



ARTWORK: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

# Bangla natok and chill

## How streaming can change our media

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*For the longest time, I've been hearing people's complaints about the Bangladeshi media industry. There are too many channels with too little quality content, the artists aren't treated fairly, and there seems to be no end to the commercials. But the industry is slowly evolving with the advent of the digital medium, which does not plague viewers with ads and brings in quality content, albeit with a higher price tag. Will digital platforms be able to transform an industry that many think is broken beyond repair?*

There are over 40 privately run TV channels in the country, of which four are news channels, one music channel, and one is for children. The rest are all the same—a gruesome mixture of news, drama, films, reality TV, celebrity talk shows, political talk shows, and “phono live”. The lack of originality is shocking. For example, if you turn on the TV late on a weeknight, you'll find some middle-aged men arguing over the state of the country. You might find that too stressful, so you decide to switch channels. You'll see that every channel is broadcasting a similar show. The only variety is in the men's hairlines.

Frustrated with the repetitive content on local channels, people found a multitude of alternatives. One segment turned to Netflix and Amazon Prime. Afifa Tabassum Tinni, a PhD student in the UK, says she was once a big fan of local television. “I grew up watching Humayun

Ahmed's sitcoms and in the early 2010s, I really enjoyed watching telefilms that leaned on the side of comedy. Watching Eid-er *natok* with family was something we all used to look forward to,” she said, “Then one fine day there was a sudden increase in quantity and a huge drop in quality. I had to resort to foreign content, to be honest.”

Nazia Rifat, teacher at a private university, echoes this sentiment. “I used to eagerly wait for *Ekanno Borti* and 69 episodes back in the day. Nowadays, I hardly ever turn on the TV unless there's a Bangladesh cricket match.” She adds that she gets most of her entertainment from YouTube on her mobile, and sometimes watches movies on Netflix.

“The last Bangladeshi drama I watched was on the YouTube app. It was an Eid special someone recommended,” she said, “I think my smartphone is the reason I stopped watching TV altogether. Social

media apps and YouTube are enough to pass the time.”

Tinni, however, mentions that she still tries to find good Bangladeshi content on YouTube, like many other viewers I spoke to. “I think there will always be a fanbase for Bangla *natok*, especially in my generation. There are thousands of telefilms on YouTube, yet I see only a handful of actors rotating on each show. My friends and I try to filter out the good ones, we're still loyal to *deshi* content.”

YouTube is simply convenient for the audience—they can find makeup vlogs, cat videos, and Bangla telefilms, all in one place for free. Director Ashfaque Nipun weighs in on this, “I don't think you will find another media industry as dependent on YouTube as ours. People want to watch for free, and producers have allowed this practice for years now.”

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