

FROM THE EDITOR

THE TV CULTURE IN INDIA

"Be firm. You wouldn't allow your child to eat garbage, would you? Why, then, let him put it in his head?"— is the slogan with which American journalist Ann Landers is trying to alert the parents about the dangerous impact of violence and sex in the TV on the minds of the young.

It appears that a number of parents are all praise for the slogan and a prestigious multi-edition monthly has highlighted it as a quotable quote.

I do not know how many of those supporting Ann's crusade belong to the category of an ex-mayor I knew.

I was among some writers attending a seminar in a certain Indian city. After a lunch thrown by the Vice-Chancellor of the local university we were walking back to the seminar hall in groups of twos and threes, along a lovely footpath flanked by well-protected plants. I was in the company of a professor and the ex-mayor of the city corporation who was the Chairman of the Reception Committee that hosted us.

"Look at these plants; they had been planted during the mayoralty of our friend," said the professor, pointing at the ex-mayor. "And, to keep our city free from pollution he had taken a firm stand against allowing any factory to come up in its vicinity," he continued. "But the present mayor is rather lax in these matters."

"Look at this," I said, opening a magazine that reproduced a poster publicised by Sweden to mark the International Year of the Child. The picture highlighted the horror of pollution by showing an infant wearing an oxygen-mask.

"Equally menacing, if not more, is the pollution of the minds of the young," I said. "Since you are no longer the mayor, you may not be able to do much against the pollution of the atmosphere, but as the leader of an influential cultural organization, you can do a lot to cultivate an aesthetic awareness in the masses, so that random use of sites and roads for display of obscene pictures, herding the kids into political procession etc. are stopped."

"You've just spoken out what was in my mind," said the ex-mayor and that enthused me. Against a roadside post hung a framed film-poster. It showed a dancer in a pose that at first gave the impression that she was intent on kicking the viewer; but she was only promising the view of a tender area of her body covered by a gossamer patch. Two urchins were throwing pebbles at it, obviously trying to hit the mystery spot, for both giggled and clapped their hands as one of them hit the target.

"Hey!" shouted the ex-mayor. The little imps ran away and hung on to a passing horse-carriage and disappeared from our view.

"Now, Sir, look at this poster. A dance-pose could be captured from many angles. But the fellow who decided on this particular pose had no art but filth in his mind; all those who were involved in its production—the painter, the printer and the distributor— had nothing but quick bucks for their motive. All of them are grown-up. But you have just seen who are the victims of their roguery."

Since I found both my companions looking grave, I concluded that they took my harangue very seriously and I went on, saying in conclusion, "Had I the necessary power, I would give an ultimatum to those rogues to forthwith remove all such vulgar posters that showed women in degraded states, or to face the obligation of being dressed up as women themselves and make similar live gestures in the public."

I knew how childish and grotesque I sounded, but I was inspired!

We reached the hall. As soon as the ex-mayor left us, the professor told me in a subdued voice, "You gave us such an awkward time! -For your information, the producer of the picture which the poster advertised is none other than the ex-mayor!"

For the remaining part of my stay in the city, both the ex-mayor and myself took care not to come face to face again.

BEHIND THE MONARCH OF SHANGRI-LA

A psychiatrist from the West told me, once a lady brought to him her husband who had developed the delusion that he was the monarch of Shangri-la. The psychiatrist cured him, but after some days found the ex-patient's wife quite depressed. "What is the matter with you?" he asked. "Even though I knew that he was living in a fool's paradise, the flowing speech he used to make addressing me as the queen used to be so interesting. But he is such an ordinary man now!" she said with a sigh.

Behind every monarch of Shangri-la there is a queen and a prince and a princess and a number of courtiers, though they remain generally invisible. No abnormal outburst in our society is an isolated phenomenon. The damage the irresponsible TV-shows cause to the young is well-known. Prof. Ivor Mills of the University of Cambridge has given a scientific account of the purely physical harm they do by causing imbalance in the hormone-system in the child's person. As a result the child looks upon an abnormal pattern of life marked by continuous tension and excitement as normal, while the normal principles of existence appear to him quite abnormal!

All those who are appreciating Ann Landors' appeal may not be so hypocritical as to be directly promoting sex and violence on TV, but most of them must be patronising the trend indirectly, in some way or the other. There is some hope if they felt as awkward as my ex-mayor host.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

GRAPES-NOT SOUR

"Now this is what I call workmanship. There is nothing on earth more exquisite than a bonny book, with well-placed columns of rich black writing in beautiful borders and illuminated-pictures cunningly inset. But nowadays, instead of looking at books, people read them!"

This observation made by a nobleman in Shaw's Saint Joan may assume a new significance before long. Those who can afford TV sets may stop reading books; those who cannot afford TV sets may not be able to afford books either, for the books too are fast growing prohibitive for them.

The World Book Fair that took place in New Delhi from 7th to 17th February was the largest show of the kind in Asia, but it was an anguish for many who found the grapes beyond their reach and were not willing to deceive themselves by calling the fruit sour.

There are many material reasons for the price of books going higher and higher. But are they all? Is there no subtle law of Nemesis at work? Nature had its own way of rebuffing any mischievous use of the wealth it puts at man's disposal. A scrap of paper, after all, is still made out of as priceless a gift as a green tree! Maybe, the high cost of paper in proportion to the blatant misuse of this wealth by vulgar commercialism. In the ultimate analysis, nothing less than a conscious cultivation of a will for making the right use of the blessing of Nature would help us solve our problems.

A valuable seminar on the effect of the audio-visual explosion on the reading habit of children took place with the Book Fair as its backdrop. We will focus on the important observations made by delegates from different countries on this most relevant issue in our next issue.