

New Playing Field

Modern technologies open up huge vistas for multi-media, and satellite and cable-based media

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THE mass media scene in India was never so good as it is today in terms of growth, proliferation, multiplicity, creativity, support systems and importance in the affairs of the country. Perhaps no other media in any other country in the world is witnessing so much qualitative and quantitative change as the Indian electronic media is today. Most of this can be attributed to technology—the ongoing explosion of telecommunication infrastructure technology and new technologies like copper and fibre cables, which have opened up new vistas for electronic media. The government's recent economic policies have helped the process further.

The future belongs to the electronic media—particularly multi-media, satellite and cable-based media. India has the largest number of cable television subscribers in the world. In a matter of five years, over 15 million households have become cable television subscribers—that means 30 per cent of all television set households are already hooked on to a

local cable television. By 2010, the number of cable television subscribers in India will be more than the number of cable television households in the rest of Asia, including China. The size of cable television subscribing households will swell to 36 million by 2001 and surpass 100 million by 2010, assuming that there is no miracle on the technology front.

By 2020, the number of households with television sets will increase four to five times from nearly 50 million households today and India will become the country with the largest number of television-

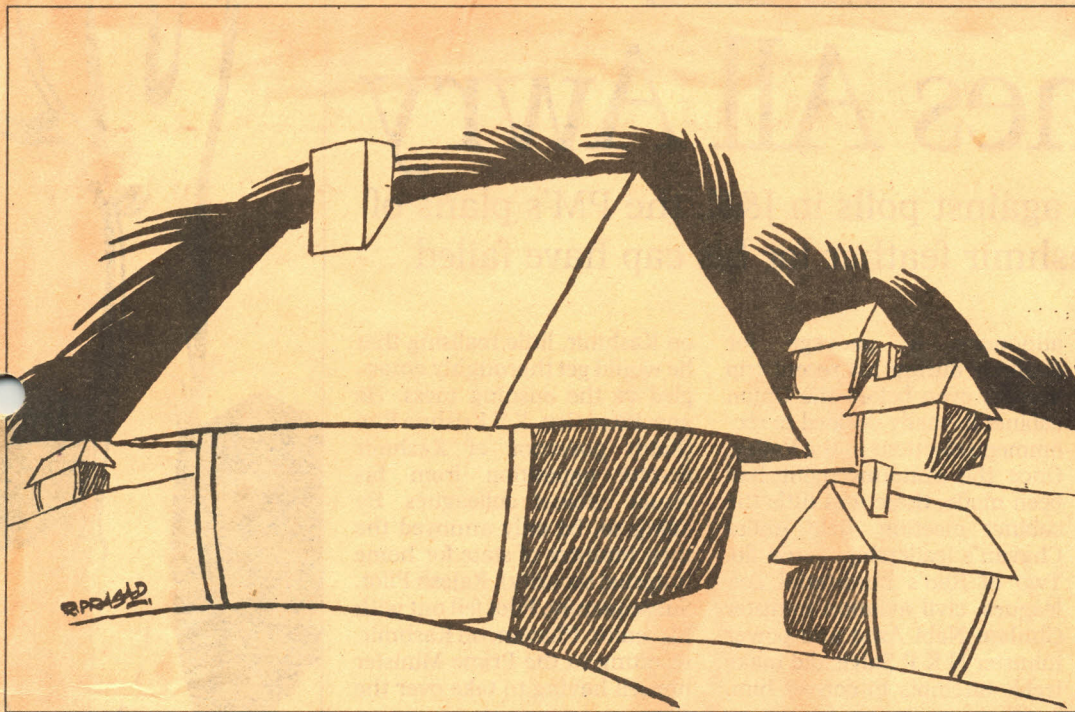
owning households in the world. And 85 per cent of these will be subscribers to cable television. In fact, by 2000, there will be 20 million households possessing two television sets each.

The Direct to Home (DTH) market in India is estimated at about 1 per cent of the country's television homes today, and it is expected to grow to approximately four million by 2000 thanks to the launch of satellites able to support a large number of encrypted digital channels. This market will probably grow in the metros, which have a larger affluent audience. The growth of this segment will see an alternate route to ground distribution with channels gaining direct access to viewers' homes.

The foreign-based satellite channels have no doubt given a boost to cable television operators in India. With both Doordarshan and other Indian channels going for regional transmissions, cable television has proliferated in every nook and corner. Now, in many areas, cable television comes with its own local transmission and pro-

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gramme schedules, including news, live coverage, and public service and interactive telecasts. Cable television has thus become a competitive mass media.

Convergence between newspapers, television, radio, film, cable, music, books and multi-media will make mass media one of the most influential industries in the country. Multi-media, which is expected to provide a further boost to cable television operations in the coming years, is projected to expand at a rate of more than 30 per cent annually. Cable television operations need

to equip themselves for this challenge. This sector is expected to grow from Rs 10,000 crore today to Rs 1,20,000 crore by 2020.

In fact, the synergies in the Indian mass media will become more obvious by 2000, by when most of the mainline newspapers and publishers, including regional language ones, would have parallel television networks, both terrestrial and satellite-based, as well as a stake in cable networks.

More important, all the various media are going to be adver-

tising driven—much more than at present. In fact, it would be more apt to call them “marketing media” rather than “mass media”. The media will also become more fragmented, more targeted and more niche-oriented. Advertising revenue for television is estimated to grow from the current Rs 750 crore to Rs 10,000-15,000 crore by 2020. Of this, satellite television will claim approximately 15 per cent. With close to 200 channels vying for this amount, channels cannot hope to survive on advertising revenue alone. As is

true today, only the strongest channels will continue to attract advertising revenue. The others will need to seek alternate routes for revenue generation—primarily from subscription fees and from fees for value-added services.

Multiplication of broadcast time in the country has led to an upsurge for television software. As channels continue to proliferate, this need is only going to grow further. The need for fresh software is expected to grow from the current 500 hours per week to 4,500-5,000 hours by 2020.

For every channel folding up, two will be launched. Half the channels at any given point will be regional. One-third will have their origins outside India. There will not be more than 75 channels even by 2001, not counting the ones that fold up. But this could go up to 200 in the first decade of the next century.

The requirement of fresh programming will also increase tremendously. The cost of software requirements for Indian television could go up from Rs 2,000 crore to Rs 20,000 crore by 2020 in terms of value and could call for 3,000 fully-equipped, full-time production teams as against the barely 100 that exist today. In view of the shortage of skilled manpower and infrastructure, it is likely that reliance will increase on software-dumps from abroad.

—N Bhaskar Rao