

## INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The advent of mass media and their presence in our daily life has been one of the major features of the contemporary world. Mass media has in a sense brought the world's people closer to each other. Innumerable messages are transmitted all the time to people over the world. Within a very short span of time mass media has expanded to include more geographical areas and more number of people. This has obviously brought about changes in the lives of people (audiences) which need to be explored and assessed.

Different mass media have different appeal to different audiences. Television is said to have a universal appeal. Its effect on lives of people is a much debated issue. Whatever people believe about the positive and negative consequences of television the fact remains that it has not only come to stay but is all the time gathering momentum.

Television has pervaded into all aspects of human life. People take decisions based on information received from television, shop through television, use it to escape from drudgeries of day to day life and to avoid conflicts between family members, and above all use it as a main entertainment medium. All members in a family view television—

a little more or a little less. Children have been found to be its most avid audience. For young children of today's generation television is a family member, existing from the time they were born. With the rest of the family, children view television programs. They use the varied information in multiple ways and get influenced by the television programs

### **Historical Perspective**

There was a meteoric expansion of television both in terms of reaching the public and increase in number and quality of programmes. Regular transmission of television programmes began in France and the United Kingdom in 1936. By 1950, five countries had a regular television service. The number increased fourfold by 1960. A decade later, more than 100 countries were transmitting television programmes. By late seventies, in most developed countries, the number of sets were nearly equal to the number of households.

Unlike in many other developing countries television came to India as an aid to educate the masses. It was first introduced on 15th September 1959 on an experimental basis in Delhi as part of UNESCO project with the objectives of experimentation, training and evaluation (Mohanty, 1989). Television at this stage was for school and rural

viewers, and programmes were educative and informative. Regular television service began in early 1966 with launching of the Krishi Darshan Programme. The Indian child vis-à-vis television gained attention in 1971 by introduction of technology cells by NCERT to produce programme to aid the teaching - learning process. In the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79), the famous Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was conducted and television sets trebled for both urban and rural viewers. During the Sixth Five Year Plan in 1982 a working group was setup to prepare software plans for Doordarshan (Agrawal, 1987, Mohanty, 1989)

From state owned television with a single channel in 1960, Indian audiences now enjoy almost 30-40 channels with a wide variety of programs. Every day, media reports inclusion of a new channel. Twenty seven million households in India own a television set. Within the whole population 60.2% own a television set. Television reaches 76% of urban households, it being the medium with maximum exposure (Bahal, 1995). Multiple channels and 24 hour telecast influence all the family members who view it. Be they children, parents or grandparents, across classes

This widespread proliferation of television into people's lives has led to diverse views and opinions about impact of television on families, especially children. While there is a general acknowledgment of television as a vital source of news, information, and entertainment, there is also a concern about its possible detrimental effects on young children. Television has come to be an additional socializing agent. Especially for children, along with other socializing agents like family, peer groups, teachers etc television has also created its own niche. It reaches children at a younger age and for more time than any other socializing institution except the family.

Television viewing can lead to two kinds of effects, direct and indirect. Direct influence of television refers to the actual content viewed. People get influenced by the characters, their roles, dresses, etc. The content of programs seen over a long period 'cultivate' people's beliefs about the people and the environment (Gerbner, Goss, Morgon, & Signorielli, 1981). For e.g. people who see violence on television for a long time (heavy viewers) start looking at the world as a more violent place, than others who do not view so much of television (light viewers)

Indirect influence of television on children refers to displacement of other useful activities due to viewing. Television may possibly lead to less time spent in other activities like play, reading, social interaction for young children. Since these activities play an important role in a child's development, ~~these~~<sup>this</sup> is a cause for concern.

The direct and indirect influences of television viewing may have an impact on the total family dynamics. In fact, television has implications for the home environment, interaction between family members, recreational pattern of the families. All these in turn may have long term impact on the child's development.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

In order to understand how and to what extent television affects children's development, one must view it as a part of a child's total context. There are several theoretical perspectives that can assist in understanding this. The main theoretical ideas that provide such perspectives are discussed herewith: Vygotsky's Theory

Ecological Perspective

Theoretical Perspectives of  
Mass Communication

Uses and Gratification Theory

### Vygotsky's Theory

According to the Vygotskian - contextualist view humans are embedded in a social matrix (context) Human behavior cannot be understood independently of this matrix The main assumptions underlying this view are (Miller, 1993)

- **The child-in-activity-in-context as the unit of study.**

The child does not operate in a vacuum, but is an interrelated part of the social context and the other person. All <sup>a</sup>three ~~effect~~ each other While identifying causes of behavior when we focus only on the child and ignore the context, we try to find the causes only within the child In reality the same developmental process can lead to different outcomes, depending on the circumstances Hence one should look at a child-in-context participating in some event as the smallest unit of study

- **Zone of proximal development**

The zone of proximal development is defined by Vygotsky (1978, cited in Miller, 1993) as, "actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving" and the higher level of "potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" Interaction with

a more competent person, an adult or a peer, will help a child to move from where he is to where he can be

- **The socio-cultural origins of individual mental functioning :  
The intermental constructs the intramental.**

The interaction between a child and an adult or a competent peer which is intermental becomes internalized in the child's mind i.e. intramental. That is, thinking is always social and reflects the culture in which the dyad operates. Any higher intellectual functioning acquired during development first appears between people and then within the child as an intramental category e.g. shift from external speech to inner speech. Thus as the social context gains importance, the child-in-activity-in context should be the smallest possible unit of study. Second, it also reinforces the concept of zone of proximal development

- **Intellectual functioning is mediated by tools provided by a culture.**

"Humans master themselves from the outside through psychological tools" (Vygotsky, 1981 cited in Miller, 1993) Peers and adults, directly or indirectly guide children to use their culture's psychological and technical tools. Psychological tools include language systems, counting systems, writing, diagrams, maps, conventional signs,

and works of art. Other examples are various strategies for learning. Some tools that influence thinking are physical devices such as computers, calculators and type writers. Both kinds of tools mediate between the child and the environment. Television may be regarded as a physical tool which brings messages that may affect/influence the psychological tools.

