Asian University for Women

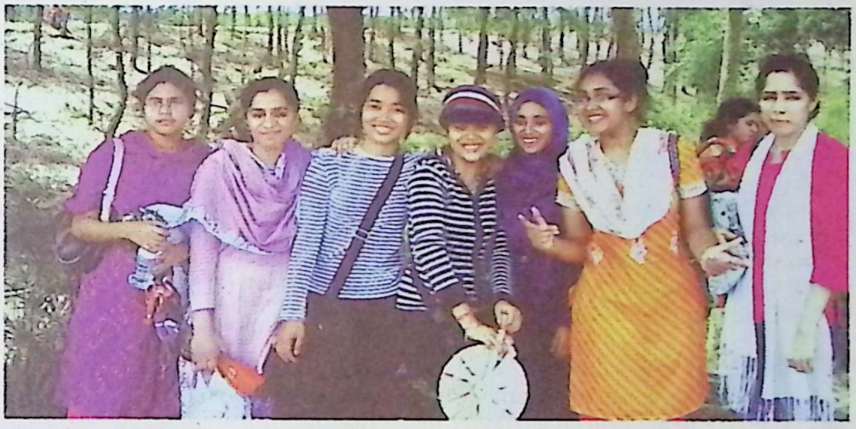
A Center for Fostering Multiculturalism in Bangladesh

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CULTURE mirrors our ways of life. It varies from country to country, society to society, and class to class. Everyone preserves his/her own culture, values, morals, and ethics in the heart. Therefore, wherever we live, we try our best to portray our culture, since it is a part of our identity. However, sometimes it becomes very arduous to practice our own cultural traditions, especially when we live far away from our own family, society and country. But the Asian University for Women (AUW), an innovative secular institution located in Chittagong, the commercial city of Bangladesh, provides all sorts of facilities to practice culture and uphold tradition in one's own way.

Students from different Asian countries including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia and teachers from the USA, Australia, and Canada practice their own traditions, which have made the institution a center for nurturing multiculturalism. We, the students of AUW, are learning a lot about each other's culture. As a Bangladeshi student I have knowledge about different major religions. Because, even though the majority of people in Bangladesh are Muslim, people from different religions live together without any racial discrimination and observe their own religious festivals. Although I was really surprised when my roommates from Nepal and Sri Lanka told me "You are the first Muslim we've ever met", now we all know about each other's religions and cultures. We respect other religions and celebrate different cultural festivals together. Here, we uphold our traditions and learn about other traditions simultaneously.

AUW helps the students to observe their religious as well as cultural festivals according to their own ways so that we can be familiar with the original traditions of faraway countries. Here, Eid, Buddha Purnima, Durga Puja, and Christmas are observed with equal festivity. Besides, this year we celebrated "Pahela Baishakh" (the first day of Bangla New Year), and Victory Day of Bangladesh with enthusiastic participation. Many of the foreign students did not know about Ramadan, the holy month for the Muslims, before coming here. Similarly, like any other Bangladeshi student, "Deepavali", the greatest festival for the Hindu community in Sri Lanka, was totally unknown to me. The Sri Lankan students celebrated the festival on October 15. "Deepavali, which means the order of brightness, is usually celebrated between the October 15 to the middle of November depending on the moon," said a Sri Lankan student of AUW. In addition to this, on August 10 "Onam", a celebration of new harvest and the first day of Malayalam calendar, was rejoiced by the Indian students of AUW. According to one Indian student, Onam is observed in Kerala state for the arrival of a king who comes on that day in an old epic story.



Furthermore, October 31 was a very fascinating day at AUW. On that day, the assembly hall of AUW turned into a horrific landscape, as it was "Halloween". It was not a well-known holiday to many of us as it is a part of American culture, which is not popular in our country. Everyone appeared in unusual costumes and there were shouts of, "Trick or Treat" everywhere. It was an awesome experience for me.

At present, the students at AUW not only enjoy the cultural festivals, dances, or dramas but also the food items of different countries provided by the dining hall of AUW. Besides, our cultural club often arranges festivals to practice our cultures in a special way. For example, recently, the cultural club at AUW coordinated a food festival. Students from different countries prepared their traditional food items and we all got the chance to taste the delicious foods free of cost!

Accordingly, AUW inspires us to be conscious about culture, which is helpful to remove prevailing cultural conflicts and to enrich our own culture. Thus, the Asian University for Women encourages us to value our own culture besides providing a high level education. AUW has thus become a center for fostering the multiculturalism of today.

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