

Research Article – Exploring ‘Culture & Heritage’ through the lens of Children

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Our quest for the ‘Culture & Heritage’ volume of Pole Star began by exploring the children’s perspective. For the purpose, RIEDU conducted a pilot study with 38 children in the age group of 8-15 years across four continents with the help of its ‘Young Editors’. The study formed the basis of book Pole Star, Volume I, with the theme – Culture & Heritage. The purpose of publishing the findings here is to expose our young readers to research, thus the deliberate use of simple language & basic analysis. The whole process of Pole Star is to nurture young fertile minds as rationale, inquisitive beings with hope that they enjoy research findings too and develop into leaders with the power to analyse and contemplate.

Have we ever wondered, what does a child between 8-15 years think about culture & heritage? The current research article is an attempt to decode the children’s understanding & comprehension towards culture & heritage. The article discusses four questions that were part of the survey conducted by RIEDU in May, 2020 to interpret the children’s perspective of ‘Culture & Heritage’. The responses were independent of the following variables – gender & age.

Question I: What does the term ‘Culture’ mean to you?

‘Culture’ is the most used and abused term of all. It is an umbrella term that summates as well as defines an individual, family, or society in whole with common threads of customs, traditions, religion, language, music, dance, food, monuments etc. Is a child of today aware of the cultural nuances? Does s/he know that a wo/man can’t sustain without a culture? To her/him what does the term culture mean? What does culture symbolises her/ him?

The first question was asked to figure out, what comes to a child’s mind when s/he hears the term culture? When our ‘Young Editors’ surveyed among their friends in Spain, India, Indonesia, Peru, Singapore & USA, ‘*what culture meant to them*’, the responses were simple & cute. The open ended question led to an analysis that all children had heard the word ‘Culture’ a lot & had an idea. All the responses were shortlisted into nine categories. The simplest & cutest response was from an eight year old writing ‘culture is a treasure’. Indeed culture is a treasure which we must conserve.

The basic analysis revealed that most children associated culture to religion. After religion the responses were divided among culture being either customs & traditions or beliefs & lifestyles. The other responses included culture being associated to food, language, art, music, dance, mythology & folklore. It was found that children of India & Indonesia only associated culture with folklore & mythology. Similarly, children from Spain & Peru responded culture being associated to history & monuments. All children recognised culture as something being passed through generations that needs to be conserved.

