



River Valley Civilizations

Shrî Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar

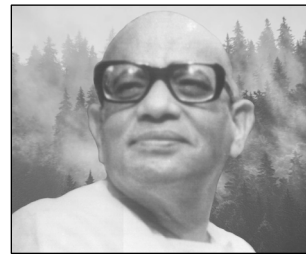
HUMAN CIVILIZATION is created in, and moves along, river valleys. Like a river, human civilization also has three stages – hill stage, plain stage and delta stage. From the hill stage, it moves to the plain stage and from the plain stage to the delta stage. A civilization starts in the hill stage, develops in the plain stage, and matures in the delta stage.

Why are civilizations created in, and why do they move along, river-valleys? In ancient times, up until the Stone Age, humans could not dig wells and depended upon natural sources of water. As such, human habitation started from springs, fountains, waterfalls, rivers, etc. Animals also select such places for habitation; only birds do not follow this rule. Thus, human habitation started near valleys, fountains, waterfalls, springs, and particularly near rivers. Due to the assemblage of humans in the river-valleys, the first stage of civilization started there.

The relation between man and man, man and woman, individual and collective requirements, individual and collective responsibilities – how to move singularly and collectively – the collection of all these is civilization. It has already been said that civilization starts in the hill stage, develops in the plain stage, and attains maturity in the delta stage. Naturally, the delta stage is the finality of a civilization.

Gangetic civilizations and their stages

The hill stage of the Gangá (Ganges) river-valley civilization in India started from the Garhwal and Kumaon ranges of Uttar Pradesh (UP). The rest of UP and Bihar is in the plain stage, and the delta stage starts from Maldah in West Bengal. The hill stage of the Brahmaputra valley civilization starts from Tibet and Arunachal. Its plain stage lies in



Shrî Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1922-1990)

Assam and its delta stage starts from the districts of Goalpara, Maymensing, and Rangpur (now in Bangladesh).

The delta is that stage where the river starts to merge in the sea by the shortest route. In the delta stage, tributaries have no prominent role. In the hill stage, tributaries play the dominant role, and there are hardly any branch rivers. In the plain stage also, tributaries have the dominant role in the growth and manifestation of civilizations, but branches also have some importance. However, in the deltaic stage, branch rivers have a more important role than the tributaries.

Simple civilizations (*maulik sabhyatā*) and blended civilizations (*vimishra sabhyatā*) are the two basic characteristics of civilization. A particular civilization changes in a particular way as a river moves and merges with other rivers, thus giving rise to sub-civilizations.

The Mandakinî and Alakānanda river civilizations emerged. We find the blending of these two civilizations at the hill stage. After passing through so many mountains, hills, fountains, etc., these two rivers, Mandākinî and Alankānanda, come in contact with each other at the hill stage. They merge near Haridwar, and there the two

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simple river civilizations. Garhwali and Kumaoni respectively, combine to produce a blended Gangá civilization, which comes up to Prayága.

Now, another river valley civilization, the Jamuna civilization along the river Yamuna, is also a collection of several sub-civilizations comprising many customs, costumes, manners, etc. It also comes up to Prayága. The blended Gangá civilization and the blended Yamuna civilization merge at Prayága and a blended Gangá-Yamuna civilization occurs after the river confluence at Prayága and moves towards Varanasi. Prayága is the second blending of manners, customs, etc., of the Gangá and Yamuna civilizations.

After Prayága we find another blending of civilizations. Therefore, there are variations in the manners, customs, languages, intonations, physical structures and economic conditions of eastern UP and western UP. A further blending occurs in the blended civilizations of the Gangá and Yamuna when the Gomati, Papti, Sone and Saraju rivers bring new trends from the northern portion of the Himalaya and Chambal-Ghagher river from the Vindhya ranges. Thus civilizations vary and sub-civilizations, branch civilizations, emerge at different stages of the movement of a river and its blending with other river-civilizations.

The Bundela sub-civilization emerges due to the blending of the Yamuna and Chambal civilizations. The Bagheli sub-civilization emerges due to the blending of the Yamuna and Sone.

