

Ocean Girl: A souvenir from the life we left behind

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Online Desk: A calm evening, in front of a black and white television with a battery and antenna, a group of people spellbound, watching a young girl exploring the deepest realms of the Ocean, swimming for hours after hours like the water in her home.

This is one of the earliest childhood memories of many of us. We remember our family members' brightly smiling faces, eagerly waiting for the foreign drama series 'Ocean Girl' to start. Their fascinated and entirely invested faces, sincere chatters and comments on the storyline, and a group of young boys and neighbours watching from the window or sitting with us because it was the only television in the neighbourhood — this is a typical home gathering scene from the Golden Era of BTV where the Ocean Girl constructs a significant portion of the core memory and childhood for the people born in the '90s or early 2000s.

Ocean Girl is a family-oriented Australian science fiction television series. Set in the near future, the plot revolves around Neri, an unusual girl with a great affinity for the waters. Neri lives alone on an island and possesses superhuman strength, supernatural lung capacity, and the ability to swim far and deep underwater.

The story proceeds with the friendships she builds with the inhabitants of ORCA (Oceanic Research Centre of Australia), an underwater research facility, unravelling mysteries, preserving the ocean ecology, and saving the earth.

Ocean Girl, created by Jonathan M. Shiff and featuring actress Marzena Godecki in the lead role, was broadcast from 1994 to 1997. It achieved a BAFTA award and inspired the animated series 'The New Adventures of Ocean Girl.'

Ocean Girl was aired once per week on Bangladesh Television (BTV) during the early 2000s when BTV used to be the only source of television entertainment for the greater portion of the population. Rapidly gaining immense popularity, the program became an instant fan favourite.

The unconventional science fiction plot and the presence of a female protagonist who braves perilous dangers and adventures by herself were novel concepts for many Bangladeshi audiences at the time, piqued their interest and contributed substantially to the show's popularity.

During that period, Ocean Girl stood in stark contrast to the entertainment offerings that the Bangladeshi people were exposed to, and it was, undoubtedly, not to the taste of all.

Revisiting Ocean Girl, we can still appreciate the show's deeper ecological science fiction theme and its portrayal of cross-species communication.

When asked about her memories of the show, Musafa Akter, a teacher living in Rangpur, explained that what captivated her was witnessing a courageous girl embark on daring adventures and accomplish remarkable feats. Her favourite aspects of the program were Neri's interactions with the research facilities, the mysteries, the scientific puzzles and explanations, and the anomalies.

“It was a show for the curious”, she reminisced with the same wonder she used to watch the show with.”

But for shows from the '90s' BTV, one doesn't have to comprehend the plot to love the program fully. Reflecting on Ocean Girl stirs a deep sense of nostalgia, as it is intricately woven into our memories of simpler times, of comforting evenings with our family before smartphone screens took over our lives.

Ocean Girl is not just a staple of '90s television but a cherished souvenir from the life we left behind.