

GANDHIAN WOMEN'S
WORKSHOPS

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81

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Waste's Workshop "In Quest of an Ideology for Indian Women".

Aim

1. to identify critical issues relevant to women, especially from the poorest classes, in the context of social and economic transformation in India;
2. to reflect on the experiences accumulated by participants in working with women within a development context;
3. to derive from these experiences a broad theoretical frame, which
 - (a) postulates a vision of a society in which women would be comfortable; and
 - (b) provides instruments, methodologies for those who wish to work with people towards reaching that vision.

Duration - 4 days

Participants

Women constructive workers as well as researchers, broadly subscribing to the Gandhian approach to revolution.

Preparation:

Each participant will write down what kinds of frontier issues they have encountered while working with people in their own environment. What kinds of contradictions, dilemmas, pressures they have come across which has made them want to reflect on what the women's movement in India is all about. They might also like to assess their own contribution of a women's component within the overall context of their work and see what changes would be required if they were going deeper into the issues.

BRIEF NOTE FOR WORKSHOP

Devaki Jain
1st June, 1981

"In Quest of a Gandhian Ideology for Indian Women".

1. This workshop is for US
for us to strengthen ourselves internally by sharing
common experiences as WOMEN.
2. These experiences can be positive as well as negative.
3. We share certain common factors
 - (a) Women
 - (b) Working within Gandhian Institutions
 - (c) Working within and outside our families.
4. At all these three levels what are we pursuing as WOMEN
Is it different from men?
In what way?
why?

Is there something that needs to be done within and outside
ourselves because of this?

And is this something, something to do with our being women?
Our being Gandhian women?

In other words what is the element of Gandhi and women
in this?

What our vision of a just and peaceful society?

FOLLOW UP

1. If we are able to fully share our thoughts and problems with
each other and go on to step 4 then we may be able to even
chalk out a course of action for the ourselves group.
But should be go on further internally reflecting and
building our own solidarity.

How many times were
How structured
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DRAFT - May 25'81

SEMINAR: Gandhian Women Workers

Gandhiji, throughout his public life preached against the wrongs done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion. Some of the public statements he made regarding women are worth mentioning and discussing.

"I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

"Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure. The result is a semiparalysis of our society".

"To me this domestic slavery of women is a symbol of our barbarism. It is high time that our womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of a woman's time".

"Today, the sole occupation of women amongst us was supposed to be to bear children, to look after her husband and other wise to drudge for the household. This was a shame. Not only was the woman condemned to domestic slavery but when she went out as a labourer to earn wages, though she worked harder than men,

she was paid less".

The above statements share with the women's movement the goals that underlie women's struggle for liberation, equality and development. For women (as for other oppressed groups) freedom from oppression involves not only equality but also the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives and bodies. Such control feminists claim is essential to ensure a sense of dignity and autonomy for every woman.

Gandhiji was convinced that if a struggle against injustice and inequality has to be fought, with non-violence, then women will have a greater role to play.

Gandhiji also believed, as many development planners now do, that development cannot take place without the active involvement and participation of women. Although this is accepted in principle and is emphasized in the sixth Five Year Plan, its implementation needs major changes in attitudes, equal access to education, health, and economic opportunities and social and political support.

I hope we can discuss in this seminar how we can promote Gandhiji ideas and convictions regarding the role of women in families and in social and economic activities.

GANDHIJI AND WOMEN

(B. Jain)

(Broadcast Oct. 2, 1975 9.30 p.m)

October 2nd, the day in 1869 that Mahandas Karamchand Gandhi was born is to me the most important day in the year. If one believed in the effect on human destiny of different stellar combinations then one would probably ask - what kind of constellation of forces was it that ushered the birth of such a fantastic man?

But constellation or not, on this day was born the man who truly shaped Indian History - and without whose touch, Indian women would have been in such an age of darkness today, that they might not even have known what they were being deprived of.

Gandhiji's style - or the way as he nudged and coaxed Indian society to do what seems to us today, to have been the inherently impossible - is best described in anecdotes.

There was this time in 1930 - when alongwith the salt satyagraha, picketing against foreign textiles and liquor was started. Gandhiji found that the movement was not gathering enough momentum. He decided then to address himself to the women. His call was answered - for example in Delhi under the leadership of Srimathi Satyawati Vidyasankar - Delhi's first woman Satyagrahi a group of women walked down Chandni Chowk distributing bangles to the men; and asking them to wear these bangles and stay at home - as now, the women were taking over the movement.

This incident came to be known as the "Chauri Andolan". It caught fire - women and girls left their sheltered lives and began to court arrest by picketing liquor shops.

Whenever a leader in their community was arrested, they would organise 'a day of mourning'. They donned saffron robes, 'the colour of sacrifice' to show visibly that they were prepared to suffer for his cause. In twos, in threes, they sat down on chairs placed before shops selling drugs, liquor or tobacco; they pleaded with men who came to buy at these shops, to give their money instead to Gandhi. When pleading did not avail, they flung themselves across the thresholds, daring the men to walk over their bodies.

It was something never known before in India. But money was being gathered by this army of women, fighting with its own version of Satyagraha. They went to prison cheerfully.

There were modern women, like Jawaharlal Nehru's wife, Kamla and his own young sister, Krishna. But there were others - wives and daughters who had lived in purdah all their lives. There was a story told of one young man who, eleven before, had married without seeing his wife's face nor she his, until after the ceremony. He had come home lately to find his wife and his mother both jailed for participation in the tax war. He was cheerfully looking after the two babies and the house until his women folk would be released.

Once women were drawn out of their homes - into the area of the struggle, once men got used to women working with them in important and risky tasks the women were emancipated - emancipated from the greatest source of enslavement, attitudes. It is the attitude of men to what women can do and ought to do; the attitude of women to themselves, their own roles and its adequacy; the attitude of samaj, the society to what is right and what is wrong in certain types of behaviour that can cripple - as much as it can liberate, a society.

Later during the thirties and forties it seemed but natural that women were elected to positions of national importance. The role of Sarojini Naidu during this period - her being appointed successor to Gandhiji as President of Indian National Congress - is well known. The emergence of Anasuyabehn Sarabhai as a labourleader, president of the first trade union in India, is another equally significant but probably less known event. There were scores of other women who became leaders during this era under the inspiration of Gandhiji.

Sarojini Naidu's address in 1925, as President of Congress is worth quoting as it so beautifully typifies the particular grace or style that Indian women have been noted for - she said:

"I who have rocked the cradleI, who have sung soft lullabiesI, the emblem of Mother India, am now to kindle the flame of liberty... In electing me chief amongst you, through a period fraught with grave issues and fateful decisions, you have reverted to an old tradition and restored to Indian women the classic epoch of our country's history."

Throughout India, not a woman in a hundred could read; child marriage, purdah, in remote areas of the country, even suttee were still practised. But by the wish of Mahatma Gandhi himself, a woman whose duties were those of wife and mother was to occupy his place.

She gave her heart to Gandhiji's life-task. Yet the centre of her existence was always her own home, her husband and children.

But what of the women, who looked after Gandhiji, his personal life and his needs? It is in this area that Gandhiji's behaviour and "experiments with truth" have been the subject of some controversy amongst scholars and Gandhians.

Gandhiji himself confesses that his treatment of Kasturba was tyrannical. He admits to bring like most Indian men, wanting complete workshop and subservience by their wives. His greatest problem, however, was that Kasturba had a mind of her own, was an indomitable spirit. She did not protest but her acceptance was of the kind through which Gandhiji received the most significant message of his life. To put it in his own words:

"Such discipline in non-violence as I have had, was given at home, by my wife. I used to be a tyrant, but my tyranny was the tyranny of love".

"I used to let loose my anger on her. I had a notion it was her duty to obey me, her lord and master, in everything. I literally made life a hell for her, changed my residence, prescribed her dress, forced her, brought up in an orthodox family where Untouchability was practised, to accept Moslems and Untouchables in her husband's home. And I made her serve them, regardless of her abhorrence....Her unresisting meekness opened my eyes. It began slowly to dawn on me that I had no such prescriptive rights over her, and if I wanted her obedience, I had to persuade her by patient argument, and she thus became my teacher in Satyagraha, non-violence."

Over the years Kasturba grew not only to understand the mission on which he was seized, but to participate in it, like a seasoned colleague.

In 1942, when Gandhiji was arrested on the eve of his launching mass satyagraha - Kasturba decided to address the meeting in his place, but was also arrested. She sent a message which is inspiring both for its simplicity and its commitment:

It said: "Gandhi poured out his heart before you for two and a half hours in the All India Congress Committee meeting last night.... What can I add to that? All that remains for us is to live up to his instructions. The women of India have to prove their mettle...They should all join in this struggle irrespective of caste or creed... Our watchword must remain, Truth and Non-Violence".

Several interesting questions emerge out of this relationship between Gandhiji and Kasturba - its tensions as well as its sublimation over time.

For example could Gandhi have moved this country in so many directions, in such a revolutionary way, if he had been less severe and more accommodating to his wife and sons?

This question is not as remote and speculative as it may appear at first sight. In my opinion it has urgent relevance to the problems of social change in the India of today, and I shall explain why I think so.

Gandhiji and Kasturba belonged to the privileged classes - those that had wealth or power, even if in modest measure. Like of his class, Gandhi was seized with the desire to take up the cause of the poor and the under-privileged.

But unlike others of his class his technique required rigorous self discipline. He wanted to identify himself totally with the oppressed, - live with them, like them - feel a part of them. He not only learnt from these experiences but also drew out of them his programmes. Again, whatever programmes he wished to carry out he tried them out in his own life, on himself and his family first.

He wanted that privileged classes - the leaders - to change their attitude to untouchability by doing their own scavenging, taking untouchables into their homes. So he insisted that his family lead the way. It was the same with austerity, simplicity. Kasturba had to be the first to shed her jewellery, her servants, her love

of rituals that involved expense. He felt that the prevalent type of higher education alienated the educated from their people - and was not necessary for the tasks before India. So he insisted that his son Harilal should not go for it and the consequent job - even though it destroyed his relationship with Harilal.

This was Gandhiji's own solution to the problem of self interest and class conflict. Through personal sacrifice, especially of his family, through demonstration and precept he tried to go and his fellow leaders, his class to bridge this gap between the haves and the have-nots - not through confrontation but identification, and hence non-violence.

In my view it is this self-discipline, this strict adherence to principles within the household, that is the need of the hour for us. How many times have we not wanted others to follow certain rules of conduct, which when it reaches our own threshold we are unwilling to practise? Take traffic rules, payment of taxes, cleanliness of public places, take attitudes to dowry, intercaste marriage, to our daughters-in-law, to untouchability, to our domestic helpers - to our work if outside the house - to ostentatious consumption. We will complain and criticise others for being dishonest or bigotted, but in our own personal lives we cannot exercise the self-control required to follow the rule.

These double standards that we follow become particularly acute when it comes to our own family. The family is the most important loyalty in Indian society.

Gandhiji recognised, with his usual extraordinary perception, that this was the strength as well as the Achilles heel or weakness of our society. Frequently what may be justified as done out of concern or devotion to a member of the family may be in direct conflict with public ethics. He wanted us to replace narrow family loyalties by loyalty to bigger things like national freedom, reduction of inequalities, economic independence. Hence his insistence that, however painful, Kasturba and his sons follow the strictest code of conduct.

For women, this message of Gandhiji is most important and urgent. In India women are still, by and large, mothers and wives and their devotion to the family usually comes first. It is they that can weaken the resolution of their families to strictly adhere to public ethics. But by the same virtue it is they that can emancipate their households from this crippling weakness, inherited from the past.

Gandhiji also saw this. He aimed at using women's strength for the transformation of society. At the same time he sought to move them out of a circumstance in which they may indulge their weakness - or that of their families. In 1939 in a letter he said:

"I do believe that it is women's mission to exhibit ahimsa at its highest and best. But why should it be a man to move the women's heart....I have no urge in me to go about preaching the doctrine to the women of India - It may be that there shall arise one among them who will be able to do much further than I can ever hope to do.

For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in Ahimsa. For the courage of self sacrifice, woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute".

In another letter in the Harijan in 1940 he said:

"My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance, truth and Ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this women will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex."

I can find no better words with which to conclude than Gandhiji's own. He said:

"So long as considerations of caste and community continue to weigh with us and rule over choice, women will be advised to remain aloof and thereby build up their prestige. The question is as to how best this can be done. Today few women take part in politics and most of these do not do independent thinking. They are content to carryout their parent's their husband's behests. Realising their dependence, they cry out for women's rights. Instead of doing this, however, women workers should enroll women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them which will compel man to release places of honour. If they will do this, they will purify the present unclean atmosphere. So much for women."

Brief profile of participants present at the Gandhian
Workshop for women from 3-6-1981 to 6-6-1981.

1. SMT. SAVITRI KHAN:

Has been drawn to the Gandhian principles ever since her 8th year when she met Gandhiji and made Sampathi Khan of her precious gold bangles. She never aspired for gold ever after. She has been involved in programmes for women since 1921 through the Balawali, health care programmes, Kathayi (Spinning) work. Of special mention is her work with Adivasi women for whom she held health camps and brought about tremendous changes in their living conditions. She rehabilitated the refugee women through co-operative society at Pipri. She is settled in Maharashtra and is currently working with Gandhi Smarak Stithi, Gandhi Bhawan, Kothrud, Pune 411029.

2. SMT. PANDITA BAI BANGI

Born in Kerala and works in Maharashtra along with her husband at Chetana Vikas, Gopuri, Wardha, on rural development schemes for the poor. She has worked with tribal children at Anarvani Seva Ashram in Uttar Pradesh and worked with different units of education applicable to non-formal educational experiments on drop-outs, health and agriculture in Wardha District, Maharashtra.

3. SMT. RADHA BHOSLE

From a very young age she took to Gandhian way and has been successfully working with women and children in the rural areas of the hilly regions of Khasi; worked closely with Smt. Sarala Behan at Lakshmi Ashram, Almora; she excelled and shared the Gandhian Principles

and her such experiences during her several visits abroad; in 1967 she took charge of Lakshmi Ashram and conducted many Eooshaan and graashhaa movements in the hilly districts of Uttar Kaad inspiring young men and women to Sarvodaya work; among her achievements are the active liquor prohibition movement, organising block level Khaal and Village industries, educational programmes for young women, social forestry and chipkaat movement.

4. SMT. VENU VANANATH PALEJHARI:

Got her Ph.D. from Poona University and has worked on socio-economic survey project about employed women in Poona. She is involved in voluntary social work in Sweepers' Colony in Meeraraj Bhawan, Maachar, Pune; austerity is a living principle in her family.

5. SMT. VIJYA DASPRASADH:

BORN from a Gandhian family of Andhra. She is the founder member of Shri. Jayaprakash Narain Ashram in Gaya and worked at Gandhi Peace Foundation at Delhi and involved in the Eooshaan Movement; at present, she is working in Uppal village in Hyderabad; she is secretary of Kasturba Gandhi Seva Sangha which has adopted 28 villages for intensive rural development; she is also the President of the Andhra Pradesh State Federation of Mahila Mandals.

6. S. M. KANVA CHODHRY:

Of the Ford Foundation, Lodi Estate, New Delhi. Is actively working on management problems of the unorganised sector in

Andhra of Forestry, agriculture, handlooms and handicrafts; she has been at the Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Visiting Professor at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand.

7. SMT. BAGINI PRANI:

Of Banavasi Seva Ashram, Mirajpur, J.P., is actively involved in the welfare of the people in that community; her approach is basically in building awareness among the women folk through informal neighbourly contacts and helping them in solving their day to day problems.

8. SMT. SITA R. BHATT:

Pioneering founderhead of a dynamic organisation SEWA Self-employed women's Association in Ahmedabad; with determined Gandhian zeal she has evolved SEWA for women workers; engaged in Home-based production, petty vending, selling various services into the trade union; she has successfully organised the co-operative Seva Bank; she is the General Secretary, Seva and worked for 15 years in Textile Labour Association.

9. SMT. SHIRAJIJI:

is Secretary, Gandhigram Trust, Gandhi and Village Industries public Charitable Trust, Jalural; is actively involved as an organiser of the Rural Integrated Development programs.

10. SMT. SIRMAYA BANSAL:

Hails from Maharashtra; married to Keralite who is also a Gandhian; Together they have established the "Jhan Gram", a village acquired from Bhodasani working in the area of basic education is one of

the villages of Kerala; she is the Chairman of the Family and Child Welfare Project at Koniolli Block, conducting Balasali and training camps.