Theoretical concepts of Vygotsky help us to look at the televiewing phenomenon of the child in the context of the home situation where other family members may be present. The concept of zone of proximal development guides us to focus on the interaction between parents and children while viewing television. In the viewing situation parents may regulate/control/discipline children's duration and content of viewing. And/or they may help children interpret the television programs. Parents may explain, question, analyse the content telecast for young children. This is parental mediation. It would be therefore pertinent to look at role of parents with reference to both regulation and mediation of television programs. The way parents help children mediate television programs may later become internalized and help children to be television literate, form their own ideas about what is good and bad about television programs, and how to interpret them.



It would be interesting to know what interactions are taking place between the other members and the children while viewing television. Do these interactions facilitate the viewing process for children? Television is present in the homes as a physical tool bringing social messages which may lead to changes in the psychological tools and hence would make an interesting study.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's "ecological psychology" consists of four layered topographical systems. It tries to explain direct face-to-face interactions, as well as, effects of macro level events and cultural beliefs on an individual.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) television is part of the child's exosystem, because television programmes enter the home from an external source. It remains at the boundary of the micro system. Bronfenbrenner (1974, cited in 1979) cautions against the danger of television viewing not for the behavior it produces, but for the behavior it prevents like talking, playing, participating in family festivities and arguments through which most of the child's learning takes place.

Overall development of the child as proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1989) is a result of complex reciprocal activity, regularly, with one or

two persons with whom the child is emotionally attached, material and environment that invite exploration, manipulation, elaboration. Prima facie thus television seems to prevent both the interactions with people around as well as manipulation and exploration in/with the environment.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four layered topography of the ecological environment consists of the micro, macro, meso, and exosystem.

The **microsystem** is a "pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting" (e.g. interaction with parents at home). This setting includes physical and material features as well as people. The microsystems for a child are his/her home, school and peer group. Variables like parent's age, number of children in the family, ordinal position of the child, age and sex of children are aspects of the microsystem.

The **mesosystem** consists of "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person". Do microsystems of school and home effect each other? What teachers

say in school should have influence on child's television viewing behavior.

The **exosystem** "encompasses the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person". Events in this system influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person. This level includes the major institutions of society, such as the economic system, the transportation system, local government and the mass media.

The **macrosystem** "consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context". It includes the "belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems". The macrosystem involves relations at the level of subculture or culture (e.g. SES) along any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies. Parents' occupation, education, income are part of macrosystem.

The theory therefore suggests that television is a physical entity present in the child's microsystem. As a mass media, it is a part of

exosystem - an institution that influences the processes within the microsystem. The microsystem would involve relationship between parental regulation and duration of television viewing of children. Parents may indicate differential regulation depending on the child's age, gender, and working status of the mother. Television viewing may influence interaction between family members. Other media available in the home, school and other activities child is engaged in are part of a child's exosystem. In the exosystem presence of variety of media and alternative activities may lead a child to view less television. Availability of more channels may increase viewing. At the macrosystem level it is an object that culture provides. The culture, specifically parents also decide about its use vis-à-vis children. This use, its reasons, may vary within different socio-economic classes. Parental regulation and duration of television viewing may vary with parents with higher income and education indicating more of regulation and consequently less of viewing for children.

Following Bronfenbrenner's (1979) four layered topography of the ecological environment, Sinha (1982) proposed an ecological model of two concentric layers of factors to understand the effects of socio-cultural deprivation. The upper most layer consists of the immediate social environmental factors (including home, school, and peer groups)

Each of these have three dimensions : (a) physical space and materials, (b) social roles and relationship, and (c) activities. The second layer is the “supporting or surrounding” milieu and consists of the physical and geographical environment, institutional setting of the individual in terms of social class, caste, etc. and general services and amenities available. The individual is influenced directly by each factor at its own level, as well as by interaction of the factors with each other at their own level, and between levels. Television falls into the second layer as part of a social institutional setting. Also it becomes an amenity/resource available to an individual. It is present in a child’s home as part of the physical space and materials, and interacts with the child directly.

### **Theoretical Perspectives of Mass Communication**

The explanation of impact of media on individuals and groups was seen as a Stimulus - Response theory. It was also believed that the mass media had the power to manipulate minds of the masses. Progressively psychological and sociological theories influenced the way people looked at the interaction between mass media and the people. The three most important prevailing perspectives as described by Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) are :

The Individual Differences Perspective.

The Social Categories Perspective

The Social Relations Perspective

### **The Individual Differences Perspective**

According to this perspective human beings vary greatly in their personal-psychological organisation. These variations are partly due to biological endowment but mainly due to different learning experiences. The personal psychological make-up of individuals is due to their different learning environments. From this they acquire a set of attitudes, values and beliefs that makes each person different from the other. This also leads to individual differences in perception.

Thus content of the mass media is received by each person based on the principle of selective attention and perception. The selective attention and perception therefore become an intervening psychological mechanism in the S - R scheme of communication theory. According to this perspective, individual members of the audience would attend selectively to messages based on their interests, attitudes, which are congruent with their beliefs and support their values, leading to differential effects of mass media on children's minds.

