CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Suggestions

This study started on the premise that a stimulus response model of explaining TV effect was unsatisfactory. One had to turn one’s attention to the intervening factors. The hypothesis was that TV effect was mediated by socialisation in the family. The effect of TV would be less on better socialised children; it would be more on poorly socialised children.

In spite of some variations and complexities, the research data generally supports the hypothesis. Compared to children from Score 1 families, children from score 4 families are relatively free of the negative influence of TV. This is especially true in the case of sociality and moral sensibility of children.

A. TV and the Sociality of Children

The study shows that TV has not affected the social orientations, attitudes, norms and values of children to a degree that is alarming. When it does have a negative influence on them children from low score families are more affected.

Children while being engrossed in watching TV may be forgetful of their surroundings. They may not like the prospect of missing Sunday afternoon cinema. But the research data show that well-socialised children are more person-oriented than TV-oriented; they are more welcoming to others and willing to go out and meet persons forgoing cinema. Generally, children do not disregard their social commitment, better socialised children being a shade better in this regard.
TV advertising has got influence on all categories of children as is illustrated by the liking of children for frootie or pepsi cola frequently advertised on TV. Here again, influence on children from high score families is much less than on those from low score families. But children do not exhibit much brand fidelity to advertised toilet soaps or cosmetic items. The higher the family score of children, the less is the liking for those items advertised on TV. The same can be said about non-deliberate learning from TV. The better socialised the child is, the less is his non-deliberate learning.

TV presents before children certain modern, Western to be very precise, products, styles and art forms which compete with traditional products, styles and forms. Bottled colas compete with tender coconut, modern dress with traditional vests, Western pop music and dance with classical Indian music and dance. Bottled colas popularised by high voltage publicity through TV and other media have found favour with the majority of children. But children in general do not favour Western style dress; nor do they go all out for traditional dress. The majority prefer modified traditional dress. Likewise only a small minority prefer Western music to Indian music; a bigger minority prefer Western dance forms. Higher family score does not indicate much influence on children's preference for bottled colas, but indicates moderate influence on children's likes for dress, strong influence on children's likes for music and dance forms. Children from well-socialised families show strong preference for Indian music and dance. The impact of family is clearly discernible on issues that is more culture-bound.

It may be noted that in a family having good quality environment parents would transmit to their children the cultural norms and values they adhere to. That is why better socialised children tend to be free from
Western influence in matters of culture like music and dance. But TV may have more influence on a habit or behaviour which lies on the periphery of culture.

In a hierarchical society like the Indian one, where family’s hold on individual members is rather strong, children are not likely to take independent decisions in choosing personal goods or their future career. But the modern outlook that TV brings about may change children’s attitude. Our study shows that children are turning out to be more independent in their thinking and judgement. But better socialised children are found to be less independent. That means despite TV family’s hold on children continues to be rather strong. This holds good for sex mores; better socialised children feel comfortable with existing mores. With regard to the question of gender justice also, better socialised children tend to conform to the traditional standards.

To conclude, TV in various ways affects social attitudes and behaviour of children. But this influence is mediated by family environment, children having good quality family environment are less affected. In matters of social and cultural significance where the basic value orientations are involved, family’s influence is found to be stronger than TV’s.

B. TV and the Moral Sensibility of Children

If one follows this line of argument, one should conclude that a family will be able to guard its children against TV’s negative influence in the area of morals. Since moral values touch the core of a society and its culture, socialisation will be particularly effective in that sphere. In other words the impact of socialisation would be clearly discernible in respect of the influence of TV on the moral sensibility of children. The research data on the whole, strengthen the argument.
TV does not make most of the children insensitive to the needs of others. But children with high quality family environment are more willing to make a sacrifice to extend help to others. TV does not make them self-indulgent. Children still value relationships and are willing to give up certain things to maintain relationships. This willingness is found more among children having better quality environment.

The data also show that though children may watch programmes suggesting dishonesty as the right policy or expediency as more attractive than adherence to values, the family's insistence on honesty would stand them in good stead.

The influence of televised aggression on children is a major concern all over the world. According to the research data, though children are influenced by televised violence, it does not make them particularly aggressive, nor do they tend to justify aggression. But children from low score families tend to be more aggressive; an even greater number of them tend to justify it. By effective socialisation, children would be kept away from the negative influence of televised violence.

