

Understanding Cultural Confusion in the Age of Globalization


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In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, cultural disorientation has surfaced as a significant phenomenon, particularly within societies undergoing substantial transformations in cultural norms, values, and practices. Cultural disorientation denotes the psychological and social turmoil individuals endure when confronted with disparate cultural influences. This article investigates the origins, expressions, and repercussions of cultural disorientation, drawing upon frameworks of cultural identity, migration, globalization, and generational discord. Moreover, it offers methodologies for individuals and communities to adeptly navigate these intricacies, promoting a more inclusive and adaptive paradigm for cultural engagement.

Keywords: culture, displacement, globalisation, colonialism, advaita vedanta, migration, cultural hybridity, cross cultural exchange

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1. Introduction

Cultural disorientation emerges when individuals or groups encounter challenges in reconciling varying cultural norms and values, frequently due to exposure to an unfamiliar culture or the ramifications of modernity. It is particularly prevalent when traditional cultural identities are put to the test by contemporary influences, whether originating internally within a society or through global interconnectedness. In numerous instances, cultural disorientation results from the clash between indigenous practices and the proliferation of global cultural paradigms, especially Western notions of individualism, consumerism, and technological progress.

It denotes an absence of systematic arrangement or coherent linkage in the perceptions and reactions related to value phenomena. Such phenomena delineate the unique domain or subject matter of philosophical investigation. Cultural disorientation may be equated with the inability of the rational intellect to construct a philosophical framework that would elucidate its trajectory toward effective engagement and action in relation to varied values. A state of cultural disorientation is prevalent when the mechanisms of appreciation and valuation, as well as those of disdain, neglect, and indifference, fail to manifest cohesively due to ambiguity, ambivalence, or skepticism regarding what is genuine and significant within the cognitive framework of the agents involved.

The following are the key Causes of Cultural Confusion:

1. Globalization and Interconnectedness:

Globalization serves as one of the foremost catalysts for cultural dissonance. The extensive availability of information facilitated by the internet, social media platforms, and global travel has enabled individuals to engage directly with diverse cultural paradigms. Although this phenomenon has fostered cross-cultural comprehension and collaboration, it has simultaneously precipitated a confrontation between differing cultural values and practices. Predominantly, Western cultural frameworks, encompassing consumerism, individualism, and the prioritization of economic advancement, frequently overshadow global dialogues, engendering discord with more traditional, collectivist societies.

Consequently, this resultant tension may incite individuals to reevaluate their cultural legacy and sense of identity.

2. Migration and Displacement:

Migration, irrespective of whether it is voluntary or coerced, frequently engenders cultural disarray for both individuals and communities. Immigrants and refugees are compelled to navigate unfamiliar cultural landscapes that may starkly contrast with those of their origin. For example, the progeny of immigrants may grapple with profound identity dilemmas, caught between the cultural values espoused by their parents and the prevailing influences of their peers within the host nation. This intergenerational schism often culminates in misinterpretations and friction among immigrant cohorts, as the younger generation increasingly assimilates the values of the host society while the elder generation remains steadfast in their adherence to traditional beliefs.

3. Technological Advancements:

The emergence of technological innovations, particularly the internet and social media, has subjected individuals to an expansive spectrum of cultural concepts, lifestyles, and values. While this exposure possesses the capacity to enhance cultural encounters, it concurrently complicates individuals' comprehension of their own cultural identities. For instance, youth in non-Western nations may encounter significant pressure to align with Western ideals regarding beauty, success, and lifestyle, perpetually influenced by these standards via digital mediums. The incessant influx of diverse cultural stimuli can engender uncertainty regarding what constitutes authenticity and worth within one's own cultural framework.

4. Colonialism and Post-Colonial Tensions:

The enduring ramifications of colonialism continue to impact numerous societies globally, engendering a cultural disjunction between indigenous customs and the imposed values of colonial regimes. Following the attainment of independence, many post-colonial states grapple with the imperative of reconciling their traditional cultural practices with the contemporary, Westernized institutions they have inherited. This conflict frequently results in a profound sense of cultural ambiguity, as individuals and communities endeavor to preserve their cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to the exigencies of a globalized, capitalist milieu.

In addition to these factors, cultural confusion may also emerge due to language barriers, disparities in social norms and values, ethnocentric attitudes, and gender role expectations.

The phenomenon of cultural dissonance represents a global occurrence. Since the advent of scientific inquiry and the dissemination of concepts and theories that challenge ecclesiastical doctrines, the Western intellect has experienced a continual state of turmoil and disquiet regarding the fundamental trajectory and preoccupations of existence; it has, metaphorically speaking, existed with a bifurcated persona since the advocacy of heliocentric astronomy by Copernicus and Galileo. The most recent manifestations of the cultural discord prevalent within the European psyche are illustrated by the resurgence of the Christian perspective as seen in neo-Thomism and various existential philosophies on one side, juxtaposed with the rise of humanistic ideologies on the opposite side. Over the past several centuries, Western nations have also generated a plethora of ideologies concerning the structuring of society and governance. These ideologies have, on one hand, incited numerous movements and insurrections aimed at the reorganization and transformation of social and political institutions, while on the other, they have conditioned Western individuals to adhere to the rule of law and to uphold relatively sophisticated standards of socio-economic and political conduct.

