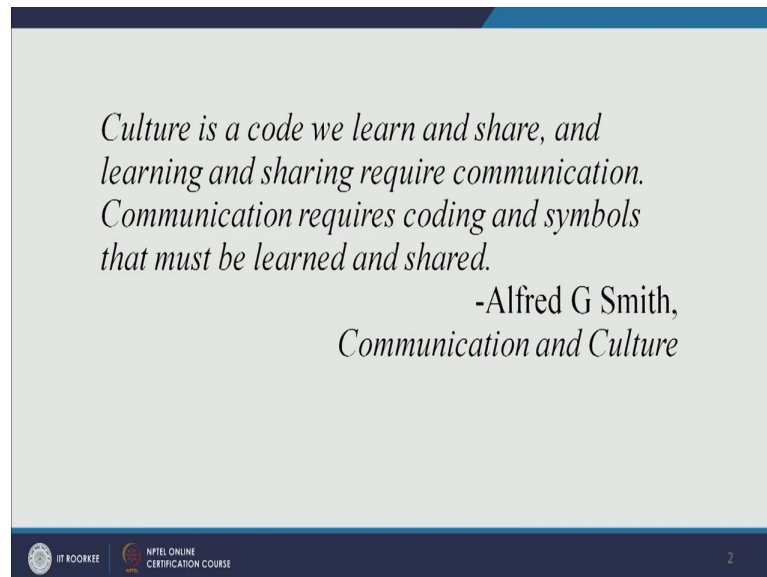


Soft Skills
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Lecture – 19
Communicating Across Cultures

Welcome back to the 2nd lecture on Communication across Cultures. In the previous lecture, we talked about the different facts of culture, different ways culture means and in this lecture, we are going to emphasize upon the fact how we as professionals in order to maintain a cooperative communication, we need to learn the cultural practices. Of course, it is very difficult to understand each and everything of a culture, but then through observation and through experience we can, if we cannot master, but then we can always try to understand. So, that while communicating we may not come across a sort of deadlock or a miscommunication. So, when you communicate with people of other cultures, this is called communicating across cultures. As humans, as we said earlier that we have a tendency to consider our culture the only best culture. We often ignore that other cultures also have some specifications.

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Now, the culture has been defined by Alfred G Smith in his famous book *Communication and Culture* as: “Culture is a code, we learn and share and learning and sharing require communication. Unless and until we communicate with people of other

culture, we are not able to understand others. Communication requires coding and symbols that must be learned and shared.” You know in your life also you come across various symbols. We are living in a world where every day or the other either waiting for a train, waiting for a bus, waiting for the traffic signals, all these are symbols, but then apart from these, there are other symbols also and in this regard, culture becomes a symbol. When we communicate culturally, we actually convey a sort of meaning through some symbols.

As in the previous lecture, we learned how we react to certain words, how we react to certain practices, how we react to certain behavioral aspects, but then simply to consider that our culture is the best is a prejudiced and a biased view. We have also talked about the various cultural contexts. Here, we have to be very specific and understand how the world which is divided into two cultural contexts---- which are the members of these two contexts.

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Cultural Contexts

High context culture (Japan, China and Arab countries)
Intuitive, contemplative, stress on non verbals, meaning to physical and social setting

Low context culture (North America, Scandanavia, France and Germany)
Logical, analytical and action oriented.
Values individualism

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There two cultural contexts, Low cultural contexts and the High cultural context and what are their attributes, what are their specifications. Especially the people of North America, Scandinavia, France and Germany come under low context culture. People of these cultures, they actually believe more in logic. That is why when you are going to have a deal with them, what they want is a written sort of contract and they believe in written words. They believe in words that you speak. They actually do not give any room

to the non-words or to the non-verbal or to the silence or to the pauses or to the dress or to some other things or to the ambience rather. So, they are more into analytical and action-oriented language. They think that words can express action and they value more of individualism. That is why when it comes to group communication, when it comes to group behavior, they actually try to withdraw themselves from the group tasks. I will give you certain examples of how they have exemplified and how in terms of their linguistic response.

