

The Future of Democracy in Western Capitalist Society: An Overview with Special Reference to writings of Oswald Spengler.

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Abstract

This paper is a critical evaluation of theory of Social Change as propounded by Oswald Spengler viz a viz the future of Democracy in Western Capitalist Society. This research article is centred around the theoretical examination of the theory given by Oswald Spengler in the context of western civilizations. He is a theorists and Historian who drew similarities of rise and fall of civilizations to that of individuals -who are born, grow, mature and then die. His assumption on cyclical change, subsequently led him to believe on the theory that western civilizations will meet the similar fate after reaching maturity. This paper will examine the claims and arguments posed by Spengler and present and future of western capitalist society. The methodology used in this paper is analytical and secondary data based, with the theoretical understanding of the concept, as well as descriptive methodology used for the empirical studies made by other thinkers, Sociologists, Political and Economic thinker etc. This paper will analyse the present scenario and the existing political, economic conditions prevailing in the western societies.....

Keywords: Democracy Civilizations Maturity Cyclical Change.

INTRODUCTION

The Centre and the Periphery

Oswald Spengler was a German thinker and his key interest areas were Mathematics, Science, Philosophy and History. As a keen observant Historian, Spengler postulated a theory which suggests that societies will transform in a manner, such that they cease to exist. 'Everything- become is mortal. Not only peoples, languages, races and Cultures are transient. In a few centuries from now there will no more be a Western Culture, no more be German, English or French than there were Romans in the time of Justinian. Not that the sequence of human generations failed; it was the inner form of a people, which had put together a number of these generations as a single gesture, that was no longer there. The *Civis Romanus*, one of 168 the most powerful symbols of Classical being, had nevertheless, as a form, only a duration of some centuries. But the primitive phenomenon of the great Culture will itself have disappeared someday, and with it the drama of world-history; aye, and man himself, and beyond man the phenomenon of plant and animal existence on the earth's surface, the earth, the sun, the whole world of sun-systems. All art is mortal, not merely the individual artifacts but the arts themselves. One day the last portrait of Rembrandt and the last bar of Mozart will have ceased to be—though possibly a coloured canvas and a sheet of notes may remain—because the last eye and the last ear accessible to their message will have gone. Every thought, faith and science dies as soon as the spirits in whose worlds their "eternal truths" were true and necessary are extinguished.' (Spengler, 1918). This is the premise of this research article on which the whole analysis and observations are based.

Spengler in his book 'Decline of the West: Form and Actuality' states about transient people, ideas, culture and eventually transient civilizations. Spengler in his delineations has raised brows on the classification of Historical periods as Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern. He calls this scheme 'incredibly jejune' (Spengler, 1918). He prophesied that the future Cultures will question the validity of this scheme. He also questions this rectilinear progression of history as conceived by various writers and Historians. Here Spengler also brings the issue of Ethnocentrism, where he challenges the concept of considering western world as the centre, and the faraway cultures and histories all revolve around it. He further makes a point that in name of 'World History', prominence was given to European History and other Histories like that of Egypt, China, India etc were brought to periphery.

Spengler's Notion of Social Change

Taking the cue from the Philosophy of History and culture, he gave a proposition that it is necessary to study whole History of humankind. The reason he gave was that World History is just sequence of cultures appearing, growing and decaying. He draws morphological analogy between organism and culture, to which he calls superorganism. He further makes a point that it is prototype of culture which is behind the emergence of Historical phenomena. He considers of everything emanating from culture. According to him the unit of study of History are individual cultures. He describes the early cultures of Egypt, Babylon, China, India and later on are the cultures of Mexico, Arab, Apollonian and Faustian (Western/European). These eight cultures make up the entire human history. These cultures represent organisms with their life cycle of birth, growth, maturity, old age, and death. Events within each culture take precedence, while relations between different cultures are secondary (Mircov, V.). Each culture goes through same stages of development and all phenomena undergoes through strict deterministic law, hence prediction of stages of phenomena becomes possible. Spengler opines that each culture goes through similar defined cycle of change, therefore the process repeats in younger cultures. He mentions about 'pulsation cycle' which governs this cyclical change.

