

# The YEP Forum Public Dialogue on Expectations from Our Tele Media

Organised by The young Entrepreneurs and The Professionals Forum in Collaboration with The Daily Star and The British Council

Among those who participated

Mustafa Monowar, Media Specialist.

Aly Zaker, Actor & Director.

Saleem Al Deen, writer.

Muhammad Jahangir, Executive Director, Centre for Development Communication.

Fuad Chowdhury, Commissioning editor, Ekushey television.

Afzal Hossain, chairman and Managing Director, Inframe Private Limited.

Meghna Guha Thakurta, Chairperson International Relations DU.

Farah Kabir, Governance and Gender Advisor, The British Council.

Anisul Haque, The Daily Prothom Alo.

Faria Hossain, Ananda Dhara.

Osama Tasser, Coordinator The YEP Forum.

Rafi Hossain, YEP Talk Incharge.

## Continuation from last week

**Mustafa Monowar:** To elevate culture, All India Radio did not stop classical music programmes which it had been running for a long time. I heard that Nehru was told that nobody listens to classical music programmes and the time of this programme should be shortened. But Nehru said that this programme will be broadcast at prime time and the length of the programme will be increased. You have to go on listening to classical songs, continuously go on hearing. And the culture elevated today is the reason that people are hearing good songs.

That means audience has to be created. At first television and radio should go on giving the programmes continuously, good programmes. The audience will not accept it at first but will slowly take it. One of my experiments in the Television was 'Muktadhabara', a discussion programme.

I should tell you in brief about how I first conceptualised the programme. The 'insert' fever was on in television. Even in the song 'Ridoy amar nacheri ajikai, myurer moto nachei re', there was an insertion of a peacock. Do you need to show a peacock there? After that I realised that the situation of television is very bad. So, I decided that there will be no insertion. Everybody will just speak standing. It will be a really dull programme. I gave it to a producer, a learned producer and he said this is a dull programme. Even then he added some entertainment into it and I said 20 per cent people will see your programme. And he said, no sir it will be 30 per cent. Then I said that I want that five per cent people should see this programme. I told him see there had been preaching of so many religions but there was no video insertion, it was only good speakers. I said go get some good speakers. Ultimately this programme got the best journal award.

We frequently talk about popular programmes. The responsibility of the national television should be to elevate culture. The programmes may not be popular in the beginning. Long term programmes should be taken up. People may not like it today but it will get popular after five years. It is surprising that long term planning is not there in our national television which is the worst flaw of our television.

Long term means experimenting. I will release the programme from today and will conduct the survey after three years. We run after immediate programme.

When its floods, we make instantaneous programmes on floods. Everything is instantaneous. Therefore, we are unable to identify our audience.

One more thing is that any culture is elevated in two ways. One it comes up from the rural, from nature and goes up to a certain limit. It stays up to the folk level where there is enough emotion. It can be amusing, artistic and have many other elements but it does not rise above a certain level.

The other culture is which grows big through long term devotion and practice. We have to give that culture through our television. We are putting away that culture. We have taken it for granted that it will not be popular. Classical songs are no longer broadcast on Bangladesh Television. The most annoying songs to me is bad classical songs. I can bear everything but not ready to hear bad classical songs.

The other thing is selection. Whatever done, nothing is effective in the television. Committees are made with renowned people. They talk big in the committee meetings and go away. Suggestions made in that way are not helpful.

Then who can do it. We are having problem with the word 'talent'. We have to bring talented people. Competent people, talented people from outside have not come in Television for a long time which has deteriorated the situation more. The main thing is we should get talented people. There are of course talented people otherwise how are good programmes being produced in the country. We have understood from the 'Nutan Kuri' that there is no dearth of talent in our country. The 'Nutan Kuri' was organised to search talents. So talent-hunting is very essential for any television.

Then there is another type of talent necessary for television but television does not want to take upper level talents. They like to take mediocre to avoid problems. This is in the case of all televisions.

