Devaki Jain

WOMEN'S QUEST FOR POWER

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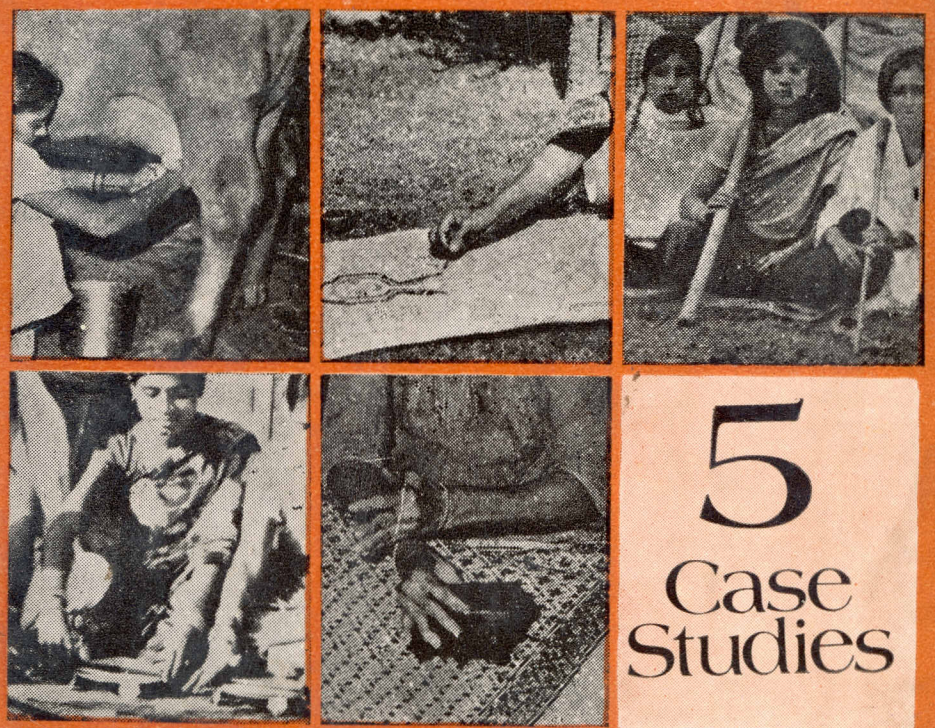

5 Case Studies

Devaki Jain

Assisted by
Nalini Singh
Malini Chand

By the Same Author

INDIAN WOMEN (ED)

WOMEN IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY:
FROM DISSOCIATION TO REHABILITATION

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT, SOME VIABLE PROJECTS
(*forthcoming*)

WOMEN'S QUEST FOR POWER

FIVE INDIAN CASE STUDIES

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New Delhi

DEVAKI JAIN

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INTRODUCTION

The five studies in this book were conceived with the objective of describing a few Indian endeavours where women in fairly large numbers have become active participants. The thought behind this was to attempt to identify the crucial levers through which women can participate more fully in national development.

Most discussions during the Women's Year highlighted the unequal position of women in Indian society and resolved that steps be taken to ensure that women emerge as equal partners with men on the road to progress. The question that had yet to be answered, however, at national and sub-national levels was *how:* how to edge women up from disadvantaged positions in various spheres—not only to what levels, but with what methodologies. It was hoped that a close scrutiny of efforts where women from the "masses" had participated with some degree of success, would yield insights on what these factors were, especially in the Indian context.

A visit to SEWA,[1] the Self-Employed Women's Association in Ahmedabad, revealed that ways had been found, in spite of all the identified constraints within the overall system, for women to reduce their sense of subordination.

Having selected SEWA, the next step was to identify a few more such "successful" efforts—whatever the objectives—in which large numbers of women from the low-income groups had participated.

[1]Devaki Jain: *From Dissociation to Rehabilitation,* report on an experiment to promote self-employment in an urban area. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

In 1975, information of this kind was not easily available. A pilot project in family planning in South India, in which women had actively participated and successfully controlled their reproductive rate, was being talked about. The locale was a tea plantation; the participants tea pickers. This seemed an interesting site. A visit to the site raised a hornets' nest of issues: population control, bonus, trade unionism, women in organized industry. It did not appear a successful project, but a laboratory for studying women's oppression.[2]

Then there were the thousands of women from rural households in the Kaira district of Gujarat, whose production of milk has been linked to a modern milk-processing plant through the cooperative form of organization.[3] This too seemed an eligible candidate for inclusion. A visit to the north-eastern states of India revealed that women in Manipur had been spearheading movements against injustice—economic as well as social—for decades. Their latest movement was patrolling the streets for alcoholics. In Bombay everyone was talking of the Lijjat miracle, where housewives had put a new product, a dried snack, on the commercial map by dedicated organization and hard-headed marketing.

Looking for a possible site where women were involved in handicrafts, the women folk-artists of rural Bihar, popularly known as the Madhubani painters, gripped the imagination. The poetry of villages of women painters as well as the sensational marketing experience the art had undergone seemed an attractive combination.[4] Hence these five sites were selected for detailed study.

METHODOLOGY

The book was not originally intended to be a theoretical work on women and development. It was intended more as a door-opener, the sharing of a tour of interesting women-oriented projects.

A short monograph on SEWA[5] was published—and the response seemed to indicate that straightforward reporting emphasizing description rather than analysis was the "felt need" on the subject. Hence the methodology adopted was broadly to describe the organization—its aims, management, staff and members. The approach included:

(*a*) A visit for about 4 days to a project site. Discussions with organizers, some dialogues with the participants, collection of material published and unpublished about history, finance, staff and so on.

(*b*) Correspondence for several months, trying to fill gaps as the drafting of the report proceeded, especially in an attempt to match information on all projects.

(*c*) A second visit to interview about 100 participants—not selected in any statistically acceptable method, but randomly, as available on site. The exception to this rule was the Kaira survey where the sample was drawn systematically from household listing by the primary cooperative society.

(*d*) The specific methodology of each field survey is described in each chapter.

However, after collecting information of this kind on three projects—SEWA, AMUL and Lijjat—mainly from the organization itself, it seemed that the processes in the projects were more important for an understanding of the women's question than the similarities of success.

All the projects claimed that they had reached the poor woman, and that women were active participants in the organizations. But differences in the texture of the impact began to emerge, and it became important to analyse them.

However, since the impressions emerged during the process of investigation, in fact only after the first round of data was collected, and since field survey was not a part of the original design, no carefully designed primary data collection survey could be organized. A very low budget, mainly to cover travel expenses to the location by one person, had been initially sanctioned for the case studies—and it was impossible on this budget to do sample surveys of populations of about 10,000—scattered in 900 villages or three towns.

So the household surveys had to be informal—designed and implemented on the spot. In some cases investigation of some variables by other people and organizations came in handy—as for example SEWA's own surveys of trade groups, or Raymond Owens' household survey in some Madhubani villages.

[2]Institute of Social Studies: "Women Workers and Family Planning in the Tea Industry," a report on the UPASI Scheme, 1976.
[3]AMUL: The Amul Story—a Saga of Cooperative Effort.
[4]Raymond Owens: *The Painters of Mithila* (forthcoming).
[5]Devaki Jain: *op. cit.*

The surveys therefore can only provide glimpses into the women's perception of their participation, some insights into the kind of impact the project has had on their economic and social condition—but not of the quality or size that could be termed impact studies. There was neither base-line data available—nor enough money and time to estimate increments, for example to income; duration of employment; or decision-making zones. Besides, the questionnaires for these surveys were direct and brief, focussed towards identifying the crises in the groups' lives rather than eliciting data for academic analysis.

FIRST RESULTS

A first acquaintance with the women involved in these efforts led to the impression that being income earners did not guarantee them improved status either within their households or in the perception of society around them. It seemed to be something outside this activity that gave them self-confidence, and also led to the changed social perception of their capacities.

SEWA seemed to suggest that this something outside was the strength the women drew from association with other women—shared identity, objectifying the individual condition and so on. The linkage of this association with activities associated with social status, such as access to banks or police protection, seemed to draw the respect of the men in their societies, and their families.

Hence the second stage in the development of this book became testing a hypothesis: that income is a necessary but not sufficient condition for female emancipation; that one of the levers to this emancipation is the strength women gain through participation in non-family association.[6]

What kind of association was this? Was it based on class, sex, or occupation? Would it vary depending on patterns of work? Would it vary according to whether the workers were wage-earners or self-employed? Would there be other variations due to caste, culture, rural/urban background, the environment and so on?

Interviewing the women tea pickers seemed to suggest that their condition as women had not changed in spite of working-class employer-employee-based trade unionization. Being wage workers had only added to physical work. They still had to cook the family's meals, do the household shopping and so on—and this

[6]Devaki Jain: "India's Efforts in International Women's Year," statement made at International Round Table, UNESCO, Paris 1975.

along with 8-10 hours of work on the plantation. This gave them about 4-5 hours of rest a day. Creches, which were the one concession to their sex, were dirty and incompetent. Maternity benefits were usually drunk away by the men of the family.[7]

The wages of the males were always higher than those of the females even though theirs was the critical task of picking, the leaves selectively. The women felt exploited not only by the employer but by the men working with them, as well as the men in their own homes. Yet these women were members of labour unions on the plantations, dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Is this the situation in other unions? A visit to Mangalore,[8] the home of the *bidi* industry, where the *bidi* workers are unionized largely by the Communist Party (Marxist), indicated a similar phenomenon. The production of *bidi* (an indigenous cigarette) is organized on the put-out system, through contractors. A *bidi* factory has contractors or agents to whom it gives leaves and tobacco. The contractors distribute these raw materials to women, who roll them in their homes. The women are paid on a piece-rate basis by the contractor who checks the product and passes it on to the *bidi* factory. The factory packages and markets the *bidi* under a particular brand name.

Mangalore has also one of the most important cashewnut processing factories, almost all its employees women, because of the skill required to crack the nut deftly to avoid breakages. Here too, while the women belonged to the union,[9] they felt the union leaders had no concern for their special needs as women.

Women were not amongst the union's leadership. Male-female hierarchical relationships persisted within the union, as they did within society and at home.

In contrast, SEWA[10] had dealt first with working women's needs as women—personal savings, health, creches, help in cases of wife-beating, and so on. The group leaders were women, the staff was women, the services were for women. Does this suggest that sex has to be the basis for organization prior to or within the class or economic category?

[7]Institute of Social Studies: *op cit.*

[8]Institute of Social Studies: "Bidi Workers," an unpublished report.

[9]Devaki Jain: interviews with cashew women-workers (unpublished), for Institute of Social Studies, Delhi.

[10]See Chapter 1, "Street Vendors of Ahmedabad."

While the SEWA experiment seemed to make a strong case in support of this proposition, the study of another women's organization, Lijjat,[11] raised some doubts. This organization, in its constitution as well as its charter, emphasizes that it is an organization exclusively for women, by women. It has used the word "sisterhood" in its basic foundations and built in a Sisters' Saving Scheme which can be used by members in times of need. It also resembles SEWA as it is also a *sarvodaya* organization; in other words, it has Gandhian roots.

Lijjat insists that it is a purely economic project and has done nothing to empower the women to change intra-household issues or even neighbourhood issues. The same Gandhi obviously can be interpreted in different ways. Associating for social power along with economic betterment was more than merely "being organized" for income increases.

Thus while the SEWA model suggested that women should associate amongst themselves to strive for equality within their own class, the Lijjat model added the question: associate for what, associate within what ideology? For "uplifting" themselves? What did that mean? If they united against male domination, then the threat to entrenched power was bound to reach a point. Was that "desirable?"

What were the implications in a rural Indian setting? Was it possible for women to unite in order to strengthen themselves internally, as well as their immediate society, with a perspective that does not juxtapose women and men?

The women painters of Madhubani[12] could not conceive of loyalties that would supersede loyalty to the family—so the idea of "uniting" them around their common skill of painting and using that as a lever towards enhancing their power within the household seemed remote. In addition there were the caste lines which, especially in villages in Bihar, were so strong and so charged with tension, that sex lines would not be able to withstand thier pressure. Yet women in those households were often grossly ill-treated and exploited—in spite of being the "money-makers."

A further layer was added by the fact that older women—especially those from the husband's side—were the real oppressors; the story of Ganga Devi, one of the artists, is a poignant illustration of such intra-household oppression *within the sex bounds*. She was

[11]See Chapter 3, "*Pappad* Rollers of Lijjat."
[12]See Chapter 4, "Painters of Madhubani."

ill-treated by her husband's mother and sister for being childless.

It appeared that the answers to these questions would depend on how the issue of women was viewed not only by those "outside" but by women themselves. Should women strive for consideration as women or strive for radical changes in the structure of society, its ethical base, its goals illustrating the defects and illuminating the future path from their own experience?