The Democracies of The World and Changing Economic Scenario

The world in which we live is full of opportunities, freedom on one hand and on the other hand there are danger, risk and crisis. The Western Democracies are experiencing the incessant war effect (between Iran, Israel and USA and on the other side Russia and Ukraine are engaged in fierce war). The effect of these wars, especially in West Asia has affected the world economic order. The geographical closeness has deeply affected not only Asian, African Countries but more intensely affected the European Countries. The peacekeeper of the world i.e. United Nation fall short of controlling this crisis. United States of America dictated the European countries like Britain, France, Italy to show solidarity to USA and give unconditional support. There has been military escalations in West Asia, particularly Iran. The crisis has unfolded many tiggering points, which consequently led to the closure of Strait of Hormuz, a geographical point strategically important for flow of oil to other nations from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE etc. The patterns which are emerging in western world are quite divergent. The observations made by analysts and experts of political economy suggests the increased peripheral movement of western world in matters of International Diplomacy. The big economies of Western world have diversified their energy dependence, not heavily relying on Iran and other Middle East Countries for oil imports. However, stand of European Union is varied on USA-Israel-Iran conflict. Many European Nations are facing inflation and Economic slowdown. Their stand on the crisis is not non-alignment, whereas keeping their sides concealed, so that any fallout with USA can be avoided.

The world behaves on the concept of profit and loss, and therefore political economic dimensions keep on changing. The transformation of alliances can be well witnessed in the form of strategic absence of Europe from West Asian Crisis. The diplomatic absence or silence are the resultant of the fear of losing capital, resources and human lives. The disruption of any kind may lead to another crisis and the crisis may engulf whole Europe. It is often reflected on the notion of capitalism and democracy of not going hand in hand or the relationship between the two is not that convenient as supposed to be. This argument suits to the conscience of those who are the ardent supporter of Communism. The Capitalist and the Communists ideologies have both been on loggerheads. In the purest form none are the champions of democracy, however the Capitalist s states brought affluence to the society and adopted welfare policies which championed the ideology of Democracy. Whereas the Communist regimes either failed to cater the democratic principles or were brutal to the aspirations of their citizens. In the present world scenario, there is certainly not a single western country which is purely Communist. The ideals may be socialist but most of the countries of developed world falling on the west side of the globe are capitalist. It was French Revolution which disseminated the value of democratic structures, institutions and egalitarian systems. The political systems adopted by many nations was largely dependent on the kind of existent economic system and the political regime. The west was by and large Capitalist, but the rule of law was largely based on democratic principles.

The world at risk

Idea of a peaceful world has always been a predominant thought in geo-political arena, but the reality has always been far from what has been conceptualized. The world in which we are living is experiencing an order which is promoting sense of uncertainties on global level. Bringing here Spengler's thought serves a purpose of understanding the society which perhaps seems to collapse, as society (especially western world) has matured enough to fall. Will this fall happen? Is world going to collapse or decline? The testimony of Spengler's argument rests on the notion of the dangers which human society is facing. The obvious threat is from the development which human societies made, particularly in the field of science, technology and machine equipments. These inventions and innovations were carried out majorly in the era of 18th and 19th century, with the advent of Industrial revolution. The revolutions in the name of development and progress disillusioned the world and as a result the whole of humanity is sitting on inevitable risks. The risk became manifold with the production of nuclear power and the forerunners in captivating this energy has been the western world, disseminating its use and technology to the developing nations. The threat became more obvious. Ulrich Beck, a German Sociologist has poignantly indicated on the notion of safety issues and calculated risks in which human society delves.

