

BETWEEN GARRULITY AND UTILITY - THE IMPACT OF TALK SHOWS

Roohi Andalib Huda

*Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University*

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to highlight the increasingly meaningful role that the television talk shows have acquired over the last few decades. In the West where the talk show featured first, it created a profound effect on the empowerment of women, amongst others. The shows provided women the opportunity to talk about their lives and their problems in public view. Another significant development of the process worth noting was the globalization of social issues like women and child rights, breast cancer, abortion, ill effects of narcotic drugs, human trafficking etc. This was possible on account of the highly presentational format of the talk shows that were telecast in several countries across many continents. Though not intended deliberately, such globalization helped facilitate networking of rights and advocacy groups of different cultures and countries. In order to delve into the different dimensions of the subject, two very popular media personalities and a top media executive of Bangladesh were interviewed. Their observations have facilitated the understanding of the progression of talk shows over the years. The talk shows are believed to provide what has been described as “infotainment” in the media lexicon. Efforts have been made in this article to gain insights by studying the different dimensions of such “infotainment” both locally and globally.

INTRODUCTION

The television talk show, a rather unusual institution is a discovery of 20th century broadcasting. Robert Eler and Bernard Timb in the online document titled “Talk Shows” state that, “It takes a very old form of communication, conversation, and transforms it into a highly popular form of information and entertainment through the institutions, practices and technologies of television.” In their discussion about talk shows in the West, they go on to say:

This kind of ‘live,’ unscripted talk is one of the basic things that distinguishes television from film, photography, the record and book industries. Television talk is almost always anchored or framed by an announcer or host figure, and may be defined, in

Erving Goffman’s terms as ‘fresh talk,’ that is, talk that appears to be generated word by word and in a spontaneous manner (Eler and Timb 01).

Although the television talk show has some degree of spontaneity, it is also quite structured. It takes

place in pre-arranged encounters, and the audiovisual scenario is always shaped by scriptwriters, producers and technical crew, and fashioned to the tune of television formula. This means that the television formula is applicable in the case of talk shows since there is a certain element of planning and research involved in the prior formulation of questions. However there is no script as there is in drama or interview programs.

Different kinds of television talk occur at different times of the broadcast day. Major talk traditions have developed around news, entertainment, and a variety of social encounters that have been reframed and adapted for television.

The talk shows have to take into account the time schedule and financial constraints in order to make room for the advertising intervals that must appear throughout an episode. These rigid time limits of the show guide the program in many ways. The fact that these talk shows are popular but are substantially impacted by the advertisement revenue factor, points to the necessity of maintaining a rigid time limit. The talk show is mostly anchored by a host or a number of hosts.

The fact that Oprah Winfrey's popular talk shows are telecast across several countries around the world has resulted in an automatic and spontaneous globalization of rights and advocacy issues that are the staple of the program. Broad-based discussions on issues like child abuse, women battering, workplace security, abortion etc on the program have sensitized women and rights groups in authoritarian societies of Asia and Africa.

The talk show's global success has been, in the eyes of analysts, an important political phenomenon. In some authoritarian countries voting in talk shows as adapted, represented the first time many citizens have voted in any free and fair election. In addition, the frankness of the settings on the show appeared to break the taboo.

HOST/FORMS

The talk shows are quite often introduced and thus identified by the host's name, (for example The Oprah Winfrey Show) because that is an indicator of the importance of the host of the particular talk show. Sometimes the host's name is also combined with the form.

According to Erler and Timb, hosts in the west like Oprah Winfrey, Phil Donahue and Geraldo Rivera came from a news reporting background, but were engaged in a wider arena of cultural topics. By intelligently mixing news, amusement and matters of public concern, hosts like Phil Donahue converted the talk show into a popular form of entertainment. This is because the shows dealt with social issues (child care, medical care, problems of working women) affecting the lives of many audiences (Erler & Timb 03).

Apart from the host forms, other talk formats are also practiced in talk shows.

