

A Walk through Talk Shows

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Abstract

I did my internship at “Channel i”, the first digital Bangla channel from Bangladesh. During my internship, I worked closely with the programmes-“Taroka Kothon”, “Khude Ganraj”, “Somoy Gele Sadhon Hobe Na” and “Eid Anondo Adda”. I learned many new things from these programmes through my internship. I tried to connect these programmes with the understanding of media I got from my studies and tried to analyze these programmes from a cultural studies perspective. In my report, I focus on how these programmes involve people’s emotions and even manipulate them to get more popularity. Three months is not enough time to learn everything that goes behind the making of a show, so I’d like to believe that I have given a fair account of my experience and insights as an intern, in this report.

Introduction

When you're young, you look at television and think, there's a conspiracy. The networks have conspired to dumb us down. But when you get a little older, you realize that's not true. The networks are in business to give people exactly what they want.

This is how Steve Jobs describes the wonder of television. As a young intern the same spectacle of television attracted me and I decided to work with “Channel i”, the first digital Bangla Channel from Bangladesh. Getting attached to the programme department, I worked closely with the programme team under the supervision of Miss Moushumi Borua, senior programme producer and presenter in Channel i. With the vision of becoming a part of all its audience’s personal lives, the channel has a very personal feel. As I worked with several talk shows personal issues of participants came out during the course of the programme which is also a very clever tactic to relate to the personal lives of the audience.

In my report, I will be focusing on the regular programme, “Taroka Kothon”, and a few specialized programmes like “Khude Ganraj”, “Somoy Gele Sadhon Hobe Na” and “Eid Anondo Adda”; all of which have certain focal points that would engage its audience. I will analyze all these programmes from a cultural studies perspective. I argue that all these programmes have their own ways of involving the emotions of their

audience and manipulate them in order to get more popularity by become a part of the daily lives of their audience.

In this respect, Marshall McLuhan, in his book, *The Book of Probes*, comments, "All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perceptions and arbitrary values." In fact, the Media plays a significant role in our everyday lives full of routines, actions and reactions. Television became a member of numerous families all over the globe, since the late 1920s, as the form of media that stayed at people's home and becoming inseparable from their daily routines.

Researchers claim that the success of television as a mass medium lies in its achievement in incorporating both visual and aural content. It not only entertains the viewers, but also keeps them emotionally involved.

It is this emotional attachment of the viewers with the television shows that the Channels target at. They show the viewers what they want to see and sometimes even create a desire among the viewers to watch what they show. Working in the programmes that are mentioned above, I gained an internal perspective of their decisions and highlights, which I will be analyzing in the next part of my report.

Observation: Insights into the Talk Shows at “Channel i”

Khude Gaanraj

“Khude Gaanraj” was a talk show where six participants of “Khude Gaanraj 2011”, a singing competition for children, were the guests. The main focus of this talk show was to know their background, experience and about their journey in this competition.

As this talk show was directly allied to the reality show of the same title, this talk show can be called a promotional show for the main talent hunt programme. Bringing the participants of the competition to this show helped the audience to know these children better so that it would influence their support for certain contestants. The same audience would decide the fate of these contestants by sending votes through their cell phone. The audience gets influenced directly or indirectly by the highlights of such shows and fails to realize that they are spending their own money to help these contestants win.

On the other hand the media tries to convince its audience that the participants need and deserve their support. That is why it tries to involve the audience's emotions with the participants. The media focuses on the personal life and stories of the participants to show them as ordinary people just like the audience which encourages the audience to connect with the show as well as the participants. Some of the audience also feels that they could become participants the next time as well.

The media also highlights the glits and glammers, these participants become a part of while participating in such shows. This creates a desire among the audience to enjoy that life style. The instant popularity the contestants receive also inspires the audience to take part and become famous. "Simon During" in his book "Cultural Studies A Critical Introduction" claims that "With the help of Television, many people were successful in bringing their talent out. People who are talented in dance, music, acting are getting more influenced through this device".

He goes to explain that "Now-a-days in television many reality shows are coming up which help individuals to build up their career. Through these shows their talents are getting exposed to the society. This brings more motivation and encouragement in the individuals".