The alternatives were not clear-cut—neither Marxism nor Feminism nor Gandhism, nor combinations of each.

It seems that women should use their experience at the local/specific or activity/specific levels to illustrate the insensitivity of some of the existing social and political structures and attitudes, the built-in discrimination in some of the economic systems, and to press for a new order. Thus if women did unite as women—locally, nationally and globally, it would be for revolutionary changes in all of society and not "against" men.[13] Such an identification of the goals removed the hesitations that prevailed before fieldwork began.[14]

The first step then seemed to be for women to associate perhaps around common interests—which may or may not cross conventional caste or income lines.

Such association might expose them to the world outside the home, as well as help them analyse their own situation objectively. These two experiences would build self-confidence and provide the knowledge required for action. Thus what would begin as a mobilization of women for their *own benefit* could be the fuelling of the fire for action towards a just society.

Here too, however, the experience of the Manipuri women[15] provided an illustration of a paradox. The women of Manipur had used their united strength in public issues of injustice, against unjust systems of labour use, against excessive taxes. They had laid the foundations for the movement towards national liberation. That they could now get together to resist excessive drinking of alcohol by men and the consequential nuisance in the family, was a part of an earlier participation in public issues which had given them a place in Manipur history.

[13]Devaki Jain: "Are Women a Separate Issue?" in *Populi*, journal of the United Nations' Fund for Population Activities. New York: November 1978. (Republished in *Mainstream*, *Yojana* and *Development Forum*.)
[14]Devaki Jain: "Can Feminism be a Global Ideology?"—*Quest*, *quarterly* Washington: Winter 1978.
[15]See Chapter 5, "Night Patrollers of Manipur."

Yet the Manipuri women are subjected to traditional hierarchies, in which men are the stereotyped heads of households, often marrying more than once, beating women after drunkenness and so on. So in order that the experience of being a (woman not in the biological sense) be wholesome and fulfilling, more than political and economic participation would be necessary, even if that was in greater proportion than men. It would require new valuation of the basic biological[16] role of women as well as a re-evaluation of many other aspects/parts of society—and the environment.

The scene of action for women's advancement seemed to be the *household* and not the community, whether class- or occupation- or locality-based. It was the household's perception and valuation of women's rule, its hierarchies, its monetary and non-monetary sources of power. Yet intra-household behaviour was not unrelated to such factors outside the household as economic class, the options available in the environment for non-traditional behaviour, for questioning of authority, for social/religious support, institutions, associations and so on. Some play of the two seemed to be the determinants of a particular situation of women. Some replay of the game with different weights appeared necessary for the nudging out and up of women. The game and its replay would naturally vary between situations. The effort would be to identify the critical elements in each situation, and work through them.

Would this mean that nothing could be generalised, that everything depended on the particular? Obviously, here too, it was an inter-play of the general and the particular. One should be able to list the factors, perhaps even rank them in importance, and gather them in general, perhaps theoretical, as well as particular categories.

So the quest began of wandering through these projects to understand, analyse, separate. But here too the investigation met with layers of issues.

The AMUL project,[17] for instance, was selected because dairying seemed a natural and desirable remunerative household industry for women. Commercially it seemed more sensible than making baskets and bags, which found no market. Women were

[16]Commission on Women: discussion at Tenth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES). New Delhi: December 1978.

[17]See Chapter 2.

the main actors in this play, and even if there were inadequacies (as for example that they were not members of the institutions), with modifications in this area, the concept and operation seemed attractive as a way out for women.

But as the scrutiny became closer, other issues appeared in the frame, sometimes overshadowing the women's issue.

Were there really cooperatives? Who were the "selves" that self-managed these cooperatives? Were their decisions part of the "mind" of the professionals, the "employees" of the unions and the boards who managed the market links, processing, and technical inputs, or did they truly decide for themselves?

Was this a kind of capitalistic cooperative? Were the cooperative members—especially the women, who were milkers (producers but not the owners)—any different from those employed in a factory? They were paid an amount every day for their labour. They sold their milk to a single buyer who supplied them with the required inputs. Was this form of put-out work not unlike that of the *bidi* manufacturers?

Did the managing committee of the primaries reflect the views of the most disadvantaged? The impressions emerged that, by and large, the better-off farmers dominated the societies. Decisions on staff appointments, size of dividend and distribution, the selection of representatives for training courses, for visits apart from union meetings and so on were taken by these members.

The better-off members were not necessarily the large landowners but small and marginal farmers. The project was designed to exclude the large land and cattle owners whose resources gave them access to inputs and markets. However, the inequality persisted, especially in comparison with the landless.

Impressions also emerged that since the landless were not the specified target group of the project, benefits to them have been indecisive.

And then there was the biggest question of all: for whom was the milk being produced? If commercial viability depended on feeding the better-off in the cities, was this an appropriate income-generating activity? When the measure of "who benefits" was applied, the aims, the organization, the priorities—all came under question.

Woven into these questions are additional negatives: although the women are workers/producers, they neither own the means of production (the animal) nor are they members of the cooperatives which are the decision-making bodies, except for a very few and

there too, often in name only. It is the men who have both these opportunities.

When interviewed, the women, as *one* across all asset-classes, wanted the sale price of milk raised at the village milk collection. But looked at from the cooperative's point of view, profits and dividends were social goals, rewarded by the union. The cooperatives were urged to be "successful" in terms of these norms. Hence the price paid to the producer for the milk could not be raised too much, and had to be uniform.

Two issues emerged. What would have been the decision if women (those who *worked* on milk production) had been the decision-makers on management?[18] They might have preferred higher daily rewards to profits and dividends.

Was the Union leadership right in offering incentives for surplus generation? Had it thereby skewed the distributional benefits, not only in favour of shareholders but against women?

This raised the question of who were the shareholders, and also whether *women*, as the invisible producers within the household, preferred/benefitted more from daily cash rewards, which reached them, to lump-sum cash that would be claimed by their own men, heads of the households.[19]

The data on shareholding seemed to suggest that the better-off owned a larger percentage of shares—apart from the fact that most of them were men. Empirical evidence on differences in uses of income between males and females—a higher proportion of female income than male income going into basic household needs such as food, housing, health—was by now too well established to leave any doubt about which system of payment was preferable, not only for women, but for the household's welfare.

The conventional top view of efficiency as surplus or profits seemed inappropriate, especially from the women producers' point of view. Yet the women had no vehicle to send this message up.

Scrutiny of the Madhubani painters[20] from the point of view

[18]For further discussion on differences between men's and women's perception of village needs etc., see "Role of Rural Women in Community Life," case study prepared by the Institute of Social Studies for United Nations Population and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Bangkok.

[19]Institute of Social Studies: "Women Workers and Family Planning in the Tea Industry."

[20]See Chapter 3.

of the commercialization of their art, raised doubts on the value of the straightforward economic development strategies. The logic of the development of the Madhubani painting was simple. In a poor, drought-prone district of Bihar, one of the backward states of India, lay a skill that could be developed into an income-earning skill. This "could" was the market and had to be similar to the market for paintings, namely the sophisticated urban and export markets. This skill, however, had been used and was being used mainly in the rituals of local culture—the celebration of weddings, death rites and so on. Women had taken their time, called upon their experience within the culture, to design and decorate.

Once income was to be derived from the skill, marketing apparatus blew into these villages. People wanted to buy, sometimes large quantities, and quickly. They wanted the women to paint on new materials. They brought feedback from their markets which asked for more or different colours, less empty space and so on. They also hinted that certain themes were more saleable than others. Along with the official marketing agencies came the traders who could see the outside value of this local ritualistic art. They influenced design and bought cheap.

The expanding market created a new group of suppliers. The poor unemployed of the area saw in this a source of income, even if they did not know the art. So now artists sprang up to satisfy demand.

What has this done to the art as well as to the artists? The art is now in a state of confusion; not only, in many cases, has its originality been lost but it is difficult even to trace an original design. There is, at present, such a wide variation in quality that the market itself has reduced both in India and abroad, supporting the axiom in economics that "bad goods drive out good goods."

Is this what development should do? The suggestion has been made that perhaps in such a situation it would be far better to leave the art or craft alone and instead develop an infrastructure to eliminate poverty. It would have been better, perhaps, to develop agriculture in that area to such an extent that these rural households could get enough income from their agriculture, and paint for pleasure as before.

It has been suggested that social services like health and education, and such civic amenities as water and fuel could have been plugged into the area so that the women artists could have had the time and the mind to paint and draw on their own inspiration,

and for purposes for which they had done so in the past, rather than for providing the household with *basic* income.

Similar labyrinths existed behind every project that was examined. Investigating and analysing from the point of view of women seemed inadequate. Yet, seeing it with too many eyes also seemed distracting—and in any case, a new task altogether. This ex-poste wisdom provided methodological insights, however, for the future; analytical frames for looking at women had obviously to be undertaken within the broader frame of equity or distributive justice.

In the case of inequality between men and women, our experience and insights gained from this study seemed to lead to the household, to the family, and the relationships *within* them.[21] The roots of inequality between the sexes seemed planted there—but spread out into society at large.

While there is no doubt that intra-household relationships, activities and roles of household members was impinged upon by extra-household phenomena, it seemed necessary to look at the reverse process, i.e., where relationships and phenomena within the household affected the structures as well as behaviourial patterns outside the household. This reverse process is often not taken sufficiently into account. There also seemed to be a case for breaking the world into "the private world" and "the public world" in order to understand women's subordination.[22] This division, while it may look similar to the division mentioned earlier of intra-household and extra-household categories, is not the same.

The private world and the public world relate to decision-making zones as well as linkages between decision-makers. It seems to be the case that the public world of power is held in the hands of men in all societies—capitalist and socialist. Whereas there may be differences between cultures and ideologies in the allocation of power in the private world, (even so) that power which leads to opportunity seems to be still denied within and outside the household to women. Therefore, it seems that the forces that generate power outside the household, the institutions linked to it, and the dynamics of the use of that power must be

[21]IUPERJ: "Women in the Labour Force in Latin America," proceedings of the seminar. Rio de Janerio: November 1978.

[22]Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. New Delhi: December 1978.

analysed sex-wise.

Similarly, the private world of power, its roots or the forces that determine it, and an analysis of its end-result must also be done for both sexes separately. The third step would be to see the linkages both as generated from the private world into the public world, as well as the reverse process: as generated from the public world into the private world, again separately and together for the sexes. Only then can one begin to see the connections and disconnections between class/sex analysis of inequality.[23]

The strategies that recommended themselves in both cases seemed the organized expression of the need for change by homogenous groups—around policies central to production and distribution—not only of *what* but *under what forms of organization*, with what directive principles.

Thus, in a sense, both frames led into each other.

Certain issues emerged, further, that merit discussion. These issues could be termed as methodological; though a more accurate term would be philosophical. One is replicability. The review of projects done in the following chapters raises a grave doubt about whether it is worthwhile, and certainly whether it is even morally right to look at projects with a view to replicability.[24]

Ostensibly, successful projects are a product of history, ideology and personality. While it is difficult to rank or allocate weight to these elements it is also highly misleading to put forward these as models to those who are starting new projects. As a methodology the quest for replicability distracts investigators from looking at the projects with a fairly sensitive and open mind. It also prevents them from looking for reasons beyond the immediate, thereby making their analysis superfluous. Lastly, for those who are asked to replicate these projects, these inadequate and superficial descriptions are a source of frustration, as whatever they may do, the projects do not get replicated.

A better goal could be to look at those projects that have had some beneficial effects on the people around them, with a view to drawing the inspiration that within a given framework things do happen. Such projects can also serve as laboratories for social scientists and theorists who want to examine the effectiveness of

[23]Devaki Jain: "The Subordination of Women: Analysis Needs New Categories," *Mainstream*, 15 August 1979.

[24]Institute of Social Studies and the Indian Cooperative Union: "Review and Analysis," in the section on Women's Employment, Some Viable Projects, to be published by UNICEF.

certain political or economic systems. Unfortunately, however, functional agencies, including the Government, rarely have time to consider such issues sensitively. Their tendency is to get on with the job and, therefore, to postulate replicability.

Another issue is the debate now current amongst those who discuss issues and theories of women and their integration in development—that self-employment is not only a soft option but also perhaps pushes women backward in the planning for women's future.[25]

The argument rests on the premises that self-employment programmes are usually low income-earning activities, they intensify exploitation both from forces outside the household as well as inside the household, and deny women access to higher skills and thereby higher paid-occupations. Further, that they maintain labour in inaccessible situations and deny them the protection of labour laws and social security as well as power which is available to more conventional types of modern work patterns, where labour can be united into unions as well as identified for protection. It is even argued that household-bound productive work is deterrent to lowering fertility. These premises are derived not only from empirical observations but also from classic theories looking at modes of production. In some of these analyses it is maintained that unless "labour" takes up its modern collective economic activities it tends to be kept down in subordinate positions—maintaining feudal relationships derived from land, strengthening capitalist relationships based on profit and so on.