But people of high context culture especially of Japan, Japanese are very reserved people. They believe in silence as well and they also believe that silence has a meaning and people of China, people of Arab countries ----- they are actually people who believe in high context. They actually give due importance to the context. Context has a lot to say in communication. They are more intuitive. When I say intuitive, what I mean is more than words. They actually think, they actually believe that it is not only the words that mean rather more than words and they are more contemplative. They actually think more and that is why when a, let me give an example. When a Japanese had to buy a product from an American seller. The Japanese after having asked the price waited for some time, crossed his arms, closed his eyes and then, started contemplating and by this time because the Americans are very impatient people, the American I mean who was the seller, he started asking loudly what happened. But then this is how there are cases of cultural differences.

People of high context culture give more stress to non-verbal's where meaning is not confined only to the words, rather meaning can always accrue from physical and social setting. So, whenever you are having transaction with people of either the high context culture or the low context culture, you have to understand some of the attributes which have been discussed now.

Now, when we talk about communicating across culture, we also ought to know what can be the different communication contexts. Sometimes you may have to talk to the international crowd when you can have face to face interactions among people of diverse cultures and these people---- all these people may have a different reaction to some particular word or to some particular expression, to some particular gesture, to some particular posture as well.

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Communication Contexts

- ☐ **International**
Face to face interactions among people of diverse cultures
- ☐ **Global**
Trans-border transfer of information by groups/ institutions and government.
- ☐ **Cross cultural**
Comparing phenomena across culture
- ☐ **Intercultural**
Face to face interactions among people of diverse Cultures

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Another context is the global context where communication is done by trans- border transformation of information by institutions and group. You will find when you are communicating either orally or say with written, you can find the difference. As I said earlier when you are going to have a meeting with Mexicans, they will not come straight to the point rather they will exchange courtesies they will also eat and if you tell them to get down to business, they often feel insulted, they feel hurt.

Then, there is cross-cultural communication. The real problem arises when there is cross-cultural communication. You actually start comparing a particular phenomenon across culture. If something happens in your culture, it may not happen in other culture. Humans have a tendency to understand and to anticipate and to believe that all over the world the same thing happens, but it is not. We have already learned while discussing gestures that one gesture in one country may have one meaning, it may have a different meaning in a different country. That is why whenever you are making gestures with the help of either your fingers or your hands or say for example your face, there can be different connotations. You have to be aware of it. Remember thumbs of expression which was used earlier, it can again even not only the thumbs of impression, even the victory sign that was used by the British Prime Minister Thatcher, that also can have a different and sometimes a negative connotation in some other countries.

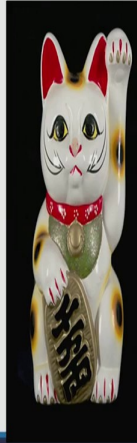
Hence, when two people, you know two Asians especially when they walk hand in hand which is each other which is a very friendly gesture that actually can go to convey a different meaning to people of different cultures. When you are communicating across culture, you need to be aware of all these. Of course, as I said, it is very difficult to learn all the aspects in all the behavioral norms of a particular culture, but then there is no harm understanding and this can be possible by observing certain traits, by observing certain behaviors, then comes intercultural. Face- to- face interactions among people of diverse cultures is called intercultural communication and when you communicate intercultural also, you can find people of the same country, but of different two sub-cultures because every culture may have a sub-culture also and then, there lies the difference.

For example, in India also you can find that suppose you are speaking Bengali, but Bengali is also the language of people of Bangladeshi, fine, but an Indian Bengali and a Bangladeshi Bengali, when they talk to each other, they may find linguistic differences. That is only because of the culture. Since, now these two are two different countries, but then they are speaking the same language. Likewise, when we speak English and the Americans speak English, though we speak the same language, but then there are different nuances that differ our speaking styles, that differ our communication styles. Since culture is also a part of superstition or superstition and myths are part of culture, every culture in some way or the other expresses its own cultural beliefs and superstitions at times.

