

# What about cultural development?



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**W**HEN it comes to the idea of Bangladesh's development many stakeholders make ambitious claims and leave aside any blame.

Economists and policy-readers may rightly hail the Prime Minister for setting the goals, which are, by and large, about better gross domestic products, income generation, and human development indices. Newspapers and television shows are filled with abundant praise and little critiquing that is needed to make sense of the complexity of the issue under question. From the outline and assessment of the policies, there seems to have been an ominous mishap in the scheme of thinking about Bangladesh's development. The mishap is related to the way development is being understood. Could income generation, leading to possible facilitation of basic amenities, alone guarantee holistic and sustainable development? Umpteen questions surface underlining the way development is imagined and discussed in Bangladesh today. Would the presence of chaotic concrete jungle of multistoried apartments alone be markers of development? Are the streets of cities in Bangladesh bursting with traffic congestion not due to an allegedly flawed idea of development?

The reason why these questions are crucial for ordinary citizens in Bangladesh today is not just due to the crises of stark income-disparity, various kinds of hazards lurking in the surrounding, or the set of inconveniences that may compel upwardly middle class to frown upon

the model of development. The reason why a critical rethinking on development should be the norm in Bangladesh is a potential decline at the front of culture. Indeed there is a soft and almost subjugated cultural outcry, not audible enough to reach the pundits of development. A hyperbolic, but forceful realisation is that crass commerce seems to have taken over the cultural constitution of Bangladesh. Ideally, commerce and culture could have flourished in intimate unity, which does not seem to be the case. And hence, the much-needed holistic notion of development inclusive of the cultural aspect is conspicuous by absence in Bangladesh today.

Let's look at some of the visible instances and try to hear the soft sobs amid the high decibel traffic noise in the city of Dhaka.

Bangladesh has had a glorious cultural history in the region of South Asia ever since its inception. Not only folk performances, mostly known as indigenous in contemporary Bangladesh, but also modern theatre played a crucial role in the country's socio-political struggles. It delivered people's cultural narratives in the face of political upheavals. The group theatre movement persisted with progressive ideas and endeavoured to nourish a cultural imagination of post-liberation Bangladesh. Many of the theatre artists and activists worked in solidarity with their counterparts in various parts of the region including India and Pakistan. They frequently showed up in National School of Drama, worked with well-known theatre personalities, and engendered a sign of dynamic theatrical practices. They performed adaptations of scripts penned by European theatre masters as well as original plays written by Bangladeshi writers, emitting an

unparalleled theatrical cosmopolitanism. If at any point in the political history the proscenium theatre came under the dictatorial surveillance, the artists took to the street performing in the midst of masses. One can never forget the vibrant street theatre during the troubled times in the political history of Bangladesh.

But where is modern theatre today, with group theatre almost sliding under the shadows of concrete bureaucratic offices? Israfil Shah, a teacher of dramatic arts at Dhaka University, made a critical comment worth mentioning, "Groups have become redundant as theatre itself is going through tough times." This is not an exceptional pessimism. The renowned thespian Ramendu Majumdar informs about the institutional crises in the theatre scene in Bangladesh too. He observed, "Some groups are struggling to stay in the picture with a few performances bringing the audience to the proscenium."

This occasions a volley of questions hard to answer. Why is modern theatre not in the reckoning of the developmental imagination of Bangladesh today? What new plays dealing with contemporary issues of people and politics are on offer for the audience? What are the arrangements to promote relatively new theatre groups striving to emerge to the cultural forefront? And what is the audience doing in the wake of modern theatre slipping away?

Are they watching popular cinema? Not really. Popular cinema in Bangladesh could never reach a satisfactory status despite the efforts of some pioneers in the early days, and some exceptional filmmakers trying to deliver good works in recent times such as *Aynabaji* last year. A glimpse of the disturbing absence of Bangladeshi films

is available in the streets of various cities where public walls are smeared with political posters alone. Seldom does a cinema poster greet one in the public space in Bangladesh.

Allegedly, Bangladeshi cinema had been poor clones of Bollywood. Notwithstanding, they exist and hence one cannot dismiss them entirely from the developmental scheme of thinking. Even though it may appear to be a daunting challenge for development experts with a deterministic mindset, it must be acknowledged that cinema is an important means in the developmental planning, initiatives, and meeting the goal posts. There are reams of works to inform about the relation between popular culture and development in any modern society. If popular cinema is in poor shape, as history of cinema in Bangladesh informs, it is also due to a systematic and sustained neglect of the industry by the state and highbrow cultural puritans. The diminishing number of cinema halls is just one small fragment indicating the decline of public culture in contemporary Bangladesh.

If this is so, where are the audiences, in the abysmally thought out cultural development in the country today? Apparently the audiences have turned to television. And most of the time they watch Bollywood movies or television soaps dished out from nooks and corners of India. There has been some noise recently on the growing popularity of Hindi and Bengali series produced in India. The government had to interfere asking the televisions not to air any Indian shows with advertisements from the Bangladeshi corporates. In the past, there was a strange fear in the air that Indian culture poses a threat to Bangladesh, and hence banning Indian television channels was mooted a few

years ago. This was not new since the audience in Bangladesh had witnessed similar propagations about Bollywood in the past. But then, the Bangladeshi audience generously consumes both Bollywood and Indian soaps. They have not metamorphosed into any non-Bangladeshi alien but public opinion remains divided. Particularly, some menfolk feel that Indian television series corrupt Bangladeshi girls and women in terms of fashion as well as social behaviour. Curiously enough, menfolk in India have similar ideas about the impact of television serials on Indian women whereas women seem to believe in the freedom of choice of cultural consumers in Bangladesh. While these are big issues for researchers in sociology and anthropology in Bangladesh, as well as in other parts of South Asia, they offer strength to the key proposition of this article that is the imperative of factoring in culture in the scheme of development. Would it not be conducive for the mutual growth in culture and commerce to have a flourishing television entertainment industry in Bangladesh outdoing the Indian popular productions? A good example is the immense popularity of the serials of Pakistan's Zindagi channel among women in small towns across India.

