

Khet Majoor Mahajan
Gujarat

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1980

KHET MAJOUR MAHAJAN
GUJARAT

A STUDY

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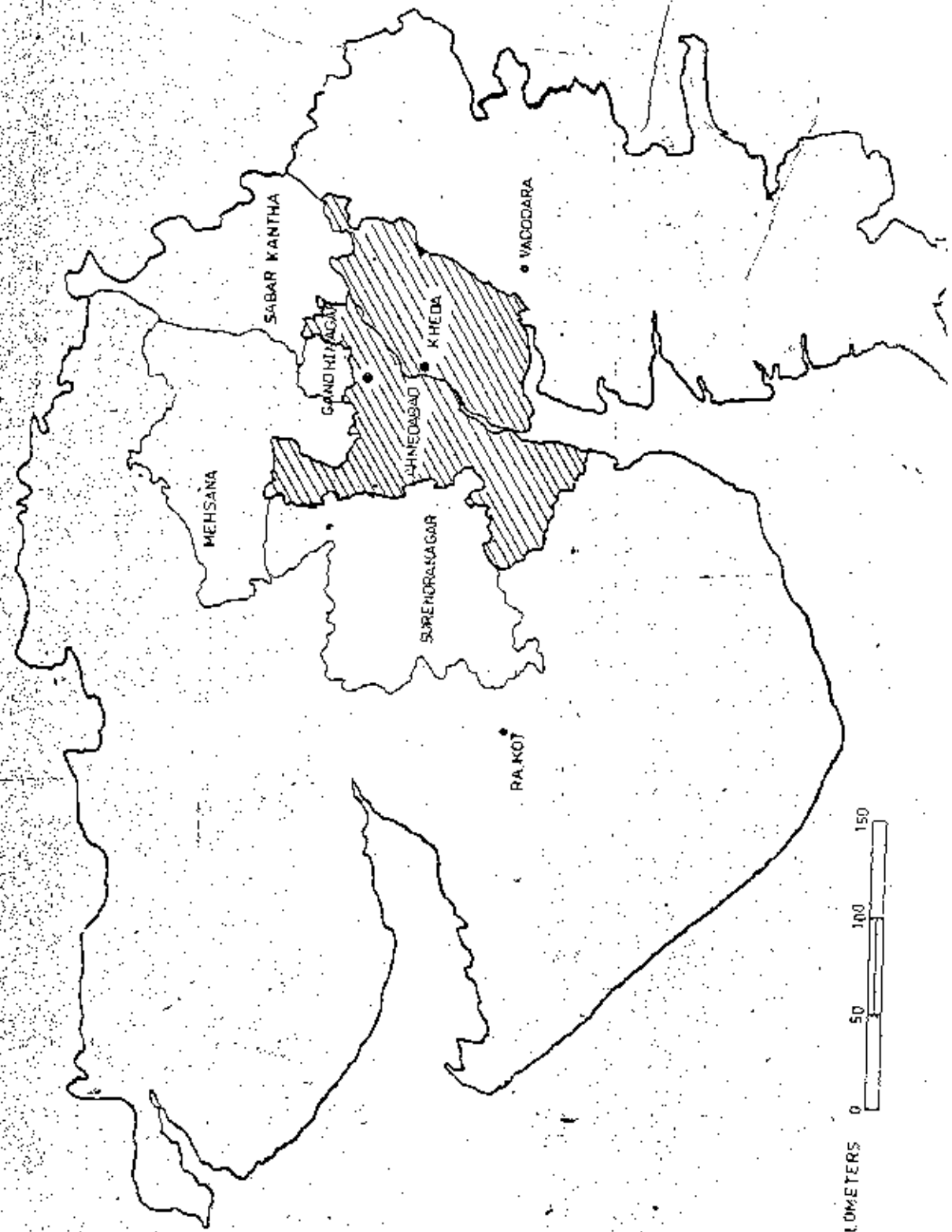
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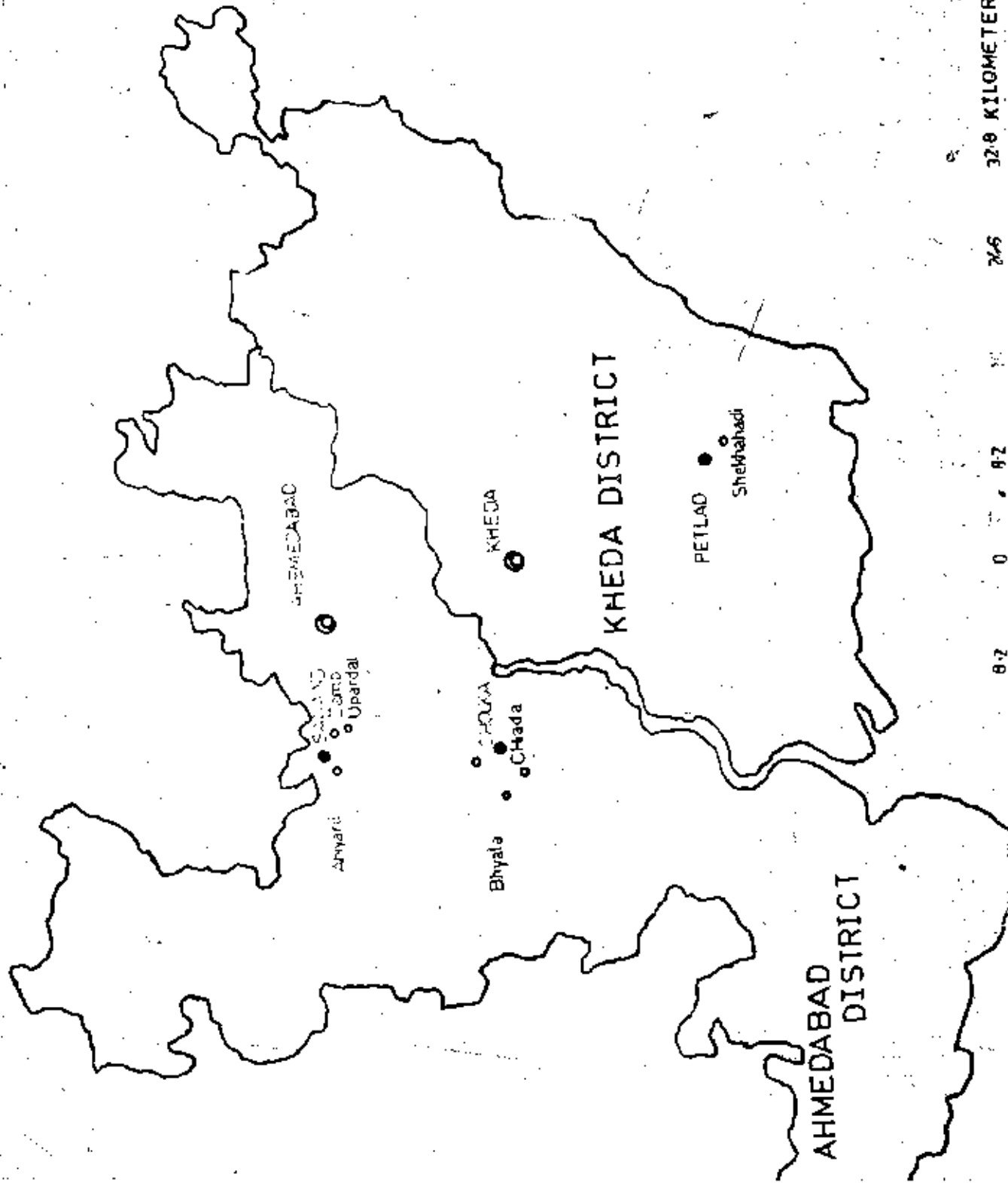
GUJARAT STATE

DISTRICTS COVERED BY KMM

DISTRICTS COVERED BY FIELD SURVEY



LOCATION OF VILLAGES COVERED BY FIELD JRVEY



32.8 KILOMETERS

24.6

16.4

8.2

0

Acknowledgement

This paper is a joint effort of members of the Institute, with the help of several friends, some from the University, and some from rural development agencies.

The office bearers of the three Unions, Gandhi Majoor Mahajan, Khet Majoor Mahajan and Self Employed Women's Association allowed themselves to be investigated and supplied information requiring an unreasonable amount of personal effort, with 'Gandhian' patience.

The Cadres of these Unions took the biggest burden. Investigation and research requires almost full-time escorts and interpreters. These busy and effective activists gave their time with enthusiasm.

The women and men living in the villages, participating with different degrees of experience and enthusiasm in the work of these organisations were warm and wise in their response. We could not fail to notice the lack of inhibition in the participation of women, compared to the men who were somewhat reserved and circumspect.

The Gujarat Institute of Area Planning shared all their research and library experience with us. Particular mention must be made of the generosity of Vimal Shah, the Director of the Institute.

We would also like to thank V.S. Vyas and Ranjit Gupta of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad for extending their hospitality.

We at the Institute acknowledge with gratitude the help of all these persons in building this study, but at this juncture I alone am responsible for its inadequacies.

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Introduction

This paper looks closely at a fairly young (4 year old) trade union of agricultural labourers in Gujarat, India to understand:

- 1) what were/are the main concerns, problems of the agricultural labourers in the areas covered,
- 2) with what hopes/intentions they joined the Union,
- 3) whether the Union was an effective vehicle/instrument for fulfilling their hopes/intentions and if not why not, and
- 4) whether the formal trade Union is a relevant organisational structure for the rural poor and why.

An interpretation of the concepts of participation and self reliance. it is hoped, will emerge at the end of the investigation.

Methodology

The investigation for this study was carried out with the usual mix of secondary data, discussions with academics and officials, specialists in agriculture and rural labour, and primary data collection both quantitative and qualitative, the latter through unstructured dialogues and participation at meetings.

Five visits were made to the field between July 1978 and February 1980 - covering three of the locales of the Union's activities as well as the three related organisations working in these locales.

The three locales are Petlad Taluka in Kaira District, Sanand and Dholka Talukas in Ahmedabad District. The three related organisations are the Gandhi Majoor Mahajan (GMM) or Textile Labour Association (TLA) as it is called, the Khet Majoor Mahajan or Agricultural Labour Association (ALA) and the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). The Gandhi Majoor Mahajan to be referred to in the paper as TLA is the mother Union which has encouraged the sprouting of the KMM and SEWA; secondly SEWA has a rural project which operates in Sanand and Dholka Taluka; thirdly, the office bearers of these three Unions overlap. Hence the need to comprehend the TLA and SEWA in working with KMM.

CHAPTER 1

Khet Majoor Mahajan

The Union

The Khet Majoor Mahajan (KMM), or Agricultural Labour Association (ALA) registered itself on 18th December 1975 at Ahmedabad, capital of Gujarat. In the first year it had a membership of 1847, of which 912 were men and 936 were women.

Between that date and December 1977 it had grown in its membership to 4236 (of whom about 40 per cent are women) spread across seven districts of Gujarat State (see Table 1.1).

Table: 1.1 - KMM Membership - 1976-77 and 1977-78 - Districtwise

	<u>District</u>	<u>1976-77</u>	<u>1977-78</u>
1)	Ahmedabad	1759	3840
2)	Mehsana	76	86
3)	Surendernagar	12	180
4)	Kheda	-	50
5)	Gandhinagar	-	20
6)	Sabarkantha	-	60
	Total	1847	4236

Table: 1.2 - KMM Membership - 1976 - Villagewise

S. No.	Name of district	Name of Taluka	Name of village	No. of members
1	Ahmedabad	Sanand	1) Zamp	48
			2) Rethal	12
			3) Upardal	40
			4) Aniyarli	-
	"	Dholka	5) Mani	220
			6) Devdholera	72
			7) Bhayala	104
			8) Dumali	8
			9) Nanodara	16
			10) Metal	292
			11) Kesardi	760
			12) Bal Dana	10
			13) Bapupura	12
			14) Kalyan Godh	6
			15) Sakodara	4
			16) Chiyada	8
			17) Jabalpur	2
			18) Siyawada	4
			19) Jalpur Godh- neswar	2
			20) Bagodara	4
			21) Rohika	106
			22) Gundi	8
			23) Vataman	4
			24) Utaliya	6
		Virangam	25) Vekriya	8
		Dhanduka	26) Nana Tardiya	3
2	Mehasana	Kalol	27) Balwa	76
3	Surendra- nagar	Lakhtar	28) Orak	4
			29) Tanmanniya	2
		Limbadi	30) Nana Ankewariya	6
Total				1847

Source: (Ref. 12) - Agricultural Labour Association, an experiment in integrated rural development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978.

Table: 1.3 - KMM Membership - 1977-78 - Talukawise

S.No.	Name of Taluka	No. of villages covered	Name of District	No. of members
1	Mater	6	Kheda	50
2	Kalol	4	Mehsana	76
3	Gandhinagar	-	Gandhinagar	20
4	Visnagar	2	Mehsana	10
5	Virangam	19	Ahmedabad	1008
6	Sanand	34	"	1892
7	Dholka	18	"	914
8	Dhandhuka	3	"	26
9	Limdi	4	Surendernagar	80
10	Patdi-Dasada	8	"	100
11	Prantij	4	Sabarkantha	50
12	Modasa	1	"	
Total		103		4236

Source: ^{Ref-12-} (Ref. 12) - Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in integrated rural development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978

An analysis of a sample of members of the KMM reveals that they are mainly landless labourers (60 per cent), small farmers (22 per cent) and artisans (9 per cent).

Its birth

In the summer of 1975 a handful of landless agricultural labourers sat around a transistor radio belonging to a marginal farmer of their caste group, Koli Patel, in village Bhayala in Dholka Taluka of Ahmedabad district. The evening broadcast included a short talk by a Secretary of textile workers' union (the TLA) who spoke of the trade union's commitment to the workers' cause. The agricultural workers listened intently. They had heard earlier of the industrial union from a young man from the village who worked in a textile mill in Ahmedabad. ~~One of the village who worked in a textile mill in Ahmedabad.~~ One of the listeners, who was generally regarded as a spokesman of Koli Patel agricultural workers, decided to establish contact with the city based union. Enlisting the aid of educated children of his community, he wrote a postcard to the Union, the 'Majoor Mahajan'. He provided the name of his village, the names of 7-8 agricultural workers, and included a request to visit their village.

At headquarters in Ahmedabad the postcard arrived in the rural Cell (known as the Gram Sewa and Cooperative Department of the TLA). Senior organisers of the Cell decided to respond to the Cell from Bhayala. However, before their visit materialised, 15-20 agricultural workers from Bhayala and some neighbouring villages took a trip to the Head Office in Ahmedabad. These included the original listeners at Bhayala.

These rural workers, dressed in turbans and tattered shirts and coarse dhoti, unlike the urban industrial workers, hesitated to enter the office premises. Out of curiosity, the Secretary of the GMM asked them where they had come from, and for what purpose. One of them came forward and said, 'Is it labourers' office. The reply was 'yes'. 'We are rural labourers and are in trouble. Shall we be heard? The Secretary replied, 'why not?'. Discussion with the workers revealed that nothing had reached them - neither social services, nor legal provisions nor employment generation.

Their main difficulty as they described it was getting work. Some of them were marginal farmers while others were crop-sharers and landless labourers. The Secretary asked them how far the political party workers helped them. The reply was that they are seen only at the election time. A few top men of the villages get the advantages of Government help while the masses are neglected. He advised them to form a Union, and explained to them how the textile workers improved their lot as they became stronger by unionising themselves. They showed a willingness to form the Union, and even to pay the dues and entrance fee as members of a Union.* *

To assess the situation and to make the rural workers conscious about their rights and responsibilities, meetings of workers as well as the better off farmers were held at Bhayala, Zamp, Dev Dholera and the idea of a rural workers' organisation was fully explained. It was explicitly stated at the meeting that the Union aims at integrated rural development on Gandhian lines.

Source: (Ref. No. 12) - Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in integrated rural development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978 (pg 2)

* * Ibid (Ref No 12)

When a meeting was planned in a village, the organisers gave prior information to those residents who had visited its Head Quarters in Ahmedabad, as also the Sarpanch and other village elite. The senior office bearers of the Union, accompanied by district officials would visit the venue in the selected village. In the beginning the bigger landlords in the area would welcome the visitors with village musicians and singers and escort them to the best building in the village, generally the school. Each such meeting attracted a large proportion of the village population, representing a cross-section, across classes, castes, sex and age.

The meetings were addressed by the trade union workers. They spoke of the rights of agricultural workers and village artisans and the existence of institutions, such as workers' trade unions, which would help them to secure those rights. The bureaucrats pledged official support to the new organisation which sought to protect workers. The meeting would also be addressed by a leader of the community of agricultural workers. The big farmers would also be invited to speak, and they would give expression to the problems they faced in cultivating their lands, e.g. unavailability of fertiliser, improved seeds, lack of credit. In conformity with the Gandhian orientation, the organisers would also heed the needs of these farmers.

At the end of three months, the organisers felt ready to formalise the structure of the new body, called a meeting at Zamp and carried a draft constitution of the proposed union, prepared by lawyers attached to the Union.

The constitution was read out at the meeting, and was passed without amendment by the audience of agricultural workers and artisans (by this time the big farmers had started staying away from these meetings as the speeches started acquiring a "workers' organisation").

On 18.12.1975 the KMM was registered in Ahmedabad under the Indian Trade Union Act (1926), and was affiliated to the National Labour Organisation in February 1976.

Roots

Though this event gave birth to KMM - its work is really a continuation of the work of the TLA or Gandhi Majoor Mahajan Sangh of Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad city is the second largest centre in India of the textile industry, Bombay being the first. The textile industry employs about a lakh and over forty thousand employees in nearly 65 units, of whom 1.20 lakhs are members of the TLA*.

Origin of TLA: The origin of Majoor Mahajan Sangh was in the strike organised by a small group of textile workers in Ahmedabad - about 500 warpers, most of them middle class - on 4th December 1917 under the leadership of Anisuyaben Sarabhai. The issue was wage increase to compensate them for loss of the 'plague' allowance; in parity with other workers in the textile mills. This day is celebrated as 'LABOUR DAY' by textile workers in Ahmedabad even to-day.

Anisuyaben was the sister of one of the largest millowners of Ahmedabad. Her entry into the trade union movement on that day was accidental. After her return from England, just before 1914, she had been devoting herself to social work among the poor people of Ahmedabad, particularly

the Harijans. She was concentrating on providing education to the children of workers by means of a chain of night schools, with the help of likeminded social workers. In 1914, she had started the Majoor Mahajan, a cooperative and industrial activities among mill employees. The strike was a success; the workers got a substantial increase in their wages.

The weavers in Ahmedabad textile mills numbering about 10,000 made a demand in 1918 for a wage rise to offset the rise in cost of living. Earlier this was offset by the special 'plague allowance' given to the workers to the extent of 75 per cent of wages and this was discontinued by the millowners. Mahatma Gandhi who had been giving advice to Ansuayaben earlier, suggested the formation of a Committee of Arbitrators representing both the employers and employees with the Collector of Ahmedabad as Chairman to look into this demand and settle it. At first the millowners agreed to the suggestion; later on they withdrew their representatives from the Board and declared a lockout in the mills. Mahatma Gandhi was perturbed by this development, took upon himself the leadership and led a strike of weavers. This strike lasted for 23 years. Mahatma Gandhi used to address the striking workers every day and through his daily lectures he taught the workers the way to carry on a 'righteous struggle' with Truth and Non-violence as weapons. The outcome of the strike in terms of industrial action was the acceptance of the strike ~~in terms of industrial action was~~ ~~the acceptance of the~~ principle of Arbitration for settlement of differences and disputes between the textile employees and employers.*

*A detailed study of this strike is given in the publication 'The Righteous Struggle' written by Mahadevbhai Desai, (who was the personal secretary of Mahatma Gandhi) published by Navjivan Trust Ltd., Ahmedabad.

The principles laid down by Gandhiji during this strike, and which were later to be accepted by the Majoor Mahajan were:

- Workers demands should be reasonable and must be made after taking all pros and cons of the case. In case they are proved wrong, they must agree to make alterations.
- The weapon of strike should be the last resort in industrial action, to be used after exhausting all other peaceful and constitutional means.
- Workers should behave non-violently in spite of the privations to which they may be subject to and the provocation that they may have to face. There should be no ill will against anybody, particularly the employers as the struggle is to fight only the evil in the employers.
- Workers should be self-reliant and should not depend on outside help in any form. There is no shame attached to it if the workers seek alternate occupation during their forced idleness during strike and no alternate works could be considered as low or mean.
- Strike is 'Satyagraha' and therefore the workers should not yield under pressures of hardship.
- During strike the workers should be truthful, courageous, just and free from hatred or malice towards anybody. They also should be prepared for voluntary sacrifice and keep faith in God.

- Workers are co-partners of the industry and as such their responsibility to the industry and the community is great.
- The leaders of workers must have the courage to own up if their demands are unreasonable and explain the situation to the workers. If the workers are still insistent with the unreasonable demands, the leaders must quit.
- The Unions have a role in shaping the workers into responsible citizens and therefore must take part in all constructive activities for social transformation and fighting social evils.