### **The Social Categories Perspective**

This perspective assumes that people can be grouped in terms of broad social categories i.e. age, sex, income, level of education, place of residence, etc. When these groups are exposed to a given set of stimuli for e.g. a particular program telecast, they will behave in more or less uniform manner. To elaborate if Tom and Jerry cartoon series are telecast for rural and urban children, both the groups will show some differences in their reactions, but within each group there will be more or less uniformity and less differences indicated.

The assumption of the social categories perspective is sociological i.e. that people/groups with similar modes of orientation and behavior will relate to the phenomena such as the mass media in more or less a similar manner.

### **The Social Relations Perspective**

Informed social relationships play a significant role in modifying the manner in which given individuals will act upon a message that comes to their attention via the mass media.

The information passed through the media moves in two steps. First, more informed individuals (the opinion leaders) will attend to the media. Based on their interpretations of the content, they will pass this

content to other individuals who are not frequent users of the media. This is the second step. Thus "Two step" flow of communication takes place.

All these three perspectives - the individual differences perspective, the social categories perspective, and the social relations perspective, put together suggest that television phenomenon may vary from individual to individual, family to family and from one society and culture to another. Television phenomenon therefore should be looked at not only from the individual child's perspective but may vary depending on the child's context. Parents serve as the more informed individuals trying to influence the choice of programs of children, their understanding of the content and also regulating their duration of viewing.

### Uses and Gratification Theory

This deals with motivation of viewers, uses they make of television, and their needs which are satisfied by the media. This theory looks at what people do to the media rather than what media do to them. The uses and gratification model addresses the functional alternatives to one's use of the media, the social and psychological environments of viewers, and their common behaviour and its



consequences. The motives for viewing may vary with television content and among viewers. The audience selects and uses content that will best meet their needs and that the same program may gratify different needs in different audience members (Van Evra, 1998).

The various uses and gratifications derived from the television experience can be grouped into four major categories (Dominick, 1987, cited in Van Evra, 1998). They are

- Cognition, to obtain information or knowledge.
- Diversion, for stimulation, relation or emotional release.
- Social integration, utility, to strengthen contact with others, to overcome loneliness, to allow prosocial relationship with television characters and so on.
- Withdrawal, for example, to provide a barrier or to avoid chores

Preschool children do have motives for use of television. And parents of these children have motives which may influence children's viewing. Understanding parents' television viewing behavior will help clarify the situation of child vis-à-vis television.

These various theoretical perspectives indicate that understanding impact of television on children is a complex process and

requires for a researcher to view myriad of factors that jointly determine the impact. The family's value system, the importance they give to television viewing, the way they help mediate programs for children, school hours, beliefs of teachers and parents about television - all influence or contribute to the phenomenon of television viewing for children, and hence this situation needs to be studied in totality. Review of various researches and empirical data provide a direction to further understand and interpret this complex process.

### **Research Trends**

Research trends related to television and children are presented under the following headings :

- Television viewing pattern
- Home television environment.
- Attitude of parents towards television viewing

### **Television Viewing Pattern**

Television viewing pattern consists of the duration and content of television viewed. The amount of time children of today consume watching television indicates the influence of the small screen on their lives

### Duration

In a typical American household the TV set is turned on for about 7 hours each day. These same studies show that by the time children graduate from high school, they will have spent 11,000 hours in school but over 15,000 hours watching TV (Murray & Lonnborg, 1995)

Kodaira (1990) reports that television viewing starts right from infancy. After that it gradually increases from the age of 3 years to the beginning of adolescence (Stein & Friedrich, 1975). The viewing is highest between the age of 3 and 5 with a peak between 3½ and 4 years (Pinon, Huston, & Wright, 1989). Very young children spend less than 10% of their time looking at television in their homes, which increases to two-thirds of the time at age 3 to 4 and 70% for 5 and 6 year old children (Anderson, Lorch, Field, Collins, & Nathan, 1986)

A report on the Television habits of preschoolers (1994) indicates that 62% of all children aged 2-5 spend on an average 213 minutes a week watching the PBS network. This television network produces and telecasts cartoon programs like Barney and Friends. Telephone interviews of parents and guardians of 13,892 children of 3 to 8 years by West, et al (1992), revealed that children not enrolled in

school watch an average of 3.1 hours of television or videotapes each day. As children start going to school the hours of viewing decreases. Children in nursery school watch 2.6 hours per day, and those in primary grades watch 2.2 hours per day. Children of Sweden aged 3+ watch for 134 minutes per day (2.23 hours per day) and those of Denmark watch for 157 minutes per day (2.61 hours per day) (Nordicom Statistics, 1997)

A study by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK 1981, cited in Kodaira, 1990) reported that the average hours of television viewing for Japanese preschoolers between 2 to 3 years were more than 3 hours on weekdays. A survey in Tokyo area in 1988 revealed that children, 3 to 4 years old were watching television for 2 hours and 46 minutes per day (Kodaira, 1989). In Canada 2-6 year old children watch about 20 hours per week (Murray & Kippax, 1981). The tendency continues for 3 and 4 years old to watch television more than those aged 5 years or older. Thus preschool children in different countries spend at least 2 plus hours per day in television viewing, thereby making it one of the most indulged in activity outside school.

