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The Role Of The Media In A National Crisis:
Bangladesh

By

A K M Abdur Rouf
THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN A NATIONAL CRISIS.

The motion picture is not only an entertainment media, it is now recognized as an important art form, because it is an excellent media of reflection for contemporary life and history. The motion picture as an audio-visual media has achieved the popularity that tends to dominate the scene of information, education, entertainment and culture much more effectively than other media of artistic expressions. This media now-a-days has much appealing effect to the illiterate people of underdeveloped and developing countries than even that of the press. So, today's film art has much effective impact to build present and future generations.

Educational planning is an integrated part of development plans of Bangladesh. But lack of accurate data about the media of motion picture is considered a major hinderance to planning film art to meet the country's need. In the absence of sufficient research on film art, together with lack of reliable and adequate data, the policies and programmes in the past had to be based on preconceived notions which had little or no relevance to the social and economic realities of the Country. Hence, the planner of the film art had to work with such unreliable data which could not bring the plan to pragmatic level.

In Bangladesh there was not any kind of film art educational institute or film archive before 1978. Archives and Museums in different countries collect and preserve selected art works, publications, scripts, historical and cultural heritages, customs, video-tapes, audio-tapes etc. and it has been recognized all over the world to sustain the past heritage of a nation. Considering the necessity of preserving films, videos and audio taps mainly national productions and other related film materials the Government of Bangladesh had established the Bangladesh Film Archive in the year 1978 in Dhaka, the Capital of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Film Archive is a repository centre of Films and allied film materials such as film posters, shooting scripts, still photographs, song books, film festival materials, synopsis, paper clippings, film books, journals etc.
The film industry in Bangladesh had started in the year 1957 from zero-level and today about 70 to 75 feature films are being produced every year since the completion of first ever film studio, The Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC). Apart from Government owned Bangladesh Film Development Corporation, there are, three privately owned studies offering facilities to film makers. Here, as like in other countries, it has not always been possible for film producers to preserve their productions for several reasons. Because, films after a certain period tend to decompose unless special precautions are taken to preserve them. On the other hand, the producers after the commercial exploitation, often destroy the films to provide storage space for new productions or other business purposes. Many movie companies are changing their marketing strategies to beat the other competitors at their own game. The fact remains that most of the concerned companies do not have the time, source nor technical skill to preserve films for posterity. In fact some of the important films have already been lost due to lack of proper care and preservation. Most of film media persons do not have a clear idea of the nature of the role that media should play.

Bangladesh Film Archive has a certain level of permanence and enjoys the confidence of the film industry. Necessary technical care and service are given to the collected films for their long term preservation.

One of the first conditions for the preservation of films is that it should be stored in a relatively cool and not too moist atmosphere. Undoubtedly, it is more difficult and expensive to create good storage conditions in tropical countries than that in temperate ones. In any case, particularly under bad climatic condition, no store should be built in damp surroundings. Dry ground, dry surroundings, natural or artificial sheds and fresh air is primarily required for the creation of good storage conditions. They will have to be supplemented by technical devices, designed to complement and improve on local climatic conditions.

The importance of moving images not only as expression of cultural identity and human creativity, but also as testimonies to world history and as a means of communication was constantly underlined throughout the people's opinion. Factors such as the volume of moving images produced which differed greatly from country to country, the existence in certain countries of private
or semi-private as well as public institutions for the preservation of moving images, and the differing socio-economic conditions. It should be kept in mind in this connection that the moving images heritage of national production and to provide for the possibility of selecting material for long-term preservation when it was impossible for technical or financial reasons to preserve the entire heritage which has great historic value for future generations. Film Archive could acquire moving images for preservation purposes on the basis through voluntary deposit arrangements with holders of rights, by purchase or donation.

Due to the nature of their material embodiment and the various methods of their fixation, moving images should be maintained under specific technical conditions. Sometimes many elements of the moving image heritage disappear due to deterioration, accident or unwarranted disposal, which constitutes an irreversible impoverishment of that heritage. Recognising the results yielded by the efforts of specialised institutions to save moving images from the dangers to which they are exposed.

Thus, moving images shall be taken to mean any series of images recorded on a support (irrespective of the method of recording or of the nature of the support, such as film, tape or disc, used in their initial or subsequent fixation) with or without accompanying sound, which when projected impart an impression of motion and which are intended for communication or distribution to the public or made for documentation purposes; they shall be taken to include inter-alia items in the following categories:

i) Cinematographic productions i.e., feature films, short films, popular science films, newreels and documentaries, animated and educational films;

ii) Television productions made by or for broadcasting organisations.

iii) Videographic productions contained in Videograms other than those referred to under (i) and (ii) above.

b) Pre-print material shall be taken to mean the material support for moving images. Consisting in the case of a cinematographic film of a negative, inter-negative or inter-positive and in the case of a videogram of a master, such pre-print material being intended for the procurement of copies.
The appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that the moving image heritage is afforded adequate physical protection. Since poor storage conditions accelerate the deterioration process to which the material supports are continuously subject and may even lead to their total destruction, moving images should be preserved in officially recognised film and television Archives and processed accordingly to the highest Archival standards. Furthermore, research should be specially directed towards the development of high quality and lasting support media for the proper safeguarding and preservation of moving images.

Access should be made available as far as possible to the works and information sources represented by moving images which are acquired, safeguarded and preserved by the Archives. Their utilisation should not prejudice either the legitimate rights or the interest in the making and exploitation thereof, in accordance with the provisions of the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention for the protection of literary and artistic works and the convention for the protection of performers, producers, film makers and Broadcasting Organisations etc.

At present the main crisis of the film media in our country is the ignorance regarding technical methodology for preservation of films. In this situation we are inviting to encourage private bodies and individuals holding moving images to take the necessary steps to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of these images under adequate technical conditions. Encouraging these bodies and individuals to entrust to our officially recognised archive for long term preservation of film materials.

In my opinion methodology to improve the acquisition and preservation of moving images should be as follows:

i. Exchange of information on methodology and techniques for the safeguarding and preservation of moving images and in particular on the findings of recent improvement or research in this respect;

ii. Participation in international programmes like the present seminar on "The Role of the Media in a National Crisis" Organised by the AMIC;

iii. Training programmes in the safeguarding, restoration and acquisition of moving images is necessary covering the most recent methods and techniques.

A.K.M. Abdur Rouf
CURATOR