Gandhiji's View of the Trade Union Worker

While inaugurating the Textile Labour Association on 25th February 1920, Mahatma Gandhi posed the question 'why do workers want to form the Union?' and answered the question himself 'in the past Thugs and Pindharas used to form their Unions and their aim was to loot the people. If this is the aim of forming the union, it is better that the Union is not formed. The functions of a real Union are to cultivate integral strength and to improve the life by securing adequate wages and healthy living conditions while serving the industry to the best of one's ability and capacity'.

Then he asked the then leader An^Ksuyaben "why did you think of forming the Union? Do you want to become a 'Sardar' (leader) or 'Sewak' (Worker) of the workers?".

Ansuyaben requested Gandhiji to explain what he had in mind, he explained that 'Sewak acts like a mother, and attends to cure the ailment and even gives better medicine while Sardar acts like a politician and does all sorts of manoeuvres to keep up his position. He said a Trade Union leader should act like a 'Sewak' and not a 'Sardar'.]

However, all these activities of strike and struggle were accomplished as an association and not as a formally registered Union. In other words there was a labour movement which grew and settled into a Trade Union, 18 years after the first event.

Formal Union comes into being

The Textile Labour Association (The Gandhi Majoor Mahajan Sangh), as it is constituted, is a federation of categorywise unions in the textile industry in Ahmedabad*. The first categorywise Union to be inaugurated was the Throstle Workers Union, which was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi on 25th February 1920 under a neem tree in the compound of Ansuyaben's residence at Murzapur. The Unions of other

*See Charts I and II for structure and administration of TLA.

1 Labour Chronicle - special supplement - Diamond Jubilee
Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - October 1977

(11)

categories followed suit one by one and all of them combined together in the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad (Majoor Mahajan) with Ansuyaben as President and Mahatma Gandhi and Shankarlal G. Banker as its Advisers. Since then the federation started functioning with its own personality, structure and activities. It was only on 23.10.1935 that the Union was registered under the Indian Trade Union Act.

The Union's first demand after inauguration was a wage rise and reduction of working hours from 12 to 10. The issue of reduction of hours was amicably settled by negotiation and this was the first time that working hours, less than those prescribed under the Factories Act, were obtained by workers. At that time the Factories Act prescribed 12 hours work per day. The other issue of wage rise met with difficulty. Meanwhile the employers decided to give one month's wages as Bonus with three Diwali Holidays to the textile mill employees. The working environment was improved with better sanitary facilities and physical comforts for employees during work.

Some Illustrations of Methodology

- 1) In 1921, the textile workers made a demand for bonus in the ^{middle} ~~start~~ of the year. While a few millowners agreed to pay the bonus monthly, others refused. A strike therefore ensued in those mills which did not agree to pay bonus. When the matter was referred to Mahatma Gandhi, he expressed displeasure at the practice of paying monthly bonus and advised the workers not to continue the strike on this issue. The workers did not pay any heed to this and

Gandhiji consistent with his principles asked Anisuyaben to withdraw her services as President of the Union and return the books of the Union to the workers. Later the workers relented and accepted Gandhiji's advice and withdrew the strike.

That year the workers of Ahmedabad contributed Rs. 40,000/- to the 'Tilak Swaraj Fund'. Under the advice of Mahatmaji, the Millowners Association decided to give Rs. 10,000/- every year for conducting educational activities under the auspices of Majoor Mahajan (TLA).

- 11) In 1923, the Ahmedabad Millowners made a wage reduction of 20 per cent unilaterally refusing arbitration in the matter. The Majoor Mahajan had demanded a minimum wage with a sliding scale. As the demand was rejected, there was a strike which lasted for 65 days from 1.4.1923 to 4.6.1923. A unique feature of this strike was that in accordance with the principles of Gandhiji, the workers were encouraged to take up alternative work at Gandhiji's Ashram at Sabarmati. ^{The} provided relief work to the mill employees. While providing work, Gandhiji took care to see that payments were properly made, work extracted and proper records maintained.*

*A detailed description of this work is given in Shri Shankerlal Banker's Book - 'Gandhiji and Labour Work' - published in Gujarati and Hindi.

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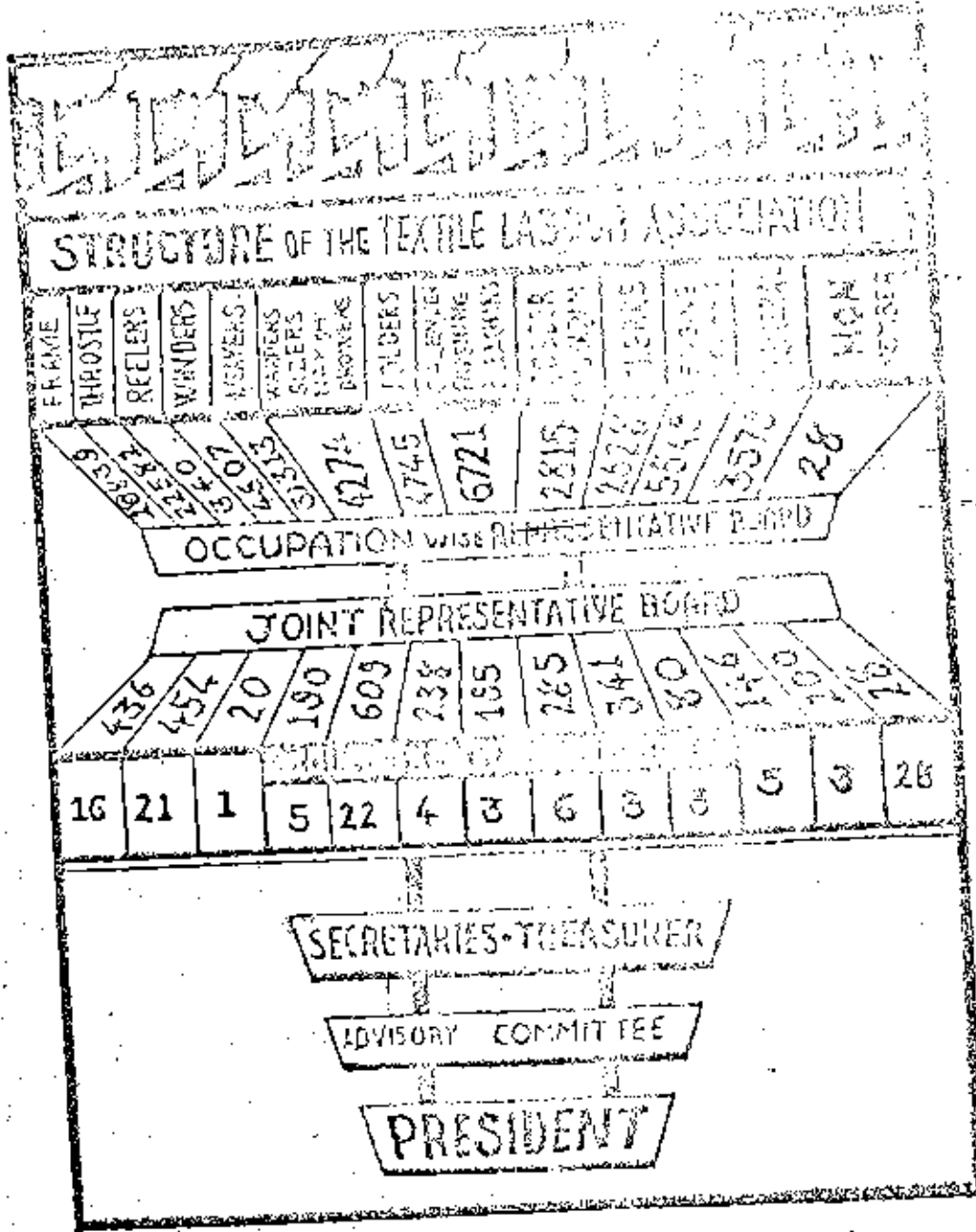
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ACTIVITIES





Khadi work by Textile Labour Association in Ahmedabad
and other rural areas:

The Textile Labour Association takes keen interest in Khadi work to give subsidiary income from subsidiary occupation. In 1923, there was a strike of 3 1/2 months by textile workers. During the strike, handspinning, handweaving, hand-carding etc. were developing on a large scale to keep workers on some jobs.

When Mahatma Gandhi went on his Dandi March in 1930 he advised workers to put on khadi. Since that day, the Textile Labour Association is propagating the sale of khadi. At present it has three khadi shops and it sells khadi and village industries goods worth Rs. 50 lakhs every year. For the production of Khadi, there are 350 Ambar Charkhas in Ahmedabad, 80 wheel charkhas at Joravarnagar in Surendranagar district, 35 Ambar Charkhas at Dev Dholera village. While weaving on handlooms are done in Ahmedabad district, in one of the villages 20 families are doing work of wool weaving on handlooms.

Rural Relief Cell of TLA

Most Textile workers of Ahmedabad city come from the less privileged sections of rural society, some from outside Gujarat but the majority from around Ahmedabad. These workers have strong links with their families in rural areas not only through the cash remittances they send but a good deal of mutual visiting.

Mill workers belonging to the TLA during these visits noticed not only the disparity in the physical living conditions and availability of civic amenities in the villages but also the total absence of any system of protection of the rights of the rural workers. Whether it was home or land or any other asset owned by their families, whether it was wage or the terms of contract under which their rural brothers and sisters were hired - there was no process by which they were protected from assault, injury and injustice by the power structure in the rural areas. There was collusion between landlords, traders, local officials and the police.

Having experienced the advantage of union membership in the city, especially the advantage of using the law in their favour, they not only brought up these issues in their meetings at the various levels of the union but also reported their experience as Union members to their kin in the rural areas. This is what made the connection in Bhayala after the radio talk.

When the more conscious among the workers brought these facts to the notice of the office-bearers of the Association, it was felt that some arrangement should be made to record such grievances and try to redress them.

TLA set up a Rural Relief Cell in 1950* in response to the demand of these textile mill workers, for attending to complaints about requirement of a well for drinking water, illegal possession of land by some strong-headed persons of the village, demand of land from the village Panchayat for

* Source: (Ref. No. 1) - Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in integrated rural development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978 pg. 2

construction of houses, threats or assaults on some of the members of the family staying in villages, etc. In all these complaints the field staff of TLA went to the spot, investigated into the complaint, and helped the complainant to redress it through the help of the Government machinery - because most of the complaints arise out of neglect of the authority at the village or Taluka level.

It made attempts in Saurashtra, Rajkot and Baroach (different regions of Gujarat State) to organise rural workers. But all these efforts were short lived and it was only the felt need of the agricultural workers of Bhayala and their visit to TLA office in Ahmedabad that got the TLA to initiate the organisation of agricultural workers.

During a period of three months (upto 31st March 1950), 232 complaints were recorded at this department. Forty one of these were concluded successfully, 6 were dropped and the remaining were pending, says a report on the Rural Relief Cell.

The tracery from the birth of an association of textile workers, through resistance to employers using Khadi for sustenance, on to a rural relief cell and to the creation of an associate union of rural workers, the KMM is to be noted. It has had both positive and negative implications for KMM which will be taken up later.

Aims and Objectives of KMM

According to its constitution, KMM was formed "with the general objective of ameliorating the social, economic, civic and political conditions of the members"*

- a) to organise and unite the persons employed in the agricultural and rural uplift village craft industry in the Gujarat State and to regulate their relations with their employers;
- b) to secure to the members fair conditions of life and service;
- c) to try to redress their grievances;
- d) to try to prevent any reduction of wages and if possible, to obtain an advance whenever circumstances allow;
- e) to endeavour to settle dispute between employers and employees amicably so that a cessation of work may be avoided;

*Source: (Ref. No. 9) - 'Constitution' of KMM

- f) to endeavour to provide against sickness, unemployment infirmity, old age and death;
- g) to endeavour to secure compensation for members in case of accidents under the Workmen's Compensation act;
- h) to provide legal assistance to members in respect of matter arising out of or incidental to their employment;
- i) to endeavour to render aid to the members during any strike brought about with the sanction of the union or a lock-out;
- j) to obtain information in reference to the Agricultural & Rural uplift village craft industry in India and outside;
- k) to cooperate with organisations (of labour) particularly those having similar objects in India and outside;
- l) to help in accordance with the Indian Trade Unions Act, the working classes in India and outside in the promotion of the objects mentioned in this rule; and
- m) generally, to take such other steps as may be necessary to ameliorate the social, economic, civic and political conditions of the members.

For the attainment of these objects, the Union may organise centres in various localities of India. Means to be adopted for the furtherance of the objects mentioned in the article II shall be always based on Truth and Nonviolence.

The constitution does not spell out the modus operandi of the Union, but makes a clear reference to 'truth and non-violence' as the basic framework on which the Union would operate.

Membership

Membership of ALA is open to any person who has attained the age of 15 years and is engaged in work in agriculture, dairy or rural industries in the State of Gujarat. Admission fee is Rs. 1/- and monthly subscription is 0.25 paise or a total of Rs. 3/- per annum. In the event of arrears in subscription for a period exceeding six months, membership is terminated.

A register of names of ALA members is maintained at head quarters in Ahmedabad. Details of age, occupation, residence are included in the register.

At the end of 1978, ALA had an estimated membership of 10,000 persons (male and female) in 9 district of Gujarat. There has been a sharp growth in membership from 1847 members in 1976 and 4236 members in 1977. The spurt in membership in 1977-78 is attributed to some extent to conscientisation of the population during the elections in 1977.

In 1978 about 51 per cent of the total members were females. Originally ALA organisers recruited only males as members, but on the recommendation of the General Secretary of SEWA, a woman, it was recognised that women were agricultural workers in their own right and qualified as full members. A vigorous recruitment drive for women members was launched with support from SEWA organisers, and female membership equalled male membership in magnitude.

Occupational and caste composition of members of KMM in the year 1976 is given in the tables given below:

Table: 1.4 : Occupational composition of KMM Members

<u>S.No.</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	Agricultural Labourer	500	815	1315
2	Craftsmen*	200	002	202
3	Marginal and small farmers	212	118	330
<u>Total</u>		<u>912</u>	<u>936</u>	<u>1847</u>

Table: 1.5 : Caste composition of KMM members

1	Harijans	30 per cent
2	Koli Patel	50 per cent
3	Village artisans	14 per cent
4	Rajputs	4 per cent
5	Muslims	2 per cent

Source: (Ref. 12) - Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in Integrated Rural Development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978

As can be seen from Table 1.4 agricultural labourers are 50 per cent of the members of the Union followed by 25 per cent marginal and small farmers and 25 per cent craftsmen. Females predominate amongst the agricultural labourers while males amongst the craftsmen which is most significant and reveals the real problem of rural labour.

*Craftsmen are mainly carpenters, weavers, leather workers and potters. Literacy amongst males is 10 per cent and amongst females is 2 per cent.

Organisational Structure

The Union has one President, 2 Vice-Presidents, a General Secretary, 3 Secretaries and a Treasurer, all of which are elected posts filled at the Annual General meeting. The affairs of the Union are handled by a Managing Committee consisting of the office bearers and 8 other members, also elected at the General Meeting.

The office bearers are presently working in an honorary capacity. The President and General Secretary who work full-time on ALA, 'make-do' with the salaries they receive from TLA in their capacity as office bearers of the present Union. They operate from their TLA desks in the TLA building in Bhadra, Ahmedabad.

Clusters of districts in the State have been grouped into four regions by ALA for operational purposes and in each region a prominent trade union worker or social worker has been appointed as an Organising Secretary of the Union. The four regional organisers are located in Petlad (Gujarat), Baroda (S. Gujarat), Rajkot (W. Gujarat) and Mehsana (N. Gujarat). Each of them works in association with district level organisers. The representative for S. Gujarat, covering the irrigation intensive districts of Baroach, Bulsar and Surat, is a well-known social worker from Bardoli who has close links with another organisation of agricultural workers, the Halpati Seva Sangh. These organisers also work in an honorary capacity, and are only allowed nominal expenses. Regional branches are authorised to spend 80 per cent of subscription funds on their own and contribute 20 per cent to the central ALA office in Ahmedabad.

At the field level KMM has village representatives who are agricultural workers or artisans and are either nominated by a group of 25-40 members as their spokesmen, hand-picked by KMM organisers on the basis of their assessment of the individual's leadership potential. There is no convention in respect of regular payment to these representatives by KMM, and at the time of ^{the} survey a few village representatives were being paid Rs. 50 - 100 per month as honorarium, while others who had received some honorarium earlier were now not being paid any. Transport costs of the representatives are generally met by KMM.

Finance

KMM was provided an initial seed grant of Rs. 10,000/- by the National Labour Organisation in 1976, and also assisted financially by the Vasavada Labour Trust. The latter is a benevolent labour trust constituted by TLA organisers and is authorised to give grants to institutions which are engaged in constructive activities for labour. This funding has been utilised for purposes of holding Shibir (camps) to create consciousness amongst rural poor and to organise them (registration and costs of affiliation with national federations of labour unions).

In the four years since its formation KMM has kept direct costs to a minimum due to the access to TLA's infrastructure. For instance KMM makes free use of office space, clerical assistance, transport, telephone etc. of TLA and is able to use other facilities such as TLA's printing press at a low cost.

The total budget of the Union was Rs. 4236/- in 1976-77, and Rs. 10,600/- in 1977-78. In the latter year the Union showed a net loss of Rs. 1600/-.

CHAPTER 2

The First Locale of KMM's Activities

(Sanand Taluka, Ahmedabad Dist)

There are fairly significant variations between the different zones in which KMM is active.

A survey done by an Ahmedabad based institution* of Sanand Taluka which is the locale for KMM's initial start and growth has been used to give the over all back drop for the regions in South Ahmedabad district in which both KMM and SEWA function. Data is also from the KMM's own survey both in South Ahmedabad District and Petlad.

Characteristics of L.

The taluka topography is fairly plain with almost levelled land. Hilly or slopy^{up} areas are almost absent.

With such a tabled plateau of the taluka, large area of

* (R.f. 15) - Survey of Gujarat Institute of Area Planning (GIAP) 1977-78. The entire field work was carried out in the second fortnight of December 1978. The information in respect of the households was collected for a period of one year preceding the date of the survey.

the taluka faces the problems of water stagnation, when there are torrential rains. Absence of systematic disposal of the standing water many times results in delayed sowings and quite often the land is required to be left fallow.

Sanand Taluka has witnessed scarcity or semi scarcity conditions for 6 out of 10 years. The land close to Nalakantha area has high salinity or alkalinity. Barren and cultivable land has increased over the years partly due to the fact that land put to non-agricultural use has been used as pasture land. The taluka has, therefore, been identified by the state planning board as one of the 69 talukas in Gujarat state which are frequently affected by scarcity conditions.*

Sex Ratio

The sex ratio of 950 females per 1000 males in the taluka is quite high as compared to the 1971 census sex ratio of only 919 (Table 2.1).

Work Force Participation Rates

Nearly all the males (95.41 per cent) in the age group 15-59 were engaged in earning a livelihood. In agriculture

* Ref. No. 15 - ~~pg. 25-28.~~

dominated Southern zone, the participation rates were higher and in fact they were nearly 100 per cent in farming occupation.

Amongst women in the age group 15-59 too the participation rate for the Taluka was as high as 85 per cent (Table 2.2). There were some inter-zonal variations in work participation rates among females, but they were in the direction apposite to that for males. The participation rate is the lowest in the Southern zone being 82.72 per cent. Such a situation is mainly due to either participation of females in non-agricultural occupations in the other zones where greater opportunities in general exist for such occupations; conversely, the participation rates in non-agricultural occupations are lower in the Southern zone.

Underemployment Among Workers

An important indicator of involvement of able-bodied willing persons in economic activity may be the intensity of employment rather than incidence of employment as reflected by work participation rates. In Table 2.3, percentage of male and female workers (of all ages who worked below full employment level of about 273 days (or to be precise, 270 days) in a year are given.

There were as many as 60 per cent of male workers who worked below their full capacity level. Underemployment rate was about 61 per cent in the case of the east and South zone and slightly lower - 54 per cent - in the West zone. Among the occupational groups, expectedly agricultural labourers, who depend for jobs mainly on big farmers, were the worst hit. Nearly four-fifth of the male agricultural labourers did not get employment all through the year. The lowest under-

employment level - 28.68 per cent - is observed among miscellaneous occupation group; this may be due to the more regular nature of their economic activities such as services, trade and commerce, etc.

On an average a little over 80 days of additional work per male worker was required to remove his underemployment. Such requirement was slightly larger in the west and the south zone - 93 and 94 days - and little lower in the east zone - 70 days. Lower degree of underemployment in the eastern zone might have something to do with its proximity to urban centres of Sanand town and Ahmedabad city.

Agricultural labourers are the worst hit among all the occupational groups in terms of availability of work (Tables 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6). They need employment for even more than one-third (38.5 per cent) (or for 104 days) of the full-working period of 270 days in a year. This group obviously is the most vulnerable group of all; they are mainly hired by other farmers to work on the latter's farms and therefore during the off season, in the absence of any alternative non-farm activities, they just are forced to remain idle. The degree of underemployment is also greater (of 89 days) among rural artisans and the miscellaneous occupational group. In the case of the latter, it may be the nature of their work which may be giving rise to apparent days of underemployment. The farmer group of rural artisans consisted mainly of carpenters-cum-blacksmiths, bamboo workers, potters, tailors, weavers, cobblers, etc. and obviously most of the goods produced by them have a limited market. This may be the probable cause of greater degree of underemployment among them.

