

CHRONICLE

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Culture and education are two favourite themes much discussed today. They are obviously interdependent. Culture gives us the background of our education while education improves the standard of our culture. Taking these factors into account a national conference was organized in Bangalore, India, from 9th to 16th March 1986. The conference was co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council on Culture, Rome and All Indian Association for Christian Higher Education. Sr. Karuna Mary Braganza, the General Secretary to the AICHE has successfully accomplished her job as the national organizer of the conference. The general theme discussed was "Cultural Process Shaping India Today-Education's Response". This central theme was viewed from different angles such as Tribal and Urban culture, Religion and Secular culture and culture of Science and Technology.

The Conference was inaugurated by His Eminence Paul Cardinal Poupard, President, Pontifical Council on Culture, Rome, and the concluding session was presided over by Union Minister of State Mrs. Margret Alva. Eminent scholars in each field presented papers opening the discussion. They included illustrious names such as Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadas from Mysore, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan and Dr. Devaki Jain from Delhi, Mr. A. R. Nizamuddin and Dr. S. Ramaseshan from Bangalore and Dr. Ram Dayal Munda and Rev. Nirmal Minz from Ranchi, and Dr. Anawati from Cairo. The number of the participants was slightly over hundred and gave us the picture of a well selected cross-section of our society including four students. Of course the educated had to speak for the uneducated ones. There were also several invitees from abroad including Dr. Herve Carrier, Secretary to Pontifical Council on Culture, Rome, Dr. Paul Lauby, Executive Director UBCHEA, New York, Miss Lovino Teri, Executive Secretary to Church related Education, Geneva. Each day concluded with the critical review of the day's programmes presented by Fr. V. F. Vineeth. These are the major ideas that emerged during the discussions.

1. Cultural Forces Shaping India Today

The first day following the keynote address given by Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadas, we reflected over the various factors that carry and control our Indian culture today.

Our culture is rapidly changing and in this process of cultural change we may give up the old values and accept new ones; we may preserve certain unwanted values and give up healthy and holistic dimensions of life. In this respect two issues were brought to our special attention :

- i. The question about women in our culture and their position in the society;
- ii. The question about the marginalized people and the tendency of Sanskritisation in our process of education.

i. *The Women*: In the oriental cultures we see paradoxical dialectics in our attitude towards women. On the one hand, they are highly respected and honourably accepted even as the supreme authority of the States or the Country. Thus, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in India, Mrs. Bandara Nayake in Sri Lanka and Mrs. C. Aquino in Philippines. The nomination of Mrs. Geraldine Ferraro for the post of Vice-President in the United States was considered as an unprecedented great event in the history of the United States. On the other hands, women in India especially in the Socio-economic aspects of her life, are very much suppressed. She lacks power, influence and consequently also freedom. What is the response of our educational systems to this situation? How are we awakening in our student a consciousness of equity and dignity of all human persons irrespective of sex?

ii. *The Marginalized* :

The charge against the sanskritisation of marginalized is mainly raised by Sociologists and Anthropologists, not so much by Indologists. This may be because from the standpoint of Indologists the so-called Bhramanic/Sanskrit culture is not so solitarily Brahmanic, nor is the non-Brahmanic cultural streams of our country so independently un-Brahmanic. Around 2000 years before Christ Aryans invaded India bringing along with them the Sanskrit culture. But in developing this Aryan culture they received so much from the culture of the prime settlers of the place that it is remarked about them that the religion of the conquered conquered the conquerers (R.C.

ZAEHNER *Hinduism*, Oxford, 1966, p. 15). Practice of Yoga, the worship of Linga, the tradition of meditation, the devotion to mother earth are cultural elements the Aryans might have received from the Indus people.