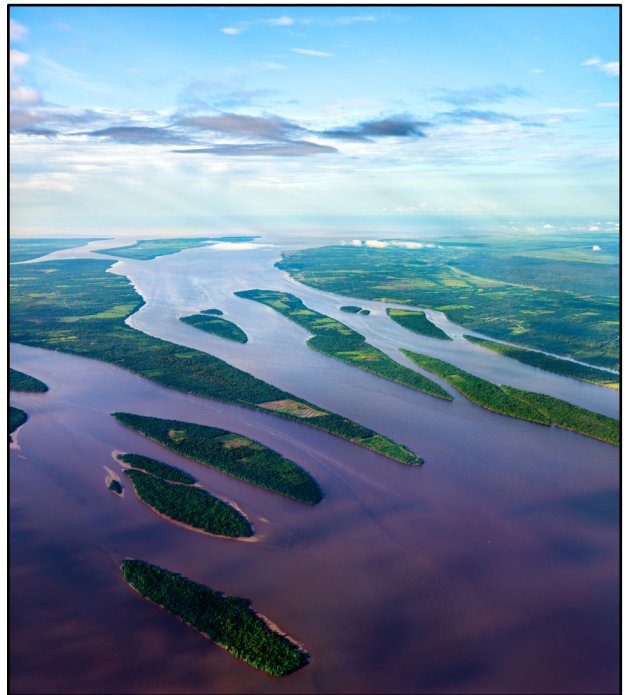
After Kashi there is another blending of civilizations where several other rivers merge. Thus in this plain stage, tributaries and branch rivers play an important role in the emergence of new civilizations.



Stage 1: **Hills** (from Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada)



Stage 2: **Plains** (the Dniester River in Eastern Europe serving as a natural border between Ukraine and Moldova)



Stage 3: **Delta** (the Essequibo River delta as it flows toward the Atlantic Ocean in Guyana, South America)

After Madrah in West Bengal, the Gangá enters the delta stage, a stage where branches have the dominant role. The blended civilization of the Gangá attains maturity in Bengal. “Daha” means the circular movement of water in a river; so it is called Maldaha. At Maldah, the Ganga turns to the right. The blended Gangá civilization is in its highest form in the deltaic stage in Bengal.

Now it is clear that the hill stage of the India civilizations occurs in the hill area of UP and the rest of UP, and Bihar are in the plain stage, where Baghali, Bundeli, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maetheli, and Aungiká sub-civilizations emerged.

The Brahmaputra civilization is a combination of the proto-Chinese and Indo-Tibetan civilizations. The civilization of Assam is a blending of the Tibetan-Chinese and Gangá civilizations, due to the proximity of Assam with the Gangá civilization. After this, the Brahmaputra turns to the left and enters Bengal, which is in its delta stage. The delta stage of the Brahmaputra civilization is its final stage. Bengal is the finality of the Brahmaputra civilization.

In Bengal there is another civilization as well, the civilization of Ráíha. The hill stage, plain stage and delta stage of the Ráíha civilization is in Bengal. So many rivers of Ráíha merge in the area of lower Bengal, which results in further blending. Thus in Bengal, there is a blending of three delta civilizations – the Gangá, Brahmaputra and Ráíha civilizations. This is the highest blended civilization of the world. Nature helps the people of Bengal in their intellectual progress, because no two great rivers like the Gangá and the Brahmaputra merge together anywhere else in the world.

In initial civilizations (*maulik sabhytá*), people are physically strong. In blended civilizations, people are strong in the psychic stratum and the civilization is complicated as well as forceful. In the simple Gangá civilization people are simple and physically strong; in the delta stage people are complicated, less physically strong and strong psychically.

The people of Bengal are intellectually developed because first, Bengal civilization is a blending of three deltaic civilizations and secondly, it is not a simple civilization but a great, complicated civilization – the blend and finality of three deltaic civilizations. Naturally, therefore, it is a powerful civilization, advanced in the intellectual and other spheres.

The preceding paragraphs are from "River and Civilization – Excerpt A" ((1982), A Few Problems Solved Part 5, Ananda Marga Publications.

Thames River valley civilizations and their stages

The following paragraphs are from "River Valley Civilizations", Histories Along The Way, Ananda Marga Publications (1985, 2008).

Now let us see how at different stages of rivers the patterns of civilizations vary.

Great Britain is a small country; the distance from any part of Britain to the ocean is not more than fifty miles. So naturally in that country there cannot be any large river: the distance between the source of a river and the ocean cannot be very great. Yet if we move along the banks of certain rivers, there is a difference between the civilization of the upper regions of the river and the lower ones, and there is also a variation in language.