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Superstition

- **In Mexico**
Saloon where people gather to drink pulque, a distillate of cactus, is considered good fortune to get worms in your cup
- **In Japan**
Maneki neko (beckoning cat)
- **In China**
Phonetic sound of 8 is most fortuitous of numbers auguring prosperity

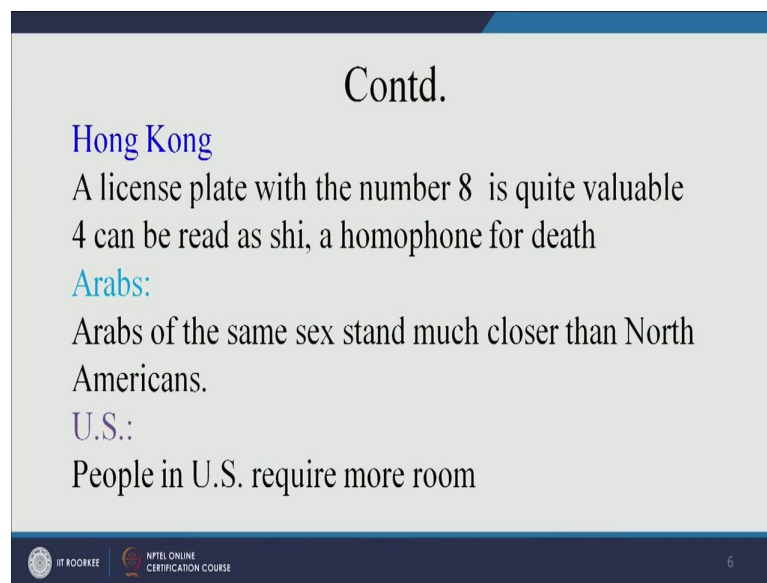


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In Mexico, in a saloon where people go to drink pulque, which is actually a distillate of cactus, now drinking of pulque and at the same time if a worm is dropped in your cup, it is considered to be very fortunate. It is considered to be very ominous. Now, in India when we are drinking tea or for that matter you are taking something else and if a worm suddenly drops in, you will not like to drink. So, this is actually a case of cultural differences. We consider that dropping of something in our drink is unfortunate whereas, it is considered fortunate in Mexico. In Japan, you will find most of the shops will have an image of Maneki neko. This Maneki neko which actually means a beckoning cat, this symbolizes a good fortune and that is why most of the shops in Japan, they will have this figure which means attracting more customers.

Even in some countries, the words and sounds they also have a different meaning. For example, in China the sound of eight is considered very ominous, very fortunate especially in terms of number. That is why what they prefer is they always prefer number 8 which actually conveys a sort of prosperity, a sort of goodness, a sort of happiness and that is why number 8, the phonetic sound of 8 is considered fortunate.

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Contd.

Hong Kong
A license plate with the number 8 is quite valuable
4 can be read as shi, a homophone for death

Arabs:
Arabs of the same sex stand much closer than North Americans.

U.S.:
People in U.S. require more room

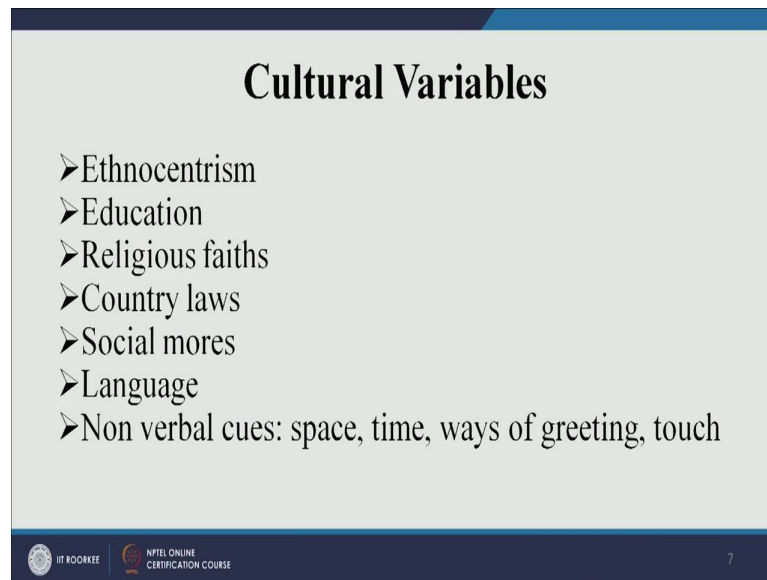
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But, then in Hong Kong, a license plate having the number 8 once again is considered very valuable. That is why more and more people would like to have a license plate which has got the number 8. In some countries, especially in Hong Kong, the number 4 can be read as shi which is homophone for death. That is why in Hong Kong, there will be no room number 4 especially in hospitals because that signifies death.