The SEWA experience provides a base for questioning these premises as well as the influences and arguments drawn from them. Firstly, it explodes the myth that self-employment need necessarily be based on "backward occupations." The self-employed workers of SEWA are traders, manufacturers of many essential goods, and services—which are not just marginal to the nature of demand in the economy. They can be unionised or collectivised and means can be found of giving them access to protection of labour laws and social security benefits such as provident funds, maternity benefits, employment insurances and so forth.

The difference is that they don't have a "capitalist" as their employer. Their "enemies" are the entrenched bigger trader, the municipality's perception of their role, the police and the law.

[25]Discussion at the committee on women's employment constituted by the Planning Commission, Government of India, 1971.

Their struggle reveals that all these structures recognize only the conventional wage-earner—conventional in the sense that he/she works for a factory system, as a worker—the police, the laws and municipal services are all geared to the conventional occupations. Their experience can modify these structures not only to deliver to them a more just system of laws and services but to all the underprivileged as well.

However, the SEWA experience has a deeper political meaning, which should be highlighted when discussing issues of democracy in Third World countries. It is well-known that democracy is a very vulnerable political system when there is acute poverty—and even more, gross inequality. Most poor countries have surrendered to some form of single-line authority systems—mostly military regimes, also monarchies or one-party regimes. This trend has been discussed at great depth in many forums.

By and large, all these regimes are justified on the ground that the poor and the weak are exploited and oppressed, that the issue of rights and privileges is only an intangible freedom to those who do not have their basic bread. It is also justified on the ground that elections, such as those held in democratic countries, are a myth since the poverty and inaccessibility to knowledge of the poor makes them pawns in the hands of those who wish to exploit them. In other words, their votes can be purchased or forced according to the wishes of the rulers.

The recent experience in India, as well as the political situation in India in comparison with many countries in Asia, should be used to raise questions of forms of organization of the needy. It can be argued that if labour is always brought into a collective modern form of organization such as the factory, where capital is owned by the private sector or the State, this labour becomes extremely vulnerable to being used as "block" support. Trade unions are known to have allegiance to any one party or candidate as a block. In other words, there is no individual right asserted by the worker in political choice. Where there are no unions because the state is the only employer, a similar suspension of the individual right is noticed. Similarly, if there are only large private employers, especially in the agricultural sector, as in plantations, similar pressures are used for labour to give one mass block of votes.

In these circumstances, it is important to consider whether a more reliable system, ensuring individual freedom, is not provided by releasing large masses of individuals who own their means of pro-

duction, that is, self-employed workers. Such a self-employed worker, man or woman, has a wider degree of options than the conventional worker in a conventional large factory. Self-employed workers may unite for production but if the system is geared towards them, then it is not necessarily the case that they must forfeit their individual opinion in assertion of political issues. In fact, they might provide the most concrete bulwark against tyranny.

It may be important at this juncture to raise this issue not only for economic betterment but for political development. The fact that SEWA is an association of self-employed workers, that it has been recognized as a trade union and promotes all the kinds of advantages that a trade union promotes, but at the same time its workers own their own means of production, are free of the bondage of either the employer or the rigid, orthodox trade union or any political party, is something to be taken note of.

Their numbers are not marginal but can be marginalised unless they, and others who support them, are able to reveal that in countries like India, production of goods and services by such households should be protected from encroachment and cannibalisation by conventional capitalist or conventional socialist modes of production.

Unfortunately, in most theories of development, categories are derived from Marx, who was watching historical change in today's advanced countries at a particular time and of a particular kind. Alternately, they are derived from theories emanating from a similar situation which protected the interests of the private owners of capital. The analytical frame that these theories offer tends not to see the possibility of the development of a social and economic structure, which recognizes a large mass of self-employed workers as a possibility. It tends to neglect the situation of peasant households, artisans and other existing economic operatives in its analysis for planning—especially towards the goal of equality.

The question of the self-employed is related to the large issue of intra-household relationships and their impact on the external world. These can be the new categories that the Third World may need to examine and develop analytical frames.

The five chapters in this book thus reveal many dimensions of social and economic change. The mood with which the investigations began was reformist; the frame with which the projects were

analysed became revolutionary.[26] But looking back at the projects and their context, these terminologies themselves come under question. The logic that reform is working "within the system"—the system of course being unjust—and that revolution is changing the system, is used to create discomfort amongst reformers. But the contention here is even prior to this simplification. The very categories on which such definitions are based seem inadequate, it not inaccurate. Many more options seem open to the people of these countries if they could shed these "eyes" or theories. These options could build safeguards against oppression, pollution and violence.

If the quest of women for equality could release new perceptions and insights, new routes to progress with distributive justice, then it would be the most revolutionary event of the century. There seems a possibility. It is for the philosophers and analysts—and the women—to grasp it.

New Delhi, 1979 DEVAKI JAIN

[26]Charlotte, Bunch: "The Reform Tool Kit," in *Quest, a feminist quarterly*, Summer 1974.

Street Vendors of Ahmedabad

BIRTH OF SEWA

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.

Membership of SEWA fluctuates between 3000 and 10,000, as the members working in 20 trade groups are scattered in the 40 sq km area of Ahmedabad city. SEWA is also making headway in the smaller towns of Gujarat, and specially in rural areas.

Ahmedabad, with a population of 2.5 million, is a prominent textile centre of India. Textile mills were established at the turn of the present century, and they now number 620. It is also an important market for cloth, grain and vegetables. Textile labour of the city number 1.3 lakhs, of which 1.1 lakhs belong to an old trade union, the Gandhi Majoor Mahajan or the Textile Labour Association (TLA). This union was formed in 1917 by Mahatma Gandhi and represents a strong force in the labour movement as well as in the municipal administration in Ahmedabad. The presence of TLA in the city's population has developed an appreciation for workers' organizations.

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.

THE TLA OR MAJOOR MAHAJAN

After World War I, the mill-owners of Ahmedabad were faced with declining profits owing to shrinking demand. They announced a cut-back in workers' emoluments, specifically in the 70 per cent plague bonus which had been provided since mid-1977. Workers resisted this loss in their earnings and the mill-owners thereupon decided to appoint an arbitration board. Of the three arbiters representing the workers, one was Mahatma Gandhi. The other two were Shankerlal Banker and Vallabhbhai Patel. The collector was the chairman of the board. While the board's award was still being negotiated, some mill-workers struck

work. The mill-owners expressed their resentment at this by declaring a lockout on 22 February 1918.

Thus began Ahmedabad's first large-scale strike of textile workers. Led by Mahatma Gandhi, the workers pledged themselves to an indefinite strike until their demand for a 35 per cent wage increase was conceded. Norms of behaviour were laid down for the strikers by their leader. They were to abstain from violence, not to molest black legs, not to depend on alms, to remain firm no matter how long the strike continued, and to earn their livelihood during the strike period by any other honest labour.

As the strike dragged on, Gandhi was anguished by signs of weakening in the workers' determination to continue the strike. The mill-owners were his friends, and one of them, Anasuyaben Sarabhai, had espoused the workers' cause. Yet he could not bring about a settlement in favour of the workers' just demands. With the strike into its twentieth tense day, and with no sign of any resolution, Gandhi pondered over the impasse at the daily meeting of the mill-hands. "I was still groping and unable to see any way clearly (and) the light came to me." He decided to go on fast "unless the strikers rally and continue the strike till a settlement is reached, or till they leave the mills altogether."

This one incident acted as a catalyst to the TLA of Ahmedabad. Workers mustered around their leader in an emotional display of solidarity, infused with new strength, and repledged themselves to the principles for which they were striking. Soon after, on the twenty-third day of the strike, a settlement was reached between the mill-owners and mill-hands, again through arbitration, and the workers' demand for a 35 per cent wage increase was met.

The framework of arbitration, negotiation and non-violence laid down during the strike became the permanent framework of the TLA. Anasuyaben became its firstp resident. Anasuyaben was the sister of Ambalal Sarabhai, who dominated the textile industry in Ahmedabad in the early decades of the twentieth century. The loss of her parents in childhood led to a self-imposed isolation, during which she appeared to withdraw spiritually from the opulence around her. She joined the London School of Economics in 1911, and on her return to Ahmedabad two years later, she settled into a life dedicated to the service of workers and their families. From a tentative beginning in two rented rooms, where she started nursery classes for the children of mill-hands, Anasuyaben went on to organize one of the strongest

trade unions of textile workers in the country: the TLA.

Speaking to union members in 1931 on the evolution of the strong yet non-violent TLA, Mahatma Gandhi remarked:

> Your work is making you known throughout the world. The members of your union are jealous of their rights, and are prepared to lay down their lives for them, but their leaders who guide them, have no ill-will against the capitalists. In their welfare and their power you see your own welfare and power. That is the secret of your strength. Outside people have thought of capitalists and working men as exploiters and exploited. But there need be no such inherent antipathy between the two. If the capitalists are apt to be proud of their wealth, the working men are apt to be proud of their numerical strength. We are liable to be swayed and intoxicated by the same passion as the capitalists and it must be our prayer that both are free from that passion.

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 classes had risen to 25, and about 1500 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 came 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 headloaders 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 headloaders' complaint. They met the Merchants' Association, and negotiated an agreement for fixing (not raising) the wages for headloading. The merchants also agreed to give a stainless steel tumbler to the headloaders 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 headloaders' 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 headloaders 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 headloader's 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. Poor 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. The women not only knew but could analyse their problems. 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 December 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 years.

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 workers' trade union.

The Indian labour law on the registration of trade unions does not recognize 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 organization 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 on 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 moneylender; they had neither approached nor had been offered loans by com-

mercial banks. A vegetable vendor, for instance, borrowed Rs 50 from a moneylender 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 cent 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.

AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

The main aim of SEWA is the "economic regeneration and social uplift" of self-employed and other working women of the poorest sections in Ahmedabad and surrounding areas. Stated in this manner, the goals appear broad and ambiguous. Yet, in this vagueness lie positive characteristics of flexibility and experimentation, which have become SEWA's defining qualities. Determined largely by members' needs, the forms and programmes of SEWA mutate and grow in new directions. As members articulate their problems, SEWA expands its operations to experiment with solutions.

In the sense in which it is understood in the organization, economic regeneration refers to the augmentation of the income of the self-employed workers in their current occupations—both in quantity and regularity and in duration. The attempt is mainly to strengthen the production base (or capacity for service) so that the worker's entrepreneurial or service potential is maximized. At the same time SEWA aims to guide women workers in the proper use of these structures by deploying their own resources, physical and financial, in the optimal manner.

"Social uplift" is a term which covers a wide range of variables, extending from women's status and participation in society to intra-household behaviour and personal habits. The basic aim is

the cultivation of self-confidence so that women are liberated from their ingrained self-image as weak and helpless members of society, occupation groups and homes. SEWA aims to establish itself as an institution with which women can identify themselves and on whose support they can rely to secure justice in matters relating to their occupation, their relationship with authority or even their family problems. The organization, in turn, aims at introducing the members to values of honesty, dignity and simplicity of life—goals reflecting the Gandhian ideals to which TLA and SEWA leaders subscribe.

ACTIVITIES

The Association offers its members seven basic kinds of services, namely:

(*a*) Bargaining and representation in matters related to trades and occupations, through the SEWA union.

(*b*) Legal aid and grievance resolution service on an individual basis through the Legal Aid Cell (a part of the SEWA union).

(*c*) Credit and saving facilities through the Mahila SEWA Sahakari Bank (registered cooperative bank).

(*d*) Supply of raw materials, tools and equipment; technical assistance in the production process; help with marketing and education in financial management, all through the Mahila SEWA Sahakari Bank.

(*e*) Social security and welfare inputs (including medical cover) through the Mahila SEWA Trust (registered under the Bombay Trust Act).

(*f*) Productivity training in trades and occupations, including functional literacy through the Mahila SEWA Trust, and assistance, thereafter, in placement in suitable employment.

(*g*) In urban and rural centres, SEWA is trying to build up alternative economic organizations and units that can provide higher and more durable wages. They hope that such units can work as a lever to demand higher wages from the traders.

In addition, SEWA also provides in-house training to potential organizers of poor urban women attached to a range of official and private institutions, both from within the country and abroad.

The association has a research cell which conducts frequent surveys to determine the efficiency of the organization, as also to identify new action areas.

