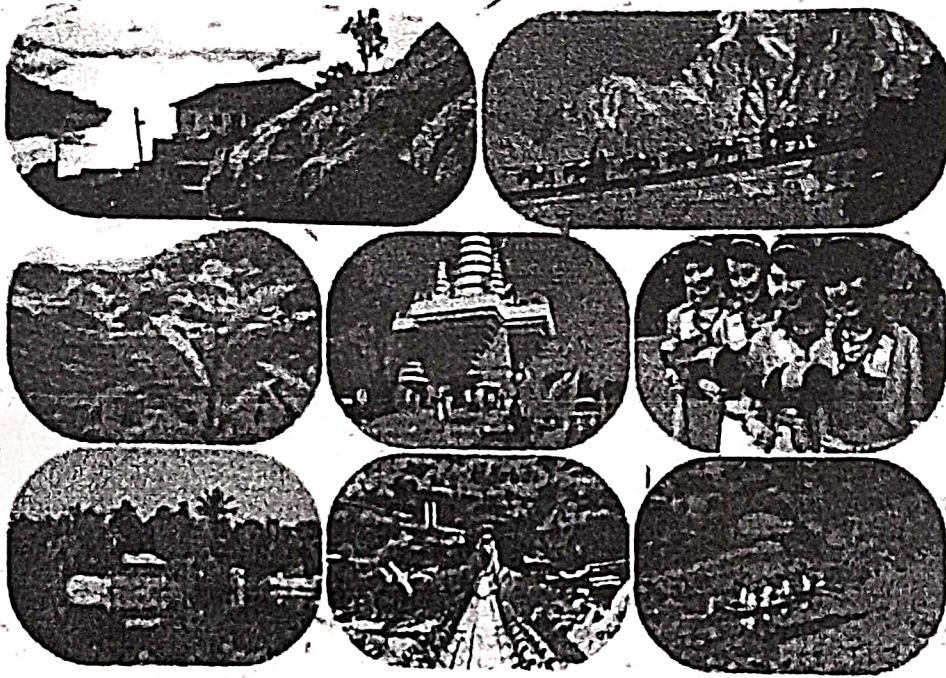




India's Northeast:

A Celebration of Cultures



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&
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Peace in Mind

Valedictory Address From Cultures of Peace to a Culture of Peace

Dr. Fr. C. P. Anto

It is said that people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots. So, the same way I personally congratulate and appreciate seminar coordinators for choosing the apt topic for the national seminar. The main objective of this paper is to visualize critically how can the sub cultures of peace can contribute in creating a new inclusive culture called a global culture of peace. Since you have taken a phenomenological approach (a subjective experience) in understanding the celebration of cultures in Northeast India, I would like to start with my own story, which took place around twenty-eight years ago.

In 1990, one of my best friends Bro. James Sangtam, took me to his home village Philingeru village under Kiphire district. The day we reached, it was already getting dark and had a community meal together with all denominations and community members of the village. I personally expected we will have dinner in the Naga traditional wooden stand plate, in Sema they call it *Asukn*, in Ao *Sungphu*, *yonyunpon*, in Phom *Lakob nungshung*, in Lotha *Chokung*, etc., but we ate in the bigger plate than the expected. We eat in a biggest plate possible, it was five meters long and one-meter breadth, a bamboo table. Thus, the first meal was served with lots of local delicacy the *Akbini*, *Batanga*, worms

and even a few pieces of dog meat. We also noticed the village houses were built very close to each other, what is spoken in the one house could easily be heard in the other house. These houses were never locked during the day time.

We learned a new culture of honesty, simplicity and hardworking mentality of elders. We also observed their sincerity, hospitality, sociability, contentment as individuals and communities, a strong sense of obedience to the elders and community feeling also was a commendable value. Having stayed with the village community more than ten days, personally I felt that they have a lot to teach and we have lots to learn from each other's culture. From that day onwards, my mental programming of culture has been changed and my brain has been rewired. My brain started rewiring and rewriting new script to locate myself in the Naga social matrix. In Nagaland we have sixteen major tribes and around twenty-four different dialects people speak in the state. We also observe here the subcultures (different tribal cultures) of Nagaland are brought together under an umbrella culture called Hornbill Peace Festival or HORNBILL CULTURAL FESTIVAL, celebrated in the first week of December every year.

