Sustaining the Essence of Cultures

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Abstract

This article throws light on the significance of having an in-depth understanding of culture and norms rather than blindly following them as they have a huge impact on people's daily life and the pillars of sustainability. Cultures have the potential to act as both a catalyst and poison in progress. The paper discusses how the lack of mindfulness and ignorance toward the roots of each culture causes them to lose their meaning, converting them into shackles that bind down the wings of betterment. Hence, it's vital to preserve the right essence of various cultures, which calls for deep thinking and comprehension on an individual level and not just shallow campaigns and institutions that claim the importance of cultures and heritage.

Keywords

Formation/ Roots; Culture; Essence; Understanding; Situations; Effects; Choices; Well-being; Restructuring

A young stream originates as per the landscape. It flows in the convenience of the terrain, entertaining young lives as forgotten fables. As it grows deeper and vaster, it becomes a mighty river capable of creating and transforming landscapes and terrains far from its origin. So is the formation of Cultures, where thoughts, choices, and observations of individuals or groups of individuals grow and transform over time, moulding today's norms. The mighty river is capable of both nourishing and devouring the surroundings at the same time.

Over the past decade, the concept of sustainability has gained importance. With major institutions like UNESCO and other Universities emphasizing the importance of preserving one's culture and initiatives of governments all over the world to promote cultural heritage, it is essential to know the effects of culture on the everyday life of people, how it affects choices and why we need to preserve the essence of each culture. Culture is believed to be the fourth domain that supports and cyclically connects all three pillars of sustainability. They are the Economical, Environmental, and our field of interest, the Social (human) pillar. Every piece of information we encounter subconsciously carves our perspective; even details we forget are retained as patterns in our brains that become the rolling stone that ultimately dictates our course of decisions. One's brain can also unconsciously bend their perception of reality to match their expectations. Therefore, it is vital to recognize if the essence of a culture is being sustained or just the empty shell is being passed down to generations, keep in check our thoughts, and become mindful of their implementation.

Experiments on animals prove that if they are raised within the boundaries of glass walls, even after those walls are removed, they will not move out of the fixed boundary as their brains are conditioned not to cross that area. Humans too are conditioned over time by blindly following customs and norms not knowing why, without questioning the systems or thinking outside the box, and not even daring to violate them. Deeply rooted cultures and the expectations generated from them are capable of exerting high invisible pressure on an individual forcing them to make choices against their will so that they wouldn't be criticized by the community and deceive individuals to assume it was their original decision. Being mindful of cultures and values followed around oneself, contemplating their origins, and understanding their maturation is essential to make ethical decisions and accepting and respecting people for who they are, and for appreciating the past and its relation to the present. Shared Family meals and differences in expectations from both genders are two of the most commonly found part of various cultures and their origins are hypothesized in this article to shed light on how cultures can grow in both beneficial and detrimental directions.

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On traveling back in time to when humans sought shelter in caves, there was no method to preserve the hunted food. Hence, it was essential for all family members to gather around the meal and have their part to prevent starving or consuming rotten food. As time progressed, methods to preserve food materials were found, however, the norm of gathering around the meal while eating passed down from generation to generation continued as it had already become a part of the unquestioned custom, and due to the sense of oneness it provided. Studies have proven that in today's world where humans are expected to produce flawlessly like robots while being mentally drained and emotionally neglected, having family meals regularly reduces the chances of developing CMD (common mental disorders) and improves nutritional levels. Over the past decade, mealtime routines as daily traditions have changed significantly, with a progressive decline in the frequency of meals shared in a social model comprising three family meals a day, due to demanding schedules, cultural issues, geographic location, and options for fast foods. Family meals greatly impact the mental well-being of all members of the family irrespective of age. The study shows how regular family meals positively affect self-esteem, and school performance and reduces the risk of drug use, eating disorders, and depressive symptoms in children and adolescents. The presence of parents and the elderly at mealtimes facilitates language development, communication skills, and school involvement, thus reducing the risk behaviors and conduct disorders in children and increasing the sense of belonging to mainstream for the elders.

