

# Where did natoks go wrong?

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This isn't going to be some light-hearted jab at the industry, I'm genuinely disappointed with the way we handled a creative medium which had so much potential. Believe it or not, TV *natok* weren't this abysmal at one time and that's where my frustration comes from; I saw what could've been. So, when, why and how did it go downhill? While there might be multiple reasons why it is the way it is, I observed some key events which I believe contributed to the devolution of the whole medium.

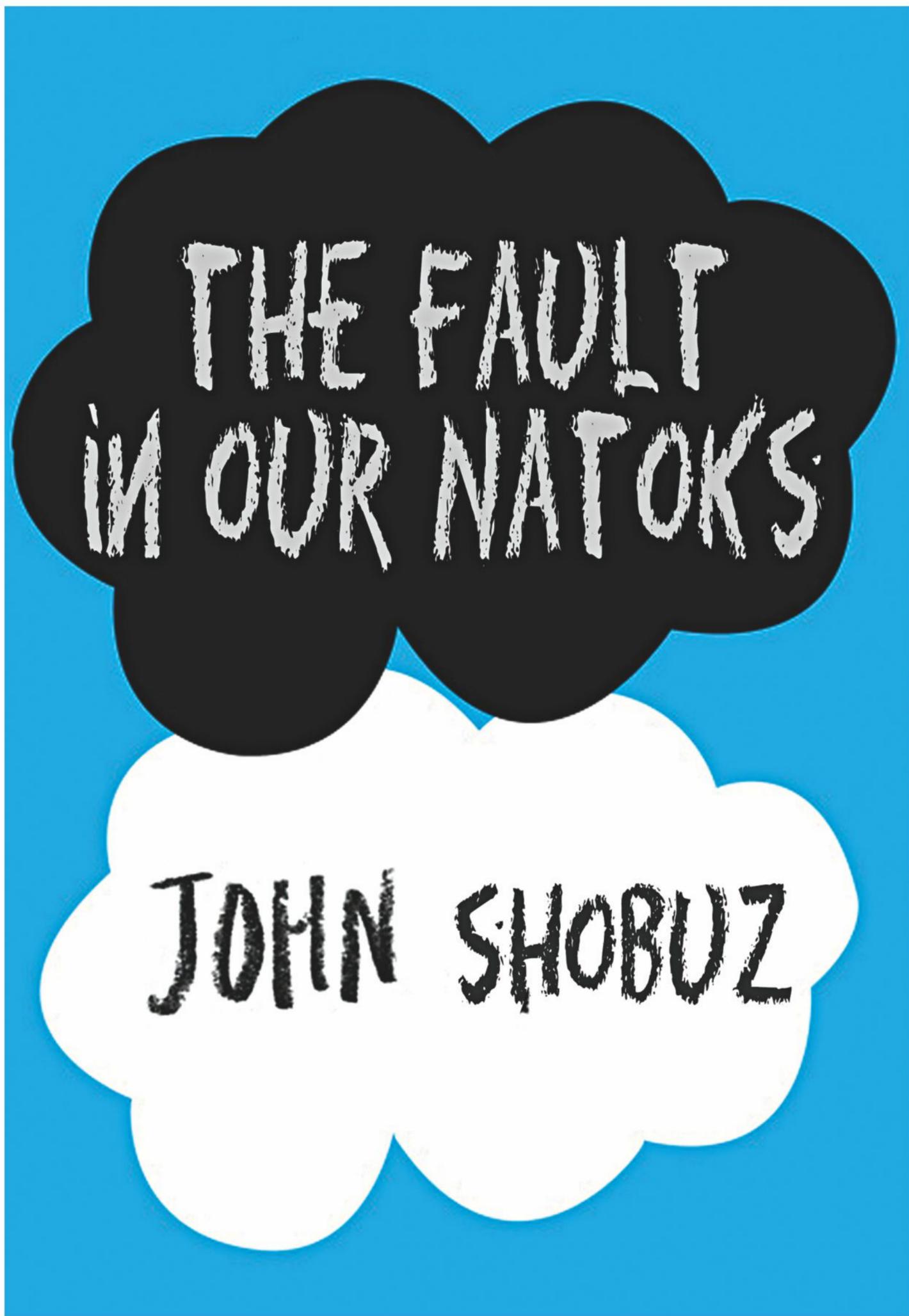
Back when I was a kid, I used to watch the Eid *natok* with my family. They weren't much to write home about – a lot of them centred around everyday life scenarios and were quite boring. However, I do remember some hilarious comedies from back then; they used to re-air the shows and we watched them multiple times. Fast forward to around 2010 and they used to produce *natok* with actual good stories, stories that made you think. Don't get me wrong, they used to make bad *natok* back then too, even the bad romantic ones but the overall content was worth your time. Then something happened that year, a certain telefilm was produced by a telecom company which depicted multiple parallel romantic storylines involving different people and situations. It was a huge success and everyone loved it.

Now, the telefilm itself was actually pretty nice – quite enjoyable if not sophisticated. What it started, however, was neither enjoyable nor sophisticated. It initiated the Valentine's Day on Eid phenomenon. The telefilm was so popular that they made a second one with the same concept. Everyone loved that one too. That's probably when *natok* producers caught on that the era of families watching a thought-provoking piece of work is over. The youngsters are the target audience and they want to be loved.

The boom of these "modern" romantic stories involving the youth, social media and hip lingo like "bro" and "dude" began. At first I was a bit into them because they were something new and I wanted to be loved as well, but soon enough it made me gag. I thought that it was just a phase and would pass soon enough but I was wrong. Why did I even think that? Surprisingly it got even worse with another major event.

The same telecom company produced a telefilm which showed three friends on an adventurous trip outside Dhaka in search of a girl one of the guys met online. Aside from the yawn-inducing premise, this one was fun to watch too and that's why it was such a big hit. Turn on any Bangla channel on Valentine's Day or Eid and you'll find a *natok* where three friends are riding on top of a truck and facing several "comedic" situations; girls will probably be involved as well.

I know coming up with original concepts is not as easy as people make it out to be but aren't the makers of these shows insulting themselves by not even trying? Well, I know there's an easy answer for this. Why put in the effort when you can rake in all that cash by rehashing the same formula? It's not like they're the only ones to blame, we voluntarily watch them and that's why they



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make them.

It's crucial to keep in mind that I'm not criticising the audio-visuals or even the writing, these are a few of the problems the industry faces because of inadequate budget and that's completely acceptable. What I'm criticising are the concepts and they don't require money.

I've tried to justify it to myself many times but when the entire industry disrespects an age group with mind-numbing shows and capitalises on their youthful desires, you have a right to give them flak. There was a time when I anticipated Eid to watch all the *natok* and support local content. There are some directors who are trying to

make extraordinary *natok* but do you expect me to go through hundreds of generic romantic adventures to find one or two gems? I go on YouTube and see all these *natok* and telefilms. They have hundreds of thousands of views, some even millions, and I wish that one day those views would transfer to works which deserve them.

All is not lost though. Some *natok* in the past two Eids were a breath of fresh air in the scene. The directors all worked in tandem to create something new for the young audience and the results spoke for themselves as people were actually talking about the *natok* on social media. It's surely a step in the right direction.