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The Effects Of Mass Media
On The Traditional Performing Arts In Thailand

By

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Thailand's Report

Presented at
The Seminar on "Mass Media, Tradition and Change"
Islamabad, Pakistan.

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The Effects of Mass Media on The Traditional Performing arts at The Fine Arts Department of Thailand

Introduction

People of every nation have the right and duty to preserve and develop their cultural heritage. Thailand, as well as other countries, is striving to protect its cultural identity. Thai cultural heritage in performing arts has existed for centuries and has been handed down through generations. Once they were the privilege of the nobilities, but later became the responsibility of the government to take care of this cultural art.

The Fine Arts Department under the Ministry of Education adopted the government policy which specially emphasized the preservation and development of this cultural identity. The responsibility for preserving is assigned to the Division of Arts Education, which runs the College of Dramatic arts, providing students with the basic studies in performing arts; while the Division of Music and Drama has the function of promoting and relaying Thai traditional performing arts to the public.

Facilities for introduction of Thai cultural performing arts to the public

The Fine Arts Department brings Thai classical performing arts to the public in various ways.

The Efforts: Regular performances of drama and dance are given at the national theatre with seating capacities of 1300 in the main auditorium and 400 in the small one. Other places for performing are outdoor pavilions in public parks. The department also reaches out to provinces outside the metropolis through its regular touring programmes.

The Need for an Effective Public Communication

Performances without audiences cannot make our cultural heritage survive. How could people be aware of the events at the theatre? They need publicity. The public relations section attached to the Department’s secretariat’s office is responsible for keeping the public fully informed of the activities. To accomplish this target, use is made of all channels of communication: newspaper, television, radio, publication. The issue of press releases, slide shows, photographs, posters has been done to spread the news to the people. Apart from that, other direct link with the public is
the information centre.

Mass media becomes an important factor; it is concerned with communication, transmitting information and ideas from one to another. It helps in promoting cultural arts by making widespread information and, thereby, induces public response by creating better knowledge of human needs and desires. We can examine and evaluate how much our production in performing arts appeal to the public or how well it has succeeded.

The effects of Mass Media on the Traditional performing arts

Mass media which involves mechanical and electronic devices, such as cameras, projectors, record players, radios, television sets and audio and videotape machines contribute greatly to the promotion of cultural arts. Audio and visual recordings facilitate the arts of music composition and dance choreography as well as the learning process of the performers and students.

Television is a good vehicle in relaying our Cultural arts to the public. In the olden days, when the dancers performed on stage or open ground, they felt that they were engaging in mass communication, but only with a limited group of people. Nowadays, with one performance on television, they can reach a hundred times the number of audience.

The Fine Arts Department has always recognized the effectiveness of mass media for the promotion of classical dance and music and has always tried to maintain programs of music and dances on radio and television.

But it is difficult to make a full report on the effects of the media on the traditional arts because the department has not kept statistics concerning performances on radio and television and at the national theater and other stages. Neither has there been any official estimation of the public reaction to the programs. Nevertheless here is the record of programs which could be collected by the writer.

Radio Programs

1. Instrumental and vocal Thai classical music on an educational program on the radio station of the Ministry of Education. (Thirty minutes, once a month). This program was cancelled in 1979 due to lack of manpower and time.

2. Instrumental and vocal Thai classical music on the Radio of Thailand (Thirty minutes, once a month).
4. Art of Thai Classical Music, an educational program, on Radio of Chulalongkorn University (Thirty minutes, every Sunday)
(from 1980)

Television Programs

1. Thai classical drama or the Khon (masked play) (One and a half hours, once a month). This program was sponsored by the television station but was cancelled in 1980 due to a scheduling problem.

2. "Saturday Club" program, a program of folk dances (Twenty minutes, once a month)

3. "Khon" program, a new program started this year (1983), sponsored by the television station for the purpose of promoting Thai art and culture (Thirty minutes, twice a month).

There are two projects being considered for television.

The first project will consist of fifty thirty-minute programs of the Khon, to be televised between January and December 1983. This will be sponsored by private resources.

The second project is called "Thai Cultural Heritage". It covers not only Thai classical music and dance, but all forms of Thai cultural heritage. It is sponsored by the Fine Arts Department and has been started in 1979. It has been a monthly program but will be increased to two performances a month for this year.

Both programs are for the purpose of preserving and promoting Thai traditional arts.

Conclusion

The Advantages of Mass Media on Traditional Arts.

Mass media facilitates the distribution of information concerning arts and culture. The recipients of information need not make an effort or any payment but can be gradually inspired and stimulated. In this age when society is changing rapidly and external influences are greatly affecting our youths, it is important that we encourage them to know and to take pride in their own cultural heritage. The best way to bring them knowledge
and consciousness is through mass media.

Disadvantage

Like any invention, the advantage and disadvantage depend on how it is put to use. Anything that is performed on stage or on mass media must be subjected to public opinion and criticism. Criticism is not always motivated by the most honest reason but a prejudiced and selfish one. To give an example, the Fine Arts Department, when performing a folk dance, has to make some adjustment in order to make it suitable for stage presentation. As a result it has been criticized for corrupting the authenticity of the art form. What the observer does not realize is that the department is trying to compromise, to preserve the basic character of the art form and yet make it as attractive to the viewing public as possible.