

Phone, the mandatory menace

by Suchita Malik

VIKRAM, my 14-year old, still in school, has demanded a personal mobile telephone for his birthday gift, "Mama, please...or else..." went on his mischievous jabbering. I tried to put him off. "Your dad, a bureaucrat, still doesn't possess one and look at me, a college lecturer, I don't need one as yet." "Mama, I can't do without one.... all my friends have it...I also need some privacy." I was dumbstruck at his abashed audacity and was in a state of "suspended disbelief", to borrow the Keatsian phrase.

Did Graham Bell ever think that "telephone", his master invention would become indispensable in modern man's life? Initially invented and designed to facilitate communication from far-off places, the telecom system has gone a long way in bringing the world closer. The live voice of dear ones at the other end was delighting the people for more than a century by now.

Leave apart the technical, professional, social or emotional support or advantages of the telecom lines! Telephone gossip, especially on the mobiles is considered very much "in" and trendy these days. Having emerged as a status symbol three or four years ago, it has acquired larger proportions and has almost become the normal accompanying gadget for all ages, perhaps even a nuisance in many cases.

Take the case of the children first. Telephone has almost become synonymous with their homework diary. Your afternoon siesta is perennially disturbed by the trin.... trin.... trin... from their friends and the constant chattering on telephone in the name of jotting down their missing homework. Ask them the reason for not taking it down in the classroom itself and pat would go the blame to the teacher who speaks either too fast or her handwriting being illegible for them to note down. Rather, the

"hep" and trendy cliché makes you feel so antique, obsolete and unfit for modern company. You already feel the "pangs" of the generation gap quite marked.

Let alone the children, the elders are no less when it comes to chatting on the telephone. For some, it may be a hobby or the best time-pass. Their "mindless chatter" about the weather, the recipes, and the mind-boggling relationships of other people makes them forget that they are impinging upon the ever busy morning time of the working woman who has to pack off her children to school and the husband to his office. Yet, if ever you have to pass on an important message, it is almost impossible to get across to them since their telephone is always abuzz with activity. How ironic!

It is at times like this you wonder that telephone, besides being a boon, is also a convenient instrument of gossip or a nuisance of the first order. The recent

advent of mobile technology has taken the imagination of our young children and adults by storm. They are almost never away from the monstrous "trin...trin..." of this innocuous looking instrument that has the power of disturbing their peace even at the most private moments of their daily routine. The worst part is to see young and middle-age people, with cellphones attuned to their ears, during their early morning walks when, indeed, they should be listening to a cuckoo's sweet melodious tunes or the chirping of other birds or feel the breeze. One only wonders...what next from here? Perhaps what is left is an instrument that can make you understand its message even in your sleep and monitor your responses while enjoying a peaceful slumber. Thank God, there is no answering machine that can be fitted inside the human brain. God forbid! No clues intended for the inventors. ■