

"Humraahi" : A Happy Blend of Entertainment and Social Communication

"Humraahi", the family planning soap opera, currently being screened on the Doordarshan national network every Tuesday (the first episode was telecast on January 14, 1992), is all set to become a trend-setter for such programmes aimed at securing desired behavioural change in support of socially important issues.

Produced by Roger Pereira, the programme emphasises the point that when women's status improves, population regulation follows almost automatically. It is now well-established that some of the fundamental factors responsible for India's high birth rate are the low status of women, female illiteracy and the early age of marriage. "Humraahi" is tailored to awaken viewers to the realisation that such traditional norms are self-defeating and must be changed.

"Humraahi" promotes inter-

spouse dialogue - a concept of companionship in which decisions are made by common consent, including the planning of families.

According to Roger Pereira, it has been a long journey in their search to find the perfect balance between entertainment and social communication. Judging by the popularity of the serial, it appears to have been well achieved.

"Humraahi" succeeds to a considerable extent, in creating a critical awareness. The recently introduced epilogue by the famous film actress Tanuja not only puts the featured issues in proper perspective but also helps in carrying the debate forward as is evidenced by the stream of letters received from viewers. Incidentally, the serial commands 80 per cent viewership in the metros, according to latest surveys.

Mr J R D Tata and the Family Planning Foundation have been at the back of this venture all along. "One man - Mr Tata - gave us unstinted support all through our long wait and much of the socio-cultural data that have gone into the scripts of "Humraahi" has come from research done by the Foundation and provided to us by Mr Harish Khanna whose abiding interest in the fruition of the project is very gratifying," acknowledges Roger Pereira.

Two research projects will seek to validate the Humraahi thesis : that social communications can play a key role in education and motivation. One project will be conducted by the Family Planning Foundation in collaboration with Doordarshan. The other will be conducted by the Annenberg School of Communications in Los Angeles, California under Prof Everett Rogers.