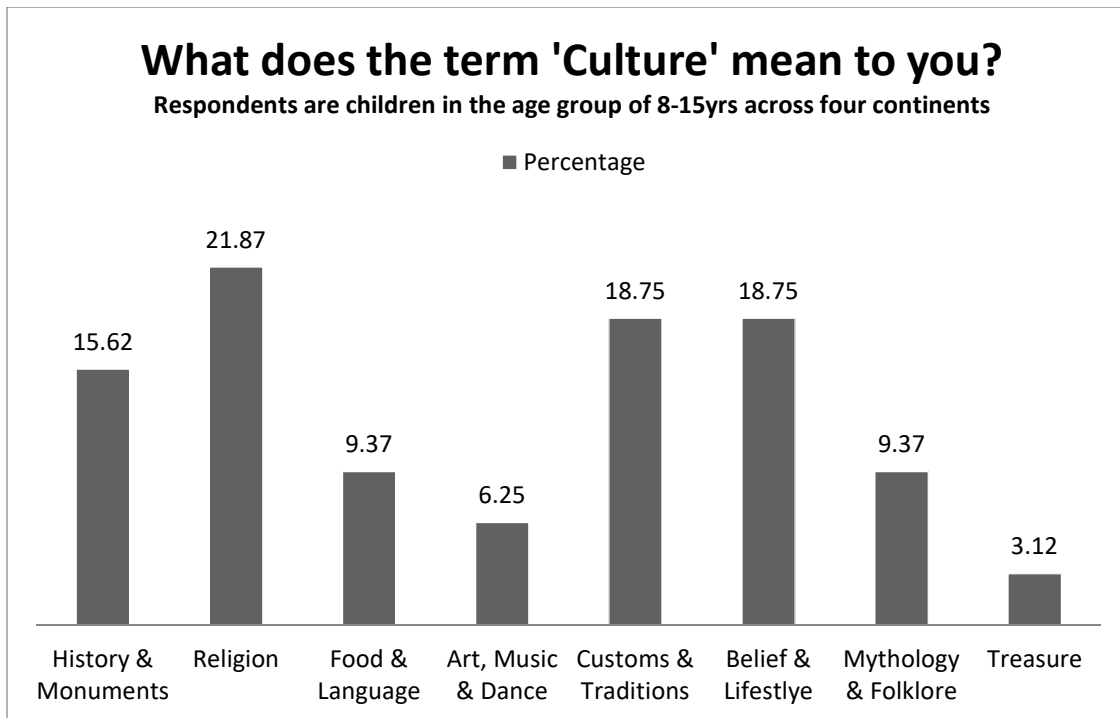


Figure 1

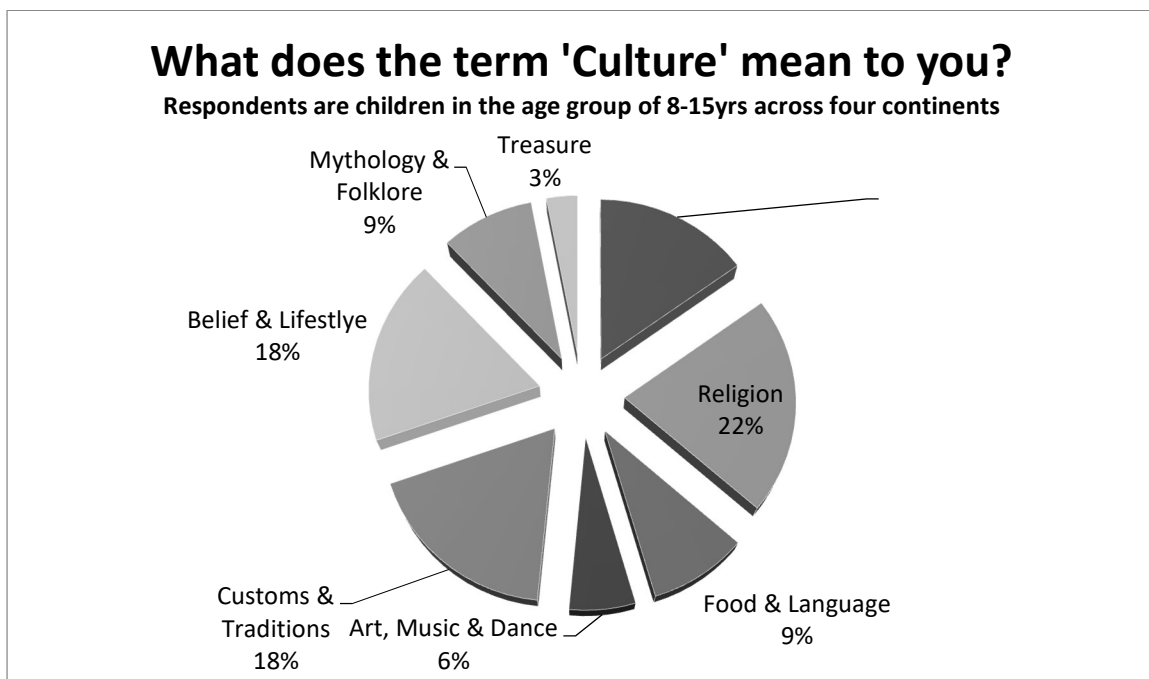


Figure 2

Question II: What do you mean by the term 'Heritage'?