All these departments of SEWA—the union, bank and trust—work in close cooperation. There is a great deal of sharing of

personnel between SEWA's constituent units, and continuous interaction on the operations of the various departments. Coordination of operation is ensured by the president and general secretary of SEWA, who head all the SEWA constituents.

Table 1: Sewa Organization

Established:	*1972*	*1974*	*1975*
	SEWA	Mahila cooperative bank of SEWA	Mahila Sewa Trust
	President A. N. Buch	Chairman A. N. Buch	Chairman A. N. Buch
	General Secretary Ela Bhatt	Managing Director Ela Bhatt	Managing Director Ela Bhatt
	Executive Committee (15)	Board of Directors (13)	Board of Trustees (9)
	Sewa members (12)	Sewa members (9)	Sewa members (5)
	Occupational Committee (7)		

The pattern of extension of SEWA's activities is a chronology of the problem areas identified by the members to the organizers. After the formation of the union, the supply of credit was the first service rendered by the organization. This was later converted into a full-fledged bank service in 1974, followed by the establishment of the legal aid service, social security scheme, day-care centres and training centres.

THE SEWA UNION

Roughly one-third of the women who are engaged in petty marginal occupations in the informal sector in the city of Ahmedabad are members of the SEWA union. The union is recognized by the National Labour Organization (NLO).

Membership of SEWA is open to any working woman above the age of 15 years, who resides in the state of Gujarat. The woman may be self-employed in a craft or trade, or engaged in

an occupation as a casual wage-earner. There are no rigid stipulations, and even steady wage-earners may join the organization provided they do not have the cover of any other trade union related to their occupation.

Each member pays an annual subscription of Rs 3 payable in monthly instalments of 25 paise. Default for a continuous period of six months can lead to suspension of membership. Honorary membership is extended to promoters and well-wishers of the association and the total number is restricted to eight.

The Self-Employed Wome'ns Association has continually laid stress on persuading its members to pay their union dues, however small the amount. It also encourages them, despite their low-earning capacities, to save small amounts, and channellize these through the SEWA—which in turn uses the money to employ women social workers to attend fieldwork. The philosophy of a self-financed movement has been inherited from Gandhian ideology.

The members are grouped according to trades and geographical locations, so that each group has 60-65 members. A group leader, who is elected or appointed by the members, heads each group. There are a total of 153 group leaders in SEWA, and they collectively constitute the Pratinidhi Sabha or the Representatives' Council. The group leaders are further classified into seven section committees representing the major vocations. In addition, each trade group has a trade committee of 15-20 members, comprising group leaders, SEWA organizers and the general secretary. This structure bears a close parallel with the occupational sub-unions of major trade unions, as for instance the TLA.

However, typical of SEWA's understanding of women and their constraints, they have kept the structure fluid. (If the mother is busy, the daughter may attend the meeting.)

Table 2: Structure of SEWA Union

Executive Committees
7 Section Committees
15 Trade Committees
153 Group Leaders
Union Members

At the level of the SEWA organizers, each trade group is

assigned a SEWA union fieldworker, much in the manner in which TLA has allocated groups of five to six textile mills to each of its mill inspectors. There are 15 field organizers in the SEWA union.

The apex body of the SEWA union is the executive committee. This is a 21-member body consisting of section hands of the trade groups, TLA workers, and the SEWA president and secretary. Currently, the composition of the executive committees is as follows:

President—Arvindbhai N. Buch (President of TLA) (1)
Vice-presidents—one TLA/one used-garment worker (male) (2)
General Secretary—Ela Bhatt (Chief, women's wing of TLA) (1)
Treasurer—TLA (male) (1)
Secretaries—SEWA Organizers (2)
Used-garment dealers—SEWA members (2)
Readymade garment workers—SEWA members (3)
Vegetable vendors—SEWA members (3)
Junk-collector—SEWA member (1)
Eggs and fish vendor—SEWA member (1)
Milk-maid—SEWA member (1)
SEWA organizers and fieldworkers (3)

The SEWA union is primarily concerned with the representation of workers' interests with respect to earnings and conditions of work.

It operates on the basis of problem indentification through intensive investigation by its fieldworkers, and thereafter representation to the concerned authorities on behalf of the workers. There are two streams of activity in the SEWA union, the resolution of individual grievances of the members and the collective representation of the wider body of members to trade groups.

Each SEWA organizer visits her trade group locations (usually one or two areas of the city) on alternate days. She carries with her a complaints register. She contacts the group leader of each section of the trade group, and through her seeks to bring her knowledge of the prevailing situation in the group up-to-date. She records all occupation-related complaints—for example, harassment by the police, *challan* by municipal authorities or the encroachment department, or cases of habitual harassment of members of certain communities of ex-criminals by the police. It is quite common for a policeman to tip over a street stall or confiscate

the contents of a basket if he suspects a vendor of not having a licence, or feels that she is causing an obstruction in the market-place, or suspects that she has committed a theft. The organizer then visits the affected member and makes a first-hand appraisal of the problem. Her first attempt is to find a solution to the problem on the spot by discussing the matter with the concerned official. The services of a female lawyer have been retained by the SEWA union for dealing with cases in which legal representations have to be made.

However, in case of complaints which require a more thorough investigation and/or representation to senior officials, for example the non-issuance of licences for vending goods, the fieldworker informs the grievance cell incharge, a full-time SEWA worker in the Bhadra office, who pursues all complaints which are unresolved at fieldworkers' level. She lodges the complaint with the concerned department, goes to meet them, and pursues the matter to its conclusion. On an average, 300 letters of complaint are issued by the SEWA union every week to the police department, Municipal Corporation, Labour Commission and so on. Frequent representations are made at Gandhi Nagar, the seat of the Gujarat government, on behalf of the workers.

The fieldworkers also make a note of non-professional developments among members of their trade groups, such as a new birth, advanced pregnancy, sickness, misbehaviour by the husband or family members, and so on. Some of this information is channelled to the Mahila SEWA Sahakari Trust for further processing (this is dealt with below), while other problems are taken up on an informal person-to-person basis.

Often members of a certain trade group have a common problem which seems to be an all-pervasive impeder of progress. Experience and repeated exposure shapes the perception of the organizers with regard to the solution. A trade committee meeting is called, and there is joint discussion of the organizers and fieldworkers with group leaders and other practitioners of the trade. The areas of priority action are identified at this meeting, and the strategy of representation is also determined.

Wherever SEWA is undertaking a survey, the president and general secretary of SEWA address meetings of the group. During the tour, they also try to locate other groups of women working in self-employed or semi-employed occupations. To cite one instance: there are one thousand women working for onion pre-

servation in large halls called *vedas*: these are the stick makers, and the women employed in button manufacturing and preparing *bandhanis* (tie and dye fabric) in the various centres of Gujarat. Such groups emerge as SEWA officials travel to meet one set of women being surveyed. The officials also visit *melas* (fairs) organized in rural areas, where SEWA members vend goods. As a result of a few such fairs a memorandum was presented to the state authorities, asking them to take interest in planning, and in the providing of various amenities where *melas* were organized.

Where SEWA has to organize an economic struggle for higher earnings the president and general secretary, explaining the objectives of the SEWA movement, appeal to local traders and the public to deal with the workers sympathetically. Where resistance is shown SEWA takes assistance from the labour commissioner's office and through persuation and pressure on the Government, results are achieved.

SHREE MAHILA SEWA SAHAKARI BANK

Credit was the pivotal service extended by the SEWA union in the early years after its inception. The union undertook the work of the processing of applications for loans, the grant of money, repayments and so on, and acted as an intermediary between institutional finance and petty self-employed entrepreneurs. The Bank of India and the State Bank of India were amongst the first banks to experiment with the provision of credit, and selected self-employed women, identified for the purpose by the SEWA union. Today loans are extended to members on the basis of mutual guarantee.

The cooperation of nationalized banks in the scheme of providing credit to vendors, a seemingly risky venture, seemed to have been facilitated by SEWA's links with the TLA.

The TLA, because of its large membership, collects every year Rs 20 lakhs as subscription alone. Hence it has a cartain prestige from the point of view of the banks concerned.

In the first three months, a total of over Rs 73,000 was extended to 125 SEWA members in business loans from three trade groups, namely, hand-cart pullers, headloaders and used-garment

dealers. The loans ranged from Rs 500 to Rs 1000.[1]

The loan applications of members were processed by SEWA organizers. Although there was no large guarantee, the SEWA union was accepted by the bank as an effective recommending organization. Members were also accepted as cross-guarantors for each other. Since most members were illiterate and unable to sign, SEWA organizers helped in completing the preliminaries and submitting the applications to the banks. The banks paid SEWA a service charge of Rs 10 per application—Rs 6 on disbursing the loan and Rs 4 when the loan was fully paid.

For the borrower, the experience was entirely new. The insecurity of oral loans was over, interest rates were much lower, and the period of repayment much longer. However, at the same time there was far less flexibility in the arrangement—the periodicity of repayment of instalment was fixed, and there was a certain institutional formality that unsettled the unsophisticated urban poor.

Listing these problems, a SEWA report says: "Our members, being all women, accompanied by children, filthy in appearance, illiterate, rowdy, uncouth in manners, unaccustomed to business talks, were annoying and not welcome to the bank staff at their office premises." There was a constant muddle of names, instalment slips, instances of repayment at wrong banks, and so on. Bank timings were not always observed by the women, who could visit the bank only when they found the time; if the bank did not accept payment on the day when they did spare the time, the instalment money was spent otherwise.

The members also faced the problem of keeping the loan money safely. A vegetable vendor or a used-garment dealer could not purchase raw material stock with the entire sum at any one time, as the slums were not secure places for storing the goods. Quite often, they deposited the money with the very wholesaler from whom they had bought the goods on credit at a usurious

[1]Loans extended to SEWA members in first 3 months of credit scheme, involving nationalized banks:

	No of Loanees		
Trade Group	*Rs 500*	*Rs 700*	*Rs 1000*
Hand-cart pullers	4	40	—
Headloaders	24	6	—
Used garment dealers	48	—	3

rate of interest. At home there was the problem of keeping the money away from unscrupulous husbands or sons, who might drink or gamble it away.

The solution lay in minimising direct contact between members and the bank officials, while simultaneously funnelling commercial finance towards them and ensuring its safe custody. At a meeting of SEWA members and group leaders in December 1973, banking problems were discussed and a spontaneous suggestion was made by the members to the organizers: "*Behn*, let us have a bank of our own. We can do it. We are poor, but there are so many of us." And they did it. The SEWA members contributed Rs 10 each towards the share capital of a bank of their own, and in a short time they collected a sum of Rs 40,020. The cooperative bank was now ready for registration, but a small snag remained. All members of the executive committee of the bank were required to sign the registration papers. In an impressive display of determination and confidence, 11 of the group leaders sat up a whole night and into the next day to learn how to sign their names without error. On 25 May 1974, the Mahila SEWA Sahakari Bank (SEWA Women's Cooperative Bank) was inaugurated by the Governor of Gujarat, and subsequently registered with the cooperative department of the state government (Registration No S-124446). The bank was accommodated in a large room in the TLA building at a rental of Rs 500 per month.

In order to streamline the procedure of maintaining the accounts of the members who were unable to read, a new system was evolved and is in use even to this day. An identification card is prepared for each woman with a photograph of her holding a slate marked with her account number. The same photograph is also pasted on her pass-book and in the bank ledgers against her account. The photograph of the guarantor is also pasted on the form. (In the initial stages the SEWA office arranged for a photographer in the office building.)

To obtain a loan, SEWA members approach either the union fieldworkers or they visit the SEWA Bank directly. All requests for loans are scrutinized carefully before the application is processed, and these are then forwarded to a nationalized bank, with the SEWA Bank acting as a clearing house. During the scrutiny it is ensured that the loan is being solicited for buiness purposes, that the member has some experience of her trade, that the group leader (who will stand as guarantor) is reliable, and that the member does not have a record of serious default in payment. When the

commercial bank has completed the necessary documentation, it informs the SEWA Bank about the date of disbursement of the loan. A SEWA organizer accompanies the borrower and her group leader to the commercial bank. An account payee cheque is issued by the bank in favour of the member taking the loan. This is deposited in her account in the SEWA Bank. In some cases when the loan is required for the purchase of equipment, the cheque is drawn in favour of the selling agency.

Although a detailed survey has not been conducted by SEWA, it is learnt from a random survey that approximately 50 per cent of the loans by value are utilized for business, 25 per cent for clearing old debt and the rest for ritual obligations, such as marriages and death ceremonies. Although the organizers attempt to discourage ritual expenditure through persuasion and by example, the percentage of such prestige-enhancing spending remains high.