Review of Indian researches gives a different picture. Phatak and Singh (1986) reported that the total viewing time of school age children

on weekdays from Monday through Friday was 5 to 7 hours, and for Sundays it was 4 to 5 hours. Other researches (Hada, 1993; Manrow, 1990, Shastri, 1992) have shown that older children in the age group of 6 to 12 years viewed television from 2 to 4 1/2 hours per week and about 3 hours on Sunday and 2 hours on Saturday. This result is supported by Abrol and Khan (1993) that 8-12 years old children of Delhi spend about one hour and eighteen minutes on weekdays whereas 3 hours on Saturday and 5 hours on Sunday. A survey by Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1995) revealed that school children in Delhi viewed approximately 17 hours of television every week i.e 2 42 hours per day. Studies on preschool children indicate that they spend on an average 10 hours (Shah 1996) and 9 5 hours (Mushtaq, 1997) per week viewing television. In Jaipur 52% of the total number of children viewed TV for more than 20 hours a week (The Times of India, March, 1997).

In a study conducted by Operation Research Group Baroda (as cited in Mohanty, 1987) children in Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras view television for longer duration than adults. In Delhi the average percentage of television viewing per week by adults and children respectively was 25.5 and 72.4, Calcutta 29 and 67.9, Bombay 28.8 and 64.1, and Madras 37.4 and 52.2 hours. This is the only

evidence of Indian published research with such high hours of viewing that I have come across

Variables like parents' education, occupation, children's ordinal position and school attendance have been found to be related to children's television viewing. In Japan children whose parents had completed higher education tend to watch less television, whereas Pinon, et al (1989) indicated that parents' education and occupational status were unrelated to viewing. Factors that reduced viewing were children's school attendance and mother's employment. Having younger siblings increased the likelihood of viewing and having older siblings decreased it. According to St.Peters, et al. (1991a) children who attended daycare watched television about seven hours a week less than the other children. Children from low-income or single parent households viewed more than children from high-income and two parent families. A study by Mahajan and Luthra (1993) found that there is inverse relation between social class of the children and amount of time spent on television viewing. Children of the upper class (72.58%) watched television on an average for two hours or less per day. This percentage came down to 39.86% in case of children of the middle class and further decreased to 19% for the lower class.

In a series of studies on preschool children, significant relationship was found between duration of viewing and (a) years since preschool children have been viewing television, and (b) actual hours of play by children. A significant correlation was seen between the number of siblings and child's hours of television viewing. No significant difference was found in the duration of viewing as a result of age, gender, grade and ordinal position of children; age, occupation and education of mother and father; family type; family income and years of ownership of television (Shah, 1996; Mushtaq, 1997)

### **Content**

The content of the programs viewed by children is an important aspect of television viewing pattern. There have been consistent reports that children in the age group of 3 to 6 years prefer cartoons and programs with special effects (Beere 1990; Kodaira, 1990). Pino, et al. (1989) report that in the United States, "Sesame Street" is one of the most popular programs with 3 year olds viewing 18.1% and 5 year olds 12.2% of its telecast. For 5 to 12 year olds the frequency of preferences for cartoons and children's programs decreased with increasing age and preference for comedies, adult drama, and adventure increased with increasing age (Rubin, 1982)

According to Condry (1989) children show few sex differences in terms of when, how much and what they watch of television programs. On the other hand in a study by Huston, Wright, Rice, Kerkman, and St. Peters (1990) gender differences were revealed in the programs preferred by children. Boys watch cartoons, informational, action adventure and miscellaneous programs more frequently than girls. The difference in the program preferences of boys and girls appear around 3 or 4. Boys start liking programs, which include action they can imitate and use in play, while girls prefer family type stories (Kodaira, 1990; Collins, 1983).

Children together with their parents view programs meant for adults. Similar results are reported from Philippines. Of the top 25 programs reported by 1400 children, nine were adult programs as well as sports programs. This in spite of the fact that in Philippines children's programming comprises 16.7% of the total weekly broadcast hours — far exceeding the recommendations of two hours by the National Association of Broadcasters (Angeles-Bautista, 1995)

The programs for children on Indian television leave much to be desired. Low priority is given to children's programs (Agrawal & Aghi, 1987). Only 4-5% of the television programs are aimed at



children (Gill 1986). The television programs are still dominated by film and film based programs. This year television had to borrow from hindi film industry because without that television channels would have closed down. The films were the largest revenue earners on television (The Times of India, 1999). Yadava and Reddi (1988) report that in India, serials, films and songs were the most common programs viewed by the whole family. The children who view programs therefore for majority of the time view adult programs only.

Cartoons and film based programs have been found to be the most popular among 6-12 year old children in India (Manrow 1990, Mayuri & Mohite, 1992, Phatak & Singh, 1986, Shastri, 1992). Studies on preschool children have found that the popular program type was cartoons (95%) followed by song based programs, serials and commercials (Shah, 1996; Mushtaq, 1997). Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1995) also reported that children between the age of 5 to 8 years reacted most favourably to commercials on television, with 90% reporting that they liked watching advertisements on television.

### **Home-Television Environment**

Television viewing is a dynamic process, occurring in natural settings, among groups of people. Especially for the Indian preschool

children television is primarily a home viewing phenomenon, happening in the midst of family members. To understand this process therefore it is essential to review researches which consider children's television viewing within the family — the social setting of children's viewing.

Researches reviewed describe the relationship of different family variables to children's television viewing. Some researches also try to establish a relationship between the role of parents, their habits related to viewing and mediational styles to children's viewing.