Average per capita monthly consumption expenditure

According to consumption expenditure criterion (Table 2.6) the over-all level of consumption of Rs. 60.9 per month per person was only slightly higher than the poverty line break-off consumption level of Rs. 55/-. The South zone was the poorest among all with average per capita consumption expenditure of Rs. 54.1 which is even slightly below the poverty line level of Rs. 55/-.

There was significant inter-occupational differences in per capita consumer expenditure. In the Taluka as a whole, big farmers were economically the most well-off group with the average expenditure as high as Rs. 73. per capita per month. Agricultural labourers and rural artisans were not only the poorest among all, but their expenditure level of Rs. 50.3 and Rs. 53.3 respectively was even below the poverty line.

In the South zone only big farmers and miscellaneous occupation households on an average enjoyed above poverty line consumption standard; all other occupational groups had below poverty line consumption level varying between Rs. 44.7 and Rs. 53.00. Further, this zone with a very large proportion of agricultural labourers had consumption levels of Rs. 53/- for the labourers which was higher than that of the marginal and small farmers with Rs. 44.7 and Rs. 48.1.

In the Taluka about 44 per cent of the families did not get enough to eat (see Table 2.7). Incidence of poverty was the highest among agricultural labourers and rural artisans; nearly 59 per cent in the former group and

55 per cent in the latter could not afford the minimum consumption level of Rs. 55/-. In the south zone, the worst hit were marginal farmers among whom nearly all - 92.3 per cent - lived below the poverty line consumption level; even among small farmers and rural artisans poverty was wide-spread with nearly three-fourths of the families not having a minimum level of consumption expenditure. Those who lived below poverty line consumption expenditure were the least among the big farmers and miscellaneous occupation groups - being 27.9 per cent and 33.6 per cent respectively.

Nearly 88 per cent of the income of the agricultural labourers was earned through their main activity as labourers. Their income through sources like agriculture - 3.36 per cent and through animal husbandry - 4.84 per cent was marginal (Table 2.8). Their involvement in terms of proportion of families getting income through these sources was also not very large; only about 11.11 per cent and 20.83 per cent of the families were gainfully engaged in these activities respectively (Table 2.10). In other words, only about one-tenth and one-fifth of the families seemed to be holding some land and/or livestock respectively.

Their involvement in other activities like industry (2.78 per cent), services (2.78) etc. is reported to be really very marginal. This suggests that nearly 60 to 88 per cent of the landless labourers' families in this Taluka are poor and underemployed (Table 2.4 and 2.9). Nearly 60 per cent of the artisans families are engaged as labourers (Table 2.11).

Marginal farmers derived the major proportion 65 per cent of their income from cultivation; a significant proportion of their income through labour (19.91 per cent)

and lastly through animal husbandry (8.94 per cent) Nearly 60 per cent of the marginal farmers worked also as labourers and 30 per cent of them did livestock farming (Table 2.10).

Nearly three-fourths or more of the small and big farmers derived their income through cultivation. Animal husbandry accounted for only about 5 per cent of their total income. A significant proportion (15.08) of income of small farmers was also derived through labour. In terms of their involvement, expectedly the role of animal husbandry is reported to have increased in importance with increase in farm-size, and the converse holds true in case of labour activity. As many as 67 per cent of big farmers were engaged in animal husbandry, as against this less than even half the proportion of marginal farmers - 30 per cent - were in this activity. On the other hand, nearly 60 per cent of the marginal farmers also worked as labourers as against only about 10 per cent of the big farmers working as labourers.

Rural artisans derived only about 15 per cent of their income through labour, but, as many as 56 per cent of them worked as labourers sometime during the year. Further, little over one-fifth of them (21.18 per cent) were agriculturists and about 13 per cent of them were also occupied in livestock raising.

Among miscellaneous occupation group, service, trade and animal husbandry were reportedly major contributors to their income. The same held true in terms of their involvement in various economic activities as well. However, besides these, a significant proportion of them - 25.33 per cent and 13.33 per cent - also worked as labourers and cultivators respectively.

It is evident that agricultural labourers and rural artisans in general are the groups which were worst hit by both poverty and underemployment in the Taluka.

Among the three zones, the agriculture dominated south zone needs special attention to the removal of the poverty and unemployment. In this zone, unbelievably stark poverty seems to be prevailing among marginal farmers as even less than 8 per cent of families enjoyed the minimum level of consumption. Poverty is also extremely high among small farmers. ~~this zone needs special attention in the removal of illiteracy, says the Report.~~

Land Holding

The average size of land holding of the Taluka was 4.72 hectares. The per capita holding works out to be 0.62 hectares. Distribution of land holdings among different size class of land holders is as under:

Table 2A

	<u>Type of holding</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Per cent</u>	<u>Area held</u>	<u>% Area held</u>
1)	Small and marginal (upto 3.0 hectares)	7140	49.6	9360	13.8
2)	Medium (3.0 to 5.0 hectares)	2354	16.3	9234	13.6
3)	Other holders (above 5.0 hectares)	4921	34.1	49437	72.6
	Total	14415	100.0	68031	100.0

It is seen from the table that the total cultivated land was distributed among 14415 land holders of which

Source: (Ref. No. 14) - Planning for Sanand Taluka, Gujarat Institute of Area Planning, Ahmedabad 380 006 - pg. 31 and 32

7140 were small and marginal farmers, 2354 with medium size land holding and 4921 with holdings over 5 hectares. Although the small and marginal holders constituted nearly 50 per cent of the total land. In contrast, cultivators with larger size holding, although 34 per cent in number held as large as 73.0 per cent of the cultivable land. Thus nearly two thirds of total holdings had only 27 per cent share in land holding, whereas as one third of the large holders had a share of nearly 73 per cent.

Classification of workers

According to this survey (1978-79) agricultural labourers were 38.42 per cent as against about 32.9 per cent of male workers given in the 1971 census for the Taluka. The next group in importance was that of other farmers (23.5 per cent). The rural artisans' group accounted for 5.21 per cent of all the households.

As per the 1971 Census the taluka had 34619 workers. The distribution of these workers is as given under:

Table 2B

	<u>Cultivators</u>	<u>Agricultural labourers</u>	<u>Other Workers</u>	<u>Total workers</u>
1) Sanand Taluka	43.7	35.3	21.0	100.0 (34619)
2) Ahmedabad District	15.5	14.3	70.2	100.0 (259323)

Source: 1971 Census

The table reveals that as large as 79 per cent of total workers in the taluka depended on agriculture. In the district total workers that depended on agriculture was only 30 per cent. Seventy per cent of workers depended for livelihood on other than agriculture.

Area background as given by KMM* of Sanand and Dholka Taluka

Pattern of Crop and Work

"The area is backward and mostly a monsoon crop is harvested. The crops grown are rice, jowar, barley, millet, wheat and whole cotton which has been recently introduced. Big farmers are very few, while small and marginal farmers are many. These need work in off-season, besides agricultural work. Animal husbandry is an occupation solely practised by the shepherd community of Bharwads. This statement contrasts with the table² given on Page 22 from the Taluka Survey Report where it is shown that 34% own more than 72% of the land in Sanand Taluka,

The industrial activities in certain nearby taluka towns is shown below:

Table 2c

	<u>Town</u>	<u>Village</u>	<u>No. of Units</u>
Rice mills	2	-	10
Cotton Gin Press Mills	1	-	4
Oil Mills	1	-	2
Agricultural Instruments (Industrial Shed (Co.op))	1	-	1
Dairy	1	-	1
Handlooms	1	-	7
Roof Tiles Manufacture	-	-	14
Brickmaking	-	20	20
Pottery	-	25	25
Leather tanning and shoemaking	3	3	6
Tailors	3	25	50

* Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in integrated Rural Development - Textile Labour Association Ahmedabad - 1978 (Ref. No. 11) [7] (Ref No - 12)

Resources

The main sources of water were tubewells and a big shallow lake. The large farmers have their own wells. They tried to bore over-deep tubewells, with result that the saline water came up.

The lake dries up in the non-rainy season, the poor farmers have no source of water. The large spill their soil by over deeping their tubewells.

Needs as identified by the KMM

Technical advice: It appears, therefore, that they should have guidance about the use of tubewells, and crops to grow on their soil and other conditions.

Credit: The farmers need credit facilities for the following inputs:

Fertilisers, seeds, water pumps, housing, customs, consumption, purchase of bullocks, purchase of agricultural implements.

Craftsmen, if provided with required capital and needed raw material, can generate employment. Blacksmiths need woods; potters if provided with coal can produce bricks, tiles and other household materials. So also weavers and leather workers.

Animal husbandary; and dairy farming if developed can boost the village economy.

Health care: There are no dispensaries of the Government. In each village there is neither a doctor nor a lady doctor.

Each village has one or two untrained doctors (midwife).

Diseases: Malaria, dysentery, skin disease, respiratory eye infection, cough etc. Children are more prone to sickness, specially due to malnutrition.

Drinking water: The drinking water is contaminated.

Clothing: The clothing is inadequate.

Socio-economic survey

A survey was done about socio-economic conditions of some members. The following problems revealed themselves.

- 1) Hesitation in giving minimum wages by farm owners to farm labour;
- 2) Unemployment of four to five months in a season;
- 3) No set rules about working condition for crop-sharers;
- 4) Shortage of water and drought condition due to regular failure of rains;
- 5) Lack of facilities viz; medical, education and housing;
- 6) Poor diet and unhealthy unhygienic living conditions;
- 7) Poor health of children and mothers;
- 8) Unsatisfactory arrangements of fair-price shops;
- 9) Exploitation by vested interest like businessmen, money, unscrupulous politicians;
- 10) Lack of knowledge about science and technology;
- 11) One season crop;
- 12) Panchayat not effective and Panchayat members not conscious about their rights and duties;
- 13) Social customs and heavy spending at marriage and funeral occasions;

- 14) Superstitions due to ignorance and illiteracy;
- 15) Infants are fed on cereals, in absence of milk. Most of the households have no milch cattle and milk is not available for children; and
- 16) Level of health - consciousness is very low. Medical aid is taken only in serious case. The concept of preventive medicine is almost nonexistent. There is an awareness about family planning programmes and probably the small family norm is also accepted as desirable but there is no conscious effort to practice it. Family Planning is almost completely identified with the extreme method of vasectomy and loop insertions. The number of vasectomy operations reported were much higher in the low income groups (low caste). It was evident that the incentive money was the most important motivating factor in their case. Very few cases of family planning were reported from the high castes land owning groups.

Table: 2.1 - Sex Ratio By Occupation & Zone, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

<u>Occupational Categories</u>	<u>Females Per 1000 Males</u>		1970	1070
	<u>East Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	1048	942	820	951
Marginal Farmers	758	882	973	815
Small Farmers	1035	946	838	957
Other Farmers	818	818	1021	912
Rural Artisans	943	1052	895	863
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	886	817	982	1086
All Occupations (Weighted)	1011	937	897	950

Table No: 2.1.1 - Males Per 1000 Females

Agricultural Labourers	955	1062	1220	1070
Marginal Farmers	1320	1133	1028	1237
Small Farmers	966	1057	1194	1053
Other Farmers	1090	1222	979	1105
Rural Artisans	1187	951	1117	1143
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	778	1224	1019	960
All Occupations (Weighted)	1011	1130	1126	1076

Source: 1. G.I. (Gujarat Institute of Area Planning)

Table 2.2 - Work Force Participation Rates Among Males and Females, Ages 15-59 And All Ages, By Occupation And Zone, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

Males

Occupational Category	East Zone		West Zone		South Zone		All Zones (Weighted)	
	15-59	All Ages	15-59	All Ages	15-59	All Ages	15-59	All Ages
Agricultural Labourers	89.47	60.30	97.37	59.42	100.00	65.57	94.78	61.64
Marginal Farmers	86.67	42.42	85.00	55.88	100.00	45.95	87.13	47.09
Small Farmers	91.49	58.14	100.00	59.46	97.78	61.25	95.98	59.34
Other Farmers	94.23	60.82	92.00	61.36	100.00	61.70	95.13	61.28
Rural Artisans	93.75	55.06	88.89	58.62	93.75	59.30	93.07	56.27
Other Misc. Occupations	00.00	57.14	97.44	51.22	85.71	58.18	96.89	55.38
All Occupations (Weighted)	92.14	62.13	97.74	58.59	98.37	62.71	95.41	59.12

Females

Agricultural Labourers	91.43	54.55	100.00	52.31	96.30	62.00	95.22	56.17
Marginal Farmers	88.23	64.00	56.25	40.00	88.24	52.78	77.75	55.29
Small Farmers	89.36	52.00	86.84	60.00	88.23	46.27	88.20	53.46
Other Farmers	94.12	60.67	91.18	62.50	75.00	43.75	88.15	56.32
Rural Artisans	83.33	49.33	48.72	34.43	58.54	31.17	74.29	35.58
Other Misc. Occupations	68.00	37.04	62.86	34.33	31.03	18.52	60.45	33.21
All Occupations (Weighted)	87.34	53.39	86.65	52.54	82.72	50.24	85.97	51.88

Note: Work force participation rates are percentages of work force to total population.

Source: GIAP

Table 2.3 - Percentage of Underemployed Workers (of All Ages) by Occupation and Zone, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

Males

<u>Occupational Category</u>	<u>EAST Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	77.77	78.04	67.05	76.64
Marginal Farmers	35.71	78.75	64.71	52.01
Small Farmers	60.00	14.63	62.05	44.49
Other Farmers	76.27	48.14	62.07	61.98
Rural Artisans	41.67	58.82	70.00	48.87
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	30.43	30.77	18.75	28.68
All Occupations (Weighted)	61.38	53.77	61.26	59.82

Females

Agricultural Labourers	77.77	97.06	90.32	86.80
Marginal Farmers	37.50	100.00	84.21	61.52
Small Farmers	68.09	80.95	80.65	75.60
Other Farmers	57.41	75.55	80.95	70.87
Rural Artisans	70.27	80.95	95.83	76.09
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	61.11	60.67	40.00	57.61
All Occupations (Weighted)	65.80	83.23	82.59	75.45

Note: Underemployed workers are those who were employed for less than 270 days in a year.

Source: GIAP

Table 2.4 - Average Number of Days of unemployment for Underemployed workers of all ages by occupation and Zone, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

<u>Males</u>				
<u>Occupational Categories</u>	<u>East Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	84	130	109	104
Marginal Farmers	30	74	89	49
Small Farmers	67	43	100	66
Other Farmers	53	75	67	64
Rural Artisans	88	87	98	89
Other Misc. Occupations	78	113	78	89
All Occupations (Weighted)	70	94	93	83
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>				
<u>Females</u>				
Agricultural Labourers	112	155	97	119
Marginal Farmers	73	127	135	89
Small Farmers	86	125	95	102
Other Farmers	73	119	74	90
Rural Artisans	100	122	138	109
Other Misc. Occupations	106	148	82	116
All Occupations (Weighted)	95	137	91	107

Note: Underemployed workers are those who were employed for less than 270 days in a year.

Source: GIAP

Table 3.5 - Intensity of Underemployment in terms of persondays of work among Males, by Occupation and Zone, SANAND Taluka, 1978-79

<u>Occupational Categories</u>	Percent			
	<u>East Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	24.21	37.30	26.80	28.49
Marginal Farmers	4.06	21.81	21.09	11.16
Small Farmers	14.73	2.29	22.66	12.22
Other Farmers	15.20	13.02	15.39	14.48
Rural Artisans	13.13	18.69	25.12	15.94
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	8.51	13.11	5.17	9.47
All Occupations (Weighted)	16.23	20.55	21.22	18.80

Source: GIAP

Table 2.6 - Average Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

In Rupees				
<u>Agricultural Occupation</u>	<u>East Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	49.7	48.2	53.0	50.3
Marginal Farmers	67.9	70.7	44.7	67.1
Small Farmers	65.9	66.6	48.1	61.9
Other Farmers	89.8	71.3	57.4	73.6
Rural Artisans	55.8	50.7	45.2	53.3
Other Miscellaneous Occupations	63.9	63.2	67.1	63.8
All Occupations (Weighted)	63.4	61.0	54.1	60.9

Source: GLAF

Table 2.7 - Percentage of Households below Poverty Line Consumption by Occupational Category and Zone, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

<u>Occupational Categories</u>	<u>East Zone</u>	<u>West Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>All Zones (Weighted)</u>
Agricultural Labourers	54.5	73.1	52.0	58.9
Marginal Farmers	23.1	46.1	92.3	35.9
Small Farmers	27.6	44.4	75.0	44.7
Other Farmers	16.7	37.5	29.4	27.9
Rural Artisans	50.0	61.9	68.7	54.8
Other Misc. Occupations	28.6	37.9	40.9	33.6
All Occupations (Weighted)	37.1	52.0	47.2	44.2

Note: Below poverty line refers to monthly per capita consumption expenditure of less than Rs. 55/-.

Source: GIAP

Table 2.0 -- Sourcewise Percentage of Income for Sample Families in each Occupational Category, Sanand Taluka, 1978-79

Sources of Income	Percentage of Income from Different Sources for					
	Agricultural Labourers	Marginal Farmers	Small Farmers	Other Farmers	Rural Artisans	Other Occupations
Agriculture	3.56	65.04	74.42	85.29	3.02	3.75
Animal Husbandry	4.84	8.94	5.04	6.82	1.13	14.21
Industry	0.84	3.10	0.52	2.08	78.35	5.82
Trading	0.11	0.30	0.82	0.26	-	21.77
Services	2.08	2.09	2.74	3.21	1.32	44.11
Labour	88.01	19.91	15.28	1.03	15.57	5.18
Other Services	0.55	0.62	1.17	1.31	0.61	5.16
All Sources	99.99	100.00	99.99	100.00	100.00	100.00
	(177687)	(100400)	(266752)	(457633)	(211974)	(290113)

Note: Figures in parenthesis are total income (in rupees) from all Sources.

Source: GIAP

Table 2.9 - Number and Percentage of Families Getting Their Income from Different Sources (In Rupees) Sanand Taluka

Source of Income	Agricultural Labourers		Marginal Farmers		Small Farmers		Other Farmers		Rural Artisans		Other Occupations	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	8	11.11	43	100.00	78	100.00	66	100.00	18	21.18	10	13.33
Animal Husbandry	15	20.83	13	30.23	36	46.15	44	66.67	11	12.94	23	30.67
Industry	2	2.78	2	4.65	3	3.85	4	6.06	85	100.00	6	8.00
Trading	1	1.39	1	2.33	2	2.56	1	1.52	-	-	15	22.00
Service	2	2.78	1	2.33	8	10.26	4	6.06	3	3.53	31	41.33
Labour	72	100.00	25	58.14	40	51.28	6	9.09	48	56.47	19	25.33
Other Occupations	1	1.39	2	4.65	4	5.13	3	4.55	3	3.53	9	12.00
Total Sample Families	72		43		78		66		85		75	

Source: GIAP

The Activities of Khet Majoor MahajanAhmedabad District

According to ^{the} report* of the "the year 1977" was the year of spreading the message of unionism through holding educational group meetings". Such meetings were held at Bhayala, Zamp, Dev Dholera and Rayaka. At all these villages, ^{the} President of the Association, the General Secretary of Self-Employed Women's Association, alongwith the General Secretary of KMM attended the programme and gave the ~~inspiring~~ message of "Union is strength".

Table 3.1 gives a summary description of the Union's activities in Ahmedabad district.

Table : 3.1 - Activities of KMM in Ahmedabad district

S.No.	Name of village	Activities
1	Bhayala	Spinning and weaving
2	Zamp	Literacy, Sewing, Pre-nursery school
3	Dev Dholera	Wool spinning and weaving
4	Rayaka	Health education, women milk-cooperative productivity society limited.

* Source - (Ref. 1) - Agricultural Labour Association - an experiment in integrated rural development - Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad - 1978

At Bhayala a Centre for spinning and weaving was opened in the locality of agricultural workers. At Dev Dholera, the weavers of woollen cloth who were on the brink of leaving their age-old profession were encouraged by the Association and were persuaded to continue the work and were promised that efforts would be made to process loans for them from the nationalised banks.

With a view to spread the message of organisation and awaken the representatives of the Agricultural Labour about their rights and acquaint them with the scheme of integrated rural development, an educational seminar of three days was held. This seminar was inaugurated by the Labour Minister of Gujarat and the office bearers of the Union.

The seminar was attended by 40 representatives of 30 villages including six women. The guest speakers were elected representatives both at the State and District, Panchayat level officials as well as Union leaders. More educational seminars were held at village level at four places i.e. Bhayalamp, Rayaka and Dev Dholera. At these seminars local problems were discussed.

Guest speakers were invited who usually discussed the following subjects:

- 1) The role of the Trade Union Movement in the betterment of rural life;
- 2) The Trade Union Act, Minimum Wages Act and other Labour Legislations;

- 3) The Land Reforms Act;
- 4) Rural Indebtedness Removal Act;
- 5) Village Panchayat Act and rural workers' participation in rural upliftment;
- 6) Ways and means of integrated rural development through multi-purpose cooperative movement; and
- 7) Rural housing schemes.

It was also decided to give training to some women workers about child and maternal health care. These women were selected and given practical training at Kasturba Gandhi Maternity Home, Khannpur, Ahmedabad which is run by the Textile Labour Association, Ahmedabad.