Heritage is our inheritance - what the past has conceded to us, what we value in the present and what we choose to preserve for future generations. When question II was posed to children

as to what heritage meant to them, the responses varied greatly. The responses led to an analysis that all children had heard the term 'Heritage'. However, data revealed that 32% respondents were not able to describe Heritage in their own words.

All the responses were shortlisted into six categories. The most highlighted finding was that children associated heritage to intangible things (language, traditions, music, dance etc.) more than the tangible (forts, monuments, property/ money from ancestors) and were unaware of the natural habitat as part of our heritage.

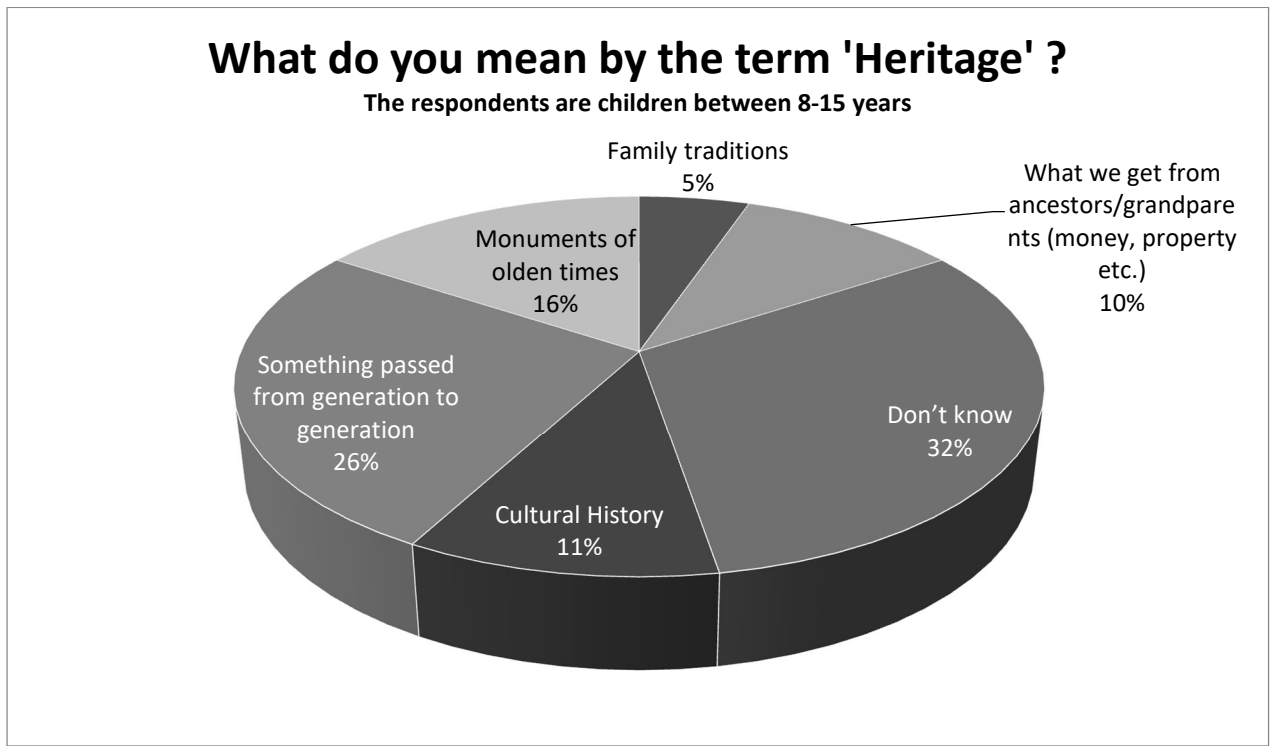


Figure 3

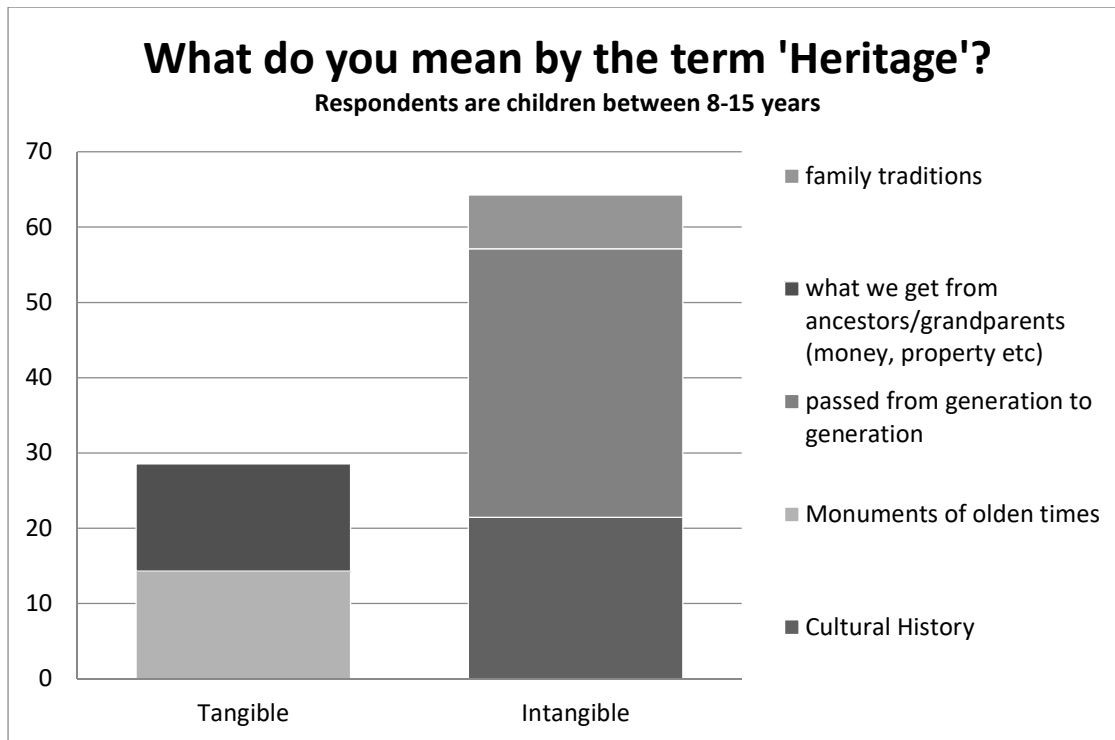


Figure 4

Question III: What do you like about 'Culture & Heritage'?

Culture & Heritage is vast & diverse. Does a child of today values the diversity? Does s/he appreciate the richness & beauty of it? Have you ever thought, what will a child of today like about 'Culture & Heritage'?

When our 'Young Editors' surveyed among their friends as to what they liked about 'Culture & Heritage', the responses were a mixed bag of funny & insightful answers. All the responses were shortlisted into four categories. The results depicted that 53% children acknowledged the diversity among cultures & heritage, thus, loving different cultures & heritage throbbing together in their country, followed by 33% children loved the essence of any culture & heritage i.e. food, clothing, customs, traditions, mythological stories. The remaining two categories went to religion & festivals as well as beautiful monuments & architecture with 5% each.

What do you like about culture & heritage?

