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**TELEVISION AND THE CHILD IN NEPAL:  
 AN ASSESSMENT OF VIEWING PATTERNS**

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Television was initially introduced into Nepal from the fourth of Fagun, 1041 B.S. on a trial basis. Regular transmission commenced from the 14th of Paush, 2042 B.S. Now, with the transmission of morning programs, in addition to the evening ones, from its studio in Singha Durbar, Nepal Television (NTV) broadcasts four and a half hours a day.

The establishment of the Biratnagar television center allows television programs to reach a much larger audience, especially in the Central and Tarai region.

The morning transmission in Kathmandu starts with a religious program consisting of devotional songs (Bhajan) and discourses on Hinduism and Buddhism (Pravachan). This is followed by news headlines. Then after a light variety program, the morning program concludes with a bulletin of news in Nepali.<sup>1</sup>

In the evening transmission, the regular programming includes an educational program for children, news bulletins in Nepali and English, and the current affairs program "Aath Baje" (Eight O'clock). Besides these, there are entertainment programs, including telefilms, dramas and serials, and weekly programs on current international events called "Viswa Ghatna."

Among all of the programs, the ones with the highest rate of viewing among children are the children's educational program "Srijana Ko Adha Ghanta," the English serial "The A-Team," and, more recently, the serial epic "Ramayana."

An average child from a middle class family<sup>2</sup> in Kathmandu watches about an hour of television daily. He or she may view continuously or in two or three phases of about a half hour each — the average length of a program.

This study focuses on the middle class child for the following reasons. Children from upper class families can be expected to be exposed to both television and video, with a usual preference for the

latter, since there is a greater number of programs and options, and a wider flexibility of viewing times in comparison to television. Children from the lower class may not have direct access to television in their own homes, although they may be able to watch television elsewhere. Unlike middle class children, therefore, they do not constitute a category of regular television viewers. Moreover, with the steady increase in the availability of televisions within an affordable price range, middle class families are rapidly becoming major purchasers of television sets — both in black-and-white and in color, though the preference is for color. Television is thus becoming an adjunct to the middle class life-style.

A fundamental reason for the growing popularity and importance of television lies in the combination of both audio and visual mediums. The programs are easy to understand, impressive, and attractive. Indeed, it is an established psychological fact that children find it easier to understand gestures and lessons accompanied by photos or visual presentations, than a mere monologue by a teacher. They find it easier to identify or establish links between elements that they have seen.... This formation of associations and identification is possible through the child's observation and socialization.

The above feature of audiovisual communication helps overcome, to a certain extent, the problem of illiteracy. Also, the majority of the programs on NTV are telecast in Nepali, which is understood by over ninety percent of the Nepali population, even if not all can converse fluently in it. Only some serials, special programming, advertisements, and news bulletins are in English. Furthermore, if the programs are in color, they portray a real life dimension (after all, nature abounds in color) which by its attractiveness contributes to effective communication of messages and makes the audience more interested in and receptive to the programs.

This attribute of "receptivity" has been capitalized on by countries such as Great Britain, the United States of America, Germany and, recently, India to "teach" basic lessons in mathematics, language and general sciences to children of preschool and school age. There are also advanced level courses for senior students. Children have given a positive response to such programming. In India, the University Grants Commission programs are quite popular among the more academically inclined children.

In Nepal, too, there are plans to expand the television network and include remote, inaccessible rural areas in the transmission area. Suggestions for establishing community television sets in rural areas to enable larger numbers of people to watch the presentations have also been met with approval. The achievement of these aims, plans and policies is being framed, and the budget allocation for the development of mass communication is being seriously assessed. At

the state bureaucratic and academic levels, urgent need has been expressed to develop Nepal's mass communications systems in the rural areas, since over 85 percent of Nepal's population resides in them.<sup>3</sup>

### The Child

Before embarking on an assessment of viewing patterns, it is important to define what is implied by the term "child" in the present study. For the purpose of this study, all young viewers falling into the age group of five to twelve years, inclusive, are categorized as children. This study excludes those below five years of age, as their mental development, awareness and interest in the outside world, and their ability to rationalize are still in the initial stages of development. Their primary concerns are their demands for food, games, ablutions and sleep. Those above twelve years are in a transitional phase in which the human individual undergoes a series of physiological and psychological changes. Moreover, new interests, values, and friends are established. Life activities are not confined to the homes of the individual or of nearby friends, as when younger, but extend outward....

Those between five to twelve years of age begin to evince a well defined interest in new events and items. Their level of intelligence, concentration and response to the environment is also increasing. Their thought system is becoming more coherent and logical. Comprehension of the native language further facilitates them to communicate their thoughts and opinions to others.