Settling of Issues:

During the year the nature and number of complaints received by the Association were as under:

- Non-payment of minimum wages (20)
- Removal from employment (38)
- Notices from the Land Mortgage Bank to pay up debt (106)
- Exploitation of small cultivators by big farmers due to indebtedness (26)
- Harassment by money lenders-cum-big farmers (5)
- Illegal extraction of the produce of land from share croppers by landlord/money lenders
- Complaints against the custodian of Law and Order.

- Legal aid to Eighty members:

- 1) Criminal 40
- 2) Civil 28
- 3) Co-op. bank 12

- Complaints to Collectors and redressal.
- Complaints about State transport bus routes.
- Cases in the court under I.D. Act, and attendance at Labour Court
- Assaults on agricultur^{ers}, workers and share croppers

"This was the year of some awakening. It was seminars and meetings which made agrarian workers vocal and conscious about their rights. From the nature of complaints the Union saw that without concerted action and demands nothing would come out."

"As a result of this, cases of assaults on workers, cases of intimidation and also snatching away of land as well as produce, by illegal means by so-called high-handed and swollen headed persons of villages were reported. The Association had to take prompt and legal actions against such elements through the top authority of the State. The authorities both of law and order at the village and Taluka level were found not only inefficient but acting contrary to the policy of the State and Law."

Illustration of such interventions are given below:

Bhayala Case

Approximately two thirds of the land in Bhayala is held by 30 rich farmer households. Their average holding

exceeds 100 acres. One third of the land is held by approximately 120 small farmer households. Given this inequality, the system of bonded labour has flourished in the village. Small loans made by big land-owners serve to consolidate their hold on the landless and the small farmers.

Deep tensions prevailed in the area. The situation came to a head in the Kharif season in 1977 when the land owners demanded repayment of the alleged loan of Rs. 5,000/- from two agricultural workers who denied having taken the loan. Threatened with dire consequences, the workers approached the KMM. KMM failed to settle the dispute through negotiations with the land-owners. It then gave a call for a strike to which about 50 agricultural workers (male and female) responded (11 workers stayed away from work at great sacrifice for 18 months - the entire duration of the dispute).

The KMM then invoked the help of the Labour Commissioner but he too could not make the land-owners to cooperate. KMM then took the matter to the Labour Court under the Industrial Disputes Act alleging that the land-owners were wrongfully demanding large sums by the workers and challenging their claim for the small pieces of land owned by the agricultural workers in default of payment.

The situation took an ugly turn when the women of the striking workers families went to their own small farms to harvest. They were physically assaulted by armed agents of the land-owners causing serious injuries. The police connived with the land-owners and locked up the injured women workers in jail on fabricated theft cases. The KMM rushed to seek the intervention of the Press and Ministers. As a result some of the petty officials who were in league with the land-owners were changed. Seven out of the striking workers were

re-instated in their jobs. But the Court case still persists, some of the workers have had to leave the village since they cannot get any work there because of the hostility of the land-owners.

Kaira District Branch

The TLA has 17,000 members in Kaira District and covers many industries apart from textile, such as workers in dyes and chemicals, paid staff of the milk cooperatives etc. The Petlad branch of KMM started in March 1979. It was more an act of co-optation from TLA. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 gives the sex and occupational composition of the membership of KMM in Petlad:

Table : 3.2 - The Composition of the Union in Petlad

Total No. of villages	80
Membership (by sex)	1144
Males	982 (86 per cent)
Females	162 (14 per cent)

Table : 3.3 - Membership by occupation in Petlad

Landless agricultural workers	60 per cent
Small farmers	22 per cent
Artisans	9 per cent
Others	9 per cent

The Petlad branch of the TLA ^{has} been able to provide the workers wage-rise, dearness allowance, provident fund, gratuity, travelling allowance and uniforms. "This has been achieved without resorting to strike, coercion or any other violent steps but following the trade union principles of Gandhiji" (quote).

The membership fee of the Union is Rs. 1/- per month. By contributing voluntarily 10 per cent of the arrears which they got from the arrears accrued to them from various Awards and settlements, the workers have helped the Union in carrying on its multifarious activities to help the unorganised and unrepresented sectors of workers.

Between 1974 and 1979 several unions in the Kaira ^{District} joined the Majoor Mahajan Sangh. The Amul Dairy Karmachari Sangh, merged with the Amul Dairy Union of TLA. This means 1600 paid staffs of the primary cooperatives are being represented by the Union. In 1976, a Union called Udyogik Majoor Mahajan Sangh was established in order to represent the workers of Anand, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Petlad and other Industrial estates in the district of Kaira. Prominent among them are: Engineering, Glass, Colour, Chemical, Ceramics, Paper, Weeds Oil, Spun Pipe, etc. More than 900 workers are represented by this Union from the above industries. Without resorting to strike or coercion, this Union has been able to give them security of service, wage rise etc.

In 1976, Khand Udyog Majoor Mahajan Sangh was started to represent the workers of Charotar Sahkarikkhand Udyog in Palej near Petlad.

In July 1979 a 7 day camp was held under the guidance and sponsorship of the Shramik Shiksha (Workers Education Centre, Baroda). 40 agricultural labourers, 2 each from 20 villages were invited. It was basically to build the cadre. These workers then became the local 'worker' for the Union, something like a shop steward. Another on February 8, 1980 of 2000 workers from 60-70 villages to widen the horizon is proposed.

The Union serves notices in the case of wage and tenancy rights - and acts as an intermediary in the case of improving services like irrigation facilities or bus routes.

Self Employed Women's Association

SEWA*, the Self-Employed Women's Association, registered as a trade union in the city of Ahmedabad (Gujarat), is an organization of poor working women. The women are vendors of goods or operating services on the pavements and vacant lots of the city, and are also casual wage-earners.

The Self-Employed Women's Association was born as an offshoot of TLA and provides methodologies for women's organization as well as for mobilization of the unorganized poor.

One of the thirteen points of Gandhiji's constructive programme was the "uplift of women". The Textile Labour Association adopted this in its programme agenda, and created a women's wing in 1954 to assist women belonging to the households of mill-workers. The women's wing also catered to the special problem of women mill-hands, who numbered 5723 (2.5 per cent of TLA membership) in 1955.

GENESIS

One of the first programmes of the women's wing was the establishment of four sewing classes in 1958 in the city's labour areas where TLA members lived. (By 1978, the number of sewing

* Extract from Women's Quest for Power.
Pages 20 to 26. (Ref. No. 82)

classes had risen to 25, and about 1,500 women was trained at these classes annually. Instruction in knitting, embroidery, spinning, press composition, typing and stenography was also added to the range of courses offered by the classes). The graduates of these courses were expected to find work for themselves, although the women's wing tried to absorb a few of the tailoring graduates in the organization which tailored clothes for workers.

In 1970 a survey was conducted by the women's wing to probe into complaints of exploitation of women tailors by contractors. The survey showed that employment was irregular and wages exploitative. Among other women a seamstress who made children's clothes on contract, using her own sewing machine, was paid at a rate of Rs. 3 per dozen shorts, inclusive of expense on thread and buttons.

Other instances of exploitative employment of women in the labour colonies also come to light during this investigation. This study revealed to the women organizers the vast ocean of labour force which was untouched by unionization, by legislation, by government, and by society. At the same time, the women workers also had their first exposure to the female investigators from TLA.

One morning in 1972, a 40-member-strong group of women headloaders from the cloth market of the city entered the offices of the women's wing in the TLA building in Bhadra. They did not belong to the families of mill-workers but came from one of the labour colonies. Familiar with the phenomenon of trade unionization, these women demanded attention from the only known platform

for women workers in the city. "You do so much for workers and their families, can you do nothing for us?" The headleaders earned a living by carrying bales of cloth on their heads from the wholesaler to the retailer, for a wage of 7-10 paise per trip through the cloth market and 10-12 trips daily earned them a wage of Rs. 2 to 2.50. Often even these low wages were withheld by the merchants since no written record of the number of trips was maintained.

The TLA women's wing decided to look into the headleaders' complaint. They met the Merchants' Association, and negotiated an agreement for fixing (not raising) the wages for headleading. The merchants also agreed to give a stainless steel tumbler to the headleaders as a gesture of goodwill on Diwali. Simultaneously, the organizers also issued the story to the press, so that popular interest was aroused in the headleaders' demand. The merchants countered with a news story of their own, denying the charges of underpayment or non-payment. The organizers summarized the merchants' claim on printed cards and distributed them amongst the headleaders as a permanent record to call their employers bluff. The merchants were thus publicly committed into adopting norms of fair treatment to these workers.

Following the headleaders' action in reaching for TLA support, used-garment workers sought out organizers of the women's wing. These women procure old garments, mend and wash them, and then re-sell them on pavement stalls. For earnings, manipulation by traders - the problems were familiar".

Women hand-cart pullers, who also operate in the cloth market, pulling heavy carts loaded with cloth bales, also went to the women's wing with a request that they be helped to purchase their own hand-carts (Rs. 800 each) so that they could be liberated from the crushing rent of Rs. 40 per month.

Dealers in used garments who procured steel utensils from traders and traded them for used garments, were the next to meet the TLA organizers. At this stage, a meeting was called by the organizers in a public park and 100 women workers attended it. From one of them came the suggestion that they should form an association of their own. Each member paid an annual subscription charge of Rs. 3. And so SEWA was born on 3 Dec., 1971. (its formal registration took place in April 1972).

The organizers recall that in the months preceding this event, they had sensed that the problems of women workers were too numerous, specific and overwhelming to be dealt with adequately by a section of the TLA. An organization which was exclusively devoted to women's problems seemed necessary.

The birth of SEWA, therefore, can be seen as an initiative taken from within the leadership of the women's wing and as an appeal from unorganized working women for help. The staff of the TLA women's wing moved over to SEWA. In addition to extending the services of its staff, TLA also provided office space without rental and an initial loan of Rs. 5,000, which was paid back over the next three year.

Accustomed to trade-union strategy, SEWA organizers concentrated their initial efforts on ensuring higher earnings for women workers through increased productivity, improvement in the conditions of work, and higher wages. The organizers were convinced that these goals could only be secured by welding the unorganized women into a worker's trade union.

The Indian labour law on the registration of trade unions does not recognise the legitimacy of a trade union of workers which does not work for an identifiable employer, that is, does not identify a specific employer-employee relationship. Supported by TLA, SEWA challenged this narrow interpretation of the functions of a workers' union merely in terms of the power to organize strikes against an employer. They argued that a trade union could be formed for the workers' "development", that is, freedom from exploitation, assurance of regular work, and access to opportunities for advancement. After protracted representation in the Labour Commission and the state labour department, SEWA was registered as a trade union (under the Indian Trade Unions Act, 1926) of self-employed women workers.

The organizers' experience of the problems of various trade groups in the TLA women's wing had revealed three trouble-prone areas in the working women's lives, namely, lack of capital, harassment from the Municipal authorities and the police department and poverty-induced family problems. Yet, special nuances in each group made it impractical to formulate a standard remedy.

The organizers conducted a quick fact-finding survey to get an idea of the problems of the constituent trade groups. The survey revealed a profile of exploitation, economic distress and overwork, and ill-health. Women laboured long hours under inhuman conditions. A majority of them were illiterate, lived in slums and had an average of four small children at home - in most cases the children accompanied their mothers to the work sites. A majority of the women did not own their tools of production and rented them at usurious rentals. Most of the households had a heavy debt burden and paid punitive interest charges.

The organizers of SEWA held several meetings in the labour neighbourhoods, perhaps as many as 1,000. They offered support to the women workers during their working lives in return for membership of the new trade union. The organizers discovered that the only inducement which attracted the women was the possibility of increasing their income through improvement in their working conditions. An assortment of other trade groups approached the organizers - vegetable vendors, milk-maids, junk collectors, carpenters, smiths, block printers, basket weavers, bidi workers, pappad makers, agricultural workers, aggarbathi workers, chindi (textile rag) workers. They flocked to the SEWA meetings. However, their active involvement in the union followed only on the acceptance of the organisation by the female community leaders. The SEWA organizers normally established their entry into a trade group by establishing their bonafides with the dominant women of the trade group, through tactful and patient discussions.

Lack of capital appeared to be the most common and pressing constraint in all the trade groups. Some of the women were self-employed (vegetable vendors and used-garment dealers), but unlike the richer class of entrepreneurs they had no personal security, and had no source of borrowing other than the money-lender; they had neither approached nor had been offered loans by commercial banks. A vegetable vendor, for instance, borrowed Rs. 50 from a money-lender in the morning, grossed about Rs. 60 during the day, and returned him Rs. 55 in the evening, thereby paying an interest of 10% per day.

The solution to this problem of capital shortage was to find a cheaper source of credit. At that time, the state was trying to persuade nationalized banks to provide loans to small entrepreneurs. The scheme, however, had not filtered down to the poorest self-employed who did not possess any banking know-how. The banks, on their part, did not know the channels through which to reach these trade groups. The Self-Employed Women's Association decided to act as an intermediary between the banks and the women. This service was the first concrete programme of the new organization.

SEWA'S OPERATIONAL TECHNIQUE

The fulcrum of SEWA's operations is mobilization • mobilization of workers, of public support, of legal support, of all available services for channellizing into its members.

For mobilizing the workers, it has evolved a technique which again finds its inspiration in the parent union, the TLA.

TECHNIQUE OF MOBILIZATION OF MEMBERS

a. The use of survey: The first phase of SEWA's communication technique is to conduct a survey in the localities or worker's groups which have been identified for inclusion in the union. To document this technique with an illustration from a hypothetical situation, consider the approach of SEWA to a community of women workers which has had no previous organizational experience. SEWA organizers are not known by the community; nor do they know the women workers and do not understand their problems. The women regard the organization with suspicion or indifference

This communication gap is overcome by the research survey method. SEWA organizers cast a simple survey design and enter the community to do a household survey. Usually the survey seeks only vital information such as age, marital status, size of family and income. During the course of the survey the fieldworkers become acquainted with the families. They come to understand the style of living and behaviour of the community. They develop contacts and friends among the members and gain an appreciation of their problems. The women, on the other hand, develop a reci-

procal interest in the fieldworkers and the organization they represent. Not only is their curiosity aroused, but the questions make them aware of their situation. The process of conscientisation begins here. The survey therefore serves simultaneously as an information-gathering tool and a device for establishing contact.

The survey results are analysed at the office and a general picture formed. This provides the organizers of SEWA with the knowledge required to have a discussion.

SEWA organizers join the women in katha¹ or bhajan² sessions in the neighbourhood. It is usually after such participation that discussions are held with the women about themselves. Survey results are shared with the women and solutions are developed jointly. Using traditional cultural gatherings for entry is considered more effective than formal meetings.

Next, the organisers tell the women about SEWA - its work with other workers. They instigate the women to associate, to consolidate their strength as a precondition to overcoming whatever hurdles they face.

b The use of local leadership: Leaders of the community, as supported by the local women, are identified by SEWA organizers and approached sensitively. Stress is laid on convincing these women of the strength of solidarity and unionization, because not only do they exercise a decisive influence on other women workers of the community, but also because they are crucial links in the communi

1 A social gathering at which a priest or elder recites stories/verses from well-known religious epics.

2 Group singing of devotional songs.

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cation lines that SEWA develops to establish contact between its members, as well as with the union organization.

SEWA programmes are implemented by the organizers largely through the medium of these Women group leaders. The group leaders, who live and work among the members, maintain two-way communication- with the organizers and with the members. They articulate to SEWA organizers the problems faced by their groups, their needs and their aspirations, and on the return flow they reach the resources and services mobilized by the organizers to the group members. For example, group leaders escort members, especially in the early stages, to the SEWA office or SEWA field organizers with individual grievances, or assist them in their dealings with the municipality.

Frequent meetings with the organizers, three to four times a week, make this an effective communication-cum-delivery pipeline. SEWA has found this a low-cost and highly successful operational technique of organising poor urban woken workers who are cut off from sources of strength by their isolation, poverty and low social standing.

At the same time, SEWA organizers make a public issue of their members' demands so that interest is aroused in society at large in these invisible groups of workers. Newspaper stories, illustrated features, processions, distribution of pamphlets, meetings in public places - all these measures are employed to sensitise the public. This also provides an opportunity for public debate on the merits of the stand taken by the workers as well as reactions from the "other side," viz., those who give them employment or facilities for plying their trade.

Publicising information, as well as the conflict, prepares the ground for negotiation. So far, every success in negotiating for a better deal for the workers has been based on this "talking the public into confidence" technique. This technique was used effectively by Mahatma Gandhi throughout the period of India's struggle for national liberation.

(c) The use of public meetings: Public meetings and processions are held often with the participation of leading social and political figures, to further consolidate the workers as well as link them to the power structure. At these meetings the issues are raised and representations made. Public assurances are given and then SEWA's leaders pursue these assurances till they are fulfilled. This technique can best be illustrated by referring to a few actual events.

To begin with, let us take the chindi workers. Textile rags (known as chindi), a by-product in the mill-city of Ahmedabad, are weighed and bought by traders and then sold to members of the Muslim community. The rags are partially re-sold to self-employed women garment-makers in smaller towns, and partially retained for stitching together into patchwork quilt covers or khols. Women of these households wash, dry, sort the rags according to colour, print, size and texture. Then the rags are trimmed, and finally stitched together into patchwork quilt covers or khols. Often women are provided the chindi on a "putting out" basis by the traders for whom they stitch the khols at a wage of 60 paise per khol, and left-over chindi is returned to the trader. Each khol consists of 70-120 separate pieces. The additional raw materials and equipment required (kerosene for removing stains, water for washing the rags, salt, thread, needle, sewing machine, lubricating oil and scissors) are all procured by the khol stitchers themselves, mobilising their own resources. They work in their homes and use their own

electricity. Computed roughly, the khol stitchers' outlay per khol is approximately 25 paise, leaving a net wage of 30-35 paise. On the average, one stitcher might prepare 10-12 khols in 2 days (7 working hours per day), earning a net income of Rs. 1.50 - 2.10 per day.

"Chindi" women resented the low wages, especially since they knew that the marchants' net profit per khol is in excess of Rs. 5. Yet action against the merchants seemed a distant possibility, more so since most of the women belonged to the Muslim community and lived in purdah.

SEWA organizers had learnt of the conditions under which chindi workers worked during their visits to the various labour localities, such as Dariapur in West Ahmedabad. In October 1977 they started a membership campaign through house-to-house visits. SEWA's work in the other trade occupations was well-known, and the chindi women were easily convinced of the potential of solidarity in securing higher wages. Several street meetings of chindi workers were organised, covering the localities in which the women lived. Within weeks the membership of chindi workers in the SEWA union swelled to 290.

Initially, the SEWA organizers addressed the merchants through a letter to the president of the Chindi Vepari (Merchant) Association, stating the problems of the women khol-makers. There was no response from him, or any assurance from the vice-president or secretary, both of whom the SEWA organizers met personally. They tried to meet other traders, but were unable to convince them of the women's hardships and just demands.

Next, they stated their case to the labour commissioner in a detailed note. Officials of the Labour Commission initiated on-the-spot enquiries of any violations by the traders under the shop Establishment Act.

The investigations were protracted, and five weeks elapsed without any discussion between the disputing parties. The women grew restive since the demand for chindi was at its peak in the winter months. Dariapur was visibly tense, with sharp exchanges between merchants' wives and the khol stitchers. SEWA organizers were also insulted and abused when they visited the locality. Finally, the labour commissioner called representatives of both parties. The khol stitchers were represented by the General Secretary of the SEWA union, 2 SEWA fieldworkers, a TLA "area inspector," and 4 khol stitchers. The merchants, who arrived much after the appointed time, were five in number, and had brought along a lawyer.

Both sides presented their case elaborately, but despite five hours of persuasion and discussion, the merchants did not yield to the workers' requests, which were supported by the labour commissioner. The merchants held that they engaged the khol-makers on a charitable basis and they incurred losses on this business.

After the meeting concluded inconclusively late in the evening the union organizers again attempted to meet the merchants, but were not successful.

Realizing that direct negotiation had failed, the SEWA organizer led for confrontation. That night a large meeting of chindi makers was held in Dariapur. The women, some of whom had turned against the union which "delivered" nothing, listened solemnly to the details of the day's proceedings in the Labour Commission, as recounted by one of their own colleagues. This had an electrifying effect, and they were determined to endure all hardships until their demands were met.

In the following weeks the merchants kept alive an ambiguous communication with the SEWA union, promising to meet them directly, but parrying questions about the exact date of the

meeting. Meanwhile, they continued to pay the wage of 60 paise per khol to the khol stitchers, and thus secured a large proportion of their winter profits.

The union, leaders committed to non-violence and negotiation, waited for the merchants. Several weeks after the first meeting at the labour commissioner's office, the merchants' representatives visited the SEWA office. Here they agreed to the appointment of a panch, or a 5-member arbitration board. It may be noted that this was resorted to from a genuine belief in the principle of arbitration, both by the merchants and the organizers. (The pervasive Gandhian influence in Ahmedabad can be glimpsed in this agreement.)

The panch, comprizing respected citizens acceptable to both parties, came to an agreement, after a delay of 3-4 weeks, in favour of the khol-makers and stipulated that stitching wages be raised to Re 1 per khol. The merchants agreed in principle, and theoretically the battle was won. But the SEWA organizers feel the necessity of being vigilant against intimidation of their members by the merchants and their subtle attempts to lure the women away from membership. There seems to be some residual tension, and the SEWA organizers have been reportedly receiving anonymous threats against their activities in Dariapur.

