

Culture and Our Culture: A Theoretical Justification

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People are cultured, by default. Though the concept of culture is not new, its differences in philosophy and exhibition have raised a great urgency of further discussion and justification. We frequently address some functions as "cultural programs" or sometimes we comment on other people such as "these persons are cultured or those persons are not cultured" etc. Before treating something as culture, isn't it necessary to understand the meanings, scope, elements and features of culture? Again, the concept of culture may be universal, but its philosophy and exhibition may vary from nations to nations and it may be customized and influenced by the faith, belief, values, region, civilization, nationalism, heritages, history, life-expectations or life-objectives of the particular nations. Again, when we use the term "our culture", then the word "our" further raises a question about "who we are or what our identity is", as everything cannot belong to us. This article addresses a brief description of culture and "our culture". If the word "our" refers to "Muslims", then this article particularly focuses on Muslim culture. In this connection it may be helpful to mention that, nationalism and citizenship differ slightly. In my view, nationalism doesn't mean the similarity in "birth place"; instead it should mean the similarity in "traits" or "manners" or "behaviors" or "ideology".

The term *culture* has been derived from the Latin word *cultura* that means cultivation. Cultivation has a plethora of meanings. The usual meaning of cultivation is the preparation and use of land, soil, etc for growing crops. But, its inherent meaning is to make the mind, manners, tastes, feelings etc more educated and sensitive. In Bangla, it is termed as *songeskriti* which means something that executes *songesker* (reform).

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Kristi which has also been derived from *korsion* (to cultivate or to excel). In Japanese, culture is termed as *bunka*, where the first portion *bun* is a kanji (Chinese character) that indicates letter, sentence, education, literature etc. In English, culture possesses manifold meanings. The most prominent meanings of culture that pertain to this article are 'intellectual expressions of a particular society', 'understanding or appreciation of anything', 'art, literature, customs', 'development through regular training, exercise', etc. The word *culture* may also express more or less similar meanings in other major languages such as Arabic, French, German etc. In agriculture & biology, culture may mean 'improving species' such as culture of bees, culture of cholera germs etc.

Culture (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate,") generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. Different definitions of "culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating human activity. In general, the term *culture* denotes the whole product of an individual, group or society of intelligent beings. It includes technology, art, science, as well as moral systems and the characteristic behaviors and habits of the selected intelligent entities. In particular,

it has specific more detailed meanings in different domains of human activities.

Anthropologists most commonly use the term "culture" to refer to the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically. This capacity has long been taken as a defining feature of the humans. However, primatologists have identified aspects of culture among human's closest relatives in the animal kingdom. *It can also be said that culture is the way people live in accordance with belief, language, history, or the way they dress.*

Four elements are common to all cultures. The elements are- technology, institutions, language and arts. In another word, a common way of understanding culture is to see it as consisting of four elements that are "passed on from generation to generation by learning alone": values; norms; institutions; artifacts. Values comprise ideas about what in life seems important. They guide the rest of the culture. Norms consist of expectations of how people will behave in various situations. Each culture has methods, called *sanctions*, of enforcing its norms. Sanctions vary with the importance of the norm; norms that a society enforces formally have the status of laws. Institutions are the structures of a society within which values and norms are transmitted. Artifacts—things, or aspects of material culture—derive from a culture's values and norms. Language carries connotative meanings as well as denotative meanings.

From the aforementioned definitions of culture, it may be unanimously concluded that, culture means something that exhibits, improves, reforms or upholds the mind (mentality), personality, manners, tastes, feelings, life-style etc of a person or a group of persons in its true senses and it never means or indicates anything that lowers or deteriorates the mind, manners, tastes, feelings, life-style, personality etc of a person or a group of persons instead of improving, reforming or upholding the same. Any attitude, activity or exhibition that creates irresponsibility, madness, uncontrolled behavior, immorality, indiscipline etc, cannot be termed as culture or cultural activity. In broad sense, the term '*culture*' refers to the entire way of life for a group of people. It encompasses every aspect of living. It may be considered as the synopsis and exhibition of the life style of a person, a group of people or a nation. Hence, any attitude or activity or program cannot be considered as the culture or cultural program for a group of people or a nation if the attitude or activity or program does not match with the entire way of life,

life style, life objective, values, morality, history, sentiment, feelings, faith, belief, manners, norms, artifacts and tastes of this particular group of people. The concept of intercultural understanding or cultural exchange means an understanding, experience, exchange etc of different cultures among different societies and communities. Exchange means "to give" and "to receive". Only receiving, but not giving cannot be a balanced exchange. Again, the quality of what we are receiving should also be checked. Cultural exchange never means forgetting one's own culture and adopting culture -partially or fully- from his/her counterparts without any justification.