Beck (1980) argues about the society entering into 'reflexive stage.' This stage is about the awareness for control on nature and society. He further elaborates about this new stage, which denotes the emergence of 'global risk society'. Its worth mentioning about the sequence in which Spengler describes the decline after prosperity, but departing point made by Beck is about the readiness for unforeseen risks. The awareness about the risks and response to it may save the civilizations. Unlike what Spengler thought, Civilizations won't diminish, but the risk of life will increase immensely. The world will be in a cliff hanger, neither safe nor guarded, but in constant risk of losing, yet constantly engaged in rescue. Beck, in a spectacular manner defines the crisis. He opines "accidents cannot be compensated for, so insurance no longer works. Exclusion of precautionary aftercare: we cannot return conditions as they were before accidents. No limit on space and time: accidents are unpredictable, can be felt across national borders and impose their effects over long period of time" (Beck, 1980).

The Philosopher Carlo Galli argues in his writings "The West is the Rest" about the minority Political model outside the Euro Atlantic world now appears to be in decline, even within its own borders, giving way to 'neo-oligarchic societies' which are synonymous to, as Galli calls – 'Crisis ridden free market economies. 'These economies are not as democratic economies used to be but are post democratic economies with subordinate populism, divided society, neo authoritarianism and digitized societies. Here individuals are not the controller of events but are controlled. This outline of the world order is bit pessimistic, but the survival mode of the society is still working. One system of political economy replaces the other, but societies are resilient. Their existence is the testimony. Compared to Spengler's theory, the existence of society depends on the resilient forces active in the society, rather than the suppressions. Society may not decline, however reshapes according to new conditions. The new digital transnational economy, is becoming norm of a new society.

Is European Union Witnessing its End

Off late it has been observed that Europe is caught between USA and China, consequently failing to act as an autonomous power. Now stating this, does it mean that Europe or Western world is declining or losing its eminence? This is not mere rhetoric. The assumption is largely based on the factor, perhaps the war between Russia and Ukraine, gave a setback to Europe and European Union. The other side, i.e. Iran is in war with Israel and U.S.A. The countries on the other side of Constantinople are furious on this war, but have neither openly criticized U.S.A nor Iran. This conflict diffused to other part of West Asia. Failing Europe to stand tall and take strong decisions. Why all this political discussion? The discussion or argument, is to compare today's situation to the theory given by Spengler. 'The Decline of the West' book gives reasons of destruction or elimination of the Civilizations. The things may not seem to be in its absolute term as predicted by Spengler, but certainly the risk for human society is quite high. This as Beck pointed out, is mentioned:

The future of humanity is bleak, as risk assessment is bleak.

Environmental Crisis in form of climate change

Increase in global terrorism

Risk of acid rain

Misuse of atomic power

Deteriorating health conditions

Here Ulrich Beck utters 'Reduced to a formula, wealth is hierarchic, smog is democratic', this saying reflects about the seriousness the world is facing on the environmental conditions. Everything is decaying, but the botheration to save earth has not been the concern of major population of the globe. Further the initiative to address the new crisis, comes with plans and policies, these programmes are counter to the pessimism that the world will die or be regressive, as this is the time when societies show resilience. The governance may outline programmes and policies to save environment but ecology of system severely demand a concrete plan and time bound action. The modern democracy has to do with the benevolence. An empathizing government is fundamental for democracies to sustain and it cannot be limited to the boundaries of a nation. Going beyond the geographical limits, the democratic principles have to act in similar manner as a nation owes for itself within its geographical limits. It has been a relevant question regarding European Union – the future of liberal democracy! In the new world order, particularly which reshaped the west after IInd world war, this is not mere rhetorical, instead pertinent enough to find the answer. It is witnessed that the European society as well as American state are now engulfed with liberal democracy, which in reality has taken 'autocratic turn. 'It can be witnessed in the case of U.S.A.' Whether it is in the case of Iran, or Venezuela or deep state politics in other parts of the world. The attack on democracy or sovereignty of many nations is endangering the very notion of democratic principles and sovereignty itself.