At the same time, it is in this period that the child's mind is most impressionable, receptive and therefore vulnerable. Certain events and experiences have a deep influence on the child's mind and may be responsible for a change in his personality, behavior patterns, responses and thoughts. It is in this context of "receptivity" of the child's mind that television viewing assumes importance.

### Objectives and Method of Analysis

The objective of this study was to access the viewing pattern to ascertain which programs interested children, how regularly they watched these, and the process of selection of the programs. The children also were asked to briefly explain what they had understood in a particular serial, and to summarize and indicate what aspect of the serial they found interesting. Their explanations and preferences provided clues to the nature of programs preferred, and from this, possible implications could be worked out. Children were interviewed along with siblings and friends, if they were also present, since they were more free and frank than when alone. The presence of others provided them with some sort of moral support.

Although a list of sixteen questions was prepared beforehand, many of these needed to be modified in order to obtain more comprehensive answers. For example, the question "How many hours in a day do you spend watching television?" was modified into two questions: "You do watch television, don't you?" and "Which programs do you generally prefer watching?". The answer to the last question enabled calculation of the total time spent watching television.

Parents were also interviewed to find out their interest in television programs, their attitude towards television, and whether they have any role in determining their children's viewing preferences.

Within the time period of three months, viz. July, August, and September, in which the study was undertaken, some programs were discontinued and others introduced. This change allowed for a certain comparison of viewing patterns for different television shows.

Comparisons were made on the basis of interest shown, regularity in watching the shows, levels of concentration with which the shows are watched, and the relative preference given to different shows. From the information gathered through the interviews, almost all of which were conducted in Nepali, each extending over thirty minutes, a descriptive report could be made on which basis an assessment was possible.

In particular, the study focused on the following programs: the children's educational program, the variety program "Srijana Ko Adha Ghanta," the English serials "The A-Team" and "I-Spy", and the Hindi serial "Ramayana."

Areas in which the interviews were taken are Jorpati, Siphel and Gyaneswar. There was a total number of 205 children and 70 parents interviewed.

### Viewing Analysis

Television viewing may be said to involve the processes of observation, cognition, comprehension, interpretation and retention.

As in their everyday life activities and interactions, children make use of their observation facilities to perceive and become conscious of phenomena, events and actions occurring in television programs. Knowledge of the language in which the program is telecast assists both perception and comprehension. However, does the lack of understanding of a language seriously hinder children's comprehension and interest in a television show? If not, then why not? This problem was also dealt with in this study.

The manner in which the children interpret a program also provides clues to their "level of understanding" of the program. Their interests also may be discovered by assessing the items or aspects of a program they select. On the basis of the information about the nature and content of interpretation, a general idea about the types of programs preferred by children is obtained. This idea may be useful in formulating policies for children's programming.

Not all aspects of a program are remembered by children. Even those scenes which they found entertaining may be only vaguely remembered on the following day. However, repeated telecasts of the same show or shows with similar themes may assist children to remember certain details which they would normally not remember after only one broadcast of a show.

The morning transmission hours rarely had regular child viewers. A few children did "glance" at the television if it was switched on during the morning, but only out of curiosity, not interest. The children's favorite programs were telecast only in the evenings, so "glancing" never developed into a more intensive form of viewing.

In the evenings, if the television was switched on by 6:30 P.M., the children would be among the first to sit down to watch the children's educational program. Even if it was not switched on by then, the children would persistently request their parents to switch it on. A few (eighteen) of the children confessed to having switched on the television themselves in their parents' absence or if they were otherwise engaged. In 103 cases, the television was kept in the parents' bedroom, which made it easier for children to watch than if it was kept in the sitting room, since the presence of adult guests often implied "no television" until the guests left. In the remaining three houses, the television was kept in the spare-cum-guestroom, which again did not hinder the children's viewing.

### Educational Programs

The educational programming included "Ramailo Sanjh," the cartoon film "Smerfs," "Look, Learn and Try"<sup>4</sup> and occasional cultural programs.

The children liked the characters "Chante-Pante" in the program "Ramailo Sanjh." A few even indicated their style of speaking.

The popularity of the English cartoon film "Smerfs" provided insight into an interesting feature of television viewing. Children could easily understand and enjoy simple and comical actions, irrespective of the language that the program was telecast in..

Similar responses were found with respect to two other English serials, "The A-Team" and "I Spy." Furthermore, other English serials (which used to be shown prior to the two above) like "Street Hawk," "Knight Rider," and "MI-5" were also found to have been extremely well-liked by the children. In comparing "The A-Team" and "I Spy," the former had a much higher popularity score, with 191 out of 205 preferring it over the latter. The other 14 children liked both of them equally well. A main reason for this was the content of the serials. "The A-Team" had more action, much of it self-explanatory, while "I Spy" had more dialogue, which made it difficult for the children to follow. Besides, watching "The A-Team" hardly required any analysis or conceptualization, as the program was one of sheer entertainment. The protagonists Murdock and B.A. were the most popular of all the characters. Many children liked watching "A-Team" because of these two characters.