TALK FORMATS

Even though talk show hosts represent a variety of styles and approaches, the number of talk show arrangements is only a handful. For example, in the Bangladeshi context, a general interest hard news or public affairs show can be built around an expert panel (such as Ei Shomoy aired on NTV), a panel and news figure (Article 39 aired on Banglavisision), a magazine format for a single topic (The Road to Democracy aired on RTV), a magazine format that deals with multiple topics or a one-on-one

host/guest interview (Ittady aired on Bangladesh Television). These are the standard formats for the discussion of hard news topics.

Some talk shows that combine amusement, information and news relating to public affairs can be developed around a single topic or a multi -topic magazine program or only one host with the guest interview format .In addition there can also be exclusive interest formats that usually emphasize on subjects as diverse as fashion, cooking, sports and home economics.

According to Erler and Timb:

Entertainment talk shows are represented by a similarly limited number of formats. By far the most prevalent is the informal celebrity guest/host talk show, which takes on different characteristics depending upon what part of the day it is broadcast. The late night entertainment talk show, with the publicity it received grew rapidly in popularity among viewers during its first four decades on the air (Erler & Timb 05).

It would appear that there are many shows which are not branded as talk shows, but whose contents would make it appear like talk shows. For example, a particular show may centre on special events like a talent show or an academic seminar by being suitably adapted to television format. In fact, the distinguishing line between television and interview program is difficult to distinguish. These keep on changing over time as newer formats of television talk are invented. There is now an expanded scope where viewer interaction becomes the line that demarcates between studio-centered programs and programs where various participants are spread in multiple locations of the interview scenario. For instance a talk show on salinity and water logging may involve experts sitting in the studio and interacting closely with field level government and non-government officials, activists and also the directly affected villagers including the agriculturists and marginal labourers.

BANGLADESH SCENARIO

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the passion for speech and utterance is rooted in our oral tradition and political speech delivery. It is highly probable that Bangladeshis are fond of hearing their own voices as well as the voices of

others from a podium or stage. No wonder, therefore, the multiple talk shows on the small screen tend to be popular and audiences across different strata of the Bangladesh society remain awake till even the early hours of the morning to listen to the talkers.

Muhammad Jahangir, a veteran journalist and prominent talk show host comments in an article titled, “Media Bhabna,” (Media Thoughts) published on 2nd February 2009, in *Prothom Alo*, the largest circulated Bengali daily of Bangladesh, that in electronic media the current affairs talk show tops the popularity rating. He goes on to observe that there is food for thought in most talk shows and our readers/audiences are becoming more conscious about society and politics by being exposed to such shows. He hastens to add that more planning would have increased the utilitarian objective of such talk shows.

In an interview¹, looking back to the late 1970’s and early 1980’s Muhammad Jahangir said that in Bangladesh many socio-political issues were taboo in so far as their discussion in media was related. One such highly sensitive subject was the armed insurgency by ethnic minority in Chittagong Hill Tracts districts of Bangladesh and the overall administrative environment there. Very few people knew the goings-on there and still fewer ventured to know. Under such circumstances, a TV program on this aspect was taken to be highly improbable but somehow the then authority approved the TV program about Chittagong Hill Tracts area. The Program when made turned out to be unusually popular and generated lots of interest among the members of public about the hitherto unknown politico-administrative condition of a sizable chunk of Bangladeshi territory.

Jahangir very forthrightly said that the special program on Chittagong Hill Tracts situation was more popular than the highly rated drama serial of the relevant time and this fact goes to prove that appropriately made talk shows hosted by capable anchors could be instrumental in raising public consciousness. He added that the incorporation of the ‘no’ vote provision in Bangladesh’s election system as a means to show public disapproval and disenchantment with the political process has been

largely possible due to constant campaigning on the talk shows. The necessity of a constitution commissions was highlighted in the talk shows as also the prime necessity of constituting an effective anti-corruption commission.

