

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE - A CONSEQUENCE OF BIOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS

Renjin Cherian¹, Supritha M. Y²

¹Renjin Varghese, Architecture Department, BMS School of Architecture, Yelahanka (Bengaluru)

²Supritha M. Y, Architecture Department, BMS School of Architecture, Yelahanka (Bengaluru)

Abstract - This research delves into the symbiotic relationship between settlement cultures, geography, and genetic diversity. Examining the intricate interplay, we explore how the landscape moulds traditions and the DNA mix of inhabitants shapes unique traits. This paper unveils a harmonious blend of history and environment, defining the essence of identity within a settlement. In this paper, we navigate the tapestry where cultural heritage is intricately linked to the geographical backdrop and the genetic composition of its people.

Key Words: nature, culture, people, settlements, habitats, DNA Sequencing

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture, a term often defined as a phenomenon practiced over time, invites a nuanced exploration into the ambiguous nature of the phrase "practiced over time." [1] While the specific timeline remains elusive, the constant is its perpetual evolution. The intricate interplay between culture and religious practices is intricately tied to the transformative dynamics within settlements. This raises the intriguing question of whether the definition of culture can be distilled to what is actively practiced in the present.

Within the realms of cultural discourse, two widely accepted definitions exist, each influencing the perspectives of sociologists. [2] Concurrently, an alternative viewpoint sees culture as a conduit for settlements to interact with individuals from diverse geographical contexts. This interaction often involves adapting cultural practices to please and align with the preferences of visitors, resulting in occasional alterations to local traditions. Illustrative examples abound in regions like Kerala and Rajasthan, where efforts are made to cater to and modify cultural practices for the satisfaction of visitors. [3]

Globally, such phenomena extend to renowned sites like Hampi, a world heritage site, where European breakfasts often overshadow local cuisines. [4] This paper seeks to unravel the genesis of culture, tracing its evolution through ages, and discerning patterns within its dynamic narrative, utilizing illustrative examples from the rich cultural tapestry of India. By navigating through these intricate layers, the aim is to shed light on the multifaceted nature of culture and its transformative journey across time and geographical contexts. [5]

2. ORIGIN OF CULTURES AND THE BIOLOGICAL LINKAGES

Studies examining the premodern migration of human populations trace the origins of Homo erectus, indicating their movement from Africa to Eurasia around 190 million years ago. [6] Homo sapiens, believed to have inhabited the entirety of Africa approximately 300,000 years ago, serve as the ancestral roots for contemporary non-African populations. The subsequent migration out of Africa, occurring between 70,000 and 50,000 years ago, played a pivotal role in populating Australia, Asia, and Europe by 40,000 BCE.

As the trajectory of human migration unfolded, diverse populations settled in various corners of the world, fostering an intricate intermingling with local and indigenous groups. This assimilation process is now scientifically discernible through the examination of DNA compositions of ancient human remains; an emerging field known as Genome Sequencing. This method offers a nuanced understanding of the genetic amalgamations resulting from the interactions between different populations. [7]

In the context of the Indian subcontinent, the genetic makeup of modern-day Indians reveals a fascinating blend originating from Africa and Central Asia. An illustrative example unfolds with the decline of the Harappan civilization, where environmental challenges such as widespread drought and alterations in the course of the Indus River prompted population movements into the peninsula. This migration led to a merging of populations, marked by genetic signatures.

One intriguing genetic variation observed through studies is related to the digestion of milk. A gene study unveils that individuals in the northern part of India exhibit a slight variation in the DNA responsible for digesting milk, allowing them to process it for protein intake. [8] However, this capability diminishes as one moves southwards and in the northeastern regions. In southern India, fewer individuals possess the ability to digest milk, and this trait is further reduced in the northeast. Consequently, this genetic distinction is reflected in the dietary habits of these regions, where individuals in the north tend to incorporate milk into their diet, while those in the south and northeast lean towards non-vegetarian options.

This intricate correlation emphasizes how the DNA structure manifests in the food culture of diverse regions, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between genetics, migration, and cultural practices throughout human history.

