

## Children's entertainment-Needs more local, creative content

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Spearheaded by amazing series and films like "Hawa", "Poran", "Karagar", and "Syndicate" amongst many others, the Bangladeshi entertainment industry seems to be booming. However, amongst all this great work, one sector of the industry, children's entertainment has been somewhat neglected.

Finding a domestic show or film for children, that has been properly produced, has become increasingly difficult, leading kids to opt for foreign entertainment platforms—which resulted in them being exposed to foreign media and languages.

### THE PRESENT STATE OF CHILDREN'S ENTERTAINMENT

Currently—even while the situation seems bleak—a single channel, Duronto TV, has dominated the field of children's entertainment in Bangladesh, with many 'edutainment' based shows.

"We produce and broadcast shows for an age range of infants to 12-year-olds, with an aim to introduce a few essential life lessons to them—be it moral or life skills—amidst all the fun and drama," says Sunjida Siddique Sumona, Head of Programmes of Duronto TV.

Over the last five years, Duronto TV has produced numerous shows for children, including "Lal Kohinur", "Adbhuturo Boighor", "Amar Shonar Bangla" and "Guddubura", amongst many others.

Compared to the 90s, when Bangladesh had movies and series like "Dipu Number 2", "Emiler Goenda Bahini", and "Notun Kuri", the children's entertainment industry is currently playing second fiddle to foreign shows and films.

"Since resuming operations in late 2017, we have produced over 35 drama series, of which some are of more than



100 episodes," said Sunjida. "However, we are a relatively new television channel, with only five years of experience behind us. At the same time, we are also the first channel to focus solely on children's entertainment. We need time to mature and create more significant content."

The children of today seem to be engrossed in the content provided by foreign platforms, as the lack of domestically produced content leaves them unsatisfied.

Cartoons like "Motu Patlu" and "Chota Bheem", among others, are easily accessible for young kid, through online platforms like YouTube.

"Children like fast-paced cartoons that are fun and adventurous, blended together with music. Much of the foreign shows and films watched by

children are tailored around these elements. Educational aspects are usually packaged together with all the exciting elements children enjoy," said Sunjida.

According to Abhijit Chowdhury, the Director of Duronto TV, the recent increase in children watching foreign shows has been due to easy access to the Internet and technology. He shared, "The foreign cartoons or shows are made keeping the culture and traditions of that country in mind. Many of our children speak Hindi better than Bengali, due to easy access to the internet."

"Even though we wish to let the children know more about our heritage, moral values, life skills and healthy habits, our shows are presented in the form of fun and adventure,

leaving the classroom approach out of it," mentioned Abhijit.

### WHERE HAS THE INDUSTRY FALLEN SHORT?

Bangladesh currently has a population of over 166 million and according to the World Bank, children make up nearly 26 percent of our population. This equates to over 45 million children, which is quite a large audience base.

However, famed foreign shows and cartoons like "Tom and Jerry", "Alif Laila", "He-Man", "Looney Toons" and "Thunder Cats", amongst many others, have dominated the children's entertainment scene in Bangladesh since the 90s.

Currently, the trend of dubbing foreign shows has gained quite a bit of popularity in Bangladesh, which has

led to local channels dubbing foreign cartoons and children's shows in Bengali.

Multiple television channels like Duronto TV, Maasranga TV and BTV have also opened their own YouTube channels or online platforms, where they are providing Bengali-dubbed content for children.

"I am well aware that there is a severe lack of children's content in Bangladesh," said Sazzad Sumon, director of the popular show "Mashrafe Junior". "At the very least, they are in Bengali instead of the original foreign language."

Sazzad Sumon and the team of "Mashrafe Junior" are now trying to make their series one that both parents and children can enjoy together.

Similarly, Abhijit Chowdhury shared, "One of our core concepts is to focus on our native language i.e. Bengali."

After "Meena", one of the most appreciated cartoons, that has been locally produced, is the film "Tomorrow". Directed by Mohammad Shihab Uddin, the half an hour-long animation was not only dubbed into English, but also in Chinese and Spanish as well.

Concerning the status of children's entertainment, Ezaz Uddin Ahmed, Head of Programme, Deepto TV, shared, "Due to the lack of marketing and sponsor support, it's quite difficult to create children's content. On top of that, even if we have an idea, we don't have adequate content creators and directors to turn it into a quality film or series."

"TV channels in Bangladesh can be accessed for free and therefore rely on revenue from advertisements. Had they been pay-per-view channels or had other sources of revenue, the overall quality of programmes across all channels, including Duronto, could be much better," he added.

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