Yet, the question of identity of the different sources of this great stream of Indian culture is to be studied and further clarified. The new awakening of the so-called marginalized or of the tributaries of this great cultural stream is to be considered as a salutary sign of the times. Our educational institutes have to give greater emphasis for the values of these non-Brahmanic sources of our culture in drawing up the plan for curriculum and extra-curricular activities. We cannot think of an educational pattern without basic pluralism of cultural expressions. India is a vast mosaic of distinctive yet integrating cultures. Pluralism and tolerance have to be in the breath of our life.

b. Education should aim at effective change in the society, both in structures controlling it and life styles expressing its values. The degradation of women and the neglect of the non-Brahmanic sources of our culture are to be remedied immediately. And this is where the educationist must step in, awakening a new consciousness, propogating a new value system and encouraging a new life style. Accordingly the way to face illiteracy of the poor people in our country is not to produce more literature or books, but change the unjust structures of the society which keeps a large section of it under inhuman conditions, incapable of approaching the 'luxury' of education.

Here an important question that challenges the educationists is this: with the present educational institutes, however efficient they be, will they effectively change our society? Institutions are established power structures. They have an inner dynamics of keeping the power within the institutions. Hence, the generations they produce will also be radically prone to keep the same structural pattern in all dimensions of life. No change will ever take place. In spite of years of educational service, the society would remain radically the same.

2. The Culture of the poor

The second day the discussions were centered on the culture of the poor and the marginalized. Dr. Devaki Jain, director of the Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi initiated the discussion with her paper on Gandian approach to the problem of poverty.

a. Several advantages of Gandhian approach were considered.

i. The chief among the advantages was the principle of proximity maintained between the production and exchange. The villagers of India still believe in production exchange life style. This means person to person encounter between the producer and the consumer. Thus this method avoids anonymity which is today an unavoidable constituent of our urban culture.

ii. It avoids violence and every use of physical force against man who is a free person ennobled by the divine spirit indwelling in him.

iii. Yet it believes in organising resistance against established evil structures in the society.

iv. Religion also plays a role in this approach. It denounces as sinful and unjust the culture of affluence which brings about this counter culture of poverty and deprivation. When one appropriates more to himself, naturally the other gets less. It is the duty of every religion to teach its followers to look at this of issue as a conscience problem and to raise an accusing finger at those structures which perpetuate poverty and affluence.

v. The Gandhian way once again reminds us of certain great values of our ancient tradition of education. Gandhi has drawn his two basic principles, *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* from the *Gurukula* practice of *Yama* and *Niyama* (restraints and observances).

b. Doubts were also raised about the efficiency of Gandhian way.

i. It is considered to be a slow process of change and transformation.

ii. It largely depends on the good will of the people.

iii. The non-violent resistance presupposes the existence of true values in the oppressor which are to be awakened by the suffering of the one who organises resistance.

But both Marxists and capitalists believe in quick results and rapid change of the society. Hence this method is continuously questioned and criticised.

c. *Our Educational Policy*: In this context, what should be our policy?

i. It was strongly suggested that we have to introduce the positive advantages of the Gandhian way to our students. We have to make them aware of the fact that apart from the Marxian aggressive and the capitalist

consumerist way of change and transformation there is peaceful and Indian approach.

ii. At present our students are perhaps fed with an overdose of scientific and technological efficiency-ideology.

This would not mean that we have to freeze the technological progress in our country; it may call for a healthy check and adaptation of technology to the mind of Indian people.

The sudden introduction of technology in the urban areas would widen the cultural gap between the villages and cities of India.

iii. We have to conscientize our students about the unjust situation prevalent in our country.

iv. We have to influence the government to take into account the reality of the poor in their over-all planning of the cities and villages. The poor have a *claim to be* also with cities.

d. *A Consultative process of Education and Development*

Change and developments are necessary. But, in this process of change we have to take the poor into confidence. The consultative process stresses on the need of understanding and incorporating the poor in the planning of programmes for them. Things should be planned to meet their needs and they should suit to their rhythm of life. Very often the so-called elite plan many things for the poor. This may not be what the poor need or can digest. This kind of non-consultative projects may have quick results, but may not be lasting, because it lacks roots in the culture of the people. Very often the so-called quick process devalues the life-style of the villagers or of the poor and creates a great gulf between school/factory and the house. The child or worker becomes part of two separate realities. He/She is basically split.

However, the rhythm of the village life style can be slowly accelerated. What is proposed must be basically suited to the taste and mind of the people for whom it is planned.

3. The Tribal Culture of India

India has a very strong tribal belt, especially in the central and north-east regions. Though the conference took place in South India the whole

third day was spent on the problems of Tribal culture. We could summarize the discussions on Tribal culture in three points.

