CHAPTER I
BACKGROUND

The after-effects of the U.N. Development Decade (1961-71) indicated that automatic "trickling down" of the benefits of economic growth to the poorest segments of the population in low-income countries is not likely. On the contrary, the absolute position of the poor was found to deteriorate as a result of economic growth. Dandekar and Rath (1971) hold that if the small gains in the Indian economy continue to be monopolised by the upper middle and richer strata of society, as their study indicates, it will take fifty years before 40% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population, who lived below the poverty line in 1960-61, are lifted above it. But much before this happens, the gap between the rich and the poor could widen to intolerable proportions.

What is the role of mass media in such development and growth-support efforts, if present growth only widens gaps? Does mass media use merely support increasing inequality? Can media be deployed differently to promote equality?

In reviewing the world-wide use of television from this gap-widening perspective, Arnove (1975) found that TV had not been aimed at reaching the most disadvantaged populations, the rural poor and the urban unemployed. In those cases where programmes were directed to disadvantaged populations, the programme content was often inappropriate, and represented models of behaviour and values characteristic of the dominant strata in society.

A post-World War II six-month long multi-media campaign to inform the less affluent and less educated about the functions of the U.N. found that
it was the affluent and well-educated who learnt most—the less affluent were at the same level as before (Star and Hughes, 1950). Chu's field experiment (1966) in Taiwan found that TV exposure had its greatest modernising effects on literate peasants.

However, Roling (1977) showed how an existing inter-personal agriculture extension strategy could be redesigned to aim at the small farmer, and that it achieved almost 100% adoption. Neurath (1960) found that illiterates gained more agricultural knowledge in community-viewing and discussion groups in radio forums in India. Shingi and Mody's study (1974) of agricultural TV in villages outside New Delhi indicated that free community-TV sets housed in public buildings had the potential of equalising inequalities in occupational information distribution, if those low on information were attracted to attend with programme items of relevance to them.

A large-scale impact survey of village adults before, during and after the Indian Satellite Instructional TV Experiment (SITE 1975-76)* showed statistically significant gains in knowledge of health, and family planning, overall modernity, and political consciousness. And, these gains were greater for the underprivileged groups, viz., women and illiterates (Yash Pal, 1977).

The present in-depth study therefore explores the nature of such differential exposure and impact during the first year of TV, in one SITE village in Kheda district in Gujerat, India. Three conditions that make the situation exceptional here are:

*See Appendix A for further information on SITE.
1. The TV set was owned by the village cooperative dairy of which all villagers were members, and was hence accessible to all;
2. The programming was biased in favour of the needs of the rural poor;
3. The time and national environment were charged with hope for change for the Common Man in light of the Congress party's election in 1971 on the Garibi Hatao (Eradicate Poverty) platform, and the two-month old Emergency and its Twenty Point Economic Programme: prices of essentials were to be brought down, government expenditure was to be cut, land ceiling laws were to be implemented, surplus land was to be distributed to the landless, house-sites were to be distributed to the poor, labour that were bonded to landlords for life were to be liberated, recovery of private loans taken by small farmers, landless labour and artisans was banned, minimum wage laws were to be enforced, apprenticeship schemes for the weaker sections were promised. (See Appendix B for the full list of the twenty points.)

This public and free access to TV, the message focus on the poor, and the Emergency-mirage made for an exceptional first year of television. These three unusual conditions should not be forgotten when comparing SITE impact in this village in Kheda with first year TV impacts in other countries, and, between time-periods in the same country. This combination of events makes it difficult to separate the climate-creating/climate-changing effects of the Emergency from the effects of development-support TV. This limitation should be borne in mind when reading references in the subsequent pages to the effects of the "TV Year," which perforce include all other interventions during the year, including the national Emergency.
The new media have been advocated as agents of modernisation in developing countries: TV was introduced into India for this purpose. This one-village study therefore concentrates on this aspect: changes in the psychological "climate for modernisation" (McNelly, 1966), tracing this effect through a social landscape that features clumps and mounds of distinct castes, classes and political power groups. The focus is on the process and context of differences in TV exposure and changes in the climate for modernisation, as seen through the eyes of different strata in the village structure.*

A survey of the literature reveals no such previous study of communication flow and communication-effects gaps between structural units in a village. Further, there have been no in-depth attempts to look at the process of communication impacts in the context of stratification.

* It is not assumed that equality in media distribution of information, ideas and expectations will lead to equality in the distribution of economic assets, status and power. Prior political decisions will have to be made to implement changes in the distribution of opportunities available for betterment without which televised information and motivation messages will barely scratch the surface of passive acceptance.