Chapter-1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since Television became one of the dominant media of entertainment and information, there have been contradictory claims about its effects. There have also been continued debates about whether the effects of Television are good or evil, powerful or weak. Some observers believe audiences are little more than puppets, manipulated by the invisible strings of Television. Others consider it as a minor influence compared to other experiences, needs, social relationships, and behaviours of people. Nonetheless, Television affects us and our society in a variety of ways.

A number of researches have been conducted for a better understanding of the nature of its effects. However, many such studies have brought out the fact that the impact of Television observed in one area, society or community may not be relevant to other culture or community. In such a situation, it is crucial that an in-depth region specific study on the audiences and contents of Cable Television must be carried out in order to extract more valid conclusions of its effects in the context of Mizoram as well.
1.1 Significance of the Research problem

Until the beginning of the 20th Century, the Print Media as we call ‘Press’ was the major means of Mass Communication. However, starting with the development of photography, the methods of communication changed dramatically. Radio and later T.V joined as the tools of communication and it increased the size of the audiences tremendously. As a result of advancement in technology, both the Electronic and Print Media played more and more important roles in individual lives and the society. Be it politics or economy, art or architecture, sports or gossip, music or dance, information plays a crucial role everywhere.

The channels for the transmission of this information are the Mass Media – Press, Television, radio and now Internet. The Mass Media has become an integral part of our lives today.) Even though, all Media are ubiquitous and all-pervasive, there is much more concern about the impact of Cable Television than any other medium. And in the context of India, the concern over possible impacts of Cable Television have been raised by Eminent Scholars right from the time when the cable industry began to flourish amid the Economic Globalization in the early 1990’s.
Right from the beginning when Television was first introduced in India on September 15, 1959, the argument against the introduction of Television was the fear that Television might alienate us from our cultural roots. Moreover, there was a fear that it might lead to consumerism, increase frustration and lead to class conflicts. The concern over possible negative effects upon individual and society increased with the coming of Satellite/Cable Television. Worries over the effects of western programmes on indigenous culture have often been expressed. There have also been concerns about social stereotypes and culturally inappropriate programming.

While raising concern over Media/cultural imperialism, Kumar (2006) said that “constant exposure to ‘images’ and ideas from dominant and powerful cultures give rise to media and cultural imperialism. During the seventies and eighties, the non-aligned countries brought up this issue in UNESCO, and pleaded for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), wherein the flow of information between the countries of the North and of the South would be ‘fair, equal and balanced’, and not predominantly from North to South. The United States and Britain saw this struggle as a ‘Communist plot’, and walked out of UNESCO”.¹

¹ To broaden the sphere of ‘New International Information Order (NIIO)’ (coined by non-aligned nations), Mac Bride Commission substituted the term ‘world’ for ‘international’ and incorporated ‘communication’ along with ‘information’. And, thus the phrase New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) came into existence.
The issue of Cultural invasion also focuses on the economic factors involved in the importation of media products from US and other developed nations into developing countries. These imported materials are seen as obstacles to the continued development and maintenance of native cultures. As Mass Media materials can be imported more cheaply from outside than they can be produced within most countries, and as a large proportion of the population of developing countries prefers the western products, local writers, musicians, filmmakers, and television producers have great difficulty competing.

Since, these materials from the west are popular among the mass, local artists and media personnel feel pressure to imitate them instead of creating works more consistent with the traditional culture of their own country. In such country where the media are primarily commercial and there is less incentive to protect the native culture or to nurture native talent, the pressures toward imitation appear to be stronger.
In the context of India, Cable TV with international satellite channels offer viewers with unlimited choice. The economic liberalization policies of the Indian Government coupled with massive marketing strategies of multinational companies have augmented the cable TV industry in different part of the country. Initially, however, many people felt that Star TV and BBC wouldn’t be able to establish a firm hold over Indian Audiences as their programmes made up of English language based operas, sitcoms, game shows and talk shows that are of little relevance to Indian society. On top of that, majority of Indian Audiences could not follow English.

However, most of the Cable Television channels quickly adapt themselves to their market demand and ‘Indianised’ their programme contents. They dubbed or sub-titled some of the programmes and telecast programmes hosted by Indian anchors. And more recently, Hindi version of many popular channels have also been created. As a result, Cable Television instead of losing their popularity has gained more and more audiences over the years.
In view of the concern over possible cultural imperialism and invasion through Cable Television, Vijayalakshmi (2004) pointed out that Cable Television “have moved to the core of cultural imperialism debate because of their clustering of programmes which includes news, entertainment and advertising and because of their production and dissemination dominated by the multinational corporations of the capitalist world market”. However, Tomlinson (1991) argues that cultural imperialism is more than media imperialism, since the media are not the totality of cultural experiences; they merely mediate capitalist modernity which is a form of global capitalist imperialism. Therefore, cultural imperialism is a far more complex phenomenon, which needs to be studied from various angles.

Nevertheless, Television has been in India for 50 years now, but the unprecedented expansion both in terms of geographical reach and in terms of Audience began with Indian economic liberalization in 1991 which open up the gateway for foreign multi-channel Television and setting up of Private Media channels. Ever since its introduction, the growth and popularity of Cable Television has been phenomenal. One reason for its popularity among the Indian viewers may be the fact that Cable Television offer

---

2 Cited by Vijayalakshmi as an arguments on Media Globalisation-India’s Experience in her book ‘Foreign Television and Indian Youth: Changing Attitudes’. 
24 hours channels and programmes with a wide range of choice to viewers and freed them from the monopoly of the Television screen by Doordarshan (DD) for decades.

