Thus values pursued by civilization in fact tend to act as a barrier to further change, the seeking of values as cultural pursuit is essential for a better future of humankind.

The dialectics of values between culture and civilization goes in such a manner that cultural consciousness apprehends new values that enter everyday life through the institutional framework of civilization. The realisation and actualisation of these values requires the support of techniques also. Human destiny has a positive direction if techniques and institutional frameworks are kept in a subordinate position *vis-a-vis* the values. But more often than not, there occurs an idolization of techniques or institutional framework that effects human destiny in a negative manner, as it hinders the further expansion of human consciousness. If culture exploits the opportunities as well as challenges provided by civilizational development and creates new value consciousness, or discovers new dimensions of existing values, then only can it give a positive boost to human destiny.
REFERENCES


2. *ibid.*, p. 29.


6. *ibid.*