In the "Smerfs," Papa Smerf's appearance was greeted with shrieks and knowing smiles by the children, especially those below nine years of age. Even if all the conversation was not understood, some dialogues were understood because the children all knew key words in them, such as "Thank you!", "where is Papa Smerf?", and "Time for morning exercises!". (Incidentally, all children were found to be attending English medium schools.)

The program "Look, Learn and Try", whenever shown, evoked a positive and immediate response in many children. Some clapped their hands in anticipation of the program. Some quickly took out their drawing papers and colors and closely followed the drawing lessons.

The cultural programs were found to be more popular among girls than boys. If certain songs which children knew came during a program, many joined in the singing along with the television.

The quiz program had a low rate of appeal, since not all young children could answer the questions asked in the quiz. The elder siblings, however, did watch the program sometimes.

"Srijana Ko Adha Ghanta" was enjoyed by the girls in particular as it included dances, songs from popular movies, and other similar items. However, many would sometimes get up and go out to drink a glass of water. Or they might stop watching the program for a while and talk to their siblings. Thus this program, unlike the "Smerfs", was not always watched with full concentration.

Besides these, some other programs will be mentioned briefly.

The news and the current affairs program "Aath Baje" were not watched at all, except when the children were sitting in front of the television with nothing else to do.

The Pakistani serial "Aasman" did not hold much interest either. The only redeeming feature for children was the repeated presence of some especially entertaining actors such as Haku Baba and Yulzari. The Nepali serial "Roopmoti" rated slightly higher than the Pakistani one since it was in Nepali and because it dealt with social values and customs which the children identified with. For example, during the rites of passage of the newborn baby, the marriage ceremonies, and the Dasain holiday, children knew what was to expect, and they could understand the events.

In general, however, serials were not watched so enthusiastically as other programs. Serials required that children remember occurrences from earlier episodes and relate them to current developments. The children seemed unable or uninterested in doing this.

Santosh Pant's "Na Risaanus Hai" also reached the "highly viewed" status. In this case, the comedy style, the comedian, and the real life aspect appealed to the children.

The telefilm "Pari Aayen" was also well liked by the children, since it dealt with a theme of fairies and fantasies which is integral to children's stories.

The children watched the Hindi serial "Ramayana" avidly, especially after the first two episodes. This was because after these episodes child characters (Ram, Lakshman, Shatrughana and Bharat in their childhood) entered into the story. Thus, until there was some aspect that the children could directly relate to, the program was not watched with any great interest.

Whatever the program, watching demanded time, concentration and involvement. Children were found to be totally absorbed while watching their favorite shows. Some did not even blink for long periods, others had their mouths agape, and almost all had expressions reflecting the nature of the action occurring in the program. For example, when somebody cried, the children would frown at the "evil doer," or their faces also would show distress. This revealed that children were being affected by some of the events in the television.

Other less dramatic scenes would find their faces animated and excited, as during the "Smerfs" or "A-Team" telecasts. Like in "Variety-Variety," a circus program shown earlier, the "Smerfs"

excited the children and invoked their sense of humor. One could hear children laughing while watching "Smerfs." Children hated to be sent on errands during this time.

Some programs even invited their censure. The voices of the puppets "Chante-Pante" were criticized as being too nasal by the elder children. They logically pointed out that children do not normally have such nasal voices. This discrepancy lowered the popularity of this program and its authenticity for many of the elder children. The younger ones, however, enjoyed every minute of it.

The *viewing pattern* was thus seen as characterized by one side or the other of the following categories: sporadic or regular, intense or light hearted, continuous or with breaks. The less favored programs were watched irregularly, casually and sometimes with breaks. This highlighted another dimension of viewing: if unpopular, certain programs, even if regular, were watched irregularly. Aath Baje, News, and the morning shows all fell into this category. In contrast, some television shows, even if irregular, were popular and watched whenever shown. For example, "Gillette Sports," "National Geographic" specials, football, and local sports shows were watched whenever they were shown.

In addition to the amount of time spent watching the television, the nature and pattern of television programs, their content, and style also affected viewing patterns.

Selection of programs, their interpretation and their reception was found to be influenced by certain factors, among which 1) siblings and friends and 2) parental viewing pattern were found to be significant.

Children were observed sharing views and interpretations of serials and of their favorite programs during playtime or at the bus stop in the mornings while waiting for the school bus. Animated discussions about a serial or program would be made, with some children imitating a gesture or style of dialogue or delivery of an actor. During such discussions, the opinions of elder siblings, as the "group leaders", were seen as having a subtle but sure influence on others. The younger children either echoed the sentiments of the elder ones, or they were seen to be modifying their opinions. A case in point, a younger viewer interpreted as mad Murdock's insistence on petting an imaginary dog and pulling its leash. The next day, however, while waiting at the bus stop for the school bus, the elder siblings and other friends negated the idea of "madness" and said that Murdock did such actions to irritate B.A. The younger children, after exclaiming, "was that so," then pondered it briefly and finally accepted it.