In the talk show "Khude Ganraj" the participants talked about their family, school, friends, etc. The six of them came from different districts and different backgrounds, but when they came into this competition, they became very good friends. They said that they enjoyed their camp a lot. They also had a lot of fun during the rehearsals. They also revealed secrets about each other. All of these conversations brought these children closer to the audience.

The shows also showed how these children were not only good in singing, but also have other talents. One participant played the piano on the show, while another

participant recited a poem written by him. These proved these children to be extra ordinarily talented and hard working, which would have an impact on the audience.

In order to highlight the main show and giving insights in to it they were asked which judge they were the most scared of. They also discussed how they feel when the judges are happy with their performance and when they are not.

They took the name of judges, someone mention Sameena Chowdhury, someone took the name of Humayun Ahmed, someone the name of thought it was Runa Layla and someone found Sabeena Yasmeen found to be the most strict judge. All the children agreed that good comments made them very happy but when their performance were not good enough they thought of practicing more and performing better the next time.

In their discussions, family, social class, background, condition of their family, etc. are highlighted and the videos also show that the audience feels the connection with them. In most cases we see that the under privileged participants or participants with any disabilities or conflicts in their families get sympathy votes from the audience and win. Videos and discussions like these help the participants to get more votes. So we see how these manipulate the emotions of the audience.

When the participants were asked who inspired them the most in their family, most of them said that their parents inspired them the most. But one participant said that his brother and teacher inspired him the most to take part in this competition. Thus such discussions highlight the role of the family in nurturing any individual talent.

When the anchor asked them how they felt perceived their popularity, they said that they felt very happy as so many people like their singing and vote for them. When they go out on the streets, people recognize them, want to take photos with them and they all agreed that they enjoy this fame a lot.

A fun game was also played during the course of the show. All of them had to write the name of the participant that he/she thought would win. The anchor then revealed the votes. Finally, they shared what they would do when this programme will end and if they win what would they do with the prize money. This is how they desire among the audience to participate in such shows and become rich and famous is created.

Taroka Kothon

People are always curious to know about the lives of celebrities, about the happenings in their lives, their upcoming projects, etc. When people watch the celebrities in different talk shows, they believe in their words. So, through the TV programmes, people are able to know about the personal lives of the celebrities. They also talk about social issues of relevance and concern, which influences the audience's views and actions as well.

Channel i's celebrity talk show, "Taroka Kothon", invites celebrities from television and movies to chitchat with them. The famous actress of Bangladeshi movies, Popy attended the programme to promote her new movie, "Garments Konya". Popy spoke about the cast and crew of the movie, along with shedding light to its plot. A video clip of this movie was also shown so that the audience can get a glimpse of it.

We often hear about celebrities throwing tantrums at different shows on and off stage. During this show I had a first hand experience of the actress Popy, asking for the anchor's seat to be sited on. She claimed that the anchor's seat would get more attention from the audience as well as a better view of the camera. Therefore before agreeing to come to the show she made sure that she would get to sit on the anchors seat.

This particular show can be called entirely promotional of Popy's movie because the people who watched the show could have gotten interested to go to the cinema hall

and watch the entire movie. So a two way business can be witness in these cases where the actress gets benefited by bringing in an actress who may have fans that would watch the show for her.

In the same programme, Monir Khan, one of our popular singers, talked about piracy and tried to build awareness about the loss the music industry has to face because of the piracy of music. He also mentioned how these leads singers more than releasing their private albums. He also complained about being asked to sing Bollywood songs instead of his own songs at live shows both here in Bangladesh and outside.

Through this programme, Monir Khan tried to raise awareness among the people to stop buying pirated products and he also asked for legal assistance to stop piracy. As people asked him to sing Bollywood songs instead of his own songs at live shows; he requested people to appreciate Bengali songs over Hindi songs. The question that if he really wanted to raise awareness among people to enjoy Bengali songs or he was just using people's emotions about their language to listen to his songs, remains to be answered.

Again, if people are not familiar with his songs abroad, they are also justified in asking to listen to songs that they know and may mistake him for a random singer singing any songs of their choice. It goes on to show that Monir Khan's popularity is confined within a certain group of people who are essentially viewers of Bangladeshi mainstream movies. Again people who buy concert tickets do not generally fall under the crowded

that would watch mainstream Bangladeshi movies going to cinema halls. So there appears to be a disparity between the fans of Monir Khan and the people who can afford to buy tickets for a live show. Monir Khan's expectations then seem unrealistic as well.

