

## CULTURAL PRINCIPLES

To understand Culture is to understand Man. The process of cultural development is the process which leads to the development of a unique personality, a unique identity in a human group.

“Man’s culture develops in his search to satisfy his needs at the most basic level and in his pursuit of quests, which are not directly aimed at satisfying the most elementary biological and spiritual needs, but quests which assume importance based on the historical development, conditioning and situation of a group.”

The whole process of interaction between Man as he is evolving culturally and his changing environment is a very complex one.

“...Many variations are possible in the course of development...many different responses to different environmental and historical circumstances are possible at every stage, and of course every response carries its train of consequences, its impact on future possibilities and choices.

“But in spite of the complexity, patterns emerge. At every phase of a people’s existence the accumulated experiences of the past, the learned responses, the habits, the preferences etc. acquired over time, shape the response to a new situation. The new situation is interpreted according to the concepts developed out of the group’s history, it is fitted into a developed framework of knowledge, values, institutions, etc., hence the pattern in the response.

“What we are talking about, quite simply, is the emergence of a group personality, a collective tendency to see things a particular way, to make judgements by particular standards, and act in particular ways.

“That group personality is the essence of the group.” (Quotations from unpublished document on Ideology).

Externally culture is expressed in institutions and practices, the way of life.

Caribbean society which are a part of, as we know it today, was founded in colonialism, which in all aspects was a massive weapon of cultural destruction. Economic and political colonization formed part of the process of cultural destruction. By taking away from the subject peoples their own institutions of decision-making and for taking care of their material needs and forcing them into the colonizers’ processes, they denied them a vital area of creative expression.

This in itself was distressing to the spirit of Man. But colonialism went further. It launched a direct attack on the other areas of culture which even more intimately reflect the identity and uniqueness of a people – religious concepts and expressions, social ideals and institutions, moral and aesthetic values, even their knowledge of themselves. In

effect they attacked a whole range of ideas, concepts and institutions which maintained the positive self-image of a people, which even under conditions of oppression can form a reservoir for the spirit.

But, as Jawaharlal Nehru said, “there is a geography of the human spirit which not invading army can conquer.” This is why people are able to emerge from the long nightmare of colonialism, scarred, it is true, but with an indomitable will to fight by whatever means necessary and destroy oppression. An area of cultural resistance always remained, a seemingly indestructible core of identity which is an important dimension of Man that must receive political recognition.

In Trinidad and Tobago we have to build a nation out of various peoples where the inter-relationship have been made more complex by the antagonisms and the cultural disorientation of the colonial period and the continuing cultural damage of Imperialist domination. Because cultural emasculation, even though it takes different forms, is as much a part of the modern Imperialist phase as it was a part of the old colonial order. And so too is cultural resistance.

The society is made up of two dominant groups, Africans and Indians, both experiencing levels of cultural trauma, and several smaller groups, Europeans, Chinese, Arabs, and a small surviving community of Caribs. Cultural insecurity and dilemmas run right through the society.

Our principles have to be based on a recognition of the peculiar dynamics of cultural development in this multi-racial setting.

In this context we affirm:

1. THERE MUST BE FREEDOM FOR ALL FORMS OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION WHICH ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE IDEALS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW SOCIETY.

It is a reality of this multi-racial society that each group will seek the spiritual satisfaction that it gets from its own unique forms of cultural expression.

History shows us that cultural roots mean to a people.

Cultural re-assertion had been a part of every anti-colonial struggle.

Peoples in the Western world, physically removed from the lands of their origin, like the Africans and Indians have shown the same tendency and urge for historically rooted self-expression.

Despite the extreme forms of self-rejection do assiduously cultivated in the Africans, the Garvey movement, with its powerful thrust of African identity and redemption, was able to arouse a depth of emotion and commitment that swept across

barriers of space and language, mobilizing Africans throughout the United States, Central and South America and the Caribbean and extending to the scattered African communities in Europe and into the continent of Africa.

Emotional reverberations of the Indian Independence struggle and victory were strongly felt in the Indian communities in the Caribbean. The triumph of 1947 gave an added zest to movements of cultural revival and even of re-patriation.

In Trinidad and Tobago today, despite the growing pervasiveness of Western Culture within the Indian community, there are strong contradictory tendencies, nourished all the time, above all else, by Hinduism and Islam.

Even among the Africans, victims of the most severe cultural genocide, there are indications of a restlessness of spirit within this cultural framework. One just has to judge by the tremendous responses to lectures on African history which formed part of NJAC's education program or look at the depth of cultural alienation reflected in Rastafarianism, one of the social forms the search for roots has taken.

These historical realities make it imperative that the society be organized on principles which allow the satisfaction of deeply rooted urges in peoples, related to their cultural origins. This satisfaction is important to Man.