- a. The original tribal rhythm of life;
 - b. The invading alien forces and the distortion of the original rhythm and the resulting crisis;
 - c. Attempt of restoring the tribal rhythm of life.
- a. *The original Tribal Rhythm of life*

Rhythm and harmony with nature is the heart of the tribal life. Though the word *rta* is an Aryan word, it is not an exclusive Aryan concept or experience. For the tribal man nature is sacred, unpolluted by man's aggressiveness and the abode of Divine Immanence. Hills and forests, trees and torrents all are sacred, casting a divine spell all over and communicating to the indwellers the eternal rhythm of divine peace and harmony. The tribal life, values and religion are centred around this unsophisticated simple, profoundness of nature and flow into a life-style of utter simplicity, honesty and concern for the other. The tribal life is beautiful as it is peaceful.

If we look at the Vedic man through the pages of *Rg Veda* we can see many of these tribal values as the central dynamics of the Vedic life-style. *Rta* was the inner core of the Vedic life and numerous hymns addressed to sun, moon, wind, fire and tree are through and through nature-bound. Around two thousand years ago, the Vedic man came to India as a wandering tribe. But with their arrival and consequent domination the so-called tribals of our land were confined to jungles. But to a certain extent there was tolerance from both sides: the Vedic and Tribal culture co-existed side by side.

- b. *The Distortion of the original Rhythm :*

Through continued contact with the outer world the Vedic culture got more and more sophisticated. And now with the growth of science and technology, these alien forces, whether Vedic or non-Vedic, begin to penetrate the heart of tribal lands and disturb their age-old rhythm of life.

The dynamics of distortion of culture is always the same. It begins with the aggressive invasion of the alien forces. It silences all resistance, conquers the natives and ends up with a deeper cultural invasion. It

introduces urban values such as utilitarianism and individualism in the place of traditional trustworthiness and collective sharing. The disastrous result of this undigested and disintegrated new life style is that people who have never begged in their life begin to beg and who never knew what stealing is begin to steal. This value inversion is a by-product of the utilitarianism and the individualism the invading culture is bringing along with it. At the same time this new life style seems to be attractive because of the favours and even honourable posts in the society accorded to and enjoyed by these people. So many a tribal look at the urban lifestyle as something to be achieved and tend to move to the cities both to get a better job and imbibe the invading culture. It may be impossible and even meaningless to remain unaffected by a neighbouring culture. Yet blind imitation without integration and hasty erosion of genuinely human values are really deplorable. Hence the tribals are now concerned about restoring the balance of their disturbed rhythm of life.

c. The Process of Restoring the Tribal Culture. The Awakening of the Tribal Culture

For several years the tribals lived in silence. Now a new awakening is taking place. Every encounter with a thou is a source of a new awakening. Encounter with the English culture was at the same time a threat and a call for an awakening for India. This awakening was masterminded especially by those who went to England and encountered the alien Thou in its country of origin. Similarly the Tribal awakening is fostered and guided by Tribals who have encountered the main stream culture and have first hand experience of the same. Since very often the later invaders have better know-how of scientific efficiency, a section of the invaded society may opt for that life-style. Encounter with a new culture is a two-edged sword. It may foster a superficial culture of imitating the efficient dynamics of the invader, whereas, in more reflective minds, it may work as an occasion for an authentic awakening. Brahmosamaj was symbolically expressive of an emerging new life-style after India's encounter with the West. Aryasamaj violently reacted to it. In this awakening what is necessary is to find out the true values of the Tribal culture and from the depth of these Values provide a new answer to its people encountering a new culture today. It is not a drive to keep the Tribals eternally in the jungles nor an attempt to push them away from the forests and put them in the cities. It is rather an attempt to preserve the true tribal values in their lives wherever they be and a claim to establish honour and dignity for their culture and life-style along

with other cultures and life-styles. Honesty, equality and solidarity are genuine human values which the Tribals seem to have better preserved up to this day. Let the nation consider this as a spiritual wealth of the whole nation and draw inspiration from this culture, if the more sophisticated cultures have lost the sense of them.