The merchants are particularly piqued by the organization of a khol-production centre by the SEWA union, which was established while negotiations were in progress with the merchants. Some of the poorest khol workers who suffered acute economic distress during the period were helped by the union, which organized the purchase of chindi rags from the mills under the Government-owned National Textile Corporation, as well as other private sector mills, and arranged for the marketing of khols through various channels including their own outlets.

In establishing the production centre the SEWA union has exceeded its traditional role of a trade union, once again in response to members' needs. The union's unconventional approach in assisting poor working women is reflected in this spontaneous gesture.

During the struggle, in fact, some of the shop-stewards of TLA provided the know-how and guidance to SEWA members on conducting the struggle, and persuaded the merchants, who are also, in a way, ordinary entrepreneurs, to settle the dispute. After the settlement was reached, however, SEWA invited the khol merchants and the arbitrator for tea to eradicate any vestiges of bitterness. These illustrate the use of the Gandhian principle of harmony between the management and the workers, as well as the role of a trade union in organizing the toiling people working in the informal sector.

I would like to illustrate another technique of mobilisation of members here: to be specific, the protection extended to used-cloth dealers against police harassment. The Veghari community, who are traders in used clothes, have

been subjected to acute harassment by the police, generally involving charged of theft of clothes from the affluent homes where they procure the garments. Regularly, a son or husband of the women garment vendors is picked up by the police, beaten in the lock-up and -it is alleged - released only after a surreptitious financial settlement.

One incident relates to the apprehension by the police of a man who had been recently released from hospital after an operation. The stitches had not been removed yet. His family and relatives feared for his life if he was manhandled in his State. They marched to the SEWA office and demanded intervention by the organisers. The organisers went with them to the police station and held a meeting with police officers on duty. Meanwhile, a growing of old clothers' sellers crowded in the compound outside.

The use of the two forces together - a show of solidarity by members of the Veghari community, and intervention by union leaders-caused the police to give in. As the sick man was released, -the police officer reportedly remarked that this was the first case he could remember of releasing a used-clothers' seller without beating him.

A similar case relates to the arrest of a young woman clothes dealer for the alleged theft of a sari from a well off family. The SEWA organisers set about tracing the original owner, and when they had confirmed that the sari had in fact been sold to the vendor in exchange for steel utensils, they confronted the police with the owner. The woman was released promptly.

On numerous other occasions the SEWA union stood as a bulwark against heedless persecution by local authorities of the poor working women, who lack the resources to summon assistance of professionals, and who do not have experience of workers' solidarity. Here too there is a striking similarity with the supportive role of traditional trade unions.

Another instance of mobilisation was on the occasion of seeking authorization for squatting stalls for self-employed women. Crowded markets such as Manek Chowk in the heart of Ahmedabad and other busy markets are prized locations for vendors. The large number of buyers assures a minimum sale of almost any product being vended. There is a constant press of sellers and buyers, and the ubiquitous "authorities". Reportedly even licensed pavement vendors are not assured of their squatting spaces without regular gratuitous payments to the police and municipal authorities. For unlicensed vendors, flight at the approach of the police is the only alternative to paying the illegal "dues".

Protesting against the system which has allowed these practices to flourish for 50 years or more, the SEWA union then organised a 3000 member procession on 5 August 1978 (Indian Independence Day). Snaking through the busiest roads of the city, and stopping for demonstrations in the areas where SEWA members

had experienced the most harassment, the procession focussed attention on urgent problems faced by the members. The Chief Minister came to address the meeting which, from a procession, had become a rally. The organisers presented their demand for an increase in the number of licences granted to vendors and the permanent allotment of pavement spaces, 2' x 3', to self-employed vendors on a formal basis in all the major markets of the city. The State Government has a counter proposal to allot vending spaces to these workers in a new market, to be constructed at a distance from the main business centres of the city. SEWA is resisting the attempts to settle the vendors in locations where they have no customers, and their resistance has temporarily stalled the government's decision.

Whatever the final outcome, the SEWA union has made a beginning in obtaining municipal recognition for vendors' rights as street peddlars. Such a move on behalf of vendors as workers is perhaps without parallel in the country.

SEWA has also provided assistance to women in personal distress. A working woman who brings a personal problem to the SEWA union is not turned away on the basis that such problems are outside the interest of the union. The union often acts as an external agency outside the family which can lay pressure on the family on the strength of its unique locus standi in the workers' community.

This approach is revealed in the handling of the case of a young house-servant (a SEWA member) who, along with a small child, was turned out of her husband's house by her in-laws. SEWA found her a better-paying job, registered a case for maintenance against the husband, and simultaneously tried to bring about a

rapprochement between the girl's parents and her in-laws. Unfortunately, the parents could not agree. Yet the girl won her case for maintenance rights, and is now financially secure on the allowance from her husband and her own earnings.

In another instance, another maidservant, who was not a SEWA member, approached the union for assistance in recovering jewellery which she had pawned with her employer two years earlier. The man, who was a money-lender, denied that he held the jewellery. The union sent the manager of the SEWA Bank with Rs. 800/- to the employer and secured its release. The girl became a SEWA member and the amount paid on her behalf was deemed a loan from the SEWA Bank. She was found a good job and helped to pay back her loan gradually.

SEWA's Rural Wing

SEWA's rural wing was initiated when due to severe drought conditions in 1977 a group of agricultural workers of Nalkantha approached SEWA for help. With the ALA, SEWA immediately launched an income generating project whose target was to integrate 1000 women in 5 years in 7 villages. The rural wing offers employment through spinning, processing of raw material, supply of sewing machines. It has also started milk cooperatives and creches.

SEWA began to enlist women in the villages in Sanand and Dholka talukas where KMM had been active. This entry was natural as SEWA's General Secretary was one of KMM's Vice-Presidents. Whenever she attended the meetings with the KMM team, she addressed herself to the women, and pointed out the special problems faced by women to KMM.

Visiting the villages revealed the possibilities of linking the women retailers or pavement vendors to the women rural producers especially in farm produce such as vegetables and milk. SEWA started to send a man to pick up vegetables directly from the women in the neighbouring villages and avoid the Mahajans.*

Another link was the KMM worker located in Zamp who happened to be a woman. This woman led the interest of SEWA into strengthening creches and schools as well as income opportunities for the women.

But the big push to SEWA's rural project has come from the dynamism of the milk revolution - the momentum of the Anand pattern developed at AMUL dairies (Ref. 82).

*Wholesalers

This experience of SEWA is worth recording for some of its implications for social mobilisation for self-reliance.

The National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) activities included the development of a dairy structure in Ahmedabad district. Such a dairy structure requires village level co-operatives federated into a different union. The Union offers guaranteed purchase of all milk produced and services such as transport, improved cattle feed and animal husbandry and veterinary services.

The planned cooperative federation could not take off in the district due to the strong presence of two well established private dairies each led by a prominent political figure. Of the two, one was particularly strong as it was based around a caste formation, the caste being the shepherded community which is associated with cattle rearing. No one from the villages was willing to break their supply to this dairy and transfer it to the new cooperative structure.

Into this situation without an awareness of this past, comes SEWA. In its contacts with rural women it finds that most of them work with animals and so as a part of its attempts to strengthen women skills and income, it sends groups of these women, its members for training to an animal husbandry and veterinary training programme run by the NDDB. The women on return are not only motivated to improve the cattle but also the output of milk and want to belong to the DB system which means becoming a cooperative and in return getting the veterinary and cattle feed inputs. They are encouraged in this and soon

milk is collected in a large container in the open space in atleast 3 villages and the NDDB's district dairy begins to come in for collection. Milk testing, measuring, paying is done informally, recruiting men and women from themselves. Money is collected for forming a cooperative, each share costs Rs. 15.

When these potential cooperatives are taken for registration, the pressure from the private dairies whose leaders have political influence resist their registration. With counter pressure from TLA, 3 cooperatives are registered. In the meantime milk collection moves from 4 to 400 litres within a month and soon the neighbouring village women want to bring it to the SEWA collection centres. Women come forward to form 7 more cooperatives and even though registration is not taking place, the cooperative union treats them as societies and the flow of milk increases rapidly. Wherever the cooperatives are formed, women become Presidents and Vice-Presidents though men also participate both as members as well as functionaries. Hirabhai was functioning as a kind of milk measurer, collector, tester, payment maker for a cluster of villages in December/January 1979-80.

The women who bring this milk to the SEWA cooperatives are from the same community which so far had been supplying only to the private dairy of their clansman. They were able to break this boundary with an almost innocent smoothness, by just taking a decision on which linkage was more valuable from their net income point of view. The animal feed improved the fat content of milk. So dramatically the payment per union increased

sometimes upto 50 per cent. This and the simple joy of working with other women managing their own affairs and being linked to an agency which lead them to all kinds of facilities - training, maternity and child care facilities, participation in shibirs, ~~wanted~~^{wanted} the women away into SEWA's dairy network.

Now the word has spread out in the Taluka and applications are coming from villages inviting SEWA to include them in the dairy project. In response SEWA cadres visit the village, hold many meetings explaining the whole process. They return and invite men and women in the village to become members of the cooperative. Once the minimum members have come forward, they ask them to elect their own managing committee, to find someone locally who can take the training for milk testing and accounting. When they return, these matters have been decided. A book is opened, a milk van bought with the share capital and the programme begins with the milk van stopping at the village.

SEWA's liaison with NDDB is important in the success of this operation as they are able every day to make demands on the union which are immediately translated by managers into the villagers.

Table: 4.1 : Membership of SEWA's Rural Wing
in Talukas Sanand, Dholka & Dhandhuka

<u>S.No.</u>	<u>Name of Village</u>	<u>No. of members</u>
1	Dev Dholera	400
2	Metal	65
3	Zamp	198
4	Kesardi	189
5	Sanked	93
6	Vasna	69
7	Baladana	121
8	Chhabasar	80
9	Devadthal	85
10	Dumali	61
11	Beganda	41
12	Vanalia	71
13	Sanked	128
14	Sial	78
15	Bagadra	92
16	Kotha	55
17	Gangad	50

Source : SEWA

Women

The question has been raised whether the visible active participation of women in the KMM can be accounted for, as most unions - both rural and urban, in India and other countries, do not have any significant participation of women. In the TLA/KMM/SEWA complex women are visible at all levels to a far greater extent than in any other peasant organisation including Bhoomi Sena. To a large extent this can be traced to the Gandhian roots of this organisation, though it cannot be said that all Gandhian organisations have any noticeable degree of participation by women. In other words even though Mahatma Gandhi made it a point to emphasise the need to involve women in all vanguard activities, those individuals and agencies which have adopted Gandhi as the fountainhead have not always followed this percept. To that extent these three unions have been more faithful to Mahatma Gandhi's own vision than most other Gandhian organisations.

Mahatma Gandhi presented an apparent paradox in that he perceived women's qualities as different from those of men, and at the same time wanted to blur the biological/sexual differences. He postulated that women were more patient, non-violent, and capable of sacrifice and self-control than men. He always placed them in the vanguard of his protest movements on the basis that they were more sensitive to moral issues and would safeguard this at all costs. On the other hand, he also suggested that there was a part of woman in every man and vice-versa and the attempt should be to fuse the differences rather to sharpen them.

His strategies on this issue, however, have to be seen in the context of Hindu religion and Indian society rather than in any general theoretical frame. Since the society insisted on segregation¹ and often exaggerated women's sexuality, he continuously demonstrated that biology was not a dividing line

1) G. Morris Carstairs "The Twice Born" (Ref No.-93)

and women were capable of courage and leadership as much if not more than men. He tried to present them in roles which were far removed from their roles as sex objects.

Because of this, women of his time, whatever their background, found it easy to join his movement¹. No doubt was cast on their morality, no inhibitions were expressed about their living and travelling with men as a movement demands.

Women of that era have reported that it was this approach that drew them to Mahatma Gandhi. Many of them had been aberrations to the concept of womanhood in conventional Hindu society. They had either left their husbands, were widows or even living with men outside of marriage. They would normally have found it awkward to participate in public life, but Mahatma Gandhi gave them status and made it impossible for their behaviour to become an issue.

It is in this kind of frame that Ansuya Behn, the non-conformist sister of the industrialist Ambalal Sarabhai, found a companion in Mahatma Gandhi. There are stories of how she would ride in an open "coach and four" in Ahmedabad, smoking a cigarette held with a cigarette holder for all to see. She was dramatising the liberation of elite women. Mahatma Gandhi, recognising her spirit of dissent and willingness to face the public made her the leader of the textile workers pitting her against her own family's business.

The induction of Ansuya Behn into the textile workers' movement led to the emphasis given to women. She straightaway started a residential school for girls, tailoring classes and other services, addressed directly to the women of the textile workers' families. This meant a women's wing, women extension personnel. Being under the umbrella of TLA, when KMM formed

- 1) Vijay Agnew-Women in Elite Politics in India, Vikas Publication 1979 (Ref No 94)
- 2) Women and the Political Process-Devaki Jain-Hindustan Times January 13, 1980 (Ref: 95)

naturally the TLA's leadership was involved and the Chief of the Women's Wing of TLA became a Vice-President of KMM. One of the organisers in the Women's Wing of TLA became the central rural organiser. This led to a reach to women in equal if not greater numbers than men, which gives the unusual female percentage in the membership of the KMM.

Comparing the momentum of KMM with SEWA in the same rural areas it appears that women get drawn into formations, especially for economic advantage, with greater speed and ease than men. The usual explanation offered for this phenomena is that women being harnessed with the basic responsibility for provision of food, and shelter to the family cannot afford the luxury of standing by, watching or waiting when it comes to struggle for survival. They may accept given boundaries such as caste, given issues such as tradition, but all of these are broken almost in one stroke when the opportunity for enhancing the lives of the family presents itself. The muslim widow in Petlad would rather have the wage than the respect of her neighbourhood. The younger muslim tobacco worker would rather not get married. This sense of heavy responsibility for the family seems to be a part of the sociology, psychology or chemistry of women in peasant societies as seen in India.

On January 30, 1980 SEWA organised a Satyagraha (non-violent, non-cooperation) in the busiest square in Ahmedabad city (Ref. 91)*. They were occupying their traditional spots on the pavements in the heart of the city's market, disobeying prohibitory orders by the Municipality. They were asserting that they had as much right to the spot on the pavement as the big shopkeepers had to their shops as many of them had occupied that spot for over

*WOMEN VENDORS ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS' - Devaki Jain, Voluntary action, dated March 1980 - published by AVARD, Vol. XXII No. 3

(Ref No 91)

three generations. They also argued that they were not a traffic nuisance any more than the vehicles - motor cars and bicycles that were parked in spaces blocking up the road. They wanted their selling rights legitimised. They were willing to move from those particular pavements if an area was allotted to them for selling their goods, which was within the shopping area of the town,

This head on collision with the Municipality provoked great debate within the parent union as many of the corporators were nominees of the TLA, and in a sense one part of the TLA was confronting another part. The women cadres were advised to call off their public demonstration and negotiate quietly, but they did not. They felt that unless they immediately presented their case, there would be the usual delay through committees and in the meantime the self-employed street vendors would be deprived of their daily earning. This gives another illustration of the tendency for women workers to prefer to go against normal protocol as their responsibility for the food for the family makes any threat to their earning power unbearable.

Review

The liveliness with which the interest in associating with SEWA has spread in Sanand Taluka appears to be partly due to the linkage with the dairy programme - a proposition which supports the Vyas hypothesis that the dynamism of a Union formation is a function of the buoyancy of the sector within which the formation is made.

Another aspect which cannot be quantified would fall under what can be called the 'style' of an organisation or movement. Travelling in the villages with SEWA's cadres and organisers, the most striking impression that emerges is the light touch with

which the mobilisation is handled. Ideas and possibilities are mentioned, local individuals are named as possible link agents and then the people are left to themselves to work out the timetable, the speed, the programme they would like. There is no active or intense dialogue accompanied by discussions on analysis, ideology, performance. It is mostly exposures on which it is presumed that the local people will talk amongst themselves, sort out their own priorities and action.

This method also means a certain slowness but the light touch inspires a certain confidence and people will be allowed not only to think for themselves to work out solutions which seem realistic given their social and political environment. Thus no antagonisms are generated, no ideas and ideologies implanted by the outsider. The outsider's role becomes somewhat undefined, yet at the same time he/she provides a resource in terms of generating an interest in issues like labour's rights and laws - and the advantages of durable solidarity in handling the super structure.

If one raises the question with the cadres and leadership on impact, assessment, analysis, there is a lack of response or a hesitation if not actual hostility as they seem to be of the view that outsiders distort programmes through their pressures on seeking information, assessing performance. The same reserve is exhibited by Bhoomi Sena but unlike Bhoomi Sena or Vietnam there is a low key approach to communication with the rural worker. This gives the rural worker especially those who are economically and socially vulnerable, opportunities to reflect on suggestions that are put to them, to opt in and out of opportunities. It seems to give him/her a freedom, perhaps even a freedom from formations. In other words it allows the individual to keep his

individuality and engineer his entry into formation according to his instincts or his pre-disposition. Active mobilisation techniques do not offer this option.

Though this methodology as described may look too unstructured or amorphous to be generated from any strong principles or ideological base, it is in fact an expression of an ideological base - and this base is provided by Mahatma Gandhi.

Though Mahatma Gandhi's various endeavours in various fields - political such as the freedom struggle, economic such as Swadeshi, social such as eradication of untouchability and harmonising the Hindu-Muslim communities was always based on massive mobilisation - within these formations there was never any attempt to merge individuality with any degree of intensity. "Unity within diversity" was more than a slogan. It was more than a slogan because the Gandhian ideology had a deeper root namely Hinduism, especially the Vaishnav tradition as expressed in the Bhagvat Gita* (Ref. 92). The individual was the all important entity, his self assertion, his self fulfilment was self determined. His individuality, his option to assert or be free could only be sublimated through self-examination. This kind of spiritual base persisted in Gandhi's approach to ownership of property, the general belief in peasant households and the self employed.

Gandhi's perception of freedom and rights was linked to economic independence, and the belief that any attempt to sublimate such individual independence through economic or social organisation which insisted on the surrender of these rights would ultimately lead to domination and a loss of the very freedom which were promised to the formations.

This belief is ingrained in the thoughtful Gandhian worker and its expression cannot be better seen than in the light touch of SEWA workers - who roam around the villages exposing the population to ideas, opportunities, injustices but never deepen these relationships. They leave it to the local individuals and groups to sort it out amongst themselves.

Dialogue with the villagers

A Sample Survey

Twenty members of the KMM were interviewed in three villages - Dev Dholera, Bhayala and Zamp in March 1979 with a questionnaire. There was no planned selection - those who had not gone out to work on the day of the field visit were interviewed in their homes.

Of the twenty responses (see Table 5,1), seventeen were fairly detailed. Of the seventeen, four had been members of the KMM for three years or more, seven for two years and the rest for one year. Six out of the seventeen members were women. Out of the seventeen, ten were landless workers, four were marginal farmers with holdings below 2 acres and three had holdings between 7.5 acres to 16 acres, but extremely poor land - more like wasteland.

Seven said they had regular work for only upto four months in a year. Employment above this period was highly irregular and uncertain. The wages were below the Minimum Wages Act. Five of the respondents found work throughout the year as some of them migrated from the village during the slack period or took up manual work in construction activity around the village.

Seven of the respondents stated that their motive for joining the KMM was to seek additional employment opportunities. One person identified his motive as seeking full wages under the Minimum Wages Act. One of the respondents was a former bonded labourer who had since set up a petty shop and

joined the KMM for not any personal gain but solely for supporting the trade union movement. Several persons stated that they were also attracted by the Anganwadi programme of the KMM for the betterment of their children. One sought membership for being able to secure a loan, another for being able to build a house and the third for securing employment in some service for her daughter. The latter three are all women.

Most of the respondents reported that their biggest gain from joining KMM was additional sources of employment income through the spinning-wheel (Charkha) provided by the KMM. Three acknowledged that they had secured higher wages, one claimed medical attention as the main gain while the other had been able to have access to ghee and fruits because of additional employment. Two claimed that KMM had succeeded in freeing bonded labour while an equal number felt that it had not achieved much. One member stated that there was resentment among women against KMM because it landed their husbands in jail because of struggle with the landowners.

The participation of the members in the KMM meetings was uneven. Half the number stated that they spoke at the meetings but the other half only listened.

Table : 5.1 - Profile of 17 ALA members in 3 villages

Res- pon- dent	Period of ALA member- ship	Sex	Assets (land in acres)	Period of em- ploy- ment (months)	Motivation for joining ALA	Gain from ALA
1	2	M	Landless	12	Higher wages	25% improvement in earning
2	2	M	"	-	Betterment	Medical atten- tion
3	3	M	"	12	Employment	Charkha
4	4	M	"	*Petty shop- keeper	Support to TU movement	ALA is freeing bonded labour
5	-	M	"	2	Employment	Not much done
6	2	M	"	4	For children and better tools	Access to Anganwadi
7	2	F	"	12	Employment	Work in woolle centres also access to Anganwadi
8	1	F	"	2	Employment	-
9	-	F	"	4	Employment and housing	Ghee/fruits
10	2	F	"	4	To get a Charkha	Access to Anga wadi, nothing else done yet
11	3	F	1	**Not Allow- ed to work	Service for daughter	Anganwadi
12	2	F	1	12	Loan	Loan and Anganwadi
13	3	M	1	10	Betterment	Higher wages
14	4	M	2	1-2	Emulating others who joined ALA	Higher wage
15	3	M	7.5	12	Employment	Charkha
16	-	M	13	5	For full wages	Improvement
17	2	M	16	3	Employment	Supplementary Employment

*He was formerly a bonded labour

**By her own family

Dialogues were held and meetings attended in locales to hear the workers. (DJ is Devaki Jain, MM is Madhusudan Mistry, a former Union worker, ~~is~~ a Gujarati).