Eid Anondo Adda

The same attractions for the lives of celebrities were attached with the emotions related to our religious celebration of Eid in the programme “Eid Anondo Adda”. This programme was basically talk shows where some celebrities were invited, who were Bangladeshi singers, actors and actresses. The topic of this talk show was how the celebrities celebrate the biggest religious festival of our country, “Eid”. All the celebrities talked about their plans for Eid, how they would celebrate Eid etc.

One of the most popular singers Kona said that her elder sister shops for her. She doesn't get time to go shopping. She even had a show the night before Eid. Though she comes back home late the night before Eid she wakes up early on the Eid day. She spent the whole day with her family and her only niece.

Two popular actors from TV, Shajol and Bindu were two other guests on the show. They said that they have lots of work at hand. They also have to work late night before Eid day. So they also will not get time for shopping either.

Such comments only go on to justify that the celebrities have to work hard to establish themselves in the media, because they want to get popular among the audience. They work day and night, even to the extent of having to work late at the night before Eid.

Another popular singer, Nancy, said that she also does not get time to go for Eid shopping. Her husband did all the shopping for her and for family. But she tries to buy her daughter's dress her self. She usually spends Eid in her mother in law's house and she tries to cook on Eid.

However, through such discussions, the celebrities tried to emphasize that they are extremely busy and since they are famous, they have many responsibilities; but they still give their families and personal relationships priority. That is why they spend Eid with their family, relatives and friends.

They also claimed that they have such a huge fan following that going shopping for them becomes really difficult as they end up getting surrounded by crowds that do not let them shop. However if they go for shopping they go late of night and they have some selected shopping malls from where they can shop. Thus, being recognized as celebrities or "stars", they cannot live the way they used to live in the past. Their lives become public.

This example reminds us of the American comedian, Fred Allen, who claims that "A celebrity is a person who works hard all of their life to become well known, and then wears dark glasses to avoid being recognized". People always follow the celebrities and want to meet them. So, whenever the fans get the chance, they try to talk to the celebrities and want to take pictures with them. It is at first pleasant for a celebrity that he/she has so

many fans that want to talk to them, or take their photos; but sometimes it starts to irritate them. For these reasons, the celebrities try to avoid their fans and go for shopping late at night.

In this regard, Subhash Ghosh in his article “Privacy of celebrities - the inevitable price of a public figure?” writes “The celebrities should indeed come to terms with the price of fame, which is to say that anyone who becomes famous inevitably loses the privacy of his life”.

The other actress, Priti, said that she received many dresses from her fans and then others also agreed with her. Most of them said that they stay at home all day, greet their relatives and spend time with them. But some celebrities said that on the Eid day they visit their relatives because they do not get time to see them otherwise and in the evening they hang out with their friends.

Some of the actors and singers said that they took a one week break, but some of them said that they had to go back to work on the second day of Eid. This again shows how the celebrities utilize their Eid vacation to come out of their busy schedule and spend time with their family.

At the end they wished the audience for Eid and the show ended with all of them singing “Romjan er ai rojar sheshe” in chorus. Thus the entire show had an “Eid” feel to it, through which not only were the celebrities brought closer to the audience but also

people's emotions surrounding Eid were met. It again showed that these are certain qualities and values in people that are present in everyone; even if they become celebrities.

Somoy Gele Sadhon Hobe Na

“Somoy Gele Sadhon Hobe Na” was a programme, which was arranged on the occasion of the 121st death anniversary of the great Baul singer from Bangladesh Lalon Shah. Fardia Parvin, singer and an enthusiastic follower of “Lalon Shah” and Professor Lalim Haque were the invited guests on the show. The show discussed the life and works of Lalon Shah, accompanied by Lalon’s famous songs, sung by Farida Parvin.