A Culture of 'Being' versus a Culture of 'Having'

Our watchword of the future shall be this: "Let the Tribals be". This demands 'an attitude of Being' in all of us, allowing the other to be, in opposition to 'an attitude of Having' which tends to negate the being of the other for one's own sake. The dominant cultures are often dominated by a culture of 'Having' whereas a dominated culture, which is only a sidestream, demands only their fundamental right to exist side by side, but unharmed and unexploited. The Tribal values are more genuinely human because they are uncontaminated by the spirit of Having, 'mine' and possessiveness.

d. *The Tribal Culture and the Role of Education*

In our educational institutes the less known cultures with their great wealth of values are to be introduced to the students in such a way that they begin to love and respect them. All engaged in education must be aware that all cultures are limited and all have to learn from one another. Hence the following steps are to be taken:

i. In designing curriculum of our educational institutes an appreciative presentation of the Tribal life is to be included in certain stage of students' formation.

ii. Higher education must be made available to the Tribals that they may speak for themselves.

iii. In giving higher education we must be careful not to alienate them from their culture and traditions. This means the non-Tribals should respect the Tribal traditions, allow them to be, and refuse to impose one's own culture on the other.

iv. The educational process must be masterminded in such a way that at least a certain percentage of the educated tribals return to the Tribal areas and work there for the welfare of their own people.

v. We should conscientise the government that in their over all planning they have to concentrate more on tribal welfare and make sure that these new projects do not upset the cultural rythm of the people.

vi. We are not envisaging a segregated tribal population in the jungles and a sophisticated population in the cities and villages of India. We look forward to a life of complete co-existence of cultures where the tribal culture is seen as a living river of noble values from which we all drink whereas the tribals receive all the advantages of the modern educational progress.

4. The Culture of Science and Technology

India, Though a land of marked poverty and tribal, wealth, is none the less a nation advancing in science and technology. On the Indian streets one may find the age old bullock-cart along with modern luxurious motor cars made in India. The newly emerging technocratic culture is making its impacts everywhere. It also challenges and distorts the age-old values and life-styles of the people. It is in this national context the conference spent two days on the threats and promises of the technocratic culture. The well known scientist Dr. S. Ramaseshan from Raman Research Institute presented science as a loving mother guiding the aspirant of investigation to the mysteries of nature. Yet Fr. Joe Naidu and his team from Media Centre, Bangalore, were very critical about the boons the culture of science has to offer. Science seemed to be an efficient tool in the hands of an ego-centered tyrant who can be any aggressive nation of high technology or any profit-making business man in one's own nation.

- Science is a powerful friend and yet a dreadful enemy.

a. *The Duel Characters of the World Reflected on Science*

Science deals with nature. But nature, which in the ancient Indian system of *Samkhya* is called *prakrti*, has a dual character. Material nature as it reveals the mysteries of reality also entices us and rarely let us free. The human can therefore very well be lost in this world or led to an authentic self-discovery. The problem science poses is basically the same. The primitive man saw sacred and secular in one and the same reality which he contemplated. For him every inch of the secular world was penetrated by a divine power and presence. In his clinging to nature the wholeness was well taken care of. Science separated the secular from the sacred and

made elaborate investigations on the secular as the sacred was unapproachable to the techniques of science. As a result the secular dimension of man had a massive growth, sometimes even to the neglect of the sacred. This is our problem with science.

b. *The Tension between Vidya and Śāstra.*

From the very ancient time onwards India distinguished between two kinds of knowledge such as *śāstra* and *vidya* based on the awareness of the outer or inner layers of the human person respectively. According to the Indian way of thinking man is composed of five *kośas* with an inner core of *vyoti* or *Atman*. The three outer layers of *anna* (sense-objects), *prana* (life) and *manas* (mind) provide us with the fields of science known as *śāstra*. *Śāstras* are quite good and useful, but they are not the highest knowledge (*paravidya*) which is the knowledge or the direct experience of the inner layers of man, beginning with *vijñana* (pure consciousness), *ananda* (joy) and *atman* (ultimate self). The awakening of the inner divine centre, known as *atman* is supposed to be the real wisdom, *vidya*. True *śāstra* (science) without *vidya* (inner awakening) produces empty persons of enormous scientific knowledge but with little inner depth. Such a person is an Egocentered man and builds up an ego-centred world and culture devoid of divine depth and deeper self-awareness. The result will be a life-style of enormous material efficiency but within the context of a culture of secularism. The consumer is by nature aggressive and therefore invades and dominates the neighbouring inhabitants and their cultures. Hence the cry from the rurals and tribals. *Vidya* without *śāstra* can at times leave the individual in deep superstitions. This happens in spite of the genuine awakening from within because of the lack of true critical tools to examine the tenets of tradition and the behavioural pattern of the awakened. Science presents challenges to be answered and demands behavioural pattern to be decent and verifiable. The development of science (*śāstra*) without the science of the inward dimension of man poses two threats before us.