The Islamic culture refers to the entire way of life for Muslim people and it is obvious to say that the way of life of the Muslim people should be guided by the Islamic ethics and codes. So, the Islamic culture may be defined as the extract and the aesthetic exhibition of the entire way of life for Muslim people guided by the Islamic ethics and codes and the Islamic cultural programs refer to the programs those exhibit the aesthetic properties, beauties and values of the entire Islamic life style in a comprehensive, meaningful, convincing and delightful way. Any attitude or activity or program cannot be considered as the Islamic culture or cultural program for Muslim people if the attitude or activity or program does not match with Islamic ethics, codes, norms, values etc. In fact, every activity within Islamic ethics and codes, automatically represents a part of Islamic culture. A person or a group of persons following Islamic life-styles are the vivid exhibition of Islamic culture. Culture is not separated from usual life, in fact, life style is itself culture.

Culture and recreation are very much interrelated. Now-a-days, cultural programs are adopted as the means of recreation and refreshment. Sometimes, picnic, parties, tours, gatherings, songs, drama, movies etc are arranged to spice and refresh mind and

mentality. These may be accepted, but these are artificial. Islam primarily asks the Muslims to take recreation from their own life style, prayers, dealings, festivals, families, nature, society and interpersonal effectiveness, which come naturally. Here, a pious-life is itself a perpetual source of recreation. Artificial cultural programs are also accepted, but these are secondary and the programs must be guided by Islamic ethics and codes. In fact, an artificial cultural and recreational program like drama, movie, picnic etc cannot make a person fresh and mentally happy in true sense if the person cannot be happy with his/her own life, career, family, society, friends and interpersonal dealings and relationships within the society. It is very much possible to build artificial cultural and recreational programs following Islamic codes and ethics. A few Islamic cultural organizations have already set examples in this regard. These are very much effective to spice and refresh mind and mentality. But, the Muslims still need to do two things-firstly, the Muslims should try to be happy with their own culture and secondly, more investment and research are required for Islamic cultural and recreational programs so that all Muslims can easily come in contact with these programs. Extensive research on human psychology and perception is required so that the Islamic cultural and recreational programs can fit human mind. Not only the Islamic organizations are responsible for flourishing Islamic culture, but also the contemporary cultural programs and films development organizations should come forward to change their activities in accordance with Islamic codes and ethics. In fact, the change is gradual. Many Muslims try to learn culture from the non-Muslims like the West, India etc. In fact, Allah has sent Muslims not to learn from the non-Muslims, but to call them to Islam in pragmatic ways and to teach them from the holy Quran by setting better examples. The Muslims could establish a different trend of culture which could be more effective, pleasant, delightful, fair and

psychologically well-suited than its Western and Indian counterparts if they could understand their own theme. Islamic culture is not being flourished very satisfactorily as the Muslims in general, due to their lack of understanding about Islam, are patronizing non-Islamic cultures instead of investing mind, mentality, money and energy for Islamic culture. Some people very foolishly argue that, do you ask the women to dance wearing a *hijab* in the name of Islamic cultural program? In reply, I just ask them, why do you think dance as a compulsory ingredient of culture? Cannot we design cultural programs excluding dance? Muslims are different (where necessary) but, still significant. Again, being a different does not necessarily mean to cancel relationships with others. It is still possible to maintain relationships with others while being a different in opinions. Regarding the culture, the Muslims should respect all other people of different cultures but should follow only their own culture. Self-dependence is mandatory to be self-motivated and self-motivation is a must to protect self identity. It is the challenge for the Muslims to make this difference meaningful, effective and significant. But, most of the Muslims did not take this challenge. No challenge, no game; no game, no win; and no win, no award.

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