

A NOTE ON DEVELOPMENT OF DOORDARSHAN

Television started in India as a one-hour twice-a-week experimental service on September 15, 1959. In the third decade of its operational life, it has emerged as an extensive national network. It has almost reached its target of 500 transmitters, which are expected to cover about 76 per cent of India's population. Doordarshan now has 10 full-fledged centres (5 of them having their relay transmitters), 5 SITE Continuity Centres and 6 INSAT Stations. Rest 147 are Delhi linked low power and relay transmitters. This phenomenal expansion backed up by indigenous technology, has helped in linking a major part of the country's rural and remote areas with the national mainstream.

**ETV**

Doordarshan introduced its first School Television (ETV) in October, 1961. At that time, Middle and Higher Secondary Schools run by the Delhi Administration were overcrowded, laboratory space and equipment were scarce and trained, qualified science teachers were in short supply. Television came forward to provide the answer. Lessons based on School-curriculum, were telecast. Doordarshan's ETV programmes directly benefited over 12,000 students. Today, in Delhi, about 3,00,000 students are being exposed

to these telecasts.

In March, 1975, India's first primary school service was commissioned at Delhi for the institutions, run by the Delhi Municipal Corporation. These were enrichment-type programmes and aimed at providing some 'fresh air' in the crowded classrooms. At present, educational programmes are regularly put out by several Doordarshan Kendras as well as Post-SITE and INSAT Centres. Programmes for the Universities have also been introduced by Doordarshan since 15th August, 84 in collaboration with the University Grants Commission.

#### GENERAL SERVICE

The restricted use of television could not satisfy the people for long. In April 1965, the General Service was introduced for one hour on four days a week. It became a daily affair from August 15 that year. Today, the General Television Transmission goes on for five and a half hours in the Evening. Besides there is Morning and Afternoon transmission. The National Network programmes are telecast from 8:30 pm. to 10:40 pm. every evening all over the country. In addition, on Saturdays and Sundays, Morning and Evening transmissions are also put out. On Sundays Television runs almost throughout the day.

#### TV GOES TO VILLAGES

Considering that India largely belongs to villages

and agriculture is the mainstay of her economy, a special programme for farmers, called 'Krishi-Darshan', was launched on January 26, 1967. Rural telecasts are now put out from all metropolitan, Post-SITE, INSAT Kendras and Low Power Transmitters of Doordarshan. The basic objectives of such programme is to familiarise rural viewers with the latest technical and scientific know-how about farming, fertilizers, weather forecasts, etc; to acquaint the rural audiences with the importance of education, personal hygiene, health and family welfare; and to provide healthy entertainment.

#### **EXPANSION**

The expansion of the Indian television, however, did not make noticeable strides till the country's second Television Centre came up at Bombay on October 2, 1972, 13 years after Delhi. It was followed by Srinagar, Amritsar (both in 1973), Calcutta, Madras and Lucknow (all the three in 1975).

#### **SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY**

From August 1, 1975, Doordarshan had undertaken the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), one of the most exciting and ambitious project the world had witnessed in the field of mass communication. It was a one year project, covering in a single sweep 2,400 villages, spread over six States, with four different linguistic

groups. The experiment needed about 1,500 hours of television programmes, produced by Doordarshan. Various evaluation studies have lauded the success of SITE for having "contributed substantially to a gain in knowledge and a positive change in the attitude among the viewers".

The end of SITE (July 31, 1976), however, did not mean the end of television for those people. A new SITE Continuity project was initiated, providing for the installation of six terrestrial transmitters in those far-flung and backward areas, (besides the one at Pij, in Ahmedabad).

From SITE to INSAT - meant a big leap forward for India. In 1982, it introduced its own multi-purpose Satellite, called INSAT-1A (besides television, it was also used for telecommunications, meteorology and radio). From the independence day (August 15) that year, Doordarshan, with the help of INSAT-1A, started its National Programmes (relayed simultaneously from all its centres). Coupled with the micro-wave linkage, INSAT-1B also made it possible for Doordarshan to undertake a number of other notable projects as part of its diverse activities.

#### **ASIAN GAMES**

The most significant and challenging assignment that came up for Doordarshan soon thereafter was the coverage of the IXth Asian Games, hosted by India in

November, 1982. About 5,000 competitors, pitched in 21 events at 18 widely-scattered venues in Delhi alone (besides Bombay and Jaipur) were to be 'caught in action'. Besides, international feeds were to be organised for various TV organisations of the world, reporting the important event to their viewers. It was indeed a trying time for the TV professionals.

After the ASIAD, the Non-Aligned Meet (NAM) came in as another formidable assignment for Doordarshan in '83 with the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi becoming the Chair-person of the august international body, Doordarshan's responsibilities increased manifold. Only a few months later, the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meet (CHOGM) was held in India. Like NAM, CHOGM had great political significance and thoroughly tested the calibre and the competence of the Doordarshan personnel. On both these occasions, Doordarshan not only covered the events well but also played host to several other television organisations of the world during their stay in Delhi. Whether for international feeds or for national telecasts (live as well as pre-recorded), Doordarshan established its competence to exploit the Satellite technology for its communication needs.

