

"Civilization" and "Development": some critical reflections on the understanding of terms – Case of India

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The starting point of this paper is that the two terms "civilization" ("Hochkultur") and "development" should be seen and treated as interdependent. As "participation" is considered as an integral part of "development" if not its key indicator, we have to ask: Who and how many of which social strata really participated in the "highly developed civilization" ("Hochkultur")? In this paper the qualitative as well as the quantitative participation of the different social strata is proven by two different "glorious periods" of Indian history, the Maurya Empire (321-185 B.C.) and during the reign of Akbar the Great (1556-1605 A.D.). On the whole we can summarize that only a (small) minority of the people did participate in the economic and social development during these "glorious periods of civilization". Consequently the often used term "civilization" resp. "advanced civilization" ("Hochkultur") should be thought over much more differentiatedly and thus used much more carefully – in history as well as in present.

I Civilized Countries in the Past – Backward Countries at Present? Statement of the Problem

It is a well-known fact, that, in ancient times, four regions in our earth had achieved a high stage of civilization ("Hochkultur") already several thousands of years ago namely – from west to east –: Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China. Regarding India V. Gordon Childe, archeologist and director of the Institute of Archeology of the University of London, wrote in his basic article "India" published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

India confronts Egypt and Babylonia by the 3rd millenium with a thoroughly individual and independent civilization of her own, technically the peer of the rest. And plainly it is deeply rooted in Indian soil. The Indus civilization represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment. And it has endured; it is already specifically Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture (Childe 1986: 24).

Later, the Mauryan Empire as well as the Gupta period and, thousand years later, the reign of Akbar the Great (1556-1605 A.D.) are simultaneously considered as "great periods", "golden ages of Indian history". It was during this time, that India not only began to regain its position among the nations of Asia and Europe but it actually became one of the richest and most powerful countries of the world.