Lalim Haque gave a short biography of Lalon Shah and talked about the philosophy of Lalon Shah’s life. Professor Haque reveals that though most biographer document 1774 as Lalon Shah’s year of birth, the experts and followers of Ohedaniat claims that Lalon never shared his date of birth with anyone. Ohedaniat is the cult introduced by Lalon glorifying humanism. He also said that Fakir Lalon Shah is the most prominent figure in the “Baul” tradition, as he is unique in his blending different traditions of devotional rites such as Shahajia of Buddhism, Shahajia of Vaishnavism, Sufism of Islam and several other traditional beliefs.

Lalon did not believe that there was anything beyond death, but he believed death to be a personal event, an experience that remained beyond language. He thought that everyone’s experience of death was unique and no one else could understand it. So he tried to develop an attractive concept for death giving the soul life after the death of the body. As death was not something is scared of for Lalon, it is said that he died singing a song.

Lalim Haque said that Lalon did not disclose his religious background even to his closest associates. Rather, in many verses he took a stand against any other organized religion and introduced his cult "Ohedaniat".

We may call Lalon a prophet or a spiritual singer whose influence was so strong that he created a cult, followers of which survive even today. In fact professor Haque disclosers about Lalon may be of interest to the post modernist who could study his anti-structuralist beliefs and the cult he created.

Lalim Haque also said that according to the experts and true bearers of Lalon's spirit, Lalon composed about two thousand verses. However, many rural Bauls claim that Lalon composed over ten thousand songs. These revelations about Lalon can be interpreted as an attempted to popularize him and his songs which are being brought to mainstream media by different artist today.

Even Farida Parvin said that her presentation style is different from that of the Bauls at Lalon's Akhra (meeting place for the Bauls). She claimed that Fakirs at the Akhra sing Lalon songs in their own style. She said, "My emphasis is on the classical aspect to give it a more polished form". Here we find Farida Parvin to be a believer of "high culture". She believes that adding classical notes to Lalon's songs to polish them, whereas the Bauls may find her style in authentic. Thus while she herself is reforming

Lalon's songs she is critical of the new adaptations of "Lalon Geeti" which she believes create confusion only. Here we find a glimpse of the tension present in the music industries today where everyone feels that their school of music is the right one. Therefore Simon During in his book *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* said,

Although popular music is genuinely popular, it is also divisive, segmenting communities by generation, class, race, ethnicity, tastes and, if less so, gender. Music quickly germinates something larger than itself –micro-communities and lived styles, each tied to a genre or sub-genre or set of genres. The big multinational corporations that dominate the music industry themselves organize their music divisions into units each concentrating on a different genre and audience.

These different versions of "Lalon Giti" however hold their own places and have separate groups of audience. Thus popular media makes it possible for different versions of the same genre coincide. Therefore Theodor Adorno in his book *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* comments, "Diversity is more effectively present in mass media than previously, but this is not an obvious or unequivocal gain".

As we mentioned before, this show was promoting Lalon's songs through Farida Parvin's singing and Lalim Haque's discussions on Lalon. This revival of Lalon is however a result of the popularity singers like 'Anusheh' or 'Arup Rahee' has given to Lalon's songs. So the entire process seems like a cycle, where a product of mass culture is made popular through media and then again challenged by the media.

Conclusion

As three months of being an intern in a TV channel cannot give anyone enough knowledge and understanding on the politics of media, these were the observations that I came up with. Being involved in these talk shows I was exposed to the making of these shows as well as the propaganda behind these.

Therefore I would comment that celebrity talk shows like “Taroka Kothon”, and “Eid Anondo Adda” focus on making the celebrities familiar to the audience so that the audience gets a glimpse of the people behind the stardom. Their personal lives thus become public and help the audience relate with them.

Talk show like “Khude Ganraj” promotes the sister shows like the original talent hunts show. These shows ultimately benefit the channel as it earns a lot of the revenue through the votes the audience sends.

Shows like “Somoy Gele Sadhon Hobe Na” are attempts to promote and popularize artist like Lalon Shah who are considered treasures of our country and icons of our folk culture.

In all these shows however, it is the audience that is aimed at and it is their mind that these shows want to influence. The media is fed by people and therefore the media also feeds its audience with whatever is profitable. The audience gets involved with and

influenced by these shows the way media pleases. Thus the audience feels personal relationship with the media and the media runs making use of these relationships.

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