CHAPTER II

The Research Design

In studying the impact of TV on children a social science approach is adopted. The tested method of survey is followed, but an effort has been made to enrich the findings of quantitative research with the consideration of the social context. While admitting that TV is a powerful medium, the focus of the study is on the viewers, in this case the children who are members of a society and share its culture.

People from various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, child development, communication, political science, marketing and advertising and education are engaged in television research. The approaches they adopt are also varied. But there are two basic methods television researchers follow: one is that of psychology - experimental study, another that of sociology - survey and participant observation method.

The experimental study obtains knowledge by examining the aftermath of a treatment. The survey study obtains knowledge by describing the attributes of some population based on a sample or census. From the knowledge obtained, inferences are made which have applications beyond the boundaries of the enquiry.

The Survey method followed in this study reflects the positive approach in social sciences. Closely observing the phenomena under study, data is collected which can be quantified, analysed and statistically manipulated. These operations enable one to make valid and useful inferences.

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The advantages of quantitative methods are well known. Since the subjectivity of the researcher plays only a minimal role, the data collected are more reliable. Survey study can be conducted among large populations which are represented by carefully designed samples. The researcher has clearly defined goals which are translated into the questionnaire. It brings out precise data that ensure clarity in the findings.

The survey results in general statements of relationships or laws. But these correlations or laws may not be of universal value and may not completely explain the phenomena. Information is extracted out of the living context, and in the process it loses vividness and specificity. Therefore in qualitative methods, phenomena are studied in specific cultural contexts taking into consideration more of its interrelations, evolution and complexity. Such a study is not extensive but intensive and provides valuable insights into social reality.

In this study, the researcher while adopting the survey method has tried to integrate certain features of the qualitative method. While conducting the survey at various centres he has tried to situate himself in the cultural milieu and to understand the social context and the underlying meaning structures that make the words and behaviour of children intelligible. Apart from the survey study the researcher has been participant observer in the community studying children watching TV, their viewing habits, their reactions, the impact of viewing on their attitudes and behaviour. This experience has provided the framework in which the data obtained from the survey has been interpreted.

Early research was too media-centred, so that the prevailing tendency was to ask what the media did to people. It was believed that media, especially TV had immense power, over the audience. Later, another interesting and valid question was raised: What people differentially located
in society, with different possibilities for control, access and participation, with different experiences and skills, competencies and abilities did with media.²

The focus of this study is on what TV does to children with different social environments. It does take note of the fact that the audiences are not a mass of faceless people susceptible to the media influence in the same way and to the same degree. Audiences consist of persons having different social backgrounds, personality structures and value orientations. Hence the same media fare may have different impact on different members of the audience. The impact may be conditioned by factors that come in between media and the audience. This study is an attempt to understand how the family environment quality is a mediating factor between TV and its impact on children.

A. The Universe of the study

The study seeks to understand the impact of TV on children in Kerala. When one speaks of children, the first issue to be settled is their age. It is difficult to elicit information from little children. Grown-up children may be too opinionated, so their responses would lack the spontaneity of younger children. Hence children belonging to the age group from 11 to 14 years are selected for the study.

They are divided into two groups: the younger group of 11 and 12 years old and the elder group of 13 and 14 years old. In Kerala, children complete their primary education by the age of 12 and enter secondary school by the age of 13. The assumption is that children complete a stage

of their personality development at 12 years. The concrete operational stage of children’s intellectual development, according to the Swiss psychologist and educationist Jean Piaget, comes to a close by 12 years. By the age of 13 they enter the next stage of formal operations or of logical thinking. Thus the division of children into the two groups can be justified.

B. The sample of the Study

Kerala has three geographical regions: Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. Two centres, one urban and the other rural are selected from each of the three regions. The centres selected are Trivandrum, the capital city, Kottayam in central Travancore, Kochi, the industrial capital of Kerala, Thrissur in the old princely state of Kochi, Kozhikode, the major city in the Malabar region and Kannur in North Malabar. From these six centres of study 300 children were to be drawn as sample. The average number of children from each centre was to be 50, plus 10 in cities and minus 10 in villages. But the final count is as follows: Trivandrum city - 60, Kottayam village - 35, Kochi city - 55, Thrissur village - 50, Kozhikode city - 60, Kannur village - 40.

C. The Units of the Study

Trivandrum, Kochi and Kozhikode are the three major cities in Kerala situated in the south, in the middle and in the north respectively. A panchayat area was selected from each of the other districts: Kottayam, Thrissur and Kannur. It is Athirampuzha from Kottayam District, Koratty from Thrissur District and Alakode from Kannur District.

Athirampuzha is a village situated about 10 Kms away from Kottayam town. The area of study is bordered by Mahatma Gandhi University campus, B.K. College, Amalagiri and K.E. College, Mannanam. The village is not immune to urban influences but there is a slum-like residential area on one side of the village, mostly inhabited by poor and low middle class people. Another interior part still maintains its rural character.