Dev Dholera: Arjun Kaka is an old man of 60 and heads a large family of Harijan weavers. His homestead is his own and it is like a colony of houses connected to each other in the Harijan area in Dev Dholera. There are 27 such families in the village. His nephew Aljee Bhai, a middle aged man, has two sons and one daughter; the sons are studying, a girl of 12 was at home. We sat together in their veranda, 8 men passing around a hukka. There is a loom which occupies half of the veranda on which Arjun Kaka is weaving the traditional woollen blanket. Three women are sitting spinning yarn. The conversation starts:

(Weaver - W)

- W : You have come from Delhi. Is Indira coming back?
- DJ : Who is coming here?
- W : No one whoever comes, becomes a Minister and comes to power, he leaves.....so no one will come.
- DJ : What about work?
- W : Over the year we work as agricultural labours- 2½ months in cotton ginning, 20 days on rice fields, 2 months on wheat and may be 20 days in construction. For the rest of the year we remain unemployed.
- DJ : Do women earn their living separately from men? Are their roles different?
- W : No. Men and women go together for work including paddy transplanting. We are from the scheduled caste and have no specific division of roles.
- (The men were also spinning, an activity usually done by women) Calculating their wage with them, this is how they presented it:

Wages in agriculture:

Paddy: Rs. 10 per day for 10 days. Women may be paid 3 maunds per bigha, a family of 8 persons work at 16 bighas in 15-20 days, they may earn 54 maunds. They will sell this rice at Rs. 28 per maund as it is Basmati, a fine grained rice which they do not normally eat.

Wheat : They may get paid Rs. 5 per day for two maunds per bigha.

Cotton : As cotton pod chellers, they would get Rs. 3 per every 20 kgs. of cotton.

DJ : You are members of the Mahajan for how long?

W : For 4 years but in the last 2 years we are paying membership to SEWA. The KMM made the men members and we pay the Union the dues together for two years. Now the women pay membership to SEWA.

DJ : How has the Union been of help to you?

W : We are weaving with yarn that SEWA obtained for us from Khadi people. Khadi people send a clean yarn. We make the blanket and resell the blankets for wages. In one week we can make one blanket. The blanket is purchased by the Khadi people for Rs. 40. First we were unemployed in the looms. We were asked to go to the banks. We went from place to place. Cattle loan is not available on subsidised rates. Yet we have no land for grazing so we could not pay the rates. We need buffaloes. 'Asha Amar Hai' (desire is immortal).

DJ : But getting work from SEWA or KMM is only one aspect. Do you know the difference between a Union and a cooperative?

W : We know nothing. We need work. This weaving and the milk programme is giving us that. Gandhiji gave us freedom through the Khadi thread. Our selected representative is a Harijan but he never comes here.

DJ : You send your sons to school, why not the daughter?

W : Let her play now. Once she gets married, it will be all work till she dies. Even educating the boys in the hope that they will get a job has not helped. They have come back as labourers so why send her to school. Take me to Delhi. I want to see the leaders.

DJ : But you do not respect them!

W : I do. I just like to complain. 'Asha Amar Hai'.

Walking through Dev Dholera village after talking to the family of weavers the dry stillness, the total absence of any vigour in the poorer areas makes a strong impression. We walked into the hut of a young girl of 16. She is introduced as the best spinner of khadi in the village. She has picked up the skill, ^{only recently} but her productivity is so high that she can become a teacher. None of her family members has any income/work. She opens her pot to show that now atleast there is enough cooked food for the evening whereas before there was not even half a morning meal. She is so excited that she walks around the village with us and wants to belong to an organisation and move forward.

The group then begins to discuss the on coming cotton ginning season. They had demanded the statutory minimum wage in the nearby gin - there had been the usual response of saying yes in front of the Union leaders, not paying when the curtains were down and threatening to disemploy if any complaints were made.

The Secretary of SEKA urges them to present a united front. We should boycott the gin, then he will learn a lesson. They look at each other. May be the ranks had broken the unity. The pressures are great. Next time we will not give in, they say.

The meeting at night in Zamp

This is Brami. He became an ALA worker on the initiative of ^{the President of the Union} ~~Sankar~~ (worker means paid staff of the Union). He talks about their sewing class started when Mahalakshmi was put here. No one came to the sewing class, so machines were returned. Four years he tried, nothing could get started. No one had any 'Laab' (advantage) inspite of the talkings at meetings. The people of the village did not take to anything.

Looms were brought, a teacher was brought. The women were interested but even that could not get started. Why? The women and men wanted daily wage to feed their children. Question: Do they have their daily wage, is there employment here? He answers "go two furlongs from here and see".

Fateh Begum speaks: She is a fairly large milk producer. Also has a grinding mill. Started and helped the milk cooperative to start. She gives a more moderate picture of the events and talks of these improvements in women's condition through the milk activities.

Then the Pandit speaks: He does not belong to the Union but like all Pandits takes interest in everything. The Pandit says no one has done anything. Money from Delhi has never reached this village. No promises have been kept even in the harijan busti. There is hopelessness here. The place is totally indebted to the banks. It is notorious for not repaying and so no bank will come here.

Once pumps were offered for water. Even people with one acre were given Rs. 5000 loan. A pump costs Rs. 1500. Many bought and sold the pump and never repaid the loan.

2amp

- MM : Kasi Ram, you are a Government employee, why did you join KMM?
- KR : I had some problem of transfer. ALA intervened and got the transfer stopped. I am happy with the Union.
- MM : Have you helped the KMM?
- KR : I was very active for 3 years because of my influence in the neighbouring villages. But I am not active for the last one year.
- MM : Why?
- KR : I tried to get a loan from the bank for purchase of a buffalo. KMM tried to help with 3 or 4 banks, but failed. I, therefore, lost interest in KMM. Second reason is that KMM is not doing anything specially for the members from whom I collected membership dues. Those who paid the dues through me are always accusing that I have taken the money but done nothing for them. I have told this to the Head Office many times, but they did not do anything.
- Kalu Bai : I am a landless labourer. I joined KMM 3 years ago thinking I will take advantage of some Government scheme and to get higher wages because the farmers get only Rs. 3 per day for 8 hours work though the minimum wage fixed is Rs. 5.50 per day.
- MM : Have you succeeded in getting the minimum wage after joining the Union?
- KB : Although I am not getting the full amount of the minimum wage but I am getting more than before. Another thing that has happened is that employers have shifted to piece rate. There is an advantage for the workers also in this system. The earlier we finish the work, we collect the payment and can do other work if we like. Of course, the landlord is also happy because the Government rule for minimum wage does not apply.
- MM : Have you attended any Union meeting or complained about wages?

- KB : I attended only one meeting but it was a function organised at Zamp.
- MM : What do you expect the Union to do for you?
- KB : Most of the months of the year we remain idle and hardly get any work. If the Union provides some work then we get little earning and can live.

Anyali

- MM : Shivabhai, when did you join KMM and why?
- SB : I paid subscription 3 years ago. My wife also joined. We wanted to take benefit of Government schemes. But I have lost interest in KMM because nobody contacted me since I paid the subscription. I am surprised that somebody has been thought of coming from outside to my village to enquire about the functioning of KMM.
- MM : What did KMM promise you?
- SB : I was told that all the grievances will be solved by KMM.
- MM : Why don't you ask the Union to pay back the money?
- SB : The Union is located in Ahmedabad. I would have to spend about Rs. 20 to go to Ahmedabad to receive Rs. 3.
- MM : What about your problems then?
- SB : I have become a member of a Mission which is active in the area providing employment on Food-for-Work programme. I am also a member of a Bhajan Mandal. It is a pity I paid subscription for membership but none has done anything for me so far.
- MM : When did you join ALA and why?
- Arjun Behn : I paid dues some 3 years ago. My intention was to get some "khalo" I do not have any land. My husband has gone to a neighbouring town in search of work.

- MM : What did KMM promise you?
- AB : They said if I become member of KMM I will get some economic support from the Union. I am very unhappy, this is a bad year (drought) and I do not have means to earn any livelihood. For sometimes I get employment in the food-for-work programme.
- Lakha Bhai : I also joined the Union at the same time as Arjun Behn hoping I will get some work. I am very keen if someone can provide me work.
- MM : Kanku Behn, you are very old, why did you join the Union?
- KB : My husband is also a member. We joined the Union to get higher wages and thought we may get some employment also.
- MM : Have you attended any meeting?
- KB : We have not attended any meeting nor do we know of any meeting held in the neighbouring villages.
- MM : Have you complained to Union officials?
- KB : We do not know^{to} whom to complain. Their head quarter is located at Ahmedabad but if they can provide us some work even now, we would be very happy.

Vanalia (50 kms from Ahmedabad)

- Gokul Bhai : I joined the Union some 3-4 years ago. I thought the Union will provide work but I have not got any benefit so far.
- MM : Have you complained?
- GB : There has been no meeting and I have not lodged any complaint but I am of the opinion that if the Union will give us some economic programme we would be very happy to become members again. We would like to have a buffalo cooperative and would like to be introduced to the bank.
- Roop Singh Bhai : I am a marginal farmer, I own very little land. My wife and I joined KMM at the same time as Gokul Bhai. I attended one function at Zamp about two years ago but have not heard anything about the Union since.

Gafoor Bhai : The Union officials told me when I joined the Union 3 years ago that they will provide work during the off season. Even now the Union should start some economic activity in Vanalia. This would make the people very happy.

Giaspur

A meeting at Giaspur

At 7.30 in the evening about 20 persons, of whom 8 are women, gather together on a veranda in Giaspur, 5 kms from Ahmedabad city. Giaspur has about 350 cultivator households, and 50 landless. Shukla Sahib, as he is called, the President of KMM, asks one of the persons present to describe their struggle with the Government.

Shanaji Duaji who looks about 70 years old starts the story. Shanaji owns 30 acres of land and is the revenue Patel. He goes back to 1946 when the Corporation wanted to acquire all their land of the village (about 1200 acres) for expansion of the sewage farm. The majority of the population he says, are shepherds.

They approached a local religious leader who advised them not to answer the notice served by the Government, but to tell the Government that 'Maharaj' will answer the questions. He tells them not to take money in compensation, but to ask for alternative land as land is livelihood and money will go.

Two years ago the Corporation stopped water and all those who were cultivating have now become labourers.

Jeevan Beha, a local women leader, speaks up and says how she came with 6 men from Giaspur to report the stoppage of water to the Union. She is a SEWA cadre. They are still waiting for water. In the meantime she adds the women work fetching sand or in the printing factories. The men also get work according to the day's fortunes.

The assembled group wrapped in blankets look up to Shukla Sahib for some answer. One or two more men are encouraged to speak. These are two landless labourers who ask for work.

In reply Shukla Sahib tells them that Giaspur is one of 5 lakhs villages in India, which means 65 crores of people. With the family sizes being 5 to 12, water and food are always short. He explains the enormity of the resource and population problem. Tells them the resources of rural India are being eaten away by the cities. He quotes from Gandhi saying that whatever the villager makes he puts it into a city. So he should make his consumer goods himself.

The villagers do not seem to be surprised by this answer, seem to take it as the conventional happening, and say goodbye. The local KMM organiser looks happy that 32 people had gathered.

Petlad

A village : Shekahadi

The meeting is in the building of a milk co-operative. Twenty two persons gather, all men. The

Local Union worker is a small farmer owning 6 bighas of land. He has become a local cadre from July 1979.

Ranchhodi Desibhai Patel, the Union's man says "my son is working in the Irrigation Department and gets Rs. 650 per month. This has been a relief and I like to do this work". He introduced a Harijan labourer, Kali Das Bhai, who owns 1/2 an acre of land.

"There are 12 members in my family, two boys work - one in a factory in Bombay from where he sends Rs. 100. My wife and I and my daughter-in-law work on other people's farms for about Rs. 5 a day. Work is available for about 100 days in the year. I last worked 2 days ago on a tobacco field."

Ranchhodbhai encourages another member, Kushalbhai, to speak.

"I have half an acre of land and 7 members in the house. We labour, my son and I, as there is no water to cultivate our half acre. Most days I get half a day's work for Rs. 2. Most days we are hungry. I have a case through the Union to get back some more of my land. Ranchhodbhai hopes it will come in my favour".

Ranchhodbhai seems to be totally involved in the misery of these men. But while listening to their story a bystander who is introduced as the local tobacco merchant's commission agent ^{views} interviews "Tell the truth", he says, "what about tea and Rotla that you get from the employer."

These people are lazy and they are liars". The labourers do not get ^{wr}disturbed by him. The group looks at him but with amusement, as if such a remark is expected of him.

A tobacco shed

Hosam Bibi and Mumtaz Bibi are two of 12 workers in a tobacco processing shed. They move into a group.

I have 12 children and no husband - and the only earning member in my family. My neighbours criticise me for leaving purdah and working outside in a shed. But what do I care - I would rather have my children ^{eat} ~~see~~ than have my neighbour's approval. Look at Mumtaz - she is unmarried, has no father and earns for the whole family being the eldest. If she marries, the family will lose their breadwinner.

The work is hard. We carry heavy loads of tobacco filled bags - we are paid according to the number of bags piled up. The employer is alright but he would ill-treat us if it were not for the Mahajan.

How did ^{you} come to the Union?

We wanted a loan from the employer for celebrating Diwali - he refused, we went to the Union office as we heard it gives loans to workers.

One day a labour inspector noticed that though the minimum wage in tobacco processing was Rs. 7.20, the factory was paying only Rs. 4. He threatened the owner who gave the

proper wage and then took it back and fired (dismissed) the women who had spoken up. In their place he brought in Adivasis (tribals from other area). Knowing the Union the women came in full strength and reported. The Union served a notice to the owner and informed the Labour Commissioner. The employer agreed to settle out of court and the women were reinstated at the minimum wage. Now they assiduously pay subscription and swear by its protection.

The Cadres of KMM

The cadres of KMM are from the villages and from the occupational groups from which their membership is derived.

Mahalakshmi, their earliest activist is the daughter of a blacksmith, Rai Singh and Hirabhai are agricultural labourers.

Mahalakshmi

Mahalakshmi's father was a blacksmith in Ahmedabad. The only child of her parents, she studied upto primary three. "I was extremely playful and behaved like a tomboy". Mahalakshmi lost her parents when she was nine, married at the age of seventeen to Natwarlal, a textile worker, aged 19. He was killed in a railway accident. The trauma of his sudden death ended her pregnancy.

Mahalakshmi then became a sewing teacher in the Textile Labour Association in Ahmedabad. She organised vegetable sellers, even though she was only a sewing teacher, demonstrating her qualities of leadership. However, Mahalakshmi had personal problems and wanted to leave Ahmedabad. Hence she was sent to Zamp where the Khet Majoor Mahajan wanted to set-up its branch office. She was their local organiser, on the Union's pay-roll. She started a membership drive - a Balwadi and later a Creche. Mahalakshmi started by living with a Harijan family in Zamp and started the Balwadi and the creche in the Harijan area. Though initially this caused resentment, now the Koli Patels have also begun to participate in it, and the community accepts her values and life style.

Mahalakshmi speaks: "In urban work when I came home I used to feel lonely. In the village all the time there are people around me. I am not lonely. Since I have been here I feel there has been an attitudinal change amongst the people. They do not spit in the choola (stove). They wash their hands after going to the toilet. They wash their cereals. They give better food to the mother who is delivering. Finally my real work has begun with the milk. Men are beginning to take interest. Men and women are working together. It is true that here men do not respect women but now they work together. The fact that women are the main focus of the cooperative has given them this interest.

I like to teach the women to cook new things. They produce cereals but do not enjoy it. The maternity benefit and death benefit schemes make the women feel that belonging to the Association means something.

Once there was a family planning camp. I took four women and got the motivators fees. With the fees I gave ^{them} who got sterilised special food such as ghee and coconut water. ~~This~~ made the women feel so well looked after that others wanted to get sterilised.

The children are cleaner. They wear underwear". However, Mahalakshmi reflects that "they are a different lot". In other words she feels no identity with the women for whom she works.

Hirabhai

"SEWA's rural wing has two wings", I often tell our rural folk - "Mahalakshmi is one wing, Hirabhai is another, says a SEWA organiser.

Hirabhai Rawal, a former landless labourer, the Associations organiser at Dev Dholera, is now Chief Organiser in SEWA's rural project.

A camel cart-driver, he is from the Rawal community. "How much did you study"?

"Just two standards, but I do not remember anything of school now" replied Hirabhai. He is a widower, a father of two small sons, has his old mother to look after the family.

Hirabhai had never seen an Amber Charkha. But SEWA's rural project motivated him to learn it, and become the trainer of trainees in 10 villages. He has made hundreds of members

from villages like Metal, Sankod, Devadhal, Baldama, Dumali, Vasna, Kesardi, etc.

SEWA, of course, is a women's movement, but "we are not that radically feminist". "If we have Mr. Buch as our President, we have Hirabhai as our rural organiser", says an organiser. Men and women, both have to contribute in this movement.

Raising Mohanbhai

Raising Mohanbhai, a Koli Patel is the local worker of the Union in Bhayala.

Raising Mohanbhai owns 25 bighas of land which is divided among the 7 brothers. Their women folk and children work as labourers. He has been working as an unpaid worker of the Union for the last three years. He has just started getting a salary of Rs. 100 per month from the last 5 months.

He recounts the birth of the KMM. TLA gave an announcement over the radio that they would help labourers to get minimum wages. So the labourers in Bhayala got together and came to TLA. They were told to organise and fill in subscriptions. Many members were made in Bhayala and other villages. There was 3-4 meetings, then the land-owners got together and beat up some labourers. A case was registered in the court of ALA. Then all activity was dropped.

He lists the KMM's activities.

- 1) 11 Charkhas were provided but they happened to be Rajkot Charkhas, which no one wanted. So they were given back. Promise was given that they would be replaced by Ambar Charkhas, but were not.
- 2) 2 looms were given but the people to whom they were given left the village and so the looms were returned.
- 3) 3 villages have collected money (Rs. 550 at Rs. 11 per person in the case of Bhayala), for milk co-operative. But the money has been lying in bank for the last 8 months.
- 4) A case is going on for the last 3 years against the land-owners but no end is in sight.

Raisingh Mohanbhai says there was a workers' education training camp in Gokulpura in Sanand Taluka for 3 days. The subject was bank loans, khadi schemes and so on. On the first day there were about 600 persons of which more than 200 were women. He says nothing came of it. In rice mills the wage is minimum wage of Rs. 5.50 for 12 hours. One political worker belonging to the Indira Congress through his village contact gave twelve buffalos without interest and also free legal aid. He has been operating since the last two years and has been fairly successful.

One of the workers of KMM took 4 cases of applications for loan for buffalo. Each application to be accompanied by Rs. 50. Nothing has come of it and in the meantime the Rs. 50 has gone. Such instances he says demoralises their effort

He suggests that there should be many more shibirs. He mentioned that after the conflict (th famous Bhayala case) those who are in the Union have suffered and are not able to work in the villages. His family has no buffalo or cow. They have very limited land. A debt of about Rs. 3000-4000 to private money lenders, a Rs. 1000 loan from the co-operative society and the Rs. 1000 loan from the land mortgaged bank for the ... He goes to the neighbouring village for wages, as he has been boycotted here. Since they were involved in the earlier struggle there are 5 to 7 cases against each of the ALA worker. So they cannot get any loans from the same landlords. This year he has not done much work for the Union. So he hopes he can devote more time to his shibir and bring enough reward to repay the loan.

Chunibhai D. Patil

Chunibhai D. Patil, the Secretary of both the Majoor Mahajan and the Khat Majoor Mahajan comes from a family of small cultivators. His father was an active social political worker in Pated Taluka. He is educated upto Matric. In 1956 he joined the Union as an organiser. With the cadres, his village and factory level contacts, he seems at ease treating them as equals. They too do not treat him with any special difference but there is a strong feeling of confidence in his honesty that comes through.

He describes his organisation- he has 11 paid staff at his Pated headquarters of which one is a woman who takes sewing classes for the women. The 11 office bearers are all Patils.

Does this not create a poor impression of casteism?

I ask.

Chunibhai explains, if one of the scheduled caste labourers is made an office bearer, the Patelas won't come. But worse than that amongst the scheduled castes there are 3 divisions in the area. They are the Chamars, the Bhangis (Harijans), the Vankar. The 3 sub-castes will not mix together. So if a Chamar is a staff, the Harijans will not come. Hence all the leaders, including in the Amul Dairy Karamchari Union where the members come from all castes and communities, prefer to have Patels as they represent acceptability of all castes.

He gives an illustration of the local leader of the INTUC, a Muslim who started another Union with the staff of the milk cooperatives. He had two secretaries both of whom were scheduled caste persons. He could only father a membership of 100 persons.