11. MRS. VANITA BHADE

Of Gurga Bharati, Bharathi Sarvodaya Ashraa, Simultalla, Bihar; has done tremendous work among women in seeking better living standards in the backward areas of Bihar; she is the Region Women Co-ordinator for the Kshetra Samawaya Samithi; she was with Dhirendra Bhai at Gandhigras for 15 years.

12. MRS. SARASWATHI SUDHAKAR

Involved in the Gandhian movement since 1925; worked with her husband Dr. Vatsarajan who was also a staunch Gandhian in Karnataka; in 1949 started an Institution of the Thakkar Bapa Service Foundation in the outskirts of Bangalore.

CONCEPT OF A FAMILY INTRA-HOUSE HOLD INEQUALITY

It is unanimously agreed that place of women in the family is secondary, to develop her special qualities and her personality. This position must be changed not only for her, but for the good of man and in the wider interest of the Nation itself. 50% of the population is that of women and unless they participate in the development programmes, however much man may try, they cannot achieve the results they desire in the development programmes.

For awakening of women power, the idea that women's place is only at home and she is to look after the family and rear children is one of the stimulating blocks. The middle class women are almost imprisoned in the four walls of their house. The lower class working women and agricultural women labourers as well as the adivasi women go and work for their livelihood without purdha. But inspite of their moving about outside the house without purdha their subordinate position in the family is not changed at all. The working women, educated or uneducated, have to put in such long hours of work for earning the livelihood besides cooking at home and taking up the responsibility of looking after home and the family that they are left with no time for themselves e.g. for their mental, physical or social development.

In India Gandhiji understood the creative power of women and tried to bring them out by encouraging them in different way so that they could participate in the independence movement shoulder to shoulder with men. However, after independence this new power got by them during the independence movement seem to be dwindling and they seem to be again shifted back to the back corners of their houses.

The question now is in such a situation how could women be made to contribute to both national and international problems, so that their nonviolent power could be utilized to the full.

The main reason why the women are not able to come out of the four walls is FEAR i.e. FEAR of Man. This fear is not reduced or removed though women may be working with the men in different institutions and different fields of work. The reason being that from the very childhood she is made to think of her body. She is treated differently from the boys, her dress and makeup is also such that her body is exhibited and this attracts the attention of men. In religion, entertainment and even in ordinary day to day life this fact comes to everybody's notice.

The second reason for her inferior position is that the family is treated as a subject and the woman as an object. This relation in the family cannot be called balanced coexistence. Her reproductive role and her duties with the pre-natal and post-natal period and her responsibilities of looking after the children especially in the early period perhaps has put her to this position. But it is not only the man who is to be blamed for this. Even the mother gives different treatment to a son and daughter. All the women in the family are very much against giving equal treatment to boys and girls, say be in serving food, in sending them to school or asking them to help in the household chores. If this FEAR which may be called, fear of her body or fear of men is to be removed, the baby girl is to be treated as a child and not as a girl. For this the following steps could be suggested:-

1. Women have to be made aware of this by various ways and means;
2. Change of heart of man by Gandhian ways of thinking and actions;
3. This work being that of changing the society, co-operation of such men, who believe in the awakening of women shall have to be sought for;
4. The women shall have to be organized at every level;
5. Simple living shall have to be impressed in the present environment and this can be done through social education;
6. To do away with dowry two fold method needs to be taken:-
 - a) Continuous and forceful propaganda against dowry at all levels;
 - b) Positive action i.e. making the marriage ceremony a simple affair by celebrating a number of marriages in a common hall and avoiding exhibition of money.
7. Women should be given equal opportunities of work and equal wages for equal work. Ofcourse, if possible part time jobs may prove more useful for them.

Report prepared by

Smt. RADHA BHATT

Venu Palshiker &
Padmaja Rani.

PROGRAMME AREAS FOR ACTION

From the earlier discussions, the participants had spotted out some issues and areas around which immediate action programmes can be planned. They are

1. Khadi Village Industries and Swadeshi-

Today's situation- It was unanimously agreed that present position of Khadi and other village industries needs fundamental improvement. Wages and living conditions of the labourers involved in these are low. In the Khadi Industry, the position of the spinners is the worst. They join as spinners and continue throughout their life to be just spinners. They cannot improve their occupational skills and ability. They have no role at all in any decision making process concerned with their occupation. They are unconscious of their rights and opportunities. Many of them remain illiterate.

The structures associated with the promotion of Khadi village industry need to do in depth re-thinking and re-designing of strategies and procedures. There have been occasions when manipulations in the production figures have to be done due to the fear of losing certified approval from the commission. High lifestyles and standards of the workers (Staff) in such institutions also help to demoralise other (mass) workers in the field.

Before Independence during the freedom struggle there was a very congenial atmosphere regarding using Khadi and other Swadeshi products. But after that people even Gandhian social workers have been becoming less and less particular about this aspect in their personal lives. More preaching and less practice goes on these days. Regarding village industries like soap making, paper making

and watch making, it was felt that keen competition from large scale production units create difficulties in the sale of such products.

Products associated with Khadi Village Industries schemes often have moved away from the initial philosophy of these products as visualized by Gandhiji. Products were to be chosen to match the economic philosophy of self reliance - the closed circle of production and consumption within a community. Today there are places where Khadi production is promoted for employment where the raw material comes from far away states and the markets are also far away.

What can be done by Gandhian Institutions:-

1. Products have to be chosen in specific locales according to the raw materials and skills and markets in the locale.

The Rural Marketing Centres - A Scheme sponsored by the Handicrafts Board provide marketing outlets in production areas. They continue the Gandhian idea of production for local consumption.

The Khadi Village Industry Programme should take note of this.

2. Women should be given equal opportunities of work and equal wages for equal work. Of course if possible part time jobs may prove more useful for them.
3. The wages and living conditions of the poor unorganized workers can be improved if relevant research is facilitated and the innovations in various working tools brought to the grassroot level. This would also help to make the working more comfortable and convenient for the labourers; It is also necessary to mobilize public opinion against the constant increase in wages and allowances for the organized sectors.
4. The workers should be constantly encouraged to become more aware of their situations through regular studies and discussions. This would lead to their active participation in the development process. They would slowly start making decisions for themselves and their work and managing the affairs of the industry. This very important work cannot be left to stereotype established structures like Khadi Commission. Only committed workers would be able to do this.

5. There should be public protest and demonstrations against the corrupt practices of institutions taking up economic programmes;
6. There should be more commitment to Khadi and swadeshi in personal lives of Gandhian workers. Khadi can survive only if those who wear it do the spinning and those who do the spinning also start wearing it;
7. The bonded industries have positive advantages as they provide congenial atmosphere for the workers. But they have a negative aspect too in the sense they make the workers vulnerable and passive. While purchasing raw materials and selling finished products they are exploited and yet helpless about it. This can be remedied if the labourers are organised into producers' cooperatives which can play key roles in making available local raw materials, making use of and improving local skills and facilitating local markets and consumption. This is one of the very important aspects of Gram Swarajya, that Gandhi had perceived.
8. If exports have an adverse effect on national consumption they should be discouraged. Production of export goods for giving employment to more people is not always desirable. Because in that case there will be ups and downs in the employment situation along with fluctuations in the demand for these products in the foreign markets;
9. Joint mechanisation in all such industries should be discouraged if they throw people out of employment and prevent local repairing and maintenance of the equipments and tools.

REPORT

HARIJAN and RESERVATIONS

'Harijans' - and their problems and the atrocities on them are a cause of concern. It is much depressing to realize that even though Gandhiji had initiated thinking and action in this field, the past 30 years of Independence have further complicated the problems rather than finding the solutions to the problem.

Harijans and the backward and depressed people - have suffered stagnation in culture and degrading poverty over generations. Hence they need a helping hand and a special nutritive food to get over the ill-health. How can this deprived section of the community be brought into the main stream and made to feel the dignity in life? They should get the priority in the field of social activity and constructive work.

As believers in Gandhi's ideology, Gandhians need to lead the movement of bringing the deprived section of the community in the main stream with dignity. The problems identified in the field are-

- I. Reservations: Reservations were made with the motivation of giving special care to the deprived class. But the experience has been disappointing. Reservations have proved to be:
- 1) hindrance in the mixing of two streams;
 - 2) depriving the community of self-respect and dignity;
 - 3) making the community easy-going, lazy and demanding - not caring for increasing the work-efficiency or enriching the life with moral values;
 - 4) contributed to the development of different anti-Harijan fronts etc.

- 5) Political parties have been banking upon this type of division of the society.
- 6) Political parties are making use of the physical suffering of the deprived to encourage conflicts and violence in the society to gain strength for their party to destroy the other parties' organization.

- II. Upbringings of skills for the absorption into the larger family. Though there is a sincere desire to promote the deprived in various fields, the candidates are not found to be in sufficient number or their skill is lacking or the desire to work hard and come up, is lacking.
- III. Cultural rehabilitation: Non-Harijans' attitudes have changed very little and the various wrong practices in personal and family life of the deprived remained as they were to an extent both the cultures have been hesitating to mix.
- IV. Replacement: or abolishing of the occupation or skills responsible for the segregation of a section of the society is necessary for removing the stigma attached to a community. But the corollary is that tomorrow a new section is likely to gain a similar stigma and deprivation, as the functions are not in reality indispensable ones.
- V. Special projects only for the Harijans: Such projects again prevent the development of love, affection and understanding among the Harijans and non-harijans or others.
(deprived)

After sharing the experience in the field, from different regions, the solutions felt to be feasible were--

- (1) One partakes in the menial jobs with the idea of giving prestige to the job as well as reducing the need to create employment round such essential functions.
- (2) Plans for the upliftment of the deprived - incorporate education for cultural change and building up of the skills.
- (3) While giving helping hand to the Harijans, it is assured that the help will not take away the initiative or discourage the development of work efficiency among the group.
- (4) Occasions are created where non-Harijans and Harijans live and work together.

6-6-51

(Rajni Rani)

FINAL REPORT (SUMMARY)

The workshop discussed the following issues in relation to role of the Gandhian Women's movements:-

- 1) The family - and intrahouse hold inequality male - female relationships;
- 2) The situation of Harijans; reservation alternative strategies for promoting equality;
- 3) Women and the Khatib and village industries - their strengths and weaknesses;
- 4) Technology and women's needs - the linkages required.

In all these discussions the emphasis was on the Gandhian method for achieving the goals such equality and justice.

Concepts/principles that constantly recurred were

- 1) the ethic of simplicity Consumption restraint, conspicuous abstinence;
- 2) Self-reliance in communities. The power of having locally interlinked production and consumption cycles in reducing dependences;
- 3) Ahimsa/non-violence the power of patience and love in overcoming conflict.

The women resolved to

build an ever-widening network of women who would together work for the regeneration of society using these Gandhian tools of austerity and non-violence;

Each participant pledged to undertake at least one of the tasks listed below within the next one year:

- 1) To organise anti ivory camps amongst girls boys and wherever possible, joint by;
- 2) To picket against posters exhibiting using the female body as a sex objects;
- 3) To awakening the women to fight for her rightful place in the family;

- 4) To create social awareness amongst the spinners and other workers so that they could grow and understand their rights and opportunities
- 5) To reduce the burden of women by taking up programmes such as building of soak pits, latrines, gas plants, smokeless chimneys
- 6) To make women aware of legal rights, legislations
- 7) To build and train a cadre of full time Gram Savikas who would be located in the villages to create an awareness and awakening amongst women, such that they may be fully involved in the social and economic transformation of society
- 8) To bring together the diverse women's institutions and organisations for common programmes.

FINAL SESSION
Follow-up

In the concluding session of the workshop decided that programmes discussed during the earlier sessions should be listed. They have to be carried on wherever possible with changes according to local circumstances. It was further decided that some common programmes need to be adopted, each one of the participant was requested to take up atleast one item.

Smt. Pankaja Ranibang accepted to be the coordinator and the focal point for about 3 to 6 months, after which some permanent arrangement could be made. The follow up programmes suggested are:-

- GENERAL: 1) To organize auto loom camps amongst girls, boys and wherever possible jointly
- 2) Propoganda against posters exhibiting female figures
- 3) Awakening the women for her rightful place in the family
- 4) To create social awareness amongst the sponsors and other workers so that they could grow and understand their rights and duties
- 5) To have better impact on society and to get better cooperation from Gandhian Institutions on the hand and from Khadi Commission and Khadi Boards on the other, it was suggested that dialogues should be held amongst our workers and their representatives
- 6) To bring together various women's institutions atleast for common programmes of women's social and economic needs
- 7) With a view to reduce the burden of women and to give them happy and healthy family it was putforward that all efforts should be made to see that soakpits, latrines, gas plants, smokeless chules are constructed in as large a number of houses as possible
- 8) The literature focusing the women's problems, legal rights, legislations, training programmes available etc., should be collected, written, printed and distributed
- 9) It was felt that there was a dire need to have trained and fulltime Gram Sevikas in villages to create the awareness and awakening amongst the women to get their full involvement.

PRESS NOTE

GANDHIAN WOMEN'S WORKSHOP "IN QUEST OF AN IDEALOGY
FOR INDIAN WOMEN".

The Gandhi Peace Foundation in collaboration with the Institute of Social Studies Trust has brought together 15 women construction workers from Institutions founded on Gandhian principles in different parts of the country.

Kerala, U.P., Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and many other States are represented. Famous Institutes such as Sevagram, Wartha, Gandhigram, Tamil Nadu, SKVA, Allahabad, Kasturba Trust are all represented.

Taking stock of the various movements flowing in India and outside towards the strengthening of women, these Gandhian workers have gathered to identify what is specifically the Gandhian approach on this issue.

The purpose of the meeting was to reflect on the Gandhian method for social change, how far they have been using it, what should be their particular role as women belonging to this specific ideological frame in response to the issues facing women and society today.

The workshop for fourdays from 3rd-6th June 1981 is being held at Gandhi Sarak Nidhi, Bangalore.

The women resolved to continue this process of dialoguing amongst themselves so that they may gain strength momentum in their struggle against inequality, oppression, violence, untruth and for a just and peaceful society.

WOMEN WORKSHOP FOR REFLECTING
ON GANDHIAN IDEALS

Many women working for more than a decade - sometimes even three decades in institutions founded on Gandhian Ideals, felt the need to meet and reflect on what they have achieved, what have been some of the problems as well as success that they have experienced. This workshop was convened in response to this need and is jointly sponsored by the Gandhian Peace Foundation and the Institute on Social Studies Trust.

The focus, is to identify in what way the work of these sisters, matches Gandhian Ideals, specifically for women. The hope is that such reflection and clarification would further strengthen both the women gathered here as well as the sisters in the field.

They are solved to struggle for a society of peace and justice to the last man and woman as Gandhi visualised.

The women come from varying backgrounds both in terms of their own caste and class, age as well as the particular work they have done. Some are in educational work, some are in Ashrams meant specifically for girls, one is a trade unionist and others are in traditional Gandhian Ashrams such as Kasturba Gandhi Trust Gandhi Gram, Sewa Gram etc. They have found the workshop useful in bringing up those issues which have found difficult to resolve and seek the counsel of other sisters.

They hope that this is beginning of a process of coming together on a common ideological base viz., Commitment of the

Gandhian Vision of Society as well as the Gandhian Methodology for reaching that society, but continuously strengthening themselves and others like them to generate those forces of revolution which Gandhiji always believed that women could generate.

They hoped to found an informal forum for such women to continue to dialogue, leading to a formulation of an ideology for women in Indian society.

The meet started on the 3rd and will continue for two more days. It is hoped that Simla meet us will be carried out in other parts of the country leading to this resolved to regenerate the Gandhian movement through women.

WORK IN PROGRESS

GANDHIAN WOMEN

Devaki Jain
Institute of Social Studies Trust
S.M.M. Craft Trust Building
Deen Dayal Upadhaya Marg,
New Delhi 110 001 (India)

November 1981

PROFILES OF GANDHIAN WOMEN

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Introduction

Gandhian Women

Not being a completely culturally indoctrinated Gandhian not having done any systematic psychological or philosophical probes into the mind of Gandhian women, - I would not be in a position to present to you a rich and interesting insight into what could be called Gandhian feminism.

I would like to get close to this category and present it but this is what I have started to do and it may take some time before I am able to make it presentable. However, what I can share with you now are some experiences and some concentrated thoughts on a pursuit of identifying in what way their being women and their being more Gandhian or belonging to Gandhian ideology institutions, distinguish them from other women as well as Gandhian men. They were in pursuit of testing out whether there was any basis for a separate identity when biology dominated over public philosophy and when public philosophy dominated over biology.

