

“The youth like disruptive programming.”

Santosh Nair, CEO of UTV Television speaks to **Complete Television** about the changes he has brought to the production house since he joined the channel to the latest shows launched by them.



How would you trace the growth of UTV Television since its inception?

We have done a lot of fiction and non-fiction shows. We experimented producing varied genres of content and have fully enjoyed the journey and success of both fiction and non-fiction shows.

You joined UTV Television six years ago. What are the major changes you have implemented?

When I joined, I used to handle the South Indian market. It's in the last three years that I have started working in the Hindi space. We have created lot of content for the Sun Network. We produced, acquired shows in the South and marketed them. After I took over we did shows like *Dance India Dance* for Zee TV, *Emotional Atyachaar*, *Cash Cab* for Bindass and recent fictions like *Rakth Sambandh* on Imagine and *Mayke Se Bandbi Dor* on Star Plus.

Of all the shows you have done, which show has given you the most creative satisfaction?

Almost all the shows have given me creative satisfaction. However if you ask me which one non-fiction show has given me the most creative satisfaction then it will be *Dance India Dance*. This show has completely rewritten the way a talent hunt is done. This was for the first time that we did a talent hunt on national TV. We never had celebrity judges and celebrity dancers. The whole aim was to get the best talent from India.

UTV produces both fiction and non-fiction shows. However the non-fiction shows especially the reality shows targeted at the youth garner more TRP (*Emotional Atyachaar*, *Love Lock Up*, *Date Trap* and *Maa Exchange*) numbers than fiction shows. Why do you think this happens?

It is not necessarily true that non-fiction gives higher numbers. *Emotional Atyachaar* for instance is the number one show on Bindass. Such content are created or targeted at the youth. However, if it's a Hindi GEC and if it's a fiction show on weekdays it does very well.

Popular serials down south – Tamil, Kannada and Telugu are seeing remakes on Hindi GECs. UTV has successfully made serials like *Mayke Se Bandhi Dor*, *Meeti Oli* on Sony... Why do you think these South serials are doing well in a Marathi backdrop instead of a Gujarati or a Marwari backdrop?

There is no compulsion that we have to air a show in a Marathi backdrop. It's all a joint work between a broadcaster and the content house. *Mayke Se Bandhi Dor* is for instance the first Marathi show that is happening on STAR Plus.

You say that UTV Television produced the first HD fiction shows of India. However not all TV sets in India are HD compliant. So do you think producing HD shows is a waste of money?

Our first HD show was *Maayleek* on ETV Marathi. The technical infrastructure had already been upgraded to shoot in HD.

Mayke Se Bandhi Dor was the first fiction show on a Hindi GEC in HD format and it was produced by us. With technology growing and the STAR network taking a leap forward with HD, foreign language content shot in HD is being dubbed and broadcast over speciality channels. For the rest of the broadcasters it's just a matter of time to change to HD. ETV has already gone HD. Zee is yet to go HD. However, it's not necessary that this better viewing experience will hike TRPs. (HD is surely better quality viewing.) Also it won't be an astronomical cost to shoot in HD. The cost between shooting on a normal camera and a high definition camera is marginal. Nowadays majority of TV sets are HD. In fact that has become basic.

UTV has been a dominant airtime seller on South Indian channels like Sun TV, Udaya TV, Surya TV and Gemini TV. Why did you venture into the Southern market in this regard?

Our association with the South Indian market is for over ten years now. Currently we are one of the big players of the Sun network. We are selling more than 50 thousand seconds on a monthly basis on the Sun network. When I am producing South Indian shows I am also holding the copyright. These stories can also easily travel to Hindi or any other language.

Do you think nowadays channels interfere too much with the creativity of production houses and maybe ask them to dumb down content?

One non-fiction show has given me the most creative satisfaction then it will be Dance India Dance. This show has completely re-written the way a talent hunt is done.

We are working on a good line up of shows both for the Hindi and regional space for both the genres of fiction and non-fiction.

As a content house, we should know how the story should go forward. It's a joint call in any case. The channel is open to inputs from the creative people. We are open to recommendations from the channel too. When we think that there is no need for suggestions we let it be the way it is. The channel and the production house jointly take it forward.

UTV has one of the biggest dubbing facilities in India with presence in Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. It is the only dubbing outfit that gives exact dialect and regional language flavours. You have dubbed in Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. This does not include the North East Indian languages though. Why is NE India so marginalized when it comes to dubbing shows in their language?

Actually, there isn't really a very big market in North East India. If something interesting came up we would have surely dubbed it. There is not a big market out there as far as dubbing is concerned. There is a big market on HBO, NDTV Good Times, UTV Action and Disney besides other channels.

UTV Television is planning an aggressive slate of both the fiction and non-fiction programmes across leading channels in the Hindi as well as regional space. What exactly do you mean by aggressive?

Yes, we are working on a good line up of shows both for the Hindi and regional space for both the genres of fiction and non-fiction.

You make shows for both the youth and for Hindi/ regional GECs. You've already replied in an earlier interview as to why the youth like disruptive programming. On mainstream GECs it seems that the story of a married bride facing challenges has been done to death. Why are just these two categories of the audience with extreme tastes catered to on Indian television? Will you be making programmes for intelligent men and women of all ages with middling values – in between the youth who love to

hear abuses on reality shows and those with those traditional family oriented values? (Sakthi on *Mamathala Kovala* for instance sacrifices a lot it seems).

You have different sampling coming in on TV. Just to give you an example when *Bigg Boss* and *KBC* (recent season) was being broadcast at the same time slot on different platforms, you had a set of audience coming in who liked the loud programming like *Bigg Boss* and at the same time band you had a set of audience coming to watch an intelligent, composed and soft-anchor-based game show, *KBC*. These are completely two set of samples. Yes, I had mentioned that the youth like disruptive programming and we will be creating content for the varied set of audience available, which includes speciality channels and the mass entertainment channels.

Why do you have characters turning negative in *Mamathala Kovala*. Rajlaxmi – Prem's mother (tough lady—going to turn negative for some time) and Reshma – modern girl is going to turn negative after Prem and Sakthi's marriage. Why did you choose this mode of characterization in which characters turn negative? Also isn't it regressive and clichéd to show a modern girl turn negative?

It purely is the creative team's vision and thought process with regards to the script and how characterization should be. Also works on the broadcaster's demand for the kind of content they need, keeping in mind their set of audience consumption pattern.

Is *Advocate Arjun* written keeping a male audience in mind? Do you think the serial wouldn't have worked if a female protagonist was chosen as the advocate? In India are female leads supposed to be mainly homely women adjusting to a big joint family?

In fact, we had debated about this internally and also with the broadcaster. Also, when you look at the south you will find lot of action heroines but we felt that a male would work fine in the role.

How do you see UTV doing three years from now?

Two or three years from now we like to establish ourselves as a major fiction player in the Hindi GEC space. However, I don't want to completely write off non-fiction as it is also a big key area. So I am looking at a scenario where we are successfully doing both fiction and non-fiction.

- PALLAVI BHATTACHARYA