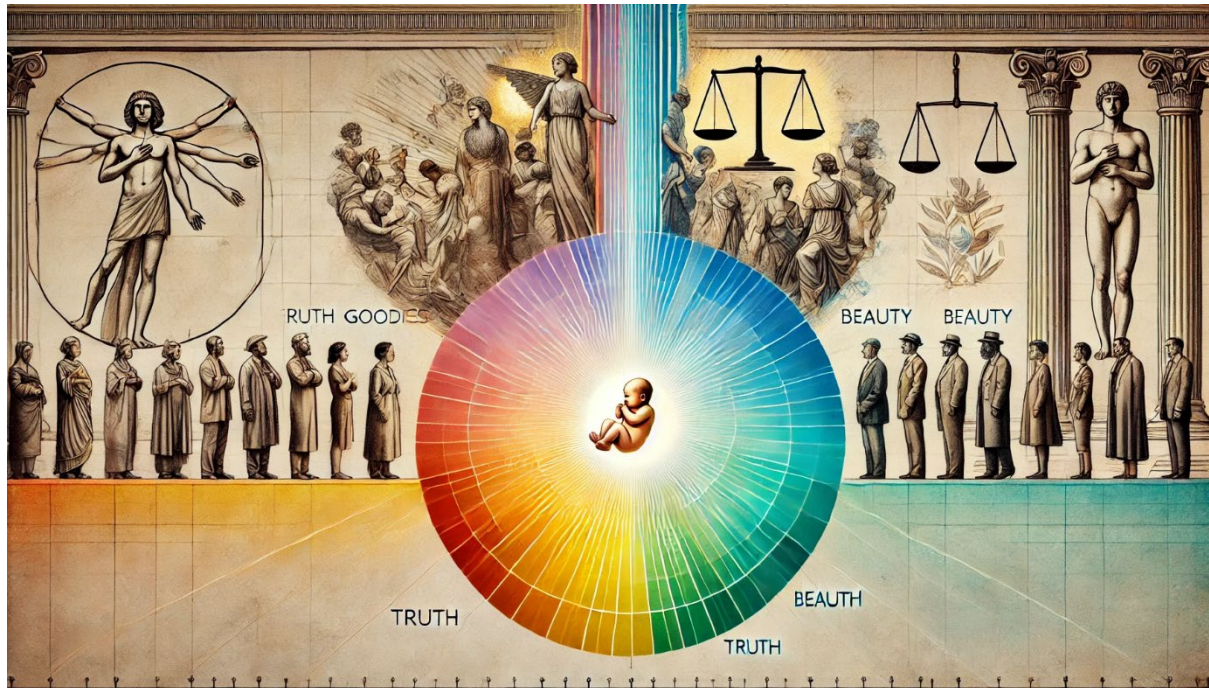


The Spectrum of Superiority: A Reflection on Goodness, Truth, and Beauty

By Dr Jesvir Kaur Mahil



From the moment we enter the world, we begin to measure and compare. We instinctively look up to those who are taller, stronger, or faster—those more capable of feeding us, protecting us, and helping us grow. We regard them with an upward gaze, associating them with safety, provision, and strength. Conversely, we notice those who are less capable—those unable to share resources, those who create risk or harm—and we perceive them with a downward gaze, consciously or unconsciously assigning them a lower position in our mental hierarchy. These repeated patterns of behaviour and relational dynamics establish heuristics that are deeply embedded in our social fabric. Over time, these heuristics form a spectrum of superiority that influences our beliefs, interactions, and aspirations.

Superiority is rarely confined to isolated variables like wealth, education, or appearance. Instead, it must be understood as a dynamic spectrum, where multiple factors intersect and evolve over time. For instance, when my family and I arrived in England as migrants from Panjab in the 1960s, we were initially viewed with a downward gaze. By the standards of the indigenous population, we were poor, uneducated, and socially out of sync—struggling to navigate an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic environment. At the time, these variables positioned us lower on the spectrum of superiority in the eyes of others.

However, the spectrum is not static. Over decades, the migrant community of the 1960s transformed. Through resilience, education, and economic progress, we became well-established, affluent, and highly educated. Members of our community became generous benefactors and contributors to British society, redefining our place on this spectrum. By demonstrating value and earning respect, we shifted perceptions and challenged the downward gaze that had once defined us. Today, we expect and often receive equanimity and mutual respect in our interactions.