Economist Emanuele Felice reflects upon the economic situation of United States of America and discusses about the "Bidenomics. The term suggests about the new reforms to be implemented in U.S.A. when Biden was the President. This concept highlights the issue of climate change, public debt, support for lower incomes etc. Felice argued about the incompetency and lack of courage of Biden government to implement the progressive tax reform. In a similar manner, under Trump administration, European countries as well as all international organizations are handicap to voice their opinions regarding the international crisis. This in turn makes China more vocal, a country which is Communist as political power and capitalist as economic power, devoid of democracy. The incompetency to uphold democratic values by western world gives precedence to emergence of an autocratic order, which governs rest of the world. The Europe is also inflicted with similar problems like that of "inequality, discrimination, and exploitation through new redistributive and inclusive social policies. Yet precisely therein lies the potential for a renewed democratic pact. Felice thus calls for "normalizing the exception" of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (PNRR), turning the expansive and redistributive momentum of Europe's pandemic response into a structural policy capable of addressing collective problems." (Giachetti,2025).

The New Governance in Transnational Economic Structure

The war scenarios and the rising conflicts in most part of the world has challenged the efficacy of gatekeepers of peace -United Nations and also European Union's increased vulnerability in resolving the issue of Russia-Ukraine war. These incompetencies periled energy resources and the economies of many flourishing oil producing nations, they experienced major setback. The rise in global terror, infringement of people's rights, race for nuclear weapon ,climate and environment crisis are the inefficiencies translated into reality. In this context the writings of Michel Foucault has relevance. He cites the notion of Governance authored by French Renaissance writer Guillaume de la Perriere in 1567.His definition of governance overlooks the concept of territory, instead talks about benevolent government engaged in correct disposition of things, organized to lead convenient end. The main concern of good governance has always been effective management of people's lives and material product of their efforts. Economic growth or growth of wealth has always been crucial in governance. It was also mentioned that good benevolent government always needs healthy population which would multiply what government wants. This combination is a security to long term prosperity.

Further the idea of Foucault focusses on idea liberal civil society, as conceived by John Locke and Adam Ferguson, true to intent, the governance in 18th century has largely been centred around is.The social government is the by product of this idea. Foucault idea of 'Liberal art of Government' is somewhat shield to stop possible

decay or decline of civilization. The liberal art of governance is based on the fundamental organizational principle of “the rationale of least governance.” The idea which advocates – ‘governance with least interference.’ Here the role of population (considering the role of each individual) of paramount importance. The population has to be living, working and social being. Here the postulate of new autonomous individual surfaced, leading to some new pertinent political questions, like rights and responsibilities of individual and state. Now here it is worth observing about how the autonomous individual and how the state handle their respective rights and responsibilities. As Michel Foucault raises some crucial points- How can individual be free, if governed by state? The link between the ‘autonomous individual’s self-control and political control become an important issue, as did the possibility of domination and economic exploitation.” (Foucault, M). Foucault maintains that discipline brings docility, but he himself contradicts the same when talks about governmentality, as it brings dominance. Now here Spengler thought becomes relevant, because the failure of any idea or ideology may lead to the cessation of cultures and civilizations. The whole of 21st century is in the quest of a governance system which benefits the humanity at large; however, systems fail to deliver the ideals when they are being governed by the hegemonic principles. The theocratic rule of Iran suppresses its citizens, whereas the Israel’s geo political insecurity due to development of technology of nuclear weapon by the neighbouring state raised concern, consequently starting a violent conflict. These conflicts are the result of too much of technological advancement. The domination of technology in the art of weaponry has opened new economic avenues in the sale and purchase of weapons, in order to strengthen the military. The democracy is being shielded by the military power. The absence of military power even in total egalitarian society may be short lived, as the wars are being fought in sky and controlling the sky within one’s sovereign state become the prime responsibility of the state and the government. All the nations are curiously engaged in protecting their populace, the hard time are ahead because the increasing risks to save the humanity from our own inventions and discoveries is the test of resilient societies. There will be one day when the elasticity is gone.

‘The Modern World is the last word of Conclusive Series’ - Oswald Spengler.