Loans range from Rs 250 to Rs 1000, depending upon the purpose of borrowing. The entire amount has to be repaid in 20 monthly instalments, so that 5 per cent of the principal is paid back each month. Interest rates charged by the banks, which varied from 9 per cent to 16 per cent in the past, have now been reduced uniformly to 4 per cent as a result of SEWA's lobbying with the Government to obtain cheap credit for slum-dwellers.

In the five-year period, from 1973 to 1977 (inclusive), over Rs 50 lakhs has been distributed in loans to about 9000 SEWA members through the SEWA union, and later the SEWA Bank The following is a breakdown of the participation of some banks in Ahmedabad in the credit scheme during the period July 1974 to March 1976. There is now a trend in the SEWA Bank to use its own resources to make loans to its members in preference to mobilizing credit from other banks.

Deposits at the SEWA Bank exceeded Rs 10 lakhs in 1977, and almost all SEWA members held personal savings accounts in the bank, as Table 4 shows.

On 31 July 1978 the deposits of SEWA Bank stood at Rs 14 lakhs. The bank has used its resources to strengthen services "which increase productivity of the members and enhance their capacity to absorb institutional support." The SEWA organizers have not been content with merely providing credit to their members, as they consider this role to be only a partial fulfilment of their objective to regenerate income.

In a characteristic rejection of the narrow interpretation of a bank's function as a loan-giving or deposit-creating agency, the

Table 3: Loans to SEWA members by selected nationalized banks —July 1974 to March 1976

Bank	No of SEWA borrowers	Loans (Rs in lakhs)	Rate of interest
State Bank of India	1070	4.98	11
Bank of India	1248	6.33	3
Central Bank of India	219	1.09	11.9
Dena Bank	318	1.56	13
Bank of Maharashtra	3	0.20	16.5
Total	2858	14.16	

Source: SEWA.

Table 4: SEWA Bank —some financial parameters

Date (as on)	Total deposits (Rs in lakhs)	No of accounts	No of share-holders	Share capital (Rs in lakhs)	Value of loans advanced (Rs in lakhs) 1977-78	Value of loans returned (Rs in lakhs) 1977-78
31.6.1975	2.43	6,188				
31.6.1976	9.37	10,459				
31.7.1977	10.54	11,038				
30.11.1978	16.13	11,64	6,959	0.82	0.99	0.68

Source: SEWA.

SEWA Bank has deviated from the general pattern of cooperative banks. It has formulated schemes which establish members' access to those services which ensure that their borrowings yield greater productivity.

THE BANK'S SERVICES

The services/facilities offered by the SEWA Bank are:

(*a*) It provides raw materials at fair prices to garment workers who are provided with cloth at mill rates and to *chindi* workers who buy rags on a no-profit-no-loss basis.

(*b*) It undertakes to re-design tools and equipment so as to ensure maximum productivity and to alleviate physical strain. For example, the bank investigated the condition of hand-cart pullers who towed several tons of load every day and were chronic sufferers from strain, fatigue and backache. It consulted the Institute of Occupational Health in Ahmedabad, and a hand-cart with a hand brake was designed in which the energy cost was lower, and the physical strain has been reduced; in addition, there was safe accommodation for a baby underneath the cart. Similarly, the institute has been engaged in studying the problems of agate polishers whose cramped sitting positions make work impossible after the fifth month of pregnancy. A study is also being conducted to provide technical assistance to cotton-pod shellers who complain that the bright white of the cotton hurts their eyes, and that their menstruation is irregular after a few months of this work. Again, the National Institute of Design in the city has designed a chaap collapsible umbrella to protect women vendors from the sun.

(*c*) The bank experiments with new designs in the case of certain products so as to enhance their appeal to a wider market. Technical organizations, such as the National Institute of Design, have been approached to help re-design blankets produced by some rural workers. There have been some experiments by the SEWA organizers to introduce members,' children to simple but attractive crafts, such as the decoration of hessian sacking with applique.

(*d*) The bank explores new markets and offers guidance to members in the marketing of their goods. *Khadi* garments tailored by SEWA members are sold at the TLA-run Khadi Kutir (retail store for *khadi* garments).

(*e*) The bank provides technical help in the storage and processing of commodities.

(*f*) The bank introduces members to financial and busiesss management practices.

In addition, the SEWA Bank encourages thrift in its members and motivates them to save by providing safe custody of their savings. The bank also trains the members in the banking habit and imbues women with the confidence that they can handle and operate money just as well as men. Husbands and sons are educated to encourage women to operate their own accounts so that the principle of economic independence starts percolating. Similarly, women shareholders and those who have taken loans are induced to visit bankers for repayment instead of sending their

men-folk to do it for them. This instills confidence in them. According to SEWA leaders, male members deeply appreciate the help and training given by the bank to their women-folk.

SEWA constantly strives to expand its capital base, so that it can expand its financial activities as well. As the self-employed vendors are very poor, their saving capacity is limited. The chairman of the bank has called upon TLA representatives, numbering 3500, to open their accounts in the names of their wives, daughters or mothers. He has further initiated a scheme of collecting Rs 1000 as deposit with interest from 1000 middle-class women for three years. This is to augment the bank's profitability so that the earnings in turn may be used to finance the activities of SEWA.

REPAYMENT OF LOANS

Both the SEWA union and the SEWA Bank accord the highest priority to the recovery of loan instalments from members, not only because the success of the credit scheme hinges on regular repayment to commercial banks, but also because SEWA wishes to inculcate honesty and moral values in its members. To quote from a SEWA publication: "A member who pays instalments regularly on her own has reached a state of responsibility and self-respect, the very first step towards helping herself out of distress. We are striving to achieve this in every member." It is impressed upon the member that the financial assistance they receive is not charity, but credit based on trust.

Qualitative surveys reveal that default in payments is not a serious problem. A little less than half the borrowers are regular with their instalments or are only one or two instalments behind schedule. For an equal proportion of borrowers, the default may range from three to six instalments. The rest (three women in 20) have very serious default problems.

Instalments are either handed over to the fieldworker on site or paid in at the SEWA office. The money is deposited in the general repayment account of the SEWA Bank and transferred to the lending bank on the following day.

Organizers and group leaders of SEWA are responsible for ensuring regular repayment of loans. Field organizers personally contact all defaulters in their trade groups, to find out the reasons for non-payment of instalments. They have to exercise tact and sensitivity in sifting the genuine reasons from the spurious. Poverty is the main reason for irregularity with repayments. A

half-starving family with a debt burden of Rs 500-2000 is likely to divert the loan to consumption expenditure. The women are trapped in a vicious circle of low productivity, poor capital base, low earnings, and loss of work due to ill-health or repeated pregnancies. Husbands' unemployment or setbacks in the member's own trade earnings might also result in defaults. Apathy or indifference towards repayments is less common, but does occur. Rivalry amongst group leaders, or vengeance against them (group leaders are guarantors) might lead to wilful neglect of repayment, but this is also rare. Other reasons for non-payment include ritualistic expenditures or concealment of the borrower's death by her family.

Sometimes vested interests such as moneylenders weaken the members' will to repay their loans. For example, following the declaration of the moratorium on hereditary loans of bonded labourers in 1975, a rumour was circulated amongst SEWA members that they too were exempt from repaying their loans. Organizers had to counter this propaganda with intensive fieldwork to re-instruct the members in loan repayment.

The SEWA fieldworkers (who are staff members of the SEWA union) are out in the field five days a week to investigate the borrowers' use of the loan, to collect instalments and to persuade the defaulters. Pamphlets are distributed to the borrowers to educate them in regular repayment (the bank offers a half per cent discount on interest charges for regular repayment of instalments) and productive use of their money. The focus is on trying to sympathetically study the problems that oppress the women, particularly the crises which overtake their income-earning roles and impede repayment of loans. SEWA takes this opportunity to get closer to its members and to assure them of its financial and moral support in all cases of genuine distress.

SEWA BANK STAFF

The SEWA Bank has a professionally qualified staff of eight members. These persons are full-time employees of the bank. They conduct the business of the bank and such is their dedication that they do not hesitate, if required, to undertake fieldwork or other tasks connected with SEWA or the Mahila SEWA Trust.

MAHILA SEWA TRUST

In this social strata to which the SEWA members belong, the concept of formal social security is unknown, except among the minority who hold jobs in the organized sector. By and large, the community provides its own social security. However, in urban slums this security is notional on account of the high cost of living which reduces the ability of the community to support its old, sick and disadvantaged. The state also does not provide a reliable alternative.

The Mahila SEWA Trust was instituted in commemoration of the International Women's Year (1975). Small amounts were collected from members of SEWA. Some shop-stewards of the TLA also presented small sums on auspicious occasions. The TLA donated Rs 50,000 from its trust funds. The Gandhian principle of self-reliance is reflected in the establishment of this trust. Quoting Gandhiji on the subject, a SEWA publication states: "Trade unions should not wait for the management or government to take the initiative in setting up social security or welfare projects for their numbers, but should prepare guidelines themselves."

At present, the SEWA Trust has three security schemes, and several other supporting programmes, as described below. On an average, about Rs 5000 is disbursed annually by the Trust under these schemes. Funds are mostly self-generated, although the Trust receives donations from philanthropic institutions and charitable trusts operated by managements of the Ahmedabad mills, labour organizations (like the TLA), and individual contributions. The Rs 1,76,000 received by Mrs Ela Bhatt, General Secretary of SEWA, as the Magasaysay Award for 1977, has also been added to the Trust's funds. The Trust is presided over by a board of trustees, largely comprising SEWA members and group leaders. A Trust secretary (who is also the manager of the SEWA Bank) operates the funds. The fieldwork involved in the activities of the Trust is conducted by the union organizers.

MATERNITY BENEFIT SCHEME

Members of SEWA in the age-group 18-35 years are covered by the Maternity Benefit Scheme for two deliveries. In the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy, the member joins the scheme [by contributing Rs 15. She is then provided pre-natal care by a doctor engaged by the Trust. The delivery is attended by a qualified

person. A sum of Rs 75[2] is gifted to her immediately after the delivery so as to compensate for her loss of income and to provide a nutritious diet. If the woman undergoes sterilization, a higher amount, Rs 100, is given. The money is taken by the SEWA organizer or the group leader who visits the member after her delivery, and helps in purchasing medicines, *ghee*, and other essentials from the market. Subsequent visits are made by SEWA organizers to check the progress made by the mother until the member returns to work. No benefit is extended to a pregnant member who already has three children.

Despite this in-built bias towards family planning, the Maternity Benefit Scheme rarely accomplishes this objective because of its restricted scope. Although most of the SEWA members have overcome their initial reserve towards family planning, they are unable to undergo a hysterectomy because of the requirement of extended periods of bed-rest during [which there is no support for child care, or for the care of animals.

In addition, SEWA fieldworkers organize, under a Know Your Body programme, visits by a local lady doctor to give lectures and show slides to groups of women and girls on subjects of gynaecological interest. The doctor advises them on menstrual problems and on the pre- and post-natal care women should take when they conceive.

WIDOWHOOD AND DEATH ASSISTANCE SCHEME

In most parts of the country, a widow is expected to remain house-bound for a period of one month. During this period of emotional strain the household is deprived of all income—that of the deceased spouse, as well as that of the widow. Savings are non-existent, and the household is rendered destitute. SEWA provides a free grant of Rs 151 to a member who has been widowed to tide over this period.[3]

The Death Benefit Scheme is intended to assist the dependents of a SEWA member on her death. Members of SEWA mooted the idea of a Death Benefit Scheme to meet their funeral expenses, as they wished to avoid plunging their families into a financial crisis in the event of their death. Usually a member of the deceased's family collects donations and alms from the community to perform the death rites. Under the SEWA scheme a sum

[2]The beneficiary signs a Maternity Benefit form.
[3]The beneficiary signs a Widowhood and Death Assistance Scheme form.

of Rs 100 is paid to the member's heir, and SEWA organizers often spend time with the bereaved family. The benefit is made available when a death certificate from the local authority is produced.

HEALTH SCHEME

The poor health and poorer medication available to members of SEWA is evident from their high mortality rate at childbirth, and frequent absence from work due to illness. Children also suffer from malnourishment.

In order to identify the nature of the health problems and to assign priorities, SEWA had a medical check-up conducted in October 1975 in a city hospital on a random sample of 350 SEWA members. Forty doctors of the All India Medical Association participated in the exercise on an honorary basis. The total cost of conducting the medical examination was Rs 500 (payment to hospital staff) which was borne by the Trust. The SEWA members examined included hand-cart pullers, garment makers, used-garment dealers, vegetable vendors, junk collectors, milk vendors and miscellaneous service groups. However, follow-up on the medical check-up has been poor, except for the establishment of a small programme for providing spectacles. One hundred garment workers have been provided free eye examination. SEWA contributed an additional amount as consultancy fee to the opthalmic surgeon, and for the spectacles.