The state, policy pundits, and development agencies ought to critically rethink, and accordingly shift gears, when they discuss the developmental goal posts for Bangladesh. This calls for an active involvement of cultural activists and ranks and files of the culture industry in the developmental rethinking of the country. On the whole, civil society needs to take a cultural turn in Bangladesh.

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# Education in ethics



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**W**E think that the responsibilities of students are to learn their lessons, get to school/class on time, submit their work on time and

do their best on examinations and assignments only. But in addition to that, students should learn something more that will guide them to being morally upright citizens. In educational institutions, there are a very few endeavours that help build the character of students or encourage them to exercise integrity in their day to day life.

When we open a newspaper in the morning, most headlines scream of corruption, frauds and scams involving millions of taka. Who commits these crimes? Most of the wrongdoers are well educated people. A very few of the corrupt practices are being committed by those who are illiterate. It is expected that educated people would display honest behaviour, decency, good manners and ethical conduct. With a huge expansion of the education system, the standard as measured by the percentage of marks obtained in examinations has been rising to unprecedented levels. But, unfortunately there is a marked decline in the character, moral values and general behaviour of students coming out of schools and colleges everywhere.

It is generally accepted that five universal human values, i.e. truth, righteous conduct, peace, love and non-violence are directly linked to physical, intellectual, emotional consciousness and spiritual surface of the human personality. These values are essentially acquired during childhood, first at home and then in school. We want an education system that speaks of creating

awareness about social justice and compassion, equality, secularism, gender equality, concern for the environment, social cohesion and national unity, quality of life, and scientific outlook and the spirit of wisdom.

Therefore, it has been suggested that learning materials should be designed to equip students with the ability to combat social evils like religious

fundamentalism etc., on the one hand, and develop a scientific temper and habit of logical, rational thinking, on the other.

Unfortunately, very little has been done to implement this. We need to take concrete steps on framing study curriculums and adapting innovative methods to inculcate values and ethics in students. It is not a subject like History, Geography or Science that

needs to be taught through dedicated textbooks.

Educating people, particularly young students, about the consequences of corruption is fundamental to preventing it. To address this, the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) has formed Integrity Units (IUs) in schools across the country. These units work as associated bodies of the ACC to create awareness against corruption and

childhood, are difficult to change. Unfortunately, in today's environment, most parents, particularly those belonging to upper and middle class families, have very little time for their children. When both working parents have their own careers, they are unable to spend any significant time with their children who are left to the care of maids or have to fend for themselves. Parents

permanent damage is done to the mentality of their children. A good example has been set by the Hong Kong Independent Commission against Corruption. Its ethics building school programme has attracted the world's attention. The Bangladesh ACC has taken its example of best practice from the ICAC of Hong Kong and has established the same programme with the expectation that it will also be successful with the support of teachers, school officials and the media.

The ACC has been helping to shape the character of students in becoming good citizens. Thus, it has constituted as many as 20,855 Integrity Units throughout the country in different educational institutions.

An integrity unit is comprised of as many as 11 students. They are usually the best academic performers, athletes or organisers of their respective schools. Moreover, there is a "Teacher's Council" comprising of 3-5 teachers to guide, manage and monitor the activities of the Integrity Unit.

It is responsible for performing duties entrusted to it by the ACC with regards to the ethics building programme. For carrying out training courses on ethics building and promoting the values of honesty and integrity to prevent corruption and take measures to build awareness against corruption. The unit is supposed to create ethical standards within the school premises, identify different sources of corruption present in their school, establish, maintain and monitor 'Integrity Stores' in their schools opened with assistance from the ACC.

The ACC has been trying hard to create a value system in the minds of young students so that they grow up learning that honesty really is the best policy.

The writer is Director General, Anti Corruption Commission.



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## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Like a clear day
  - Canyon sound
  - New York lake
  - Music genre
  - Archers
  - Begged
  - Iraq's capital
  - Price holders
  - Surmise
  - Make mistakes
  - "Simley's People" author
  - Maiden name label
  - Historic
  - "- Cear Day"
  - Boxing combos
  - Goose egg
  - Talked at length
  - Flower feature
  - Igneous rock
  - Casserole bits
  - "Relax!"
  - Diplomatic skill
  - Summon up
  - Sacred chests
  - Intensify
- DOWN**
- Blubber
  - First numero
  - Fresh
  - Tree parts
  - Creative germ
  - Distinct flavor
  - Site of Sevilla
  - Weather map line
  - Shade
  - Unoriginal
  - Chops into cubes
  - Caruso, for one
  - Sports site
  - Buck
  - Bert's buddy
  - Kingdom
  - Grassy expanses
  - Freud topic
  - Drinks to
  - Bumer setting
  - Litmus reddener
  - Solitary
  - School org.
  - Cochela setting
  - Cut off
  - Mamie's mate
  - Decimal base

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

BOLTS DECOR  
BOAT OMAHA  
COIN RETURNS  
KEN EAT TOP  
CARET  
ALBUM DOPED  
BEET WAGE  
STEEL HITON  
RESET  
ADO AHA FOE  
PUN RETURNS  
PECAN USEUP  
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