

# Scientific temper: crucial for media

Sarika Kanjlia, Department Of English, D.A.V. Centenary College, Faridabad, Haryana, India

**Abstract**—Scientific knowledge is needed for enlightened life and good enjoyment. In this context media holds a position of great responsibility. At every stage, the aim and objective of media should be to create scientific outlook amongst the people so that all superstitions, blind faith and conviction could disappear in society. In this paper, my area of discourse is ‘daily soap being telecast on television’. Many people, especially women have become so addicted to these soaps that they seem to have become an integral part of their routines. Now as these serials exercise a strong impact on the minds of the viewers directly or indirectly, the persons concerned or producers of the channels should deem it their duty to see to it that the programmes should be shown in a true scientific spirit. They should lay greater emphasis on the development of scientific temper which all members of society should acquire. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that mind only interprets whatever is fed by the senses and owing to inherent limitation of knowledge gives a distorted picture of the categories of the subject, time and space. Media especially television that holds a huge potential of influencing a large number of people should carefully sieve the programmes and not allow superstition and blind faith to flow through them.

**Keywords-** Media, television, scientific knowledge.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As the population of modern human increased on our planet they formed larger groups and communities. To prevent dispute and aggressive behaviour among members of the group or tribe, certain rules and regulations became necessary so that the members of the group could lead a relatively peaceful life. As human beings civilized, more acceptable rules and regulations became necessary as a corollary. As the human species civilizes into a more advanced and noble society, these rules and regulations or laws, which have regulated life of human societies, are modified whenever necessary from time to time. This evolution is still on. These rules are formulated to guard the people not only against disputes and aggression but also from immoral and unscrupulous members of society, which use misinformation and misguidance to cheat and harm them. To be more precise, at this moment of time in this part of the world, superstitions exist in a very large extent in the majority of uneducated and educated strata of society. It is also a fact that there exist large number of people whose main means of livelihood is to misuse these superstitious beliefs and fill their own coffers. If societies have to be more

civilized a deliberate attempt has to be made to change the scenario. This could be changed on the one hand by educating the people and on the other by preventing unscrupulous elements in society from taking advantage of the ignorance of people. Hence it is very necessary to enact a law to protect the people from such unscrupulous members of society.

Questions are always posed as to whether society changes simply by enactment of rules and laws? There is ample historical evidence to prove that enactment of laws has always helped society to give up such evil, uncivilized practices. Moreover, if there is an active social agitation going on in the society, against some undesirable belief systems and if a large section of society is actively participating in eradicating harmful superstitious beliefs, and then the enactment of such a law will certainly accelerate this process. Moreover, people, social reformers and well-wishers desire that in the interest of the community, their representatives should ratify such an act as early as possible.

The scientific age is riddled with intriguing contradictions and human-made follies. The technology-driven consumer culture and entertainment industry has fueled the growth of primitive superstitions, myths and new age beliefs. The need to promote a rational discussion on science, technology and equitable social development has never been so pressing. The first thing to guard against such trends is to be aware of the subtle persuasive techniques, marketing strategies and advertisement gimmicks that make us increasingly helpless consumers in the scientific age.

The information age is not free from its perils. This may sound like an oxymoron. But there is a growing body of evidence that clearly raises serious concerns of increasing influence of technology in our daily lives. We are constantly bombarded by an enormous amount of information flowing from the Internet, television and other forms of mass media. The menace is still prevalent even in this Internet era as is evident from the growing crimes being perpetrated under the garb of superstitious beliefs at the behest of vested elements.

Sometimes it is hard to discern relevant from frivolous, good from bad and desirable from deceitful. *While the capacity to find patterns and infer meanings had obvious advantages for survival, the brain is not always successful in distinguishing meaningful and meaningless patterns. In fact,*

*"pattern finding" and "order seeking" mechanisms form the basis for nearly all existing myths, superstitions, cultural taboos and ritual practices all over the world. The same mechanism also makes us extremely vulnerable to all kinds of deceptions and manipulative techniques that impair our critical faculties. We may imagine things that don't exist, make false judgments, accept uncritical claims, misinterpret facts and arrive at conclusions that are completely at odds with reality. Conveying the excitement of science and scientific discovery is no doubt an essential part of science education and public outreach activities. But equally important is to learn to draw the distinction between unsubstantiated claims and factual findings based on sound reasoning and evidence. Discerning magical thinking and vague ideas from the realm of possibilities that lie within limits of physical laws is therefore important to inculcate scientific temper.*

Stevie Wonder once sang that superstition is "when you believe in things that you don't understand." Superstitions rise to our minds when we want more control or certainty about something. We want an explanation for why things go wrong -- or right -- and, for whatever reason, we're quick to attribute success or failure to something seemingly innocuous.