As I had said earlier that as regards maintenance of space during communication, people also have different norms. Arabs of the same sex stand much closer than North Americans. Because North Americans and Canadians, they actually stand 5 feet apart. Even people of Canada during their communication, they maintain a distance of 5 feet. People in the U.S, they actually require more room, but when it comes to communication and silence, they actually cannot bear the long silence and they feel that the longer silence actually can allow, we can rather feel more concessions because very soon they get puzzled, they get upset and they cannot bear that long silence. When we are having a cross-cultural communication or communicating across culture, we need to be aware of certain variables such as ethnocentrism.

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Cultural Variables

- Ethnocentrism
- Education
- Religious faiths
- Country laws
- Social mores
- Language
- Non verbal cues: space, time, ways of greeting, touch

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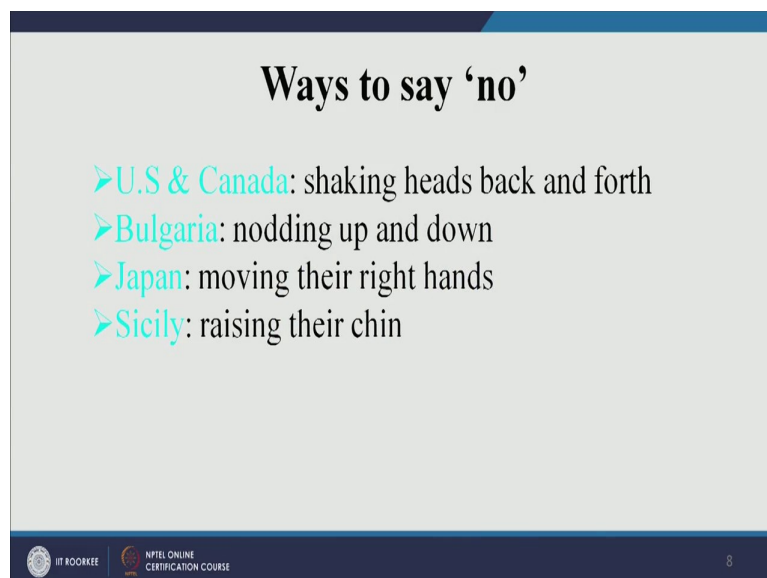
Ethnocentrism is the belief you know that ours is the best. We often believe that our culture is the best. Then comes the education. Most of the time you believe that the education you have attained or you have received from one particular University or a particular Country is the only best. Then there is religious faith. You always believe most of the people in our own country, we believe that the Hindu religion is the best religion. Likewise, others may also believe that their religion is the best religion. Then their country laws. The laws of one country may be totally different from the laws of the other country. Even language, the use of language as I had discussed earlier that people's response to language and their response to words that also can create confusions in terms of communication, especially many people especially of the high context culture, they also extract meaning from space, the maintenance of space.

And you know we have discussed in one lecture how there are different zones when we are communicating and every person cannot enter your zone. There is an intimate zone, where people of say your close circle only can be there. Then, there is a distance zone, then there is a friendly zone, then there is a common zone where especially during parties you find people not being too close rather people are separated and they have more space, but when it comes to intimate zone, no other person can enter into that zone. So, in culture, every culture has its own norms, even in the maintenance of space. So, is also the case how people also maintain their own cultural norms in terms of colors while

red color may be very symbolically and may be very ominous in one culture, it may also be threatening in some other culture.

So, even the ways of greeting, even the ways of touch as we discussed in our talk on haptics that also differs and at times you know when people of one culture meet people of other culture and willingly if they have touched others that can create to a very confusing situations and at times, it also becomes embarrassing. Even the way we express our non-acceptance or say our negatives. I mean the way we want to say no, that also is expressed differently.