Jahangir also pointed to the conduction of a 12-part program on women’s rights issues, styled as “*nari*” in which topical issues like dowry, acid throwing on women and economic aspects of women’s emancipation in particular were discussed with expert help. He felt that heightened awareness about women’s plight in our society and appropriate remedial measures were the positive achievements of such programs.

On the whole, Jahangir added, the socio-political scenario of Bangladesh experienced meaningful change in the form of changing people’s attitude and range of information. People started discussing the shortfalls in the constitution, graft fighting machinery, the issue of balance of power between President and Prime Minister of the republic etc as a result of continuous exposure to talk shows. Enlightenment and sensitization of the polity was the end product, according to him.

In an interview², Zillur Rahman, the moderator of perhaps the longest running talk-show styled “Tritio Matra” (Third Dimension) on Channel- I television program took measured satisfaction in observing that his show has substantially affected the Bangladesh socio-political scene. He said that for a painfully long period a large majority of our people were used to hearing and seeing the predominantly official version of any issue; and those were mostly monologues delivered in a dreary manner in a drab background. He also remembered that for a long spell of time our parliament, the admittedly principal forum for discussion on issues of public concern in a democratic polity remained dormant due to the boycott of the proceedings by the mainstream opposition.

Rahman added that while our media had disturbingly assumed the mantle of “His master’s voice” between 1982- 1990, and the return of democracy in 1991 did not usher in any positive change in the style and presentation of news and

¹ Roohi Andalib Huda interviewed Muhammad Jahangir on 17th March 2009 at his office in Moghbazar, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

² Roohi Andalib Huda interviewed Zillur Rahman on 5th May 2009 at the Channel I studio at Tejgaon Commercial Area, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

views. Under such circumstances, the talk-show format has been a trendsetter in the electronic media, in so far as an environment of openness and relative objectivity in public discourses is concerned.

The changes brought in by such talk shows, as Rahman saw are manifold and of public significance. For the first time political heavyweights across the divide agreed to sit and discuss issues that had a bearing on public welfare. This was no mean achievement in a polity marked by confrontational politics and acrimonious deliberations with top politicians virtually remaining incommunicado even under very pressing circumstances. So when prominent politicians decided to sit across the table in the talk show and engage in lively discussions, it was a welcome departure. Members of the public were greatly enthused by listening to varying views on one issue, quite an unprecedented experience by our standard.

Rahman informed that his program "Tritio Matra" (Third Dimension) has perhaps succeeded in breaking the elitist flavour of the discussions in the media by bringing in guests of diverse background hailing from different layers of our socio-economic strata. Analysis of important public issues thus no longer remained the exclusive preserve of a few who, until recently would discuss and proffer advice on a variety of subjects, often beyond their known areas of competence. This departure engaged public attention and added to the vibrancy of the talk shows.

A significant impact of the talk show has been public awareness about laws, especially the mother law, that is, the constitution; interestingly enough, people of humble origins have evinced keen interest about the supreme law of the country. Discussions on the jurisdiction of the legislative, executive and judicial organs of the State generated lots of interest across a broad spectrum of the general population. Rahman opined that such developments augur well for our fledgling democracy.

Rahman concluded by saying that the timing of most talk shows is scheduled deliberately in a manner that suits the Bangladeshi diaspora in the Middle East, and those living in North America to tune in at a reasonably convenient time.

THE REVENUE PERSPECTIVE

In an interview³, Ashik Rahman, the head of Marketing and Sales of Banglavisision, a renowned Bangladeshi satellite TV channel, said that in privately operated TV channels such as Banglavisision, magazine shows and reality TV shows (or event shows), get more sponsors as opposed to talk shows. News, live music program (unplugged shows etc), followed by drama serials get most attention from the sponsors. Political talk shows trail behind these.

