

## Language and Culture – Then and Now !

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Folks, ever wonder how the language has changed over the past couple of decades? Or is it just me in my golden years wondering about such things? I was reading an article in a senior's magazine recently and I started thinking!

I remember, back in the old days, everything used to be "*groovy*", "*far out*," or "*swell*." Those words have gone the way of the hula hoop and Mickey Mouse watches. Same with many terms and phrases. I remember the days when the terms like "*domino theory*" and "*iron curtain*" and "*bigger than the bread box*" and "*fail-safe*" used to be as omnipresent as oxygen. And now we rarely, if ever, hear them or read them. At least I don't! Or am I reading the wrong stuff? Take TIME magazine, for example. I have been reading TIME magazine for I don't know how long - some of you were probably not even born when I started reading TIME. And I still read it but I never see these words or phrases any more. I can understand why phrases and terms like "*shift into high gear*" and "*hung out to dry*" and "*you sound like a broken record*" etc. disappeared from our vocabulary and every day conversations. Why do I understand? Because in today's hi-tech world, nobody drives stick shifts any more or hangs wet clothes on the clotheslines or plays a 78-rpm phonograph - that's why!

And it's not just the technology - just about everything seems to have changed. People have grown BIGGER in every way. I am six-foot one inch tall and, in "those" days, I used to be called 'very tall' - not just among Indians but among the general population, six-footers used to be considered TALL. And now? Look at athletes, for example. there are Yao's in the NBA and there are Venus Williams in tennis. In fact, NBA (no, that is not a "tech" word, it stands for "National Basketball Association) has more than a dozen seven-footers. No wonder NBA did not recruit me!

And then there are the genderless terms that have made many words in the dictionary obsolete. I wouldn't be surprised if the Oxford and Webster dictionaries omit the politically incorrect words like "*mailman*", "*fireman*," "*waiter*," "*stewardess*" etc, from their next editions. The politically correct words are now 'mail carrier,' fire fighter,' 'server' and, of course, 'flight attendant.' When is the last time you heard the word, "*stewardess*" ? Think about it! What is the world coming too, MAN?

And, speaking of being politically correct, there are no longer "*midgets*" or "*cripples*" or "*deaf*" or "*bums*" or "*tramps*" in this world. Instead, there are now 'physically disabled,' 'hearing impaired,' and 'transients' and 'homeless.'" It might be a kinder and gentler term or word but when some one says, "hearing impaired," you know, I know and "*they*" know what that some one means - "*they*" are no dummy!! This technology revolution and the political correctness are not changing just our language, they are changing our culture too! My question is, then, if WE are kinder and gentler to the to the average people who make their living "serving" others either because they made the choice to do that or because their level of education did not leave them with many options, why can't "*they*" be more polite to us by showing the manners of the good old days?

For example, in the good old days, on your flight to Los Angeles on Pan Am, when you asked the stewardess - I mean flight attendant - for an extra lemon for your ice tea, and she brought those extra slices of lemon for you and you said, "Thank you, ma'am" and she would say, "You're welcome" or "Mention not." Yes, I am an old geezer and my question is whatever happened to this custom of 'polite acknowledgement' by *stewardesses* and *waitresses* now that they are flight attendants and servers? Now that we have become kinder and gentler and have elevated the stewardess to a "flight attendant," how come she has gone the opposite direction and become almost rude? How does today's 'flight attendant' respond when you say "Thank you" for bringing that extra slice of lemon? Not with "You're welcome," but with "No problem." "No problem my foot!" I am almost tempted to tell her, "You're darned right it's no problem. It's your job.....!" On one hand we are claiming to become kinder and gentler but, in

actuality, we are becoming more and more rude by the day, especially when it comes to language and the words we use. There was a time when "*crack*" meant more than a small opening. But today you have to be very careful when you use that word!

Hey, you probably are thinking, 'Chandu is getting old and grumpy' but think about it, this technology and political correctness and whatever else have changed the English language so much that I am having a hard time keeping up! Honest!! I am trying to be as hip and as cool as possible but when Saneel (my son) and Saloni (my daughter) write to me via this medium, it gets my "dhoti" in knots when they start a sentence without the customary capital letter and when they deliberately misspell the words to be "cool."

And, honestly, I am having a hard time keeping up with this hi-tech (I resent the term 'hi-tech') lingo. Here are the examples, if you want be "cool": BTW - by the way, when I discuss some issues with Saneel on this medium, he some times writes back saying, "-- Dad, we will discuss it F2F when I see you next in a few weeks. F2F for his world is "face to face" but to me it some how sounds repulsive! Look at all these "words": WRT - with respect to, LOL - laughing out loud, ROTLF - rolling on the floor laughing, BRB - be right back. For me even FYI was too much! But this continual 'refinement' of English language is getting on my nerves. And at my age, my nerves are not all that tolerant and it is just not easy to keep up with this and the iPods and the hard drives and uploading and down loading and the Plasma TVs and HDTVs and DVDs. And don't you laugh at me!! Let me tell you, soon-to-be-old-geezer, if you think you are "with it" so far, wait a few more years and your DVDs and HDTVs and Microsofts and Googles are going to go the way of the fountain pens, inkwells, slide rules, Photostat copies, Frigidaires, mimeographs, HMVs and manual typewriters. Make no mistake about it!

IMPO (for those of you technologically challenged "IMPO" means In My Humble Opinion), this kind of massacre of the English language is not called for. What is next, massacre of the sacred language of the Mahabharat, Sanskrit?

This NEW world is driving me crazy, man!! Please bring me back the old meanings of *boot*, *crash*, *mouse*, *memory*, *spam*, *virus*, *windows*. And I am afraid to even talk about the word "*gay*". In my dictionary, it still means "exuberant, high spirited."

Sorry, GTG (got to go!). CUL - (see you later!)

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