

their phones. That's almost 46 percent of the population in a country where 45 percent live below the poverty line.

At least we don't have to feel all elitist about it, when everyone from the maid, driver and security guard to the vendor and rickshawpuller on the street and people in remote villages own or at least have easy access to one.

I know the cell phone has really spread its wings (or has us in its clutches) when I see my parents who, sadly, still don't know how to turn on the computer, using it. Their use may be limited to making and receiving calls and struggling (when I'm not around) to find whose calls they missed; they may still ignore text messages and never hear the phone ring in their stuffed purses; but

have it all. The desire is made so intense, the craving so unbearable, that not having one makes us feel like failures. And having less of it, like a less flashy or expensive set, makes us feel like lesser beings than those who go around listening to music and taking pictures with theirs.

It's hard not to have an issue with ads for most things -- including my other favourite, fairness creams -- that they are made to seem indispensable. I often wonder, wouldn't that woman have made it as a photographer, wouldn't that guy have gotten the girl in his class, wouldn't people be smiling in general, without their cell phones? Or do cell phones, and only cell phones, make winners of us all?

My media theory teacher at university points out that we are made to feel like winners, talking at such unbelievably low rates all night long, forgoing a good night's sleep, damaging our hearing, filling the pockets of the owners of cell phone companies while emptying our own. Ouch! Now, that bites.

Imagine the power all these companies have, when they sponsor everything, from radio and television programmes and live concerts, to sports events and even teams. They follow you down the road from the airport, and throughout the city, the beautification of which they are also responsible for. They place full-page ads in all the leading dailies. It's no wonder that protests against high tariffs rarely make headlines.

A lot of the times, they do get involved in noble causes. They give money to the poor and help flood victims. A lot of the times, they're not even advertising their rates and sets and what-not. They just want you to hum

their tunes, do the wave with them, make you smile. They just want you to know that they're there.

In all honesty, I feel lost without my cell phone now. And, besides myself, I blame my friends, my colleagues and of course the media for making me desperately dependent on something I spent well over half my life without. It's suffocating sometimes, with cell phones, cell phone ads, and people's obnoxious ringtones sounding loudly in meetings and conferences and quiet conversations, caving in on me from all sides. According to a market study by Portio Research in 2006, half the world's population will be using cell phones by the end of 2009. Marshall McLuhan predicted a global village. "Mobile village" is more like it.

So, even if the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals are set to reduce extreme poverty and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by half by 2015, at least half the world will be using cell phones well before then.



Flashy, all-in-one, must-have -- cell phones are the status symbols of today.

they've agreed to carry one, to use it when absolutely necessary, to pay for it and they are gradually shifting from "We used to manage fine without cell phones" to "Thank God for the cell today".

As for myself, along with one ear more damaged than the other, one cheek full of pimples and a sore neck the morning after I clean my room or do anything else using both my hands and not my hands-free, I believe my biggest problem will be FFS -- flat-finger syndrome -- which will cause my text-messaging thumb to, eventually, disappear.

And let's not forget that cell phones have become the new booty of choice for hijackers and made people even more vulnerable to such crimes.

Cell phones are my favourite example for media theory class. What better demonstration of the media creating "false consciousness" or false needs, making us want and believe we need things we could easily have done without; making us feel all important and powerful, happy and successful by having them. Basically, like we