

Preserving, Promoting, and Globalizing Indigenous Islamic Literature for Universal Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Universal framework of multi civilizational world and United Nations' agenda of global sustainable development warrant preservation of civilizational diversity by conserving diverse indigenous folk cultures as reservoirs of millenia-old indigenous folk wisdom for conserving biodiversity and ensuring universal sustainable development. Preservation of indigenous folk culture is a social goal of environmentally sustainable development. Civilizational diversity balances socioeconomic and environmental interests of groups and generations of people. Translations of folk literature in foreign languages disseminate local folk wisdom and promote civilizational diversity and biodiversity on a global level. Universalization of indigenous folk cultures and folk literature is a key to realize Islamic universal sustainable development. This view is reflected in the English translations of Allama Iqbal's Persian poetry entitled *The Secrets of the Self*, Khush Hal Khan Khatak's Pashto poetry entitled *Selections from the Poems of Khus Hal Khan Khattak with Translations and Gramatical Introduction*, and Rehman Baba's Pashto poetry entitled *The Nightingale of Peshawar*. This article highlights indigenous folk wisdom as a preserver-cum-promoter of civilizational diversity, biodiversity, and sustainable development. It presents a retrospective on translations of folk wisdom-based Islamic literature in foreign languages and contributes pertinent policy recommendations.

Key words: Islam, indigenous folk literature, globalization, languages, sustainable development, Allama Iqbal, Khush Hal Khan Khatak, Abdul Rahman Baba

1. Introduction

Indigenous geographical literature is an embodiment of classical folk wisdom embedded in written indigenous geographical literature and folklores. Its aforementioned constituents have been progressive springs of human wisdom, equality, justice, benevolence, harmony, affinity, unity, integrity, peace, education, culture, civilization, prosperity, happiness, and empowerment, and culturally as well

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as environmentally sustainable human development on local, national, regional, global, and universal levels in harmony with universal natural environment through their crucial roles in conservation of originally existing biodiversity and environmental balance. It is a potentially wonderful natural spring, reservoir, and mine of pearls of folk wisdom and intelligence. Pearls of folk wisdom are either self-evident universal truths (maxims) or true intellectual insights into the nature, dynamics, implications, consequences, and lessons of real world scenarios.

Of course, folk literature potentially includes universal truths as well as myths. Therefore, folk literature is like a composite mine of gold and copper in the sense that universal truths found in the folk literature are gold, which can be scientifically separated by the knowledgeable people from other substances (copper) such as myths for precluding their possible harmfulness for humanity.

In this setting, this article highlights the imperatives of preserving, promoting and globalizing all indigenous languages, indigenous local folklores, local folk literature, and local folk culture as embodiments of local folk wisdom for conserving civilizational diversity and, thereby, the global biodiversity in the contemporary non-mono-civilizational multi-civilizational world enveloping all indigenous folk civilizations for realizing socially and environmentally sustainable universal development through an eclectic approach of effectively solving all global and universal problems of unsustainable development by wisely applying all potential local solutions to effectively solve all global as well as universal politico-economic, strategic, and environmental global problems.

This study has six sections. Section 2 presents methodology. Section 3 contributes reflections on universal sustainable development. Section 4 highlights the pertinent literature. Section 5 identifies sustainable development-oriented results of globalization of knowledge of the Islamic culture embedded in the Islamic teachings (of the Holy *Qur'an* and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)) translated in English. Section 6 states conclusion and policy recommendations

2. Methodology

This article highlights the imperative of preserving and promoting all indigenous geographical languages and their literature through their digitalization and dissemination on local, national and global levels for conserving and promoting indigenous cultural diversity from the point of view of maintaining civilization as well biodiversity, restoring universal environmental balance and, thereby, ensuring sustainable human development .

Narrow concept of folklore and folk literature is limited to those traditional folk literary contributions, whose authors and contributors are unknown. But in light of Dundes' definition of folk as "any group of people whatsoever who share and own a common tradition — occupation, language, or religion (Dundes, 1965), this study uses the broader liberal ethnogeographical concept and methodology of indigenous

geographical folk and folk literature, whose original contributors are either unknown or known, as their all folk literary contributions have universal appeal and popularity among local, national and global masses.