The first session laid bare in very poignant terms how while the philosophy of Gandhi had drawn these women away from their conventional roles expected of them from their class, caste and their families, in the work that followed as activities in the

institutions springing from Gandhian origins, - They were harassed, inconvenienced and quite often subordinated by the men within their ideological frame.

Each woman revealed how from childhood she had shown her difference from the rest of her family- in wanting to respond to poverty, misery, injustice, as well as inequality, sometime it was expressed in teaching neighbouring slum children; sharing food stealthily, sometimes in clearly walking away from home and joining a Gandhian Ashram.

From childhood to womanhood there were struggles from education, for choice of partner in marriage or no marriage and for leading a life independent of social conformism.

In adulthood most of the women present were leaders of one kind or the other in Gandhian institutions. They experienced the usual constraints of domestic role and professional roles where men expected women to first fulfil their domestic responsibilities. They also experienced a certain criticism that they were over-playing the women issue-there was no such issue in Indian society.

Looking back while they could see a common thread in their struggle as women to come to the situation of leadership

and public work where they were, they could also recognise that in some way they were not interested in joining the more vocal sex-based womens movements in India. They were still directed by Gandhian proposition, the issues Gandhi placed before society as well as the perception Gandhi had of women's roles, women's abilities.

Radha Bhatt

"Lakshmi Ashram" or

(Kasturba Mahila Uthan Mandal)

One of those women who had felt the call of their vocation early in life was Radha Bhatt of Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani. Born into an aristocratic and well-to-do Brahmin family, she was the eldest daughter of her parents. From her childhood, she was an incorrigible bookworm, so much of one that she decided quite firmly that she would rather pursue her studies than get married. For sometime her father encouraged her in her ambitions to study, but then, perhaps succumbing to traditional pressures, himself began to present suitors to her for her approval. When she would not change her mind, he insisted that he 'put down in writing' her reasons for wanting to remain unmarried. 'I want to do social service' she wrote, 'and be a second Vijayalakshmi Pandit'.

In order to punish her as he thought, Radha's father sent her to the 'Kasturba Mahila Uthan Mandal'.

He felt that the rigorous discipline of the ashram and the hard life of austerity would soon make her change her mind and bring her home.

Quite the opposite happened. In the Gandhian atmosphere of Lakshmi Ashram, Radha Bhatt found a congenial outlet for her

desire for social work and in this totally unexpected way she became introduced to Gandhian philosophy and adopted it as a way of life for herself. Gradually, the strength of her beliefs and conviction with which she adopted Gandhian ethics in her personal life impressed her family and her sisters followed her example and joined the Lakshmi Ashram. Her father, too respected her belief and usually came to believe in Gandhiji's principles of Swadeshi, caste, simplicity and equality.

Radha Bhatt has now taken over the entire responsibility of the affairs of the Ashram and is continuously engaged in a struggle to emancipate the overburdened hill women of her area from the crushing weight of overwork, poverty, ill-health and ignorance which had initially moved Sarala Devi to start the Ashram in the first place. In between her ^{mountain} numerous chores, she has found the time to write a novel about the life of a young kumaoni girl, which partly reflects her own experiences. Her desire to improve the lot of the hill women takes her into diverse fields - in organising women to resist alcoholism, to fight against the indiscriminate cutting of forests which directly affects the women who have to go miles in search of firewood, to organise marches against dowry and to introduce new skills at the ashram to help the women towards some measures of economic security.

Kasturba Mahila Uthan Mandal

(The Kasturba Society for the Uplift of Women)
ALMORA (U.P)

The Kasturba Mahila Uthan Mandal, also popularly known as 'Lakshmi Ashram' is a small institution situated in Kausani, Almora district of Uttar Pradesh. The ashram was founded by 'Sarala Devi', a German woman who came under the influence of Gandhiji and totally identified herself with the problems and needs of the women in this area. She realised during the course of her voluntary work in the area that the problems characteristic of the hill regions, i.e. deforestation, soil erosion, low fertility and lack of basic services like education and health had a direct depressing impact specially on the women whose condition has deteriorated drastically over the years.

The activities of the Ashram stress the Gandhian concept of total village development, concentrating on the uplift of poor women. There are 50 local young girls and women residing at the ashram, and the ashram provides a basic education in farming, forestry, dairying and spinning, along with formal studies. There is also a large training unit in spinning, knitting and weaving, and units have also been separately established in two villages.

Radha Bhatt, the Chief Organiser of the ashram, believes that the hill women need to be taught these skills so that they can become economically self sufficient and need not depend for

survival on their marginal farms which produce hardly enough for their families in spite of an enormous input of time and labour. In order to free them also from the burden of fetching firewood from long distances, she is actively engaged in an afforestation drive. The other areas in which Lakshmi Ashram has contributed in creating a climate of social awareness in prohibition, and a tangible result has been a total ban on alcohol in Almora District.

The ashram has expanded its programme to include adult education, health care services, dispensaries and creches.

Sarla Devi

(Founder of Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani)

"Sarla Devi" (Kathleen Heilmant was born in 1901 in London. Her grandmother came from the Black Forest and her father was born in Switzerland, so right from her childhood she had the advantage of knowing of different countries and languages. She was brought up by her grandmother, since her mother died when she was seven, and her father, a jeweller by profession was a happy - go lucky, irresponsible person who hardly contributed ~~contributed~~ much to the up-keep of the household. Being self-contained and independent by nature herself, she disapproved of her father's ways and often came into conflict with him.

During the war years, in 1914, her father not having his birth certificate in order and suspected of being an enemy agent, was put under house arrest. When Germany attacked East London, Sarla Devi thought that the world would raise its voice against this flagrant outrage against the conventions of war. Instead there was much talk of an air attack on Berlin and some instances of stoning of German women and children began. Even at that time Sarla Devi felt that the path of peace was much better than resolving the conflicts by talk of more war. She could not voice her feeling for her grandmother feared for her safety.

At this time she was influenced a great deal by "Kerala, the land of the palm trees" a book presented to her for excellence in school, also by the life of Jesus, but she felt that she could not accept many of the teaching of the Catholic priests. Although she used to accompany her grandmother to Church, she disliked the priests' exhorting soldiers to war and commending their bravery in killing. She often wondered whose prayers were heard louder by God: those of the German priests or those of the British. Her belief in religious dogmas was gradually eroded and she stopped going to Church. Whenever she got a chance, she would go off on her cycle to tour Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, deep into the forests.

Sarla Devi was a very bright student and her teachers had faith that she would do well in an academic career. She was equally good at languages, maths and history, but her German Stock was a disadvantage in England and became an obstacle both in her studies and her career prospects. She was amazed to hear the explanation put forward for her good results "you don't participate in war activities and that is why not get more time than other students to study. You don't deserve any accolades". The frustration at this lack of recognition of her abilities made her leave her studies and search for work, where again she was disappointed, she could get only clerical work, far below her capabilities, and finally accepted a job in a factory. There too, she was only tolerated, considered a German 'enemy'. At the first occasion for retrenchment, she was dismissed inspite

of her sincerity at work. This happened time and again; she changed many jobs, many residences. All these experiences alienated her from her environment and the seeds of social reform were sown deep in her psyche. Once she stayed in a boarding house where there were many foreign students, including an Indian boy. This boy often spoke of Gandhiji and his vision of "swarajya", and of the non-violent movement for freedom. Sarla Devi was so impressed that she began to associate with Indian groups in England and became a supporter of the Indian freedom struggle. She resolved to go to India and when Dr. Mohan Singh of Udaipur invited her to work with him in educational programmes, she took a 3 month course in child education and left for India.

Her first meeting with Gandhiji was in 1935 when she went to Wardha in connection with visiting a mahila women ashram. She immediately left Udaipur and came to Wardha. Unfortunately the climate of the plains did not suit her and she shifted to Almora in the Kumaon hills of U.P.

This was the beginning of her work among the hill people. She started the Lakshmi Ashram for the education of the hill girls and prepared many cadres of women to participate in the freedom struggle, in which she herself was always in the fore front, earning the title of the 'Most Dangerous women in the hills' in 1942.

Apart from education Sarala Devi initiated a movement against alcoholism and also became deeply involved in issues of ecology and forest preservation.

Now, at the age of 80, she still lives in the hills of Almora and even now writes about conservation and ecology. Many other women's organisations in the area draw their inspiration from her example, and she was recently honoured by the government who awarded her the Jammalal Bajaj Award for exemplary social service.

Savitri Madan

(Maharashtra Gandhi Smarak Nidhi)

Savitri Madan is one of those who came under the influence of Gandhi very early in her life: at the age of seven, in fact. She spent her early childhood and had her basic education in Sialkot. One day she accompanied her mother to a women's meeting which was to be addressed by Gandhiji. Gandhiji often had these separate meetings for men and women, and here he would speak of backwardness of Indian women and ways and means for their emancipation. He would talk of the importance of wearing khadi and of the contribution that Indian Women could make towards the struggle for freedom. At such times he would also make collections for his fund for Harijans. The call of Gandhi had such an effect on Savitri Madan that even as a child of seven, she got up and donated her gold bangles to Gandhiji. Gandhiji was moved but reluctant to accept them fearing that the child would face her mother's wrath. At the mother's insistence, he took the bangles but asked Savitri whether she would go home and ask for new bangles again. At that the child gave a promise that she would never wear gold again and she has kept true to her word through her whole life.

In a sense, her promise to Gandhi also freed her from the sense of fear which most Indian Women suffer from, especially those from the upper classes who customarily wear a lot of jewellery

Never wearing anything valuable, she was never afraid to move around alone and thought nothing of going to college and back alone even in the face of her family's disapproval of the idea of her wanting to be educated - "No one can spare the time to see reach you to college and back everyday" her father said and so she went alone.

Her studies carried her to Lahore and Banaras and then she returned to Sialkot where she taught in a school. Like Gandhiji she held women's meetings every week where various issues were taken up relating to the education and emancipation of women.

After her marriage in 1936, she moved to Poona, and visited War Wardha in connection with a Teacher's Training Programme. She got and opportunity to visit Sevagram and establish a close contact with Gandhiji again.

Savitri Madan had wanted to conduct training courses for teachers all over the Punjab but with a family to look after, she was unable to do so. In 1940 she took up teaching in Poona again and both she and her husband participated in the "Do or Die" Andolan of 1946.

Dr. Dattarkar of Poona gave his house for use as an office premises and many meetings, were held and many rallies arranged. Savitri Madan's husband was arrested, she then sent her two small children age 4 years and 1 1/2 years to her sister-in-law in the Punjab, and spent two years in jail herself.

Gandhiji's wife Kasturba died during this time and Trust was formed in her name and funds collected in order to put into action Gandhiji's programme for the emancipation of Women. A meeting was held at Uruli Kanchan to appoint representatives for each state for handling the work of the Trust but Gandhiji preferred to nominate people whom he felt were most suited for the task and Savitri Madan was one of those he recommended for the Maharashtra branch of the Kasturba Trust. While she herself felt that she was 'only a domestic housewife', Gandhiji chose her for this very reason, believing as he always did, that women were most ideally suited to take on social responsibilities having already been tempered and trained in their domestic role.

Maharashtra Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Gandhi Bhawan
Kothrud, Pune

Like many of the Gandhian institutions in India, the M.G.S.N. had its roots in the Bharatiya Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (the All India Gandhi Memorial Organisation). This was set up after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 to utilise the funds collected in the name of the Mahatma for a practical development programme based on Gandhian philosophy. Branches of the parent body were set up in each of the Indian states, the work being financially controlled by the Head Office. In 1969, however, the Gandhi Centenary year it was decided to allocate funds to the separate states and the branches of the main organisation were given the option to register themselves as independent bodies, which many of them did. Funds are still made available to these state institutions from the General Fund. The activities of these Gandhian organisations are similar to the extent that most of them are ideologically committed to the implementation of Gandhiji's programme for economic social and spiritual development necessary to usher in a more just and equitable social system.

The programme advocated by Gandhiji for the realisation of "Swarajya" or the ideal society included the ethic of simplicity, consumption control, the liberation of harijans, the untouchables among the Indian castes,

The production of swadeshi goods through village industries, rural sanitation for liberation of harijans and prohibition. Most of the Gandhian institutions are engaged in one or other or all of these programmes with financial support from the khadi and Village Industries Commission, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and the State Governments. They also generate their own funds through many of their programmes.

The 'Shangi Mukhti' message of Gandhi led to concrete research in sanitation, technology and one of the organisations which has done pioneering work in this direction is the Maharashtra Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

These institutions also encourage the development of cottage industries to provide employment to the rural poor in their villages themselves. These industries include oil extraction, making of joss sticks, soap, leather goods, matches, brick making, and more recently solar cookers and gas holders. To support themselves they also have publication on Gandhian literature. Many training schemes are also initiated by them.

The M.G.N.S. covers the whole of Maharashtra state but in effect has been able to carry out work in 2,500 villages only. It aims at reaching the scheduled tribes and castes and the Harijans. In keeping with Gandhiji's vision of freeing the harijans from the stigma of untouchability and liberating them from

their hereditary profession of scavenging, the Nidhi aims at propogating Gandhian ideas and programmes in a practical and constructive manner. Thus the liberation of scavengers or the Bhangi Mukti programme and the uplift and cleanliness of villages of "Gram Safai" has been taken up through its major activity of Rural Sanitation. The Nidhi has worked in 6 blocks of Amaraoti District and constructed 6,000 sanitary latrines in the past two years alone. Special types of latrines have been tried out and designed, and the "Sopa sandax" has been finally accepted. The Nidhi has linked the programme of installation of sanitary toilets with biogas production, the plants being based on nightsoil.

The Nidhi has set up village industries as well, and has also introduced a course on Gandhian Students upto Graduation.

Ela Bhatt

(SEWA, Ahmedabad)

Ela Bhatt was born into a well to do upper caste Gujarati family of Ahmedabad, her father being an important government official. Nothing in her early life indicated the direction which it would take in later years. She passed her matric examination at 13, and during her college years met her future husband, Ramesh Bhatt, who was however not accepted immediately by her father as a desirable son-in-law due to differences of birth. It took seven years for them to be able to get married, during which time Ela Bhatt worked briefly with the government, during the National Census taking in 1951, she then joined the Law Department of the Majoor Mahajan Sangh and also worked for a time with its Women's wing.

When her daughter and son were born, she was expected to devote herself to her domestic role but she felt frustrated at the thought of not utilising her education and taking up a job, and when her son was four years old, she took up a job with the employment department. The blatant corruption in the department, which involved all officials from the most petty to the highest caused her great anguish and since her views on the subject were known, she was transferred to the university branch of the employment department. There though less obvious,

corruption was a way of life and again her open opposition to the system brought her under great pressure and again her open opposition to the system brought her under great pressure and exposed her to ^slander and humiliation.

On the advice of Shankerbhai Banker, she left and joined the Women's Welfare wing of the Textile Labour Association, the Majoor Mahajan sangh. She began to see things from the point of view of the poor women among whom, she worked and her involvement with the aspect of women's rights and legal status increased. As she gained an insight into their problems. When she was sent to Israel for a short training programme, she was able to see in perspective the work that she wanted to take up on her return to India. The fact that her first and most important priority was to organise the self employed women of the unorganised sector, who had no protection, no facilities. When she started her work with the self-employed, the first problem she encountered was that there was no model in front of her that she could build upon. She wanted to unite the self-employed women into a union which would at the same time be a movement which would constantly search for newer forms for solving the many problems faced by this sector. Yet none of the accepted 'Trade Union' technology was appropriate to circumscribe these women-they had no employer; nor were they even recognised as economic contributions.

It was here that Ela Bhatt felt that the Gandhian framework would be the most relevant from this kind of structure. She had not read deeply of Gandhi but as a practical philosophy she found the use of Satyagraha and non-violence the most effective methodology for achieving the ends of "SEWA". (More especially since the members of Sewa were all women). She also realised that ~~the~~ such time as alternate means of employment were provided for the disadvantaged, there was no substitute for the 'Charkha' at least in the Indian context, providing destitute women as income right at their door-step.

SEWA, Ahmedabad, Gujarat

SEWA or "Self Employed Women's Association" is an organisation of poor working women of Ahmedabad and its surrounding areas. Its membership at present consists of 10,000 women who are self employed vegetable sellers, junk-smiths, hand-cart pullers, block printers, bamboo and cane workers and 'chindi' (used rags) workers.

SEWA was established in 1971, by Ela Bhatt who had been working earlier with the Women's Welfare wing of the Textile Labour Association, a Gandhian Trade Union of Ahmedabad. She felt that these women who represented and formed the major part of the unorganised sector were the most unprotected and exploited, and decided to help them to organise themselves to fight for a better deal from the authorities.