### Coviewers

One component of home-television environment is the presence of companions or co-viewers while watching television. Field (1987, cited in St. Peters, 1991) reported that five year old children co-viewed with others 85% of the time, 27% of the time with their mothers, 18% with their fathers and 62% with older siblings. Another research review revealed that for about one-half of the viewing hours, children watch TV by themselves or with other children, the other half is spent co-viewing with one or more parents or other adults (TV viewing and parental guidance, 1994). Stanger and Jamieson (1998) report that parents are active participants in their children's television experience through co-viewing or supervision of viewing. In each of the three

years studied from 1996-1998 nine in ten parents reported that they sit down with their children while watching television. "almost always" or "once in a while". Parents (61.8%) said they supervised a great deal of their children's television viewing.

Mushtaq (1997) revealed that in 33.6% of the cases all family members were regular viewers of television. Child co-viewed with the mother most (42.4%) followed by viewing with the father, the whole family together and the siblings. Kodaira (1990) reports that after reaching age 3 to 4, children tend to watch television more often by themselves or with other children rather than with their parents

### **Parental Viewing Patterns**

Studies indicate that parental viewing patterns, both amount viewed and reasons for viewing, predict children's viewing patterns (Stein & Friedrich, 1975).

Children's television viewing, both with and without parents is influenced by parental viewing preferences, habits and orientation towards television. Various surveys in Japan have shown that children whose mothers are frequent viewers watch television longer than those whose mothers view less (Kodaira, 1990). Factors like parental choices and program availability played an important role in determining

children's exposure to programs (Huston, et al., 1990). In the Early Window Study for children aged 2-3 and 4-5 it was found that younger children watched more child informative programs than older children. They were also exposed to more adult programs, presumably because they were at home or in home-based child care where adults were viewing (Huston & Wright, 1999).

Children generally watched children's television programs without parents and adult programs with parents. Children and parents' co-viewing of adult's programs was predicted by viewing habits of parents (St. Peters, et al., 1989, 1991). In a telephone interview of 384 parents of children aged 6-14 it was found that parents watched television with their child an average of 4 days per week; one in three (34%) said everyday. Most (59%) said they watched together because both wanted to watch at the same time. Webster, et al., (1982) found that television viewing of children was related to the viewing levels of both female and male heads of household.

A history of co-viewing informative programs with parents was positively related to children's attention to television and use of print. However, a history of co-viewing general entertainment programs with parents was negatively associated with children's visual and auditory

attention to television, preference for print media, and pro-social behavior (St. Peters, et al , 1989).

Since parental guidance influences children's viewing habits, positive selection and encouragement may be atleast as important as regulation and prohibitions. This is especially true for preschoolers because they have few independent sources of information about what programs are available. If parents do not control the type of programs viewed, children may watch programs that can have negative effects on them. Especially for young children, as Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1995) comment, parental regulation may not even be an issue. Many parents may tend to believe that a young child, even a preschooler, is too young to be influenced by or understand what is happening on the television. Children thus may learn a lot of things without conscious awareness of parents.

### **Interaction Between Viewers**

Television viewing in most of the homes, especially in India is not an isolated activity. In the NHK survey (1981) it was found that about half of the two year olds were seen asking questions while viewing television and 70% of the three year olds wanted to get some of the toys and sweets, advertised in television commercials. Indian

researches show a similar trend. A study conducted by Manrow (1990) found that both verbal and non-verbal interaction occurs between family members while viewing television. Shah (1996) reported that percentage of children asking questions, conversing and acting/mimicking was quite large but the percentage of co-viewers responding or commenting during viewing was comparatively small.

Fry and McCain (1980) revealed that besides being concerned about what program content the children view, parents were also concerned about how their children interpreted the television content. Parents had ambivalent feelings toward talking about TV with their child. While 79% said that it was at least somewhat important and 30% said very important, few reported really enjoying such conversations. Also, children did not appear to talk with their parents about programs they watched alone (Gantz & Weaver, 1984)

Khurana, et al., (1987) observed that while television owners and non-television owners did not differ significantly with regard to time spent on social interaction, there was comparatively more interaction during the transmission hours among children who did not possess a television set at home. On the other hand, in the Topeka Study (Huston & Wright, 1999) children who talked about television characters and

events, used such events in their play, and asked questions to their parents about television, were apt to watch a lot of television. Thus two conditions may arise - exposure to television could lead to involvement, as well as involvement can lead to viewing. In all probability both the processes occur.

The review suggests that while viewing television family members interact with each other. This interaction can be made worthwhile if parents interpret the program content for children, help them to differentiate between good and bad quality programs and thus help, both in comprehending the program content and being media literate. Researches reveal that adults who watch with children, comment and interpret the content improve the amount that children learn from educational programs (Stein, & Friedrich 1975; Watkins, Calvert, Huston-Stein, & Wright, 1980). Unfortunately many parents do not use co-viewing opportunities for these purposes.

For young children co-viewing is mainly circumstantial. Children more often co-view programs with parents which are more of parents' choice. This suggests that parents do not coview consciously to make television a learning experience but because they are together in one

room with a single television set. It therefore ends up with children viewing more of adult programs like hindi serials.

### **Attitude of Parents Towards Television Viewing**

A survey of parents of 2 to 17 year old children found that 70% of parents were more concerned about what their children watch than the hours of viewing. At the same time 61% thought that the influence of TV on children concerned them most (Hart, 1996, cited in Aday, 1996). Similar findings are reported by West, et al., (1992). More children have restrictions on the types of television shows they may watch (85%) than on the number of hours they may watch on weekdays (60%) and on the total number of television viewing hours (56%). Numerous investigations reveal that North American parents impose relatively little regulation on the amount of time their children watch television. They more often regulate the kinds of programs children are allowed to watch. Many parents of young children try to prohibit exposure to graphic violence, sexuality, frightening content and bad language (Wright, et al., 1990).