While advocates of the aforementioned narrow concept may counter the views presented here, the orally disseminated Islamic literature in the form of traditions [*Ahadith* (Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)), stories of his companions and prominent Muslim personalities, Islamic songs, and poems have potential effective progressive educational and inspirational roles in indigenous languages and their literature for achieving multidimensional sustainable human development on local, national, global and universal levels. In this broader context, this article emphasizes the potential key progressive roles of especially the progressive folklore and the folkloric literature embedded in the ever popular indigenous Islamic poetry, Islamic historical literature including oral narratives of the widely disseminated oral reports of Sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his (Peace Be Upon Him) companions and indigenous local folklores, local folk wisdom reflected in indigenous universal truths-cum-maxims as well as indigenous universal Islamic folk poetry of Mawlana Rumi, Khush Hal Khan Khatak, Abdul Rahman Baba, Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Mian Muhammad Bakhsh etc. and the resulting local folk cultures as embodiments of indigenous local folk wisdom for conserving erving cultural-cum-civilizational diversity. In light of both the narrow literal and liberal literary narratives of the progressive folklore and the folkloric literature, this study highlights the potential progressive key inter-linkages among the truths and the pearls of wisdom embedded in the folk literature and the universal sustainable development of humans on local, national, global and universal levels in the framework of multi-civilizational world.

3. Universal Sustainable Development

Universal sustainable development refers to the continuous balanced and equitable development process, which balances interests of different groups and generations of people in interrelated economic, social, and environmental realms. Current major problems of socially, economically, and environmentally unsustainable development are extreme inequalities-driven extreme hunger and poverty, global climate change, and global warfare. The United Nations' Development Program (2022) has been highlighting people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership as the mainstay of the United Nations' global consensus-based 2016-2030 global agenda for sustainable development since circa 2015. In this setting, folk wisdom embedded in folk culture and folk literature has great potential to holistically realize and optimize the universally, politically, socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainable universal human development throughout the world.

4. Reflections on Literature

Indigenous geographical literature is embedded in local geographical ideas and knowledge, which also includes folk literature. Folk literature literally *means* traditional customs, folk literature [folktales, sayings (proverbs), and legends] or art forms preserved among a people, an often unsupported notion, story, narrative, or saying that is widely circulated¹. But the modern literature also broadly defines folk as a group of scholars and government officials having common characteristics (Yoon, 2017).

Egonu (1987) regards folklore —a vital ingredient of people's cultural heritage —as the depot of folk knowledge and wisdom as accumulated and cherished notably by the lowly folk. He highlights people's verbal and performing arts, oral literature and material culture, their beliefs, customs, and institution as the natural habitat of folklore. In the realm of folk literature, he asserts, “We find fables and animal stories... ; legends or stories containing certain elements of historical fact; myths or explanatory stories which offer explanations of the people's conception of the universe and their understanding of man's place in it,...traditional songs... proverbs and wise sayings of immemorial antiquity, all transmitted down the generations by word of mouth,...the values and ideals, the customs and beliefs most cherished by the community, the inculcation of which is considered as an essential prerequisite for proper socialization and integration within the group”.

Cheng et al. (2009) emphasize the realization of sustainable development through conservation of ability of an ecosystem to provide humans with service and materials for sustainable development. They highlight the imperative of conservation and promotion of original indigenous (local) cultures for preserving cultural diversity as well as biodiversity for the sake of realizing multidimensional sustainable socioeconomic and environmental as well as ecological development. They critique the scientists' imperfect approach of underestimating the role of original indigenous cultural knowledge in the process of mountain development and assert that the indigenous cultural knowledge, which has been infiltrating production practices, is in deed the kernel of mountain culture.