The above statement was given by Spengler in his analysis of fate of West. Spengler cites the holy war or crusade, and while analysing it, has said about the stretching of the act to that extent and limit of not being able to bear anymore. Spengler also coins a term ‘Third Kingdom’ in which each one forms his/her own theory and backs it. This is to an extent applicable to the theorists born till date. Spengler’s expresses in his book about Western Civilizations and tries to explain how each one tries to interpret the culture-“On the very threshold of the Western Culture we meet the great Joachim of Floris (c. 1145-1202), the first thinker of the Hegelian stamp who shattered the dualistic world-form of Augustine, and with his essentially Gothic intellect stated the new Christianity of his time in the form of a third term to the religions of the Old and the New Testaments, expressing them respectively as the Age of the Father, the Age of the Son and the Age of the Holy Ghost. His teaching moved the best of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, Dante, Thomas Aquinas, in their inmost souls and awakened a world outlook which slowly but surely took entire possession of the historical sense of our Culture. (Spengler, 1918).

In his writings, Spengler questions the paucity of solution west has given in order to resolve many underlying human associations, institutions and organizations. Here Spengler may seem to be post-modernist, nevertheless he sounds relevant in today’s context (we can criticize him of being too theoretical, but the fact is he has raised some pertinent questions, because in the earlier section of this paper various ancient, modern, post-modern thinkers, socialists, democrats have been analysed the post-industrial society is in the state of peril.) Giving his argument – “What the West has said and thought, hitherto, on the problems of space, time, motion, number, will, marriage, property, tragedy, science, has remained narrow and dubious, because men were always looking for the solution of the question. It was never seen that many questioners implies many answers, that any philosophical question is really a veiled desire to get an explicit affirmation of what is implicit in the question itself.”

Civilization is a part of Culture

Oswald Spengler opines-“Every Culture has its own Civilization.” From here he takes the cue of defining civilization and fall of west. The Decline of the West tackles the notion of ‘problem of Civilization.’ He raises

some valid points in his writings, where he states Classic Rhetoric – “What is the hallmark of politic of civilization today, in contrast to politic of culture yesterday?” For Western Journalism, as Spengler states -the power of Civilization is money. It is money spirit which penetrates unremarked historical form of people’s existence. This economics can be well understood through Roman empire, which underwent minimal reform, unlike Greeks, through the mode of governance with small group and line of deputies, rhetors, journalists who kept alive illusion of popular self-determination.

Spengler analysing the Ancient European Empires, moves forward on Imperialism. He call ‘Imperialism as Civilization Unadulterated.’ He highlights here the ancient classical civilizations of Egypt, China, India etc which met the fate long ago, now have dispirited masses and remains of great civilization which once existed, and this is a symbol to be taken as an end of something which was once so great. The Imperialism of the west is also such phenomena which decides the fate of the west. Here Spengler expresses – “In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set. The energy of culture-man is directed inwards, that of civilization-man outwards.” For Spengler the West will meet to its fate, there will be the end of Imperialism.

End of Conquest-End of Imperialism

The History of Europe’s Economic and Political Imperialism is approximately of 200 years. Most of the Asian, African Nations were in the grip of Imperialism for more than a century. The trade and economic exchange encouraged expansionist policies of Europe, particularly of Britain, (Spain, Portugal, France too had colonial policy). In decline of the West- Spengler calls Imperialism as doom. He also makes a point that subjugation or dominance is not a matter of choice, or the decision which masses take, it is forced. Here he also says ‘Life is the process of effecting possibilities, and for the brain man there are extensive possibilities.’ In his analysis of the western world, he cites of wars fought by Julius Ceaser and military triumph which he brought for Romans, soon dried off, hence nothing is permanent. The decay of the mightiest empire and civilization has been witnessed by History of humankind. To support his argument, Spengler brings in the illustration of Bismarck-who himself was the founder of New Age, started believing that he has reached to the conclusive stage of political process.