#### INSAT SERVICE

Having attained skill and expertise to make use of

Satellite for television programming, Doordarshan has introduced a regular INSAT Service in six States of India. These States are Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The INSAT plans are primarily aimed at providing programmes of local relevance and education for rural and tribal people living in remoter areas in a country of continental dimensions. Most of the INSAT Programmes are locally produced on ENG/EFP equipment and in different formats. These include plays and skits, puppetry and other folk-art forms, documentaries and development reports from the field, etc.

The entire INSAT Service is telecast via Satellite. At the receiving end, however, a combination of Direct Receiver Sets (DRS) and Very High Frequency (VHF) sets has been tried. By this arrangement the "rediffused signals" can easily be received by an ordinary VHF Set, whereas a DRS set can directly receive programmes from the Satellite itself. All this has ensured greater utilisation of INSAT transmissions for larger emotional and educational purposes. The INSAT plan includes provision for 2,000 DRS and 2,000 VHF sets for community viewing in the villages of six selected States.

#### A RED LETTER DAY

Worth recalling at this stage is an interesting 'coincidence' and achievement - August 15 being India's day

of independence has always held importance. But this day in 1982 had a much special significance for Doordarshan. It saw the commencement of four different major TV projects in the country. These were : (a) commencement of National Network programmes for an all-India simultaneous relay; (b) conversion of black and white TV to Colour; (c) use of INSAT-1A for television; and utilisation of micro-wave links for television on a regular basis.

Doordarshan's capability to provide a direct on-air linkage throughout the country was extensively demonstrated during the last General Elections (November, 1989) and the State Assembly Elections (February, 1990). On both the occasions, poll scenes and results were taken to different parts not only simultaneously but also almost instantaneously.

Professional ability comes from professional training. But in the absence of organised and recognised courses in production or technical operations being available outside to meet the specific requirements of television, Doordarshan has to organise in-service training courses for its personnel, mainly at Film and TV Institute of India, Pune. Some facilities are also now available at Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi and Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad. Of course, some of its professionals are sent abroad for training to institutes

like Asia Pacific Institute of Broadcast Development, Kuala Lumpur.

#### AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Considering the changing mood of viewers and basic natural objectives, TV programmes cannot be made in isolation. No effective planning of programmes is possible without assessing needs, flairs and expectations of viewers. For this a regular feedback system is a must. Guided by the Director of Audience Research at the Doordarshan Headquarters, every Programme Production Centres has a team of social scientists engaged in the worthshile task. They work in close collaboration with Producers so as to make programmes target oriented and specific to the needs and problems of viewers. They also prepare profiles of audience and conduct need assessment studies. Proto-type programme testing, mid-term evaluations and summative assessments are also carried out by these researchers.

#### NEW PROGRAMME FORMAT

To meet the viewers demand for newer and fresher programmes, Doordarshan introduced a number of innovative programme formats. Notable among these were :

- a) JANVANI (Voice of the people), in which various Ministers were invited to the TV studio to be face-to-face with a cross-section of people invited from different parts of the country. Thus, the



viewers share with the Minister concerned their problems, difficulties and experience testifying to the highest traditions of democracy.

- b) PANORAMA : An in-depth many-sided study of the burning problems agitating the people's mind from time to time.
- c) POINT COUNTER POINT : A forum for presenting diverse thinking and view points on important issues of public concern.
- d) ISSUES AND APPROACHES : Projection of a problem and possible ways to solve it according to well-known specialists and thinkers.
- e) GREAT MASTERS : TV documentaries on some of the mighty minds India has produced in different fields.
- f) CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS : Recapturing the scientific and social importance of the Indian thoughts and traditions.
- g) FOLK TRADITIONS : Attempting to preserve and popularise India's forgotten - or dying - arts or folk forms.
- h) PREMIER INSTITUTIONS OF INDIA : Documentaries on the contribution made by various institutions in national development.
- i) THE WORLD THIS WEEK : A weekly round up of news events.

j) Directed to the adults, especially in rural areas 'GYANDEEP' has been a very successful television project in Bombay. About 500 'mandals' (tele-clubs), formed in different parts of Bombay, have emerged as formidable forums for viewers to discuss, debate and ultimately decide how to tackle their problems. The project has been extended to Bihar, U.P., Haryana and Delhi. Having a different approach, treatment and presentation techniques, these programmes intimately involve the members of the 'mandals' in their planning and production.