Macnaghten and Jacobs (1997) highlight public participation as a core component of sustainable development at local level. They examine the ‘cultural’ factors governing the potential public uptake of sustainability. They recommend for people to give their greater attention to those cultural factors, which control and support public participation in sustainable development-oriented activities in different cultural backgrounds, and conserve cultural diversity as well as biodiversity. Martin (1974)

¹ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folklore#:text=Definition%20of%20folklore,folklore%20a%20specialist%20in%20folklore>

asserts that human well-being is constrained by the fetters of ceremonies, myths, folklore, and other "institutional" constraints highlighting folklore as a regressive institution and potential cause of unsustainable development. But this assertion of Martin, is only partly true in case of myths embedded in the folklore, folk literature, poetry as well as folk literature, and it is not true in case of the universal truths embedded in the geographical folk literature, folk poetry, and folklore.

Therefore, this study views universal truths embedded in the folklore, folk literature, and folk poetry as progressive institutions, which have potential instrumental roles in realizing virtuous circle of Islamically, socially, politically, strategically, economically, environmentally, and ecologically sustainable universal human development. Protection and preservation of biodiversity driven by pearls of wisdom of universal truths and maxims embedded in the local languages' folk literature will be accompanied by peace, simple life styles, conservation of bio diversity as well as cultural and civilizational diversity, and use of local traditional herbal foods as well as herbal medicines, which potentially improve human health, productivity, and well being which in turn can potentially improve human nutrition, strategic peace, and quality of local and global environment thereby conserving and promoting universal environmental balance (Akhtar, 1996).

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) contributes a standard definition of sustainable development, which highlights sustainable development as "progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." For realizing sustainable development, World Bank (2003) emphasized the imperative of integration of economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects of sustainable development in a harmonious manner in order to enhance the intergenerational human well-being.

Poetry of Mawlana Rumi, Khush Hal Khan Khatak, Abdul Rahman Baba, and Allama Iqbal has been globalized through translations in at least one global language. English translation of Pashto poetry of Khush Hal Khan Khatak by Biddulph (1890) is entitled *Afghan Poetry of the Seventeenth Century: Selections from the Poems of Khus Hal Khan Khattak with Translations and Gramatical Introduction*, which highlights the potential progressive role of strong and courageous leadership. English translation of Pashto poetry of Rehman Baba by Jens Eneoldsen (1993) is entitled *The Nightingale of Peshawar*.

English translation of Allama Iqbal's *Asrar-e-Khudi* by Reynold A. Nicholson (2010) is entitled *The Secrets of the Self* in which Allama Iqbal warns, "O visionary (Muslims), "cash, dress, silver and gold are not wealth of a (Muslim) nation, This (Muslim) nation's healthy, intellectually enlightened, hardworking, and active-cum-proactive children are wealth of a Muslim nation." He highlighted the Islamic imperative and narrative of universal sustainable human development through the operationalization

of instrumental role of Muslim women in institutionalizing the progressive cradle of Islamic civilization and in proactively building, conserving, and developing indigenous Islamic civilization of the global Muslim nation (Muslim *Ummah*), while successfully confronting the challenges posed by the globalization of the Western materialist civilization.

Akhtar (1996) asserts that Allah (Subhanuhu Wa Ta'ala) created this universe with environmental balance, which needs to be always conserved. He highlights the significance of applying Islamic approach for conserving the environmental balance for realizing environmentally sustainable human development. Huntington (1997) defines development as civilization implying that sustainable development (durable culture and durable civilization) is possible to be realized, conserved, promoted, and enriched in the framework of a durable multi-civilizational and multicultural world having cultural diversity such that each culture and civilization merits its sustainable conservation, promotion and enrichment. He exposes the illusion of the late 20th century that the West's European civilization was world's universal civilization as the parochial conceit and arrogance.

Saeed (1995) portrayss the indigenous human cultures as embodiments of wealth of historical indigenous (local) environmental knowledge about local plants and herbs as traditional foods and traditional herbal medicines, which have been persistently used as a means of human and animal diets as well as indigenous preventive and curative healthcare to realize sustainable human development (Saeed, 1995, 141-145, 179, 207, 221-229):

“Our study of Nature proves that use of medicinal plants for somatic and psychological treatment has a history stretching to primordial times when man had his birth,...The Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) allude to the value of plant drugs as curatives. This should serve as a guidance for the Muslims of the present age...Has the Muslim world contributed anything to this collection by way of plant identification, folklore, or material medica?”