He added that they have to consider the average cost of producing a talk show in order to understand the kind of revenue that a media seeks. In their case, the average cost of broadcasting each show including studio, host and other production related costs comes to an average of taka 30,000. The sponsors must provide enough to cover this cost and allow them some profit. In case of Banglavisision the average contribution from sponsors for a political talk show comes to about taka 70,000.

He concluded by saying that the fame of the TV channel goes a long way in determining what the media can hope to ask from the sponsor. A political talk show on NTV or Channel I may fetch taka 100,000-150,000 per show from a sponsor. On the other hand, lesser known and mediocre TV channels such as Islamic TV and Digonto TV can expect less money. Some such TV channels are known to have received taka 20,000 or less for a talk show. In these occasions the objectives of the TV channels are to cover some portion of the production cost from the sponsors rather than make any profit. He believes that these channels await a promising situation when the name and audience of the channel become more significant.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF TALK

Ahrar Ahmad, a Professor of Political Science at the Black Hills State University in South Dakota, USA however, takes a very critical view of the emerging talk shows. This is evident in his article "To talk is to be" published in the *Daily Star*, the foremost English Daily of Bangladesh on 7th October 2007. He calls them a gab-fest made possible by the proliferation of private TV

³ Roohi Andalib Huda interviewed Ashik Rahman on 5th May 2009 at the Banglavisision studio at C. R. Dutta Road, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

channels. He says that, "[T]his enthusiasm for 'talk' can be counter-productive, and perhaps damaging. First, it supplants any serious, meaningful, informed analysis for the chatty, transient and cursory. It trivializes the written word (indeed Bangladeshis are notorious for not reading each other's work, unless they are popular novels where the text merely replicates 'talk' in a more organized format), and smothers research, reflection and judgment" (Ahmad 11).

Ahmad adds that excessive attachment to talk means we are championing certain personalities, especially those who can use language to their advantage and have formidable oratory skills. These personalities can use their skills to support and establish their political agenda. The thinkers, idealists, activists and visionaries who do not have the gift of the gab are usually unnoticed and left on the fringes. If the ability to talk well and be eloquent becomes a performance that defines politics then the orator politician will command the national attention while some of our most brilliant and dedicated politicians struggle as obscured ones, he asserts.

Ahmad maintains that during the Pakistani period when a problem arose, a committee was customarily formed, so that it could be solved. In time the committee published a report that nobody would read. The Pakistanis adopted this practice from the Colonial British. Our contemporary rendition of this situation is a public forum or a television show that nobody will remember. He further submits that most of the talk shows follow a clichéd script that is predictable and commonplace. They are a means to exhibit political correctness, which often do not have any follow-up. Quite a few of the talk shows thrive on the inputs of contributors, who are typically public figures and not popular intellectuals. These are top bureaucrats and elites of the ranks in 'talk shows' who are valued more for their perceived power and social status than expertise or knowledge in any given issue or area.

Ahmad concludes by saying that the liberating effects of talk can also be suffocating, and while it is a required condition of democracy, more of it does not make it better. Quality and depth are being traded at the expense of quantity and volume. The national discourse is cheapened and served unhelpfully when talk is practiced in a gratuitous way. This also buttresses a simplistic and self-

serving political culture, which is loud, ambiguous, and a muddle of vocalized exaggerations. The post-modernist who wishes to deconstruct the text of these talk shows or explore the symbolic interpretations would be caught up in insurmountable difficulties as these are essentially made up talk that is of little substance.

These are the pros and cons of talk shows in the Bangladesh scenario. Let us take a look at the scenario in other countries.

BARKHA DUTT AND NDTV

Barkha Dutt, group editor of Indian TV channel NDTV 24 x 7 and anchor of programs like "We, the People," "The Buck Stops Here," and "India-Sixty minutes," hosts and conducts very topical and stimulating talk shows that are considered to have significantly influenced public opinion.