But how many of us really know what they mean, or, more importantly, where they came from?

Here I would like to make distinction between faith and superstition. Following and practicing your religious beliefs, traditions and customs does not amount to superstition. Superstition is blindly following, believing or practicing something which has no religious basis.

Unfortunately in India, the pure religious practices have, with the passage of time, turned into superstition thanks to unscrupulous pandits, poojaris, babas, sadhus and the like. Today, very few people know about the genuine customs even as most people follow superstition disguised as religion.

Television is a powerful audio-visual medium having a strong impact. In the last decade, television has reached the remotest corners catering to not only the educated masses but illiterate people living in distinct villages,"TV serials and programmes concerning ghosts, horror and supernatural powers reinforce blind faith in society.

The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti

(MANS) (Maharashtra Blind faith Eradication Committee), a voluntary organisation, has questioned if such telecast of ghost and horror episodes or advertising so-called supernatural powers is permissible under the law. It is on a mission to revive the memories and work of great social reformers and promote scientific spirit among people.

Ever since the times of cable TV have arrived, roots of superstitions have gone deeper further down. The trend of leaving the domestic chores in the hands of servants and spending the times leisurely in front of T.V. sets has fast caught up. Whereas the daughters-in-law handed over the kitchen works over to the servants, mothers-in-law too have washed hands in the flowing Ganges. Taking leave from the daily domestic chores, they have taken shelter to the idiot box to while away their times which alongside providing entertainments for all age groups is presenting superstitions too.

Media has been dedicating more time to programmes that promote blind faith just to sustain television rating points (TRPs).

There are channels devoted to news, religious preaching, and entertainment but other types of serials, ghost and horror serials are becoming more and more popular among the spectators and more so among children.

Television is also used for advertising hundreds of products brought in market like golden rings, pearls, stones, yantras, kavach which the advertisers claim to be endowed with supernatural powers.

After being bombarded by such advertisements, the common man tends to go for such things and later realises that he has been cheated. In this way, millions of people are victimised.

Whether the Constitution of India, under the right of freedom of expression, allow such things which cause injury to the mind and good sense of the masses and affect development of scientific temperament of the society.

Should public exhibition of ghost and horror episodes or serials and false advertisements about so called articles endowed with supernatural power, such as Kavach, Yantras or ring by the TV channels should be allowed.

The Cinematograph Act 1952, provides for examination and certification of a film or cinema by the Board of Film Certification. There are also guidelines which stipulate that

anti-scientific visuals or words should not be exhibited.

The Board of Film certification should ensure that any episode, serial, film or advertisement to be presented by TV channels concerning ghosts, horror and supernatural power should not be allowed for exhibition.

"Such exhibitions reinforce the blind faith in society and strengthens it. It is unconstitutional and injures the social health.

#### I. CONSUMER MARKET AND ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

The consumer market and entertainment industry too have forged an unholy alliance with technology to exploit the gullible public. The mass media and digital technology has emerged as a most powerful instrument of propaganda and persuasion.

The younger generation loves horror show, women like Ekta Kapoor's Saas- Bahu never ending serials are spoiling the family's traditions and customs. The conspiracies shown in them mar the peace of the family.

Spreading superstitions effectively by saints and pandits become the star attraction through numerous TV shows.

Take for instance the popular show "Balika Vadhu" which deals with important social issues of child marriage and widow remarriage. Even this serial has not escaped from the strokes of superstition. Gauri, the other woman in the serial spoils her marriage with Jagat as it does not take place on a "Subh Mahurat". Stories of ghosts-jinh read during childhoods, the roaming spirits torturing innocent humans out to take revenges after their deaths, magicians, tantriks come alive into the mind through TV serials. The audiences are once again pushed deep down into the old world of superstitions. Many other instances of superstitious beliefs such as breaking of glass, putting off of lamp, or some other ominous portents, stress the importance of believing in such irrational things and then subsequent consequences have to be borne.

The "Fear Files" show being broadcasted on Zee TV (every Saturday and Sunday) is just a source of creating more misunderstandings about nature and gives new dimensions to dangerous imaginations to paranormal activities that do not actually exist. Toddlers and young children and any normal

person who watch such television shows are more likely to develop anxiety, sleep disorders, and aggressive and self-endangering behaviors. It is reasonable to recommend that we pay closer attention to the potential media stimuli that create long-lasting fears of the surrounding world, fears that can interfere with normal functioning. Hence, I would like that a much awaited necessary action should be taken against the TV show.

