

By CHAITANYA KALBAG

Gone are the days of traffic jams on Thursday evenings when everyone rushed home to see Chhaya Geet. Gone also are the days when Kamleshwar spent hours telling us why the trains were not back on the tracks. Now it's only affluent sons who buy TV sets so their parents can spend the evenings at home and not get in their discothequed hair. And now we have Sukhdev uttering a four-letter word after sitting through Maya Darpan.

TEEVEE MADNESS

There was a time when smart foreign-returned sons-in-law flicked specks of dust off their tweed jackets and told their deshi relatives about the television programmes they had got to see in Washington or London. They sat late into the nights, describing the Breakfast Show on Channel 14 and the baseball on Channel 7 and the



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midnight thrillers on BBC TV. The parlance of Harvard or Cambridge mingled with the jargon of the TV-watcher — NBC, ABC, and sixty-second spots.

And the heathens here gaped at all this technology and turned green at the gills as they dreamed of the fun they were missing.

And then television came to India and the *nouveau riche* farmer in Amritsar and the executive in Bombay and the bureaucrat in Delhi all rushed to buy a TV set.

After that everyone ignored the dapper sons-in-law and concentrated on their own TV sets. And people sat late into the nights discussing the relative merits of different brands of sets, of the different programmes, and of the girls who read the news.

The news.... In the beginning, there would be silence. Then the signature tune and the leaping collage. And then the newsreader's face. People learnt to identify their favourite newsreaders, and men discussed Kumud Merani and Jyotsna Kirpekar over their coffee breaks, and girls discussed the marital status of Pradip Bhide and Siddharth Kak.

The days passed in this euphoria of telescreen watching. There were traffic jams on Thursday evenings when everyone rushed home to see **Chhaya Geet**. And on Friday evenings, Nissim Ezekiel and Surinder Singh made it a point to watch **Phool Khile Hain Gulshan Gulshan** so that they could comment on Tabassum's mannerisms in the next week's columns.

That was how a new breed was born — the television critics. We had Ezekiel and his literary criticism, Singh and his earthy criticism, Gautam Vohra and his goateed criticism, and Eikram Vohra and his *My Wife*-style criticism. Later there was a new member — Shalini Pradhan and her *Tower Talk* criticism.

The sad thing was, with only four hours of evening broadcasts, no one paid much attention to the critics and their columns, except the critics themselves who had to keep track of how many better points their rival critics had made.

When our cousins from Madras or Calcutta or Hyderabad came to Bombay for a vacation, they spent ecstatic hours before our TV sets and forgot their dinner invitations and turned green at the gills when they dreamt of the **Chhaya Geets** they were missing.

And there were only three programmes worth watching every week — **Chhaya Geet**, **Phool Khile Hain**, and the Sunday movie. And the Worli people brought down a hornet's nest when they decided to have regional language films too on Sundays. Sundays were sad days anyhow, with no one promenading on the sands of Chowpatty and the streets looking like an Alaskan ghost town.

Those people who owned television sets and stayed in co-operative housing societies had to clear their living rooms of excess furniture to accommodate the Sunday rush of neighbours and the dhobi's kids, and some nasty people suggested that they ought to charge a rupee a head admission.

When they showed **Shyamchi Aai**, all the Aais in town flocked to the living rooms. When they showed Claude Chabrol's **The Butcher** in French, the ladies sniffled into their handkerchiefs after the hospital climax.

Gone are the days when Salome Parikh compered **Reflections** in a vaguely pedantic style. Gone also are the days when Kamleshwar spent hours telling us why the trains were not back on the tracks. Now we have Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni interviewing batik artists and Sukhdev uttering a four-letter word after sitting through **Maya Darpan**.

And television grew and grew. And from New Year's day this year, television went commercial and the same old radio voices told you **Marlex** pressure cookers were the best and **Sharmila Tagore** was starring in **Bombay Dyeing** saris. And the television people decided to be more democratic and had **Indradhanush** where every Rani, Shyam and Hari could play the guitar or imitate Mukesh, and **Aap ki Rai** half-hours when T. P. Jain answered your letters and defended every flaw in his suave, shudh Hindustani.

Now you get to see a new lady on the screen — a demure female with folded hands saying **Kshama Keejiye** every ten minutes. And Surinder Singh spends half a column talking about the fly on the television camera. And people are generally waking up again and you can once again see young people promenading on Chowpatty, and it's only affluent sons who buy TV sets so their retired fathers and dentured mothers can spend the evenings at home and not get in their discothequed hair.

If you happen to visit the TV Centre

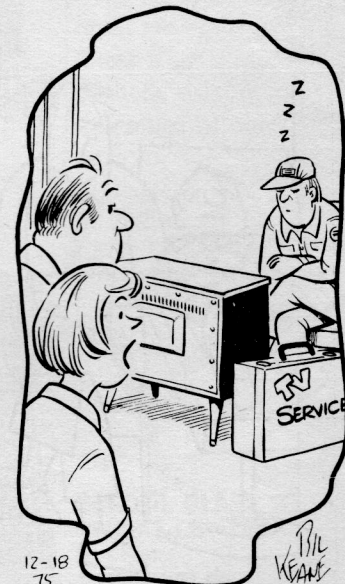
at Worli you meet young and intelligent people who discuss Benegal, Brecht and Bogart, and sync, sound and prime time in the same breath. These are the television intellectuals. Then there are the young men who service your set during the one-year guarantee period and they come so often they get to be on first-name terms with you.

As if that were not enough, the cousins in Madras and Calcutta have their own TV stations now, and it's the turn of the cousins in Masulipatnam and Murshidabad to turn green at the gills.

And though Ezekiel and Pradhan and Singh and Vohra have bigger columns and more critical things to say, the poor television-set owners see newsreaders in their dreams and repair bills in their nightmares. And soon some *desi* Webster will coin a new word — DDP.

That's not an insecticide, that's *Door* Darshan Phobia.

POWDERED MILK
IS AN
UDDER FRAUD



"He must have it working.
He's fallen asleep."