The most urgent needs of these women were credit, raw material and control over the means of production. Over the years, a cooperative Bank has been established which provides credit to the women and has helped to free them from the money lender who charged exorbitant rates of interest. SEWA provides raw material, equipment and marketing assistance, and also takes up the legal battles of the women against the authorities. In its rural areas, SEWA has started creches,

health schemes, literacy classes, and daily cooperatives.

SEWA was the first organisation which tried to unionise the activities of this unorganised sector and it reveals methodologies for reaching the poor, especially women. One methodology which SEWA has found useful is the Gandhian way of 'Satyagraha'. Where present day trade unions function in a climate of violence and 'goodalism' (strong-arm tactics) SEWA in contrast achieves its ends by using the collective strength of its women members as its bargaining power.

SEWA has also thrown light on a hitherto unexplored range of issues: the possibilities of forming unionised structures for the informal sector, the reaching of credit to the assetless poor and the changes required in bank proceedings, and attitudes of bankers, and the whole legal machinery for protecting the poor.

Santosh Goindi

(Kasturba National Memorial Trust)

Santosh Goindi was born in Sialkot in 1932. She belonged to an affluent family, her grandfather being the Diwan of the princely state of Patiala, and her father a big land owner who worked in the Department of Agriculture in Prataogah.

In 1920, under the influence of Gandhiji, her father left his government job and began to support his family by making sports goods. He began to feel that a strong nation could only be created by a morally responsible government and that he could not longer work within the present framework. In this he was supported by his wife, and the whole family embraced Gandhian thought and took to wearing khadi.

Santosh Goindi then imbibed Gandhian influences within her own family at an early age. Her father believed in education for women although he felt that education itself was quite useless on the whole. Yet it gave women self confidence to be educated, he thought, and so he sent his eldest daughter to college and that too alone on a bi-cycle, in the face of such adverse comment. Santosh thus had no difficulty in entering school and college, her sister having made it easier for the rest of them. She joined the Arya Samaj School in Sialkot and both in her home as well as outside, Gandhian ideology was gaining support.

In her home, every Saturday, prayer meetings were held and a symbolic gesture of spinning on the charkha was made. Her mother would participate in picketing and instead of ^{telling} tales of princes and fairies. The children heard stories of heroism and sacrifices for the country. The atmosphere of her home was charged with one dominant emotion: that of a national struggle for freedom and her mother spoke with pride of her readiness to sacrifice her children for the country.

Santosh behn's elder sister did not marry and she too was inspired by her to choose the task of social service and work in a village. Living and working with the village folk, she became more convinced that she should work for these people who should also benefit from the skills and education of people of her class. She adopted a harijan village and began to distribute charkhas (spinning wheels) among them to generate income for them.

After completing her Master's, she wished to take up a job but on her father's insistence, she did a Ph.D, the subject of her research being the backward classes. Subsequently she took up a job as welfare Officer in the Labour Department, although her father was not in favour of a government job. There she had status, money and many facilities but hardly any work, and ultimately after 10 months, she left, not being able to take a salary for doing nothing. She then joined in the Department of Social Welfare, but here too the work was not satisfying although she got some training in keeping accounts. She also ~~took~~ ^{taught} ~~taught~~ ^{taught}

extensively at this time, visiting many institutions and finding many in a process of breaking up. Eventually she left this department also, sickened by the atmosphere of slander and backbiting.

She then began to teach in a Meerut College leaving her earlier and much better paid job, much to the surprise of her students. She felt more at home in her new academic environment, both from the point of view of the atmosphere at work as also the stimulating nature of the work itself. There was also scope here for teaching in villages, her first love. She had however been there only for a short while, when the well know Gandhian worker and a family friend Shyam bhai, visited her to come and work at Kasturba Gram, Indore. Although she was not mentally prepared yet to take up the assignment, she however, visited Kasturba Trust and met the Secretary, Smt. Rajalakshmi. The Trust was planning to start a new Institute which Santosh Goindi felt would be the kind of place that she would like to work in. She immediately decided to leave Meerut and from 1963 to 1971 she stayed at Indore.

In 1971, she moved to Allahabad and set up the "Anant Shiksha Niketan" in Jannipur village. This village was well known for 'goondaism' and it was a difficult job to establish a school for girls, but she received support from her family particularly her elder sister who encouraged her by saying that "one sweeps only where there is dirt".

The villagers were amazed at her courage and she, along with a friend strengthened and expanded the ashram without any financial aid from the government. The ashram provides school and college education for girls.

Santosh Goindi maintained her contact with Kasturba Trust, and in 1980, returned to Indore and became its Secretary.

Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust

(Kasturba Gram, Indore, Madhya Pradesh)

Just as the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi was set up in memory of Gandhiji to collect funds for Gandhiji's practical programme for rural development, the Kasturba Trust was started in 1945 specifically for the emancipation of women and children. The call of Gandhiji for 'Stree Jagran' or 'Awakening of Women Power' inspired millions of people and donations poured in, ranging anywhere from 2 ps. upwards, a huge amount of Rs.13,179,369 was collected only by donations. Indore was chosen as the Head Quarters of the Trust as being centrally located in the heart of India, with branches in 17 states, supporting almost 400 villages centres.

The Trust works towards training village women so that they get a measure of self confidence and can become self reliant eventually. Gandhiji believed that women had tremendous inner strength which should be channelised towards the task of national building.

The trust tries to do this by running several training programmes for women in nursing, mid-wifery, farming, dairying and community development work. It maintains a model demonstration farm and a rural institute for education which specially encourages tribal students.

Kanta Tyagi

(Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram)

Kanta Tyagi belonged to a land-owning family and had never been exposed to a tradition of social service. On the contrary, from early childhood she ^{was} ~~was~~ only the illtreatment meted out to agricultural labourers on the family farms and this was one of the experiences that she unconsciously absorbed and which surfaced later in her life when she began to work with the tribals. Her contact with Gandhiji began in an indirect way in 1947, through her sister's husband Rangopal, who was in close touch with the famous Gandhian Social Worker Thakkar Bappa. It was the year after the partition of India and the major problem confronting all social service agencies was that of rehabilitation of refugees. Thakkar Bappa put Kanta Tyagi to work in a refugee camp, nursing the sick. Although she had no training in nursing, she found that she had great rapport with her patients and was able to handle the work successfully. Thereafter she went to Wardha for training in nursing and subsequently joined the Kasturba Gram, Indore, as a mid-wife.

It was here that she had her first contact with the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, a people who had been battling with poverty, illiteracy and exploitation for centuries.

The staff of Kasturba Gram often took waking tours deep into the tribal areas and on one such tour, Kanta Tyagi went to Mandu and observed the Bhils at first hand, one of the most backward of the tribes, their living conditions shocked her and she took up the challenge thrown to her by one of her co-workers, and decided to stay there and work for them.

Her decision was not an easy one. It meant giving up a way of life and adopting a completely new one since acceptance from the tribals meant total identification with their ways. Kanta Tyagi organised song and dance programmes and encouraged the Bhils to participate in them. She also tried to organise them through health services. Gradually she overcame their suspicions and was able to get their cooperation for her work. The work started with a small hostel with 18 children and today has become the biggest centre for Women's education in the area.

Kasturba Varvasi Kanya Ashram, Nivali.
Madhya Pradesh

As the name suggests, this institution is a school-cum-hostel for tribal children and young girls. Situated at Nivali in the heart of the Bilal district of Nimad in Madhya Pradesh.

In Madhya Pradesh, 20 percent of the population consists of tribals, the original inhabitants of the area, who had once owned land and property. In the eighteenth century, however, under the Maratha occupation of this region, there was an influx of non-tribals and these peoples were pushed out into the hills and jungles where they continued to preserve their tribal culture. They still live in these inaccessible areas, practically untouched by economic development; their only contact with the outside world is through petty officials who exploit them as a result of which they have become hostile towards all 'outsiders' including development agencies and government administrations.

The Kasturba Varvasi Kanya Ashram was initially established in a similar atmosphere of suspicion and hostility but has succeeded in winning the confidence of the tribal people.

Started initially as a creche-school for little children, the ashram has expanded into a 100 acre campus providing education,

health and training services for tribal women where nothing had existed before. Three hundred girls are residing in the Ashram and stay till they clear their school-leaving examination. Some continue to work at the Ashram, while others return to their villages. Many have entered professions such as nursing, teaching, law and administrative services.

The Ashram is a model of Gandhiji's concept of self sufficiency and self help where the students themselves share the entire workload among themselves turn by turn, thus getting training and experience as well as a sense of the dignity of labour, again a very Gandhian concept. The Ashram is a self contained unit and all its requirements of food, water, etc. are met from the 10 acre campus itself.

For those who have to return to their villages, the Ashram proposes to introduce a new subject into its syllabus, that of agro-forestry, which would be relevant to the lives of these people and would later help them towards an additional income through the forest resources on which they depend for their livelihood.

Through the Gandhian methodology of love and compassion, the founder of the Ashram, Kanta Tyagi, has succeeded in winning the confidence of the tribals to such an extent that she has

become not only their principal contact with the outside world but also the arbiter of many local disputes among the tribals. An unorthodox system of "Lok Adalat" or the People's Court functions at Nivali, in which she and local elders decide issues which may otherwise have been taken to court.

In Nivali also, it is proposed to start employment generation projects for the tribals which will not only help them to earn an income but also service their traditional crafts and skills. Gandhiji's idea of establishing cottage industries is demonstrably relevant to areas like Nivali which are relatively untouched by modern 'development', remote and inaccessible, and where it is questionable whether 'development' in the sense commonly understood is even desirable.

Venu Palshikar

Venu Palshikar was born in an ordinary middleclass family and remembers that as a child she always craved for new readymade cloths because she always had to wear cloths stiched at home by hand. There were other brothers and sisters to be looked after and ready-made cloths were expensive to buy, just opposite her house was a clothes shop and she wistfully thought how wonderful it would be to 'own all those clothes'. Later in life, when she came in contact with friends and acquaintances who had been influenced by Gandhiji, she learnt to spin and soon weaving Khadi became a source of satisfaction for her. There was a pleasure now in wearing clothes made from hand spun cloth.

In 1954 she finished her M.A. and in 64, her Ph.D. from Pune University and began to teach there in a College. Her reputation as a teacher was known and soon she was made the Principal of a Degree College of Commerce, the first women Principal of the college. In 1964 she married a colleague, Shri Vasant Palshikar, who was younger than she was and not so highly educated. There was opposition to her marriage in a small town like Pune, but for her it was a happy alliance because her husband was also a staunch follower of Gandhiji.

Unable to cope with the administrative and teaching load, alongwith running her home, she resigned from the post of principal and took to a less heavy assignment. Her resignation was accepted but when her salary was also reduced she decided to leave the college.

Her husband, however, advised her to fight injustice by a different method: by making all the facts public so that in future others would not be victimised in the same way.

Both husband and wife are engaged to-day in organising and conscientising oppressed groups of people to make them aware of their exploitation. Venu Palshikar works with Harijan women in a sweeper colony during the time she can spare from the college teaching. Austerity is a living principle in her family.

Padmaja Rani Bang

Chetana Vikas

Padmaja Rani Bang is the daughter of a well-known Sarvodaya worker of Kerala, Shri Radhakrishna Menon. A product of an inter-state, inter-caste marriage, she herself has married into a well-known Sarvodaya family of Maharashtra, the Bangs. Both parents being full time social workers devoted to Gandhian philosophy, Padmaja was from early childhood exposed to the ideals of community development in Gramdan villages. Her special interest was in education, and after getting her University degree, she toured Gujarat intensively to study the working and problems of the institutions providing basic education. For a year she also worked in the Gandhi Peace Foundation library and documentation section, concentrating on the issue of basic education and educational innovations in the country.

She took a Bachelors Degree in Education from Delhi and then along with her husband, Ashok, spent two years at the Barwasi Seva Ashram in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, a voluntary agency working in a very backward area of the state. Hence she was involved in rural development work, and also gained some experience in organising women groups.

Jai Prakash Narayan's call for a people's movement aroused her to leave her family and work, and spend one year in Bihar,

courting arrest and a month's stay in jail in connection with the Bihar Bandh of November 1974.

Since the last four years she is a full time worker with the Chetana Vikas voluntary agency, which was started by her husband's family and in which the entire family is involved. She coordinates the educational programmes, including adult education centres, follow-up libraries for new literates, day care centre for rural children and non-formal education for their parents. She is constantly experimenting with innovative methods of communication technology and is specially active in the field of women's issues.

Chetana Vikas Sangh

Gopuri, Wardha, Maharashtra

As the name suggests, the organisation was started literally to "Spread Awareness" and has been working in a backward area, Wardha of Maharashtra district.

Two generations of the Bang family are working with the organisation which run svarious programme and schemes for poor families and especially for women. In order to reach women, 'Chetana Vikas' has opened 10 creches and 2 nurseries, which are run with the involvement of parents. The Sangh believes in reaching parents through their children and local women of poor families are employed by them to help in the day to day running of these centres so that they identify easily with the children.

The Sangh is devoted to the Gandhian ideology of simplicity and self reliance. This is reflected in their using only locally produced items for their daily needs and for their creches and nurseries also. The sense of self-reliance has gradually been incalculated into the villagers also.

The sangh uses the medium of drama to create awareness in the villagers about dowry, superstition, alcoholism, etc. and also spread the message to others. It also takes up the cause

of workers employed at the Maharashtra Guarantee Scheme sites and helps them to secure their rightful wages and to learn about payment, measures etc. so that they can fight attempts at exploitation. The workers are instructed at camps held specially for them.

Issues for Gandhian Women

Women's organisations in India especially those which are urban and active are engaged in unified action on the following platforms since the last two years:

- 1 Rape
- 2 Dowry
- 3 Prises

The organisations represent different ideologies such as CPN, CPI, Janata, RSS; different networks such as All-India Women's Conference, NFIW as well as Theatre and Literacy groups like Manush, stree Sangharsh, students from the Universities and so on.

The strength of the formations and their expression has been particularly intense on biology based issues, like rape and dowry where feelings are strong and sex becomes the basis of solidarity and not class, caste, ideological frame etc. On prizes however there is a self-consciousness amongst those who do not want to show opposition to Government and those who do not want to articulate political alliance even through a Women's march.

The question arises; in uniting to express power on biological issues, the basis for the generation of women's power

in society. Issues based on biology such as rape which is a function of women's sexual vulnerability or dowry which is also the consequence of the roles women play and the low value given to them by society again arising out of biological roots are only an evidence of women's vulnerability and not women's power. United actions to protect against these crimes is women's power. United actions to protect against these crimes is women's effort to overcome this vulnerability of collected action. It is not an expression of women's positive power as a revolutionary force playing upon the other forces operative in an environment.

Apart from these biological issues, as mentioned earlier, price is the only other issue on which women have chosen to be active, sometimes across the ideological variations. Why should price become a women's issue and how does it reveal any power of women except as middle class consumers?

Protesting against rise in the price of cylinder gas or scooter fares or bus fares seems trivial and obscene when it is seen in the context of the concerns of the poorest whether they are urban or rural whose consumption lies away outside cylinder gas, sugar, vanaspati or the bus. What then could be powerful issues on which women could exhibit any cleansing force?

1 Solidarity with the poor. How?

Boycotting of goods which have been produced by large business houses. In other words a commitment only to buy goods produced by the poor and to only use goods which are providing incomes to the poor. While it may be difficult to decide how to demarcate the line as many industrial goods including mill made textiles provide employment to the working class such as textile workers, can the conscious selection be made of goods which are being produced by hand by the unskilled, unorganised labour? This will lead to the use of Khadi, handmade shoes, of pots and pans and dishes made of wood and mud and metal by hand rather than otherwise.

It would lead to a certain austerity as the options for consumption are limited. It would mean buying hand pounded rice, buying pickles and processed foods only from small cooperatives and so on.

If all the women's organisations in Delhi or Bombay unite and decide to use their purchasing power only through selected producing organisations whether they are within the city or they decide to adopt the production of some neighbouring villages, there can be a dramatic change on the economic power of what is called the capitalist or the ~~economic power of what is called~~ ~~the~~ trading community.

Middle class women tend to go in for the cheapest even if it means that they would save to buy luxury goods or indulge their children: yet they will lament about price rise. Self-imposed discipline on purchases which would naturally mean denial of certain types of style of living could give moral power to women's hands, which could transform the distribution of economic power as much as the central on consumption and redirecting of purchasing power. By challenging a system women would be more than passive reactors to a corrupt economic system.

2 The second issue on which women have shown more united action is alcohol. Alcohol consumption hits hardest the poverty and labouring household both in urban and rural area. It is true that poor women especially tribal and scheduled caste women participate in the purguing and trading of liquor and are said to be a bread power.