Friends would remind each other of a program that was going to be telecast that day, as for example on Tuesdays they would remind each other of Santosh Pant's program or on Wednesdays of "The A-Team."

In the case of "Ramayana," parental viewing patterns reflected on their children. It was the parents who first acquainted their children with the great Hindu epic, the Ramayana, and introduced them to the characters in it. The children perceived the concentration with which their parents watched the serial. The parents allowed and even encouraged their children to join them. Moreover, the children found the serial interesting, making it an exception, since they generally preferred not to watch serials.

The children were highly impressed with the bows and arrows of Ram and Lakshman. They made their own bows and arrows of wooden sticks and killed imaginary "rakshas" (demons). Many even murmured before "shooting" an arrow. When asked what they were doing, they replied that they were reciting "mantras" to make the flight of the arrow stronger and surer.

The games that children played thus reflected on their interests and daily experiences. Given this, a persistence of certain patterns and themes could affect their general behavior and thought. Aggressive or destructive play could become a dominant personality trait of the children and, later, of the adults into which they develop.

Excessive television may lead to stunted mental development as television does not require analysis or exercise of the brain. Caution should be taken by the parents not to let the children watch television continuously. There is also a need to allow children to watch only certain programs, and to prevent as much as possible the child from watching programs meant for adults or having a high degree of violence. For this purpose, not only at the family level, but at the institutional one as well, definite policies for children's programs should be made.

Indeed, realizing the need for such policies, countries such as Britain, West Germany, France, Russia and the United States, to name a few, have specific policies for television programming for children. Studies have also been made to assess the impact of programs on the child audience. These studies have shown that programs with violence and murder have a high level of impact on children and their personality development. Some people even attribute homicidal tendencies and actual crimes to the indirect instigation of television programs.

Nepal can avoid such adverse impacts of television viewing. The country can take hints from the experiences of developed nations to provide for programming which will assist children in their development. Programs on science, culture, sports techniques and so forth are bound to have tremendous positive impact on the mental development of children. However, it would be wise to continue with cartoons and similar programs which will make for "balanced" television programming.

Some positive steps were seen taken by parents during examinations. They would ban television during the week or two before the commencement of examination in order to make sure that their children concentrated fully on their studies.

However, though such control is welcomed, a comprehensive television policy for children is necessary, a need which has yet to be fulfilled. Thus, even if it is still early to talk of an "impact" of television on children, predictions can be made. After all, as television is definitely here to stay, we might as well make the best out of it.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This study was conducted in the months of July, August and September 1989, and the programs mentioned here refer to that time period.

<sup>2</sup>Class status as used here is defined by income. A middle class family's earnings range from about three thousand to six thousand rupees (Nepali Currency) per month.

<sup>3</sup>This was brought out in a recently conducted seminar from September 26 to 29, 1989 on "Mass Communication" in Kathmandu.

<sup>4</sup>"Hera, Seckha ra Gara."

## MERCANTILISM AND DOMESTIC INDUSTRY IN WEST-CENTRAL NEPAL: SIGNIFICANCE FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE COMMUNITY<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

The country of Nepal was never formally incorporated into the boundaries of the British Empire. Accordingly, based on state records, ethnographers have assumed that the community and domestic production remained relatively autonomous until 1951 when the Royal family regained control of the country from the autocratic rule of the Thapa and Rana Prime Minister families.

Our work, focusing on the merchant town of Bandipur in west-central Nepal, uncovered quite a different picture of domestic production and rural economy. We based our historical work on 200 years of business records stored away in the musty cupboards of the shops of merchants. These records include ledgers, letters, purchase orders and receipts, railroad freight bills, shipping insurance documents, court and other litigation records, and tax and land records. They also include many bundles of promissory notes recording, in addition to loans, credit given to the villagers for purchases of fabric from the merchants.

Previously, the usually accepted sources of documentation about the state have been official government records, ancient and not so ancient engravings, and so forth. But if the state is considered in terms of a combination of interests struggling with each other for hegemony,<sup>2</sup> then official records are biased by the particular interest or alliance of interests in control of the state. They show the struggle of the divided "subaltern"<sup>3</sup> or opposition interests, with their own counter-hegemonies, from the standpoint of the dominant interest mainly by inference. The merchant records, while generally not "official" documents, provide documentation for the extension and rise of a major new form of state representing the global dominance of capital, as it was experienced in Nepal. Importantly, the documents give insight into the struggle of capital to establish its control and legitimacy in the countryside. For Bandipur and other Newar bazaars, and the surrounding villages that came under their influence, the