The respondents are children between 8-15 years

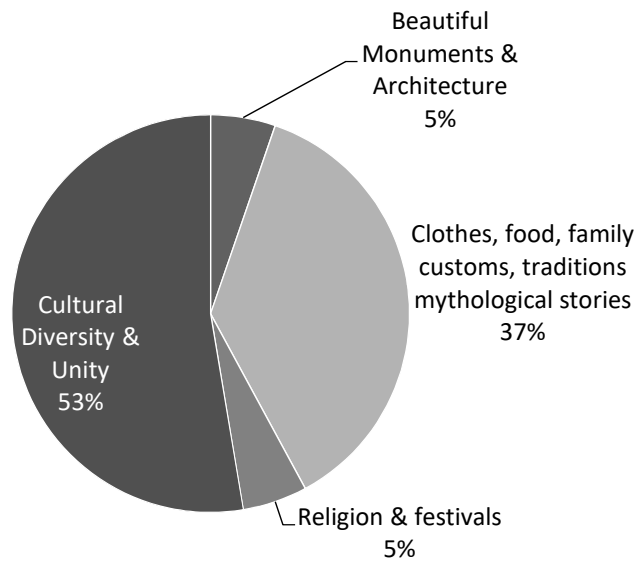


Figure 5

Question IV: What do you dislike about 'Culture & Heritage'?

Can there be anything NOT to love about Culture & Heritage? For culture & heritage is rich, diverse, beautiful so & so that we all love it. During the survey, when we asked children 'what they didn't like about culture & heritage?' The answers amazed us with the sensitivity & depth that these young respondents depicted. The cutest response was from Spain. *'The child disclosed the inability to keep antiques from the museums (which are part of heritage & culture) at her home as something she disliked.'* *'A fourteen year old boy from Indonesia disliked that culture is often confused with religion and thus, the point of conflict begins. He reaffirmed that culture & heritage are broader than religion & we must respect diversity among different culture & heritage to stop fighting.'*

All the responses were shortlisted into five categories. The data depicted that 37% children didn't dislike anything about culture & heritage. 16% children were worried that we are forgetting our culture & heritage which shouldn't be the case. 10% children didn't like intolerance towards the other culture & heritage while 21% children found culture & heritage to be outdated, boring, or strange and 16% considered culture & heritage as nothing more than superstitions of ancient times.

What do you dislike about culture & heritage?

The respondents are children between 8-15 years

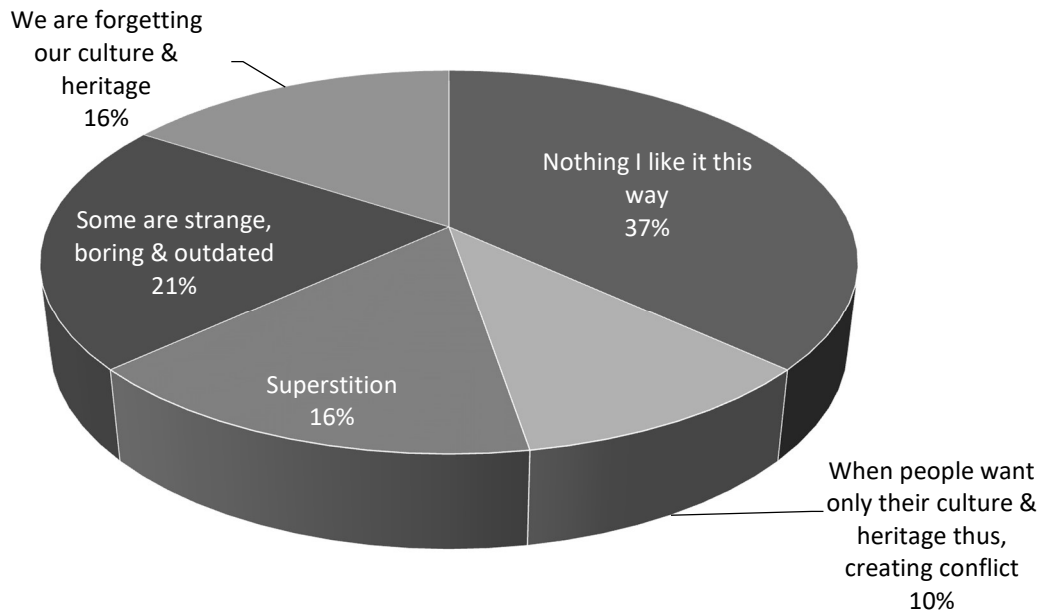


Figure 6

What do you dislike about culture & heritage?