Take, for example, the case of the river Thames: it is not a big river, neither in width nor in breadth. The part of the river Thames where the ships sail is not really a river, it is only an estuary of the sea, just like the Mátlá river near Canning. Many people think that the Mátlá is perhaps a wide and large river. They may think that in olden days the southern branch of the river Yamuna (Vidyádharii) emerging from the Ganges at Trivenii, moved southwards. Then, after flowing separately for some distance, the Yamuna and the southeastern tributary of the Ganges (Piyálii) joined together to form the Mátlá river. Though this is a fact, yet the collective waters of these two combined rivers is quite small. In fact, the Mátlá River is nothing but the estuary of the sea entering into the land.

The deltaic portion of the river Thames is somewhat similar. The more one proceeds down the river from the source of the Thames, the greater is the Anglo-Saxon and Norman influence. If one moves from the southern bank of the Thames towards the Straights of Dover, there is still a tremendous Norman influence, like a subterranean flow. If one moves from the northern side of the river towards the port of Grimsby on the delta at the coast, the Anglo-Saxon influence is greater than the Norman influence. If one moves towards the coast, the Norman influence becomes negligible. Where there is a Norman influence, there are large numbers of Latin derivations in the spoken language. Where the Anglo-Saxon influence is predominant, the number of Latin derivative words is comparatively small. The difference in intonation in the respective areas is also quite discernible.

If one moves towards the opposite part of the Thames River, or towards Wales in the west, the

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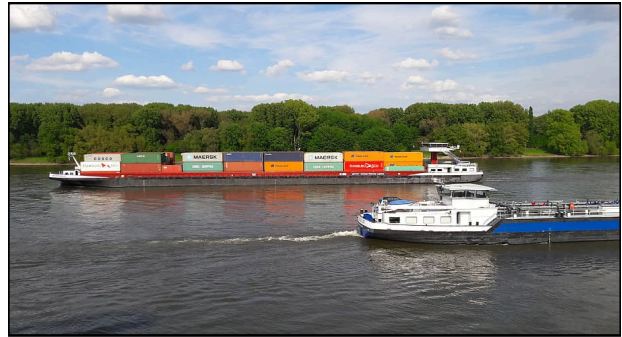
ancient Briton influence becomes significant, even in the spoken language. This is the reason why, though Welsh is the language of a small country, yet it has certain specialities of its own. Even the difference in people's external appearance, though not very prominent, is significant as well.

Gangetic civilization – Gaod-Rárh part

In our land of Rárh, on either bank of the Bakreshvar river in central Birbhum, there is a local civilization which, though small in area, has its own uniqueness, even in the style of its temples and also in its terracotta work. There is also a difference in the use of verbal forms in the spoken language of that area. Similarly, in southern Birbhum also, there is a small river called the Kopái (Kupita or 'angry') in whose valleys there is also some sort of local civilization. As far as I remember, someone once said that the water of the Bakreshvar valley is one of the best, for it is full of sulphur. But the water of Kopái valley, though it is as good as that of many places in Bengal, is not as good as that of the Bakreshvar valley. The two small rivers, with their own distinctive streams of water, flow from west to east, carrying the rhythmic songs of the most ancient human civilization, in cadence with the dancing rhythms of the land of Rárh. When the two rivers meet at Melánpur (meaning 'meeting place') at one end of the area under the jurisdiction of the Nanur police station, they are known as Kuye, and at that point both their local civilizations become blended. Actually, Melánpur merges the two rivers in all respects. If one listens intently to the local dialect, one will hear a particular drawled intonation that is lacking in western Birbhum. Aside from this, other local variations also came into being.



The snaking path of the Thames through central London



Even with the construction of highways and railways, rivers continue to play a crucial role in inland transportation both for trade and passenger traffic (from the Rhine, Germany)

The specialities of the river valley civilizations are very distinct in our Birbhum. In the upper reaches of Birbhum, the spoken language has no drawled intonation: it is one of the flawless branches of the Rárh language. But in the lower reaches of Birbhum, the same Rárh dialect has a local drawl.

This subtle difference in intonation between the area of the Khayrásol police precinct and the Lábpur police precinct, and again between the Khayrásol police precinct and the Mayureshvar police precinct, be easily discerned simply by listening to it.

At Khayrásol in the upper reaches of Birbhum, there is widespread use of poppy seed [as food], whereas in the lower reaches, the use of poppy seed is less by five to seven per cent. That is to say, in the upper reaches there is an empire of poppies, and in the lower reaches there is merely a kingdom of poppies.

The other symbols of Rárh culture – like díríle [a type of pumpkin], kheó [another type of pumpkin], green gram and jhumur dance are equally popular in both the upper and lower reaches.