“The decline of the ethics in the Afro-Asian region is to be sought in the revolt against God. The last two centuries have witnessed the dissociation of the indigenous cultures of the these nations, resulting in their having turned their back, upon their theological heritage, accepting the hegemony of the West.”

“Arrangements should be made to make available all the existing books on the subject of herbs and plants for translation into the English and French languages in order that wider researches may be made possible on them. This will help the world realize and appreciate the enormous scientific works carried out by Arabs and which is still hidden under the dust of our negligence.”

Thus local cultures and languages are repositories of such traditional wisdom and drivers of conserving biodiversity and culturally as well as environmentally sustainable development. Therefore, indigenous languages and indigenous geographical folk literature merit to be preserved through digitalization and globalized through folk

literature's translations in other languages. For example, Punjabi language's folk narratives of Dhemian Booti (name of an indigenous medicinal plant in Pothohar region of Pakistan) as a cure for blood cancer can be globalized through digitalization as well as translation of Punjabi language and its folk literatures as a potential medical solution of global blood cancer disease for ensuring sustainable human development on global level. Similarly, findings of local scientific studies of numerous untouched indigenous plants and herbs having food value and medicinal value documented in indigenous languages merit globalization through their digitalization and translation into other global languages have great potential for effectively solving the global problems of unsustainable hunger, poverty, and diseases on local, national and global levels. Moreover, the translation, digitalization, globalization and universalization of indigenous languages, universally true short statements as well as narratives in foreign languages can help end current global warfare and strategically false, futile, senseless and international alliances of Cold and Hot Wars, which are major causes of unsustainable development.

Here it is pertinent to refer to the following maxim found in Urdu literature:

Koalon Ki Dalaali Main Haath Munh Kala (that is, the process of advocacy of pieces of coal blackens hands and face (of the advocate of coal)

On the eve of ceremony of signing of Geneva Accord on Afghanistan (to be) attended by then Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo in 1988, the then Pakistani President Zia Ul Haq expressed his strategic and diplomatic frustration with his own Prime Minister and Pakistan's Western Cold War allies, who later left both Pakistan and Afghanistan in lurch in the 1990s, by citing an Urdu (and Punjabi) maxim "*Koalon Ki Dalaali Main Haath Munh Kala* (that is, the process of advocacy of pieces of coal blackens hands and face (of the advocate of coal) in one of his last interviews of his life and his Presidency with Pakistan Television (PTV) in around August 1988. If this maxim were kept in view by later rulers of Pakistan, they would not have been part of Pakistan's later futile opportunistic alliances with the West. This strategic policy implication is further reinforced by remembering the spirit of another following ever popular piece of Punjabi poetry contributed by Mian Muhammad Bakhsh:

Kikker Te Angoor Chadhaya, Te Her Guchah Zakhmiya (Placement of (bunches) of grapes on Wattle tree inflicts wounds on every bunch (of grapes).

If Pakistan's former President Zia Ul Haq, later statesmen and strategic policy makers had made politico-economic and strategic policies in light of both the above historical narrative and the indigenous folk literature including the above maxim as well as folk poetry, Pakistan would have emerged as a politically, economically and strategically stronger autonomous nation state in the 21st century.

Pakistan and other nations could also achieve national food security, food self-sufficiency and national self esteem through policy of national self-reliance warranted by a Punjabi Maxim "*Jinnahn De Ghar Dane, Oh Kamle Ve Siyane* (The possessors of

grains in their own houses are regarded as sages even if they are lunatic (people).” In globalization, digitalization and global dissemination of several indigenous cultures’ maxims, there will appear the emergence of global consensus on indigenous maxims as universal truths as reflected by the following maxims of three languages Punjabi, English and French respectively:

Bharuya Ondha [*Ghada* (Pitcher)], *Jindha Tod Chadhiya* (Only that person’s (fetched) pitcher filled with water Is acknowledged to be full of water, who successfully fetches that pitcher being full of water to his/her destination.)

All is well that ends well.

Tout est bien qui finit bien [French].

