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<th>The role of the Bangladesh mass media in shaping values and lifestyles of children and youth</th>
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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
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The Role Of The Bangladesh Mass Media
In Shaping Values And Lifestyles Of Children And Youth

By

Abdul Halim
There is no denying the fact that the modern society in its present form could survive because it stands for certain human values. A civilized man is supposed to acquire some basic facilities by which he can call himself a human being. He has to continue soul-searching so as to decide his duties in the society. This attitude of man has given the society a strong foundation. This is in short the story of development of human society through different ages.

The great Indian thinker Shwami Bibekananda used to preach the message: 'Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached.'

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His prescription of this continuous effort to reach the 'goal' was in fact a call to make the world a better place to live in. Similar calls were given by almost all great men in human history.

The children and youth are our future citizens. The future leaders of the society are sure to emerge from amongst them. It is, therefore, imperative that they are imbued with certain positive ideas and values so that they can lead the society to progress. Apart from the influence of the place of learning and that of the family, the most important factor that is supposed to influence the life of a child and youth is the exposure of mass media.

The media, therefore, should be cautious in disseminating materials so that they do not have any harmful effect on children and youth. Are the mass media in Bangladesh doing the same?

The answer is perhaps an emphatic 'no'. Rather, their role may be termed as somewhat negative. So far as building a healthy and congenial atmosphere in which the innocent minds of children and youth could get attracted towards constructive idealism, the role of the Bangladesh mass media is quite frustrating. The media do not care to cater to the needs of the youngsters. A close look at our media will convince anybody that they are meant for adults only. They seem to have no

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commitment for the welfare of the children and youth of the country who numerically consist of more than half of the entire population. It can be said that the media are avoiding their logical responsibility towards the future generation. The result of this irresponsible behaviour of the media is quite evidently reflected in present day Bangladesh society.

The Role of the Television.

In today's Bangladesh, one of the most powerful media is the television. Now let us try to examine the role of the television so far as shaping the values and lifestyles of children and youth.

Apart from news bulletins, the TV programmes include songs and dances, selected songs from local films, foreign films, Bengali dramas, discussion sessions, magazine programmes, some programmes on religion, women and children and last but not the least, television commercials. The cultural programmes are not considered to be up to the mark by most viewers. Some of those programmes are rather considered as indecent and vulgar.

Most of the modern songs telecast donot contain any real entertainment value for the cultured and educated viewers. The ideas are shallow and the songs donot appeal to the heart of the viewers. Moreover, the words, lyrics and the tune are mostly imitated from the Hindi films of Bombay and from the Western songs. The same effort in imitation is also evident in the mode of presentation. In most cases, the attire of the performers, the design of the set, and the movement of their
limbs produce a tasteless and artless sequence. Such a situation brings in more embarrassment for the viewers than entertainment.

But the television could have screened many descent materials from our rich cultural heritage including the traditional and folk songs. These aspects of our cultural life are being ignored in preparing the TV programmes. In the name of satisfying the modern viewer, the TV is dumping their screen with sub-standard, back-dated, western trash materials. They are trying to transplant the over-loud western culture into our society. The part of western culture pregnant with extravagance and lavishness are seem to be very favourite to our television authority. Idealism which encourages a descent and disciplined life is almost non-existent in our television programmes.

Not that the TV is presenting only the canned western programmes, but in addition to that they, very often, telecast locally conducted indigenous bands which are again unsuccessful imitation of western bands.

If we come to the part of the dance performances, the situation is rather more confusing. Artless, senseless, meaningless movements of limbs are the characteristics of most of these dances, which are cut-outs of the sub-standard local feature films. Some classical and folk dances are also being presented. But their numbers are quite inadequate.

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Magazine Programmes: These programmes as they are being called in the Bangladesh Television are some sorts of variety shows. Quite a good number of them are propaganda shows. The "entertaining" ones also donot depict any finer taste. The words 'wit' and 'humour' seem to be almost unknown to the producers of these programmes. The finer and subtle side of life is almost absent in this presentations.

Programmes for selected audiences: Though not very often, Bangladesh television, sometimes, present programmes meant for selected audience like women, children, youth, students. As the Bangladesh TV has only one channel and the so-called entertainment programmes and news bulletins occupy most of its viewing time, programmes for selected audience get neglected. Their quality is also not upto the mark. They are produced in a very casual way, as if, to fill up the gaps only. Therefore, these casual productions cannot attract the audience whom they are meant for. In most cases, the message imparted in these programmes go right over their heads.

