

Some Reflections on Traditions

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A tradition is a social custom that is passed on from generation to generation. They originate from historical myths, legends, events, or beliefs that are mostly unverifiable. People follow traditions with liking and festivity or sometimes even with disliking due to social pressure.

One culture's tradition may be hilarious or weird to other cultures. For example, the annual La Tomatina Festival in Spain. It takes place on the last Wednesday of the month of August in a small village near Valencia. The festival begins at midnight and ends at 1 pm. It's a fun fight with red tomatoes. People gather in thousands and engage in throwing tomatoes at each other. About 120 tons of ripe tomatoes are thrown at the festival.

Another strange tradition described by Stephen Rabley in his book 'Customs and Traditions in Britain' is Hogmanay which is still common in Scotland. It's the Scottish New Year's Eve celebration. After midnight people visit their friends with a weird present – pieces of coal. This is because the year's first visitor must bring coal to the house for good luck. Of course, the present can also be used to make a fire in the cold Scottish winter.

Such interesting and inexplicable traditions are not rare. They can be found in almost every culture in the world.

Traditions can be cruel and unethical like human sacrifice and cannibalism. Such traditions do not exist anymore. They have vanished as the societies that practised them became civilized in course of time.

Governments often step in to stop traditions that are unfair or unethical. In the cultures of our subcontinent, dowry is a common custom. It's a payment of property, money, or specific goods by the bride's family to the groom or his family as demanded at the time of marriage. The tradition of dowry has been legally banned by the governments of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in 1961, 1976, and 1980 respectively.

In India followers of the Hindu religion used to burn the widows alive during their husbands' funerals. The First British Governor-General of India Lord William Bentinck abolished that horrible custom in 1829.

Another cruel tradition that existed in human societies from time immemorial to the recent past is slavery. Slavery was banned by different countries throughout the late 18th century and the 19th century, and finally by the League of Nations in 1926. After the establishment of the United Nations (UN), the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which included the article, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

We have seen very recently the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II of the UK. Her coffin was placed on a gun carriage. Carrying coffins on a gun carriage at funerals is a widely followed tradition around the world. It's a demonstration of honour to the departed. At the funerals of both Pakistan's Mohammad Ali Jinnah and India's Jawaharlal Nehru, coffins were carried on the gun carriage. In the United States, a two-wheeled ammunition wagon is used instead of a gun carriage at state funerals. Why should a person be honoured if his/her body is carried on a vehicle meant for carrying guns or ammunition that are used for killing people?

You might have noticed that the MPs in the British parliament sit on long benches without any table or anything in front of them to keep papers or documents or to write on. They huddle on the benches keeping their belongings on their laps. They also have to dodge and wriggle to get out of the rows or



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reach a space to sit. The British don't change this and provide their MPs with a convenient and modern personal workspace because it has a long history and tradition. The British Parliament was almost entirely destroyed by German bombing during the second world war. They rebuilt it but did not take the opportunity to change it. Should traditions overrule modernization?

But human history tells us that traditions are by no means static. They can change over time or can be discarded and new traditions may begin that will be carried on to future generations. In today's world, technology and globalization are making huge impacts on cultures and traditions.

Spending time on social media or computer games is becoming a new tradition. Technology has changed the look of the traditional workplace. Instead of pen stands and files, office desks have now computer monitors. Rows of typewriters and typists have just vanished. Archives have moved to clouds. The tradition of holding face-to-face meetings has largely been

replaced by video conferencing. People working in different offices around the world are now holding virtual meetings over video conferencing platforms using the internet.

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