

Satellite Television In Nepal

by

Narendra R Panday

SATELLITE TELEVISION IN NEPAL

(11)

Nepal is a late entrant in the field of television. But even without her own TV station, the Nepalese viewers were able to watch TV. It was no other than India's Doordarshan, first with the help of a booster antenna and later through dish antenna receiving signals from INSAT. The Nepalese having thus tasted television could not be kept waiting for long. Hence Nepal Television (NTV) was launched in 1985 with less than adequate infrastructure - physical, technical and in terms of trained manpower. Progress has, however, been relatively quick. NTV today covers about a quarter of the country's population, with plans already afoot to raise the coverage to one-third of the population. At the same time, the number of TV sets is estimated to have reached 300,000, and is growing fast.

The Beginning and Extent

Satellite television had made its debut in Nepal before the Gulf War. But it was CNN's live coverage of this event two years ago, transmitted through NTV, that really exposed the Nepalese to the potentials of satellite broadcast. The subsequent launching of STAR (Satellite Television Asian Region) from Hongkong opened the gates of satellite television, ushering in a new era in TV-viewing in Nepal. Dish antennas started sprouting on numerous rooftops urban areas, in addition to the one some people already had for Doordarshan viewing. The trend is fast spreading. Concerned circles estimate the number of dish antennas in Kathmandu alone to exceed one thousand, and increasing every day. There are five major dish antenna manufacturers in Kathmandu, who say that they produce about 7 or 8 pieces a day, but far short of existing demand. Their business is booming. The profit margin is quite high, 5 to 7 thousand rupees apiece. Antenna assemblers, without any experience or training, are also emerging to cash in on the unmet demand.

Some dish antennas are put up for private use while others are shared by groups of households through cable network. Legally, there is no limit on the number of households that can be linked through a dish antenna. But there is an extra fee for each line beyond the 20 lines allowed in collective use licence. There are 13 channels available over the Nepalese sky through satellites at present. (Durga Nath Sharma in the

Gorkhapatra January 16, 1993). But most of the dishes receive signals from STAR TV. There are antenna manufacturers offering multi-channel antenna as seen in the accompanying advertisement in a local daily.

COST:

Initially, the cost of putting up a dish antenna capable of receiving STAR was in the range of around seventy five thousand rupees. It was a year ago. Now there is much more competition among antenna fitters. As a result, the cost has come down to between 24 and 35 thousand rupees (ibid). The cost actually varies, depending on the make of the equipment used. Equipment assembled in India are the cheapest. Naturally, the more the number of channels, the higher the cost. Similarly, the subscribers' cost for a dish antenna connection by cable is also coming down. The terms and conditions vary from operator to operator. In most cases, the subscriber pays a certain amount as enrollment fee and a monthly charge of 100 or 200 rupees, depending on the channels. The distribution is prompted by cooperative fellow feelings among neighbours, while in some cases it is purely a commercial venture. Again, in networks where only one receiver is used, the operator controls the channel and the individual subscriber has to content himself with the operator's choice. Or arrangements are made to allocate fixed hours for particular channels. But in networks with as many receivers as the number of channels, the subscriber can select his own channel. Although it is not legal, in some localities, the operators are also known to use the network to show movies or other popular programmes through UCR's.

DETERMINANT FACTORS:

A cursory enquiry made with persons having their dish antenna or a connection thereof revealed generally three factors responsible for their decision to have a dish and antennas connection. They are:

- a) insistence of the family, mainly young ones,
- b) because others have it; and
- c) because it is useful and affordable.

COMMUNICATION POLICIES ON SATELLITE BROADCAST

The National Communication Policy, 1992 states that satellite and cable television will be regulated and managed by enacting relevant legislation and regulations. Although the legality of dish antenna was recognised three years ago when in the Radio Act amendment dish antenna was included as a category of radio receivers, provision has been made in the Radio Communication (Licence) Regulation brought out in July last year on the requirement of licence and procedure for obtaining it for Satellite Receiving System (including dish antenna) or Satellite Communication System (Earth Station). Some salient provisions of the Regulation are as follows:

