

THE INTERACTION between cultures can often be rewarding and beneficial to all parties concerned. This is applicable to encounters between equals. In such cases the cross-fertilisation adds to the acquired cultural attributes of mankind as a whole. This level of interaction has been going on throughout history and the rewards are amply depicted in the annals of history.

With the entry of colonialism a new kind of cultural encounter has entered the scene. This is the attempt by the colonial powers to impose their culture forcibly on their subjects and systematically denigrate the native cultures of the colonised peoples. It is thus that we see the colonisation crusade led by Christian missionaries, justifying their actions in the name of 'civilising the heathens'.

Two centuries of such unequal encounters have left a superficial gloss of the dominant culture on the erstwhile subject peoples. Indeed, the departing colonialists have also left a thoroughly westernised elite, whose survival lies in the perpetuation of the hegemony of the alien culture. There are often two cultures running parallel in most developing countries.

So pervasive has the domination of western culture become, that the whole conception of geopolitical reality is beginning to be defined in its wake. Thus we have the parcelling of the globe into three - the First, Second and Third Worlds. The sole role of the Third World is to strive to attain First or Second World status! Not only does the Third World constitute over two-thirds of humanity, it also contains a multitude of cultures which have histories going much further back than the western culture being imposed upon them.

For those who still harbour doubts, the recent experience of Nicaragua is instructive. We choose Nicaragua because it is a largely Christian country and thus the overtones of the 'Crusades' are absent. The US has persuaded her allies like Britain to help it to sabotage loans to the country in such forums as the World Bank and the American Development Bank, on the grounds that Nicaragua is not agreeing to her cultural and

political hegemony.

The attempt at imposing a social, political and cultural order in the western mould to the exclusion of all existing systems is the most pernicious facet of our present-day reality. This attempt has been absorbed in different ways by the large variety of cultures under attack. Thus the Bhuddist and Hindu cultures have assimilated the superficial aspects of the western culture, but native cultures continue to thrive underneath this veneer. The Koreans, the Japanese and the Indians (Hindus), seem to have found a *modus vivendi* with the western cultural onslaught.

The Muslims have reacted rather differently to this cultural onslaught. The Muslims believe in Islam as a complete way of life, a (*deen*). Their reaction to the alien cultural imposition has thus been one of total rejection. This accounts for a much more violent encounter between the western and Islamic culture in Muslim countries. This encounter has just commenced, and as the Muslims regain the initiative, promises to herald far-reaching changes in the cultural map of the world.

Political and social commentators in Europe, where large Muslim minorities reside, are already branding this encounter as 'indigestible Islam'. Daily there are reports of events in which the Muslims have refused to accept the imposition of western cultural mores over their cherished Islamic ones. The Muslims are increasingly not content with having to observe a facade of western cultural exterior.

The unequal encounter of cultures since the colonial era has led to the aborting of fruitful cross-fertilisation, and given way to unmitigated growth of harmful traits in the western culture. The result in terms of mass environmental degradation, and acquisition of instruments of mass destruction are visible to us. Only in a true reassertion of other cultures, particularly the Islamic culture, has mankind the chance of successfully containing these traits.

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