Sex on TV is an issue which parents concern a lot. Here again, the data show that children's exposure to sex on TV has not considerably altered the children's attitude or behaviour. But children from low score families are more prone to the negative influence of TV in this regard.

What is the impact of TV on religious practices? Contrary to commonly held apprehension in this regard, the study shows that children's interest in, or commitment to, religious practices have not declined. This is especially true of children having good quality family environment. Children from low score families appear to be more lax in religious observances; they may be more influenced by TV.
The researcher feels that he is on firm ground to state that the research data prove the hypothesis: TV's influence on children is mediated by their family environment in respect of their social behaviour and moral sensibility.

C. TV and the Cognitive Development of Children

Children of the age of 11 to 14 are at a stage when they still develop intellectually. How exposure to TV during this developmental period affect their study, academic achievement and perception of reality was another area of enquiry.

Children's academic achievement and their learning from TV are not issues directly related to the basic social structure or value orientations of society. Therefore socialization in the family may not have a significant mediating role in the area of cognitive development. The research data suggest that TV is primarily considered as an entertainment medium.

The study shows that TV does not seriously affect the academic performance of children. As indicated earlier, children with higher family score tend to watch TV more than those with low family score. This may be a reason why the former lag a little behind the latter in academic performance. But it must be noted that academic performance is predicated not so much to the family environment quality as to the education and income of parents.

Children in general do not seem to depend on TV for learning new things. But as they regularly watch certain programmes they are bound to pick up certain things from TV. Thus about 90 per cent of the children know the meaning of a term used in a cricket game. Economics and current affairs are the other two areas where children acquire knowledge.
But they fare poorly in certain other disciplines such as consumer affairs, political science, international events, etc. Children's family scores do not play a role in their learning new things from TV. If at all they play a role, it is a negative one for children with high family score who are a little behind the others in acquiring knowledge from TV.

With regard to children's perception of reality the conclusion is that children in general do not confuse the TV world for the real world. Though they are cautious about ad messages, they are to some extent influenced by their persuasive quality. But in other respects, TV does not influence much of children's perception of reality. Quality of home environment does not seem to play a major role in the process.

Watching violence on TV for a long time may either desensitize children to violence or make them overestimate it in the world around. The data indicate that children tend to overestimate violence in the world. Exposure to TV violence tends to produce in children a kind of 'mean-world-syndrome', but effective socialization in the family seems to serve as an antidote to it.

D. TV and the Emotional Life of Children

How do the scenes of violence and horror affect the emotional life of children? Does TV aggravate children's emotions of fear and anxiety? A fair number of children are affected, to some extent, by the violence and horror on TV. But family environment does not seem to be a determining factor. The same can be said about anxiety. A few children are anxious about their 'dangerous' environment the root cause of which cannot be traced to the family background.
More than one third of the children investigated, have developed some attachment to screen characters. In this case, family environment does play a role: the higher the family score, the smaller is the number of children having attachment to TV characters. Children having healthy social relationships are less likely to develop attachment to real or fictitious TV personalities.

To sum up, TV does not seem to have an overriding influence on children. As they spend considerable time before TV, they are naturally affected by what they see. The impact of this viewing is mediated by the quality of socialization a child has had at home. Better socialized children seem to be protected from the harmful effects of TV especially in areas where the norms and values of society are involved. A child who has internalised these values through effective socialization tends to reject many messages that go contrary to them.

In the introductory chapter, mention was made of the concern or anxiety of parents about TV's influence on their children. One of the main reasons for this anxiety is perhaps, what people have heard of the happenings in the West. Our study shows that there is no cause for undue worry provided the quality of home environment is good and the family has effectively carried out its most important task, viz. socialization. It should be obvious to any keen observer that TV has not brought about radical changes in the Kerala society in the last fifteen years; it has not given rise to the spiral of violence, as for instance, in the US. The chief reason must be the strength of family bonds in Kerala and the consequent hold of family on children.
E. Media Education or Value Education?

In the West, in order to counter the harmful effects of TV, ‘media education’ is promoted. Media education is being introduced into the curriculum of school education. It proposes to demystify media, to give children an idea of how media work. For example, it imparts knowledge to them as to the conceptualization, production, editing and broadcasting of a TV programme. Children are told of the interests and pressures behind programming and of the motivations of media organizations. Media education enables children to be critical viewers.

