

SITE, the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment, began on 1 August 1975 and ended one year later, 31 July 1976. For me this 'experiment' represented one of the most significant results of the American space effort, as it showed the highly effective scientific attempt to reduce the population explosion by cheap instruction to rural populations of the Third World. So far, it has regrettably never been repeated anywhere else. I published a description of it in January 1978 and of the first positive results achieved. The author was Professor Yash Pal, the Director of the Space Application Centre, Ahmedabad, India. Perhaps one of the best examples of the Scientific Temper, I can quote.

During several visits to India I had met him and heard of SITE. Yash Pal had received his PhD from MIT, Cambridge, Mass. and was therefore conversant with space science and space technology when, after his Professorial appointment at the famous Tata Institute in New Delhi, he was appointed Director of India's foremost space research center, most likely by Nehru himself. We had often talked about SITE, and after my repeated invitations, I finally received his manuscript in London on 1 November 1977. The satellite used for the experiment was NASA's ATS-6, launched May 1974.

Video tapes were prepared by All India Radio/Doordarshan in Delhi, transferred to the Ahmedabad Centre and beamed from its ground station to the Satellite. The programmes achieved considerable progress in the areas of information, awareness and knowledge of health and hygiene, political consciousness, overall contemporary thinking and family planning. In addition 50000 rural teachers were enrolled during the experiment in a multimedia package, training them in the teaching of mathematics and general science.

The simple community television sets and the efficiency of their maintenance was sufficient to keep 90% of the sets working at any time at a picture quality better than the normal VHF receivers in Indian cities. One and a half hours of broadcasting in the morning was devoted to school children and 2½ hours in the evening to general audiences, which averaged 100 people per set. From the total of 2400 villages in six states receiving the programmes, 27 were chosen for continuous analysis, with 270 interviews per day.

Yash Pal reported that the experiment was an exhilarating experience for all, that the benefits were greater for 'the underprivileged classes, such as females and illiterates', and that these gains increased as viewings multiplied. Case histories of farmers showed that innovations were adopted, provided that no additional expense was involved. Altogether, female audiences were keenest and learnt most, as several statistical analyses showed.