- a) Satellite Receiving System may be used individually or collectively.
- b) The licence has to be renewed every year.
- c) Even dish antenna, fitted before the Regulation came into effect, need to be licenced in accordance with this regulation.
- d) The application for licence for Satellite Receiving System should specify:
 - i. Purpose,
 - ii. Specifications of the System, including make, model number, serial number, size etc.
 - iii. Area of operation
 - iv. Frequency
 - v. Satellite from which signals are to be received.
 - vi. Use - Individual or Collective, if collective, names of subscribers
 - vii. Applicant's name and address.
- e) The licence is given on the condition that:
 - i. No public road, electric supply, or communication system shall be disturbed.
 - ii. Except matters received for public consumption, no other matter may be transmitted through the system; and
 - iii. There should be no commercial motive.
- f) The annual fees for the licence are as follows:
 - i. Individual use: Rs. 1,000/-

ii Collection use : Rs. 4,000/- (up to 20 lines and
Rs. 400/- for each additional line)

The legal requirement to obtain a licence before or after installing a dish antenna, as provided in the Radio Communications Licence Regulations of July 1992, was notified in a public notice issued in December 1992 giving one month's notice to apply. But the response was not been very encouraging. As the one month period has already elapsed, and only a small fraction of the dish antenna owners or operators are believed to have actually applied, the government (Ministry of Information and Communications) is expected to extend the deadline.

The country's Eighth Plan (1992-1997), on the section dealing with Television, reads :

"TELEVISION : During the Eighth Plan period, efforts will be made to extend the services of Nepal Television to all those places of the Kingdom where regular supply of electricity is available. This will be achieved through establishment and capacity enhancement of transmitting stations at appropriate locations and through the establishment and strengthening of the central studio. Appropriate steps will also be taken to avail necessary equipment and skilled manpower required to raise the quality of telecasting".

Obviously, this does not quite address the situation created by satellite TV in an effective manner.

Nevertheless, only last Saturday, which addressing a function marking Nepal Television's Ninth Anniversary of Operation, the Minister for Information and Communication, disclosed that, "Satellite will be used in the near future for broadcasting the Nepal Television transmission throughout the country."

The government is discussing with all available talent and knowledge in the country as to how to proceed in this regard. Since a number of applications from the private sector for permission to non satellite TV has been made a policy and relevant legislation should be in the offering.

- ii. Collective use: Rs. 4,000/- (up to 20 lines and Rs. 400/- for each additional line)

The legal requirement to obtain a licence before or after installing a dish antenna, as provided in the Radio Communications Licence Regulations of July 1992, was notified in a public notice issued in December 1992 giving one month's notice to apply. But the response was not been very encouraging. As the one month period has already elapsed, and only a small fraction of the dish antenna owners or operators are believed to have actually applied, the government (Ministry of Information and Communications) is expected to extend the deadline.

The country's Eighth Plan (1992-1997), on the section dealing with Television, reads:

"TELEVISION: During the Eighth Plan period, efforts will be made to extend the services of Nepal Television to all those places of the Kingdom where regular supply of electricity is available. This will be achieved through establishment and capacity enhancement of transmitting stations at appropriate locations and through the establishment and strengthening of the central studio. Appropriate steps will also be taken to avail necessary equipment and skilled manpower required to raise the quality of telecasting."

Obviously, this does not quite address the situation created by satellite TV in an effective manner.

CHANGING PATTERNS IN NTU PROGRAMMING AND VIEWING

It is perhaps a bit too early to see any clear patterns emerging in Nepal Television programming, as a result of the impact of satellite broadcasting. As a matter of fact, Nepal Television is doubly hit now. Even before STAR TU came to Nepal, NTU was slowly losing its viewers to Doordarshan. In a bid to check this trend NTU started airing DD's popular series like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Katha Sagara*, Hindi Movies on Saturdays and now the *Uiswamitra*. In addition, it also introduced return of Pakistani Serials- one after another. Now swamped with STAR TU's multiple offers, running into 200 hours or so a day as against its own 32 hours a week, the pressure on NTU has mounted manifold. The accompanying advertisement in the local English Daily, *The Rising Nepal*, clearly illustrates the big gap that exists in what NTU and the STAR have to offer. A letter to the editor in the same daily suggested that the programme schedules of the Doordarshan and the Zee TU be also published. Furthermore, STAR has already reached areas where NTU will probably take years to reach.