Gangetic civilization – Maethilii branch of pre-Gaodiiya part

Now travelling from the west to east across the border of the ancient Káshii state was the last area to come under Aryan influence. In the fourth phase of the Aryan invasion of India, Káshii can be regarded as a border state of northern India (Aryávarṭta). The River Sarayu not only carried the Aryan influence down its banks but also Mongol and to some extent Austric influence as well. That is why its eastern bank was considered as non-Aryan land. Later on, this boundary was further extended to the River Gaṇḍakii (Nárāyaṇii Gaṇḍak). The Kányakubja Brahmans of those days did not like to cross the River Sarayu. As the land on the other bank was non-Aryan it was considered unholy. They were afraid they would lose their Aryan purity. The Kányakubja Brahmans who dared to cross the river, being lured by the fertile land of the trans-Sarayu area, were declared outcastes. They lost their identity as Kányakubja Brahmans and became known as Sārayupáarii Brahmans.

During Pathan rule, the last boundary of Aryávarṭta was the present Ghazipur District. In those days, northern India consisted of three Subás [administrative divisions]: Subá Bángál on the east, Subá Punjab on the northwest and Subá Hindostan between the two. Even today, the people of Bengal and the Punjab call the inhabitants of the central part of northern India “Hindustani”. Some people are of the opinion that Hindustan means the whole of India, and thus why should the inhabitants of a small part of India be called Hindustani. But this is wrong, because the term “Hindustani” is used for the people who were once the inhabitants of Subá Hindostan, and not in the sense of Hindustan as being the whole of India. During the Mughal period, when Akbar divided his empire into fifteen subás, the name of the northern part of Subá Hindostan was Oudh and the southern part was Subá Agra. Ghazipur District was the last boundary of Subá Agra. To the east of Ghazipur District lies Balía District. Previously it was only a subdivision of Ghazipur District. Similarly, there was no Deoria District in those days. It was only a subdivision of Gorakhpur District.

The British occupied both Agra and Oudh Subás and created one administrative area from both – the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (UP for short), with its capital at Allahabad. In the last part of British rule, the capital was moved to Lucknow. In

any case, there was a marked influence of Mongol and Austric cultures on Aryan society inhabiting the Sarayu river valley. Later on many Aryans crossed the Sarayu River and declared the banks of the Gaṇḍakii as the boundary line of Aryávarṭta. The area lying to the west of the Gaṇḍakii valley was called Shákyáraṇya, and the area to the east was called Videha or Mithilá. The latter area was not considered an Aryan colony. I personally consider it as part of the area covered by the pre-Gaodiiya Gangetic valley civilization.

King Mithi occupied Videha. To sanctify the land he held a Trihotriiya Yajña [a large sacrifice presided over by three priests]. It was then declared sacred. The land sanctified by the performance of a Trihotriiya Yajña was named Trihut. The land of Shákyáraṇya, although not widely valued by Aryans, was respected by Buddhists. Lord Buddha visited it a couple of times. Later it became known as Sháraṇa (Shákyáraṇya > Shákyáraṇa > Sháraṇa). In later years it was wrongly spelt as Sháran.

To the north of Shákyáraṇya was the ancient and famous place called Champakáraṇya. Reference to it is made in the Rámāyaṇa [one of the two great Sanskrit epics] (Champakáraṇya > Campáraṇya > Camparaṇ). Shákyáraṇya and Champakáraṇya are situated in the Nárāyaṇii-Gaṇḍaka valley. On the eastern bank is Videha, Mithilá or Trihut, the land occupied by King Mithi. *Mithi* + *lá* [holder] + *ḍa* [suffix] + *á* [feminine suffix] = Mithilá. In the Buddhist period one of the famous villages of Shákyáraṇya was Hatthiigrám (Hastiigráma in Sanskrit). Buddha visited this place a couple of times. It is now known as Háthoyá. During British rule the Háthoyá estate was one of the largest estates in India. Then came the river Gaṇḍakii – Nárāyaṇii Gaṇḍaka. The biggest cattle fair in India, known as the Hariharksetra fair, is held once a year on the banks of this river. Nearby is the Shoṇpur railway station.

During the Mughal period and the early part of British rule, the Mithilá division of Bengal Presidency consisted of three districts: Trihut, Champaran and Sháraṇa. The district headquarters of Champaran was Motihari, that of Sháraṇa was Chapra, and that of Trihut was Muzaffarpur. The latter district was named after Muzaffar Shah. It covered a wide area and until the early part of the British period its fertile soils were thickly forested. The forests contained an abundance of numerous species of flora and fauna, notably tigers, antelopes, crocodiles, panthers and deer. The lake on the

ancient river course of the river Lakhandei covered a larger area in those days and was surrounded by extensive forests full of abundant flora and fauna. A major part of the forest was part of the estate of King Darbhanga. Some of it was in the Shúrasāṇḍa kingdom, and other parts belonged to the estate of the Bettiah king. People today, due to necessity but also out of immense greed, have destroyed most of the forest, particularly in Trihut District.

