



Letters for publication in these columns should be legibly written or typed with double space between lines.

'Cultural Commission'

Sir,

My attention was drawn to a letter published in your esteemed daily on December 8, 1988 on the subject of the "Cultural Commission". The writer questions the aptness of the composition of the Commission and expands his reasons. As to his statement that no member has a knowledge of history I would like to point out that Dr. Enamul Haq is an historian although I am unaware of his area of concentration. Other members of the Commission are all eminent personages in their own right but, if I am not mistaken, all belong to the same discipline.

My question is how does one define culture and, if the honourable members of the Commission succeed in doing so, how to coerce all the members of society to stay within its confines?

Culture is the sum total of all the elements which combine to make up the whole. It is a living, vibrant thing and because it is living it grows, develops and changes. It is constituted by various elements as folk lore, folk music, folk songs, traditions, eating habits, family life, architecture, passive art and the performing arts to name a few. It is influenced by great writers and poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, to name one, whose influence on our culture cannot be denied. Yet Tagore, although Bengali, was not Bangladeshi. Tagore's writings were greatly influenced by western writers and many of his tunes were in fact western tunes. Does this make his works any less Bengali for all that?

Our dance is influenced by South Indian and Temple dances but is now so much a part of us we often forget the origins. Likewise our music which I believe was developed at the courts of the Mogul's. Even the harmonium so indispensable to our vocalists came originally from Italy!

Today we have electronic instruments and contemporary composers utilize these in the development of their art which obviously has an appeal to many. The extent to which anything becomes absorbed and is then part of the whole only serves to enrich a culture. Art, sculpture, drama architecture etc. all benefit from outside influences and become an integral part of the whole as does the expression of thought and poetry.

Can anyone deny the beautiful, intricate, Islamic calligraphy a place in our culture? Or the 'teep' that adorns the ladies' foreheads which add to their charm? It is the amalgamation of all these, and more which constitutes our culture. Even the Bangladeshi film and the television drama have their place and if anyone believes them to be misrepresentations of our lives is mistaken or, at least, has not lived life such as mine.

As for the questionnaire prepared by the Commission to solicit public opinion, it might be a good idea to publish it in the "dailies" so that interested members of the public can, if they so choose, send their replies. Then it will be truly a national consensus.

Sylvia Mortoza, Patenga, Chittagong

Missionary School

Sir,

Christian missionary schools of repute, which used to make their

students attend chapel services in the past, had ceased to do so long ago during Pakistan time on notification from the then government. This practice was not revived even after the liberation of Bangladesh and these schools maintained a strict neutrality in the matter of religion.

However a certain missionary school in the Moghbazar area, which started in the early eighties, makes the students- irrespective of their religions- sing Christian religious songs. Although the parents have noted this and expressed their dislike of the practice among themselves, few have the courage to confront the school authorities. They fear that they might be asked to take their children elsewhere. With an acute shortage of schools in the city, this fear can become a nightmare for some.

The prospectus of this school also boasts of imparting 'education for children of all communities, irrespective of caste or religion, recognizing and maintaining that the guiding principle of the government, character and discipline of the school shall be based on Christian teaching'. The question arises in our minds whether public service or simply conversion is its motive.

I would request the relevant government authorities to make this school desist from such practices and follow the path of the rest of the missionary schools in the country which have given the nation a great selfless public service.

Rumana Sultana, 61, Kakrail.