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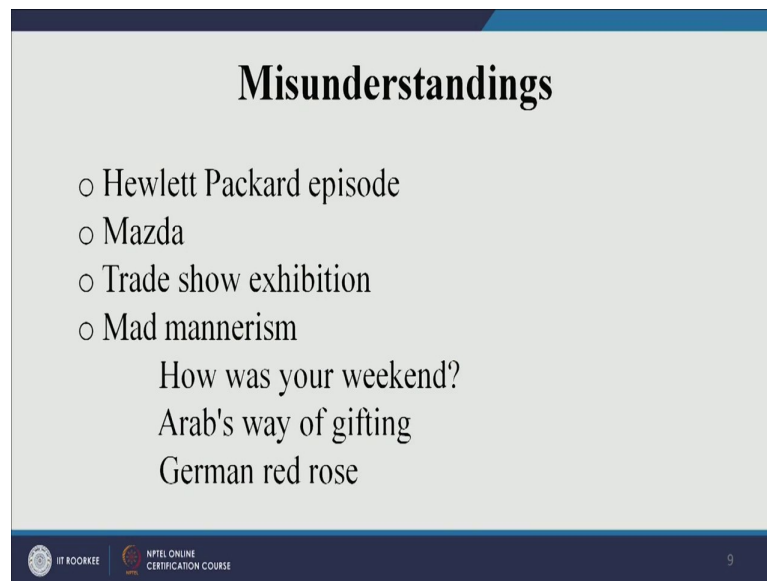


You know in U.S and Canada in order to express denial what you do is--- you shake heads back and forth. You shake heads back and forth in U.S and Canada just to say no, but in Bulgaria you nod yourself up and down, you nod your head up and down just to express.

In Japan people move their right hands to express their non-acceptance or express their negative expressions, but in Sicily people often raise their chin to say no. Now, you can find how even though a sort of communication, you feel that in India because you as Indian, you will always feel that the way we say no, people of other cultures should also say no, but it is quite different and sometimes when you want, when you are communicating with people of other culture, there no can be meant yes to you and your yes can be meant no to them. I am reminded of a particular incident where out of grace

and out of dignity, one Indian person while he was invited at a dinner, what he did was he simply said no. No, I cannot have more. This was just out of a grace and literally at the end of the dinner because you know Americans, they believe more in words, they stopped giving him more food, but it was his Indian way of saying no and this left him empty belly and when he came back, he was expressing the same.

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Misunderstandings

- Hewlett Packard episode
- Mazda
- Trade show exhibition
- Mad mannerism

How was your weekend?
Arab's way of gifting
German red rose

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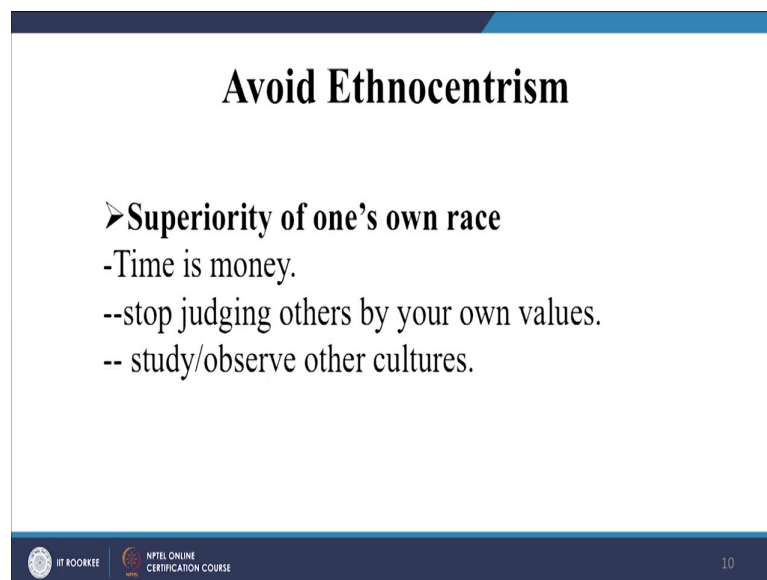
So, dear friends at times there can be misunderstandings when people of two cultures communicate with each other and we can also here cite to one example where HP which hired engineers of French to work with U.S engineers, they found that in their electronic mail exchanges, while the U.S people were writing long mails and French people, they actually since they appeared to have written less, it was understood by the U.S that information was being withheld, information was being stopped. Likewise, there is another case where in a company named Mazda while the Americans were asked to wear baseball caps while at their work, but then they took it very casually. Since they are very casual people and they took it very casually, at the end of the day when they were asked why they did not wear caps, they really felt hurt because to them it was just a casual way they could wear or they could not.

Likewise, there are other examples. You know there are plenty of examples that can be given when culture has created a problem in terms of communication. For example, if in China you are going to gift somebody a clock, you are actually inviting evil for them.