The first major effect of Cable Television entry into the country has been on the Advertising revenue earned by Print Media and Doordarshan, as mentioned earlier, which had monopolized the TV industry in India for a long period. In a bid to win back the top Advertisers, DD launched a Metro channel and four other channels which are available via Satellite in any part of the country. This effort has proved fruitful for DD. Similarly, to withstand this challenge, Print Media such as Newspapers and Magazines have introduced visuals and colours as well as interesting and impressive layouts to keep the attention of their readers.

In fact to meet the challenges posed by Cable Television, Doordarshan changed its programming strategy. Moreover, a number of Indian private satellites TV Channels were launched between 1991-2000 which included Sun TV, Zee TV, and Jain TV etc. Nowadays, the viewership of Indian Private channels accounts for 40 percent of the estimated Cable Viewers in the country. As such it can be said that the entry of Foreign Cable Television has positive effects on the Indian Media Industry as a whole by accelerating its growth and development.
Moreover, within a short period of time, the number of Cable operators and the households having Cable connection has been increasing along with the number of Channels and type of programmes. This has resulted in the educated masses, feeling concerned about the impact of Cable Television on familial, social and cultural life of the people, particularly on children and young Adult. With its expansion, Television is attracting an increasing number of Audiences of all age group, literate and illiterate, and all the strata of the society and has been able to influence people living in remote areas as its outreach has covered the remote villages as well. They are ushering information explosion; but how do people react to this information explosion? In an attempt to answer this question, several studies on Cable Television related topics have been carried out at the national as well as at a more local level. As Uma Joshi (2001) wrote, “In view of the fact that Television in India is fast developing as a major source of Mass enlightenment, leisure and pleasure, it is essential that its impact in various areas is analyzed. This can go a long way in providing guidelines for future developmental programmes of television in India. In terms of Critics, comments and reviews no other medium, print, radio, cinema, caught the fancy of the analysts as Television has.”
Similar to the rest of the country, the diffusion of Television in Mizoram can be attributed to the launching of Cable/Satellite Television. The luring entertainment programmes and the wide range of choices available for viewers motivate people to buy Television set. Moreover, the improvement in the living condition and income of the people and the availability of Television sets on installment basis also contributed to the growth of Television in Mizoram. Within a short period of time, almost all people are now familiar with the Cable Television. It has been spreading its wings from the city, right to District Capitals and now even to the remote villages. With the increase in number of Television Set, Television Audiences have also expanded tremendously during the last ten years or so.

In the state of Mizoram, Print Media and Radio were the only means of Mass communication before Television made its presence around the late 1970’s. The reasons for this rather late entry of Television may be as follows – firstly, the large scale disturbances that broke out due to Insurgency (1966-1986); secondly, the economic backwardness and lack of infrastructure; thirdly, the location - Mizoram is located on the north-eastern corner of the country; and fourthly, lack of good transportation and communication facilities.
Television was seen as a novelty till the end of 1980’s in Mizoram. During this time, the general mass did not have access to Television. With the coming of cable T.V. in 1991, the popularity of Television is gaining momentum. It instantly became a major means of information, education and entertainment for the people. Television penetration rates in Mizoram are on the up and increasing. Apart from its low impact on household budgets, viewers are able to enjoy local contents. One reasons for their popularity may be their bundled programming and wide variety of choices ranging from sports, movies, soap operas and news. And the other reason may be the availability of Cable channels in Local dialect devoted to local issues and concern.

A question may be raised as to why the study focuses on Cable Television rather than satellite Television. Although both Cable Television and Satellite Television are generally considered synonymous for the sake of convenience, they differ to some extent in terms of distribution system, equipments and in some other diminutive features such as reception quality and interactive controls. While Satellite equipment includes a satellite dish, or set of dishes, that must be placed outside and Set-top Box for each TV; Cable TV equipment is significantly less cumbersome than satellite equipment, it requires receivers, Cables for distribution of signals to households and Amplifiers to boost signal quality.
In terms of channels, the so called Cable Television channels are satellite channels received via satellite dish which are then distributed to households using Cables. Unlike Satellite Television system, Cable Television Networks usually offer more local based channels originated from their control rooms. Moreover, all channels in the Satellite Television are available for viewing by subscribers while the Cable Operator chooses channels to be made available for their subscribers depending largely on the choice and demand of their subscribers. In the state of Mizoram, the multiple channel Television service is mainly operated using Cable system. As such, given the fact that Cable Television with local channels seem to have more implications among audiences in Mizoram, the study focuses on Cable Television.

Today, Cable Television may be regarded as the most popular media in Mizoram. It is bound to have an influence on individual and society as a whole. The level and extent of Cable Television effects on Audiences is hard to determine with any degree of certainty, partly because no systematic study on Cable Television and in particular the Local origination channels and Audiences have been conducted. As such a study in this line is vital for the assessment of contents of Local Cable channels and examines the level of Cable Television’s impact on Audiences. In fact, it will be able to provide us some notion of its importance in our lives and of ways in which we can control their impact on us.