

When the concept of the supermarket first sprung up, the effect it had on people was that of euphoria and confusion. Euphoria, about instant choice, confusion because of the multitude of choices available.

The field of consumer electronics, including audio products, TVs, VCRs etc, seems to be right at the hub of all this choice and confusion, there being a plethora of companies manufacturing similar products. What then helps decide is not just good quality, but great advertising. Liberalisation promises the availability of a great multitude of Audio Products. Since we are poised to take a quantum leap it seems an opportune time to dig up details from the people who actually do the selling.

Two of Bombay's oldest and reputed audio houses Kumar Malani of 'Hiro Music House', at PM Road and Bhisham Sahjwani of 'Navratna & Co', Opera House, deal in indigenously manufactured audio equipment.

Says Kumar, "The average Indian knows what he wants for a music system. People who come here are fairly knowledgeable, unlike a few years back. Today, the general trend is to buy all-in-one music centres or the mini component systems, although these do not sound as good as a system with individual amplifiers, decks, equalizers and speakers." But the general trend of the customer is geared towards convenience of size, many facilities and not so much towards sound; price also being a consideration.

Bhisham concurs, adding that although consumers are decisive about the equipment, they don't have a clue as to its specifications or its technicalities. The blame lies on the manufacturers who do not take the pains to educate their consumers. Very often consumers

SOUND TREATMENT

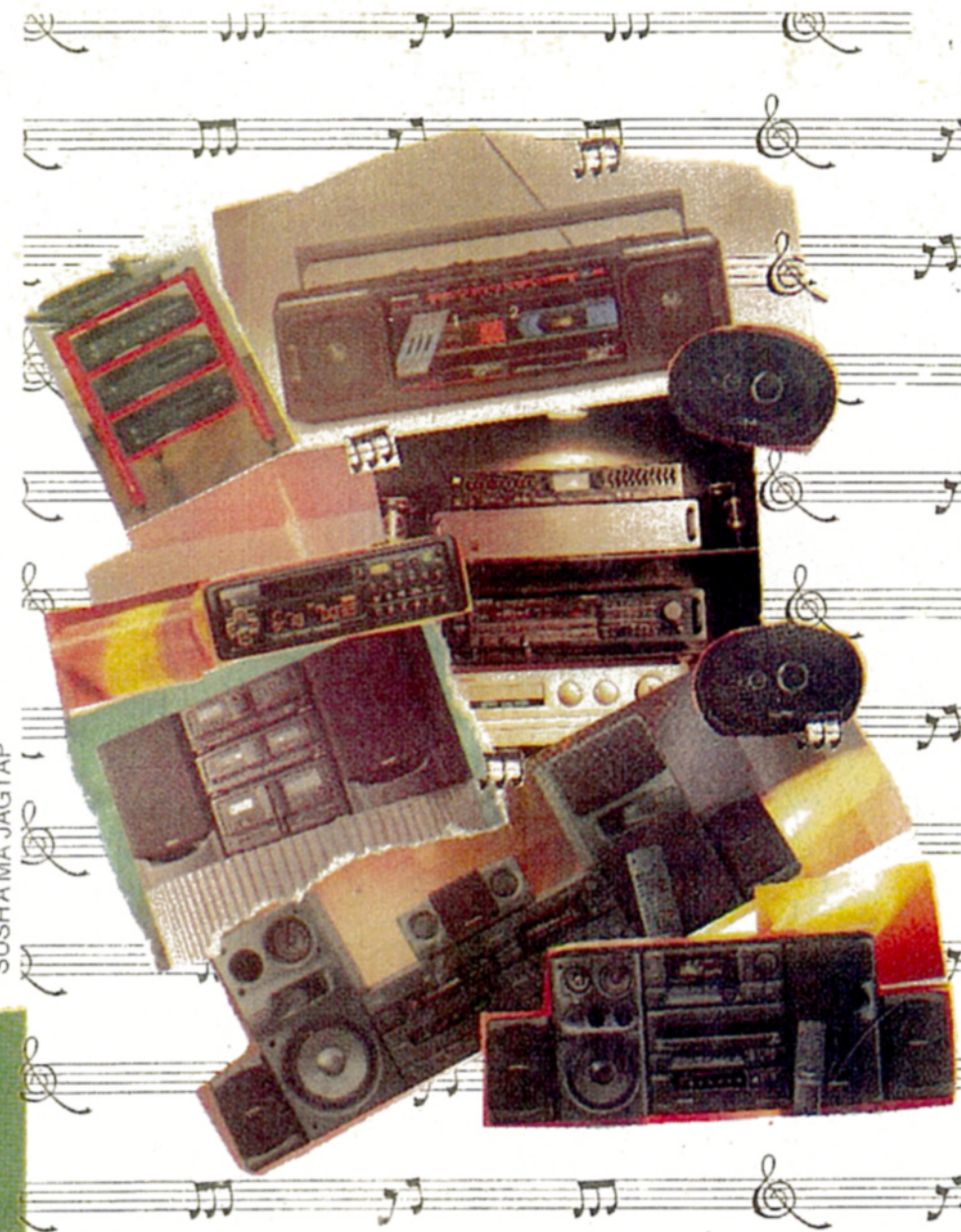
shop with a particular advertisement in mind. One of the greatest controversies that has been created in the audio industry is that of the 'Power Output' of an amplifier. In recent years we find puny looking equipment being advertised as having a power output of 500 watts and 1000 watts PMPO, which is actually 'Peak Music Power Output'. It doesn't really convey any genuine information about the performance capability of a music system.

Generally the dealers are very confident of the imminent audio boom. The slump in the audio market started after the 1982 Asiad when TVs and VCRs

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ruled the day. It is estimated that the biggest beneficiary after the multinationals come in will be the retailer. Competitors trying to out-do the other will dump their products in the market. People will be faced with a barrage of ads and the demand for audio equipment will rise. The audio



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the fact that selling any audio equipment takes greater dedication, time and space, which is responsible for the lack of many, many audio dealers. People often want to hear only a part of the equipment, they want to mix and match and so on.

Dealers feel that Indian audio products are very competitively matched with their foreign made counterparts. Kumar categorically states, "If I were to choose between an Indian equipment and a foreign make for the same amount of money, I would opt for Indian simply because I get more

value for money, not to forget a guarantee and easy reparability in future." Most other dealers felt that even the existing competition has greatly improved the quality and finish of the Indian product. This indeed is cheerful news — the first step towards changing the Indian psyche that foreign is better.

As for foreign equipment, what better place to go to than the one stop shopping centre at the Heera Panna Complex at Bombay? This is a place where you can acquire almost anything in the world, at a price. Deven Majumdar who manages 'Valentines Music Centre,' was comparatively vocal about things. He feels that the audio clientele of today knows what it wants, and money is not the criteria. People have become more quality conscious. This is really what, according to him, brings them to buy foreign made equipment. A person who wants to spend money will not settle for a compromise. To an Indian made system costing Rs 25,000, a foreign made equivalent, which may cost a couple of thousand more, will be preferred by the elitist clientele. Amongst foreign brands SONY seems to sell the most for one, SONY markets its products actively in India. Also they are priced competitively. Besides, their service centres ensure after-sales attention.

In a nut shell what I would advise readers is: Think twice before discounting an Indian made product. Use the advertising you have been bombed with, only to make yourself aware of a product's existence. Judge for yourself what you like. It's always preferable to compare audio equipment on a one-to-one basis. The bottom line is that within your budget buy the equipment which sounds the most pleasing to your ears — otherwise believe me, it will be a white elephant in your house.