

## CHAPTER 10 - CULTURAL EVOLUTION

At the beginning of the course we talked about the two types of evolution which have affected humankind - biological evolution and cultural evolution. Once we understood the essential facts of biological evolution, we then turned to cultural evolution which has occupied us for most of the course. Chapter 10 summarizes the two ways in which culture evolved: through cultural diffusion and through parallel development (or also called independent development). Chapter 10 gives definitions and several examples of each of these 2 types of cultural evolution.

### 1. What is cultural diffusion?

Cultural diffusion is the spread of cultural and technological innovations from one people to another. It is the spreading of language, technology, beliefs, stories, architecture, and music from one people to another. Examples of cultural diffusion are:

LANGUAGE: We have often discussed the Indo- Europeans, steppe nomads who migrated to many other lands seeking a better life. Their language was deeply imprinted on many Eurasian languages as follows: brater - Sanskrit                      frere - French

phrater - Greek

fratello - Italian

frater - Latin

fraternal - English

INVENTIONS: Mesopotamians may have spread their knowledge of architecture, engineering, and written language to the Egyptians. Minoans learned shipmaking from the Egyptians. Chinese inventions such as silk making, porcelain, printing, ink, paper, and gunpowder eventually spread from China to Europe.

BELIEFS AND STORIES: There is a flood story in the Epic of Gilgamesh very similar to the one in the Old Testament where Noah takes many species on his ark to save them from a great flood. Sargon of Akkad, the world's first emperor, as an infant was placed in a basket and left on a river just as Moses was left on the Nile in Egypt. The Mesopotamian Mother goddess, Innana, was called Ishtar by the Arabian desert nomads, and in the Old Testament there is a story about giving cakes for the Queen of Heaven (this Queen of Heaven is also a Mother Goddess).

### 2. What is parallel development?

This is cultural development which occurred independently when people made discoveries (in agriculture, metallurgy, stories and myths, architecture, and even civilization itself) independently, unbeknownst to other people, because people were often still very isolated geographically from one another. Examples:

AGRICULTURE- Domestication of plants - notion began in many different parts of the world around 8,000 B.C. Slash and burn agriculture - practiced in Europe and Americas - people slashed trees to drain sap out and then burned down several acres of forest to cause ashes from burnt trees to fertilize

soil. Terrace agriculture - practiced in Andes, China, and Europe. Garden plots built on the sides of hills and mountains to efficiently utilize land.

ARCHITECTURE - Megalithic stones were built in many places across Eurasia and these were sites of worship with stones symbolizing permanence and durability. Pyramids were built not only in Egypt, but also in Mexico and Peru.

STORIES AND BELIEFS: Most early peoples worshipped a Mother Goddess or Earth Goddess and revered women for their fertility. Whether in Eurasia or the Americas or Africa these beliefs were very widespread. With the rise of civilization came the system of patriarchy, whether in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, or India.

The Theory of the Axial Age, developed by Karl Jaspers, holds that around 500 B.C. people in various parts of the world, unbeknownst to the others, independently, developed more complex belief systems. In China, India, and Greece the societies had reached a point around 500 B.C. where they wanted to refine and deepen their beliefs to seek new levels of truth and morality. In China Confucius condemned war, conflict, and social and political chaos and put forth his Confucian belief system. In India, Buddha condemned the Caste system of Hinduism and put forward his own Buddhist belief system of compassion, equality, and meditation. In Greece Socrates, Plato and Aristotle sought answers to life's questions through reason, free debate and personal self-analysis. These thinkers built on previous cultural traditions but also produced a depth of original thinking that was rarely matched at any other time in history. This example of independent development shows that once humans have reached a certain level of development or threshold of knowledge, then they will be ready to progress to the next level. Humans have tended to want to achieve the same goals whether in China, India or Greece - that is, progress to the next level of refinement.

Parallel development in human history is strong evidence for the unity of the human family. We have reacted to our empirical environment in many of the same ways and we have also reacted to our own cultures in the same ways always seeking to improve our present conditions and our present understandings.

## CHAPTER 17 - CULTURAL DIFFUSION INCREASES

As time went on by the Classical Age (500 BC-500AD) there were more links between regions and cultures. These links were due to migration, trade, and cultural diffusion.

MIGRATIONS - Migrations have been part of human existence since our first ancestors left Africa. People leave to better their lives, escape harsh climates, escape political enemies, etc.

The BANTU migrations were one of the great migrations of history which occurred from 500 BC to 500 AD. Having learned how to make iron axes, Africans in both east and west Africa could chop down trees in dense rain forests and migrate to southern Africa. Their arrival caused pygmies in rain

forests to have to retreat deeper into the forests and the bushmen of the Kalahari desert to retreat deeper into the desert.

**SEA MIGRATIONS ACROSS THE PACIFIC** - People migrated from Southeast Asia to settle all of the island groups across the Pacific ocean from 2,000-1,000 BC. They migrated because of famine in their homeland, defeat in war, or fleeing political rivals.

TRADE - By the time of the Classic Age many long-distance interregional trade routes were established which linked Asia, the mid-East, Europe, and Africa. There were caravan routes across land such as the Silk Road, there were sea routes across the Indian ocean and the Arabian Sea. The Mayans had large canoes and carried goods across the Caribbean Sea.

CULTURAL DIFFUSION: During the Classic Age the spread of the beliefs of the great world religions was the most important form of cultural diffusion. Buddhism spread from India to China, Tibet, Ceylon, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and other parts of Southeast Asia. Christianity spread from the Roman Empire to Europe, Russia, Byzantine Empire, North Africa, Ethiopia. At first these religions were simple and offered salvation without elaborate ceremonies, priests, and theology. But as time went on they developed and became powerful institutions shaping the lives of millions of followers.

What was the importance of these contacts?

They changed the people and gave them opportunities to grow, expand, and prosper in all sorts of ways.

## CHAPTER 25 - DIVERSITY AND CONTINUITY

This chapter deals with 2 trends in the world which could be seen around 1500 AD - one trend toward a narrow attachment people had to their own culture, their pride in their own cultural identity, and their resistance to new ideas and foreign ways. The other trend began with Columbus' voyages, the other European voyages, and a new wave of conquest by which Europe dominated most of the rest of the world. This conquest began an unprecedented interaction of peoples around the world and brought about a complex mixing of peoples. Intercontinental empires were created encompassing all the world's land masses.

So what happened after 1500 was the acceleration and intensification of long established historical trends. With so many channels of communication and interaction, all of the peoples of the earth came to influence each other greatly. The result was to create the possibility of a single global community encompassing all peoples of the earth.

The author feels that today's world still reflects the interaction of 2 opposing tendencies - a thrust toward global unity and persisting local loyalties to older, narrower communities. In much of the world people still see themselves as part of an ethnic group or religion and not as members of a "human community". The Hutus and Tutsis in Africa, the Palestinians and Israelis in the mid-East, Moslems and

Hindus in India and Blacks and Whites in America. But certain phenomena link rather than divide people and world music consisting of an eclectic blend of rock, reggae, township and indigenous sounds is a uniting factor. How the drift toward a true global community takes shape is one of the most fascinating issues of our times.