

## Bottoms Up

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It should be culturally unacceptable to write the four letter f-word here in this article. Or, is it?

One can never be sure without trying it. So, here is a fair warning. Please quit reading beyond this paragraph if you are so inclined. That way, I will remain guilt free. And, since I am not responsible for editing or publishing, I will be sleeping well too. This may be mildly provocative but isn't this fair?

Now, I should be able to run my keyboard without inhibition. Although, I do not think that you who read English and have access to the net would quit. Some counter cultural urge would push you to see four simple alphabets arranged side by side in a literal fashion signifying something. What is happening here? Did curiosity get the better of you? Decorum drowned? Or, it really does not matter, does not matter because no one is looking? Or, it is none of the above. It is, perhaps, the manifestation of bottom-up contemporary culture.

The flow of cultural juice in the “modern” part of our global society is now in a “back-facing” mode. It is like the stretch of a river that streams in the direction opposite to its destination. We all are floating on it going north to reach south. The river still carries water, floats boats and encourages habitation on its banks. In the scheme of things, nothing fundamentally changed except the flow pattern. Similarly, our culture, which used to look north for sustenance, now looks south for the same. People aspired to pay good money for well tailored slacks and skirts, now they can afford, but pay more for baggy jeans. One came from the educated and rich the other from the inmates. The cap that was used as sun shed for a baseball player while proudly declaring allegiance to his team is now a desirable commodity for the youth in Tokyo streets. They use it backwards like the house painters and exported that style back to the American youth. T-shirt and shorts are sufficient for traveling thousands of miles with a mixed group of people or, for that matter, attend some offices. The marketing of worn out sneakers to artificially created and exposed cleavage, et all, are our attempts to reach deep in the other end of the society for the next cultural trend to follow. So, it is not an accident that porn industry provided a sound financial foundation for the proliferation of Internet into our homes. The same pattern is reflected in the satellite radio industry dominated by the Sterns' and Imuses of the world. They do not take language leads from Maya Angelou or Tony Morrison, they go straight to the heart of the inner city. We have happily allowed the movies and television programs to nudge us in the same direction too. As we settle in front of the tube, the cable companies take us to a luge ride, effortlessly. They spend huge resources to reach deep into the layer where cultural sediments settle. Then, they churn it. They churn it fiercely and creatively. They hire experts to churn it both clockwise and anti-clockwise at the same time. Thus far, they have been successful in labeling tradition as taboo, and establish the sights and sounds of procreation as daily recommended dose of recreation. We have started floating north to reach south.

History indicates that societies admired lofty morals and cultural principles in old days. Life and welfare were uncertain. The vulnerable citizenry, by necessity, were dependent on each other for survival. But, every group, however culturally identifiable they might be, always included people with varied tendencies and inclinations. So, the group leaders endeavored to point all members in the same direction in matters deemed important by them. They created grammar, protocol, constitution, scripture, code of conduct and the like. However, if the desire or benefit to identify with that particular group diminished, the sacredness of its rules suffered. And, so suffered the social discipline afforded by those rules. Under this condition, any group would lose cohesion and, individuals would find it easier to tread downhill than to strive for old higher values. First, the group behavior would be torn along the edges and then changes would infiltrate into the mainstream. This change in the humanly behavior of the particular group is the change in their culture. This happens to a club, ethnic group, a state, a country, a religious or political congregation. But, the human spirit being what it is, nothing takes away the individual urge to stand out. Thus the cultural drift coupled with individuals' urge to push the envelope creates a complex dynamics where anything goes. Such is our time. We are treading choppy northern water to go south.

We still are the same human beings we were yesterday. Our fundamental ingredients did not mutate. We simply accumulated layers of cultural paints on us and discovered that yesterdays colors are no longer in style today. Plato in his Republic, Book VI, speculated on utopian society where a group of people will be bred for certain behavior and clean lives. We saw the reflection of that concept within the old British aristocracy. They were neither particularly powerful as the Royalty nor productive like the commoners. Most of their power came from being exemplary citizen with style, substance and admirable behavior. They provided an iconic image to follow and indirectly injected civility in the society. People copied the etiquette and aspired to similar style in their own lives in spite of not being able to afford similar lifestyle. We are possibly going thru a patch of iconic famine. Traditionally, Heads of State, Philosophers and Priests provided an image for all to follow whether they themselves followed the same or not. For the pre-fifteenth century Europe, Machiavelli summed this up as, "It is not necessary therefore for a prince to have all the above named qualities (conventional virtues) but it is very necessary to seem to have them." During our time, our icons do not seem to need them. Some leaders defend the obliteration of a country with glee and hardship of the people with gangster's indifference. During our time, some proclaimed religious mentors insert fear of God to weaken our soul and take advantage of the body, all the while protected by the organized religious hierarchy. Not very different, but immensely more damaging, than a rich family with scoundrels. During our time, some leaders are allowed to cling to the highest moral ground in defending human and civil rights while known to practice blackmail, prejudice and anti-social lifestyle. Some even propose anatomically critical surgery on others whenever microphones are cold. This is not rain water from the sky; this is water from dirty shallow well. We have come to accept that the intellectual superiority of the concept of "freedom of expression" should be so overpowering that we must exhibit and applaud the painting of Christ with cow dung thrown over it. After all, it is possible that it could be the start of another movement like the Impressionism! As could some of the

Rap music be the start of a neo-classical genre! We want to be free to go north in our southward journey.

History will have to take the heavy burden of judging all of this. Nothing else can. Not any more, when there is only one rule left in the book. To judge is unfair. Meanwhile, we will continue to float away northward to reach south!

PS: By the way, you read the promised word in the last sentence of second para.