In India, the trajectory of cultural evolution over the past one hundred and fifty years has been markedly distinct; the nascent cultural disarray and unrest observed is also significantly different in crucial respects from the cultural crisis currently being faced in the West. A heightened level of confusion appears to pervade our socio-economic and political behavior, which unfavorably contrasts with the systematic operation of Western societies, particularly those characterized by democratic governance.

The Renaissance that was witnessed in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries represented a movement towards secularism and humanism; these tendencies within the Western cultural consciousness were further reinforced by the escalating influence of scientific and technological advancements.

In India, a form of renaissance commenced in the 19th century, manifesting as a revival of interest in ancient philosophical traditions or religious philosophies, such as Advaita Vedanta. This renaissance, or revival of engagement with ancient religious culture, provided a renewed impetus for growth and advancement among the Indian populace. The religious resurgence of the 19th century also encompassed a re-interpretation of ancient ideals, as exemplified by leaders such as Rammohan Roy, Tilak, Vivekananda, and Dayananda, who articulated traditional philosophies in a manner designed to galvanize the Indian people towards greater endeavors for the enhancement of their national standing.

The Advaita Vedantic philosophy in particular, that was emphasized and preached by Vivekananda and Tilak did not seem to be opposed to western science. Consequently, the Indian intelligentsia did not suffer any crisis in the field of religious values comparable to that experienced by Christian intelligentsia in Europe and America. This was the secret of the popularity and appeal that Vivekananda achieved at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.

But surprisingly, most of the Indians still believe that a prosperous India can be built up only through development of science and technology and not through adherence to the traditional philosophies.

In recent past, India has successfully borrowed from the west the external forms of their socio-political and economic institutions in addition to science and technology but it has not been successful in developing the reflective and emotional attitudes and habits that lend meaning and strength to those institutional forms. The new goals and norms of behavior subconsciously entertained by the new generation remain rationally unexplained. This means that the new values emerging in the national consciousness are not finding any support and justification in terms of a rational philosophy.

The life and consciousness of the Indian people have suffered a radical change during last few decades. These changes are not properly comprehended by the conceptual pre-suppositions and postulates of the philosophies of life created in ancient and mediaeval India.

Even the reconstructed versions of those philosophies fashioned by Tilak, Tagore and Gandhi are unable to do justice to the needs and aspirations of the new generations of India. A modern man can yet enjoy the writings of Kalidas, Bhanabhatta, Dante and Shakespeare, even he can appreciate the moral insights of a Manu and the ideal of Stithaprajna of Gita. But the modern student of literature may not be able to accept the postulates where by ancient critics and moralities sought to justify their presuppositions of values in their respective fields.

Cultural confusion can be overcome in India. M.K. Debraja in his 'Philosophy, Religion and Culture' says that we can overcome cultural confusion by the creation of new powerful philosophies of life which, while preserving the best moral and religious insights of the ancients, would not hesitate in making radical departures from traditional metaphysical schemes. Unless and until that is done, the Indian national mind would continue to live in a philosophical vacuum as it were, or to suffer from a split personality, being important to bridge the gulf between the demands of traditional philosophies on the one hand and those of modern sensibility and the modern aspirations on the other.

While cultural disorientation can evoke distress, it is not inherently detrimental. It also possesses the potential to serve as a catalyst for personal development, innovation, and intercultural comprehension. The following delineates several strategies to effectively navigate cultural disorientation:

Embrace Cultural Hybridity: A plausible approach to addressing cultural disorientation involves the acceptance of hybridity — the amalgamation of elements from diverse cultures to forge a novel, hybrid identity. Numerous individuals naturally engage in this process, drawing from the nuances of both their ancestral culture and contemporary, globalized influences. The acceptance of hybridity facilitates the emergence of a more adaptable and dynamic self-concept, unimpeded by rigid cultural classifications.

Critical Reflection and Self-Awareness: Individuals grappling with cultural disorientation may derive significant benefits from introspection and analytical thought. By enhancing their awareness of the values and influences that inform their identity, they can more adeptly navigate the intricacies of cultural discord.

Comprehending the historical, social, and political contexts that underpin cultural practices can further cultivate empathy and tolerance towards disparate cultural viewpoints.

Dialogue and Cross-Cultural Exchange: One of the most efficacious methods for transcending cultural disorientation lies in engaging in dialogue and exchange with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Open and respectful discussions concerning culture, identity, and values can dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions, enabling individuals to appreciate the richness inherent in diverse traditions and perspectives.

Cultural Preservation and Adaptation: For communities, the preservation of culture is paramount in sustaining a sense of continuity and pride. Nonetheless, this does not necessitate a complete rejection of modernity. Cultures possess the capacity to adapt to the evolving world while safeguarding essential elements of their heritage. Achieving a balance between preservation and adaptation is crucial for addressing cultural disorientation on a broader scale.

Cultural disorientation constitutes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, propelled by globalization, migration, technological progress, and the enduring impacts of colonialism. It manifests in personal identity crises, intergenerational conflicts, and social fragmentation. Although traversing this disorientation may present challenges, it concurrently offers avenues for growth, innovation, and intercultural comprehension. By embracing hybridity, participating in dialogue, and nurturing self-awareness, individuals and societies can enhance their adaptability to the dynamic cultural milieu of the 21st century. Grasping the tensions between tradition and modernity, and discovering methodologies to amalgamate the finest aspects of both realms, may assist in alleviating the disorientation and contribute to a more harmonious, interconnected global community.

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