5. Practical Effects of Globalization of Knowledge of the Islamic Civilization [Embedded in Teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)]

Australian Australian High Court Judge (1996-2009) Justice Michael Kirby, in his address in the International Conference on Globalization for Common Good 2008 at University of Melbourne (Australia), highlighted the potential universal sustainable development-oriented solution of the problem of Global Climate Change found in the *Hadith* which inspires plantation of trees as an act of continuous charity (*Sadaqah*) and the solution of the then widespread global warfare in the *Hadith* inspiring people to accomplish *Amr Bil Ma’roof Va Nahi Anil Munkar* (Enjoining food and forbidding bad) for securing all people of the sea ship through the recommendation that the people of the upper part of the sea ship must forbid the people of the lower part of the sea ship from their potential destructive action of making a hole in the bottom of the sea ship for fetching water with the intention of not causing any inconvenience for the people staying in the upper section of the sea ship. He highlighted the strategic imperative of holding the next international conference on “Globalization for Common Good” in the United States of America for convincing the American policy makers to stop the then continuing warfare for securing the planet from its potential destruction. Later, the next conference on “Globalization for Common Good” was held at Chicago, USA. This was a direct consequence of the globalization of the knowledge of the Holy Qur’an and *Ahadith* of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

Globalization of universal humanitarian thoughts-based on folk poetry of Rumi and Abdul Rahman Baba through English translations has created universal appeal for their progressive message of unity and affinity of entire humanity. In this setting, German author Annemarie Schimmel authored a book entitled *Rumi: a maker of civilizations*. Rumi was embraced by Allama Iqbal as his *Murshid* (Mentor).

Arabic, English and German translations of Islamic folk poetry of Allama Iqbal [true champion of human freedom, human’s awareness of self (*Khudi*), and its great progressive potential] and its emphasis on humans’ passionate feelings of the universe-winning mutual affinity/affection/empathy, and sympathy, guarantee of universal

Islamic socioeconomic justice equality (*Adl*) and benevolence, and human's continuous revolutionary politico-strategic struggle (*Ishq and Jihad*) have culminated in the actualization of national independence of Muslims of the subcontinent India, Indonesia, and Iran (the cradle of the successfully launched modern Islamic Revolution). These elements of Iqbal's poetry have been driving all Muslims' national struggle for independence of Muslim Ummah and sustainable development of humanity. His Islamic folk poetry has culminated in practical pan-Islamic strategic, diplomatic, and politico-economic institutional platforms of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Islamic Development Bank at Jeddah and the OIC Summit-level consensus on the establishment of the prospective Islamic world-level Islamic Common Market of all OIC-member countries for solving the alarming Islamic politico-economic problems of unemployment, inflation, poverty, income and wealth inequalities, lack of investment, lack of technological progress, lack of infrastructure, low levels of international trade, international warfare, and patterns of unsustainable development. These globalized folk narratives have culminated in the Islamic Summit-level consensus of 57 member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the issue of establishment of the Islamic Common Market (ICM) for the sustainable human development in the form of the adoption of Resolution # 33/8-E (IS) on ICM in the 8th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Tehran (Iran) on 9-11 December 1997.

Beenish Razzaq (2020) paraphrased Allama Iqbal, "If "Selfhood" will be possessed by the youth, they can change the face of a county in a highly positive way." Many elements of folk poetry of Maulana Rumi, Khush Hal Khan Khatak, Abdul Rahman Baba, and Allama Iqbal have been driving especially Muslims' national struggle for universal sustainable human development.

Following is Maulana Rumi's universal folk narrative of unity of humanity:

"Come on, deny your Ego. Get united with everybody. So long as you remain in your-self, you are a particle. But if you get united with everybody, you are a mine, an ocean.

"Believe that all spirits are one! And all bodies are one! Just like almonds in quantity hundred thousands; but there is the same oil in all of them.

There are many languages in the world, in meaning all are the same. If you break the cups, water will be unified and will flow together

Moreover, Maulana Rumi's *Mathnawi* included his pioneering scientific concepts and explanations of gravity, relativity and evolution as well before the dawn of era of modern sciences of physics and biology in the West.