On the other hand the liquor lobby plus those who are concerned with financial resources or revenue for the state are interested in the liquor trade for the obvious reason that it is one of the biggest resources of the state revenue and for the private sector one of the biggest sources for profit. It is what is called the sellers market product.

Stories of liquor deaths in slums or the invidious use of liquor as a source of subordination and bondage in the Chhatisgarh Mine by the employers and the liquor merchants. - Or in the hills of Almora by pharmaceutical firms like Dabur and the political leadership to initiate will people into alcohol addiction - thus opening new markets, - still do not deter government from withdrawing prohibition.

True, legislation by itself has never been a solution to the alcohol problem. This is where women or a women's movement can provide the strongest social force against liquor. If every women's organisation in the neighbourhood decided to make alcohol consumption the priority of social field workers to combat, then there are ways by which it can be cleansed from the neighbourhood household by household, shop by shop.

The Manipuri women "women quest for power" Devaki Jain: 1979 have shown that it can be done for it considers liquor its first enemy.

When the Shramik Sanghathan in Dulia or the Chattisgarh miners and their women met the issue that they were confronted with liquor. Again it has never been a priority for the middle class women that dominate the women's movement in India.

It is the middle classness of the organised united women in India which carried them away from such issues like saving fuel, consumption styles, like alcohol, to prices and dowry.

Harijan

What are formal issues for Harijan women? What are their social issues? Their house bound issues? What are their economic issues? What are their female issues? How do Harijan women articulate their voices as a group and bring it into focus for response. We do not know.

It is common knowledge that it is women from these castes as well as the tribals who are the majority of those who enter the flesh market. It is common knowledge that their entry into the flesh market is not only because of the wickedness of society but because the compulsion of poverty and ignorance draws them into traps. What is the concerted programme for these women? If it only a question of providing employment? It not? what is this not a priority action of women's organisations?

It is these issues which should be the platform for a new ideological formation of women which overcomes the myopia imposed by the urban middle class. These three issues, are consumption restraint and selective consumption habits oriented towards economic support to the poor; restraint on alcohol consumption; and emancipation of Harijans from bondage are in fact issues which had been made priority by Gandhi.

If women who are working in Gandhian institutions ever feel that they have a role which is women's but at the same time rooted in a unique ideology then it is these issues that should be the platform for solidarity as well as action. It is only if women take up the issues which go beyond the points of biology that they will be a political force in any society. So long as they cling to issues which are based on their sex while they may be protecting themselves from their vulnerability which is an important activity: they are doing no more than limiting the sex to the weakness of their sex.

Uniting on biological issues therefore may be necessary aspect women's solidarity but it would not be the basis of a women's movement. A women's movement which wishes to assert that women are a political force and can revolutionise society because of their historical as well as biological experiences has to go out of sex based issues into social issues. It has to take up broader issues of inequality oppression, injustice, exploitation, cruelty, violence.

Most of the systems political or economic operating in the globe as today are spent forces. They have neither been able to tend inequality, inflation or the threat of war. They have violently shaken natural formations and introduced distortions which are compelling the globe towards destruction. No global organisation such as the United Nations or global ideologies such as

Marxism are able to deflect this globe from this path as they are all parties to the existing system.

Women however can create and generate these new energies as they are relatively less politicised or involved or parties to the system. They have so far been passive participants and their cry now is to be active participants. But if their goal is merely to be equal participants in the existing systems and processes then they are doing no more than to add to the crime. If however they consciously chalk out an alternative survival path based on these extremely difficult but exciting strategies such as consumption control or consumption denial, solidarity with the poorest at all costs and so on then they would become active participants but against a new canvas.

It is this option that is open to women and especially to women rooted in Gandhian Institutions who are already trained in consumption restraints, in working with harijan, in being on prohibition councils, It is these women who can, if they unite and take up these stands, generate a new swing and style.

The younger generation of idealists both in India and in the world are looking for some such ideology which has a meaning and has a methodology and demands some sacrifice rather than indulgence. There is no doubt that if these platforms

are strengthened it will attract youth which is always searching for roles which are at the same time idealistic and demand some personal sacrifice.

The opportunity is there, - will they have the energy to reach for it?

Annexure (s)

Annexure

PRESS NOTE

Gandhian Women's Workshop "In quest of an ideology for Indian Women"

The Gandhi Peace Foundation in collaboration with the Institute of Social Studies Trust has brought together 15 women constructive workers from Institutions founded on Gandhian principles in different parts of the country.

Kerala, U.P., Maharashtra, Andhra, Bihar, Tamilnadu and many other States are represented. Famous Institutes such as Sevagram, Wardha, Gandhigram, Tamilnadu, SEWA, Allahabad, Kasturba Trust are all represented.

Taking stock of the various movements flowing in India and outside towards the strengthening of women, these Gandhian workers have gathered to identify what is specifically the Gandhian approach on this issue.

The purpose of the meeting was to reflect on the Gandhian method for social change, how far they have been using it, what should be their particular role as women belonging to this specific ideological frame in response to the issues facing women and society today.

The workshop for four days from 3rd to 6th June 1981 is being held at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Bangalore.

The women resolved to continue this process of dialoguing amongst themselves so that they may gain strength and momentum in their struggle against inequality, oppression, violence, untruth and for a just and peaceful society.

List of Participants present at the Gandhian
Workshop for Women held at Bangalore from
3.6.81 - 6.6.1981 and at Ahmedabad on 8.11.81

1. Smt. Padmaja Bang C/o Ashok Bang, Chetra Vikas
Gopuri, Wardha-442 001
2. Smt. Savitri Madan Maharashtra Smarak Nidhi
Gandhi Bhavan, Mothrud, Pune 411 029
3. Smt. Radha Bhatt Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani
Distt. Almora, U.P.
4. Smt. Venu Palshikar Hemraj Bhawan, Mancher, Pune
5. Smt. Prabha Prabhakar Kasturba Ashram, Kasturba gram
Arsikere (Karnataka)
6. Smt. Kamala Chaudhry Ford Foundation, Lodi Estate
New Delhi
7. Smt. Devaki Jain Institute of Social Studies Trust
S.M.M. Theatre Craft Trust, Bldg.
Deen Dayal Upadhaya Marg,
New Delhi
8. Smt. Rekha Bezboruah -do-
9. Smt. C.P. Chinappa -do-
10. Smt. Vidya Omprakash Kasturba Gandhi Seva Sangam,
Eman Besra, P.O. Uppal, Hyderabad.
11. Smt. Ragini Prem C/o Agro Indus., P.O. Govindpura,
Dist. Mirzapur.
12. Smt. Ela R. Bhatt General Secretary, SEWA,
Opp. Victoria Garden, Bhadra,
Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
13. Smt. Srirangam C/o, The Secretary, Gandh-igram Trust
Gandhigram, Dist. Madurai, Tamil Nadu
14. Smt. Nirmala Menon Seva Mandir, P.O. Rannatkara,
Dist. Calicut, Kerala.
15. Smt. Varmala Behn Women Unit of AVARD, Gram Bharati
P.O. Simultalla, Distt. Monghyr, Bihar.
16. Smt. Sarswathi Natarajan Takkar Bapa Institute, Bananagar
Bangalore-23
18. Smt. Lelawathi Family Planning Association of India
Chandrashekar Bangalore.

18. Smt. Indira Swaminathan Director, Play House Nursery School
 19. Smt. Hemlatha Cavanam Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, A.P.
 20. Smt. Mahadwa Thai Vallabhaniketan, Bangalore
 21. Smt. Suman Bang Chetan Vikas, Gopuri, Wardha
 22. Smt. Vidya Behn Sharm Bharati, Khadigram
 Dist. Monghyr, Bihar.
 23. Smt. Kanta Tyagi Kasturba Vanvasi Kanya Ashram,
 P.O. Nivali, Dist. Nimod(M.P)
 24. Smt. Sushila Dashottar 39, Fatehpura, Udaipur, Rajasthan
 25. Smt. Harvilas Behn Sarvodaya Kendra, P.O. Pindval,
 Ta. Dharampur, Distt. Valsad, Gujarat
 26. Smt. Bharati Bhatt At Post-Mangral Via, Rajpipla,
 Dist. Bharuch-393 145
 27. Smt. A. N. Seth Director, Centre for Agranon-
 Research Training & Education,
 KA-59 Old Kavi Nagar, Gaziabad
 28. Dr. G. Bhave Advisor on Livestock - Development
 Centre of Agranon Research Training
 & Education, KA-59 Old Kavi Nagar,
 Ghaziabad.
 29. Dr. Neelan Gupta Advisor on Work among Women Centre
 for Agranon Research Training &
 Education, KA-59 Old Kavi Nagar,
 Ghaziabad.
 30. Smt. Chandratai Kirloskar Dr. Raikars Bungalow, 884 Deccan
 Gymkhana, Pune-411 004
 31. Smt. Suman Dabholkar C/o Indian Institute of Education
 Prashant, 49 - A-23 Brandwane,
 Pune-411 004
 32. Smt. Anila Rasesh Dholakia SEWA Reception Centre, Opp. Victoria
 Gardens, Bhadra, Ahmedabad, Gujarat
 33. Smt. Renana Jhabwala
 -do-
 34. Smt. Tara Appachu Institute of Social Studies Trust
 S.M.M. Craft Theatre Building
 Sreenivas Mallaya Memorial Trust Bldg.
 Deen Dayal Upadhaya Marg,
 New Delhi.

Gandhian Women's WorkshopAhmedabad - 9-11 August 1981

A workshop was held at Ahmedabad from 9th to 11th August this year, bringing together Gandhian constructive Women workers from all over the country. This workshop was the second of its kind, the first having been held at Bangalore in June. Most of the participants at Ahmedabad had attended the earlier workshop, but many participants were new; at the same time all those present at Bangalore were not able to come to Ahmedabad.

The workshop was preceded on the 8th by a one-day seminar organised by 'CARTE' - Centre for Agrarian Research and Training - with the help of Smt. Suman Bang, one of the participants of the Gandhian Workshop. The CARTE seminar had been linked with the workshop to enable CARTE to gain experience for starting a women's wing, from the varied experiences in the field of the Gandhian constructive workers.

At the Bangalore workshop it had been decided that Smt. Padmaja Rani would be the rapporteur for the next workshop, and she opened the proceedings with a brief recapitulation of the earlier workshop in which a greater part of the time available had been devoted to a sharing of individual experiences on the part

of the participants. It was desirable she said to maintain a continuity with the earlier discussions and discuss the methodology of achieving the programmes outlined earlier, at greater length. Smt. Padmaja Rani also underlined the importance of the groups having chosen Ahmedabad as the venue for the workshop: it was partly to express support to Smt. Ela Bhatt and 'SEWA' and also to enable participants to see for themselves how 'SEWA' had achieved success in organising women, using a purely Gandhian methodology. (Note:- Because of this purpose in mind, the minute details of SEWA's work and their experience are reported here. Works done by other groups would be reported in the quarterly newspaper being prepared by Institute of Social Studies).

The programme for the workshop had been arranged in such a way that discussions would follow from visits to the SEWA Marketing Centre and Bank on issues that presented themselves from such visits and which were relevant to the work experience of all the women activists present.

On the 9th

SEWA's work: A new vista for the women activists:-

The planned field visit on the 9th introduced the participants of the workshop to the rural aspect of SEWA's work, started in 1977. Smt. Anila Dholakia of SEWA described the circumstances

in which the project was started, the difficulties SEWA encountered, the progress it had made and the subtle attitudinal changes that had taken place in the out-look of the people.

The area reflected all the problems associated with rural poverty and exploitation. It was a dry area with seasonal employment only. There was massive unemployment for eight months of the year. These were traditional craftsmen and women reduced to poverty and loss of craft skills by lack of raw materials and exploitation.

SEWA's faith in Gandhian ideology was reaffirmed when the distribution of the ambar charka to starving families provided them employment and more income than many of them had seen in their lives. SEWA provides raw material and markets products at Khadi Gram Udyog.

The SEWA programmes in the village cover several activities: creche, balwadi, a legal aid committee, dairy cooperative, tailoring class, craft training, maternity protection, scheme, arranging of bank loans etc. The people of the village are themselves involved in all the programmes and speak with pride of their connection with SEWA.

The participants at the workshops were interested in knowing how SEWA had overcome the practical problems of working

with women of the poorest sections of the unorganised sector since this concerned them all, especially as Gandhians. They also wanted some elucidation on the methodology specific to organisation.

Smt. Ela Bhatt spoke at length of the formation of SEWA. She said that she had not studied Gandhiji in depth nor started initially with an idea of Gandhian ideology, but she had faith in him because he always talked of the poorest and thought in terms of their total development. When SEWA was started, there was no model in front of the organisers; only a feeling that every man/woman has strength within to fight injustice. After meeting women from the unorganised sector and having discussions with them, SEWA had a better understanding of their problems.

In India unions have been formed only in the industrial sector and the public sector workforce has benefitted the most. The mass of the workforce on the other hand has received no benefits but has been exploited. The organised sector provides employment only to 11 per cent of the workforce and disproportionate attention is lavished on it. If any mill closes down, there is a great to-do and many organisations like NTC are there ~~to~~ to protect the workers. The remaining 89 per cent of the workforce, however, is untouched by any interest. This is the 'unorganised' i.e. the self-employed sector, which can be strengthened only through organisation, only if they have security. But among them only, the unemployment is increasing. No national survey has been done

to find out their skills, what they do, how much they earn etc., and the majority of this sector is women. The Census data also never captures this hidden workforce. Census workers are conditioned, women also do not consider themselves as workers, so there is no official record and hence no planning for them. Who is the average Indian women? She is in the rural areas, illiterate, invisible and a worker. She works hardest and is paid the lowest. If the man is the weaver, he is noted but not the pre-weaving and post-weaving labour expended by the woman - thus she gets no wage either. With the growth of a cash economy, the increase in the value of money has devalued the women's labour in kind. Thus she has no money, no land, no control over income and when she is thrown out of her house, she is absolutely destitute. When a man has money to spend, he buys a transistor or improves his appearance: but does nothing to ease his wife's physical burden.

When SEWA was started, Smt. Bhatt said, all these issues were not so clear but in retrospect SEWA could concretely pinpoint what it had achieved. It had shown that here were the women and they were economic contributors to the country, who were entitled to control over income and to higher wages. SEWA's work had reduced destitution and provided economic support in the form of a bank system.

SEWA reached three kinds of self-employed categories:

- (1) those who work at home, at bidi, chindhi, basket work, (2) those

who vend items like vegetables, junk (3) those who sell labour, like dhobis, head loaders, agricultural labour, construction labour. The first category has many problems in common with the third, but their basic problem is raw material. The items they produce are also made for the poor who cannot afford to pay much. Raw material is expensive or not available and much labour is expended on the items produced. Thus the profit margin is low, wages are small, and effort put in is great. If we wish to revive the artisan or craftsman we must provide a raw material bank which caters to those who depend on it directly. This would even free them from the need for credit. SEWA has been writing to the Planning Commission to consider this issue as of primary importance.

The problems of the third category of workers are the worst and they are the most exploited. Contract labour has the maximum women employed. Labour is surplus, rules are bypassed and there is maximum exploitation. Women also do not come forward because they are thankful for even a little work. To organise this category of women, one has to overcome their constraints like lack of time, household chores, lack of privacy, burden of child care, hostility from the husband, from society. Often even after getting them together and conscientising them about minimum wages, one setback may cause them to slip back into their shell of fear. SEWA had tried to get the minimum wage implemented for cotton pickers. By the time the women

were organised enough, the season was over. And on getting the minimum wage, they went back to the "Seth" and gave him half their wage so that they would get work the next day. Yet one had to wage a constant and continuous battle with the Government to get the minimum wage implemented.

SEWA had also done a lot of work for the second category of women, the vendors, by trying to get wages fixed according to distances carried but their men came in and took over the work while women went back to head loading. The story was the same for block printers. The men of their own families went to work in the screen-printing factories so it was not so easy to identify the "enemy". With chindi workers, SEWA had more success. Chindi workers were the lowest paid where the lowest wage was 50 paise. SEWA used all the Gandhian methods and finally a settlement was made over the table with the Labour Commissioner. Yet over a 9 month period, many of the chindi workers were victimised, and of these most depended entirely on their wages from chindi. Thus SEWA was morally pressurised to start their own Production Centre and ultimately this proved to be the answer and the SEWA shop was opened in the chindi bazaar. Thus the union of the Self-Employed Workers was formed.