There is another dimension to media education. It is said that in our time there is enormous information overload. It is difficult for a person to choose what is needed for his survival from this overwhelming array of information. Fred Friendly, a former president of CBS News, once said, “We live today in a world where it is what you don’t know that can kill you.” On the other hand, one will have to filter out many unwanted information from one’s consciousness. Media education helps people to develop an internal mechanism to switch off the overload in order to protect their sanity. William Fore writes, “For these reasons, media education is now an essential tool. It now must become central to the curriculum in our kindergartens, schools and colleges, if we hope to live in a society where the average citizens can cope with the barrage of images which daily comes into their lives and where what they do know will help them survive.”

Media education is good as far as it goes, but the researcher thinks it does not go far enough. It is doubtful whether media education can change the way a person perceives media reality. For the cognitive structure

1. Quoted in William F. Fore, op.cit.; p. 129.
2. Ibid.
of a person, to a large extent, is laid out in childhood. It is this formation stage that educators should concentrate on in order to enable children to take in what is good and reject what is not good in the media. Therefore, the preventive measure against the harmful effects of TV may be value education imparted in childhood.

In this context, it is worth recalling Gandhi's insistence on character building. Quoting Huxley, Gandhi writes that the chief objective of any education must be 'making men of us'. Education can be of use "when we have brought our senses under subjection and put our ethics on firm foundation. Character building has the first place in primary education". A building erected on that foundation, according to Gandhi, will last.3

F. Cultural Identity

Another concern as regards the impact of TV pertains to cultural integrity. There is a section of people in this country who think that 'invasion' from the skies will undermine the cultural foundations of India. In the light of the research data, the researcher thinks that this fear is also without foundation. A society, aware of its cultural identity will always try to preserve it. Being aware of cultural identity means being aware of the values, ideals and basic orientations of a culture. Such a society will transmit those values, ideals and basic orientations which form the bedrock of its social structure to the children through effective socialization. Thus a society which lives its culture, reproduces it and ensures its continuity. As long as a society is aware of its cultural identity it easily identifies alien cultural elements that go contrary to its grain and tends to reject

them. Foreign TV programmes will have only limited influence on the people especially in areas where culture is at stake.

G. Suggestions

What steps parents should take to protect children from the negative influences of TV? They need not be very fussy about their children watching this or that programme. They should try to maintain high quality family environment and inculcate in children from the earliest years, the social norms and moral values they hold dear. Once children are educated in those values they would later be able to choose what is good and reject what is not. Children may be influenced by the persuasive messages of advertisements, alien life styles and not very acceptable modes of behaviour depicted in TV programmes, but not to the extent of the core of their personality being affected.

On the other hand, if children have to derive positive benefits from TV, parents should make conscious effort to that end. They will have to motivate children to watch educational programmes. This kind of learning depends, to a great extent, on the viewing habits of parents. Many of the things children watch on TV may not be intelligible to them, i.e., their cognitive structure may not be able to assimilate them. In that case, parents should be on their side to explain such things to them.

What is said of an individual child is true of the society at large. A society rooted in its culture, being aware of its basic value orientations will remain, by and large, unaffected by foreign cultural influences. If the Kerala society is deeply aware of its cultural foundations, it need not be

afraid of ‘invasion’ from the skies. It can positively benefit by the sanguine aspects of other cultures. So what is required is not blaming that which comes from outside but going deeper into one’s culture and its basic value orientations.

H. Suggestions for Further Research

The validity of the thesis proposed could be tested by further research which could be done both intensively and extensively. Children from a limited area who watch more or less the same programmes and approximately for the same duration could be studied and the mediating role of family environment ascertained.

Children from different regions of India who watch different programmes and have got different viewing habits could be studied to see whether family environment is a mediating factor between children and the influence of TV on them.

In this study the family environment is taken as the most important mediating factor that conditions TV effect. But other mediating factors, school for instance, cannot be excluded. Research could be undertaken to ascertain the mediating influence of school or religious community.

An experimental study could also be made with a group of children having a very poor family environment but watches more or less the same programmes comparing it with a control group having a high quality family environment.