Except for legalising satellite broadcasting, there seems to be no immediate plan to introduce measures aimed at correcting this imbalance. The realisation is very much there. The retention of its viewers is the main challenge before NTU today. But there seems to be no programme either to increase telecast hours, or in improving programme quality. It is a serious problem because as the viewership erodes, NTU is bound to lose its programme sponsors, making it difficult to continue with the airing of foreign popular serials. The main attraction for sponsors or advertisers is the very modest NTU rates, compared with Doordarshan or other foreign channels NTU charges Rs. 2,500/- (little over \$50 US) for a 30 - second prime time slot, whereas DD's rates for the same could go as high as IRs. 330,000/- and that of the Zee TU IC Rs. 38,000/- (Durga Nath Sharma in the *Gorkhapatra*).

In view of the existing number of TU sets (300,000) in the country which commands a sizable audience, some entrepreneurs are reported to be exploring the possibility of introducing pay - TV in the private sector.

ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS

The introduction of satellite television in Nepal is too recent a phenomenon for any discernable impact to emerge on the social and cultural patterns. In most cases, it is the youth members of the family whose insistence or initiative is considered responsible for deciding to have a dish antenna/link. It is also this generation that is glued to TV for longer hours because of their knowledge of the English language as well as the entertainment-loaded programmes. The youth groups that includes boys and girls in their adolescence are the most vulnerable section of society. It is also this generation that is most attracted to alien culture. At a time when the lure of foreign culture in terms of music, fashion and life-style has already been a strong attraction for the younger generation, the availability of foreign TV channels with enormous amount of entertainment and information is bound to further enhance this lure with its resultant impact on their behaviour, views and values.

Secondly, in Nepal, the institution of joint family is still prevalent. Most are one-TV-set households. Here also, the younger generation usually dominates the choice of the channel. It sometimes leads to tension and friction in the family.

Again, at times, some of the scenes, especially in Western movies, go against the accepted social and family norms, thus creating embarrassing situation to viewers in the family watching together. They also include children. They are liable to be affected by the sex, violence and horror content of the movies of alien social norms. These effects might manifest in the behaviour of the children as they grow.

Recent studies are reported to have shown that exposure to TV or Videogame for long hours have been found to contribute to epileptic feets among children.

If children are a determinant factor in the family's decision to have a dish, parents are sadly experiencing that it is a problem to limit their viewing not to hamper their studies. Precisely for this reason, some parents, although in a position easily afford, have shown reluctance to instal dish antenna. In due course, a comparative study of the academic

performance of school/college students with access to satellite TV at homes before the dish antenna days and after should reveal actual the impact on children's education.

Another area where the impact of satellite TV is being felt is in the business of video cassette parlours whose rentals have suffered steeply. It is also said that some people, having realised that there is not much use of VCR any longer, have disposed of their VCR to pay for dish antenna - a deal which provides adequate quantum of entertainment, including movies, and a bonus of information.

STAR TV will slowly, but surely, become a part and parcel of the life of the urban elite. Its programmes are already one of the topics discussed on social occasions, in coffee shops or the corridors of colleges. It is becoming a status-symbol. Even those who may benefit little from it, are likely to have it, whatever the cost, as it happened with TV sets when NTU was launched. The economic impact on the family, in most cases, could be burdensome.

CONCLUSION

Satellite Television is a burgeoning phenomenon in Nepal. It is here to stay. It is neither feasible nor desirable to try to stall it. Also, it is better if it is viewed positively as an opportunity to be utilised in the best interest of the Nepalese society. Its impact on various aspects of life is inevitable. But viewing it as a challenge and an opportunity, well-thought-out policies and programmes have to be devised to pre-empt, if possible, the negative impacts by providing better alternatives either through the national TV or by using other satellite TV channels. Mechanism for constantly monitoring the impact and exploring avenues of making use of the facility positively to get across the other side of the story needs to be created to help policy - makers and programme-designers to produce suitable and effective output. This exercise may also serve as a guide as to how best to cope with any negative trend affecting national interests or social sensitivities.