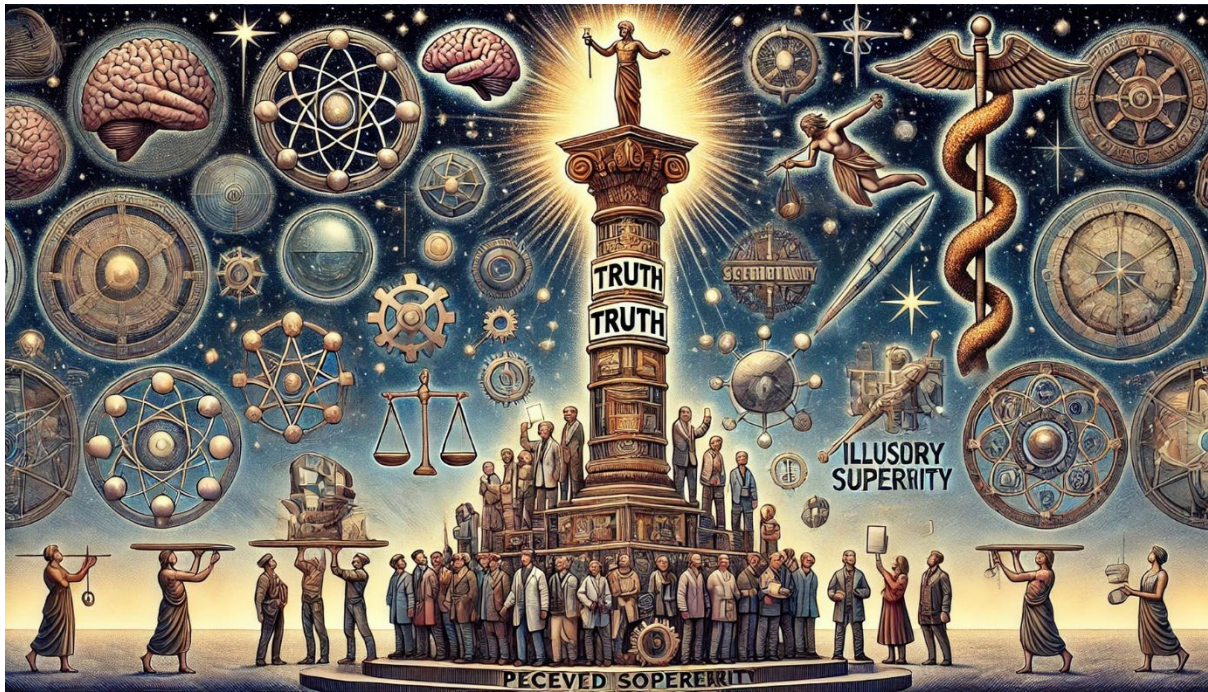
This evolution highlights the need to view superiority as a spectrum rather than a binary or fixed state. By doing so, we can recognize the fluidity of social hierarchies and the interplay of factors such as goodness, truth, beauty, and rootedness. Such a perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of human worth and encourages the dismantling of biases that arise from simplistic comparisons. Only by embracing the complexity of the spectrum can we foster a more inclusive and equitable society.



Goodness: The Moral High Ground

Ethics and morality serve as the foundation of perceived superiority. Those who are viewed as embodying goodness—adhering to principles of fairness, justice, and kindness—are often regarded as superior. The concept of moral superiority reflects a universal human tendency to judge oneself and others based on ethical standards.

Research reveals that individuals perceived as morally upright often enjoy heightened status within their communities. This perception is further reinforced by societal norms that elevate those who uphold laws and ethical principles. However, the pursuit of moral high ground can lead to hypocrisy and self-deception, as individuals project an idealized version of their ethical selves. This highlights the importance of evaluating goodness within the broader spectrum of superiority, rather than as an isolated trait.



Truth: Knowledge, Skills, and Experience

Truth is often associated with the pursuit of knowledge and expertise. Individuals with higher qualifications, advanced skills, or extensive experience are frequently perceived as superior because they contribute to understanding and solving complex problems. For instance, scientists, inventors, and scholars who uncover truths about the natural world or develop groundbreaking solutions are celebrated for their impact on society.

The phenomenon of "illusory superiority" highlights the cognitive bias where individuals overestimate their own knowledge or skills. This bias underscores the subjective nature of perceived superiority and the importance of self-awareness.

Branding and reputation of identities can lead to illusory superiority or illusory inferiority when we assume that stereotypes are accurate, acceptable and immutable representations of the unique characteristics of the individuals within a social identity. In reality, branding is contextual and changes its influence in relation to time, distance and space.

Truth, when considered within the spectrum, is not merely about expertise but also about the ability to apply knowledge collaboratively, holistically and ethically.



Beauty: The Visual Spectrum of Superiority

The concept of beauty, deeply rooted in cultural and evolutionary contexts, profoundly influences perceptions of superiority. The "beautiful-is-good" stereotype demonstrates how physical attractiveness is linked to positive traits such as intelligence, sociability, and moral integrity. Attractive individuals often receive preferential treatment, reflecting a bias that equates aesthetic appeal with intrinsic value.

This bias is evident across various domains, from hiring practices to interpersonal relationships. Beauty, as a societal ideal, creates a spectrum where individuals are positioned based on how closely they align with prevailing standards of attractiveness. When integrated into the broader spectrum of superiority, beauty becomes one of many variables that shape human interactions and societal hierarchies.



Integration: Wealth, Influence, and Roots

Wealth and influence further amplify perceptions of superiority. Financial success is often equated with competence and intelligence, while influential figures such as activists, politicians, and celebrities are revered for their ability to shape societal narratives. Similarly, those with deep roots in a community—established members with long histories—may be viewed as superior to newcomers, who must prove their value.

Each of these factors intersects with goodness, truth, and beauty. Wealth reflects perceived merit and achievement; influence stems from the ability to inspire and mobilize others; and rootedness connects to the truth of belonging and cultural heritage. Together, these elements form a tapestry of social hierarchies that define the spectrum of superiority.



Conclusion: Embracing the Spectrum

Superiority—whether racial, ethical, or potential—like goodness, truth, and beauty, resists binary definitions. It exists as a dynamic spectrum shaped by societal values, cultural norms, and individual perceptions. People often attempt to position themselves favourably within this spectrum, sometimes by projecting an enhanced image of beauty through expensive clothing, accessories, and material assets. Understanding this complexity enables us to challenge inherent biases and strive for a more inclusive and equitable view of human worth.

Rather than pursuing superiority in isolation through distinct variables such as qualifications, specific skills, or specialized experience, we should embrace the interconnectedness of goodness, truth, and beauty. This holistic perspective enriches our understanding of ourselves and others while fostering a society where diverse contributions are recognized and celebrated. By transcending the limitations of the spectrum, we can broaden our horizons—much like the sky that hosts the rainbow, offering possibilities far greater than its temporary colours.