OTHER WELFARE SCHEMES

The poor self-employed worker and her children pay a high psychological price in terms of neglect on the one hand, and anxiety on the other. Often the children have to be taken to the work site or left to play in the streets. The SEWA Trust has set up two Day Care Centres (DCC) and one creche, located in busy labour localities. It is revealing, however, that one DCC had had to close down since the landlord objected to the presence of Veghari children in his house. There are forty children in a DCC. The centre is open from 9 A.M. to 7 P.M. and is meant for children between the age-group of 6 weeks to 6 years. The centre works two shifts, and about thirty children stay in the centre for 4-5 hours each day. The centre has a staff of two maidservants and one caretaker. Meals are left by the mothers, while the DCC provides milk and biscuits. It also provides medical attention and medicines in special cases.

As the children have little or no formal schooling, KG classes and elementary classes are also held. The DCC at Shanker Bhavan provides an illustration of the scope of the SEWA child-care programme. This centre, located in a slum area, started a kindergarten for children, most of whom were from families of sack repairers. Then an education programme was organized for older children. A local sculptress who heard of the centre started art classes there, and a public exhibition of the children's work was held. It is at this centre that children were encouraged to experiment with applique designs on hessian sacks.

A member pays a fee of Rs 5 per month for a child, and the SEWA Trust contributes Rs 10. Members have requested more DCCs in their areas, and regard this facility as an important factor in their ability to work with concentration.

In order to improve the living conditions of the members whose squalid living quarters often lead to "physical and moral degradation," SEWA has formulated a Cooperative Housing Scheme as a part of the SEWA Bank. Seven hundred and ninety-four members are already saving for housing and the money accumulates in their bank account every month. Meanwhile, SEWA is negotiating with the Gujarat State Housing Board for low-cost housing for 1000 members.

Functional literacy is a cherished aim of SEWA, although its purely academic adult educational programme has failed. Women were not interested in literacy for its own sake, and attended the evening classes only to be seen by the *bens* and win their goodwill. However, a new urge for education is now visible in the group leaders. Their participation in the organizational activities of SEWA has been somewhat restricted because of their illiteracy. On their request, a teacher has been engaged. They feel that education will create many opportunities for them to improve their skills in their professions, and at the same time also create a consciousness towards children's education.

The most important of the programmes of the SEWA Trust is the series of occupational training courses which are held regularly. These courses aim at upgrading skills in occupations and increasing productivity and are conducted with the participation of professionally qualified personnel. For instance, a 2-day instructional programme for milk-maids in cattle care and artificial insemination was held with the involvement of the National Dairy Development Board and the Animal Husbandry Department of the state government. Gujarat University assisted in training

courses for machine workers in equipment maintenance, for junk-smiths in tool handling, for vegetable vendors in financial management, and so on. These courses have proved popular and have been uniformly successful in strengthening women workers in their traditional trades.

SEWA, through embroidery, knitting and sewing classes conducted by the Labour Welfare Trust of the TLA, organizes courses for its members. Training programmes are also launched for imparting training to poor women who do not possess an income-yielding skill. The Home Help Training Scheme, started in October 1976, was launched to train SEWA members or their women relatives as home helpers, and then to find them employment at suitable salaries. The training provided all-round education to the trainees in cooking, sewing, operating modern appliances, child care, caring for the sick and aged, and other services required of a domestic helper. Twenty trainees were selected for the training, and they were given on-the-job training in a Home Science College (one week), local hospital (one month), and then practical experience with a few volunteer families.

In addition to the practical training, the SEWA Trust and union undertake a wider programme of general education. Meetings are conducted in workers' settlements and slums to educate women in family care (specifically diet and nutrition, hygiene, preventive health measures), family planning, the "Know-Your-Body" course and so on.[4] The "classes" are open to all women of the community, and are often attended by young mothers who are non-SEWA members, and a few interested kindergarten teachers in the locality. Children's songs and games are also taught. Sometimes these turn into sessions of group singing (devotional songs). Support from the Polyvalent Adult Education Centre of Gujarat University has ensured a high standard of programme content and delivery.

Group leaders and other SEWA members are provided instruction in social legislation (focussing on areas affecting women) leadership and cadre organization, holding meetings and so on. Reportedly, these programmes have been particularly well received and women report that they have gained in self-confidence, and are better equipped to serve their group members.

[4]Organizers use a manual for teaching members about processes of their own body. They have found that this is the most popular of all the classes that women attend, and leads to interest in family planning.

SEWA also organizes short tours and excursions for the members to places of pilgrimage, picnic spots and historical sites. SEWA organizers state that the main purpose of these trips is to give the members a change and "some fun." All programmes funded by the Trust are implemented by the staff of the SEWA union.

SEWA RESEARCH WING

Intensive study of workers' problems through research surveys has been an operational technique of SEWA, as described further along in this report. The surveys are conducted in the spirit of enquiry to orient action programmes to areas where SEWA members require assistance.

Research ideas usually stem from the experiences of SEWA organizers in the field and their perception of members' needs. A research frame is then drawn and a questionnaire is canvassed. Generally, a standard questionnaire is used with modifications for special features of a trade group. A fairly large sample, ranging from 200 to 800 members of a trade group, is interviewed. The members are either contacted at the SEWA office when they visit the bank or the Legal Aid Cell, or are approached at work. There is no staff exclusively for research, and all the fieldworkers assist in canvassing the schedules.

The scope of the questionnaires is wide. Besides demographic data relating to all members of the household, information is also collected about education (including technical education), occupation and income of all members of the household. In addition, a thorough investigation of the SEWA members' conditions of work, earnings, production, unutilized capacity, savings, major problems, expectations from the union and so on are conducted.

Trade groups which have been covered in past surveys include garment makers, used-garment dealers, milk-maids, hand-cart pullers, junk-smiths, carpenters, vegetable vendors, cotton-pod shellers, waste-paper collectors of Ahmedabad city, handloom weavers in the towns of Cambay and Dholka, and firewood collectors of the forests around Mount Girnar (situated at Junagadh), who supply wood to town dwellers.

The emphasis on research in SEWA might have been inherited from the TLA, which has had a long tradition of surveying workers' conditions. One of its earliest labour enquiries was con-

ducted in the thirties, and this has been followed annually by other in-depth investigations.

THE PEOPLE OF SEWA

SEWA ORGANIZERS

There are presently 14 organizers in the SEWA union, not including the General Secretary, Mrs Ela Bhatt. These constitute the field force of SEWA as well as the office staff at the Bhadra office. Except for one or two workers, whose work is specialized, the others have no job specialization and each person does all kinds of work, often substituting for each other.

The women are young, ranging in age from 22 to 46 years. They are from middle-class homes or the better-off blue-collar families. They all have at least high school education, and there are two women with a masters' degree (in law and social work respectively). The family background of the organizers does not generally reflect an involvement with social work or workers' struggles. Yet in two or three instances, there is a family history of participation in Gandhian programmes of social uplift or help to the poor on a voluntary basis.

Their motivation for joining SEWA was predominantly economic, although the organization has low-salary scales, ranging from Rs 110 for a newcomer to Rs 165 for a senior organizer. The income makes a big difference to the family budget.

A common thread that unites the organizers is a single purpose in their understanding of women's vulnerability *as women.* The commitment often springs from personal expression within the family, and sometimes from repeated exposure to appalling conditions of physical stress which has to be endured by women on account of their femaleness.

Official working hours for the organizers are from noon to 4 P.M., but in practice they put in longer hours in the field each day, often extending late into the evening. They gather at the SEWA office every working day in the morning, discuss their day's work with the General Secretary or with senior organizers, and then disperse, each for her trade group. They use the public transport system—*rickshaws* or buses—and are reimbursed by the organization for their transport expenses.

A large part of the day is spent in fieldwork, which covers all work involving contact with SEWA members. It may mean making new members, resolving members' trade-related problems, giving advice on personal matters, teaching women about saving, cleanliness, children's education and so on, or arranging and addressing meetings. Basically, the work calls for establishing rapport with the members, encouraging and helping them, and drawing them into SEWA.

An organizer must possess certain qualities which will facilitate her performance as a SEWA organizer, viz., patience, sympathy, tact, the ability to bear insult, a liking for people, the ability to talk to them, the instinct for identifying underlying problems and relationships, and the skill of organizing and communicating with groups.

SEWA organizers have to deal with a large number of public departments, usually at the second level of administration. Offices such as the Housing Board, Slum Clearance Department, Municipal Corporation, Police Department, Department of Civil Supplies, Ahmedabad Zilla Panchayat, nationalised banks and municipal hospitals have to be visited often, or officials from these departments have to be accosted in the market place. Self-confidence and conviction in the workers' cause are necessary attributes in dealing with these departments and securing justice for the workers.

Some of these qualities are acquired on the job and the field organizers' personality develops in response to the situations with which she is faced. For example, various traits like a quick temper or nervousness in communicating with large groups, which interfere with the organizers' work, are quickly overcome.

In the present system of operations in SEWA, the field organizers are involved primarily with day-to-day problems and their solution. They are not, in general, called upon to take important policy decisions or to shape future struggles of the organization. Here their role seems to be limited to conveying factual information about the prevailing situation to the General Secretary, President, or other senior TLA representatives on the executive committee. The critical macro decisions appear to be taken by these leaders, although organizers are given the opportunity to express themselves on any decision.

Rivalry and competition among the organizers is fairly common, although rarely does it assume infructuous proportions. Organizers seem to strive, on an individual basis, for objectives

such as popularity among SEWA members, establishing contact with influential visitors to SEWA, approval of top organizers and so on. There is a tendency amongst a few of them to dominate their colleagues through overbearing participation in discussions, or unreasonable criticism of others' proposals. Yet a serious situation has not arisen from these individual personality problems—due largely to non-partisan and firm handling by the General Secretary.

The experience of working for poor and unprotected women is novel. While on the job, the organizers develop a genuine concern for the women. The job transforms into some sort of crusade, and grips them with its relevance and the needs of the poor. This perhaps is their chief motivation to stay on in SEWA, even though other jobs might offer better salaries (see profiles at the end of this chapter).

While cooperation from their families is crucial to the young women whose job takes them to "dangerous" labour localities even at night, they do not always have this support. In one or two cases there is resentment from the husband about his wife's prolonged absence from home and her irregular hours. Mindful of this, the women tend to attend to domestic chores conscientiously to maintain harmony in the home. There is evidence, however, of a gain in status on account of a steady salaried job with SEWA in the case of most of the organizers.

GROUP LEADERS

Group leaders are natural leaders of their community—women who have always identified with other people's problems in the community. They are associated with a willingness to help, to protest against mala-fide practices in society, and with leadership experience in dealing with authority both within the community or outside it. Group leaders are also actively engaged in a trade or occupation, and have generally made a commercial succees of it. They are generally middle-aged, with grown-up children. Some have daughters or daughters-in-law to assist with the housework, and can devote some time to their work for their group.

In general, women of the community regard these women as fair-minded and wise, and appoint them arbiters in local quarrels or petty squabbles. From this locus standi, they are the automatic choice of the community for leadership of the trade group for SEWA.

As group leaders, the women have the crucial link role to play

between the members and the organizers. Since they belong to the community and are familiar with all its details, they are a valuable resource for (*a*) implementing SEWA's programmes, as for instance the credit scheme; (*b*) providing feedback on the success of each scheme; (*c*) conveying members' problems to organizers; (*d*) throwing up ideas for new programmes and (*e*) extending membership of SEWA in their community.

Their work as group leaders is time-consuming and demanding. The day's duties include various tasks, such as the collection of loan instalments, discussion with the SEWA organizer or *ben*, encouraging reluctant members to avail of facilities offered by SEWA, intervening in quarrels between members of the group, dealing with officials of city or state authorities, conveying information to members about forthcoming meetings/training schemes, and so on. The outlay of time on these tasks often erodes working time in their own trades, and sometimes there is a loss of earnings.

Each group leader seems to strike a balance between SEWA work and private trade, based on her perception of the trade-off between status gain and earnings. Leadership in SEWA gives them a distinct eminence in their community. The fact of their intimate contact with SEWA *bens*, and their acquaintance with well-known labour leaders of TLA, etc., builds authority and respect for them. They are associated with the power to "do things" in case of injustice, and to secure fair treatment.

At home the group leaders enjoy bigger status, stemming from their acceptance as leaders in their communities. There is also the underlying threat of their access to SEWA and SEWA's established reputation for intervening in women's distress. There has been a marked decline in the incidence of wife-beating and an increase in these women's participation in decision-making in the household.