The other problem is that we speak about democracy but do not believe in it. What do we understand about cultural democracy? I can see any drama. The drama can be focused on a minister, a government official. But have we seen one drama which is based on a government employee? We see dramas in television where offices and officers are portrayed but we don't understand what is the status of the officer shown in the drama.

We do not practice democracy. As a result the characters of dramas are becoming very limited.

I once released a drama based on a foreign story named 'Inspector General' and showed very prominently that it is translated and not based on our story. The next day I received a phone call from an highly influential and he asked me what have I shown. I said sir this cannot happen in our country, our police is very good. This is the story of another country and so I have broadcast it. Such things were done in the past.

We are in India that they are criticising the ministers, the prime ministers. We are surprised. Those who are praising it in our country will hinder when such things will happen here. So, we are not taking democratic attitude in case of television programmes. We are not taking it from any quarter. This is another huge problem.

**Farah Kabir:** Who created this culture?

**Mustafa Monowar:** Nobody created this culture. The culture is we are cowards. We were cowards during the Pakistani period. Even during the Pakistani time it was us who said that there is no harm if we do not listen to Rabindra Sangeet. There was a time when a 'feep' was not allowed on the forehead. This television culture that we will say nothing you just understand.

Another thing is that television should portray the current affairs as authentic as possible. If this is left out, many things will be left out. Even if we cannot say, we should make understand that this is the truth.

Like BBC, if it creeds government version it mentions that this is government information. BBC has its own version and says that government has said this. This democratic attitude has to be built up.

The situation has changed a little. Nobody will listen to the radio if the language is not Bangla. But this is not the case with television. You don't need Bangla in case of Television. Everybody, even me, will see if the programme is in Hindi or any other foreign language or if a girl is clad in a mini dress.

The producers of television are trying to compete with the numerous satellite channels. The things sold on the satellite channels are so costly and so well presented that we cannot compete with those. We have to go back to cultural programmes.

The situation is bound to change now. The audience will understand that we have to take a democratic attitude in programmes. We have to make more programmes for minority viewers because one day these minority programmes will be the popular programmes.

People still remember the dramas of famous people like 'Rakta Karabi'. I am talking about my productions. I willingly kept all the dialogues of Rabindranath and did not edit them.

There was very slight changes. This is national television and the drama has been written by Rabindranath, why should I edit it? So, this proves that it is possible. It is not true that people of our country do not like good programmes. There is problem if we try to find majority liking the programme or popularity.

I will finish with another example. BBC produces Shakespeare drama totally anew every eight or nine years.

Another example is that after the World War when American programmes had taken over the entire Japan and people did not see Japanese programmes NHK started 'Small Heroes'. They

**We are very upset over the situation at Bangladesh Television. Will this situation continue? Viewers of BTV from different sectors have gathered here at the dialogue to discuss where this situation is leading us. As viewers, can we put pressure on the BTV which is run totally on taxpayers' money? Today's dialogue is aimed at finding out an effective way to put pressure on the BTV authorities.**

brought in history of small heroes who had contributed to the culture and the war. In the beginning nobody used to see the programme and the rating was very low. But slowly after continuing for about seven to eight years the American programmes started decreasing.

**Fuad Chowdhury:** As commissioning editor of Ekushey Television what I am trying to do at present is execute the policy being developed. ETV is the first South Asian region to obtain permission to broadcast programmes through land transmission. This means 90 per cent of the people in Bangladesh will be viewing ETV when it starts. It will be like BTV which cover 96 per cent viewers.

It is a private sector. Audience survey has been conducted for two reasons. One, it has the maximum viewers.