In addition to agreeing with the statement that “there is too much violence on television”, more than half of national UK sample (Gunter and Stipp, 1992) agreed that we would all be better off without



violence on television. Most viewers believed that television violence may have potentially harmful effects on children, influencing their behavior and disturbing them emotionally. Parents who restrict their children from viewing of television programs generally give reasons like it disturbs studies, has adverse effect on the vision and programs are not educative enough (Chaudhary, 1990).

Parents also encourage children to watch television programs that they consider educational or entertaining for children. In the Topeka Study it was found that families classified as selective and promotive encouraged children to watch television (Huston and Wright, 1999). Kodaira (1990) reports that parents encouraged their children to watch television programs so that they did not remain ignorant about the same and were not ignored in their social groups.

Parents regulate the kind of programs children view such that slowly children are socialized to watch the program that the parents view and consider as appropriate. This is supported by St. Peters, Fitch, Huston, Wright, and Eakins (1991). They report that not only parents play a major role in determining young children's exposure to adult programming, but parents who encourage viewing particular programs at particular times appear to be thoughtful and careful about

their children's viewing. They usually encouraged beneficial and child-appropriate viewing. Also, covieving with their children was higher than that of parents who did not encourage television viewing

On the other hand, the failure of parents to monitor and control the amount of time their children spend watching television encourages the displacement of other important activities that enhance growth and may optimise development. If parents do not control the types of programs viewed, children may watch programs that can have negative effects on them (Wilson & Christopher, 1992). Lack of parent-initiated interaction or discussion of program content silently reinforces any messages learned on television and can leave children with distorted sense of reality (St.Peters, et al., 1991)

Study by Unnikrishnan and Bajpai (1995) reveals that parental restriction on the young child's handling of television is not enforced (or is simply not an issue). A number of parents interviewed in fact expressed admiration for the skill with which young children handle the television set and related technology. Many studies found that parents were satisfied with the child's viewing. Many parents reported an increase in verbal interaction and help given by children due to television (Manrow, 1990, Shah, 1996). Majority of parents therefore

see television as advantageous for children (Manrow, 1990; Shah, 1996; Mushtaq, 1997). Most parents admitted that television becomes an immediate target when academic pressures on the child increase in senior classes, because it is then that television seems to be taking up too much of the child's time (Unnikrishnan & Bajpai, 1995) Parental involvement in monitoring or mediating their children's television declines with age (Rogge & Jensen, 1988; Atkin, et al , 1991)

As children become older, they are independent and parents too seem to be enforcing fewer rules on them. At the sametime many television viewing habits (like other social habits) get established early, so the experiences of children in the early years may lead to long term consequences for the ways in which they use television as a medium

The trends that emerge from the review are .

- \* Television viewing pattern, both duration of viewing, and content viewed. The difference (if any) due to social personal variables of child and the family.
- \* Content analysis of programs telecast.
- \* Analysis of the type of programs telecast i.e. how much percentage of programs catering to which type of audience

- \* Television in the family context with reference to role of parents, the way they regulate, and mediate television viewing for children
- \* Influence of television on children. Maximum researches have studied impact of television violence on children. Other researches try to look at displacement of other activities, impact on academic performance and cognitive skills, and specifically impact on reading habits.
- \* Theoretical articles. They try to theorize about television, communication processes involved, impact on people's lives and development
- \* Comprehension of television programs. These researches focus on what and how much children comprehend, which skills they use in the activity of television viewing. Lot of these studies are laboratory experiments concerned with specific programs.
- \* Few researches with older children have tried to look at the cultivation effect, impact of advertisements.
- \* Lot of articles are opinion based. The author without revealing data source or source for theoretical ideas gives opinions about television - good or bad.

### **Methodological Trends**

While conducting any research the methodology used to elicit information becomes very important. For studying home television environment of preschool children there are two main reasons why use of appropriate methodology becomes pertinent.

First, preschool children are very young. They have limited language ability and therefore may not be able to express themselves on all aspects and are unable to communicate through written language effectively. They also would not be able to give reliable data involving recall and may forget names of programs, characters, etc. Parents therefore are the source to gain information about these young children. Parents on the other hand may give biased reports. Experience indicates that parents from the higher income group report less hours of television viewing by these children being aware of disadvantages of television. Parents from the low income group report higher amount of television viewing because of the social prestige associated with television. Thus cultural bias may result in invalid data.

The second issue is of studying/understanding the child's television experience in the home context. Television viewing is a dynamic process taking place among family members. There is a need

therefore for, combination of methods which are reliable, valid, and cover the different dimensions/components under study. Information from parents, teachers, and children, and objective information collected by the researcher will altogether provide appropriate understanding of the situation at hand.

As discussed earlier it is just not a method or combination of methods which is the question. It is essential to look at the topic under study in totality. Rather than child or television viewing by itself as units of study, it is important to study child-in-activity-in context i.e. children viewing television in the home, among family members need to be studied. This research therefore needs to be looked into from another angle (one which gives a total picture).