Then coming to the cultures of Northeast India, the festivals are very dear to all the communities and tribes in the region. For Ahomias it is *Bihu*, Mizos *Chapchar kut*, Arunachalis *Monpa*, Manipuri's *Yaoshang*, for Nagas it's still different: Aos *Moatsu*, Angamis *Sekrenyi*, Konyak *Aoleang*, Lothas *Tokhu Emong*, Phoms *Monyu* etc., In this region there are around two hundred tribes, spoken two hundred twenty different dialects and the people belong to mainly three races. My many years of experience in the region prompts me to say it is a paradise on Earth. I don't see such a variety of cultures and traditions in any part of the country or doubt in the world. Many subcultures can form in to the culture of peace. As Hornbill festival is the festival of festivals in Nagaland. Can we not dream to have a new culture or festival which can bring all the cultures in to one umbrella? I would like to call it a RAINBOW CULTURAL FESTIVAL. It can be the festival of festivals of the region or the Rainbow Festival of Peace in Northeast India.

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Valedictory Address

Then India is a cradle of many religions, spirituality, civilizations, cultures and traditions. Thus, Mark Twain calls India the mother of history, grandmother of legends and great grandmother of traditions and cultures. India has twenty-two major languages and seven hundred twenty dialects, six hundred twenty-five tribes and has six main types of races. Therefore, my question here is diversity or the incredible differences among the communities in Northeast India or in India asset or liability? For, me these diversities, is an asset rather than a liability.

A few months back, I had travelled to Ireland to study its tradition and culture. One day while on a sightseeing city tour, a lady initiated a conversation with me. Having introduced to each other, she started to speak about education system in her country. She said, that she is coming from a country where all our children learn in a happy environment. Then, immediately I asked her, are you from Denmark or Finland? Because these countries have the best education system in the world. She said, that she is from Denmark. What makes the Danish system a happy environment is that they have developed a new culture of questioning and constant training? A culture of questioning develops the subculture and then to develop in to a new culture.

Continuing the conversation, she then turned to ask me about the Indian education system. I made it very simple. Our children learn different methods mainly most of the things are taught in traditional method and they often struggle to learn. At times I think, "In Indian educational system, I am afraid whether we teach the elephant to fly." Indian cultures have lots of positive and negative aspects. We have too much of respect, reverence for our teachers and elders thus our students don't ask questions. If then, what is the possibility of creating 'happy environment and questioning culture' in the state, region and the country as a new culture? I think we need to build our educational institutions, organizations and communities which should be built on the scientific and universal human rights principles, values and practices.

Let me also share my experiences of having travelling another country in Africa. A couple of years back I visited Rwanda, after the genocide in 1994. As many as 800000 to 1000000 peoples were killed

within a matter of 80 days in a war between Tutsis and Hutus. After the genocide the Church initiated empowering and educating women. As a result of reconstructing that war-torn country, Rwanda topped among the countries in the world for electing the highest number of women parliamentarians. The elected women comprised 67% which declined to 53.2%, recently. The second is Cuba with 52% women parliamentarians. A new subculture is borne by the rise of empowered women from the ruins of war devastated country. This has relevance to Naga society, here, also. I said this because in our Naga traditional cultures the women bear the maximum impacts of 60 years old violent conflicts. Unfortunately, they still continue to struggle for their active participations in decision making bodies that directly affect their lives and wellbeing. We don't have even a woman member in the Nagaland assembly. The time has come to move from subculture to develop a new of empowering culture for women.