Leadership causes attitudinal changes in the group leaders with respect to their own aspirations and values. They report that they become broadminded about inter-caste relationships and much less rigid about the "proper role" of young women in their own homes. Their aspirations for personal success become tinged with the desire to carry their less fortunate colleagues along with them.

There have been cases of unscrupulous group leaders who have used their position for personal gain, or cheated the SEWA Bank with regard to instalments collected from members, or deepened

social cleavages in society from their position of authority. But such cases have been few, noticeably low in an organization of the size of SEWA.

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 workers' 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, martial 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 reciprocal 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 *katha*[5] or *bhajan*[6] 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 organizers 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 communication 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 organizing poor urban women 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,

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

[6]Group singing of devotional songs.

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 "taking 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-markers 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, mobilizing their own resources. They work in their homes and use their own electricity. Computed roughly, the *khol* stitcher's 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 merchants' 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 organized, 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[7] 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

[7]Merchant.

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 organizers called for confrontation. That night a large meeting of *chindi* workers 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 techinque of mobilization 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 charges 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 organizers. The organizers went with them to the police station and held a meeting with police officers on duty. Meanwhile, a growing group of old clothes' 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 releas-

ed, the police officer reportedly remarked that this was the first case he could remember of releasing an used-clothes' 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 organizers 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 mobilization 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 and more, the SEWA union then organized a 3000-member procession on 15 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 organizers presented their demand for an increase in the number of licences granted to vendors and the permanent allotment of pavement spaces, $2' \times 3'$, 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 peddlers. 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 rapproachement 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 moneylender, 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.

FIELD SURVEY

SEWA

As mentioned earlier, SEWA has been doing its own field surveys since its inception in 1972. It uses this method as a technique for the mobilization of self-employed women. The survey

serves simultaneously as an information-gathering tool and a device for establishing contact.

The analysis presented on the socio-economic characteristics of SEWA's members is based on data collected by the SEWA Research Cell on selected trade groups, as presented in *Profile of Self-employed Women* by Ela Bhatt.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Except for garment workers, where the women are distributed fairly evenly across age-groups, in fact where at least one-third of them belong to the age-group below 20, the remaining women seem to be clustered in the age-group 20-40, tapering off, as can be expected, after 41 (Table 5). Amongst the garment workers there is a dramatic drop from 30 per cent to 5 per cent as the age-group moves above 40. This is because the eyesight of these women (mainly Muslim), who work indoors, deteriorates due to the long hours of work they do in dark rooms.

It will be noticed that more than 70 per cent of the women, whichever occupation group they belong to, are married. Again it is the garment workers who show the other ratio —30 per cent unmarried. This matches with the information in Table 5, where it can be noticed that 46 per cent of garment workers are below 20 years of age. Firewood pickers, hand-block printers and handloom weavers also show a slightly higher percentage—16-27—amongst the unmarried. Again these figures match the age distribution which shows that younger women, mainly unmarried girls, work in these occupations (Table 6).

Information on family size was available for only four trades and reveals that the majority of women came from families ranging in size from 5 to 10 members (Table 7).

It is interesting to see that it is amongst the garment workers that the majority, namely 75 per cent, have completed primary and/or secondary education, whereas of the other trades 90 per cent of the women are illiterate. This finding is consistent with the earlier observation that nearly 50 per cent of the workers in garment stitching are young girls. Handloom weavers and hand-block printers are also in a comparatively better position than many of the other trades in terms of education. About 20 per cent of them have either primary or secondary education (Table 8).

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The average debt per family for most of the trades seems to be

in the range of Rs 1000-1500. Almost every group has borrowed for social customs, marriage and death, and all of them have done so quite heavily for sickness. As is to be expected, milk producers have borrowed for cattle-feed. Cotton-pod shellers give unemployment, as do the handloom weavers, as a major reason for borrowing. This finding tallies with the overall situation in these two trades, where displacement due to technological change is quite widespread (Table 9).

The monthly income of most self-employed women ranges from Rs 100 to Rs 200, dropping to a mere Rs 31 for garment makers and Rs 62 for handloom weavers. The wage rates for these two groups of workers, who are paid on piece rates, is not only extremely low but has been stagnant for many years, again due to displacement by mass production of garments as well as mill weaving (Table 10).

The women claim that they contribute between 15 to 75 per cent of the family income. The percentage of contribution is greatest amongst the vegetable vendors, where the family income is Rs 450, and the women workers' contribution 74.5 per cent of that. The next highest contribution is from the used-garment dealers, who contribute 70 per cent (Table 11).

This is followed by the hand-cart pullers (57 per cent) and the milk producers (52 per cent). The least contribution is from the garment makers (14 per cent).

Matching the occupation of the head of the household or the male to the female worker in a family, it is quite clear that most of the trades are family occupations. Ninety-three per cent of the women milk producers have husbands who are also in dairying, 73 per cent of the women hand-cart pullers work with their men at pulling the cart, 93 per cent carpenters and junk-smiths have carpenter husbands. However, in certain occupations there are differences. For example, 30 per cent of the vegetable vendors are wives of textile workers, whereas 40 per cent are married to vegetable vendors, 50 per cent of handloom weavers have unemployed husbands and 27 per cent of husbands are casual labourers. Seventy per cent of cotton-pod shellers have agricultural labourers and casual labourers as husbands.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Age	*Garment workers*	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*	*Milk-producers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Handloom weavers*	*Fire-wood pickers*	*Hand-block printers*
Sample Size	1000	500	1000	500	750	400	500	230	300	210
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Below 20	46.2	5	16	7	—	8	10	21		
21-30	25.4	46	45		43.7	35.8		29.5		
31-40	22.9		25	74	32.9	40.5	59	27.2	92.0	76.5
41-50	40.8	44	10	16	18.7	12.5		13.9		
50+	0.7	5	4	3	4.7	3.7	31	8.4	8.0	23.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6: Marital Status

	Garment workers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*	*Milk producers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*	*Fire-wood pickers*	*Hand-block printers*
Sample size	1000	500	1000	500	750	400	500	230	300	210
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Married	67.6	92.0	75.0	86.0	85.4	80.0	73.2	63 0	53.0	79.5
Unmarried	30.0	2.5	—	3.0	0.3	6.7	5.8	23.0	27.0	16.5
Widowed	2.8	5.0	16.0	10.0	14.0	13.3	19 0	13.0	20.0	4.0
Deserted	0.5	—	9.0	—	0.3	—	—	—	—	—
Divorced		0.5	—	1.0	—	—	2.0	1.0	—	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100 0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7: Family Size

	Garment makers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*	*Milk producers*	*Cotton pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*	*Fire-wood pickers*	*Hand-block printers*
Sample Size	1000	500	1000	500	750	400	500	230	300	210
			%					%	%	%
1—5			49					32.8	38.0	8.5
5—10			47					58.7		55.0
10			4					8.5	62.0	36.5
Total			100.0					100.0	100.0	100.0
Average size of family	7	7	7	8.2			5.9			
Average number of children		4.5	4	3.8	5.0	2.8	3.2			

Table 8: Education

	Garment workers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*	*Milk producers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*	*Fire-wood pickers*	*Hand-block printers*
Sample size	1000	500	1000	500	750	400	500	230	300	210
Illiterate	18.0	91.0	93.0	92 0	92.3	90.0	58	77.3	97.0	76.5
Can just sign			6.0							
Primary (II-V)	76.0	6.0	1.0	7.0	7.7		30 0		3.0	21.5
Secondary (V-IX)		3.0	—	1.0		10 0	3.8	22.7		2.0
Higher (X-XI)	5 0	—	—	—			2.2			
University	1.0	—					6.0			
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100 0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 9: Indebtedness

	Garment makers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*		*Milk producers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*
					smiths	*carpenters*			
Sample Size	1000	500	1000	500	600	150	400	500	230
Percentage Indebted	44	61	46	79	25.3	24.0	35	55	70.8
Average debt per family (Rs)	2089	1724	986	1261	1390	1370	862	1835	1333
Cause of Debt:									
Education of Children								10.9	
Social Customs, marriage, death		28	55.3	61	57.9	56.0	4.3	36.7	17.7
Business		72			10.5	11.0		1.4	
House Repair			17.5	18.0			2.9		
Sickness		14	21.4	13.0	31.6	29.0		15 0	3.8
Household Expenditure		13	5 8			4 0	5.7		
Unemployment				8.0				55.6	78.5
Cattle-feed							63.6		
Purchase of cattle							37.9		
Other inherited debt								5.4	
Total		100 0	100 0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: 42 per cent of the firewood-pickers were in debt. Reasons for incurring debt were unemployment in the monsoon months illness, social celebrations and other household expenditure. No data for indebtedness was available for the hand-block printers.

Table 10: Income

	Garment makers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*		*Milk pro-ducers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*	*Fire-wood pic-kers*	*Hand-block printers*
					car-penters	*smiths*					
					750						
Sample size	1000	500	1000	500	600	150	400	500	230	300	210
Average monthly income of self-employed women (Rs)	50.00	157.60	180.00	355.00	130.00	150.00	193.00	175.10	62.00	120.00	
Average family income	352	225	262	450	200		374	450.8	206		
Women's contribution as percentage of family income	14	70	57	74.5	50.0		52.0	39.0	30.0		
Income of self-employed women (Rs)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)			(%) (in one season)	(%)		(no data was available)	
Below 15	31										
16-50	55		49				14.5	32.0			
51-100	11										
101-150	2		22				23.5	19.6			
151-200			18				42.5	29.0			
201-250				7			4.5	11.0			
251-3 0			10	50			8.5				
301-400			1	25			6.7				
401-500				15				3.4			
500				3				4.2			
Total	100		100				100	100			

Table 11: Occupation of Guardian

	Garment makers	*Used-garment dealers*	*Hand-cart pullers*	*Vegetable vendors*	*Junk-smiths*	*Milk producers*	*Cotton-pod shellers*	*Hand-loom weavers*	*Firewood pickers*	*Hand-block printers*
Sample size	1000	500	1000	500	750	400	500	230	300	210
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Textile & other industrial worker	65	17		34	3.1		23.2	17.8		(data not available)
Government servant	6			8		2.4		4.1		
Casual labour	2			6		4.1	25.8	27.8		
Agricultural labour							35.3			
Small tradesmen	19		16				7.7			
Used garment business		67								
Cart-pullers			73							
Rikshaw drivers			7							
Motor drivers			3							
Vegetable vending				40						
Smith					24.2					
Carpenters					68.8					
Cattle breeding						92.9				
Farming						0.3				
Firewood picking									21.0	
Others		16	1	8	3.9		1.7		68.0	
Unemployed	5			4		0.3	6.2	50.3	11.0	
Not existent	3									
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	

REVIEW

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

No description of SEWA's technique could be complete without going back to Mahatma Gandhi, to the TLA—and to its leaders. The three are so deeply intertwined that to analyse these life-sources of SEWA separately would become an exercise in repetition.

Central to Mahatma Gandhi's ideas for social action was his total belief in the goodness of every man and woman. Whereas Hume or Marx may doubt man's capability to overcome his burning interest in himself, and postulated theories based on self or class interest, Mahatma Gandhi totally trusted man's potential to rise above himself. His theories in economics and politics, and his strategies based on harmony and peace, all stem from this trust in the goodness of the human being, or more precisely in his selflessness—a basically spiritual approach, or an approach based on awakening the spirit or the God in self.

Mahatma Gandhi had an additional rider, revealing his practical wisdom. He could not see how any society could survive unless it believed in its members. Any difference-emphasizing technique would snowball into conflicts which could be self-destructive, was his view.

These beliefs are central to the methodology used by TLA and SEWA leaders. They accept not this or that aspect of Mahatma Gandhi but the entire view as a consistent philosophy of social development.

The course SEWA has chalked for itself, the steps it has taken over the years, have thrown out many ideas for handling some of the most hard-to-overcome problems that challenge development in this country. Essentially, SEWA illustrates the effective use of Gandhian instruments for social change. It emphasizes the means by which its members strengthen themselves economically and socially, self-reliance and non-violence being two of the main pillars of this ideology.

The argument is that power, economic or social, emanating from one's own effort can be held on to, whereas developmental services delivered from the outside weaken through dependence. The means, therefore, are more vital than the ends.

It hammers at the principle that the poor should be helped to become independent, not only from private-sector support but

also independent of the state. A powerful illustration of this principle is in the fees it collects from its members, however poor, for creche care.

