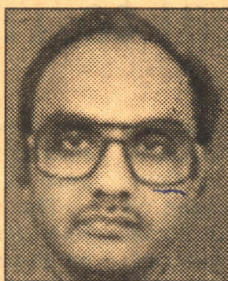


Media should be people-oriented

HE is a media expert who has not been swayed by its expansion and boom. **N Bhaskara Rao** is a communication researcher and policy analyst. He heads the Social Audit of Public Utilities, including the mass media. He also spearheads the Centre for Media Studies.



The expansion of the media has not enamoured him because he feels that it is accentuating the gap between the rich and the poor. In an interview with **Rahul Gupta** in Delhi, Rao sums up the present media scenario with the observation that the information haves are getting information-rich and the information have-nots are getting poorer. Excerpts:

What was your objective in organising the recent series of seminars?

We are working to remove imbalances in the field of information. We wanted to sensitise people all over the country. The seminars were on issues ranging from the social impact of the electronic media on communication support for rural development programmes. We had invited self-motivated concerned volunteers, academicians and NGOs to participate in the proceedings.

How do you visualise the present boom in the electronic media?

There is a concept of educating the people through entertainment. In India, cinema had started with the concept of education through entertainment, but TV has lost its moorings. Now entertainment has become 'mere entertainment' and this has become the mainstay of the electronic media. Moreover, we have not learnt to make proper use of this medium. In spite of being an interactive medium, this interaction is used only for entertainment programmes and not for education. Our culture has epics with moral overtones which are not only entertaining but also educative, but these have not been brought to the fore. The programmes are such that these do not provoke the audiences which have merely become passive recipients.

In what way does the information gap exist and how is it widening?

The information imbalances increase because the information-rich have access to more information whereas those who do not have the access get deprived of a kind of information. People for development programmes are nev-

er get to know about the existence of such programmes. This is also because the media is Delhi-centered. More channels do not necessarily mean more information. India is not an information society and cannot hope to be one. A majority does not have access to the media and a large

number of those who have do not comprehend what is dished out. Even Doordarshan news is becoming difficult for people to understand. How many people in a small town understand the functioning of the stock market? When people who really need information get something which is beyond their understanding, they lose interest.

How can the information gap be bridged?

There is an urgent need to relocate the media units. Bihar has 17 districts where there is not even a single media unit, whereas in some districts there is a large concentration. Areas without any media centre remain backward in terms of media reach and information. Most of the time government units do not work in tandem with each other. Moreover, more time should be given to NGOs and open universities on air. There has to be decentralisation of the media so that people at the local and regional levels come in contact with technology, make softwares in their language and take up issues that have a direct bearing on them. SEWA is playing an important part in providing information and making technology accessible to the poor. Uneducated rural women are producing programmes which are understood by the people of that area. I bring into focus their problems.

What do you think should be the priority for the electronic media?

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry should be replaced with a Communication Commission and an Information Board. The Communication Commission should consist of the broadcasting division of the I and B Ministry, Department of Telecommunications and the Department of Electronics.

The Information Board should be an independent body and not a part of the government, only then will it achieve an equity character. It should have the involvement of a large segment of the public and professionals and not be limited to the babus. It should address the concerns of the people.