Likewise, U.S people often ask you know how was your weekend, but in some countries, it is just like interfering. If you ask somebody how was your weekend, it is like interfering with your private lives. In a country like Arab, you cannot gift an Arab's wife something, but you can always gift something to their children because this is considered in appropriate. To a German lady if you give her a rose, it can be misconstrued as a sort of romantic invitation. So, when you are having a sort of communication from people of the other world or people of other cultures, you will find that there can be cases of confusion.

Hence, the need of our is to avoid ethnocentrism. We are rather to accept that cultures can be different, cultures I mean other cultures also are as beautiful as ours.

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Avoid Ethnocentrism

- **Superiority of one's own race**
- Time is money.
- stop judging others by your own values.
- study/observe other cultures.

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Now, what we usually do is, we always have a sort of superiority complex about our own culture and we do not judge the people from their cultural point of view, rather we judge them from our cultural point of view. It is always better to take some time to study and observe the cultural norms of the world because if you have to survive today and to succeed in a world that is global, you have to understand and you have to respond to the cultural norms, to the cultural authenticities.

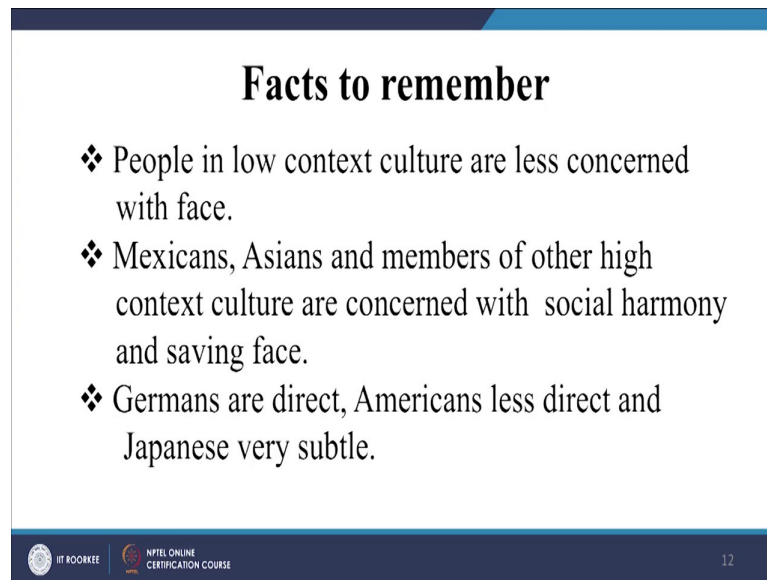
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There are ways we can do that in order to avoid this cultural confusion. The need is to bridge the gaps and this can be done by adopting tolerance, empathy, stopping ourselves from being judgmental, rather we should have patience and this can be done only when we allow more room to others, only when we allow more space to others and think that their cultures are equally important and significant as our cultures.

You know, sometimes we react too suddenly, but the best way to avoid these cultural chaos is to tolerate. Nothing will happen if you tolerate for some time, nothing will happen if you see it from the other person's perspective and you will not hurt, you will not mistake. There are certain facts that we should always remember and if we remember that we can avoid such cultural conflicts, people in low cultural context, they are not much concerned about the image as in us.

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Facts to remember

- ❖ People in low context culture are less concerned with face.
- ❖ Mexicans, Asians and members of other high context culture are concerned with social harmony and saving face.
- ❖ Germans are direct, Americans less direct and Japanese very subtle.

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Now, we Indians we are very much concerned about our reputation, we are very much concerned about our image. Mexicans, Asians and members of other context culture, they are concerned more with social harmony and saving face. That is why they prefer friendship and cordiality to agreement or contract.

As I had said earlier, I want to repeat that *Germans are direct, Americans less direct and Japanese very subtle*. That is why you will find the Japanese women when they want to smile what they do is, they put their palms on their lips because public display of private emotions is considered inappropriate from the cultural point of view of Japan. Hence, we have to take a little bit patience and we should move from these stereotypes. What happens is we often judge person based on their community.

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Move beyond stereotypes

- ☐ Stereotype is an oversimplified behavioural pattern applied uncritically to groups.
- ☐ People resent being stereotyped.
- ☐ Discover individual personal qualities.
- ☐ Move from ethnocentrism to ethno-relativism.