CHAPTER 6

Implications of Survey

In the introduction, some-questions had been raised as providing a frame for understanding the KMM.

- 1) The problems and concerns of rural workers as seen objectively and subjectively
- 2) Their motive in joining the Union and whether their hopes had been fulfilled
- 3) The relevance of the union to the objective situation of the rural poor workers
- 4) The relevance of Trade Union in the larger context of organisations of the rural poor.

Problems & Concerns of Rural workers

The Sanad Taluka, the earliest geographical area covered by KMM (Ref. No. 15) identifies the region as backward in every way with acute poverty and unemployment. It suggests that employment in non-agricultural activities is the critical need of the poor. It specifies that many of the poorest agricultural labourers have artisan's skills and could be redrawn into this sector. For the small farmers, it suggests that animal husbandry should be developed to supplement their income from agriculture.

It suggests that land cannot offer any more opportunity to those seeking work. The field visit also emphasises this. The land is low lying and collects water in the rainy season. The land is not very fertile and there is an absence of irrigation facilities crop prospects are therefore-low. While it is clear the land in this region seems to be espec.

ill-endowed, there is gross inequality of land distribution. Table 18 shows that 73% of the land is owned by 34% of the families. This could have the following implications:-

- 1) The land is so poor that even large land owners do not find it economical to cultivate land.
- 2) Large land owners find it more remunerative to earn through usury and low key cultivation with various forms of bonded labour or unpaid higher labour.
- 3) The land has already reached saturation point under existing technological conditions in terms of use of labour and cannot absorb any more.

Neither the Sanand Taluka survey nor the KMM's own survey seems to pursue this aspect of the impoverishment of the peasants. In fact, KMM's report (Ref. No. 12) says:

"Big farmers are very few while small and marginal farmers are many who need work in all seasons besides agricultural work".

Motivation in Joining the Union

A further cloud is raised by the workers own perception. Not one raised the issue of land re-distribution, of employment within agriculture. Yet the Bhayala case (page 30) illustrates or shows that totally unjust encroachment and attachment of land owned by the less powerful social groups is prevalent. However, the Bhayala case also offers the clue to why poor peasants do not keep the land issue in the forefront of their minds. The petering out of the Bhayala case can only add to their skepticism about reaching for justice. The KMM has obviously not been able to cope with this situation and adopted a strategy of building up these peasants around a resource other than land.

Some Hypothesis of Unionisation of rural workers in India

Should KMM not have adopted this strategy? Should it not have taken up the land issue frontally and seen it through? Did it have this option?

Vyas (Ref. No. 23) offers the hypothesis that unionisation and the struggle by peasants for reclaiming their land, or organisation of landless for the implementation of land redistribution policies, or the pressure by their Union for minimum wages or improved wages can be effective only in sectors where there is the dynamism of growth. He states that no agricultural sector in Gujarat is experiencing or has experienced this dynamism and therefore unionisation would be an ineffective method of seeking to support the poor peasantry. The demands of labour cannot be satisfied unless there is the momentum in the generation of surplus and a pull on the labour market - which provides a base for a demand for justice, and as positive response to this demand. When there is slow growth or stagnation or subsistence type of cultivation then the poor or the landless peasants have no base for making any claims. In addition to this, the reserve of under employed or unemployed labour adds to the disadvantages of the peasants. Hence any attempts to organise and assert, whatever the ideology whether violent or non-violent, whether politically supported or not, cannot provide a durable solution to the condition of this class of peasantry.

His hypothesis gets support from the contrast provided between the KMM's activities in the Petlad and in South Ahmedabad district.

Petlad is located in the buoyant district of Kaira. Kaira is not only a rich district for cash crops such as sugarcane and tobacco, but super imposed on this land based prosperity is the booming milk industry. The famous AMUL

(Ref. No. 81) was born in Kaira district and it is here that the radiation effect of operation Flood or the milk revolution is most widespread.

The small and marginal farmers in more than 900 villages have additions to household income as a result of the vitality of milk marketing promoted by the NDDB or the Dairy Development Board. Here in Kaira district, unions mushroom with no effort at all, unions of tobacco workers, union of sugarcane workers. The curious phenomena of the unionisation of the salaried staff of the primary cooperatives is another proof of the "quickness to catch", wherever there is economic buoyancy. The demands of the cooperative staff appears curious for two reasons.

(i) The primary cooperatives are supposed to be collective institutions of the poor, or atleast the "not rich and not big". The staff such as those who do the book keeping and the milk testing in these little cooperatives are taken from the village itself as part of the people's participation. They are often the relatives of the cooperative members and work in the cooperatives on a part-time basis for a few hours and a few hours in the evening. In their spare hours they also cultivate land or work as agricultural labourers or tend their cattle. In other words, they can also be milk producers. Yet they have come into unions to demand various forms of privileges and rights and demands of their own cooperatives which is normally associated with employees. Making these additional payments reduces the profits of the cooperative.

(ii) The other aspect which is not so much curious, as useful evidence for the Vyas hypothesis is that the members, cooperatives, workers or Karamcharis as they are called are 2 or 3 per cooperative, and these cooperatives are scattered in more than 900 villages across the district. In other words the usual doubt that difficult to unionise

workers when they are scattered breaks down. They are really few and far between and yet have been able to be bound together into an effective union. All its demands have been met including payment of dues with retrospective effect claimed lakhs of rupees from the Kaira District cooperative union in 1979.

Similarly, tobacco workers have been able to get full minimum wages of Rs. 7 and more which is higher than the agricultural wage of the State of Rs. 5.50. As reported in the Petlad dialugue, the KMM organiser did not find it difficult to negotiate this settlement with the tobacco factory, even though there were stocks talks of idle labour such as Adivasis lying not far away. The employer in both the cases cannot afford to take on any labour unrest, any dislocation in his production, any strain which can be caused by tensions with other labour. What he "cannot afford" is again related to the employers' own calculation of the benefit cost of paying the extra remuneration. In other words, if he can still reap a return which satisfied his expectations and pay the additional labour price he is willing to be pushed to pay it. This situation does not prevail in may other sectors or in many of the other districts of Gujarat.

Another hypothesis that also combines with the Vyas hypothesis is that the striking capacity of a union is a function of its resources. Unions of well paid labourers have holding power and hence have a greater proneness to assert their rights, to demand more than the unions of low paid workers. In reverse small isolated groups of the poor and exploited workers in the casual-labour sector have no staying power. Bhoomi Sena had to ask for the opening of an employment

site, during their strike. Gandhiji started khadi spinning during the first strike of the textile workers, before the union was established. It got dissolved due to their incapacity to survive without even the ~~minimum~~ subsistence wage, against which they may wish to struggle.

It is such vulnerability that prompted those who attended the first conference of unorganised labour in Delhi - (Ref. No. 6,7,8,9,10) - whether they were established trade-unionists or micro-level activists, government officials or politicians to unanimously suggest that some form of subsistence level full employment becomes a precondition of effective organisation of the labourers. Such a cushion against starvation, gives staying power, gives options in a vulnerable situation. Such a base would also provide a constraint on the tendency for employers, whether landlords or industrialists to bring labour from other pockets of acute unemployment, to punish local labour. It would provide the solidarity required for assertion of rights.

Another hypothesis which is developed by Madhusudan Mistry*(Ref. No. 17) is that the poor peasant in a feudal system of agri culture prefers the security of the feudal relationship to the wide-world of uncertainty. He adds a rider that attached labour on scattered farms cannot identify itself with the wide world of attached labour as it is too remote and too distant, there is no socialisation, no identification. They have a greater stake in the performance of a way of life which atleast gives access to food. He thinks that this would be the response of an attached labourer on a British farm as it would be of a similar person on an Indian

* Conversations held in Delhi March 8th and 9th.

farm. He says that it is this sociology that has made it difficult for agricultural workers to be unionised even in a highly advanced and unionised country like the U.K.

While this hypothesis may be questioned on the basis of the effective organisation of the cooperative staff in Kaira etc., the experience of bonded labourers in India provides support. They were released by law but could not on their own find forms of organisation or individual routes for rehabilitation and survival, and therefore often reverted with even more humiliating arrangements to their earlier masters. Both these hypotheses lead to a consideration of a wider economic context within which peasants can be organised.

First, the nature of the agricultural growth process - the product, its growth, momentum etc. Second, the organisation of agriculture and its internal relationship - feudal system as different from the cooperative with professional management leadership as in AMUL or in small scale industry or small factories. Third, the quantity, proximity and quality of under-employed and unemployed labour in the environment - quality meaning unemployed and very poor, unemployed and un-skilled etc.

Into this set of propositions enters a third hypothesis which is developed by the Rudolfs (Ref No. 28). They suggest that caste and confession namely religion determine formations in India. Unionisation which attempts to break through these formations and introduce the class concept cannot easily take root unless external conditions such as large scale factory operations, urbanisation etc. have already broken through the traditional formation with the traditional motivation for

formation. The experience of the organiser in Petlad (page 106) who analyses the failure of those unions whose leaders were strongly identified with strong lines of social stratification adds to this hypothesis. It also revealed that the caste that formed the highest proportion of the poor peasants and the landless namely the scheduled castes are not homogeneous, but are at war with each other within the broad definition of scheduled caste. The competitiveness of the poor for the same resources is a well-known phenomena and has often led to the breakdown of the solidarity of the poor. In the Indian context it is further riven by these special caste binds.

A fourth hypothesis or consideration is that peasant's struggle for more fundamental rights such as land or wage cannot function without organisation. The professional skills associated with unionisation can break through many of the constraints imposed by feudal structures, poverty, caste etc. The success of the TLA in extending its reach into districts with greater efficiency than informal groups such as Chhota Udaipur¹ is cited as an example. This hypothesis was elaborated by a Labour Commissioner² who scanning the Labour movements in Gujarat classified them into

1) Politically motivated, namely mobilisation in order to be

there is a movement generated from Rangpur Ashram, which is directed by Hari Vallabh Parikh, a Gandhian social worker. The movement is located in a tribal area. The strategy is to provide free legal aid and also conduct people's courts. Many cases including murder are settled in this people's court to avoid going to the formal court where there is delay and great deal of pressure. It is said that organisationally there is over dependence on Parikh, no self-management, no follow-up of any crisis.

2 Conversation with Mr. R. Basu, Labour Commissioner, State of Gujarat. Jan 29th, 1980.

used for political campaigns and support.

- 2) Idealistic motivation namely those who feel moved by the condition of the rural poor, generate a conscientiousness amongst them to fight for their rights and continue to work with them; and
- 3) Professional unionism - the skilled momentum that unions can generate to bring more and more groups of labour under their leadership.

Going over these 3 categories with illustrations from Gujarat, he assessed the third as the only process which had delivered any benefit to the workers. He mentioned that the other two might have roused some interest but in spite of long years of effort, these formations had not made any change in the material or socio-political condition of the participants. They were exactly as they had been before their participation. On the other hand those who belonged to the last form of organisation had every time gained a little as professional unionism knew how to handle the system of Government and bring it to work in the favour of the worker.

The relevance of Trade Union's in the context of organisations of the rural poor

While the Gandhi-Majoor Mahajan and SEWA, its sister organisation and the Petlad branch and perhaps similar branches in some of the dynamic districts have been able to live upto this judgement, the KMM's work in South Ahmedabad district cannot claim its credit. In every case they have taken up or with every village they have worked there seems to be utter disappointment amongst its members.

Is it because of the external situation? Is it because of the strategy or is it because of some weakness in KMM only which does not exist in TLA or SEWA, who adopt similar strategies?

Obviously to launch a strong workers movement based on land namely improving the distribution of land, access to ownership rights etc, would require far greater grass roots, mobilization and intense communication activity of, the kind that Bhoomi Sena developed, than what KMM have shown a capacity to do. Any attempt at changing land ownership patterns in the area would have to be wide reaching as unlike a little pocket like Thana, where Bhoomi Sena worked, this would be a large mass of land with historical stagnation. Therefore, greater effort would have to be generated than for Bhoomi Sena.

Here the roots of KMM are its greatest constraints. TLA has settled down to a fairly established low key maintenance type of activity, after years of dynamic and radical leadership. It has got linked into the existing establishments through its representatives in Corporations and Governments, it links with other State Corporations and powerful bodies. Any direct confrontation has to be undertaken with great circumspection as it may shake the structures to which it is linked. In other words, TLA is chained by its own expansion and involvement with the establishment. KMM still being a limb of TLA cannot wag the dog and has to back out in response to signals from other related structures.

Development Vs Consciousness raising

Behind the discussion on priorities for a peasant movement in the Indian context is the doubt in the minds of those working with and for the destitutes amongst the peasantry whether land based confrontation could be maintained at all without massive organisation and political support?

According to this the first step in developing a force to contend with the entrenched landed interest is to develop an alternative source of economic staying power for the poor peasantry. One such staying power programme is the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme which gives the right to wage and work to every citizen of Maharashtra. It provided a source of sustenance to Shoomi Sena to provide staying power in their struggle, it has also provided staying power in Shahada in Dhulia district to another peasant struggle (Ref. 81). Many other organised groups of rural poor have used this employment programme to be able to fight for minimum wages. In other words, it removes the handicapped position on the supply side which is one of the most vulnerable points in the road of rural labour towards self assertion in India.

Gujarat does not have any such programme and hence it is a view of some activists, including the organisers in SEWA to develop a minimum employment programme first as a tool to provide striking power to peasantry. Developing a source of income away from land makes the first cut in the traditional links between the poor peasantry and the land-lords. Once the large land owner is deprived of his role as provider of survival to the poor peasantry, the peasant is free to organise himself to undertake the more fundamental struggles such as to reclaim his mortgaged land, ^{and} insist on minimum wages for his labour or to press for the implementation of land reforms, such as redistribution, ceilings etc.

It is this minimum striking power that is provided by artisan development programmes such as spinning, weaving,

milking etc. SEWA has used these means not only to relieve the urgent need for survival income in these households, but to develop the independence and self-confidence amongst the peasantry especially the women, to build institutions of countervailing power.

The case is often made, however, that such economism or providing bread through employment programmes for the exploited may pamper them into passivity. It is further suggested that this is a form of paternalism that creates dependence (opposite of self-reliance), ^{and} will dull the exploited and oppressed into working within the system/ or accepting the given system, its social hierarchies its modes of production and all.

According to this view (and this is brought out most clearly in the study of Bhoomi Sena³ (Ref. No. 19) the steps for generating people's power - a full participatory and self-reliant organisation of themselves should move along the following steps:

- a) A deep experientially worked out awareness of the root causes of ones condition. This would mean identification of enemy - the enemy could be a system, a class of people, a caste.
- b) The next step is a recognition that this 'enemy' is common to all of them. In other words, is an objective condition which they can discern and over come if they unite under that identification. The solidarity is to emerge from their own recognition and

analysis of the situation and this solidarity must be spontaneous; emerge from their own experience and intellection of their experience.

- c) The third step would be to develop an organisational frame which can bring the solidarity to play continuously as well as when the occasion demands in order that their collective power can be asserted on the system or against the class or caste that has been responsible for their condition. This organisational strength is necessary as the external overall system is such that sporadic individual action cannot make the slightest dent. There has to be an understanding and a united course of action to make any impact.
- d) Fourthly, some crisis - violent such as assault or injury; injustice such as usurpation of land is necessary to generate or to awaken the anger or inner power of the oppressed into the formation (or mobilisation).

In other words, analysis, deliberation some amount of intellection or consciousness should precede any action towards improving the quality of physical life such as improving access to income, nutrition, housing, health,

education etc. A modification to this is made in the sense that provision of health, education and social services from outside are not postulated as being as dangerous to the enervation of the fighting stamina of the poor, of their self dependence as provision of income (monetary or real) (Refer strategy in Vietnam, Badhuri's paper where through-out the slow process of cooperativisation, a minimum social infrastructure was provided) (Refer also reports of studies of Kerala and Sri Lanka where it is argued that the levelling of inequality through the provision of social services made the development less unequal in its impact).

According to the views described above, economic development, especially the philosophy of distributive justice which provided minimum needs like bread and employment offers a serious threat to the genuine development of people's power to handle or over throw an oppressive system. It does not question the production process, production relationships and the social and political power associated with such production relations. Hence, the development of social and political power should almost precede the programmes of economic improvement if the change is to be genuinely in favour of the poor.

This view is well taken and there are innumerable instances including the overall economic, social and political histories of India in the last 30 years both at the macro and the micro level, that show the total inability of well meaning distributive economic programmes from fulfilling their objectives inspite of the dedicated efforts of some leaders, whatever their ideology. The central issue in the economic sphere would hinge around the ownership of the means of production.

However, given the Indian sociological scene, certain modifications in this strategy suggest themselves. "

Firstly among the acutely poor, namely, those who are amongst the poorest the lowest deciles of these deciles below the poverty line, the mental and physical energy to debate their condition, to comprehend the environment and objectify their condition to generate collective action seems an unrealistic, if not cruel, first step. This experience has been noticed by many investigators (refer Garrit Huiser - in his review of Latin American experience - Ref. No. 32). It is not so much apathy but a condition which is almost subhuman, and based on their experience of decades of hopelessness (refer Huiser - Ref. No. 32 - for Latin America experience).

Secondly the lack of homogeneity around class in the Indian social scene. Bhoomi Sena could develop a common force because they belong to a tribe - Adivasis. This is not the case especially amongst the scheduled caste, where there is not only a high degree of stratification but the sub-caste line is strict and the animosity between them vigorous. This characteristics of the divisiveness not only of caste but of sub-caste stratification has been documented by many.

Illustration

A dialogue with Shri Chunai Bhai Patel, Secretary of the Khet Majoor Mahajan in Petlad Taluka, Khera District. Patel has a staff of 11, organisers with him in Petlad 9 of them are Patels. Yet amongst his membership more than 25 per cent are workers from the scheduled caste. Asked whether giving all the staff positions to Patels had not given rise to dissatisfaction amongst members, if not influence the

perception of a truly participatory organisation of the poor, he has explained that the infighting amongst the different sects of Harijans was such that if he took an organiser from the Bhangi sub-caste and vice versa. They had such entrenched historically developed suspicion of each other that they would come together only under the banner of a neutral caste such as the Patels, of whom many were in a similar economic situation but not in a similar social situation.

This painful fact of the lack of homogeneity amongst the poor due to caste lines has been noticed again and again by activists all over the country. The Marxists especially the vanguard non-party radical groups in India who had tried to apply class based analysis of revolutionary process have faced disappointment and disarray because of this phenomena.

While it can be argued that such unity ought to be forged by a dedicated durable process of "conscientisation", the phenomena based as it is on the personal experience of the groups has to be taken into account in developing the theoretical frame for analysis. It comes into play in assessing alternative strategies especially those which do not conform to the model set by the Bhoomi Sena as given above.

Because of these two observed phenomena:

- 1) the psychology of not the poor, but the poorest of the poor;
- 2) the stratification and hostility within the caste associated with landlessness, exploitation and oppression

it could be suggested that the first step with such people or households may have to be some form of economic support. The

economic initiative could provide the basis for formation, the formation can then grow if exposed to the relevant stimuli. For induction of individuals into self-reliance, development, through the social services or social infrastructure route may look less harmful than through the bread route, but at certain levels of poverty social services may be perceived as irrelevant as they cannot be absorbed by the poorest of the poor.

The case of the landless

In the overall consideration of peasant organisation especially in relation to the central issue of ownership of means of production a special identification should be made of the totally landless "no land not even homestead land" and "no asset not even tool or animals".

Usually in looking at the category called agricultural labour the tendency is to club together the marginal farmers and the landless labourer. This is because many small peasants hire themselves out as labourers either seasonally or permanently due to various reasons (Ref. 28). Rudolphs elaborates this problem as well as the concern for the separation of landless from the small cultivator. They also observe that the completely assetless are usually nuclear families as opposed to extended kin families associated with small peasant households. They argue further that this nuclear family can be developed into a formation based on class more easily than the larger households where family, communal, sub-caste loyalties may be more determined.

The vulnerability of the assetless cannot be sufficiently highlighted unless this set is separated from those with minimum asset.

Land Reform which concentrates on legitimising tenants, creation of a small holding economy releases pure landless labour into the market seeking employment, Hayami, IIRI, Philippines predicts that this can be the greatest problem in Asia as a result of "distribution" policies in

land. Huiser (Ref. No. 32) also refers to this phenomena especially in the aftermath of redistribution of land to the landless in Latin America. After a point there is no land to distribute and hence there are again streams of employed landless labourers). The vulnerability of the landless also is commented upon in the Bhoomi Sena study (Ref. No. 19) where hired labour loses shelter along with work as a price for dissent. Homestead can be so important to a poor family that it may stake much of its freedom for this facility.

Programmes for small peasants ignore the landless. Programmes for overall development - agricultural development such as irrigation or drainage of land again do not necessarily have any benefit for this set. In fact an improvement in the economic viability of a small farmer may lead to a further disengagement of this assetless set from opportunities in agriculture.

The studies* carried out on women workers have also revealed sharp variations both in the material condition as well as in the perception, as well as in the impact of programmes and processes between the totally assetless and those with even a little (Ref. 35 and 82).