The other thing is that there is a mandate that we will stress on three sectors. There will be of course prime time entertainment programmes. The news and current affairs analysis will be of one-and-a-half hour. News will be of nearly one hour and hopefully we will make it real news. Apart from news and current affairs there will be programmes on education and human rights issues. I have taken the responsibility of making these programme for the time being. And while performing this responsibility we have taken an outreach programme. What we are trying to do is to develop a series of programmes with NGOs and other community groups which will be issue based. We will make social issue based programmes which we will promote and show it to the people. Such an agenda has been taken. I have personally received about 200 proposals for such programmes. We have seriously evaluated these proposals and a line-up has been done that will work close from conceptual level, to production and up to broadcast and one of the producers from the television would be involved as a line-producer with them. We are planning to hire line-producers in this context.

Even regarding news and current affairs, although it will be in-house production, but we have talked with environmental groups, some human rights groups to provide us news items. For example BELA and Philip Gain's group. They have said that they will provide us with items on the research and other works they have been doing for the last 10 to 12 years which can be broadcast as news and feature items. So, we are trying to do that networking which never happened in Bangladesh before this.

Another thing we experienced in our recruitment that about 13 boys and girls who have studied abroad on media have applied. They want to come home. You have to create the environment to come home. A working condition need to be created where they can come and work.

There are about 30 million adolescent children in Bangladesh, more than the Canadian population and if programmes can't be developed without addressing them. At first we thought that adolescent programmes mean programmes that deal with entertainment or message giving through entertainment. But later we attended some workshops and realised that children can go down into depths. They talk so in-depth about growing up experience and sexuality that we are really surprised. So, we thought that no, not only songs and dances but you can go into more depths with them but for that you have to create the environment where people can come and participate. So we are going through a process. And we have so far some very young people from Jahangirnagar University, although it is a core group now and we are trying to develop it. So, as a role model, it is something happening internally, within ourselves. It is absolutely open. It is not a government channel. Although it is a private channel and if we can open up and if we can increase participation it will get the popularity very quickly.

I recently had a meeting with someone who is very close to BNP and said that they will watch us for one week and we will be able to understand whether you are Awami League brand or not.

Then if you are genuinely talking about participatory process, specially when election at any level comes, and you are open we will come to you. And if that happens I think there is an opportunity that we will fare. And Simon says one thing that if we become the spokesman of the government, tomorrow people will stone us and day after tomorrow they will set fire. And that is what is going to happen to ETV as we are not aware about this and sensitive about this. That process is on but it is a hard process.

**Rafi Hossain:** You have to telecast allegorically or symbolically.

**Fuad Chowdhury:** Why symbolically? Whatever is the fact, we will say. If an incident happens, we project the facts and let the audience judge it. Let the audience make their own judgement which they could tell today. And we don't have to go out of our way to show the facts.

**Aly Zaker:** I have got a question for Mr. Fuad. The question relates to democracy and you were talking about being democratic in presenting your news. I would like to relate democracy to religion.

**Fuad Chowdhury:** We were discussing about this that how far we can go with this actually? It will depend on the political sensitivity and leadership within the ETV. It depends on the policy makers. I am not a policy maker. They have to decide how secular they want to go and politically how sensitive they are.

**Rafi Hossain:** How are you affected by those legislation?

**Fuad Chowdhury:** As far as the agreements are concerned we have agreements with three ministries. One is the Information, the other Finance and lastly the Telecommunications Ministry. We are regularly dealing with these ministries because we have to go for uplink programme and whatever. As far as we are concerned, it has been okayed to function independently.

**Osama Tasser:** Yes, you are entitled to function independently but the question was whether the censorship law is applicable for you or not?

**Fuad Chowdhury:** Freedom has been given but I cannot say about the parliamentary policy.

**Osama Tasser:** Secularism is also a big issue, but I think there are more priorities which has to be looked at.

**Muhammad Jahangir:** We hope that various political opinions will be reflected on ETV. This is our dream of private media. As long as this does not start, it will remain in our dreams and we will continue to hope for it. I am very hope towards ETV and I hope that ETV will be an open window in the present suffocating situation. But I am scared when I look at the political situation in Bangladesh. The political culture of Bangladesh fears the electronic media more than the print media. Look at the contradiction of the present or the immediate past government. They have provided 100 per cent freedom to the print media, but they are not ready to provide five per cent freedom to the electronic media. Even progressive party like Awami League is ready to the blame but will not compromise in the case of electronic media.