At Vaeshali¹ in Trihut District, Vardhamána Maháviira was born into a Vaeshya family. His father's name was Siddhártha and his mother was called Trishalá. Trihut District as well as Mithilá were located partly in the Náráyaṇii-Gaṇḍaka valley and partly in the Buṛigaṇḍaka and Lakhandei valleys. There was greater Gaodíya influence prevalent here than in Áryávarṭta. Bengali script is used there. It is to be noted that both Buddha and Maháviira were born in a place where there was comparatively less Aryan influence.

Trihut District was quite a large area. The British divided it into two parts: Muzaffarpur District in the west, with its headquarters at Muzaffarpur, and Darbhanga District in the east, with its headquarters at Laheriasarai village which has since become so large that it almost touches the city of Darbhanga. The old Muzaffarpur District is now divided into three districts: Sitamarhi, Muzaffarpur and Vaeshali (Hazipur). This is the same Muzaffarpur that once was considered one of the most cultured places in

the whole of Subá Bángál. The old Darbhanga District has since also been divided into three districts: Madhubanii (a place with an abundance of forest honey); Darbhanga, named after the famous Dáribhángá Shah (in Maethilii the town is called “Dairbhángá” but spelt Dáribhángá); and Samastipur, named after Samasti Náráyan Ray.

The Maethilii branch of the pre-Gaodíya valley civilization was enriched by the Mongol-Tantric civilization that flourished in the Náráyaṇii Ganges, Buri-Gaṇḍaka, Lakhandei, Bágmatii, Kamalábálán and Koshii valleys. King Prthvii Náráyan Shah established the Gorkha Empire in Nepal at this time. The Gorkhas occupied Tirhut District and advanced up to Hazipur. Thereafter they were defeated by the British and were forced to sign the Treaty of Sugaoli (Champaran District.) (The British commander-in-chief was General Octorloney in whose name the Englishmen living in Kolkata built a war memorial. In recent times, the [political] leaders, ignorant of history, have changed the name of the Octorloney Memorial to Shahiid Minar [Martyrs' Column].) According to the terms of the treaty, the British gained possession of Garhwal and Kumayun regions from Nepal, which was included in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and they also reclaimed a major portion of Champaran and Trihut Districts. Part of the northern portion of Trihut remained in Nepal and is still part of Nepalese territory. The former capital of Mithilá, Janakpur, is situated in that area. Many people of Bengal know the famous Janakpur catechu [*Areca catechu*]²

¹ “The oldest portion of the Vedas, that is, the Rgveda, was composed outside India. The remaining portions, that is, the Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, were partly Indian and partly non-Indian. Samaveda is not a separate Veda by itself but is the compilation of the lyrical and musical portions of the different Vedas. So only the Rgveda can be regarded as an ancient relic of the non-Indian Aryan civilization. The Yajurveda was composed in Iran, Afghanistan, northwest India and certain parts of what is modern Russia, so it cannot be called entirely non-Indian, particularly since the then Afghanistan (Gandhárá) and certain parts of Russia were regarded as part of India at that time.

The original Rgvedic civilization belonged, in spirit and language, to the non-Indian Aryans. But the Yajurveda was composed by a particular branch of the Vedic Aryans who, when the Aryans later began to spread out in search of food (especially wheat), migrated to India via Iran (Áryanya Vraja) and Afghanistan. When we say ‘Indo-Aryan civilization’, we basically mean the civilization of these people.”

–Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, “Tantra and Indo-Aryan Civilization”, A Few Problems Solved Part 1.

² About the Licchavi Republic, the author has written in “Requirements of an Ideal Constitution”, A Few Problems Solved, Part 8 “The first written constitution was framed by the Licchavi Dynasty of Vaeshali (in northern Bihar) in ancient India over 2500 years ago. Prior to that, the words of the king were law and kings ruled according to the advice of their ministers. The first republican democracy was established by the Licchaviis. The Licchavi Republic comprised some portion of Muzaffarpur, portions of Begusharai, Samastipur and Hajipur between the Gandaka and Kamala rivers, all in the present state of Bihar. It was the first democratic state and they had their own written constitution.”