Regarding the formations of unions, Sut. Ela Bhatt felt that we must not adopt western models of unionisation but evolve our own structures. There are no laws to protect the unions of the

self-employed like SEWA. One way could be to form cooperatives of all workers especially agricultural labourers. Here one can see the relevance of Gandhi's ideas of socially responsible unions who are responsible for the entire welfare of the labour. The present day unions had degenerated into a wicked and privileged section and become a vested interest. One can expect nothing from them. At the same time the image of trade unions will not change unless the women come forward with the work life. Violence does not solve issues and quickly turns into a law-and-order situation, in which the cause is lost. Gandhian methods have been tried out successful in Ahmedabad by SEWA and the members of SEWA are now ready to organise and absorb new ideas. It was for the constructive workers and voluntary agencies to show the way, she felt that all labour; agricultural and marginal farmers, and artisans should all unite into one formal structure called the R.P.O. - Rural Poor Organisation, and they should be entitled to all the benefits of traditional trade unions. She was in touch with the I.L.O. on this issue and had requested them to consider the self-employed on an equal footing with the organised sector. It seemed highly unjustified that an organisation like I.L.O. should be set up only to handle 6 per cent of the 11 per cent of the organised labour force.

Smt. Bhatt also suggested that the minimum wage should be the same all over India and if government was interested in doing, it could be implemented.

Also, government schemes did not reach the poor - many of them did not know about them. There should be a system of propagating schemes and making them easy to avail of. A labourer has to go to the Secretariat in order to get a form to get a subsidy for purchasing a cow. The bank does not give the loan till the subsidy is cleared - and vice versa. To avoid this kind of harassment of the rural poor, delivery of services should be at one centre, at the taluka level.

Voluntary workers should request the government to provide E.G.S. everywhere, and to see to its proper implementation. At present, wages are not paid and officials are highly corrupt. In the rainy season, some alternative employment should be provided. The E.G.S. is a good place to get women organised. Organisation leads to acquisition of self-confidence and integration between the rural communities and the urban women who work with them. Women have a special role to play in this work because women in India still have a credibility which could be used to advantage. Women also have a better economic sense and this should be used for the betterment of society as a whole.

The participants at the workshops were anxious to know about the formation of cooperatives and asked Smt. Bhatt how she had organised them so successfully. One problem raised was the harassment of cooperatives by auditors, especially when they did

not offer bribes. Another was about the SEWA bank (which had already been discussed during the visit to the SEWA bank).

Smt. Bhatt then elaborated a little on the various cooperatives of chindi, vegetable, bamboo, printers and sweepers. They all had a large degree of participation from the rural women themselves and the women had to be trained to handle administrative procedures. Gujarat government was also progressive in its outlook and bought all the bamboo were produced by SEWA's members. SEWA provided training to improve their skills.

The Sweepers had been given a big contract by the dairy cooperatives (five of them) had been formed with the assistance of the NDDB and SEWA had used the NDDB's infrastructure of spearhead teams and training programmes. Smt. Bhatt wanted to federate all the cooperatives under the bank.

The introduction to the project by Anila Dholakia and the speech by Smt. Ela Bhatt were interspersed by songs and speeches by the rural women members of SEWA. They spoke freely after some initial shyness of their own responses and their husbands' to the efforts of SEWA to bring them together, and the sense of an identify and dignity that they had acquired as women emerged as a strong impression.

Most of the participants were impressed by the replicability of the SEWA experiment, particularly the bank and were anxious to implement similar schemes within their own agencies.

On the 10th:-

The discussions on the 10th referred at some length to the Bangalore workshop, and how Mrs. Devaki Jain had felt the need to get women constructive workers together on the common platform of a Gandhian ideology. The highlights of the Bangalore workshop were summed up, namely the sharing the personal experiences and problems which had drawn the women together through the realisation that they were common namely the identification of priority issues such as intra-household equality of men and women, organisation of women, dowry, equal wages for equal work and equal opportunities for work, opposition of mechanisation and the harijan issue.

The participants had agreed that while it had been thought that economic dependence was the cause of intra-household subordination of women, it was really so, and that most women were suppressed by fear; of men, of society, of their own bodies, and there was no real coexistence.

In order to tackle these problems, women should be constantly involved in discussions to create awareness, be made aware of their status while men who are already 'liberated' should be made to participate and other convinced with patience, not militancy.

In their personal lives, the women had felt that more stress should be laid on simplicity and implementing the basic philosophy of Gandhiji.

The Bangalore issues were summed up by saying that most of the participants present were already working on the programme outlined at Bangalore, and it would be useful to elaborate individual experiences which highlighted how these issues have been tackled.

As the participants spoke, the following priorities emerged:

- (1) dowry (2) the image of women in films and posters
 - (3) unemployment (4) prohibition (5) the need to prepare the mental ground for women to fight for equal rights.
- This involved thinking of how to unite women, who have no time or energy and how to arouse them to help themselves.

Since the views expressed as to the order of priority were divergent, the group felt that dowry for instance should be redefined and the issues divided into urban and rural according to their importance for the area. It was difficult to convince a rural woman that she should not take a dowry from her parents since that was all she got of her parent's assets. This example was given by a worker from Bihar. For tribal areas like those of Madhya Pradesh, men were required to pay the bride price and while

'dowry' acquired a different meaning, here also the custom was often used to oppress women. Thus dowry was a complex issue and it would be difficult to make it a common cause at the national level although in areas where it was a social evil, it could be tackled locally - dowry weddings should be publicly boycotted as a strategy.

Similarly, the image of women in cinema, advertisements, posters etc. was an issue affecting only urban women and could be tackled by those individually who were affected in their area. One methodology would be to form a study team or spearhead team, which would take up one film, analyse it, record objections and take up the issue with the Censor Board. The issue was important, even though restricted, since a large percentage of the future generations were being morally effected by the media.

The issue of unemployment and equal wages, however, concerned all women, urban or rural and this could be an unifying factor to organise women. The women uniformly expressed their concern at the fall in women's employment. Wherever it was a question of providing employment to only one member of a family, invariably men were employed. It should be possible for government to restrict certain categories of employment only to women. Creches, facilities for women were often used as excuses to not employ women.

The other issue which could be a national one was prohibition since the consumption of liquor was one of the prime cause of the subordination of women particularly in poverty households. It was felt that the well-to-do set the trend in drinking and that a dialogue should be initiated with them as well.

The women agreed that while they continued to work within their own organisations, tackling local issues, they should also unite at a national level in order to be able to influence policy decisions of the government regarding these major issues concerning women. On employment, the government should be forced to recognise the right to work and be made to implement equal wages. The EGS should be set up and properly implemented in each State. Banks should be motivated and new schemes called for from the government.

The strategies used to achieve the above goals could be (1) agitations, (2) padyatras, (3) satyagraha, (4) an anti-dowry day all over the country during the marriage season, (5) propagation of literature among women's groups/others, and (6) movement of activists from one State to another to exchange experiences and disseminate information; seminars and workshops to exchange experiences. Organisations like Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) could play a useful role by circulating a news letter

linking sister organisations together and giving information on various schemes of the government.

Some participants felt that agitations were not a very successful method - not only did they have a seasonal pattern of 'rise' and 'fall' but they also very easily acquired a political colouring after which it became difficult for the neutral activist to work in rural areas. Agitations were also easier to organise in some areas than in others - in Gujarat for instance, it was difficult while in Maharashtra it was easier. From this point of view, 'padyatras' were an effective method of reaching and involving all classes of women. They could be used to conscientise women on issues like casteism, reservation, evils of drinking. Participants in padyatras also acquired confidence. However it was important to maintain a momentum between padyatras by organising programmes on the issues discussed, to prevent a slide back into apathy.

The discussion on the 10th ended by the participants reaffirming their faith in Gandhian ideology and its relevance more particularly to the world of to-day. At the same time they recognised the need to strengthen Gandhian institutions themselves, to analyse their failures - the lack of younger people in the movement, for instance - before they could unite to fight for a common cause.

The follow-up on the workshop would consist of (1) a workshop at Kausani in early may next year, (2) a programme of padyatras from January 30th to 12th February, 1982 to focus on prohibition (3) a system of exchanging news i.e. each voluntary agency would send in reports of its work and experiences to ISST who would publish and circulate a quarterly news letter.

On the 11th: (Informal Session):-

On the 11th since most of the participants were still present at the spot, an informal trip was arranged in the Ahmedabad city to visit SEWA's urban work areas, Jyoti Sangh (an institution committed to defend women against the atrocities and injustices on them) and Samaj Kalayan Sangh (a voluntary agency conducting about 200 Balwadis in Ahmedabad district and committed to child education.)

This workshop was not restricted to just ideological discussions But all the discussions were based on the down-to-earth field experiences of the activists and so were more meaningful. It was a rich experience of introspection and analysis for all the participants.

SUMMARY OF GANDHIAN WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

The Institute of Social Studies Trust decided to organise a series of workshops in collaboration with Gandhi Peace Foundation for Gandhian Women Workers. The first workshop in this series was held in Bangalore - 3rd June, 1981 to 6th June 1981.

Mrs Devaki Jain, the Director, expressed the purpose of having such a Workshop in her opening speech. She said, 'This workshop is meant to strengthen women by providing them a platform to exchange their views and share their experiences. She continued 'we all have certain things in common - all of us are women associated with Gandhian Organisations working for our own families as well as outside. Being women what are views at different levels? Are there any differences between our views and those of man? If there are differences, then how do we differ? What does it mean to be Gandhian woman? What is our vision of a lawful and peaceful society? To this end we have to formulate programmes to fulfill our vision.

After this comprehensive introduction, Mrs Jain, highlighted some of the problems faced by women, and stressed the need for finding practical solutions to these problems. These should be of help not only to Gandhian women but also to other women to whom the services are directed she said, and added that we must also explore the possibilities of spreading Gandhian ideology in our target area.

"One such possible solution could be the development of Khadi Industry". Some of us are connected with such organisations. Many of these organisations have big production centres where hundreds of women are working but there is hardly any organisations of these workers which will air their professional and personal problems.

The second possible solution could be the construction of lavatories under the rural sanitation programme. The third could be the development of cottage industries.

Ever since the Governmental control on the production wool has been lifted, many cotton mills have been taking over wool production. This is likely to affect 16,000 to 1,00,000 Mill women who will be rendered jobless. Efforts were made to change this policy but were not fruitful. Had a demonstration been launched, it would have been, perhaps, illegal.

After introducing themselves, the participants related their experiences and the hurdles overcome by them during the course of their work.

This meeting was called so as to form such a powerful women's group which could tackle the problems of sister organisations and be of help in their times of need.

SEWA, during this period, was going through difficult times in connection with the Schedule caste reservation policy. To understand and assist SEWA, it was decided to hold the next meeting at Ahmedabad from the 9th to the 11th of August '81. To begin with all the women participants first saw the working of SEWA and understood the problem faced by the organisation. The next day the issues focused were as follows: Dowry, the image of women as portrayed in films and advertisements, unemployment, mental preparation of women to struggle for equal rights.

A participant from Bihar viewed dowry from a different perspective. She observed that only sons were given a share in their father's property and that dowry was the only way a daughter would get a part of her share of the property. Therefore, it is difficult to dissuade a girl from taking a dowry with her. As opposed to this system, amongst the tribals it is usually the groom's family that pays a bride-price. This is why it was felt that the problem will have to be solved at the local level.

The issue of the image of women as portrayed in films, advertisements and posters was also discussed. A direct impact of this portrayal usually effected urban women only. The workshop decided to convey its views to the Censor Board.

As far as unemployment and the issue of equal wages is concerned, it effects both, the urban and rural women, equally. The decrease

in participation of women in the labour force was also discussed.

Decisions were also taken about the future programmes to be undertaken, which is as follows: a 'Kadh Yatra' from the 30th of January to 12th February '82, as quarterly newsletter would be brought out by the Institute of Social Studies Trust to facilitate exchange of information amongst the different organisations.

It was decided to hold the next meeting at Kausani.

PROCEEDINGS OF GANDHIAN WOMEN'S WORKSHOP
HELD IN
LAKSHMI ASHRAM, KAUSANI 1st-3rd NOV.1982

Proceedings of the 3rd Gandhian Women's
Workshop - held at Laxmi Ashram, Kausani

Introduction:

The third workshop of Gandhian Women was held from 1st-5th November 1982, at Laxmi Ashram, Kausani, in the Kumaon Hills of Uttar Pradesh.

The beautiful surroundings, with the Kosi river, the pine forests, the snow-capped peaks and the inspiring atmosphere and example of Laxmi Ashram, did much to enhance and enrich the discussions and interaction that took place during the workshop.

There were six sessions over three days and the last two days were devoted to field visits to nearby villages where Lakshmi Ashram has been involved in developmental activities.

The workshop was a "Free-format" and totally informal one, with only broad outlines of topics indicated for each session. A chairperson was nominated for each session, to facilitate conduct of proceedings, but participants were free to bring up any issue they thought relevant/imp. and did so.

The discussions took place entirely in Hindi. There were about twenty-five participants and observers. The senior students of Lakshmi Ashram as well as the staff, attended many of the sessions.

Session I:

Smt. Radha Bhatt briefly welcomed the participants and expressed the hope that the workshop being held in such inspiring surroundings, would prove fruitful for all present.

She referred to the association of Sarla Behn with Lakshmi Ashram and noted that several close colleagues of Gandhiji had passed away this year. She suggested that a message of condolence could be sent to Dr. Sushila Nayyar sister of Mr. Pyarelal, who had just expired.

After this the participants and observers briefly introduced themselves mentioning the highlights of the activities they were involved in and indicating their interest or expectations from the workshop. Many said they had come to learn and to find answers for their problems-organisational or otherwise-through the workshop. Some had attended the previous workers' ~~workshop~~ but for many it was the first one. See Annexure I for brief profiles of participants.

When the introductions were over, Radha Behn referred to the previous two workshops and mentioned the chief issues discussed in them. In the first workshop, held at Bangalore the main issues discussed were Khadi, environmental health and income-generation for women. However for Radha Behn, the most memorable experience of the

workshop was the acquaintance and personal knowledge of so many wonderful "Gandhian" Women". She was particularly impressed with the story of Nirmala Menon and felt that even though Ms. Menon was not present at this workshop, her presence could be felt.

Radha Behn appreciated the continuity provided by this series of workshops and the chance they offered for women of all ages, with Gandhian ideals, working in far-flung areas on their respective projects, in their respective organisations, - to come close to each other and share their experiences, problems, solutions etc.

She noted that one common factor among those present was their adherence or belief in Gandhian ideals/concepts (she did not like to use the word ideology) - and their wish to propagate these values more widely.

Another common factor was their womanhood-therefore the group could consider what they wished to do or say as women - wives, mothers, sisters - in bringing about development and social change. Should women try to follow the paths trod by men or should they try to find a separate identity?

Referring to the second workshop held under the aegis of SEWA Ahmedabad, she noted that a lot of the discussions centred round the crisis Sewa was facing at that time, and on the issues

arising from it. The workshop had expressed solidarity for SEWA and the stand it had taken. Other issues discussed were social crimes against women, vulgar projection of women through media etc. and prohibition.

It was mentioned that KGMFF at its last meet had planned a Padyatra from 30th January-12th February 1982. To create awareness and arouse women on these issues (Stree Shakti Jagaran Andolan?)

The first issue of the ISST newsletter to link Gandhian Women in all parts of the country, was distributed to the participants, as also a summary of previous two workshops.

Session II

In this session Smt. (Ms.) Indu Tikkikar addressed the participants, dwelling on the underlying philosophy and principles on constructive work for development and social change. She noted that humanity in man lay in his power of discrimination, his ideals and aspirations towards a better life and his realisation and consciousness of the unity of life and experience. These are some of the perennial truths, enshrined in the Hindu's scriptures. She felt that the Gandhian perspective gave practical shape to these values in the modern age of science and technology. She did not favour the term "Ideology" vis-a-vis the Gandhian view of life and society - preferred "Vichar" to "mad". In an

age of rampant materialism and consumerism Gandhi spoke of "Sarvodaya" - protest against evils and exploitation of all kinds. Gandhi's constructive work was to aim at development of study in the physical as well as the spiritual sense.

While other spiritual leaders/thinkers accepted the use of violence under certain circumstances as a means of bringing social change, Gandhi was the first to uphold non-violence as the only means for it. She mentioned that the true change in society as well as in the individual, through self-realisation and awareness, could come through the Gandhian view of life.

Khadi spinning was conceived as an unifying force in the country wherein labour would own its means of production. Society was not to be based on exploitation but on mutual support. In the ancient times some women achieved spiritual things, but today women who enter public life through politics, are unable to maintain their value and integrity.