Issues like culture wars pertaining to self-styled moral policing of Indian women for drinking in pubs, criterion for determining censorship standards in advertising, changing pattern of ragging in educational institutions and its desirability etc have brought into sharp focus the public sensitivities relating to the moral, ethical and legal dimension of such issues. The depth and extent of views and reactions consequent to its telecast has quite often positively sensitized the authorities and policymakers. In effect, topical public issues were discussed threadbare and politicians were facilitated in choosing the desired course of action.

The NDTV talk shows have also dwelt on other less serious public debates like whether hosting a mega sporting event like the IPL (Indian Premier League) could be accorded the same priority as the holding of general elections as both events made heavy demands on security provided by the government. Quite interesting to note in this matter was the fact that holding of IPL tournament would have brought billions of money in revenue in addition to providing exciting entertainment to millions of Indians. Though the said tournament was ultimately shifted to South Africa, the viewing public had the occasion through the program of talk shows to hear public officials of the concerned subject, eminent sports personalities and other elites about the desirability and practicality of holding the mega-sports event. Members of the public could apparently appreciate the compelling

reasons forsaking revenue and entertainment to ensure the pre-eminence of orderly democratic election.

The NDTV talk show also initiated a lively discussion on the now famous multiple Oscar winning film “Slumdog Millionaire” that according to many were not a faithful portrayal of Indian society; while others admitted that an underclass and an underworld did exist and their celluloid depiction does not harm. Doubts were raised as to whether the multiple Oscar awards were acts of patronage and politically motivated.

THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW

In the audience participation talk show, Oprah Winfrey became a sensation in mid-eighties in the United States. She did not change the format of the talk show but what distinguished her from others was the cultural dynamics of her show and that was in effect a direct reflection of her personality. She is also credited with breaking the colour line for national television talk show hosts in 1986.

“Winfrey’s role as talk show host was inseparable from her identity as an African – American woman. Her African American heritage and roots surfaced frequently in press accounts. She confronted with the issue of race constantly and was very conscious of her image as an African American role model” (Erler & Timb 3-4). She did succeed in overcoming barriers that have obstructed many in television.

“(T)he image of Oprah Winfrey as national talk show host played against both white and black systems of values and aesthetics. It was her vitality as a double-sign(...) that made her compelling to a national audience in the United States”(Erler & Timb 04). She proved to be a cultural symbol and setter of social trends.

Oprah Winfrey became increasingly important and influential as she spoke on cultural ideas and ideals as forcefully as politicians or educators and quite often appeared as surrogate for the citizens. As interrogator for the citizen Oprah almost acquired a license to question. Her show became one of the “[M]icrocosm of society as cutting-edge social and cultural issues are debated and discussed” (Erler & Timb 06). This drew the attention of the political and social analysts. The social significance of Oprah’s show lies in its emphasis on self-esteem

and child abuse, advocacy for abused children and support for philanthropic program for the poor.

Oprah’s show “[P]resents feminist arguments about women’s lower economic and social status, women’s difficulties in combining paid work and parenting[...] (Squire 356). The show’s feminism meant indication of an interest in women’s political, economic and educational advancement. Oprah represents women as sharing emotional and social qualities and her aim is to empower women throughout the world.

Oprah’s shows give “[S]ome psychological content, usually in terms of ‘feelings’. Each episode’s narrative moves towards psychological closure: people end up ‘feeling’ better because they have ‘expressed themselves’ or ‘started to think about what they really want’. Winfrey’s psychological democracy, her representation as a person just like the audience members, is also very powerful” (Squire 362).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TALKSHOWS AND REALITY SHOWS

In the reality show format, the participants often described as housemates are lodged in a specially made house where their actions are recorded by camera and microphones. In the West the “Big Brother” is an acclaimed reality television show whose title derives from George Orwell’s 1949 dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

The reality show, as seen from the sociological and demographic perspective angle maybe analyzed to see people’s reactions when they are staying outside their usually comfortable residences. Since the participants of the reality show hail from different backgrounds, the show tries to depict how these varied individuals react on the outside and what they feel inside.