- i. The threat of an exclusive growth of the outer dimension of man;
- ii. the consequent threat of negating the other in the all-pervasive growth of the scientific man.

c. *The Achievements of Science*

However science has made marvellous contributions to humanity. First of all developing a scientific attitude, science has effectively questioned the

superstitions of religions and demanded greater rigour and exactness in its assertions. It has made life much more comfortable and with the increased facilities of communication reduced the world to a small global village. Airing secular and humanistic values into the culture, it has also achieved a certain degree of respect and dignity for every individual in the society which the religiously dominated cultures have failed to do in spite of their favourable doctrinal position of the issue.

d. *A Risk and a Gift*

Advance in science is like a two-edged sword in our hand. It is a risk and a gift. It is all the more so with the advent of electronic revolution which forces us to change the structure of our life so rapidly and drastically. The west entered the electronic age with a natural pace of progress. It was the result of changes that were already taking place in the culture. On the contrary in India as in most countries of Asia the electronic culture is imported all of a sudden and the corresponding cultural changes are forced upon the people. This means a break of rhythm and harmony, and a consequent experience of emptiness and meaninglessness. Even the West, in spite of its spontaneous entry into the electronic world, is beginning to feel the emptiness of the affluent life-style, made easy by the achievements of science. This is one of the reasons why thousands of young men and women come to Asia in search of inner depth and mysticism.

e. *Science and the Role of the Educator*

Science is certainly a reality to be encountered and not a nightmare to be fled from. It is in our educational institutes that this reality can be best encountered, controlled and directed to the benefit of our humanity. Education is the development of the total personality of the human individual. In fact, education is an art of establishing the harmony between the outer and the inner dimensions of man. That this may be achieved we must be capable of posing the right questions at the right time. Confronted with a new culture what is the question to be posed? We get answers only to the questions we pose. How does the emerging culture of science and technology affect us and our students? Are they going to turn out into persons possessing the knowledge, power and will to bring about material prosperity but lacking in interiority and spiritual depth? Can we bridge a gap that may emerge between these innermost aspirations and external achievements? How can our educational institutions where science and technology are welcome along with religion and morality bring about a balanced approach to the two-dimensional reality?

Science unveils the laws of nature. The law and the law-giver are ultimately one. The perception of the law-giver in rhythmic flow of law was an ancient wisdom which made *Dharma* (religion) the rhythm of human life. With the advance of science, scientific rigour and methodology, what happened to this ancient wisdom? Can our educational institutes answer this question? Perhaps the answer is this: Combine *Vidya* and *Śāstra*. The result will be a healthy person. Combine I and Thou. The result will be a friendly world.

5. The Culture of Religion

India is traditionally said to be a land of Sages and Seers, the birthplace of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. In modern times we see a flow of western admirers to India seeking Indian wisdom, meditation and Yoga and missionary pilgrimages of Indian Gurus to the West. Taking into consideration this national and international context, the conference spent two full sessions on the Culture of Religions. The panel of speakers consisting of Fr. V. F. Vineeth, Fr. Anawati, and Swami Abhiraṃanaṃda highlighted different aspects of religion such as interiority, transcendence and the culture of the spirit respectively.

