Why Should One Conform To Societal Norms?

1. Introduction

   Conformity to societal norms fosters social cohesion, stability and sense of belongingness. Social norms offer a foundation, but embracing diversity and encouraging critical thinking can lead to more dynamic and inclusive society.

2. Understanding the term "Societal Norms"

   Edward P. Hall book " The Silent Language"

3. Conforming to Social norms : Road to stability

   Concept of labelling theory

   i - Reduces crimes and deviation

   ii - Improves social cohesion

   iii - Creates sense of belongingness

   iv. Facilitates effective interpersonal relationships

   v. Maintains balance in the society

4. Resisting social norms brings change

   Iqbal's Concept of Khudi to embrace change

   i. Road map for innovation

   ii - Potential for social change

   iii - Brings positive social change

   iv. Challenge for status-quo

   v. Change in lifestyle

5. Striking the balance between conformity and expression

   i - Embraces diversity

   ii - Encourages innovation

   iii - Establishment of inclusive and dynamic

society.

iv. Improves communication gap

v. Encourages critical thinking.

6- Conclusion.

x — x — x — x — x — x

Aristotle - a Greek philosopher - had said that man is a social being and he cannot live in isolation. While living in society, he has to follow social norms and values. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals conform to societal norms to achieve social approval and to avoid disapproval. Therefore, conforming to social norms is pertinent as it provides stability in a society. Additionally, it improves social coordination and sense of belongingness. Furthermore, it also reduces crimes and deviation and maintains balance among the peers. On the contrary, resisting values provides the roadmap for bringing positive change in a society. If one delves into the past, all the innovations, advancements and revolutions are brought by going against standards norms and they brought positive social change. Hence, one cannot deny the fact that resisting societal norms is also advantageous as it can bring innovation and revolution in the society. Often societies who do not embrace social changes may find it challenging to adapt to new circumstances. They miss out an opportunity for personal growth and experience stress and discomfort while facing evolving situation. The reliable option is to strike the balance between conformity and resisting conformity. It will provide a way for embracing diversity thereby motivating inclusion. Additionally, communication

gap among opposition will reduce as they learn to embrace each other. Futhermore, it is not only limited to change but also improves and encourages critical thinking among its individuals. Therefore, conforming to social norms and values fosters social cohesion, stability and sense of belongingness. Societal norms offer a foundation but, at the same time embrassing diversity and encouraging critical thinking can lead to more dynamic and inclusive society.

UNICEF defines social norms as the percieved informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour. It consists of what one does, what one believes and what others approve and disapprove. Social norms vary from place to place and do have similarities and differences. Edward T. Hall in his book " The Silent Language" explores how social norms and non-verbal communication differ across cultures. He argues that gestures, body language and proxemics vary across the globe and highlights the importance of understanding cultural nuances for effective communication. Societal norms are informal rules and norms which determin behaviours of individuals.

Stability in the society is achieved through conformation of societal norms. In every society, the standard norms usually approve legal means of achieving goals and discourage illegal means. As a result, individuals try to refrain themselves from deviating behaviour and create stabilized social circle. On the other hand, disapproving the social norms will create chaos and turbulence. Labelling theory suggests that individuals are afraid to become labelled negatively and they preferred to observed desired values and norms. Hence, sense of rationality reprains the individuals from resisting values and this brings stability in the society.

Conformity to social norms reduces deviation and crime rates in a society. Deviation and crimes emerged when a group of individuals decide to go against the set norms and values. However, if they observe certain standards, this ratio will reduce. It is the human choice which makes him to adapt either conformity or non-conformity. Rational Choice Theory argues that man is a rational being and make choices while considering the consequences. He will never make a choice which will present his image negatively in the society. Sense

of rationality is important factor in determining behaviour of an individual. As, he decides to abide by rules and norms, deviation and crime rates become low.

Secondly, conforming societal norms also improves social cohesion among the members of society. Individuals of a society living together under the umbrella of similar social norms try to achieve their desired goals collectively. All of them will be aware of consequences of choosing illegal means and as a result, they choose to help each other unconditionally. In crime typology given by Robert Merton, there is a group of people who follow set norms and legitimate means of achieving them. Such group is placed under conformity and they build strong social cohesion. Despite their unwillingness to help each other, they will prefer to help others and thereby improving social cohesion within a society.

Thirdly, sense of belong-ingness is developed by conforming to social norms. When individuals adhere to share norms and values, they signal their alignment with the group expectations, reinforcing a sense of unity. People follow rules and regulations to fulfill their needs of belongingness and social acceptance. Abraham Maslow's

theory of hierarchy of needs depicts a better picture of social conformity and belongingness. He argues that humans have social needs including social acceptance and sense of belongingness and individuals often show conformity to social norms to fulfill this need. Therefore, sense of belongingness is a strong factor associated with conformity of values and norms.

Fourthly, interpersonal relationships are facilitated by showing conformity to set values. It is a natural fact that every individual wants to be center of attention in a group and for this purpose he needs adherence to values. This adherence will provide a sense of pride and pleasure and will maximize his interpersonal relationships. Jeremy Bentham concept of "Utilitarinism" suggest that an individual wants to maximize his pleasure and minimize pain. Resultantly, he take steps which maximize his pleasure and interpersonal relationships are one of them. In order to improve interpersonal communication, he has to approved himself in the eyes of society. Therefore, individuals often prefer to observes informal rules to facilitate interpersonal relationship.

Furthermore, conformity to social norms creates balance in the society. It is general observation that

Societies who stick to their informal rules and values foster balanced and cohesive society. In case of absence of informal rules, a strain will create among the people. This fact was also highlighted by a prominent sociologist Emile Durkhiem who argued that absence of social norms will disturb the balance of society. Morover, they will create a strain and a state of anomie. Conformity helps to maintain social equilibrium and prevents deviance, fostering a balanced and cohesive society.

Though, conformity provides a road map for social stability but, resistance of societal norms brings change in a society. With the passage of time, many societies have transformed themselves. It is pertinent to acknowledge the fact that change is inevitable and more often it brings positive attributes for a society. Allama Iqbal, a philosopher and poet, gave the concept of Khudi. He urged people to developed a strong and creative self to confront challenges of changing times. Societies which shows inflexibility in changing societal norms often do not grow. Growth and innovation of a society requires to look beyond the set circle of values and norms.

Resistance to societal norms often brings innovation in the society. History is full of stories of people who brought innovations in the society by moving away from desired norms and values. Innovation demands risks and immediate choices for bringing creativity and positivity. Adam Grants in his book "Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World" discusses the examples of individuals who challenged the society. Adam Grants shares example of _Pablo Picasso_ - an artist - who challenged the established artistic norms of his time. Picasso introduced abstract and cubist styles which significantly influenced the modern art. Hence, non-conformity and pushing against established norms can be a catalyst for creative breakthroughs and innovation.