Koratty panchayat is at the southern end of Thrissur District, almost in the middle of the two cities of Kochi and Thrissur on the National Highway 47. There is a major industrial firm in the village and also a Government of India undertaking. Koratty can be described as an urbanised village where the density of population is rather high.

Alakode is a mountainous village in Kannur inhabited mostly by settlers from other parts of the state. Agriculture being the predominant occupation, it is thinly populated and socially and educationally backward. But many of the middle class families have dish antennas mounted on their roof-tops which bring satellite channels home.

In the cities two areas, one in the city centre and the other on the outskirts, were selected. Once the areas were identified, the selection of TV-owning families with children in the specified age group was completely at random.

D. The Mode of Data Collection

There is advantage in the researcher going out and meeting each child in person. He can try to understand the social milieu and evaluate the family situation for himself. He will also be sensitive to the non-verbal communication of children. The disadvantage is that the child may get influenced by the presence of the researcher who is a stranger and try
to give 'the right' answer instead of a spontaneous one. Hence the following strategy was adopted. At each of the centres a local volunteer was identified. He accompanied the researcher to the houses and in many cases he/she helped in doing the interviews. By doing so the researcher got a feel of the locality and the general social context of children interviewed while children got over the difficulty of opening up to a stranger.

All the children were interviewed at home, most of the parents/elders either participating in or keenly observing the interview. Nevertheless, the interviewer took care to ensure sufficient freedom and privacy for the children interviewed. The medium of interview was Malayalam in most of the cases but English was used in the case of children who were more comfortable with that language. The same applies to the qualitative research of the contexts of the interviews.

Though the number of sample is 300, there are not cent per cent responses to all the questions. Either a few children did not answer a particular question or the answer was too vague to be useful.

E. The Tools of the Study

The hypothesis states that the higher the quality of home environment of children the less is the influence of TV on them. Therefore the first task before the researcher was to develop a scale to measure the quality of home environment. Such scales developed in the USA could be adopted. But, since being culture-specific, they did not suit the conditions existing in Kerala. Therefore, the researcher has developed a scale for the purpose titled 'Quality of Home Environment Scale'.

Four factors were considered in developing the scale: 1) relation between husband and wife, 2) relation of parents with children, 3) relation among siblings, 4) relation of children with neighbours.
There were six questions each on relation between the spouses and on relation of parents with children. To evaluate the relation among siblings there were five questions and on children's relation with neighbours three questions. The twenty points were not formulated as questions proper but as statements; each statement followed by five responses from which the respondent was to choose one that correctly described his/her family situation. The responses ranged from the most negative to the most positive. The first answer carried one point, the second two points and the most positive response five points. Thus the maximum points a family could get was 100.

Families were categorised into four groups on the basis of scores they obtained. Families which got 60 or less than 60 points constituted the first group - Score 1 families, the quality of environment of which would be low. Families which obtained 61 to 70 points were score 2 families the quality of which could be termed satisfactory. Score 3 families obtaining 71-80 points would have a good quality environment and score 4 families getting 81 and above a very good quality environment. According to the hypothesis, children of score 1 families would be greatly influenced by TV and children of score 4 families would be least influenced. The distribution of the families in each of the category was as follows: score 1 families - 14, score 2 families - 64, score 3 families - 136, score 4 families - 86.

The first interview schedule meant to gather information for measuring the quality of home environment was primarily directed to the parents of the child interviewed, but information was collected also from children and neighbours.

The second schedule titled 'Impact of TV on Children' was a tool meant to determine the influence of TV on children. The influence on four
aspects of children's personality was sought to be gauged, the four aspects being cognitive, emotional, social and moral.

1. Cognitive dimension: The enquiry was oriented to assessing how TV influenced children's study and intellectual development, what all things they were likely to learn from TV, how their reality perception was affected by it.

2. Emotional dimension: The questions were formulated to gather information on how TV affected children's emotions of fear, anxiety and love.

3. Social dimension: The questions were on children's social orientation, impact of TV advertisements on children, TV inducing modernist outlook and independent thinking and TV's influence on attitude towards gender relations and traditional forms of art.

4. Moral dimension: This section dwelt on children's concern for others, honesty, aggression, sex, attitude to religion and piety.

The research was an attempt to assess TV's influence on these four aspects of the personality of children having different family environment quality. Six other variables were also taken into consideration along with the family score: sex, age, religion, region, education of parents and income of parents. The assumption was that the family score would play a greater role than these variables in children getting influenced by TV.

Before bringing together the findings, the study has to be situated in its historical and theoretical contexts. Hence a brief history of media research both in the West and in India (chapter 3) and theoretical perspectives on media effect (chapter 4) follow. They are followed by analysis and interpretation of the findings (chapter 5) and conclusions and suggestions (chapter 6).