



आर्य प्रतिनिधि सभा, (दक्षिण आफ्रिका)

ARYA PRATINIDHI SABHA (SOUTH AFRICA)

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On the 17th May 1992 the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha held its Annual General Meeting. The first part of the days programme was conducted by the Aryan Youth League. It consisted of two sessions. In the first session two of our youth who attended the "United Nations of Youth" meeting in Nainital, India reported on the functioning of this International Youth Organisation. The youth have formed an interim committee that will look into the formation of a local branch of UNOY.

In the second session the youth looked at "Culture in Crisis". The session was conducted as a workshop. We present to you a summary of the response of the youth to the issues raised.

WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY CULTURE?

Culture is associated with the word cultivate as in agriculture. Culture is a set of values that are cultivated and nurtured in a community by its traditions, customs, religious practices, diet, dress etc. These are generally passed on from generation to generation. They are communicated by language and language is a very important tool. It helps unlock a lot of information which helps us overcome misgivings about certain cultural patterns or practices.

HOW ARE CULTURES DIFFERENT?

There are several factors that make for differences in cultures: Religion, Geography, History, Politics, Climate, Diet. The response of a community to these factors determines its cultural habits.

Since the different cultural entities are all an integral part of South Africa there should be common factors and therefore a common culture. This as we all know is not the prevailing scenario.

Generally most of us are westernised or have our eyes set on western standards. Therefore the cultures we speak of are more often traditions and habits peculiar to certain communities.

We should not concern ourselves too much with these external trappings of culture but rather appreciate the value systems of such cultures, ideals such as reverence for elders, respect for natural elements, social ethics and so on.

In this way we will be able to understand that while cultures may be different in their mannerisms, there are certain value systems that all cultures adhere to and wish to propagate.

SOME VIEWS ON GLOBAL CULTURE

Here the consensus was that a global culture was largely an idealism that was far from being practical. People needed to identify with certain groups, this need for identity is only normal and should be encouraged as long as there is a mutual respect by cultures for one another. There is the need to recognise the diverse but harmonious existence of cultures; the need for the wisdom of tolerance. Cultures do borrow from one another and the good from one culture can always be adopted and adapted into another. The youth noted with concern the rapid emergence of a global culture where materialism and personal ambition have become paramount for success in life. Every young person wishes to become an executive who is a financial wizard. Although the youth cry out against discrimination they admire heroes who present "macho" images. Young boys and girls are presented as sex symbols. Youth are not told frankly that such things as casual sex, drugs, junk food are wrong; it is not good for the media and the various industries that thrive on these fantasies. The youth are taught rather to be clever about how they indulge in these atrocities.

IS A EURO-CENTRIC CULTURE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL

This question received a vehement No from all groups. Different cultures uphold certain different values. This has to be accepted and respected. The freedom of thought is the work of civilization and is a fundamental right of every human being. Each culture must be afforded the scope to express and propagate its virtues. The individual who prides himself in a culture must be allowed to further that culture.

Cultures that enjoy financial superiority should not presuppose a cultural supremacy. It does not always hold true that wealthy people come from culturally sound communities. Capitalism and its ruthless adherents provide enough evidence to the contrary. Therefore we should not be misled by the notion that Western or European Cultures are the best, because they stand for all that is modern, wealthy and civilised. We must realise that Euro-centric Global Culture presupposes a superiority over all the other "inferior" cultures of the rest of the world. We all know that the simpler cultures of the "third world" may not boast of any sizeable wealth but offer very humane values of love and compassion. It is a pity that poverty has not allowed them or their cultures any pride of place in the world of wealth.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND ETHNICITY

Most of us prefer not to talk of cultural differences simply because of its abuse by the Government as a handy tool in promoting apartheid. Because of the age-old strategy of divide and rule and the tremendous damage it has done to South Africa, anybody who promotes any culture other than that represented by the English language and western norms is viewed - with suspicion. Such efforts are viewed as a promotion of apartheid. This situation was made worse with the promotion of culture being passed into the hands of government structures such as the House of Delegates. These organs of the government have capitalised on the fears of cultural minorities and have posed as the saviours of cultures in Crisis.

The notion that non-western cultures are ethnic must be demolished. Even in a country like South Africa where Africans are in the majority, African cultural arts eg. music are studied as ethnic cultures. We have been indoctrinated into a cultural subservience. Every culture has a richness it can be rightfully proud of and this pride must never be stifled by the fear of negative ethnicity.

Codesa is urged to acknowledge the unfair advantage a minority culture has enjoyed over all the other cultures of our country. Music, Dance, Drama, as we have studied them are the arts of an exclusive minority. The funds set aside for the promotion of the Arts were purely for the furthering of the Western Arts.

The new dispensation should allow for the full development of all the cultures of the land. We also have to be reasonable and acknowledge that the numerical distribution of the population will necessitate a proportionate allocation of resources.

In conclusion we are happy to note that one of the groups expressed its admiration for the Ten Principles of the Arya Samaj and in particular ^{to all} Principles number 4-10 which the youth felt were acceptable and of particular relevance to our situation here in South Africa.

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