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This stereotyping is an oversimplified observation or oversimplified view of a particular culture. You know something somebody does and you actually start thinking him that this entire community does. If some community is at fault, that does not mean that all the people of that particular faith or culture will be bad. You know, if you are having a basket full of mangoes and to call that all mangoes are rotten, maybe there are some mangoes which will not be rotten also.

So, try to avoid yourself from these stereotypes. You know when you judge people, when you judge an individual from the point of view of the stereotypes, the individual may feel angered, they may resent. Also, the need of hour is to discover the special talents in a person and not to consider him only the stereotype. What we can do in this regard is to move from ethno-centrism to ethno-relativism.

Now, what is this ethno-relativism? This ethno-relativism is to say or is to understand that there are six stages. We can say let us not deny that cultures are not different.

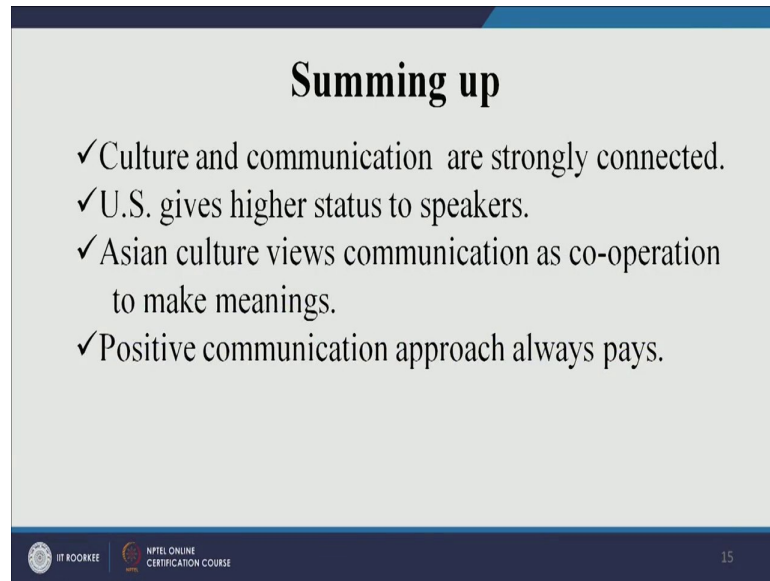
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We should always accept that culture who deny when people come from ethno-centrism. When they want to come from ethno-centrism to ethno-relativism, they have to pass through these stages. They actually see that people start denying that there can be differences in other culture rather what they do is, they start defending their own worldview in view of their own culture. The need of hour is to minimize, it is always better to minimize.

It is always better to seek some amount of commonness. Cultures are different, but there are certain commonalities associated with it and we need to garner or we need to focus more on acceptance, adaptation. It is rightly said 'if you really want to be welcomed in a particular culture, you need to adapt' the ways of the culture and if you have been able to do that, you will be able to integrate, you will be able to combine yourself.

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Summing up

- ✓ Culture and communication are strongly connected.
- ✓ U.S. gives higher status to speakers.
- ✓ Asian culture views communication as co-operation to make meanings.
- ✓ Positive communication approach always pays.

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My dear friends, we have come a long way and we have understood that the world has different cultures and the different cultures, every culture is unique, every culture in itself is distinct. Culture and communication are thus strongly communicated and a positive communication approach will always help. Remember the fact that Asians often view communication as a co-operation and as Asian, we actually need to go a little bit more forward and understand the fact because we have told the outside world that we believe in making the entire world one family.

Let me quote from Sanskrit Sloka and let me say “*Ayaṃ nijah paro veti gaṇanā laghucetasām! udāracaritānām hi tuvasudhaiva kuṭumbakam!!*”. Let us try to welcome, let us try to say, let us try to believe that the entire earth you know people of all the countries, they are from this earth and let us welcome them, let us understand in the diversity of culture and once we start understanding the diversity, we will also start understanding the significance of culture in communication because the basic aim of culture is to express and the basic aim of communication is to unite. Cultures have come to unite, cultures have come to make other people come closer and here no communication can take place without a culture. Hence, culture and communication are equally related to each other. They have come to integrate and they have come to make world a beautiful place to live in.

Thank you.