These three aspects of the poorest of the poor mainly sub-human subsistence conditions, lack of homogeneity within the class amongst the social stratifications and thirdly lack of opportunities for income-earning, inability e.g. the inability to avail even of progressive policies such as cooperative farming calls for reconsideration of methodology when it comes to this set of persons.

* 1) See study of the condition of the MEGS workers, page No. 67.

The poorest amongst the poor, the total assetless and amongst them those who are further socially oppressed such as the Bhangis, the women, need a period of initial assuaging with economic and social support in order to develop a motivation for organised action. Hence while this process can be participatory and self-reliant, as for example, in SEWA it would not be strict about laying down the sequence that conscientisation should precede development support.

Land is a dream that every rural based person would have. The Kannada film Chomana Dhuddi* captures this dream/hunger of an attached labourer in Mangalore, Karnataka who cannot believe that the landlord for whom he has worked all his life can deny him a plot after so many years of service.

"Asha Amar Hai" says the peasant in Dev Dholera. Such a desire may be transformed by ideology into acceptance of collective ownership but as Badhuri (Ref. No. 83) reports from Vietnam, the peasant still clings to his private field and brings out higher yields per unit from these assets than the collectively owned ones.

Another perceptive remark on the emotion of land comes from a Gandhi based activist in Champaran in Bihar. Commenting on the historical change in the focus of the

* This is a film produced by B.V. Karanth about a share cropper in North Canara District in Karnataka. He has worked for years for the landlord on whose land he lives with his sons and daughters. He owns a pair of bullocks which he uses to plough his landlord's fields. He is paid grain and given moath once a year. After decades of such work he hopes that he will be given the tiny piece of land on which he could use his own bullocks. This is his dream. However, the landlord refuses.

Gandhian workers, he reflected that while the Shoodan and Gandhian* movements had given a fever and dynamism to the development of people's power by raising the level of consciousness wherever they went, for providing hope for some radical change in the social structure in the village, the current trend amongst Gandhian workers to physically improve the success of the poor and underprivileged² to government services - schemes etc. - was timid, if not ineffective. It had in it no power to generate self-confidence or the will to be a force, in the people. In other words, it had put aside the thrust of social transformation. This comment by this young Gandhian corroborates the analysis in the Bhoomi Sane study that merely distributing or improving the access of the oppressed to services, can be not only ineffective, but even harmful.

But whatever this emotion, in some situations the reality offers no options but alternative employment generation. The Table on page 41 as well as the Sanand Taluka survey and the cry of the workers points to the need to find income from sources which are not land based.

The critical point in this dialogue on development versus radical structural change is whether this "economism" is taken as an end in itself or whether it is the means to an end. The Gandhian foundations of TLA, SEWA and KMM see the economism as a means only for reaching structural changes. Such processes however take time and circumspection. Most successful processes of radical change have been slow. The

* Movement for voluntary land distribution leading to collective ownership by the whole village, something like Ugaama, spearheaded by Acharya Vinoba Bhave in 1950 - the movement receded except for a few rare spots due amongst other things to the failure of Vinoba to accept the need for the mundane process of legal records and settlements which was essential as it was a non-official, non-party movement and therefore had no sanction or support from Government.

contrast provided between Vietnam which has a slow transformation and Ujaama in Uganda which was fast in terms of effective or real social transformation provides a dramatic illustration (Ref. 3). What makes for the success of the slow Vietnam process is the constant awareness of an overall strategy and the vision ahead.

While the process of organisation, struggle, contentment and movement should be continuous, it is the initial steps that have to be fairly clearly worked out in order to gain some momentum. The activities of SEWA in the same villages in South Ahmedabad district where KMM failed to take root, illustrates this qualitative difference. Both SEWA and KMM are offshoots of the same ideology and organisation and strategy. But while SEWA is moving its members into the areas of power, KMM had to recede. SEWA's organisers and cadres are actually aware that they are on the brink of struggle and that these are all steps towards reaching a revolutionary phase. They are clear that production relations must change. However, they would not rush the process nor take up fundamental issues, until they are clear that they have built up an effective counter vailing force.

In this struggle for minimum wages for chindi workers or pappad rollers, they simultaneously build up a producers' cooperative and a retail outlet, while negotiating with and pressing the traders to give minimum wages. In the informal sector of production, no real threat can be made by self-employed producers to the buyers. But having alternate routes to the market, poses a threat to the buyer, and hence whenever the situation looks imminent, SEWA moves into production and retail trade.

This philosophy, underlines the general approach of constructive work based on Gandhi, to give economic independence to the poor by making them producers of certain basic necessities - or what may be called village based necessities. However, from this philosophy of Khadi as it is called, the next step of mobilisation of surplus in such a way as to avoid dependence has not been thought out or worked upon by most of the Gandhian constructive workers. It is for this reason that assessments made of dedicated work with the poor whether it is by SW* in Bhooni Sena (Ref. No. 19) or by the SWs in Surat associated with the Halpati Seva Sangh (Ref. No. 78) of the group in Valod, known as Vias (Ref. 32) are somewhat negative.

The assessments usually find that while some benefits may be distributed to the unemployed and the poor, there is a stagnation in the development of the power of the people, there is also no component of self-reliance as ultimately these producers are depending on the outside markets, on linkages with exploitative systems. Their dependence on the SW increases. They are depending on SW and, therefore, vulnerable. However, if Gandhian thinking is followed through then as in Vietnam with the cooperatives (Ref. No. 33) there could have been a division between production for self-consumption and production for exchange. While production for self-consumption could have been kept on an individual basis, production for exchange should be collectively marketed by the producers. As the system of collective marketing by producers becomes more widespread, the external system of "capitalist mode of production" could be encroached upon and finally usurped.

In a sense the strategy adopted in the Anand pattern by

* SW - Social worker who created some economic opportunities for the Adivasis, with Bank loans.

Operation Flood (more popularly known as Amul) for the cooperativeisation of milk production and sale could be said to have the same philosophy. Surplus is not sold individually but collectively and a very large area, namely a milk shed becomes one united group which determines its own shares of reward, its use of rewards that is in hospitals, roads, etc.

However, the pattern while extremely efficient due to scale has created a dependence on another class of people, namely the technocrats, the management and marketing men, the milk processors, or what are known as dairy technologists. The far flung rural milk producer, is depending on this force to keep him at work.

In a sense this has happened also in Vietnam except that instead of having what is called a state level dairy development corporation or a national level dairy development board which does the signalling, the state clears the surplus in the market. But whether it is the state or a dairy development board it is the technocrat who is guiding the destiny of the producer though his motive may not be profit maximisation for self. He may be more reliable in re-routing the profit back to the producer than a "capitalist".

The question, however, remains whether this is a form of organisation and management which not only strengthens self-reliance in the individual producer or labour, but also whether it provides the maximum reward to these producers or labour. The technocrat, his infrastructure, his wage apart from what goes before it, is a cost to the producer and in the "Amul" case questions have been raised whether his intervention between the producer and the consumer has not eaten the biggest slice of the cake. In other words, his reward has been a substitute for the capitalist's reward. Perhaps in the political ethic of Vietnam the wage of the technocrat or his facilities are low key. But these similarities between the Vietnam's case

or model of labour cooperatives and the Amul Dairy Farm or Organisation cannot be overlooked.

Within this scheme of things, the Gandhian based model provides another ethic which appears to resolve this problem. There is a control over production of surplus also. In other words there is an ethic of austere consumption and within that of consumption being limited to what can be produced locally. The bounds of what provides its locality is the tricky question which those who support the Gandhian economic philosophy find difficult to answer. And they find it difficult to answer because the macro world outside is already so crisscross with various modes of production and linkages that it is difficult to define the boundary in any general terms.

However, in the example of ^{SEWA} ~~SEWA~~ there is an attempt to keep this ethic of limited scale of operations even at the collective level and a limited scale of production at the household producer level. The ethic also adds that the poor must buy from each other in order to maintain their independence of the outside system. Another resolution of this tricky problem which has been adopted by ^{SEWA} ~~SEWA~~ is that it has collectivised its members when it comes to their expression of strength against the external world of law, including the functionaries who are supposed to maintain it, namely the Police. It has collectivised their access to critical input such as credit and it has collectivised their purchases of social security services. But it has kept their individuality not only in production but also in sale. However, while ^{SEWA} ~~SEWA~~ has been able to achieve this kind of organisational development, for example vegetable retailing, load carrying or used garment trading it is finding itself pushed to cooperative purchase and cooperative sale when it comes to items or products in which the individual self-employed producer has to compete with the large factory or large scale producer, in their quilt, in their milk and in their pappad. They are finding that if they want more of the

benefits to go to the producers they have to develop counter-vailing organisations of collective strength.

This again reveals that small-scale production for local consumption is the only style which can maintain participation and self-reliance whether the overall politico economic system a 'mixed economy' like India or a socialist state like Vietnam. It is not possible to develop processes which are genuinely self-reliant as long as the scale of operation demands centralised management. It is this kind of concern that may have driven Gandhi to what is considered as an extreme view, namely village level production for village level consumption, leading to Gram Swaraj or village self-reliance.

Labour Laws and the Self-employed

Another issue which emerges from a scrutiny of trade unionism amongst agricultural workers is the irrelevance of the current labour laws to the problems faced by the agricultural labourer. The rules have been framed for conventional situations where there are employers who own the means of production and employees who are hired in.

In the case of the average agricultural worker/artisan in countries like India the rural labourer does not have an identifiable employer except for short patches, unless he is some form of attached labour. He is in a way self-employed and more similar to the artisan who owns his means of production which is mainly his labour or the skill in some particular production process. The institutions with which these self-employed have to transact are not the employer but a local revenue inspector, the police, the labour contractor, the local bodies like the village council or the municipality as well as the government agencies which provide civic amenities. In other words by

and large it is with the government departments that they have to struggle in order that their problems and difficulties would not only be heard but attended to.

New statutes may have to be drawn up identifying the rights of the self-employed worker and the conditions under which he can assert these rights. Local administrative bodies including police may have to have new or additional guidelines such as the industrial disputes act giving them some norms by which they have to conduct themselves in relation to these self-employed. This is an area which requires serious consideration by those who are not only building peasant organisation but are moving towards their unionisation.

Secondly, the employees are by and large not only working ~~by giving~~ ^{for a given} period ^{or} time per day, but also for a certain period of time in the year. The laws are basically related to the relationship between the employer and the employee and govern such issues as wages, hours of work, benefits, social security etc.

CHAPTER 8

Organisation Vs Spontaneity

The effectiveness of peasant organisation in situations such as those described in South Ahmedabad district would depend largely on how well the organisation takes stock of the external, operative economic, social and political world.

It has to size up the advantages and disadvantages of head-on collision. It may have to build countervailing power within the system before it attacks the system. It may have to use traditional formations based on traditional loyalties, enter traditional markets before it can link these formations which can pose an effective threat to the existing structures. Doing this without getting linked up to a political party with its own linkages with power, is a formidable and difficult task. While this is where Bhoomi Sena's future has to be watched, this is where SEWA has shown a way.

The Union may have to undertake activities which are "un-union-like" in the initial stages to emancipate the peasantry from total dependance on land based relationships but with a methodology which does not dislocate them from return to the land based occupations. It is here that providing sources of self employment which provide alternative income, gives the staff to take on the larger walk to a land based struggle. SEWA is attempting this strategy. How far it is able to fulfil its vision would depend not only on the external world but also on the tenousness of its links with TLA.

The Trade Union as Peasant Organisation?

In the general discussions on participatory organisations of poor peasants trade union does not feature prominently. The trade union is associated with industry, including the plantation (tea, coffee, jute) industries in India and elsewhere.

A Union premises an identifiable employer - whether the employer is the State or the private sector. Production relations are such that there are the owners of the means of production and then the workers (who work on the factories but do not own it). Unionisation also presumes a durable relationship between the labour and its employer. The rights and the obligations are legally binding only as long as the relationship exists.

Agricultural labourer of the kind prevalent in Asian peasant economies do not come under this classification. The majority of the peasants are self employed, small cultivators who cultivate their own land hire themselves out as labourers or work as artisans. The men may be cultivating the field, the women weaving the cloth, or the whole family may be doing, both depending on the seasons. If the agricultural labourer is completely landless and assetless, he still is not like the pure employee as he may get work intermittently during the year and that too with different employers under different terms or arrangements of hiring.

The Khet Majoor Mahajan members interviewed in Dev Dholera had at least 3 employers within one year; payment sometimes on piece-rate, sometimes on daily wage; sometimes in cash and sometimes in kind; sometimes hired under contract

or specific piece job or for a period of time; sometimes on a daily basis. It is difficult to see conventional unionisation having any basis in this fluid situation.

Apart from these reasons why a Union may not take root in an agrarian situation, there is also the case against the Trade Union as an internally undemocratic organisation. A Trade Union can be one of the most entrenched establishments not only with no participatory element, not only with no spontaneity, but also with misuse of power and misuse of solidarity by a few on the top. It is well known that Unions becomes pawns in the hands of political formations - and or lose their value by voluntarily joining them. That is why it does not normally feature under participatory organisations of the poor.

Some (not all) of the difficulties of take-off for KMM are traceable to the length and staleness of its roots, namely the long established, linked TLA. The Bhayala case, or the Giaspur problem is taken quickly to the highest political authority, without any process of formation and assertion at the base-level. As easily as it can be taken to the political bosses (a phone call) it can get squashed by political intervention. The leaders advice that the confrontation may be called off as it will disturb some other political balances. The workers and cadres also become complacent - relying on the access of the Union's bosses, rather than their own efforts.

Informal groups like Bhoomi Sena, however, find a basis for formation when there is sharp inequality in ownership of means of production, and a vivid incident. They also exhibit a high degree of spontaneity and flexibility - opposite to organisation and centralisation.

However, as is being found by Bhoomi Sena after passing through the initial stage of unity for asserting their rights some constructive activity or programme becomes necessary to maintain and strengthen the unity. This is especially necessary when the immediate as well as national level environment is not one of forceful collectivism as in Vietnam. Bhoomi Sena is already moving into this phase in its attempts to work with the milk development programme in the area, and it is an open question, as the authors recognise (Ref. No. 19) what would be the consequence of its linking with this external system. Bhoomi Sena has also registered itself as an Agricultural workers Union, another step towards formal organisation.

The Himmatnagar incident*

Himmat Nagar is a village of tribals in Gujarat. It is customary in these areas for shop-keepers to locate themselves in a service village and charge inordinate prices for goods brought from outside as the tribals usually do not have access to any other market and can easily be cheated. It was customary for the tribals to be harassed by the Talathi, the forest guard, and the police, from these service villages.

One of the Adivasis was a contractor who had given a loan to one of the forest guards. The forest guards were in the habit of coming to Adivasi area for drinking liquor. When the Adivasi contractor asked for the return of the loan, the forest guard complained to the police that he was a thief.

* Report by M. Mistry

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individual, and organisation it cannot take of

In the situation as it exists in the Talukas of
... .. sharp inequality

The police came, beat up the adivasi contractor (who was called Babu), so severely that he died,

This incident was like the proverbial 'last straw', and the Adivasis signalled to each other with drums, got together that night and killed the police man who had killed Babu. As a result eight of the Adivasis are in jail, the case is pending at the Himmatnagar court. The Adivasis have not come together again to follow up this one act of mobilisation and expression of their anger.

This incident illustrates that unless there is some leadership as there was in the shape of Kalu Ram in Bhoomi Sena, a crisis is not a sufficient condition for mobilisation. Frequently tribal groups who lend themselves to formation get stimulated to strike cannot maintain their striking capacity because of the lack of a leader. Authors of the paper, Bhoomi Sena (Ref. No. 19) talk of failure of the Social Worker. It appears that this judgement fails to recognise that Kalu Ram was a product of the social workers' efforts. However, 'soft' it may have appeared, provided many of the elements - not only negative ones as mentioned by the authors - but positive elements for the success of Bhoomi Sena. Methodology may have a value but unless combined with leadership, often just one individual, and organisation it cannot take-off.

In the situation as it exists in the Talukas of Gujarat where KMM and SEWA are functioning, sharp inequality does exist. However, the land seems hostile and does not seem to offer itself as a target for the mobilisation of the poor. Caste lines are also not so closely associated with class or property lines. There are rich and poor Koli Patels

as there are better off and worse scheduled castes. There are no outside groups of exploiters as in Thana of Bhooni Sena. There is animosity and distress but the situation does not allow sharp focus. In Kaira district there is a dynamic milk sector and some brisk unionisation. In South Ahmedabad District there is not even this acute poverty and a need for emergency employment even before unionisation.

In such a situation informal formations such as Bhooni Sena, it could be argued, do not have a basis either for taking root or for survival.

In such a situation a purely developmental organisation also would not be adequate. The Halpati Sewa Sangh (Ref. No. 78) and similar social organisations may provide some income relief to those brought under their umbrella but they do not come any way near reaching some of the bigger issues of rights of workers, even if as a part of a process. In fact Gandhian social organisations are often criticised for doing "good works" but not intervening in their own localities on behalf of workers on issues such as minimum wages or land encroachment. They have none of the skills, nor does the form of organisation induce the development of such skills.

However, a trade union by definition rides on the issue of wages and rights - and hence even if it may have on the one hand to perform the role of a development agency it does so along with and outside of moving to the assertion of workers' rights. It sets up processes and routes by which injustices are aired, put in the perspective of what are listed as rights.

Hence, while bearing in mind the Vyas, Mistry and Rudolph hypotheses that the union cannot easily take root

and flourish in socio-economic situations as in South Ahmedabad district, it seems to appear that the Basu hypothesis that union is the only form of peasant organisation that can provide a sustained platform to the peasantry, also has a place.

The juxtaposing of spontaneity and organisation also calls for some elaboration. The critical questions are what should be the mix, with what timing and in what sequence, with what methodologies? These issues have emerged from the Bhoomi Sena study. The study of Khet Majoor Mahajan also add to the experience uncovering the appropriate combination of the two. While seeing the value of professional organisation skills, it may appear to be overstating the case for organisation.

However, the major issue in the debate on spontaneity and organisation is the ideology, nature, structure and style of the overall initial political system. It is in this context that the future of Bhoomi Sena has to be reviewed as also the methodology of the Khet Majoor Mahajan. Just as options open to workers to fully exercise their participatory rights would be limited, given the political regime in Vietnam so too the capacity of movements of the poor in a country like India would have to use the legal frame work atleast in the short run. It may operate against the law, or its interpretation. But the fulcrum of its operations is the legal frame work. In that sense the KMM's methodology of developing in its cadres the skills of reaching for the law, showing its workers and members the possibilities within the law, it could be arranged in the most effective method of developing in the members or workers the capacity to participate both in the micro organisation as well as at the macro level.

The overall political system and the
peasant organisation - the links

But over and above all these hypothesis and explanations the most important consideration against which an organisation's viability has to be assessed is the political frame within which it operates. The terms participatory, self-reliant, democracy can be interpreted in divergent ways depending on the value or the political psychology of the dominant regime.

In a liberal democratic open society as in India where, by and large government operates under the rule of law, it could be argued that the most obvious methodology for seeking justice would be to make use of the law. The validity for such a statement would, of course, depend on how far the law is favourable to those who are enduring exploitation, oppression, injustice. But again in India, the laws are usually designed to promote an egalitarian society (the Constitution is based on socialism and democracy). However, it's functioning is limited due to gross inequality in distribution of all goods and services including knowledge. Organised power is able to reach for this law whether it is a lobby of the rich or the high caste or of workers. Making the law work in favour of the poor therefore needs not only organisation but also skills in using the legal process and in management of organisation during the process of struggle or of reaching for this power.

The trade union especially if it has a strength not only of members but also the strength of the members' subscription in large numbers provides the ideal organisation for almost grabbing the law towards itself. The power lies not so much in actually filing cases in the court, but settling the disputes, through the strength of members, but with the back drop of legal support.

It is no secret that the legal frame is closely knitted into the political system and hence even for law to be brought towards oneself, political access is necessary. However, in a parliamentary democracy political power is to some extent vulnerable to "public pressure". Organised trade union activities usually use both the legal frame work as well as the process of representative government to work in their favour. As the officer in the Gujarat Labour Ministry remarked with great perception, the clout of KMM, SEWA and IIA is effective, compared to some of the informal peasant movements, because it can draw on these structures. The fact that the Bhoomi Sena has also registered itself as an agricultural workers union gives further support to this methodology in the Indian context.

However, this particular forms of organisation may not only be ineffective under other forms of Government but may be impossible. Where State provides the symbol of collective ownership, for example, there is no case for unionisation of this kind. The development of labour cooperatives in Vietnam (Ref. No. 83) illustrates the need for alternative institutions.

Yet, the question can be raised whether the option available to the peasant in the legal - politico frame that it exists in India, if he is efficiently unionised, is available to a peasant in Vietnam? He has been nudged and concientised into a form of organisation, which is in his interest - but he has not any degree of freedom to break away from that form, and survive. He is too calculated a part of a collective vision, which emanates from outside. In many ways, he, the Vietnamese peasant in the labour

cooperative is like the peasant in the Amul Union. He benefits, but he is not a decision maker. His operations especially his key activity of surplus generation is managed for him by professionals who know the whole macro system of interdependence. Sensitive aspects of individual freedom, of choices, of self development cannot be delinked from the ideology and framework of the overall political system. The poor peasant however far away and embeded in his micro-frame, is a creature of the macro-frame, the analysis turns full-circle.

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