However constructive workers were free to choose a different option, to take a different chance. These were listed by Indu Behn as (i) commitment to protection of the environment (ii) building up self-awareness, self-evaluation and self-confidence in order to be a successful and effective worker. (iii) commitment to regional development and self-sufficiency and de-centralisation.

Here Ms. Tikkikar related an anecdote when Gandhiji addressed the protesting mill workers of Manchester who had lost their job as a result of the "Swadeshi" movement. He sympathized with their plight but explained the condition of the rural producers in India who were forced to depend on raw material coming from distant shores. He was able to convince them of the rationale of his belief that primary needs of a community should be met locally - and in the economy of permanence.

Ms. Radha Bhatt commented that the centralisation had become the norm in the present social set up. She felt that leadership is important but should remain within limits, the impetus for the change has to come from within the community.

She noted that "Khadi" has become nearly a commercial commodity - too expensive for the common man to afford. Thus the original concept of khadi is being forgotten.

She felt that qualitative work is more important than ~~mere~~ numbers reached and said that she applied that belief in the case of Lakshmi Ashram. Also, organisations of constructive workers should limit their size as undue and quick expansion inevitably brought in many evils and problems. Concrete examples of this phenomenon are to be seen ~~and~~ today.

A case in point was KVIC whose centralised planning left no room for contact and manoeverability at the regional level.

There followed detailed discussion of the ills of KVIC and the system generated by it. Almost all participants expressed their dissatisfaction with KVIC. Reference was made to Vinobha Bhave's direction to leave Khadi Commission and make a Khadi mission - where individual organisations would have greater say in decision making etc. Ms. Kamala Lela referred to the meeting of the khadi mission at Paunar in the second week of January 1983.

Vidya Behn from Khadi Gram, Bihar and Shakuntala Behn from Kumari Kata, Assam, related their experiments with pricing and sale of Khadi even within the existing framework. In Khadi-gram, the price was brought down by about Rs.2/- without any losses being incurred; while in Kumari Kata, the spinners and weavers of 'endi' silk were paid double the KVIC rate without affecting the price structure.

Here it was pointed out that efforts to provide increase in income should go along with guidance on how to spend the income. Otherwise there was great risk of distortion of values and up-setting the balance in the lives of rural people. But this kind of input became difficult when implementing government programmes. Results have to be shown in numbers, targets have to be reached - this left no time for interaction with people.

All these comments led to the suggestion by Krishna Kumari Behn that a memorandum expressing participants issues, should be

presented to KVIC. Anila Behn mentioned that after a meeting at Ahmedabad, the entire matter and all problems were discussed with KVIC but nothing had come of it. Hard facts and good documentation were required on which the demands could be based.

The dispute between the Khadi Board and Khadi Commission further complicated matters for Khadi workers and organizers.

It was decided that these problems should be tackled through protest as well as constructive work.

Each organisation should document its own experiences with khadi; all the facts could then be put together and presented to KVIC in a memorandum. But Gandhian organisations should also protest by boycotting the KVIC connection and being prepared to face whatever hardships this way entails since certification was found to be such a burden & constraint it should be rejected and independent marketing channels should be opened.

It was agreed that publicity should be given to the views expressed and the suggestions mooted through sarvodaya press service and magazines like Maitreyi and Kasturba Darshan.

It was also suggested that specially trained persons who could educate the masses regarding the significance of khadi, should be appointed for all Khadi programmes. Salesmen of Khadi should

also be oriented to their role in order to be effective.

Mrs. Jain summed up the discussion on Khadi by saying that one output of the workshop could be initiate a dialogue with KVIC at the highest level; this should be based on well-researched, well documented facts and should be in the form of a 2-3 day interaction with top KVIC people. Otherwise, it was likely to be as futile as earlier attempts.

In case of failure to get responsive action from KVIC there could be a movement for Gandhian groups to form their own network of non-certified agencies and work out their own production and marketing channels.

In her concluding remarks, Radha Behn reflected on styles of organisations; how evils could creep into Gandhian organisations and they should always be alert against it. Special efforts should be made to ~~make~~ these organisations free of exploitation and non-violent in the true sense of the term. In the modern world 'man' is lost in society and has become a cog in the wheel: Gandhian perspective was to fight this trend. Also women's organisations should not take on masculine names and styles but should develop their own.

The third session was chaired by Uttara Behn. Vidya Behn introduced the topic for discussion: Role/content of constructive work and creating peoples awareness.

Gandhiji believed that constructive work for social change should be carried out parallel to government programmes. His projects for Khadi, animal husbandary, adult literacy, education, peoples organisations and neighbourhood self-sufficiency were meant to be implemented through community participation.

In Khadigram, these principles were being followed since its inception in 1956. Through their work, the organizers had developed considerable inter-action with the people and had come to know the particular problems of the women.

They were now involved in awareness building among women in 22 villages in the Santhal Parganas. The villages are quite small, comprising of 18-150 families in each village. This is because it is a custom among the people (tribals) to abandon homes if anyone dies there. The tribals occupied this land in earlier years when land laws were not so strict and were not enforced. Also the villages are scattered.

Earlier men used to collect firewood and go to the city to sell it. After toll taxes and other rules were introduced, men could be arrested and fined etc., therefore women took on the task of carrying and selling the firewood, leaf cups etc. However they faced harassment and exploitation of all kinds to which they were forced to submit.

When Renana from Sewa (Ahmedabad) visited them, the women eventually admitted they disliked what they were doing and would like a way out but could find none. However, the awareness of their plight has come and they would welcome a solution.

25 of these women are being trained in Charkha spinning and getting a stipend of Rs.3/- per day. Shram Bharati has initiated this programme on its own, with no help from KVIC or anyone else. The intention is to start a SEWA and to provide alternative sources of income for these women.

Anila Behn asked whether SEWA (Ahmedabad) could help in any concrete way. Vidhya Behn replied that one project had already been forwarded to SEWA and she hoped that suggestions and help may come during the organisers training camp at Ahmedabad to which she and her colleagues were going.

As alternate income source, some of the tribals were against charkha-spinning, therefore, this was not suggested unless asked for.

Vidya behn said she was exploring the possibilities of bidi-making and mentioned that in Bihar women get Rs.3/- only per thousand bidis as compared to men who get Rs.7/- for the samework. It would be easy enough to motivate them to go to strike against such practices but how could the voluntary agencies ensure that they filled their stomachs during the strike?

This statement was followed by several others where similar discriminatory practices were highlighted.

Uttara behn disclosed that in some districts of Gujarat Rs.80/- is paid for 1 ton of sugar cane if delivered by truck. The same amount of sugar cane delivered by bullock-cart would fetch Rs.8/-.

Since the minimum daily wage rate in Gujarat is Rs.5.50 many migrant labourers come there, who are willing to work or sell their products, for any account offered. These migrant labourers come mostly from Khandesh in Maharashtra.

Vidya behn also remarked that they would like to install toilets for the Santhali women but faced a problem of scarcity of water. Even the one "lota" needed for ablutions and to keep the water seal - was hard to come by. Radha behn stated that Laxmi Ashram was proposing to install gopuri latrines and to try and overcome the cultural constraints against it - among the hill people.

Kamala tai pointed out that one of the targets of constructive workers should be to organise a struggle against sexual harassment and exploitation of women.

Also, education has become commercialized and meaningless. True education means training and disciplining of the mind

so as to bring about changes or guide the thinking process. This could be another focus of constructive workers.

There was also considerable discussion on the pros and cons of government programmes being implemented by social organisations. It was felt that the programmes themselves were not bad, but usually suffered in implementation. Several participants related their experiences in undertaking implementation of government programmes.

An example was Sharam Bharati's application to run a TRYSEM programme. Though it was duly sanctioned no money was forthcoming for two years apparently because of political reasons and because no bribe was paid. Anila Behn mentioned a similar experience with TRYSEM. On the basis of the promised sanction, SEWA started the training and when no funds were available, they had to carry on somehow because they could not let down the people. In such circumstances, when the social organisation is let down by the government, the financial loss is nothing compared to the loss of trust of the people.

Radha behn commented that no scheme or constructive work should be undertaken where people's awareness would not be advanced. She felt that the time for dependence on individual leaders had passed (People of that high status were rare now) and that the era of teamwork and people's leadership had arrived.

To illustrate this, she related some episodes that had occurred in the region.

In the hills, women collect stacks of pine needles to put on the floors of cowsheds, for warmth. Manure is also formed from it. In one village when all the nearby trees were cut, women had to walk further to collect their stock. They realised this and decided to stop cutting trees. Forest preservation automatically started in that area.

In the same village, a soapstone quarry was started and workers started carrying loads of stones through the paths which the women used to go to their farms and to the forest. The women protested and a conflict started with the contractors. The struggle was protracted and several had to be fought before the quarry was closed and the issue resolved. Women took the lead in the whole process which took several years.

Lakshmi Ashram's work in the region had prepared the ground, but the initiative was taken by the village women who also had the determination to continue and raised the funds to support the struggles.

Similarly, in another case, women asserted their right to belong to the forest Panchayat. Smt. Vidya Omprakash said that in the current era some rethinking on constructive work is required. Focus should be on the individual and all plans should create on the person. Parallel lines of development should be promoted, by NGOS Gandhian institutions got carried away on the wave of independence

and became dependant on government funds. The movement became diluted and became centred on money (resources) and not on men. Now, their work should go on in depth and not be diversified. Character building should be the main aim, and organisation of people should be through the satyagraha rather than the trade union approach. Gandhian institutions should try to remain as pillars of idealism and noble values.

Ms. Devaki Jain raised the question of funding for voluntary organisations. Many feel they should not be implementors of government policy. But where could they get funds to pay their staff, arrange meetings etc. could funds be raised from the people they were working with? This was not yet possible in India.

Smt. Krishna Kumari related her experience with funding resources for constructive social work. For the last 9 years her group has been conducting a seven-day camp which costs about Rs.2,500/- somehow the money has always been available. She felt that work should be started and if it is worthwhile, the money will come. In their camps, contributions are requested; when the requirement is met, no more is collected.

A harijan basti was adopted: when villagers saw the good work being done, the Shiv Mandir was put at their disposal. These organizers now run a balwari, an adult education centre and sewing and embroidery classes. Smt. Vidya Omprakash felt that those who have benefited from Gandhian ideals and guidance should

not get totally submerged in the modern currents. They should engage in awareness building and integrated village development. The accent should be on the young who will form the next generation. Gandhian constructive work should be for nation building, character building and social change.

People who believed in this would find themselves going against the current and would be faced with lot of obstacles. Often they found themselves ^{losing} ~~losing~~ hope and despairing. Therefore workshops like the present one were so helpful - one met and exchanged experiences etc. with others with the same beliefs, same problems.

She added that their emphasis should be on decentralisation, and ⁱⁿ⁻man rather than money should be the focus. There was great need ~~to~~ to-day for constructive workers of the Gandhian ^{ideology} ~~whose~~ examples could be set through personal and organisational choices of modes. Some expansion of activities is essential but in her opinion "deep casting" was more important than "broad casting".

Kamla tai: Small projects can be started without external funds, but for larger projects, other sources have to be tapped. If one is strong enough, money can be taken from any source. The source should not be able to put any pressure on the integrity and strength of the institution.

Gandhi had the stature, so he could take the hospitality of the work-shop and money from Birla.

Smt. Jain suggested that as an outcome the groups participating could take up one common constructive programme apart from the programmes they were already carrying out.

Smt. Vidya Omprakash stated that family should be taken as the unit for developmental efforts - rather than western - inspired women's liberation - which separated men and women. She felt that man - woman relationships and responsibilities should be classified for the future. Women already have their own work and responsibilities, they should not be obliged to take on more.

This point was later classified by Smt. Jain who made a plea for separate planning and policies for women - for a while - in order to redress the imbalance that exists to-day. It is important to promote solidarity of women and to develop their consciousness of women, as individuals and as vehicles of social change.

Shakuntala Behn related a very striking episode that had occurred in Kumarikata in Assam. Refugees had settled for several years/generations in some reserve forest land. They would periodically face eviction orders, their huts would be destroyed but they would rebuild and carry on. In 1964, the Revenue Minister

ordered that the settlement be wiped out once and for all. People came to the gramdan office for help and got permission from the collector to do satyagraha. But the ultimate moment, they could not decide what to do though they did want to stand against the corruption etc. Finally the women found a solution. They rushed forward and held on to the trunks and legs of the elephants brought to crush their homes, and started praying to them and invoking the spirits. The elephants refused to move forward and the operation had to be stopped. No further eviction was tried though the issue is not yet settled.

Sugandhti behn raised the issue of ^{caste} she also mentioned casteism in use of wells and water - sources provided under government schemes. Anila behn cited similar experiences in Sewa's work in villages.

Women got together for everything but water. This shows that they accept the new ideas superficially but not at heart. The process of change is very slow.

Kunjumal bhai said that in the hills, harijans are materially well off, but remain segregated. This is accepted tacitly even by official agencies. In other environments and in the cities, the differences are not kept up but the same people revert to old norms and habits in the villages.

The Gandhian groups in the hills organize a community tea on 2nd October where all mix and eat together.

Ms. Jain commented that identification of the scheduled castes was meant to give them benefits and status and help in upward mobility. But this idea had backfired. She referred to the dispute/controversy between Gandhi and Ambedkar where one favored assimilation while the other was for reservation. It appeared now that reservation on basis of caste was not helping the scheduled castes and had created a backlash.

Mrs. Jain also stated her belief that women should write as women. They have their own perspective and should draw on it and strengthen themselves as women. The states for place and progress are greater for women and they have greater strength also but must realise this. She felt that women were ripe for action and were looking for inspiration, ready to ignite women, as homemakers, need peace more than men.

Gandhiji saw women's development in two phases. Phase I was women for women and Phase II was women for society.

Smt. Vidya Omprakash stated that as Gandhians no caste distinctions should be acceptable to them.

Tadha behn commented that it was necessary to build up self-awareness and self-confidence in women. As of now, women consider themselves as inferior and therefore do not venture to

take initiatives. The best way to build up and strengthen women, is for them to take up social, humanistic issues rather than individual ones.

The same thing could be said for scheduled castes and tribes. It appeared that discrimination against them has increased in the last 25 years and this could be attributed to some extent to government policy of reservation. Caste was being emphasized rather than wiped out.

She quoted an episode: a valuation Committee interviewed students and through their pointed questions established the caste of a student publically. The girl was very upset, as caste distinctions were totally non-existent at Lakshmi Ashram. After that L.A. stopped taking the grant for which the valuation Committee was sent.

Ms. Venu Ralsikar referred back to the question of foreign funds for development programmes. She said sometimes in development projects with foreign collaboration, project staff were highly paid and had an ostentatious life-style. This was inadvisable and set a bad example to the people who began to feel money was freely available and began to expect benefits without putting in any effort themselves.

It was generally agreed that job reservation should be on the basis of poverty i.e. economic condition and not caste.

Bharati behn said that their group had decided while drawing up a development project that funds would be collected from different sources and not from any one source. Also 75% of the contribution should be from local resources, only the remainder could be met through foreign funds. They also believed that the project should not have too many outsiders on its staff; the target village should have a mixed group of inhabitants - only then was integration possible. The minimum time necessary for building up contacts in the village is one year.

Bharati Behn went on to describe the activities of her organisation and their experiences with implementation of appropriate technology schemes - like smokeless chulaus, gobar gas plants and sanitary latrines. She also related experiences regarding adult education and co-operatives and organising women through awareness building discussions, towns, camps, festival etc; and of their schemes to provide employment to women in off-season months.

In Session Five topic of discussion was - awakening of womens power and how to campaign for it. Bharti Behn said that it was difficult to take up the campaign on a national scale at one time, but small campaigns spread over a year, were possible.

In the previous workshop, images was decided as an issue to be focussed on. However, in spite of best intentions nothing could be done by the group as a whole. One issue therefore could

be limiting. She noted that the first step would be to help women in their household work, so that their drudgery is lessened - only then could women be free to think about or do other things.

Durga Behn wanted to know what could be done to improve the lot of ordinary housewives?

Radha Behn said that so many development programmes are going on-women could try to benefit from them according to their needs and conditions.

She continued that while plains people are attracted and impressed by the beauty of the mountains, there is no time for this in the times of the hill people themselves.

By the time they are twenty-five and have one child, women age in the hills. They have to toil from dawn to dusk in tough conditions for mere survival.

Whereas it is desirable that balance should come in their lives, the spirit and independence of hill women should not be put in jeopardy.

She stated that it is very difficult to know what exactly will touch women, when and how to arouse them to protest, to assert themselves. No outsider can stimulate this - the impetus comes

from the women themselves and then it is really strong.