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We don't expect even 25 per cent of the political debate as you can watch on 'India Question Hour', on BBC. Our electronic media cannot do that in the next few years. However, we are hopeful that ETV will definitely do that exercise.

Even with these apprehensions we are very hopefully looking towards ETV like we had hoped about our print media which they had fulfilled.

**Fuad Chowdhury:** Let us come back to ETV. We of course have lot of expectations from ETV which we also had from ATN but did not get. Let us hope that ETV will not be like ATN.

In reference to Saleem Bhuiyan's statement, I also say that there is not much to expect from autonomy of the BTV because even in autonomy there will be somebody to make the decisions. There will be a set of people who like the present set of people in BTV would make the decisions. Actually their attitude is very important towards programme centred audience.

Due to technological revolution over the last two or three years the demand of the audience has also changed. This has to be understood first.

Secondly, there was a question whether BTV at all has a policy or not. The four pillars of BTV are to motivate, to educate, to inform and to entertain. Regarding entertainment programme, the idea is vague. There is a feeling that there is something wrong in making an entertainment programme. Actually there is nothing wrong in it. After the day's work when I will sit in front of the Television I would like to be entertained.

Those who are sitting on the decision-makers chairs should control things with their talents and not through authority. Time has also changed and the demand for stars and popularity has come up. Actually BTV is not a victim, it is a convict and should be treated like that, it should be punished.

**Aly Zaker:** I am also don't want to consider BTV as a convict because I am indebted to BTV. It is not the fault of the Television for its today's situation. It is the fault of those who run it and the way they run it. I am also very hopeful about ETV, but we



don't want to part from BTV. Why should we? It is our television, our national media, run with our taxes. Can we find the reasons for the degradation of our television?

This is not true that one who is born in the USA can produce something of international standard and one who is born in Bangladesh cannot. Talent is a common thing. It does not in which of the worlds the person is born. One who has the talent can produce things of international standard. My teacher, Mustafa Monowar who is sitting beside me here, has received gold medal in all India painting exhibition. When he produced 'Rakta Karabi', Bangladesh Television had many limitations. Those limitation were overcome by talent. Talent can overcome technical limitation. There was a scene in the drama that a ray of light comes and falls on the hand which is very difficult. He had held the ray of light on the hands continuously. Today there would have been three dissolves and beautiful faces of the actresses just keep hold the audience.

Mustafa Monowar does puppet shows. I have also seen it elsewhere in the world but never felt that the standard in Bangladesh is in anyway less than those.

How has his talent been used? BBC does a children's puppet show and I think it is possible to produce such a programme in Bangladesh. But why is it not being done?

I believe that there is no dearth of talent in Bangladesh. The lack of application and pleasure try to find out the reason. I think we still can keep bright contribution.

I also consider that popularity is not a problem. There are two sides of popularity. I am sorry that I have to mention one name. Tarun Majumdar is a popular Indian film maker and I think he creates audience. He has been for long creating audience of good films by which more serious film makers like Mrinal Sen and Satyajit Ray are being benefitted. I consider that Tarun Majumdar has a contribution in going to watch films made by Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak. I think they are creating a platform.

Mustafa Monowar said that it is not necessary that good production should be liked by everybody. I differ a little here. If we push away the majority of the people then it will be difficult to draw them near again.

For example Sheikh Niamat Ali makes a film and people don't go to see it. He says there is no audience for good films. In that case what Tarun Majumdar is doing is he is trying to make the film good, trying to say the story in a better way. Those trying to understand it deeply are getting it, those going for entertainment are also getting it.

Bad taste is not inside a person, it is being created. So, please stop creating bad taste.