

OPINION

The inclusion of gender studies in our national curriculum is commendable

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What do you think happens when a child is born and immediately swaddled into a blue or pink towel to denote their sex?

In most cases, they become stamped by a set of predetermined values and suppositions that they are expected to follow throughout their life. To an overwhelming majority of our populace, this is the norm, with any exploration outside of what was assigned being subject to immense taboo. This perpetuates a culture where kids are taught to conform to certain gender roles that they have no say in from an early age.

When faced with stereotypes that are completely ungrounded, we have to turn to our education system to talk about topics like gender studies. Since the information that is presented to children through textbooks can shape their impressionable minds, it is no surprise that the education system plays a major role in forming opinions regarding fundamental concepts.

And now, after years of reforms, the latest revision of the curricula brought about a wave of change that signals a step in the positive direction.

In class seven's History and Social Science coursebook, a section is dedicated to explaining how to identify communities, how they are formed, and how they operate. What caught me by surprise, however, was the introduction of the section "sex diversity, gender identities, and gender roles".

To put things into context, the lesson began with the introduction of a fictional character named Sharifa, a transgender woman. The plight of transgender people in Bangladesh was illustrated through her life story — from the way her family disowned her for acting "like a girl" during childhood to how she eventually found her footing in life.

Additionally, the lessons also talked about influential figures in the local hijra community, discussed gender stereotypes and encouraged being tolerant towards marginalised communities.

Keeping all the failures aside, I don't think anyone expected such a positive shift in our national curriculum. Introducing these topics will allow children to gain a more inclusive outlook, one that has been missing for as long as anyone can remember. It also has the ability to disperse taboos and allow for healthy conversations that may have been previously looked down on.

It will also aid in a rudimentary factor of learning — unlearning. Given how the textbook is structured, there is ample room for discourse that can help in unlearning certain biases that have been ingrained in households. Filtering our perception can go a long way in expanding our world view and leaving behind mentalities that may have been imposed on us by mass media, society, or our families.

Even though the government's efforts to include gender studies in the national curriculum is laudable, significant changes must still be made if real change is desired. It must be ensured that teachers are capable of relaying the intended information and messages to their students instead of skipping these topics entirely, which has always been observed in the case of teaching reproductive health in the Physical Education textbooks. Unless the relevant stakeholders are held accountable, the efficacy of this initiative will be watered down to nothing but mere lip-service.

Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Bangladeshi TV shows fail to cater to ageing audiences

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

With the influx of paid digital platforms that allow us to choose from a sea of content without ad interruptions, modern viewers no longer strictly rely on cable/network television for entertainment and information.

But this metamorphosis of TV has created a dearth of deshi content catering to the older generation that still prefer cable channels over OTT services such as Hoichoi and Netflix.

Older audiences, like our parents or grandparents, share a history with television. It has been their major source of content throughout their lives, and they might not want to relinquish the familiarity of TV. Older audiences often lack time and tenacity to binge watch shows and prefer the scheduled nature of television. Moreover, whether or not they can even enjoy the advantages of streaming services will depend on how comfortable they are using such platforms.

Because audiences have evolved, our cable TV channels now focus more on live coverages. Although specials are still common during festive occasions, they are plagued by repetitive commercials. Often times, such commercials span longer than a show's runtime.

Older audiences have always relied on TV for clean and engaging content reflective of our local lifestyle. But the quality of current family shows suffers due to recycled stories. Scriptwriters wield profanity as a comedic or emotional device and justify it as colloquialism of local dialects.

It's important to understand that not all Bangladeshi TV shows will appeal to older audiences like they do to us. After all, the older demographic of audience grew up accustomed to watching family-friendly shows which portrayed wholesome family dynamics. However, OTT platforms have opted to stray away from such traditional depictions. On the other hand, local TV channels are trying to catch up with OTT platforms. In the process, they have deviated away from producing what the older audience have grown up with.

For instance, *Punorjonmo* is an intriguing series and aptly deserving of recognition. But I would surely hold off watching thrillers based on dark themes with my parents or the elderly.

TV channels are hawkling content that can recover viewership. As a result, every channel is airing a mixture of the same kinds of shows — political analysts heckling on live talk shows, boring rip-offs of *Koffee with Karan*, overwhelming infotainment and oversaturated news coverage.

Our reality shows are underfunded, under promoted and unoriginal. Instead of highlighting talents of contestants, they focus on celebrity judges and their antics.

We need local channels devoted to niche interests like food, nature, lifestyle, and film relevant to modern Bangladeshi culture to ensure content suited to tastes of ageing audiences are produced.

Although replacing cable subscription with streaming video services can make it easier for elderly audiences to experience internet and TV together, it has its limitations and expenses. Moreover, it's still unfeasible in rural areas with dodgy internet.

There was a time when we could look forward to shows like *Aaj Robibar*, *Rupnagar*, *420*, *Kothao Keu Nei* which depicted flawed human relationships through colourful and endearing characters, unique plots and subtle performances. The philosophy of those shows resonated with young and old audiences alike. While we can't expect modern shows to be cast in the same mould as these old, iconic ones, the lack of quality family content on TV is truly concerning.

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