Even to this day in Bollywood, there are films being produced relating to revenges to be taken of the past birth's atrocity, emerging as an ichchadhari Nagin.

The books of 'Harry Potter' and films based on them are breaking all records of popularity to smithereens.

In the crowd of increasing the TRPs of such superstitious serials, not only the older people are contributing to this mite but well educated intellectuals working in the MNCs are playing their role to the fullest.

#### III. EFFECTS

After watching some horror serials people are haunted by these scenes in their dreams. The blame falls on the daughter in law as if she is using some black magic. As a result the peaceful atmosphere of the family gets polluted.

The peace of the house is totally tattered by a magical doom and gloom in the family. Books elaborating the meanings of dreams are being sold like hot cakes.

The menace is still prevalent even in this Internet era as is evident from the growing crimes being perpetrated.

There are many other examples of how technology is used to (mis)educate and enslave people. These techno-hyper challenges pose a greater threat to the advancement of scientific temper and critical thinking among people.

We cannot stop propaganda, but we can certainly take some discrete steps to stay immune to it.

Subtle ideas and values are ingrained through clever visual imagery, tantalizing graphics and sound effects.

Children are highly susceptible to propaganda and become soft targets for mind control.

Where will this mental atrophy lead to? These people later on come into the grips of depression, tension and worries ending into the psycho clinics. At the beginning of the 21st century and the new millennium, everyone is aware of the need to be able to think with an open mind and to lead a

rational life. The Constitution of India has stipulated adoption of scientific outlook as one of the responsibilities of every Indian and has included it as a value to be inculcated through education.

Where lies the remedies to superstitions?

Intellectuals should condemn the telecast of these programmes, and try to instill scientific temper among the public

Rationalists should raise their voice whenever the media projects blind beliefs as the truth

Youngsters especially college students should form groups and visit different areas periodically to work against superstition. Various programmes should be organised to this effect.

The programmes should include quiz, road shows, poster exhibitions and sale of literature on inculcating scientific temper. Eye opening programmes should be frequently staged to stress on the following:

- To cultivate scientific attitude, scepticism, humanism and critical thinking among the people
- To oppose harmful superstitions, which exploit people.
- To cultivate rationalistic moral values, humanism and create a just society.
- To encourage constructive analysis of religious traditions and customs.
- To agitate against harmful superstitions and rituals and suggest useful alternatives to some.
- To help and work with other social reform organizations.

It is most deplorable to telecast serials glorifying the supernatural powers," says a student, highlighting a joint campaign to check the evil of superstitious beliefs.

Regular protests made against programmes on the electronic media encouraging superstitions should be presented to the government.

Social activists like Dr Narendra Dabholkar and prominent activist Avinash Patil have asked the state government to take a lead in ensuring such content is banned from TV. Thought provoking cultural programmes against superstitious beliefs should be staged. Exciting feats based on scientific

concepts to expose the deceptive tactics employed by the self proclaimed god men and tantriks should be performed for general masses. Media should take up the responsibility of addressing the problem of uneducated and backward areas such as the problem of witch hunting under which women are branded as witches and killed.

Remember, though you don't have control over the outside forces throwing surprises of life at you but you certainly have control over your mind the owner of which is none else but you yourself.

#### IV.CONCLUSION

As media holds a very responsible position in the Indian scenario, it cannot afford to allow telecast of such serials that spread superstition and blind faith among people as 99% of Indian population watches television and the thongs shown in the serials and other programmes leaves an indelibly deep impact on the impressionistic minds of the gullible people. Because of which one of the greatest invention called "Television" has become an idiotic box.

#### REFERENCES

1. *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time*, by Michael Shermer, Holt Paperbacks publication (2001)
2. *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* by Carl Sagan, Ballantine Books (1997).
3. *Age of Propaganda: The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion* by Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, W. H. Freeman (2001)
4. *Brave New World Revisited* by Aldous Huxley, retrieved from [www.idph.net](http://www.idph.net).
5. *How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life* by Thomas D. Gilovich, Free Press (1993).
6. *Propaganda And Psychological Warfare* by Terence H. Qualter, Literary Licensing (2011).
7. M. Owens and I. W. McGowan, Madness and the Moon: The Lunar Cycle and Psychopathology, German Journal of Psychiatry. Vol 9(1), 2006, pp. 123-127.
8. P. Jhingan and B. Lusignan, retrieved, *Propaganda and the Information Revolution: The Effect of Communications Technology on War Rhetoric in India and Pakistan*. retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/>