The following are the poetic insights especially about success and failure of political and military leadership contributed by Pashto poet Khsh Hal Khan Khattak, which were highlighted by Biddulph (1890) in his book entitled

Afghan Poetry of the Seventeenth Century: Selections from the Poems of Khush Hal Khan Khattak with Translations and Gramatical Introduction (Biddulph, 1890, pp. 116-117):

He who fears to risk his life,
Or who grudges money spent,
Never will be Chief or Monarch,
Nor will conquered lands be his.
Either the Throne or the Bier:
Such the Resting-place of Kings,
He who has not a warrior's heart,
Armies bring him no success.

Success thus depends upon the leader,
And naught else: know this, my son.
When the Captain's heart is stout,
The hardest enterprise is easy:
If he have but patience and courage,
Victory bears him from the field.
Violence for Kings, Bognery for Priests,
Parsimony for the rich, luxury for women -
These four are their besetting faults,
As it seemed when I thought on them.

The above centuries-old insights contributed by Khush Hal Khatak are still pertinent to partly explain the culmination of role of failures of national politico-military leadership in national military deafeats (German defeat, defeat of Pakistan in East Pakistan, defeat of the United States of America in Vietnam, defeat of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Afghanistan in the 20th century as well as defeat of the United States of America in Afghanistan in 21st century) and the resultant perpetual national as well as global politico-economic and strategic crises.

Abdel Rahman Baba's message of unity of humanity and peace presented in his poem entitled "Sow Flowers" was translated by Anwar Wafi Hayat in English:

Sowing flowers will adorn
Your home and your street.
Sow flowers; don't sow thorns.
They will prick your own feet.

When you shoot arrows at others
Don't forget to realize,
That the same arrows will come
Back to pierce your eyes.
Dig not a well in another's path
Lest you come to the edge yourself.
Human beings are all one body;
Who hurts another, hurts himself.
On a highland sow not,
Farmers, to farm a crop.
Seek lowliness, o friend,
If you want to reach the top.

In 2022, the United Nations Environment Program lauded Pakistan for its efforts to increase ecosystem restoration and acknowledged that Pakistan was leading the world by launching its Ten Billion Tree Tsunami Project. This practical sustainable development initiative is mirror image effect of the orally disseminated Hadith of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) highlighting tree plantation as an act of continuous charity (*Sadaqa*). In this context, it is pertinent to note the piece of scientific evidence reported by Australian media that there occurred decline in both the temperature and the cost of electricity consumption due to voluntary tree plantation campaigns of citizens of a residential neighborhood of Sydney in Australia.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Universal truths and pearls of wisdom embedded in folk literature have potential key progressive roles in conserving as well as promoting cultural diversity and biodiversity and sustaining universal environmental balance in the framework of a multi-civilizational world for realizing peaceful universal sustainable civilizational development of humanity in complete harmony with the universal natural environment and its countless ecosystems.

In this context, indigenous languages, local and national pieces of folk literature merit to be preserved, promoted, popularized, disseminated and globalized through their translations in all global languages and through their practical applications for universal sustainable development.

It is recommended for the Government of Pakistan to set up its generously funded National Centre for Documentation, Digitalization, Dissemination and Globalization of Pakistani Folk Literature along the (organizational) lines of National Centre for Documentation and Research at Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

It is recommended for the Government of Pakistan to make the truths of folk wisdom embedded in indigenous folk literature as an integral part of the national educational curricula and syllabi as well national policies for popularizing as well as disseminating folk literature in the society, safeguarding cultural diversity as well as biodiversity,

protecting and restoring environmental balance, promoting social affinity, stability and integrity, developing sustainable civilization, promoting harmony in the multi-civilizational world, and realizing peaceful sustainable universal human development. It is recommended for the Government of Pakistan, Non-Governmental Organizations and diverse media platforms to widely disseminate and globalize the truths of local folk wisdom embedded in local folk literature through their regular programs of publications, seminars, conferences, dialogues, academic as well as policy discourses, and inter-civilizational as well as cultural exchanges on local, national, global, and universal levels.

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