3. ORIGIN OF CULTURES AND GEOGRAPHICAL LINKAGES

The essence of culture finds its roots in the intricate relationship between human settlements and their natural surroundings. Whether nestled in hills, along shorelines, or on plains, the geographical location of a settlement plays a pivotal role in shaping its cultural fabric. This phenomenon is exemplified in various instances, illustrating how diverse landscapes influence the development of distinct traditions, religions, and ways of life.[9]

A compelling case unfolds when examining the kingdoms in the southern part of India, particularly Kerala. Kerala's long coastline has not only facilitated sea-faring but has also fostered extensive trade relationships. The outcomes of this trade were profound, resulting in a unique fusion of cultures, traditions, and religions. It challenges prevailing notions, revealing that the first church and first mosque in the Indian subcontinent were established in Kerala, contradicting assumptions about the spread of Islam from the north and the introduction of Christianity due to colonial influences. The success of this cultural amalgamation is attributed to Kerala's geographical conditions, especially its coastline, which acted as a conduit for diverse influences.

Coorg, a distinct cultural entity, further exemplifies the impact of geography on cultural development. Coorgis, residing in higher altitude areas, distinguish themselves by worshipping natural forces like the sun, moon, stars, wind, and water. The unique culture that emerges is a product of limited contact with inhabitants of the plains, preventing significant intermixing of cultural practices and religious beliefs. In this context, the geographical location, with its higher altitudes, plays a pivotal role in preserving the distinctive identity of the Coorgi culture.

Transitioning to the heartland of India, the cultural significance attributed to the meeting of two rivers is noteworthy. In many instances, this confluence is marked by a temple, emphasizing the holiness associated with such geographic junctures. Intriguingly, settlements are notably absent from the immediate vicinity of these sacred confluences. The logical explanation lies in the inherent risk of flooding in these regions. Crossing international borders to Bhutan reveals a contrasting perspective. In Bhutan, the meeting point of rivers is considered unholy, marked by a Buddhist temple and devoid of settlements. This practice, engraved into the cultural fabric, is a testament to how diverse cultures adapt their narratives to geographical conditions, prioritizing the safety of people and safeguarding against natural disasters.

The impact of geographical conditions extends beyond religious and cultural practices to the choices individuals make in their daily lives. A stark contrast emerges in the fabric choices of regions like Rajasthan and Kerala. Rajasthan, characterized by vast deserts and a predominantly bare landscape, witnesses the infusion of vibrant colors into the fabrics worn by its people. This serves as a visual representation of the region's attempt to inject liveliness into an environment that lacks natural hues. On the contrary, in Kerala, where a profusion of natural colors envelops the landscape, traditional attire predominantly features off-white. This choice is not merely an aesthetic preference but a practical adaptation

to the climatic conditions of the region. The use of off-white fabrics helps individuals cope with the intense heat prevalent in Kerala, showcasing how geography influences not only cultural aesthetics but also the pragmatic aspects of daily life.

In essence, the intricate interplay between geography and culture emerges as a defining feature of human civilization. From the coastal influences of Kerala to the distinct Coorgi culture in higher altitudes, and the symbolic significance of river confluences in the heartland, each instance highlights the profound impact of geographical conditions on cultural narratives. These examples underscore the dynamic relationship between humans and their environments, where cultural evolution is shaped by the geographical canvas upon which it unfolds.[10]

4. CONCLUSIONS

Culture moulds our existence, frequently misconstrued as a phenomenon to accept without full comprehension. A profound understanding of the scientific intricacies behind our genes and the factors influencing culture offers deeper insights into our identity. Whether through the inheritance of genes across generations or the influence of geographical conditions, these elements play a pivotal role in shaping who we are.

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Author's:



Renjin Cherian is an Asst. Professor at BMS School of Architecture, Yelahanka (Bengaluru). His keen interest lies in urban design and urban affairs.



Supritha M.Y, Assistant Professor at BMS School of Architecture, Yelahanka (Bengaluru)