

FROM THE EDITOR

ECHOES OF WISH-FULFILMENT

It is not at all a pleasant task to disillusion a gentleman in his fond ideas or to point out that the paradise he has found for himself is not the wise man's, but it has become a painful necessity to do so when it concerns the Director General of Doordarshan, for his ideas concern us all.

The other night the Doordarshan broadcast, on its national network, a debate among some important men on the effect of the TV advertisements on the common people. Those who expressed their concern about the effect of the advertisements on the poorer population in particular—and they ironically included the former bureaucrat who ushered in the age of commercial ads on the Indian TV—sounded quite sure in their assessment of the situation. The TV ads, according to them, were harmful. Those who defended the ad policy—they included the D.G. and the chief executive of an -advertising agency—understandably asserted that it was not harmful.

What, however, surprised us was an argument which the D.G. put forth. He said that recently, they have conducted a survey. Although its finding was yet to be published, he was good enough to divulge it which is, the ads do not produce any adverse effect on the poor people. The people see a commodity offered and then forget about it if they cannot afford it. That is all.

We can visualise the survey. The researcher goes to the slum, locates a woman and asks, "Do you see that damsel assuming wondrous dream-like forms as she changes into different luminous attires one after another?" "Yes," says the slum-dweller. "Do you feel tempted to buy such attires for yourself?" she is asked. "How can I? I can just make my both ends meet with what I or my husband earns!" she replies. "Does any longing for the attires remain in you?" she is asked. "No!" she says.

We wonder what else she could have said or if she could have ever said, "Yes, the longing remains; it results in disappointment; that breeds frustration and envy—and one day I find myself bursting into anger and violence!"

Our bureaucrats are among our best educated people and we expect them to be wiser. Such surveys can only scratch the surface; they cannot penetrate beneath a certain layer. The accumulative response of those who cannot touch a stuff offered through advertisements —advertisement made aggressive, arrogant and vulgar by a combination of sound and sight —cannot be determined through a collection of such answers. Even common sense should tell us more than what a thousand-page survey report can say in this regard.

The TV advertisements are designed to entice and to lure. Those who can buy the glorified stuff (the rich go shopping not to buy things but in hope of buying happiness), their temptation is momentarily satisfied; those who cannot, remain tempted. And this latter reality cannot be wished away by a report. Advertisers know better than the bureaucrats or the professional bureaus conducting a survey for a fee.

The style of the TV advertisements is embarrassing. How to explain it to their makers and their prompters? Imagine the 19th century London restaurant when the well-to-do customers, while relishing the various dishes spread on the table before them, also relished the poor folks, often

travellers from villages, gathering around them and observing them eat! The situation is something nearer this—but with different results in a changed time.

But neither our embarrassment nor the effect of the ads on the poorer multitudes is the only cause for our being critical of the thing, its effect on the urban, well-to-do youth is worse. It is stimulating and pampering the hedonistic traits in them—to their own misfortune.

The fact that such advertisements are widely prevalent in the West (the commercials are confined to certain channels in multi-channelled broadcasting systems), should not have made an example for us. We cannot say that we were helpless before this trend. The truth is, in a country where the TV was launched newly, we could have decisively shunned this trend. Just as the West has set a bad example, we could have set a good example. The choice was ours. We let ourselves be earned away by the bad example. It is our lack of vision, courage and individuality. No use deceiving ourselves with survey reports. Such reports are echoes of our wish-fulfilment.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

THE ROAD TO KEDAR-BADRI

The old thrill of pilgrimage, when devotees travelled by foot to inaccessible regions, through untold hardships and risk, is perhaps lost forever. However, the spirit of pilgrimage, we are told by sages, does not get lost for those who have genuine aspiration and devotion in their hearts.

We do not know. But the form of pilgrimage has so radically changed that it could not but have affected the spirit — at least for most of the pilgrims. Devotees who have got the taste of an inner pilgrimage are a class apart.

This change in the form is obviously unavoidable. Since it is unavoidable, we should improve upon the change.

The road to Badrinath now available to us was a curse changed into blessings. The road had to be built to Manar Pass for the movement of our army, about 25 years ago, when the Chinese struck in that frontier. Afterwards the road was left open to the pilgrims. Well, all those who take advantage of the facility are not pilgrims, many even come in a picnic spirit and many are looking for a reasonably safe adventure, but such discriminations are irrelevant at the social level.

The traffic is on the increase, but one has to observe the panic writ large on the faces of the travellers when vehicles take a turn or when two vehicles have to cross each other. The road is narrow, with deep precipices on one side and stiff high hills on the other. A driver cannot afford to be slack or inalert even for a second. While demand on his concentration is too high, the passengers are on tenterhooks all the time. It is the same with the road to Kedarnath, from Rudraprayag to Gourikund.

It is true that accidents are rare, a pointer at the value of alert driving.

But when an accident occurs, it proves devastating. No medical attention can be expected immediately along those long stretches of desolate road.

The builders of these difficult roads who are also the vigilant sentries over them, the Border Road Task Force, do marvellous works. As a friend told me during my recent journey to these areas, "They are the soldiers who go on fighting all through the peace-time." Indeed, it is so. The

promptness with which they clear the roads of gigantic landslides, rescue men and vehicles trapped and stranded, are examples in service and courage.

They can surely be entrusted with the task of broadening the road a bit, so that the travellers' minds are free enough to marvel at the Himalayan splendours. "The VIPs travel by helicopters; no politician speaks for a region where there are no votes or when the people concerned do not come from any particular constituency. Hence this situation," observed a gentleman at Joshimath.