Films, in television: There are two types of films shown in Bangladesh TV, one of foreign origin and the other local. There are also TV serials coming from the West and also from Japan. With few exceptions, most of these films are basically erotic and sensual. A very perfect example of such Western TV serials is 'Dallas' presently being shwon in the Bangladesh TV. (Of course, the Japanese serial 'Oshin' is an exception).
These serials do not conform to our ideas of life which is disciplined and serene. The pervasive western lifestyle which is the theme of such films can only make our children and youth confused.

The Radio

The Radio is a very widespread medium in Bangladesh. Less expensive and easily available, this popular medium like the television, is also disseminating the same audio messages to its audience. The songs, dramas, and the commercials are similar in nature to those of the television. The radio commercials are rather more outspoken and sometimes they border vulgarity. This is particularly true in case of the radio commercials about family planning, contraceptives, local feature films etc.

Newspapers and Periodicals

Apart from some honourable exceptions, all the newspapers and periodicals in Bangladesh try to increase their circulation by any means, ethical or unethical. Naturally crime, violence and sex are the most favourite subjects of these publications.

In these newspapers, murder, rape, violence, crime, scandals get undue prominence. Of course, politics is also a favourite subject to many editors. But in politics also wild speculations, rumours and character-assassinations dominate over constructive interpretations. Spaces devoted to stories related to specific readers like women, children, youth are quite inadequate.

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Some of these publications are so vulgar that they cannot be read in front of all the members of the family. Some of the pictures published in the periodicals make them, in effect, pornographic. Most of the newspapers and periodicals also publish materials which make the readers dependable on fate. They publish items relating to supernatural affairs and also regularly publish zodiac. This dependence on fate and the vulgar way of presenting things are also reflected in the advertisement columns.

Films

The Bangladesh film industry is relatively young. Starting its journey in the mid-fifties, the film industry now has a huge number of viewers mainly coming from the lower-middle and lower income groups of the population. The main elements on the basis of which these films are made are sex, violence and fantasy. Folk theme is also very popular with the film makers. With few exceptions, most of these films are poor and unsuccessful imitation of Bombay and western films of similar nature. Any film based on folk film hitting the box office is again being monotonously imitated by other producers with few alterations. Films with sex and violence are, in short, Cocktails of Bombay and Western films. Many of the films, like the newspapers, try to make people believe and dependent on fate and fortune. Supernatural elements are introduced in these films in illogical sequences. To make the real state of affairs of the Bangladesh Film Industry crystal clear, a humourous comment of a film critic may be stated here. He said... continued...
that to make a film in Bangladesh, one has to buy one kilo of sex, another kilo of violence, half a kilo of romance, a few hundred grams of fantasy from a store across the street and put them all in a mixture machine. You get the desired result, you get a film.

VCR/VCP/Audio Cassettes

The VCR/VCP culture is silently extending its wings and has, in the meantime, become one of the most popular medium in Bangladesh society. Originating in the cities, it has now spread out to the remote villages of the country, as more and more areas are being covered by the rural electrification programme. Apart from private use within the family, it is increasingly being used commercially. Makeshift halls are being arranged and tickets are sold like those of the cinema halls. In these makeshift halls, uncensored cassettes of Bombay and western films, full of sex and violence, are being shown. More secretly arranged shows offer blue films as well.

Besides audio-cassettes of traditional songs like the modern Bengali songs, Tagore and Nazrul songs and folklores, etc. There is another type of cassettes, particularly popular with the young people has been successfully marketed in Bangladesh. These cassettes contain Hindi songs of Bombay films, Western band music and locally composed and tuned songs and music in line with the western bands. The instruments used by

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these bands are all of foreign origin.

A few hundred of such bands, solely participated and managed by young people have sprung up all over Bangladesh. Thrillers, Comics, Pornographic books etc.

Bangladesh footpath market is, now-a-days, flooded with thrillers, comics and pornographic publications of both foreign and local origin. Some foreign pornographic materials are reprinted and the local thrillers are mostly adaptations of the hot western ones. The buyers of these materials are mostly the youngsters.

Traditional Media

Popular traditional media of Bangladesh include Jatra, Jarigan, Gombhira etc. These media are still prevalent in rural Bangladesh, though with the advent of modern electronic media, their popularity and appeal have decreased to a great extent. For survival and to attract the younger generation in rural Bangladesh, the producers of the Jatras are injecting almost raw sex in the form of dances by scantily-dressed showgirls locally known as "Princess".

The Jatras, breaking from the traditional form in which they used to preach certain morals and values through historical events, now-a-days are more and more influenced by local Bengali feature films and try to acquire many of their characteristics like the fantasy and superstitions.