India is a land of mountains and caves. In the religious culture of India, these mountains and caves have played important roles. Thus mount Kailas, Thirumalai, and Śaurimalai are acknowledged centres of religious devotionism. So also caves Ajanta, Ellora and Elaphanta are well-known as places which fostered a religious culture. Absorbed in the scenic beauty of mountains and serene atmosphere of caves, the Indian mind developed aspirations for religious transcendence and interiority. The mountain naturally symbolizes transcendence and the cave points to the cave of the heart in which the Divine dwells. "He who dwells in the space of the heart" is a favourite Indian expression. For example, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* says:

All-knowing is he, all-wise; his glory
expands through all the earth. He is established
as the atman in the city divine of Brahman,
in the space of the heart.
He consists of spirit: he guides the life powers
and dwells within the heart, being based upon food.
Him do the wise perceive by means of wisdom,
the immortal, radiant, whose nature is bliss.

(Muṇḍ. Up. II. 7-8)

This is interiority. But at the same time this is a call for transcendence as well. Religious culture is certainly a culture of interiority and transcendence. This search for depth makes him authentic and ultimately spiritual. His culture then turns to be a culture dominated by the spirit. He lays the foundation for a heavenly kingdom on earth. But it was also brought to light that in this great search for depth and transcendence the great religions of India have greatly failed to recognize the other fellowmen as equals beyond the barriers of caste and creed. In fact, the more secularized states have made greater advance in this line.

Conclusion

1. The Seminar has given us a comprehensive vision of ourselves and our culture. We have discovered that we have rich values in our cultural heritages, whether they be in the main stream or side-stream. We have the depth and profundity of the Aryan tradition, the warmth and devotionism of the Dravidians, the simplicity, straight-forwardness and the love for nature of Tribals. We are *a real we*, the confluence of all these valuable traditions and ways of living. What one of these groups misses, we find in the other and our strength will grow as we learn from another.

We have made considerable progress in science too, both to our advantage and disadvantage. We saw also that the spirit of our culture is very much religious, characterized by interiority, *ahimsa*, renunciation and a deep spirit of dialogue and tolerance.

But we have discovered problems as well. In our great religious culture the poor are negated, ignored and dehumanized. The Tribals are attacked, disturbed and overpowered. This is mainly caused by the emerging culture of science and technology with its enormous stress on quantity of production than quality of life, or material efficiency than excellence of character. We have also found that our religiosity is not always that genuine or sincere.

2. Now having seen the bright and dark sides, light and shade of culture, it is our duty as educators to pose the right questions, conscientize our students about them, and seek right answers.

a. What are the values we transmit through our educational institutes? Why, in spite of all our educational service, the country remains basically the same? Are we not producing the same type of aristocratic people who will fight against any change?

b. Why discrimination to women, untouchability, dowry system, and all such inhuman elements in our culture still continue in spite of all legal sanctions against them ?

c. Why have we not developed an ethic of science and technology which in spite of its positive contribution, continue to adversely affect our culture, especially that of the poor and the marginalized ?

d. What is the depth of sincerity of the religiosity of our people ? These religions, in spite of their finest doctrines, do not effectively condemn corruption, nor sufficiently influence the masses for a righteous way of life. Why ?

e. Is not such an ineffective religiosity bound to be rejected in the nearest future as salt without flavour ?

These are the challenges we now face. As educators we have to train our students to face these challenges.

3. Hence we have to evolve such programmes as are called for by these challenges :

a. Conscientization for developing a genuine spirit of religion;

b. Cultivation of a sense of civility and sincerity to oneself and to fellow men;

c. Eradication of unethical elements in productivity in the application of science and technology;

d. Fostering of a genuine sense of unity, solidarity among all people and of respect for the human dignity of all, irrespective of cultural differences;

e. A serious attempt to bring pressure on the government to develop a morality based on the equality of all and, to adopt a policy which gives preference to the poor;

4. Culture, in whatever meaning it is understood, consistently refers to the idea of refinement. In the human beings, culture is a source of refinement of the person. Our problem is that in our actual existence we are deculturized in several ways :

We have gone away from the depth of our being, genuine values and from the nearness of our fellowmen. But we have great hopes as we see ourselves strengthened by complementarity of values and heritages preserved in different cultural groups of our own people. The educator is called upon to render his/her service for the reculturization of our people, for the re-establishment of the authentic man and woman in our society.

V.F. Vinceth