The reality show program has four basic elements to depend on. Firstly, there is a back to basics environment, the elimination, the pre-arranged weekly tasks set by the Big Brother and the diary room in which the participants individually convey their emotions and nominate others for elimination.

Continually observing people who are living together is the distinguishing feature of the reality show, “Big Brother.” A show of this type lasts for a number of months and the contestants have the privilege of winning large prizes at the end of the

show. The major emphasis on such a show is on human relationships. However, talk shows are usually one-subject, one-episode presentation wherein the anchor is the dominant attraction and there are actions and reactions from the studio audience. The talk show primarily intends to educate and enlighten and is often accompanied by a message with an eye for affirmative action. Social mobilization is its objective. It has no big cash or kind prize as its objective.

Reality television often displays a modified and imported form of reality with participants put in unusual situations, and there are efforts to create an illusion of reality through editing and related production technologies. The distinguishing difference is the emphasis of the human story and conflicts of reality shows as against the emphasis on the process and information in talk show format.

In the talk show format, usually the host interviews a featured guest and discusses a chosen topic with a guest or a number of guests. Such guests are recruited through advertising a likely topic for a prospective program. In such programs the actual description of someone's life in a brief interview format is frequently treated as resembling a reality television programming.

Some considered views of the commentators have it that the title reality television is not an appropriate description of the program. The insinuation is the program producers bring out a make believe world in which the competition plays out. Participants are often pre-determined and there is a deliberate use of carefully designed scenarios, events and settings to provoke particular behaviors and the so-called conflicts.

POPULAR CULTURE TELEVISION STUDIES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TALK SHOWS

There is now an increased appreciation of the reality that culture has become material. This materialistic culture finds meaningful expression in what we have come to know as media. It is seen that such media has three distinctive elements, consisting of firstly, a specific form of aesthetic production, secondly, a specific technology and thirdly a social institution. These dimensions of the media are usually addressed.

Television as part of the broad media could be

construed as successor to the cinema and its genres and narrative are shaped by the wider context of capitalism, meaning the industrialization of show business and leisure. Television is a distinctive medium, which, admittedly, has "[A] different psychic investment in image, a different treatment of sound, different definitions of the shot or the sequence, different concept of off-screen space" (Elsaesser 07).

Television, a predominantly visual medium, with its direct address, its performative modes, its manipulation of images is too important to be ignored; and it would not be an exaggeration to say television occupies a dominant place in the media hegemony.

It appears that in order to stay in touch with whatever is happening in our culture we have to be familiar with what is on television, being cognizant of the reality that television also helps shape the culture. Television's ability to use powerful imagery confers high credibility. The talk shows that seem very persuasive acquire an authoritative edge because it presents interesting topics and conversations. Since images overwhelm the words, television amplifies the importance of the symbolic form.

Television as part of the media not only reflects the values and beliefs, political, cultural and economic but goes beyond mirroring the culture to dictating what the values should be. The cynics may even say the present day television is now controlling the thinking of a nation in a totalitarian manner. In fact, the significance of television as a technology is the impact it makes on our habits of interaction and practically, we may be living in a culture that is largely affected by the habits engendered by television.

C.Lowe in Farhad Saba's course homepage Cyber Culture and Learning Systems states that, "Television is more than a business of entertaining. It is also a teacher, shaping values of our society. It teaches young people how we as a nation think about ourselves and our place in the world, and it affects the way we behave both as individuals and as a nation" (Saba 04).

It has been the worldwide experience that television, whether commercial or under state control, has been identified predominantly with what has come to be known as 'public service

broad casting.’ This means in effect that regardless of the revenue factor television is obligated to operate within a framework of public accountability and social responsibility. Such accountability and responsibility is reflected in television’s desired function to “inform, educate and entertain.”

The British TV Channel Four highlighted an image of Britain as multicultural, regionally and nationally diverse, and divided by gender, race, opportunity and living standards. Thus this channel addressed the viewer differently and therefore constructed a different symbolic; it strengthened the notion of television as a social bond that held the fabric of the nation together, as the big story-telling, narrative generating machine, realigning the fragmented subjectivities, political institutions, cultural past and collective memories.