#### FESTIVAL OF INDIA

Among other important programme activities that Doordarshan was occupied with mention may be made of the coverage of the 'Festival of India', held in Japan, USSR, France and the USA. Besides providing the direct coverage of the inauguration of the Festival by Prime Minister, at the venues, a number of specially produced programmes were offered by Doordarshan for telecast as 'curtain raisers' in those countries. These included a one hour show on famous 'Khajuraho', Indian Musicals and Dance Recitals and TV documentaries. Arrangements were also made to get special coverages from there for telecast in India from time to time.

## SPONSORED PROGRAMMES

To provide a variety in the daily TV transmission, sponsored programmes were invited from outside Producers/Agencies. Introduced in 1983, the scheme of sponsored programmes has a twin objective to fulfil, firstly, to widen the production base by tapping outside talent and resources and secondly to increase the commercial revenue of Doordarshan. One of the sponsored serials - 'HUM LOG' (We People) - which was based on the soap-opera style, telecast its 160 editions. Produced jointly by Doordarshan and a private commercial agency, 'Hum Log' enjoyed great popularity of the viewers. The success of HUM LOG led to the launching of many serials such as BUNIYAD, RAMAYAN and currently MAHABHARAT.

The popularity of sponsored programmes has confirmed that all over the world television has been an advertiser's first choice and so it turned out to be in case of India. Doordarshan turned commercial from January 1, 1976 with the initial introduction of 'Spots'. Now, not only 'spots' but also series of programmes and family serials can be offered for telecast by the advertisers. But all these have to conform to the Doordarshan's commercial code. The advertising revenue has constantly been showing an upward trend. From meagre 0.65 crores in its first year, it increased to Rs. 9.54 crores in 1981-82, 16.85 crores in

1982-83 and over 30 crores in 1984-85. In 1988-89 this has jumped to Rs. 195 crores.

It was in April, 1976 that carved out of All India Radio, Doordarshan was made a separate Department of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. It was considered necessary for providing "more specific attention to the growth of this medium in the country". Doordarshan is headed by the Director General, who is assisted by one Additional Director General and five Deputy Director Generals. The Chief Engineer heads the technical wing. Today, about 5,000 persons are on the roll of Doordarshan.

Greater exposure means more demanding and more critical viewership. With the great diversity that India is known for it is by no means an easy task to keep the audience fully satisfied. What might have been acceptable to them sometime back, may not be so now. Doordarshan has, therefore, undertaken several measures to improve the quality and content of its programmes. Apart from its own in-built mechanism for planning, production and monitoring of programmes, a number of Advisory Committees and Consultative Panels are organised to throw new ideas. Eminent outside producers and film makers are also being regularly invited to offer their productions to Doordarshan, generating thereby a healthy competition.

## SECOND CHANNEL

To overcome, at least partially, the handicaps of having only a single channel system in the country, channel-two has now been introduced at Delhi (September 17, 1984) and Bombay (May 1, 1985). Other metropolitan centres are also likely to have it by this year end. The channel-two will essentially cater to the local viewer's interest and activities, providing alternate viewing. A most modern Central Production Unit has been set up in Delhi at a cost of Rs. 50 crores.

## PROGRAMME EXCHANGE

India has entered into bilateral cultural agreements with several countries. In addition, Doordarshan has separate protocols for exchange of programmes with various TV Organisations. In view of the increasing interest in India's rich, colourful cultural heritage, especially in the areas of dance, music, folk form etc., the demand from foreign countries for Indian TV shows has of late, gone up. To meet these commitments, a Programme Exchange and International Relations Cell has recently been set up by Doordarshan. It should make the distribution of Indian TV programmes among outside agencies/organisations easier and speedier.

## FUTURE PLANS

The extent and pace of expansion of Television

that India has witnessed during the past six years should hardly have any precedent even in developed countries. From July 1984, India witnessed the one transmitter a day programme uninterrupted till the end of the year. By any standards, it should be considered a real 'achievement'. All the more, because it has entirely been, what may be termed as, an 'indigenous' effort. The present TV expansion has rather been more on the hardware side. It will, therefore, be followed by increasing and augmenting its software facilities during the current five year plan. Some of these include :

- a) Essential programme production facilities for local television service at all high power transmitters;
- b) Setting-up of Studio Centres in all State Capitals;
- c) Satellite and/or microwave linking facilities for the relay of the State Capital Centre over all the transmitters in the State. This will help the viewers in getting programmes of local relevance and interest and in their own language; and
- d) 10 Kilowatt transmitters with studios at all metropolitan centres for local service.

In terms of ideas, creativity and ingenuity television is a serious, exacting business. It works on all the 365 days of the year and each day is a day of new commitments for its professionals. Every time a viewer

expects on the television screen something new, something exciting. Besides, our society on the whole, is in the process of a rapid change. Doordarshan is naturally expected to play a larger role as a catalyst. Alive to its multi-dimensional responsibilities Doordarshan is today conscious of the fact that to be effective as a medium of mass communication it has in the first instance, to ensure good programming.