Today, universities and organisations abroad have changed their approaches. Being an Advisory Board member at the International Institute of Peace Education (IIPE) in New York, USI observe that having women in the board help taking better decisions, some studies show that Governing board or advisory boards comprising of both genders perform 15% better than the boards' mainly one gender. Studies also show that boards comprising of different cultures perform 35% better than the boards of same culture. Study also shows that cultural diversity increases problem solving ability and it increases creativity and innovations. The real challenge here is to make people being able to communicate, well. We do it through cultural differences rather than commonalities. What I would like to ask you, therefore, what is culture, after all? Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define. It's a fuzzy concept. There are a lot of difficulties in defining culture. An American Anthropologist, Kroeber critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled together and brought out in gist form. Culture, according to Kroeber, is the collective programming of the minds which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Another author, Hofstede, looks at culture as the traditions and customs that govern behaviour and beliefs that

are transmitted through generations by ways of social interactions and learning. Julien Bourrelle, defines culture as mental programming and it tells us the good behaviour and bad behaviours or wanted or unwanted behaviours, what we should do and what we should not do.

There are three ways to connect or relate with people in culture. **Confront:** When you confront you believe that your behaviours are the right behaviour. **Complain:** When you complain you isolate yourself from others and society will segregate you. **Conform:** when you adapt your way to behave to conform to whole society: then you can truly benefit from diversity. It means you are observing and learning and adapting yourself to the situation. Thus, if we are able to stand ourselves into other's shoes, I believe, we can understand values beyond cultures and we can understand them better and we can accept them and respect what they stand for and where they come from and where they are heading to...

Antonio Gramsci, an Italian writer, politician and political theorist, who is a founding member and one-time leader of the Communist Party of Italy said that *the old is dying and the new cannot be born*. Why the new cannot be born? The dilemma and crisis we are faced with today are so intense and thus it's so difficult to bring a new culture. What is the biggest problem that people face in the world? Its lack of love. And what do the people long to have it but very difficult to get it? Its peace. Here we speak about the culture of values and it is so difficult to be born. In this context Antonio said, that old is dying and the new cannot be born. Here, what I think a culture based on the universal principles, values and traditions very difficult.

On the other hand, everyday a new culture is being born. We experienced in the early 18th century the industrial revolution and the discovery of steam engine brought a new culture of workmanship. Then after 100 years came the second revolution, the invention of bulb and electricity brought another culture to work over night and increased the production. Then after 50 years came the revolution of computers brought another culture a culture of perfection and speed. Then after a decade came the fourth revolution, a new culture also was

born with it, namely digitalization. The whole life has been digitalized and now we have a new culture called digital culture. Undoubtedly we can say that these were the result of a questioning culture. As a result, we have today, artificial intelligence, Machine learning, cloud computing, and 3D printing recently someone was speaking about 4D printing. There will be reduced demand of skilled labourers in the days to come. In the process of setting the new trend in building a culture we need speed, efficiency and commitment.

Thus, there is a dilemma today, whether we need our culture and education system should be technology induced or driven method or we need to go back to education system with values and principle based. In this context, is it possible to build a new world order, a global culture, a new transcended life of culture? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "If we are to have peace on earth, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; this means we must develop a world perspective." A new world order, where we all love, respect and uphold the dignity of life of all, this culture can be called the culture of "*rasudbaira kutumbakam*" the whole world is a family. A common culture where we all be belonged, cared, connected and reared without any discrimination and judgemental.

To achieve this culture we need to be transcend and transformed persons, we need to move from the present culture of violence in to a new culture of peace. Transforming the culture of violence and conflicts in to culture of peace and harmony. This transition is possible when we move from the culture of authoritarianism to democratic participation, control of information to transparency, competition to cooperation, misunderstanding to mutual understanding, tolerance or solidarity, exploitation to respect human rights and dignity, control of resources to sustainable development, domination to equality and lastly, education to education of culture of peace, nonviolent communication and inner peace.

Let me conclude here, by quoting the United Nations understanding of creating this new global culture called "culture of peace", it is a "set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject

violence and prevent violent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations." Thus UN encourages us to take a pledge to promote this culture of peace that "in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country and my region: Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice; Practise active nonviolence, rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents; Share my time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression; Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others; Promote consumer behaviour that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet; Contribute to the development of my community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity."

The peace channel a youth peace movement of third millennium is striving to build this new global culture of peace by transforming the culture of violence in to culture of peace by peace education in the communities and educational institutions. We are working towards making Nagaland and Northeast India a model state and a region for the culture of peace by 2030. Let me wind up by quoting, Alvin Tofler, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn".

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