

COVER STORY

CHORKI - FILM FUN FOORTI

Chorki, one of the largest video streaming platforms in Bangladesh, launched on July 12, 2021. Redoan Rony noted filmmaker and CEO of Chorki, along with director Giasuddin Selim, Amitabh Reza Chowdhury, Shihab Shaheen, and Robiul Alam Robi, sat for an interview with Rafi Hossain. In this interview, the directors shared their thoughts on Chorki.



REDOAN RONY

Chorki is a Bangladeshi video streaming platform, and its journey began recently from July 12, 2021. It serves as a one-stop platform for passionate directors who want to bring forward their best works, stories of Bangladesh, and Bangladeshi originals and cater to avid movie or series lovers all over the world. I am also a director, and I always felt the need for a platform where I could regularly work. Even the directors before me and the rising directors who have the passion to present good stories required a platform to connect and represent their stories globally. And from this thought and requirement, Chorki was created. We were concerned about whether or not the Bangladeshi audience will subscribe and pay to watch content. To our surprise, the projection or target we predicted for a month came in within three days of launch. We were amazed to observe that audiences are subscribing, paying to watch Bangladeshi content, sharing on social media platforms, and even leaving feedback for us regarding the contents or any technical difficulties. The



expected profit ratio from the Bangladeshi audience is already covered. However, I did not expect that the platform would also receive subscriptions with dollars and foreign currencies in such a short time. It is a great achievement that Chorki and its contents are recognized not only

in Bangladesh but around the world. The process of commissioning occurs through two stages of pitching. The primary pitch is presented to our content team, who finalizes the stories from a pool of submissions. We follow a format for the pitch, which includes, story ideas, treatment plan, director's philosophy, budget plan, and so on. The pitch format aims to provide a basic idea to our team to understand the director's vision. The second pitch is presented to our commissioning committee. The committee members are a combination of employees of Chorki, film enthusiasts, young professionals and so on. In this final pitch, when the committee agrees to create the project, it is handed over to the purchasing committee. Then the purchasing committee finalizes the commercials and commissioning. Even I will be going through this process if I want to release anything on Chorki. Just because I am the CEO does not mean I will be treated differently. We are trying to improve the standard of this process, and in the future, we believe we can take it to an international level.



GIASUDDIN SELIM

I believe Chorki stands out because it was thoroughly developed with great care over a long period of time. OTT platforms must appeal to the right audiences. In Bangladesh, it is usually telecom companies that run such platforms with their agendas. The groups behind Chorki consist of passionate individuals who want to bring forth something new. As someone who knows a few of them, I would say they are very transparent and honest businesspeople. They are experienced and well renowned in the entertainment field as well. Needless to say, they would have done quite well even if they worked with television platforms. Then again, this is the age of OTT platforms. Especially with the ongoing pandemic, it is a great time to introduce Chorki, and I believe it will be successful. Adding to it, I want to talk about the language of our content. For many OTT platforms, it becomes tough to promote films that are not in English. Usually, the dubbing process takes up a long time. However, Chorki's primary target is Bengali audiences. They can put their focus on local shows and do not have to allocate too much time for foreign content. There is always the question of whether these platforms will replace television. I do not think so. The reason television channels in our country are declining in popularity is because their owners lack vision. Television platforms in India and other Western countries are thriving because they have better adapted to modern times. OTT platforms also affect the way shows are produced. I have experience with most contemporary entertainment platforms. So, I know that it is not just the production style that changes with the platform it will be released on primarily. For example, when I am producing a television show, it would also depend on what channel will broadcast it. All in all, I hope Chorki finds success in our country because I have seen the effort put into it. It will greatly support independent filmmakers who have good stories to tell. That is why I encourage everyone to support them and other platforms that strive to bring quality entertainment to your screens!

SHIHAB SHAHEEN

Our country was missing a full-fledged Bangladeshi OTT platform, and Chorki fulfills that void. With the help of Rony's communication, this platform gives importance to directors and help them achieve recognition in the industry. From my experiences working for both local and international OTT platforms, I never found any of them so well-planned and orderly as Chorki from the very beginning. Now talking about the relevance of television, I feel the industry will remain prominent. Cable television and content released on television is easily accessible to the mass public in Bangladesh. It is mass media which is why I feel it will remain relevant for the coming years. On the other hand, OTT or web platforms viewership is still a niche market in Bangladesh. Finally, I would request our audiences to subscribe and support our projects by streaming rather than downloading through torrents. I am hopeful for Chorki; they have an amazing line-up of projects to be released.



Rakaat Sharif, Photo: Collected, Transcribed by Rakaat Sharif.

AMITABH REZA CHOWDHURY

When it comes to OTT platforms, content curation is crucial. It is like exquisitely arranging a shelf because there are so many different genres of films and series. When you are providing your audience with such an overwhelming number of choices, they all have to be up to a certain standard. Many other platforms do not have such strict curation. Rony is one of the biggest assets they have. He has been in the industry for a long time, and I know that he will act responsibly when it comes to picking the projects out of a diverse pool. I also think many OTT platforms do not value their content creators as much as they should. The creators and filmmakers along with their work must be respected for these platforms to thrive in the market. Chorki has these creators at the forefront, and I think that is amazing. As for whether televisions will stay relevant,

I would say they definitely will. I agree with Selim bhai. Owners of entertainment channels need to have a unique vision. They need to stand out. Instead, in our country, these channels have more political agendas. It will not work when their primary goal is to provide entertaining content to the masses. Similarly, I believe for a filmmaker it is important to know the main platform for their works. Of course, they can have it on multiple ones. However, the production process would be quite different for each. If it was to be released in cinemas, for example, it would be designed for a huge screen with appropriate sound design. Shows primarily released on OTT platforms try to be more engaging and dialogue-focused. Before signing off, I would like to thank all the fans and supporters of OTT platforms in our country. As long as we can provide a decent story made with heart, they are always very appreciative.



ROBIUL ALAM ROBI

A platform creates identity through its programming and curation, and Chorki is well-organized in this part. As Rony is a filmmaker and has prominence in the cultural industry, Chorki is organized and maintained properly. My experience working with Chorki for my series was wonderful. As a filmmaker, I had creative freedom and the space to share my ideas. My ideas were appreciated and valued by Rony and Chorki's content team. I got positive vibes and good energy from them. The OTT platforms booming in the market has many contents released, and Chorki being a brand new podium has limited web series or films released right

now and still has time to grow. I feel at this stage, Chorki is still new to be evaluated and compared with other platforms. As for the relevance of television, I also feel there is no reason for the market to fall. Currently, cinema and drama are merging into OTT platforms as web films and series. Before, movies were watched in cinema halls and dramas on television. Now, OTT platforms have made it possible for audiences to enjoy a different type of content in one place. So, I feel television is not losing its value, rather the contents are merged into web platforms. My final thoughts for this discussion ends on a positive note. I hope Chorki will continue to be a platform to not only audiences but also filmmakers like us.

