

FROM THE EDITOR

THE TV CULTURE IN INDIA

There were honest and dishonest people, truthful and not truthful, kind and unkind people before the newspapers came into being. The natural arrangement remained undisturbed after the advent of the newspapers. There were wise and not-so-wise before the cinema or the radio was introduced and the division remained equally distinct even after these media became popular.

And the same law will continue to be in operation after the flooding of the society by the TV; some people will continue to be decent and some otherwise as was the case in the pre-TV days. In the long run it is not the film or the TV or some such thing that moulds our destiny or gives a character to our spirit; that function is discharged by something far greater than these innovations.

But let it be repeated, that is in the long run. At any given time, much can happen to exercise our attention. The average man being a repository of both good and bad possibilities, though good is expected to triumph ultimately, he can be reduced to a puppet by forces of mischief.

In India, *the time has just come* when we have to take most serious note of this fact. Vast areas have come under the reach of the TV. Much of the conduct of the masses, much of their life-style and much of their thinking process are going to be determined by this medium. The time has just come when we have to remember that TV, after all, is a means, not an end. We must not surrender this means to the demands of reckless elements. It has caused much damage to several societies. Let it not do the same to India.

There are intelligent, educative and beautiful items prepared in other countries and our TV is borrowing some of them particularly from the U.S.A. and the U.K. and Japan. It is also giving a boost to our artistes and highlighting aspects of our cultural heritage. The authorities should be thanked for this. However, they cannot but do this much and this does not require any special dynamism or vision on their part.

This said, we must ask ourselves: Is the Indian TV going to assume a character of its own? Or, is it just resigning itself, without any resistance, to the powerful world current that is sweeping this medium? It should not be too late when we wake up to the mischief it might have already caused to the psychological climate of India.

If we are to base our observation on the trends that are obvious, we must say that the institution, at the moment, is not run by the kind of consciousness and conscience that can give it a distinct Indian character. Its own programme lacks quality and imaginativeness, while, on the other hand, that part of its programme which is sold to advertisers is already in the process of being abused. I must confess that one of the most irritating sounds for me is the professional voice announcing or singing out the glory of a product; I must also confess that the moment I see a good scene interrupted by a superimposition of the legend of its sponsor, I instantly take a decision never to patronise that house, for it does not have any respect for our aesthetic sense. I am sure, there are many individuals like me. But that is a different matter. What is a matter of great concern is the cool indiscrimination with which sometimes programmes are presented. Here is an illustration: On the 9th of March a certain cultural extravaganza which had been instituted in aid of the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy was telecast. The whole programme was executed by the aspiring young artistes who were imitating third grade Western—American to be more particular—pop music and rock and twist and-what not. Now, who can infuse that much sensibility into those minds which sponsored the programme or those which allowed it on the TV that there was a chasm between the purpose of the presentation and its content? Who can make them realise that it amounted to a ridicule of those unfortunate people of Bhopal? Already victims of a Machiavellian commercial adventure, must they

be greeted with the echoes of a decadent culture emanating from the same level of anarchy, by artistes who too were victims, but by choice, of an equally poisonous gas?

A child came to his father and demanded money for buying a certain beverage. When questioned, his calm reply was that they were going for a "Gossip" party for which the beverage was indispensable. Inquiry showed that gossip had already assumed a status, thanks to repeated claim of a product over the TV. No use of shedding tears over the impact or influence of the TV programme at a later stage. There are forces, mostly commercial, supported by an unsuspecting if not a vested-interest bureaucracy, which put into circulation insensitive and crude slogans. Once they had gained acceptance and currency, it is only a step more to the ugly, the vulgar and the violent. It may hurt some people, but for the sake of our tomorrows, we must protest against all irresponsible handling of this medium. We must do our best to resist this new force from turning monstrous. Beware of the Western example.

This is just the morning of the TV culture in India. If we wish, we can, instead of being swept by the ill-wind from the Western direction, set a new example. We can give a civilised turn to the medium, can make it a true vehicle of culture and creativity. There is no reason why our TV cannot become a model for the world.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

THE READER AND THE VIEWER

An International seminar was sponsored by the National Book Trust, India, in New Delhi, during the World Book Fair in February, to discuss one aspect of the situation: the effect of the audio-visual media on the reading habit of the children. (Please see the *Topic on the Day*.) Most of the participants agreed that however good and sane be the use of the TV, it can never be a substitute for the book.

It is often asked today, what is wrong with the audio-visual means of imparting knowledge since it can do so more effectively than the books? The question emanates from an incomplete idea of the role of education in the making of man, from the idea that it was enough to be intelligent or well-informed. It ignores the truth that man has an inner spirit which has the need for continuing a silent dialogue, a private exchange, with the spirit of a worthy book. However well-produced as a visual a classic work of literature may be, it is after all only an interpretation by its actors and directors. The makers of the audio-visual version present the scenes and the characters as they visualise them. The freedom of the viewer is limited.

But infinite is the reader's freedom in creating his own world out of a book. This freedom is indispensable for the growth of his imaginativeness, for the development of his own insight into literary work.

Needless to say, much depends on the quality of the book. To keep alive the habit of reading is important, but more important than that is promoting the habit of reading good literature, not books that are produced just to rival the audio-visual invasion.