The respondents are children between 8-15 years

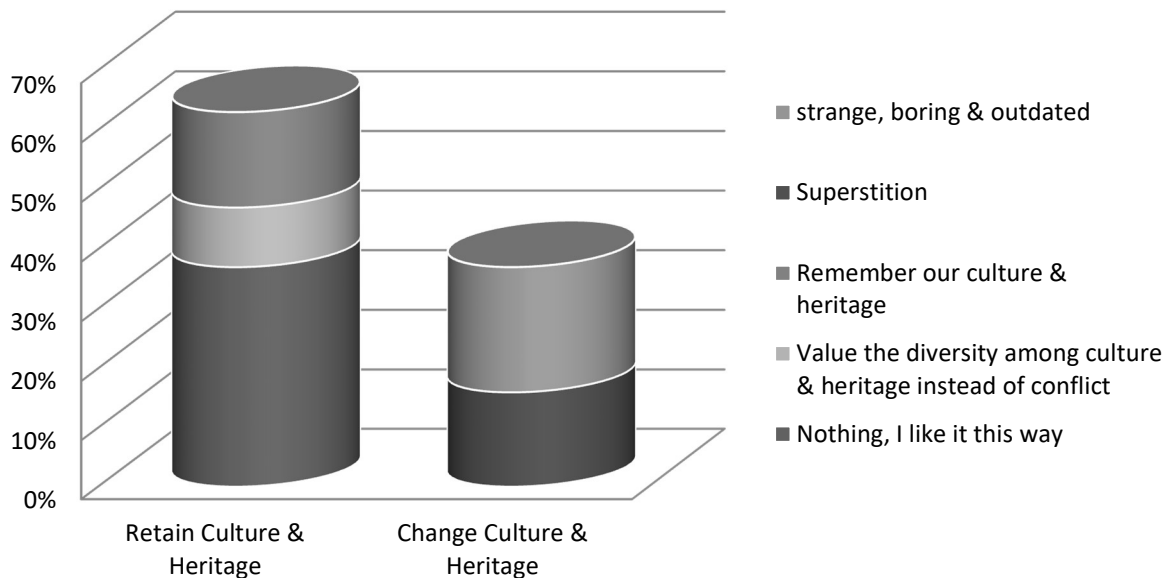


Figure 7

Conclusion

The survey revealed the intricacies of culture & heritage as perceived by the children. They interpreted culture in their own unique way, highlighting at least one aspect of culture. It thus,

becomes imperative to expose children to the magnificence of culture and all its components. Heritage on the other hand, is less understood by children. Having heard the term a lot, they struggled to define it. It is not a good situation. As humans, it's our duty, to be aware of and thus, value the cultural and natural heritage entrusted to us. The role of children as future carrier, protector & conserver of heritage cannot be denied. Thus, it becomes utmost urgent to increase awareness among them regarding everything they inherit under the sun.

Children are our future. We must trust these little beings. It was refreshing to discover that children loved the vibrancy of culture & heritage and at the same time respected the diversity of it. An understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity will help create a world of peace & inclusion, with help of the children. While some children were worried for losing our rich cultural heritage, others had apprehensions regarding the tussle between the superiority among cultures. The children surveyed reinstated our belief in humanity & the future that it will be in safe hands. For, every culture is unique and beautiful in its own way and must be inherited with all its richness.

In the context of globalization and increasing migration and urbanization, the interrelated challenges of preserving cultural identity and promoting intercultural dialogue assume a new prominence and urgency (UNESCO World Report, 2009). It's a huge responsibility for the future generations and it's our duty as elders to prepare them for it. In the wake of current global scenario the pilot study conducted by RIEDU for Pole Star holds significance, created for the sole purpose of enlightening future generations to celebrate every culture and own the heritage granted to them.