**Variety is spice of life**

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*“The essence of the beautiful is unity in variety”- Felix Mendelssohn*

If the whole world were to follow the same lifestyle—same language, same clothes, same food, same mannerism, same outlook, same culture—how morbid and mundane it would all appear! Nothing to get impressed with, nothing to make fun of, nothing to bring a smile or perhaps a frown and nothing surprising—everything uniform. No controversies, no differences, no deviations, no disputes, no arguments, a routine that is regularly observed like a clockwork mouse, day in and day out. Even the very thought is terrifying. So to add a delightful tinge to life it is important that there should be diversity, which mercifully is available in abundance in the world. This helps to break the monotony that would have been our fate if we had opened our eyes amid global monoculture.

Just to be on the safe side of argument and better clarity, cultural diversity has a wide spectrum which spans over sophisticated better evolved societies to crude and rudimentary, sometimes nomadic, ones that can be mostly found in the under-developed and poor countries. Other than this, cultures are also based on ethnicity, religious and regional differences which in turn cause remarkable variations in language, food, clothing and social norms making this beautiful planet more colourful and bright. With scientific progress and immense strides in communication, these aspects of civilization are no longer locally confined but have spread all around the earth evincing themselves amid alien surroundings, assimilating with native traditions, absorbing and getting absorbed, adding new fragrance to the bouquet of man-made cultural traditions.

Nonetheless, many groups have retained their well-loved and closely-guarded conventions no matter which country they may have chosen as their permanent abode and regardless of the type of lifestyle of their adopted land. One needs to be sympathetic towards such people as they could have been forced by reasons beyond their control, to migrate to foreign countries. Basically, human beings are rooted to the soil where they are born and raised. If given a choice hardly anyone would like to leave the land of his/her birth because this would mean leaving behind one’s relatives, friends, established values, congenial environment and comfort of home unless one has no better option. Obviously, the purpose of adventure seekers and travellers is different and one cannot be apathetic to those who are desirous of improving their financial standing or who are looking for greener pastures. Exercising their free will, they choose to migrate to distant lands.

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There is a famous saying by Saint Augustine, “When in Rome do as the Romans do”, which was originally meant for the observance of fast in Rome on a day different from that of Milan but today it is mostly used to convince travellers to adorn the get-up of the country they are visiting to merge with the crowd so as not to feel embarrassed at being eyed quizzically. Since these visitors are there for a short time, they are mostly inclined to make the best of the available resources getting a taste of the local culture. They are not there to either influence or be influenced unless if that is their purpose of travel, like today’s Muslim Tableeghis or yesterday’s Jesuits. Generally, one intends to temporarily enjoy alien traditions and perhaps learn a thing or two while at the same time, introduce oneself in a way that would induce curiosity among the hosts motivating them to reciprocate by being guests in one’s country.

Contrary to these transient trips, permanent migration is more serious in nature as it encompasses multiple elements of one’s life. There are many compromises one has to make with respect to one’s likes and dislikes, habits, mind-set, education, social and religious outlook that may either facilitate or hinder the process of complete or partial integration into the system of the adopted country of which the socio-political and economic characteristics are also vital factors. As the river loses its identity once it enters the vastness of an ocean, it may be desired that the same hold true for human beings. If they want to live in peace, they are expected to submerge themselves in whatever belongs to the host country, letting go their own values and traditions. This could be possible if a country boasts of uniform cultural values in its entire domain but the manner in which the world today has evolved there exists an overwhelming heterogeneity noticeable in almost every human settlement especially in the United Kingdom (UK), United Arab Emirates, Australia, Canada and the United States of America.

Other than UK, the remaining territories have a much recent history of modern human civilization having been discovered just a few centuries back, therefore to say that they have a homogenous society would be incorrect from many angles being populated by people of every possible ethnic origin. Having said this, one cannot help appreciating the remarkable progress on all fronts in these regions. From political to creating an enviable justice system, there can be no doubts about efficiency of governance and rule of law because of which these countries have progressed at a lightning speed. Hats off to the early administrators whose determination to establish manageable countries despite tremendous diversity, met with success. Now, one can experience a melting pot of cultural pluralism that is their hallmark. Amazingly, the communities that are at daggers drawn in their home states live here in perfect harmony which by itself is a great plus point for these countries.

A statement from a recently published op-ed ‘Immigrants’ integration into the mainstream America’ says: “A large majority (70% to 90%) of naturalized citizens originally from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Arab and Islamic countries seems to be culturally, mentally, and/or emotionally attached to their country of origin. They often socialize only with those people who are from their own country of origin while they misconstrue and denigrate the culture or society of the adopted country in a hostile manner, especially if the adopted country is a Western country (just like, they often used to say anti-West things in their country of origin).”

The learned writer does not appear to have any reservations about the socio-cultural traditions of the migrants as in a free society, people are entitled to practice whatever they like as long as there is no interference with law and order but he is lamenting about the attitude of the migrants with respect to their narrowed and critical outlook towards their host country. Integration does not mean parting ways with one’s roots but remaining loyal to the oath of allegiance taken for the purpose of naturalization. There is nothing wrong in creating a home-like atmosphere in a foreign land but it is definitely improper to gnaw at the roots of the tree under which one has taken shelter. The beauty of integration is not in transforming oneself into another person or espousing another culture or discarding one’s cherished values but it is actually retaining one’s individuality without disturbing the essence of harmonious co-existence.

In the writer’s own words: “If any socially and culturally integrated (Americanized) Pakistani-American who misses Pakistani culture can visit a Pakistani family in America for a weekend, instead of traveling to Pakistan,” it would save him/her time and money.

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