Television’s progression as a medium over the years appeared to sustain the belief that just as print culture changed the way we think about the world and our place in it, so also the audiovisual culture had changed us. “[A] certain logic became apparent whereby the public spheres, the social worlds which the great bourgeois revolutions had passed on, were being transformed”[...] (Elsaessar 14). This is where television could stand as its living form and embodiment.

“A new articulation of the interplay of the media and social life gave rise to the idea of television as a stand-in and stand-for society, as the storage medium and storage modes by which to pass on cultural capital and socialize future generations” (Elsaessar 14).

Television could be described as the microcosm of society that ventures to constantly reinvent the society in its own image. The power of gathering audiences is always a political power before it is an economic one. However, the increasing concentration of the ownership of television in the hands of already very powerful groups indicates that the market cannot be relied upon as protecting or safeguarding democracy.

In the United States where the talk shows featured first, the late night entertainment talk-show hosts made such an impact on viewers that at times they appeared as influential as political leader or leaders of State. In an environment where political scientists continue to hold a dim view of the

possibilities of democracy in the public arena, the talk show hosts assumed the role of interrogators for the public good by questioning the values and political ideas. Often such talk shows, particularly the political ones were considered a litmus test of public opinion, a form of commentary on the news.

As social texts, the political talk shows are highly sensitive to the topics of their social and cultural moment. Often it reflects a preoccupation with domestic violence and gender issues. Viewed in this angle, such shows are social histories of their times. Talk shows with a political emphasis are actually forums in which society tests out and comes to terms with the topics, issues and themes that define its basic values and the meaning of citizenship or in other words, a participating member of a society.

In the *Time* magazine Barbara Ehrenreich in her editorial, “In defense of talk shows” published on December 4, 1995 comments that the “(T)he talk shows are one of the most excruciatingly moralistic forums the culture has to offer. Disturbing and sometimes disgusting, yes, but their very business is to preach the middle-class virtues of responsibility, reason and self-control” (Ehrenreich 92).

Talk shows carry the potential of turning social issues into political movements. Davis and Owen concluded “there seems to be evidence of an agenda-setting effect: Frequent depiction of social problems leads to greater perception of importance of the issue (Davis and Owen 84). Talk shows were also found to “heighten teens perceptions of how often certain behaviors occur and how serious social issues are” (Davis and Owen 85).

There is no denying that the audiovisual medium of television significantly impacts the sociopolitical life of people across different cultures, having varied degrees of socioeconomic advancement. A large number of people are always influenced by the visual splendor of television. And thus when interesting talk shows are presented through a visually pleasing format, opinions are formed, often for positive social goals like women empowerment and the rights of public to be informed and heard.

For Bangladesh, a fledgling democracy, the talk shows, particularly the political ones have been quite significant in shaping public attitudes and bringing into sharp focus, maybe temporarily, the

norms and nuances of a free society. Topics like trial of war criminals and building digital Bangladesh that featured in talk shows appeared to have impacted public choices in the historic 29 December 2008 election. The right of the public to be informed and the right to question persons in authority appear to acquire some foothold although the ability to effectively seek answers for public wrong done maybe a distant reality.

People of humble origins have dared into venture in public view and ask apparently embarrassing questions and sometimes got replies that were hitherto unimaginable. On a broader socio-political canvas the culture of confrontational politics is slowly but hopefully moving to an environment of dialogue and discourses, at least on a limited scale. The talk shows have been positive in indicating that discussions of issues of public concern cannot remain the exclusive preserve of a select few often claiming expertise on nearly all subjects. The habit of listening to a different view in a predominantly reactive environment is gradually taking shape. It is expected that such talk shows shall continue to play a positively supplementary role in furthering the cause of democracy for sustainable development.

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