Different methods have been used to study television viewing of preschool children. The research review from 1971 onwards helps in gaining information on this issue. Parents are the most common source of information. It began in the 70's with sending questionnaires for parents to fill in about children's television viewing pattern (Barcus, 1973, Lam, 1978, Shively, et al, 1975) and has continued till present times (Costabile, et al, 1992, McKenzie, et al, 1992). Over the period, telephone interviews (Fry & McCain, 1980, Gantz, 1982, Stanger &

Jamieson, 1997, St Peters, et al , 1991) and daily diaries (Huston, et al , 1983, St Peters, et al , 1988, 1991, Trugglio, et al , 1996, Webster, et al , 1982) became popular. Direct observations of children at home (Homberg, 1978; Saloman 1973) and video taping at home (Singer & Singer, 1984) were also used especially to study mediation styles and other home environment features. Observation and video recording in the laboratory settings have been used widely to observe and study children's viewing styles (Anderson, Lorch, Field, & Sanders, 1981, Haukins, Ho,& Pingree, 1991)

In India, observations (during SITE studies), interviews with older children and parents, and questionnaires with adolescents and parents are the commonly used methods. Viewing diaries have not been widely used. Daily diaries were tried with parents by Shah (1996). Though it yielded reliable data parents found it cumbersome and time consuming. The other two methods- video taping in laboratory situation and in homes is too expensive especially for a small scale research and require advanced technology and infrastructure which are not easily available in India. Table 1 presents the strengths and weaknesses of the commonly used methods in television research.

Table 1  
Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Methods of Television Research

METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
1 Observation in a naturalistic setting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most accurate method without speculation.</li> <li>2 Preserves much of the behavior as it appears</li> <li>3. Can collect reports of varied behavior i.e verbal, nonverbal</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hazard of observer influence</li> <li>2. Problem of reliability of observation</li> <li>3 Limited to behaviour/time limits</li> <li>4 Time consuming</li> </ol>
2 Personal interviews with children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Direct contact with children</li> <li>2. Chance of explaining properly to children</li> <li>3 Probe can be used to collect proper information</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Problem of developing rapport</li> <li>2 Conventional role relationships between adult &amp; children in our culture can hamper children's responses</li> <li>3 Children might respond only to gain adult approval</li> <li>4. Preschool children's limitation in using verbal language.</li> <li>5 More use by preschoolers of symbolic language to express complex and subtle concepts</li> <li>6 Children's refusal to respond to verbal approach</li> <li>7. Chance of communication of interviewer's bias</li> </ol>



METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
3 Questionnaires	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not very time-consuming</li> <li>2. Can collect a large amount of data in a short time</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cannot be used with illiterate parents</li> <li>2. Cannot be used with preschool children therefore dependence on parents views and responses.</li> <li>3. May not be able to probe.</li> <li>4. Parents may report from memory</li> </ol>
4 Diary keeping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can collect detailed information for a number of days</li> <li>2. Can collect very accurate information.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too time consuming for parents therefore parents can lose interest</li> <li>2. Cannot be used with illiterate parents or preschool children</li> </ol>
5 Video taping in laboratory situation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Records behaviour as it occurs</li> <li>2. No chance of observer/interviewer bias</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too expensive</li> <li>2. Child can become conscious in a laboratory situation.</li> </ol>
6 Video taping in home by using automated equipments.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Records behaviour in a naturalistic setting</li> <li>2. Simultaneous recording of all homes can be done</li> <li>3. No chance of interviewer/observer bias</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Too expensive.</li> <li>2. Absence of appropriate technology and infrastructure in India</li> </ol>

There have been recent reports of the introduction of people meters to determine television ratings in India. In this, the respondent presses a button to log on to a meter placed on top of the television set. The meter records the duration of viewing and change of channels (India Today, July 1995). Here too, it is not possible to get information about attention to the program, co-viewers and interaction between co-viewers.

Review of methods used in researches on television reveals that questionnaire provides information on television viewing pattern of preschool children including duration, content viewed and covievers while viewing. During interviews parents opine on advantages and disadvantages of television and their perception of role of television in their children's lives. Parents are able to report about strategies they use to mediate and regulate children's television viewing. On the other hand, it is difficult to get information about the attention and concentration with which children view television programs or the quality of interaction among covievers. In this case observation of families will provide more detailed, qualitative information on parent child co-viewing. Thus a combination of methods of questionnaire, interview of parents and teachers, and actual observations would seem to yield reliable, valid and informative/appropriate data.

### **Rationale for the Study**

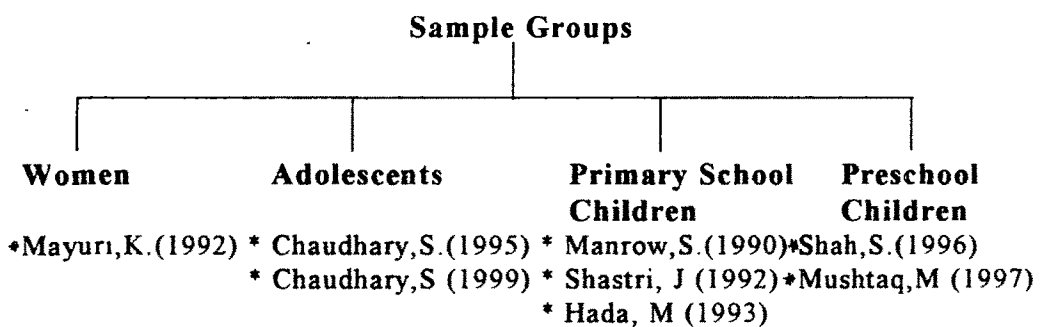
During preschool years children start learning to comprehend the world around them. The major vehicle for learning at this stage is play, exploration and interaction with the environment, material and people around. Television has become an integral part of this environment. In India, television viewing activity for preschool children takes place in the home, within the family context. Theory and research point to the importance of the home environment, especially role of parents vis-à-vis child's television viewing.

There is a need to study television viewing of preschool children within the family context because,

- First, television has come to stay. It is one of the most widely used medium and very popular with young children.
- Second, television as a medium itself is neither good nor bad. The quality of programs telecast can have detrimental or positive influence on the viewers.
- Third, television contrary to popular belief is not a one-way activity. Children are cognitively active while viewing television. They pay attention at will and learn from television.