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Stage Drama and Group Theatre Movement

Dramas are being staged in Bangladesh since the British period. But it was never a very powerful medium and was confined mostly to a limited section of the society. However, it gathered a new speed and character through the group theatre movement. Imbued with the spirit and ideals of the liberation war, group theatre movement is a recent phenomenon, and has added a new dimension to the Bangladesh mass media. During the last twenty years or so, group theatre movement has played a significant role in making the people politically and socially conscious. The people connected with this movement not only stage good local dramas, they also translate, adapt and stage world famous dramas like those of Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, Pushkin and others. The dramas against autocracy and social injustice got unprecedented popularity during the recent anti-autocracy movement. Street-plays also deserve honourable mention in this regard.

Though the group theatre movement is predominantly concentrated in the capital and city areas, it has taken up programmes to spread out in the remote areas of the country. This is the only medium which may be termed as to have been playing a very positive role in the society.

Advertisement

Advertisements as telecast, broadcast or published in the Bangladesh mass media do not always conform to the taste of
the people, particularly the educated and cultured section of the population. A lot of advertisements are being telecast or published wherein the children are made targets. Quite a number of items, particularly milk food, chocolate, foreign and indigenous canned food, soft drinks, tooth paste, soap, lotion, shampoo, mosquito-coil, etc. are advertised in a way as if they are essential for child health. Using of female figures in improper way badly affect the young mind. Some of the advertisements are so unreal that they might have a negative influence on the readers' listeners' viewers' mind particularly that of the younger ones.

The mass media of any country do have a profound influence on its population and Bangladesh is no exception. Consciously or unconsciously, the Bangladeshi mass media are playing their role in shaping the values and lifestyles of the children and youth and unfortunately enough, this role has been largely negative than positive, largely harmful than beneficial. The Bangladesh mass media, their roles and performances as discussed above, have miserably failed to create values among our children and youth. The media have neither any social commitment nor any proper planning to guide their life in the right direction.

The media, mainly because of financial interest, are publishing, depicting, disseminating or propagating such materials which don't conform to nation's heritage, traditions, culture and values cherished through the ages. The media have
gradually become and more and more are becoming vehicles of alien culture, particularly of western culture, values and lifestyles. From a consumer's point of view, it can be put in plain terms that the unfortunate victims of this transplantation of alien culture are the children and youth of the country.

The media want to create their own market and increase their revenue earning and with this end in view, they have taken recourse to depicting three things: sex, violence and crime. They are making money by capitalising these three harmful elements of the western sexual culture. But at the same time, their role is creating unrest in the society. As a result, a total degradation is taking place among our children and youth. They are being dragged to an empty and hollow way of life. Human values and qualities are being shattered. The younger generation is gradually developing a sort of disregard to the traditional oriental social, religious and moral values.

The mass media of Bangladesh are evidently active in breaking the eternal values but can not create any new values or lifestyles beneficial to the society. Certain programmes of the TV and the radio, certain newspapers and magazines, our all-pervasive cinemas and video-cassettes-the cumulative effect of all these have made our younger generation violence-prone. Significantly enough, in almost all the social crimes- campus violence, killings, rape, kidnapping and demand for ransom, street fighting, bank robbery, car-chasing, hijacking, etc., we
painfully observe that a sizeable portion of our younger generation is actively involved.

Exceptions apart, the Bangladesh television and the radio do present some programmes suitable to the children and youth, but they are just drops in the ocean and moreover, standard is not always up to the expectation and cannot help create the desired values or lifestyles beneficial to the society.

The video culture (the English and the Hindi films, including the porno or blue films) is creating a sort of 'sexual perversion' among the youth, making them unstable and restless. As a result, sex-related crimes (rape and murder of women, torture and throwing of acid on them, demand for dowry, teenage marriage) are increasing today in such a proportion that was unthinkable even some ten or fifteen years back. A look on any day's newspapers could convince a reader about the downward trend in the society of the moral values.

In their race for increasing circulation, the daily newspapers are competing each other by publishing prominently stories of sex and scandals. By reading these stories, the younger generation is getting more and more interested in sex-related affairs. It should be borne in mind that Bangladesh is predominantly a developing agro-based society, unlike the industrialised and permissive society of the west. What is almost natural in those countries are harmful to our society.

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The children, the teenagers and youth, before attaining their physical maturity, are becoming over-conscious about sex, thanks to the role of the media. As a result, different kinds of sex-related crimes are increasing and polluting our younger generation.

In conclusion, it may be said that the popular Bangladesh mass media with their enormous capacity to influence the youth, could have become their friend, philosopher and guide. But unfortunately, they are playing a contrary role and thus, failed to perform their duties towards the society and the nation.

It is high time, the Bangladesh mass media take up the issues relating to the younger generation in right perspective, otherwise the nation may not achieve its desired goals of building a healthy and prosperous society-so optimistically cherished in the spirit of the glorious war of liberation.