The rotation of the Earth around its axis was converted into the institution of time by humans to make it convenient for them to travel, meet loved ones, coordinate roles, and much more. Now, the same time separates family and friends and inconveniences the humans who formulated it. This lack of time is the major contributor to failing regular family meals and co-dependency, lack of communication, degrading community values, etc. People start considering family meals as a waste of time and inconvenience unaware of their benefits. On the contrary to this, the Greece culture holds it customary to have regular family meals (Greek Sunday tradition) to nurture the bond between family members and also promotes community gatherings and meals to increase the societal harmony and

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brotherhood. This culture has been followed and valued throughout generations in the nation.

Rewinding to the stone age, we can visualize the roots of the current-day dilemma, Gender inequality. In the age where hunting and gathering were sources of meals, it was essential for both men and women to hunt. However, in the presence of offspring, leaving them alone in caves makes them easy targets for predators. Women, the only ones who can feed the babies, chose to temporarily stay back for hunting and gathering within the cave's proximity as an act of affection, consideration, and partnership. To aid the process of traveling, running, jumping, etc while hunting, male clothing evolved to resemble today's pants, and to aid females in gathering, carrying infants, climbing trees, etc. they wrapped a larger piece of clothing around them. Babies learn through imitation, be it humans or other life forms. As offspring grew, over the centuries, they observed who stayed farther from home and who stayed closer. Being in an era with no outside knowledge, they believed what they saw to be the Right and re-enacted it without knowing why in a similar way to the famous story of the formation of 'The Cat Temple'. Hence, as time progressed and tribes started forming, it became customary for females to stay within the walls of the house and for males to lead outside. As civilizations grew and walls became sturdy, women no longer needed to stay home and protect the family. However, the culture for women to stay in the house submissively prevailed because its reason for origin was long lost amongst the ravages of time. From the early 14th to late 17th centuries, the number of women who excelled in their botanical and zoological knowledge increased allowing them to carry out treatments and cures. They were labeled as witches, tortured, fed to animals, and publically burned on stakes for allegedly causing disruption in societal harmony, spreading false insights, forming contracts with the devil, or trading their souls to the darkness, because the medicines and drugs they made shook religious institution's authority over treatments. This caused those who supported these studies to go into hiding, rampant witch hunts, false accusations, and homicides of hundreds of lives, 80% of which were women.

Similarly, when the importance of wealth and clothing gained momentum, people focused on adding more layers to the existing hunting and gathering costumes creating

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skirts and suits instead of designing clothing that met the needs of the present. Those caveman costumes traveled through time unharmed and persist in the 21st century as mandatory forms of dressing for each gender. This forces both genders into wearing inconvenient and uncomfortable clothes even in demanding workplaces and lays restrictions on individuality. Anyone who tries otherwise faces harsh backlashes, criticisms, insults, and abandonment that leaves them questioning themselves and crumbles their self-esteem and confidence. This has grown to the point where actors, idols, influencers, models, and icons enter rigorous contracts with organizations that controls even their clothing, speech, appearances, etc. ensuring that the skewed public sees only what they desire to see and the safety of the artists. What was once an innovative choice for convenience has now evolved into obligations that must be satisfied to survive in society.

We can infer that Cultures were formed based on the general thoughts, advice, situations, and opinions of people of a given demography and geography of a certain time or period of time which was taken as gospel by following generations instilling the want to protect the virtue of those words despite the visible change of conditions. Each individual's situation varies from another, hence, following cultures without knowing their valuable core in depth may create more problems than solutions. It also hinders one's self-awareness, understanding, growth, goals, empathy, ability to comprehend situations, and ethics which may also lead to hopelessness, impulsiveness, rebellions, grief, depression, unhealthy coping mechanisms, risky behaviors, etc. leading to aimless and sorrowful life. This enlightens us about the need to restructure cultures while sustaining their essence (non-visible aspects of culture) to hold their roles as a resource for the betterment of human lifestyles instead of being transformed into neurotoxins or meaningless shackles that bring down human capabilities.

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