2005 : English Special The
Flash (Part 15)
2100 : Pratikriya
2140 : News in English
1.2.1993
Morning Programme:
0730 : Opening
Evening Programme:
1900 : Opening followed
by Educational
Programme
0740 : News
Follow Me
0800 : Teleclinic
1940 : News

Central Transmission:
Evening Programme:
1900 : Opening followed
by Educational
Programme
0740 : News
Follow Me
0800 : Teleclinic
1940 : News

STAR

STAR Plus

06.45 Children's Room	11.45 Ruth Rendell: "Kissing the Gunner's Daughter"	12.45 Movie: "Tomorrow"	14.15 Whits Shadow	15.15 Floyd On Oz	15.45 Movie: "Television"	16.15 Eye On Asia: "Mini Dragons" Pt. 1 of 4	17.15 In The Picture	17.45 Special "The American Music Awards"	20.45 Sledge Hammer!	21.15 In The Picture	21.45 Start Of Something Big	22.45 Mini: "Verdi"	00.45 Movie: "Television"	01.15 Floyd On Oz	01.45 Whits Shadow	02.45 Festivals Of The Far East	03.45 "The Jewel In The Himalayas"	03.45 Holiday	04.45 Choppy & The Princess	05.15 Ovid & The Gang	05.45 Wide World Of Kids	06.15 Smoggies
-----------------------	---	-------------------------	--------------------	-------------------	---------------------------	--	----------------------	---	----------------------	----------------------	------------------------------	---------------------	---------------------------	-------------------	--------------------	---------------------------------	------------------------------------	---------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------	----------------

PRIME SPORTS

03.45 TN: The Australian Open Finals	09.30 CBK: This Week In The Big East	10.30 CKT: Live India V England 1st Test from Calcutta Day 3	17.30 WAT: White Water Rafting	18.00 SOC: European Soccer	19.00 TN: The Australian Open Finals	01.30 WR: WF Wrestling	02.30 VAR: Trans World Sport
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--	--------------------------------	----------------------------	--------------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------------

MTV

06.45 MTV Rockumentary	07.15 Week In Rock	07.45 Classic MTV	08.45 MTV Mon Amour W Tommy Page	09.45 VJ Angela	12.45 Chow	15.45 VJ Sophiya	17.45 MTV Asia Unplugged	18.15 VJ Taiwan	18.45 Classic MTV	19.45 Dial MTV (Repeat Of Friday Edition)	20.45 MTV Mon Amour W Tommy Page	21.45 MTV Top 20 Video Countdown USA	23.45 Dial MTV (Repeat Of Friday Edition)	00.45 VJ Nonte	03.45 VJ Sophiya
------------------------	--------------------	-------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------	------------	------------------	--------------------------	-----------------	-------------------	---	----------------------------------	--------------------------------------	---	----------------	------------------

BBC

07.45 World News	08.10 Film '93	08.45 World News	09.10 Kilroy	09.45 World News	10.10 Public Eye	10.45 World News	11.10 A Question Of Sport	11.45 World News	12.10 The Name Of The Room	12.45 World News	13.10 The Late Show	13.45 World News	14.10 Germany Means Business	15.10 World News Week	15.45 World News	16.10 Public Eye	16.45 World News	17.10 Mastermind	17.45 World News	18.10 Assignment Europe	18.45 World News	19.10 The Late Show	19.45 News Headlines	20.10 Frost	20.45 World News	21.10 On The Record	21.45 World News	22.10 The Name Of The Room	22.45 World News	22.55 Assignment	23.45 World News Special	00.10 The Late Show	00.45 World News	01.10 Network East	01.45 News Headlines	01.50 Two Edged Sword	02.45 World News	03.10 First Tuesday	03.45 World News	04.10 The Name Of The Room	04.45 World News	05.10 Food and Drink	05.45 World News	06.10 World News Week	06.45 World News	06.55 Assignment
------------------	----------------	------------------	--------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	---------------------------	------------------	----------------------------	------------------	---------------------	------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	-------------------------	------------------	---------------------	----------------------	-------------	------------------	---------------------	------------------	----------------------------	------------------	------------------	--------------------------	---------------------	------------------	--------------------	----------------------	-----------------------	------------------	---------------------	------------------	----------------------------	------------------	----------------------	------------------	-----------------------	------------------	------------------

Zee TV, Please!

As the regular readers of *The Rising Nepal*, we highly appreciate daily publishing of programmes of Radio Nepal, Nepal Television, Star TV and BBC.

There is no doubt that television is, nowadays, a major source of various television programmes.

In this respect, we think this is a commendable and

appreciable job done by *The Rising Nepal*.

May we make a request to publish daily the programmes of Indian Doordarshan and Zee TV as these channels are also liked and watched by thousands of people in the urban areas.

Subhash Shrestha
Kaipana Shrestha

Thahity
Kathmandu