She gave the example of the women of garud. Some women took to drink only to keep warm, not realizing its true consequences. They became aware of its evil effects only after an episode when a woman got drunk had to be rescued etc. Still no one made a move to protest until one day one old woman came forward to protest and to pick it. She said she had nothing to lose and was going to die anyway, - so why not have her say? Subsequently 3,000 women jointed here, while the men kept in the background. The most illiterate and backward women were sent to the DM & spoke very frankly to him.- They threatened to set fire to the liquor shop if it was not closed. When the DM threatened them with arrest they said he would need 3,000 pairs of them. This episode showed that a movement/awareness can be spear-headed by one person, but needs a mass-base to succeed.

It was felt that it was necessary to publicise examples where women have shown their strength. Among illiterate women, the word cannot be spread in ~~print~~^{print}. Therefore the method has to be verbal and visual. Radha Behn suggested that all participants could make a "Padyatra" of 20 days to a month, to take the knowledge and examples of women's strength to the villages. If seeds are shown their way, they are sure to sprout sometime. Such a journey would also recharge the batteries of the villagers. If they go in all humility, they will be accepted by the villagers and will be able to learn from the experience. It is more difficult to work in the

villages than in an institution or organisation. But one must have the humility, patience and willingness to learn.

Collection of water, fuel and fodder are the three major responsibilities of women - yet so often policies are formulated in such a way as to increase the burden of this responsibility on women.

A case in point was the construction of an eighty-bed tourist complex in Kausani: ITDC had taken up this project because the Prime Minister had commented on the beauty of this hill resort. But accomodating upto 1000 visitors in the hotel meant so much fuelwood requirement for cooking, heating etc. - and the repercussions of this on the surrounding forests and therefore the people, i.e. the women?

Its not that tourists are not welcome; India/the hills has always had tourists, pilgrims - but why not house them in guest rooms in peoples homes? This way tourists will also come into contact with the local people. This practice is prevalent in the alpine region. Centralisation and building of large structures is what creates problems.

Kamla tai stated that awareness and education should start at home. Women should set the examples in their own families. Women in every strata of society are oppressed in a patriarchal set-up women are generally more civilized (because more controlled?) - than men, Women have to teach men, (as mothers) therefore they need greater spiritual strength.

Krishna Kumari behn said that her group had been concerned with stree shakti Jagaran (awareness of womens Power) in U.P. for the last 10-11 years. Every year padyatras are undertaken.

She felt that the village women work so hard-they get no rest, even for an hour it is necessary to create the atmosphere for a change in approach to women. The self-image of women is so low. Even urban women who think they are very liberated and independant, depend on men for decisions.

However, there is a misapprehension about the term "Jagaran" - people, even women, often misunderstand it. 279 dowry deaths were registered in U.P. in 1980-81. She wondered how this could be so and why the concerned girls/women, do not have the self-confidence to live rather than commit suicide.

She therefore thought it necessary to go to the high schools and colleges, to reach educated young women - to arouse, conscientize them too. She agreed that the base of the thrust for arousing womens power should be spiritual and ideological.

Uttara behn commented that women were responsible for many ills, ends in society through their acquiescence and passivity. For e.g. regarding corruption - if women - as wives and mothers, protested against it and refused to utilize the fruits of corrupt practices, there was sure to be a sharp decline in it. She said

she was interested in a comparative study of vedelin and its surroundings - between now and 30 years back - to see what changes independence and developmental efforts had brought about.

Mr. Venu Palsikar suggested that as a token gesture, women could carry out a one-day bucket-down strike - i.e, refuse to carry water. These men would have to do it and would realise the problems, hardships faced by women in their respective villages.

Not everyone agreed with this suggestion because they felt that as the nurturer and rearer, it would be in the women's interest to collect the matter regularly.

Venu tai also recommended establishment of more rescue houses or short stay centres for women who want to leave their houses. They should thus be helped to find second homes.

Shakuntala behn concluded that its not only men who have made us puppets, but women have also let ourselves become puppets and we have to try hard, pull ourselves up by the bootstraps to get out of this situation.

In the sixth session, Ms. Devaki Jain summed up the discussions of the previous days and listed several possible platforms for action plans by the group.

Referring to the previous session- on stree shakri Jagaran, she noted that two main points emerged: (i) the instinctive germination of techniques for working with women (ii) once moved, women rally arouse spontaneously.

It was also apparent that the profile of poverty and strength amongst women is an universal phenomenon.

The instinctive response to crisis situations is essentially motivated by a survival drive-and this is an immediate need for the poor sections of women. So the instinct is to form solidarity to solve their problems.

The problem posed to women by the tourism industry is also universal. For e.g. in the Phillipines 80% of the women are in prostitution. Governments allow prostitution because of the foreign exchange. This can be focus for women's solidarity.

Ms. Jain felt three fields for action could be identified immediately - toilets, tourism and technology. Since there may not be anyway of changing or persuading the government be it the KVIC or the tourism policy, it would be necessary in Laxmipur Block where Shram Bharti works, perhaps 1000 women could land upto protest.

Also, Gandhian women could collect and keep a "Maun Vrat" or spin charkha for a day - to strengthen themselves and establish their solidarity. Such a "Maun Vrat" could even be taken up at an international level for an issue like the tourism industry. These could be movement to promote tourism in more decentralised style.

Commenting on the workshop as a whole, Ms. Jain felt that though no conclusive decisions had been reached, many interesting points had been thrown up. The most important outcome has been

the germ of freindship amongst the women present. All those attending had similar beliefs and values. - e,g, non-violence, khadi etc. - so this discussion was not like a discussion within the family.

All the participants had been able to freely express their anxieties about the work. The general couscious was that women should struggle for emancipation of the society as a whole and not so much for the individual or for women alone.

Roughly speaking, about eight main points emerged from the discussions.

On the first day, khadi was discussed in depth. The dialogue with KVIC should be pursued, but only after constructing a solid data base. A lot of Gandhian constructive workers feel sceptical about the usefulness of negotiating with KVIC and are in favour of khadi mission. For this a lot of research, planning and co-ordination would be required. Khadi as a concept, the wage and price structure, the quality-should all be studied and documented. Then "certification" which proves such a problem could be rejected/boy cotted and non-certified khadi could be marketed through personalised channels for e.g. the Gandhian women's net work. ISST could co-ordinate such an effort, but co-operation would be needed from all the other organisations. They should collect and send all their data to ISST.

2. Organisation of poorest rural women towards self-determination and self-reliance through two action programmes - a) padyatra and b) satyagraha - both of which are necessary according to conditions prevailing.
3. The "harijan" issue - the term was given by Gandhiji in good faith - but had acquired a different use or connotation now. The term - "harijan" as well as the uplift of those so termed, require serious thought and action.
4. Poverty groups - one of Gandhiji's priorities. He believed in antodaya participants could undertake to raise at least one family about the poverty line as a commitment to this workshop group.
5. Sanitary Latrines: was not taken up in great detail - but it was definitely a felt need and so acknowledged by all. Organisations could resolve to make 50 latrines in the coming year.
6. Technology:- Appropriate and otherwise. Its impact on women could be studied. e.g. 80% of female agricultural labour are at present engaged in weeding. With new technology coming in, they're being retrenched. The answer is to train women in the new technology so that she continues to have some employment.
7. Eco-development and afforestation are also issues which affect lots of women. Other possible issues suggested were: (a) dowry, (b) rape, (c) prostitution and devadasis, (d) media use of women through films, advertisements etc. According to Mrs. Jain, a lot of women's groups were working on these issues. The present group in selecting a sphere of activity, should choose an

issue which has greatest historical association with Gandhi's philosophy. That way, the Gandhian perspective would get wider publicity - which was one of the goals identified by the workshop. She concluded the choice of issue or platform should be made by each member institution which should commit itself to carrying out the selected programme in the coming year and to share the failure at the following workshop.

Responding to the above suggestions, Radha behn said that each point could be taken up and discussed or commented on.

I. For the dialogue with KVIC the data would have to be collected. As a start Vidya and Shakuntala behn, could send a detailed analyses of their experiments. Also, the injustices within the KVIC pattern could be identified and some work could be done on it. Shakuntla behn stated that they were looking for a pattern to emerge within the khadi mission approach.

Krishnakumari behn suggested that those who were directly involved with khadi, should take up this issue. Radha Bhatt, Shakuntala, Vidya behn, Kamla tai and Devaki Jain were interested in taking up "khadi" Kamala Lela offered to do a write up and prepare a dot chart. This was welcomed and she was asked to co-ordinate the "khadi" plan.

Radha behn said she could get information on the khadi mission-which was very young and of which she is a member.

II. Awareness building and organising the people

Padyatra and Satyagraha are two important tools for this.

Krishna Kumari agreed that padyatra was a very good idea for organising people. She had experienced this in the movement for stree shakti Jagaran; it would be useful for other issues like anti-dowry campaigns.

Devaki Jain said that padyatra would seem to organise the poorest women and to raise the consciousness of women on issues which touch their lives directly. Bharti Bhatt said it would also help to convey others' attempts and concern for the needs of the people of that area - otherwise the people will not respond.

Krishna Kumari asked if "Shibirs" could not also be linked to padyatras. Anila behn wanted to know whether events like scarcity or failure of monsoons could also be issues around which to organise the poor.

Radha Bhatt replied that it would depend on the situation of the people. She asked which of the participants were prepared to take up this programme. Devaki Jain, Bharti Bhatt, Vidya behn and many others promised to undertake padyatra.

Uttara behn suggested a shibir for training of women in Vedchi towards the end of April. Hospitality would be taken care of by her organisation. The list of trainees could be decided together.

Radha Bhatt concluded that "padyatra" was generally welcomed by a lot of activists and many were interested in taking it up. She said that for the last six months she had been considering a padyatra from ~~Bhambha~~^{Bhambha} Vidya Mandir in Perunar to Maitreyi Ashram in Assam. However, such a project needs a lot of organisation. In between she was pre-occupied with taking care of Sarla Devi. But now she could focus on it. Sarla Behn had started a "Save the H Himalayas" movement and organisation to spearhead it. So a "padyatra" to focus on ecological and environmental issues would be very appropriate.

She wanted Vimla Thakur to give it a start and participate at least for the first few days. She was going to consult other women from Uttarakhand.

Next, the question of satyagraha was taken up. Devaki Jain suggested that it could be used as a technique to take an issue. Krishna Kumari said it should be effective for issues like dowry and prohibition. Kamla Lele mentioned that the Anil Bharatya Mahila Parishad would be meeting (annual conference) in Nagpur in January. Why not participate in that activity and use that national platform for spreading the Gandhian perspective? Mrs. Jain said that she was a member and could participate in it.

Regarding the Harijan issue, several participants spoke about their experiences. The Kunjmals related how they had been ostracized by their village for having associated with

harijans. But they maintained their stand and ultimately the villagers came around.

They were of the view that any term which devoted caste, should be dropped from people's names. Uttara behn felt that all usage of class classification should be dropped from government forms. Venu Palsikar said, this could be done as in the census. Devaki Jain said that cause of the reservation, identifying their caste, helped harijans to get privileges like scholarships and reserved jobs.

Radha Bhatt said that her organisation would tackle the issue of harijans whenever confronted with it. For e.g. in the balwadi programme, they are trying to help the harijan children to integrate with children from other communities - but gently and gradually. However, in extreme cases, like the one mentioned by Sugandha, immediate action may be required. This is essential where there is a conflict.

Shri Kunjwal said that they organised a community meal once a year - on occasions like the festival of Holi. At such functions everyone mingled and interacted freely. Some individuals resisted, but the effort was to persuade them gently, without aggression. He felt it is best to have a positive approach to the harijan issue but generally it does not help to move quickly and ruffle up (raise the hackles) other communities.

Radha Bhatt said that everyone could keep in mind this approach to the harijan issue - if they were not working specifically for harijans. Devaki Jain and Venu Palsikar said that Shri Kunjmal's example of community meals etc. could be taken up actively by some participants.

On the next issue - "poorest women", Radha Bhatt said that all the Gandhian organisations or those present, were working for this group anyway. Each one was doing it in their own way.

On the rural latrines programme, there were several offers. Bharti Bhatt, Radha Bhatt, ISST, Shakuntala behn, Anila behn, Vidya behn, had either already undertaken this programme or were planning to do so.

Radha Bhatt noted that it is important to take up specific programmes in full seriousness and to report on it the following year.

Shri Kunjmal suggested that of appropriate technology devices ten-day demonstration camps could be held when door to door approaches would be made, people could communicate their requirements for latrines, chulahs etc. These moves should be followed up and the first projects should be successful, otherwise people lose interest and faith.

Mrs. Jain said that rural latrines was adopted as a programme at the Kasturba Trust meet in Indore. All participants had undertaken responsibility for construction of 4 toilets in the course of the year. If some did not know about the low-cost technologies available, this knowledge could be shared by those who had it. She gave the example of the project designed for trying out smokeless chulahs for Shri Chandi Prasad Bhatt's organisation.

Uttara behn said Safai Vidyalaya in Ahmedabad could give the necessary training and technical input for the sanitation programme. Shri Kunjmal volunteered to be a resource person for this programme. Devaki Jain suggested the possibilities of linking up toilets with gas plants to get energy and fertiliser as well.

Appropriate technology: Kamala Lele commented that lot of research and experimentation was going on at centre for Science for villages in Wardha - but its director, Devendra Kumar, never answered letters, queries. Radha Bhatt said that appropriate technologies to lessen the strain and drudgery of women and to save energy and time, were most necessary and welcome.

Devaki Jain was interested in a movement against machine spinning of wool. She said attempts had already been made not to have the hand - spun industry delicensed - to avoid displacement of women workers. She asked if others would join in a campaign if she organised it. The response was positive.

Shri Kunjmal mentioned some of the appropriate technology items that he had worked on. He is currently engaged in improving the output of the Bageshwari Charkha so that spinners can earn upto Rs.10/- per day with it.

Prohibition: Radha behn said she would not like to take it up again. They had organized a very successful campaign; the women had got mobilized and all the liquor shops had been closed - but subsequently they had all been re-opened and some new ones added.

Shri Kunjmal said that while it was possible to campaign against country liquor, what could be done against the so called English wine? He also commented on the high alcoholic content in medicine and how this was an indirect means of getting people addicted. He suggested that a campaign should be started to change the medical act so that the alcohol content would have to be within a stipulated limit.

Radha behn agreed that this issue should be pursued diligently as it was causing great harm among the hill people.

Devaki Jain suggested that media and communications people should be drawn into the campaign and wide publicity should be given to this evil to bring it to the notice of educated policy makers.

Afforestation: There could be three ways of tackling this issue: (i) Building awareness through conferences, (ii) planting trees according to season and (iii) schools could undertake this programme as in Gujarat and Umla Kanchan, Maharashtra.

Radha Behn said it is essential to mobilise the villagers for this programme. The government also has an afforestation programme but the output was too little compared to the out-lay. Moreover the government is not too concerned with village people's needs. Also in the hill areas where saplings have been planted, animals are able to enter and destroy the trees despite fencing. This can be averted only with the full co-operation and involvement of the people.

Ms. Jain concluded the discussion with a summing - up of the major points that emerged.

First-there was to be a co-ordinated Joint effort by several organisations on the khadi issue. Kamla Lale would be the co-ordinator. The workshop discussion on khadi would be sent to Sarvodaya news, ~~Maitreya~~ and Acharykul.

Second-there was a quantified commitment to rural latrines. All the field organisations would get at least 4 constructed in one years time. ISST will circulate the proceedings to all participants in 4-6 weeks.

It was decided that the next workshop would be hosted by Shram Bharti, Monghyr around October or November 1983. At that time the necessity or validity of continuing this series of Gandhian women's Workshop would have to be reconsidered.

The proposal for holding a mass demonstration or rally of Gandhian women through a Menn Vrat, Charkha spinning and an active programme like clearing one slum etc. - could also be considered and discussed at the next workshop. Such a project would require very detailed and long-term planning.

Finally it was suggested that some issues that emerged through the present discussions could be put in the form of a memorandum which could be given publicity through a political press release to the national press as well as to local papers in each state. Items like the recommendations regarding alcohol percentage in medicine, women's wages in khadi, style of promotion of tourism, adverse impact of technology on women, could be included.

The workshop ended with expressions of appreciation to Radha Bhatt and her colleagues and students at Lakshmi Ashram for the excellent arrangements and the hospitality extended to all participants. Radha Bhatt expressed her happiness at being able to receive all present at the workshops. The 3 day discussions was followed by two days of writing to places of developmental interest, and significance in the villages around Kausani.