The fate of Imperialism has been witnessed by whole of humanity post world wars (though Oswald Spengler could not witness his prophecy). Imperialism also doomed, the ruled masses protested against the mighty rulers, the colonial legacy ended in most part of colonial world, however in the name of Commonwealth the colonies in the past are still keeping that legacy partially alive. As Spengler sparks debate by saying that the “half developed Socialism is fighting against expansion, one day it will become arch-expansionist with all the vehemence of destiny.” This argument of Spengler is true in the context of, China, North Korea etc. though they are the example of Communist regime, not of Western world. However, these illustrations are the facts which support another argument of Spengler where he uphold the idea of West which will not always move upwards or onwards, the trend is not limitless, the tendency to go upwards is extremely limited and has a duration. This is a calculated statement coming out of precedence, as Spengler believed. Including more facts to his argument, he states about the era of 19th and 20th century, as era heading towards the highest ascending point..... which is witnessed in every culture, has ripened up to its limit.

These arguments of Spengler form base to understand today’s political economic conditions prevailing in West. Though America still acts as the boss and fallaciously thinks of controlling the global world, is tracking the same path of ascendancy, (as what has been the insights of Spengler) perhaps entailing the end of polarised world. The success of America in controlling the international agencies, levying tariffs, controlling the purchase of oil, dictating other countries not to buy oil from Russia, compelling European Nations to show solidarity in war against Iran has posed transnational threat and revise of International trade policy. The isolation of the west by many Asian countries may be a jolt to the affluence which has been experienced by Europe since centuries.

An article of Carlo Galli (2025) ‘The West is the Rest. The Liberal Order Turns Provincial’ is an insightful coverage of Western world’s liberal order and the hegemonic American political Economic scenario. For him the liberal democracy is a Western affair not a global one. It is byproduct of later modern world shaped by the cultural, social, economic preconditions of the European society. In recent time all nations and societies are consciously aware about, who is exploiting whom. They can easily make out the difference between good governance and exploitation. Galli asserts that democracy has long been provincialized, therefore West is at Rest. The article also clarifies many points about today’s global scenario where the ideas are symmetrical to that of the Spengler’s view

of the west. He can be cited – “The ongoing dismantling of what was once called the liberal world order bears out this premise. That expression contained both a universalism—legal and economic, grounded in the ideology of human rights and the free market—and a particularism: the Anglo-Saxon, and above all American, dominance that this order sustained from the end of the Cold War onward (and, in financial and monetary terms, since 1945). Today, an international political pluralism is reasserting itself, with Russia and China—together with India, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—challenging American power and the United States’ long-standing hegemonic reach. Though the BRICS have yet to take on a fully defined geopolitical or geoeconomic form, they nonetheless threaten the old order in practice. Friction and slippage between old and new spheres of influence, renewed tensions along maritime routes and supply chains, and the ruthless competition for technological supremacy are shaping an international landscape in motion—unsettled, convulsed, in crisis, and, in some cases, at war.” (Galli, C.2025).

The shaping of new world order

It is worth mentioning about the decline of an era in which Europe and America were the key players, dictating how the world will behave, but new alliance in global world and strong regimes, with new social order are replacing the economics governed by the western world. The transnational boundaries have become blur; global economic prominence has to incorporate local economic prominence. The decline of the Economic order in the west is being witnessed. The fragility to stand against the challenges posed by their own alliances (particularly America) is quite evident. The West cannot overlook East. The world is fighting against many threats and paramount is the threat of terrorism. These external threats have seeped deeply into the democracies of Western world. From where the Spengler began, connotation of not dividing histories into parts/epochs and treating it as only History, applies same with world today. If Europe and America want to be secure, they cannot have fragmented security. To survive in uncertainties, it has to be resolved by considering whole world as global unit, rather than dividing on political and economic interests. There has been inequalities in all sphere like in wealth, geography, political order, knowledge and resources. The mitigation of the inequality with cooperation can only increase the chance of survival of the world in which we are living. History is the biggest mentor, through which we can shape our future endeavours. The imbalances in profits and rising inequalities are to be addressed by the nations. The issue of Climate change and environmental crisis is prominent. If Civilizations have to survive, and their decline to be managed then these issues are to be central in policy making at global level. In his book Spengler quotes the conversation between Napoleon and Goethe ‘What have we today to do with destiny? Policy is destiny.’...

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