## 2. OUR DIFFERENT CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE BUILDING OF A UNITED NATIONS.

The expression of separate aspects of identity, which allow each group to find its maximum fulfillment, is compatible with the building of a united society. An important factor in determining our ability to work and live together as a cohesive nation is the way in which our people conceive of the differences which in fact exist.

We must be able to perceive unity in diversity, a unity which comes from our common situation, our common purpose and destiny as a nation. A strong, proud concept of nationality, of national purpose and commitment must be merged with the particular forms and influences each group brings from its traditions.

The political, economic and social projections in our principles, which would replace the dog-eat-dog, competitive basis of the society with a system based on co-operation would lay the foundation for unity.

## 3. ALL OUR PEOPLES MUST HAVE MUTUAL RESPECT FOR EACH OTHERS'S DIFFERENT CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS.

This is closely related to another principle.

## 4. EACH GROUP'S CULTURAL TRADITION MUST BE TREATED AS EQUALLY VALID.

Ideas of superior and inferior cultures, the feeling that one culture must dominate or efface others, such concepts have become strongly ingrained in peoples today. But for most peoples of the world, for most of their history there was a different conception. The belief was that each people had was valid for them and ought to be respected by others, even when not understood.

History has examples of how peoples thrown together by circumstances were able to live together in harmony because of the principles of mutual respect and recognition of equality of cultures.

#### 5. THE SOCIETY MUST PROMOTE WITHIN EACH GROUP KNOWLEDGE OF ITS ROOTS.

There is no underestimating the damage done to peoples by distorting the knowledge of the past. You destroy a man's image of his history, you also destroy his image of himself in the present and his vision for the future. The education system is still continuing this damage.

A people must know their history and understand the roots of their culture, to have self-esteem, to be themselves.

Even when we talk about changing the political culture of the society, it has much to do with people not only changing their concept of their role in politics, but re-evaluating themselves completely.

Part of our resignation to a non-participatory role in politics comes from the rape of our self-confidence through denial of Self-Knowledge and the introduction of malicious falsehoods.

The belief and will needed for economic transformation also demands a rebuilding of that self-confidence.

This is so vital to the whole process of transformation of the society that we further elaborate as a basic principle.

#### 6. THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENTIRE SOCIETY MUST BE FIRMLY WEDDED TO A CONCEPT OF SELF RELIANCE.

A people must have the will to be free. Inculcating a positive knowledge of themselves is an important part of developing the will to self-determination. This has to be complemented by another side of the education process, imparting the skills relevant to the nation standing on its own feet.

7. THE SOCIETY MUST ENSURE THAT EACH GROUP UNDERSTANDS THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF EVERY OTHER GROUP.

The historical conditioning of our peoples in the Caribbean has been one to give the peoples brought here inflated concepts of Europeans and to impart to each exploited group negative images of other non-European groups.

We cannot really have respect for each other unless we can remove the clouded visions and see each other as we really are.

Mutual understanding would also help us to appreciate each other more, to be more aware of each other's sensitivities, and so to live and work together in real Brotherhood.

8. UNITY MUST BE BASED ON THE TRUTH OF OUR HISTORICAL SITUATION.

There are those who feel that because of the gross exploitation of the past, the history of the country must be buried. But this period of our history was the cause of very much of the sickness that envelops our society today.

We believe that there can be no real unity where people pretend that basic truths, which are having a real effect on their lives, do not exist.

Our peoples in this society, have to look at each other honestly and everyone confront the Caribbean experience with all its bitter truths if we are to liberate from its disastrous psychological consequences.

There are very real tensions existing in the society and an essential part of overcoming them is tracing their origins and projecting a path for the future that represents a fundamental change of principles, a change in direction.

Our history must be used for the cultural purification of the society.

9. THE INDIGENOUS GROWTH OF CULTURE MUST BE ENCOURAGED THROUGH THE CREATIVE EXPRESSION OF OUR PEOPLE IN THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

Culture is dynamic. It is a living, growing force. People draw from the past to live the present and shape the future. Their traditions grow with their historical evolution as they respond creatively to their environment based on their accumulated experiences, their learned responses, habits, preferences, values and beliefs acquired over time.

Both creativity and continuity are necessary and complementary aspects of cultural development.

The freer the society is, the more people would express their creativity and distinctive indigenous growths of culture would complement the forms more directly inspired by tradition.

In this society now, creativity definitely takes an inferior place to mimicry. This adds to the superficiality of our existence. It distorts any approach by our people to a collective definition of our nation.

A cultural environment that frees the creative expression of our peoples will reinforce the growth of national identity, without in any way stifling the Selfhood of any of our peoples.

#### 10. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT MUST BE SEEN AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

The society must encourage the widest participation in sports, as the physical development itself as well as the mental alertness it produces add to the fullness of Man's development.