- Fourth, family is the core socializing force influencing children's use of television and what they learn from it. Preschool children view television at home with other family members. Their choice of programs are influenced by other family members. Family members in turn are influenced by the society and culture to which they belong.

There is little published information available on the television viewing pattern of Indian children within the family context. In the Department of Human Development & Family Studies (HDFS), since 1990 researches are being conducted in the area of television viewing with various age groups (Figure 2)



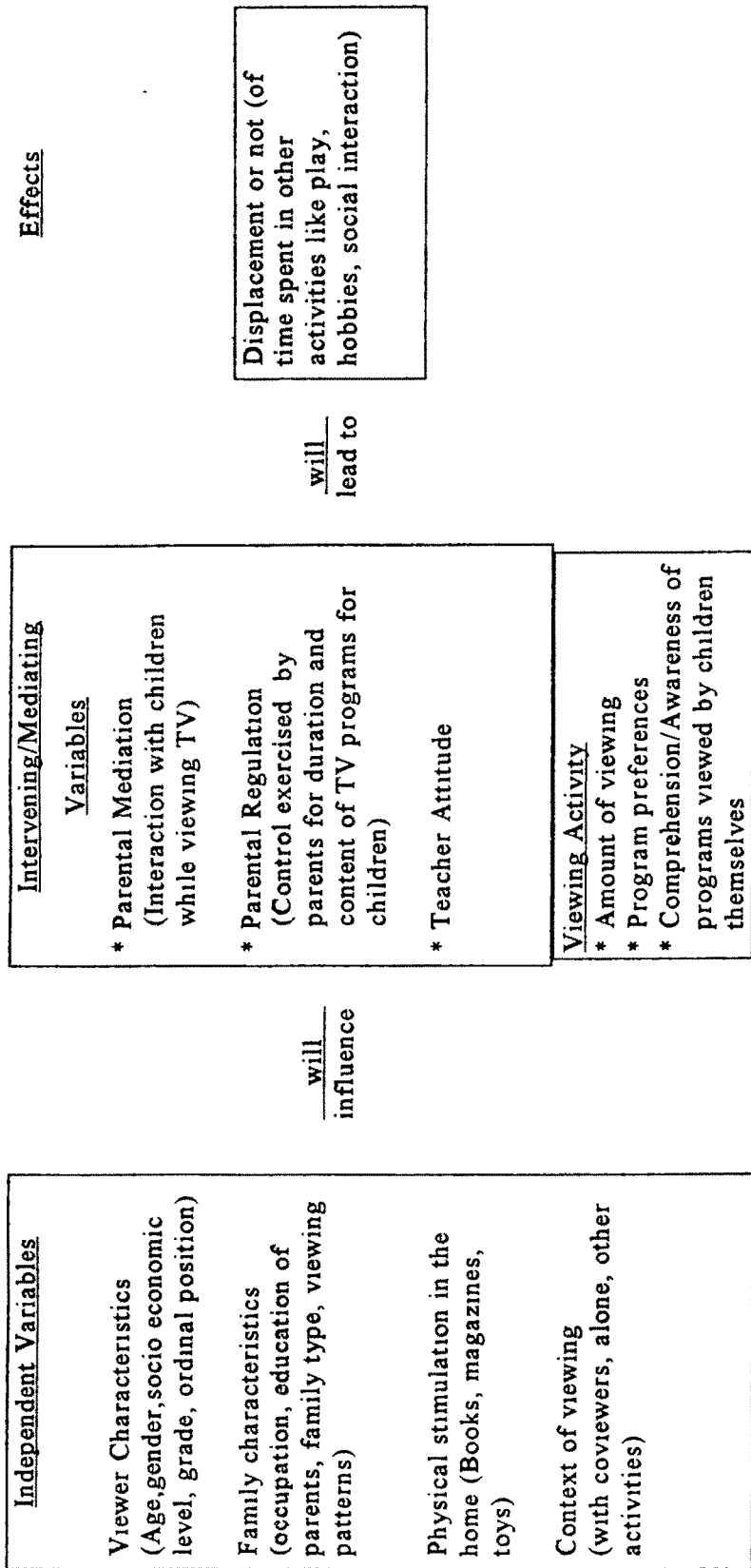
**Figure 1** Researches in Department of HDFS, Baroda on television viewing.

The researches by Shah (1996) and Mushtaq (1997) were “pilot” studies mainly exploring the different methods of data collection which can be used with preschool children together with exploring their television viewing pattern. These two studies revealed the important role that parents/families play in the lives of their preschool age children. The present study is an attempt to gain an indepth understanding about home-television environment of preschool children and document the same.

Research questions need to be addressed to gain information on what is happening in Indian homes in terms of,

- Who are the viewers ?
- What kind of interaction is taking place ?
- What parallel activity along with television viewing is going on?
- What are parents doing to regulate (or not) the television viewing of their children ?
- What do parents think about television viewing as a phenomena vis-à-vis their children ?

To answer these questions, a tentative framework for study is suggested. It is developed based on the theoretical and research review



**Figure 1.** Framework for television viewing of children

**Broad Objective**

To explore the home television environment of preschool children

**Specific Objectives**

- To study the television viewing pattern of preschool children
- To understand parental regulation and mediation of preschool children.
- To study television viewing behavior of preschool children
- To understand the difference (if any) between heavy, moderate and light viewers with reference to
  - interaction between children and co-viewers
  - parental regulation of duration and content of television viewing
- To understand the attitude of parents and teachers about television viewing for preschool children