Seen through the work of TLA and SEWA is Gandhi; the labour leaders are human but determined, unbending but non-violent. That TLA should have made way for SEWA is also an effect of Gandhi. The members of SEWA are atomised economic agents, a contrast to the members of TLA—one is unorganized and the other organized, yet there is a shared growth of the two together. Theory would define some members as individual entrepreneurs, rivals in the competitive market. But SEWA has united them—made them and the larger community aware of their power as a group.

In these and other instances is seen the rejection of the concept of conflict, the ingrained belief in sorting it out though moving community opinion to take care of the vulnerable.

SEWA's approach to women also has a value-base. Here too Gandhi is visible. As Gandhi's perception of society was not confined by class categories, it was not confined by sex stereotypes either. SEWA looks upon women as economic agents whose work and income are as vital to society as is their home-bound life. It also attempts to draw then into the mainstream of public life by encouraging them to participate in institutions outside the family such as the union and the bank.

Over the years SEWA has concentrated on the women, taking pride in making them bank depositors, leaders, directors. Along with this, they have also encouraged the women to bring their husbands to the offices, to the bank and to meet the *bens*. Now the men want to become members of SEWA. While such a move may appear to contradict the earlier thrust of SEWA to empower women even in their household roles, it is typical of the organization's ideology—and could even be the kind of subtle modification of feminism that may be more humane, especially in India.

It is a victory for the women that the men followed them into SEWA—but it is also a relief as it emphasizes their family bonds.

SEWA has revealed methodologies for reaching the poor, and especially the women poor. The areas on which the SEWA experiment can throw light are endless, and cover the whole range of development planning issues—unionization, the possibilities open to established unions of formal workers to unionize workers in the informal sector; the reaching of credit to the assetless poor, changes required in bank procedures, bank personnel's attitudes,

savings, training of extension staff; legal changes required for protecting the poor; procedures and attitudes that govern the limbs of government, especially planning employment, self-employment for men and women from the poorer sections of society; and using the method of research for mobilization of both people and public opinion.

Gandhi's injunction to reach beyond the poor to the poorest keeps pushing SEWA forward, identifying tasks, and innovating methodologies. Recently it has unionized vegetable vendors in a rural area and linked them to their city sisters, eliminating the middlemen.

A measure of idealism and an almost rigid adherence to basic principles seems to be necessary to create the mixture of adaptability, coupled with clarity, that SEWA exhibits. While it has apparently made reaching the poor, especially women, appear simple, it also reveals that ideology is the fountainhead of effective action.

PROFILES

BILQUISH BANO, SEWA MEMBER

"I was married when I was 14 to a man related to my mother's side of the family. I was very innocent in those days and it was only four years later, when I was describing my husband to a close friend, that I discovered that he was a *hidva* (hermaphrodite). My father obtained a divorce for me. Those days were bad for my father. Due to trechery of associates and employees he lost all his money and became a poor man. Before he died he married me to a school teacher. My second husband was cruel to me. He would beat me and not let me out of the house. We had two children, a girl and a boy. Soon after my son was born my husband sold off all my things—pots, jewellery and furniture—and ran off with the money. I was left penniless with two children. My brothers wanted me to put the children in an orphanage, but I wouldn't. I said I would support them anyhow.

"Since I was a girl I had been sewing *khols*. However, this did not give me enough income to support my family, so I began to go to the traders to sort their *chindi*. This work was very difficult for me since I had always led a very protected life, always stayed

at home. At this time my mother came to stay with us and looked after the children while I was working. The traders paid us very little—only Rs 2.50 a day. So one day I asked for a raise. When I didn't get it, I left.

"I have always tried to better myself. I don't mind working hard but I must have enough to feed my children and my mother. Many, many times I have gone to work hungry. I do not mind that so much, but it is very difficult to see the children hungry. Also, my house is very small, dark and airless. When my father was alive and well-off, we lived in a nice house at Dariapur, but after my husband ran off we had to move to this awful house in the Chali. My daughter, who was about four, adjusted but my son, who was only two, cried all the time. The most heart-breaking experience was when once we passed what used to be my father's house and my son ran to it and clung to the window-railing, crying, 'Mama, this is our house. Let's go home. Let's not go back to the house in the Chali.'

After I left the sorting work for the traders, I did many jobs. I worked in a printing factory, jerking gasoline out of cloth. There I ruined my eyes, but I used to make good money, especially on night duty. I also worked for a few days in a mill, but the male supervisor did not behave properly. I sewed cement bags for a while but then they got machinery to do it, and I wasn't needed any more. I have hawked many things—corn, *khols*, cloth pieces, milk. I do the washing and cleaning for some people in my Chali. I fetch water for the well-off families in my locality.

"When I heard SEWA was beginning a small *khol* business, I went along to investigate. There I found they needed a woman to sort *chindi*, so I sat down. Since then I have been with them. I feel that this work we are doing of building a *chindi* business is very important because the traders suck the life blood out of us. We can build a business controlled only by workers in which all of us draw salaries and no one draws the profit—then we can get the fruits of our labour. In the present system, all the fruits go to the trader and we can't even feed our families, though we labour from morning to evening. I think we Muslims should stand together as one. I have persuaded many women to join SEWA though I must say that when SEWA can't give them work they come and fight with me.

"The most important thing SEWA has given me is a steady job. I want very much for the *khol* business to be successful. Partly because if I work hard and learn new things, I can make more money and become more capable and do many jobs other than sorting, and if SEWA's *khol* business grows I can be part of it. Partly because SEWA can give employment to many women and can be a source of strength in the Muslims community. There is no reason why this business should not grow, there is a lot of profit in it.

"SEWA also put my daughter into the municipal school and provided free books for her. I feel very happy about this because I want my daughter to stand on her own feet and not be married off like I was.

"It has been very interesting for me to be in SEWA because I have met many different people. I have also spoken in public, which I hadn't ever done before. I was very nervous but I did it."

CHANDABEN (USED-GARMENT DEALER), SEWA GROUP LEADER

"I was born in the Veghari section of a village north of Ahmedabad. When I was 17 I was married to a mill-worker in Ahmedabad and I moved to the city with his family. The women in his family used to sell old clothes, so I also started doing it. I have four sons and two daughters. The girls travel around the city with *topla* to get old clothes and the boys sew the old clothes. When my husband is not at the mill he helps me in the market. There is not enough for everybody in the family and we have been trying to get my 18-year-old son a job but we haven't been able to, and he is unemployed.

"I first heard of SEWA when an acquaintance asked me 'Do you want a loan? Then go to SEWA.' Now, we are business people and are always in need of capital. Because of this many people have taken advantage of us. Only a few months before I heard of SEWA, a man came saying he was from the Bank of Baroda and would get us loan. So we all gave him some money and he disappeared. We were cheated. Because of this experience I was not interested in SEWA. But later my brother-in-law, who works as a telephone operator in TLA, told me that many women like myself were coming to SEWA and that I should go too. He took me to Elaben (SEWA General Secretary). In SEWA, I saw that there were many Veghari women from the city. These women are cheats and rogues, not straight like us village women. So I told Elaben and Buch Sahib (SEWA President) that they should give loans to our group and not to these city women. I also saw

that the *bens* in SEWA could not control the crowds of women who were coming for loans, so I helped the *bens* keep order.

"When I saw that the loan-giving was genuine, I made many new members from our district and brought them for loans. I also organized meetings in my district and I took the SEWA *bens* around so that they could make a survey. In those days SEWA used to help women get loans from nationalized banks. But we were not used to going to the banks and the *sahibs* would insult us. Even though we wanted to be regular with our loan instalments we wouldn't do it because of the officers' behaviour. We also wanted to open savings accounts because though we sometimes manage to save some of our earnings, we have nowhere to hide it in the house. Our husbands or sons find it and use it up. So we told Elaben that we should have our own bank; many women thought it was a good idea. We called a big meeting, at least 2000 women were there. I addressed the meeting for the first time. Buch Sahib told us about the bank and we women were very happy. I have worked very hard to make this bank a reality. I have brought women to open savings accounts. Even now I collect their money everyday and bring it to the bank. I bring women for loans and then I collect the instalments on it. I think the SEWA Bank has come about largely due to my efforts.

"Right from the beginning, I came to the SEWA office everyday. It was a new experience for me and it has changed my life in many ways. I have met many new types of people, have talked to visitors from abroad and they have taken my photographs. I have addressed many meetings and there have been all kinds of people in my meetings: *bens*, *sahibs* from outside, Muslims, Harijans, all types of people. I have learnt to wear a *sari* (before I would wear our traditional dress) and I have learnt how to speak like the *bens*. This has helped me a lot in my business because now when I go to the big houses to get clothes, I can speak to them in their own way. It has also helped in addressing customers.

"At first my husband was very suspicious of me and would follow me all the time to SEWA. But when he saw that it was just a society of women and that Elaben was very respectable, he stopped being suspicious. Now he is very encouraging and often discusses with me the new ideas that I bring home from SEWA. My position within the family has changed after I joined SEWA. Before, if the food was not well-cooked or the house was dirty

my husband and older men-folk would insult and scold me and even beat me. But now they see how much respect I have outside. They can see how respectfully the *bens* and even the visitors from outside treat me. They see how I lead our groups of women and address public meetings. So, in the house also they treat me with more respect and talk to me politely and not as an inferior. I have much self-respect now and I have to keep it up.

"My attitude has also changed in so many ways. Before, I used to quarrel all the time with my neighbours and relatives over small things, over children, over water, over animals, over spilling garbage. At that time these things seemed very big. But now I see how small they are and not worth quarrelling over. Now I try to convince our neighbourhood women not to quarrel over little things. I have become more tolerant towards people of other castes. In our public meetings we all sit together and eat together even with Harijans and Muslims.

"The police in the city have always harassed us, and arrested our boys and men on false thieving charges. But because of the way SEWA has shown, whenever an innocent boy gets arrested I always go to the police-station, usually with one of the *bens*, sometimes by myself, and I get the boy released. Recently we took out a procession of women. We shouted slogans and marched. Then we had a big meeting in which the chief minister came. I gave a speech and explained all our problems to the chief minister.

"I think that there should be organizations like SEWA all over the country. There are many women like us and they should be organized. If I went to another city I would organize a SEWA there. I would like the message of SEWA to spread everywhere."

RANJANABEN DESAI, SEWA ORGANIZER

Ranjanaben Desai is the Deputy General Secretary of SEWA, with a special responsibility for training. She is a small, slim woman of 43, with laughter lines at her eyes and a smile never far away from her lips. She has two children still at school, and a geologist husband working in a state government ministry, and now working in far-away Kutch district. She comes from a wealthy Bombay family with a tradition of social work. Her mother spent time and money helping the Harijan community. Ranjanaben and her husband are not themselves wealthy, but she is happy to devote her time and energy not just to the SEWA members in her charge, but to anyone in need who crosses her

path—family, friends or strangers. She studied economics at Bombay University and since then her jobs have included office work at Gujarat University and social work in the T.B. department of the municipal hospital. She joined SEWA four years ago, because of her interest in people and their problems, and her special commitment to the cause of women. She hopes to be there for the rest of her life. "If it were not for my children I would stay here all the time!"

She believes that the greatest strength of SEWA is its fieldwork, and that only through on-going contact with women will their work be effective. There must be continual feedback from the field in order to form relevant programmes which meet real needs. She felt that her own best contribution was simply one of human relations—her good relationship with the members. She claims that this comes easily in the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of the association. She was reluctant to admit that SEWA had any weak points, but admitted that one problem was the low salaries paid by the organization. This discriminated against women whose husbands were not well-paid, and also acted as an in-built check on hard work in the case of some organizers.

Her views on unionization are that the voices of individuals are not enough to bring about change; those at the top will only be forced to listen by the organized voice of the masses. This should include women and men, whose position must be one of equality. Women work as hard and as efficiently as men; they constitute half the population, so they should be equal in status and have equal opportunities to work outside the home. If this was the case the country would become rich and the full potential of its labour force would be realized. Industrialization should increase in such a way that more jobs are created; agricultural machinery should not put labourers out of work. At the moment the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer.

Her hope for the future is that SEWA and organizations like it will grow in strength and become world-wide so that all workers, especially women, will become organized and gain power, freedom and prosperity.

SEWA ORGANIZERS

Niruben: "When I was a sewing teacher, I was working like a machine from 12.00 to 4.00 P.M. I used to work only with a group of 20-30 girls during the whole year. Ten years I passed like this. I could hardly realize that I was getting rotten. When

TLA started SEWA they selected me, maybe because they appreciated my sincerity of work and/or my temperament. Today I come into contact with hundreds of women, all very active and powerful. I feel elated when I see them. I am now so much drowned in SEWA work that I lose my sense of time, my home, my family.

"My blood boils when I see my market-women being harassed by the police, the municipal corporation, the merchants. Why do the women have to suffer in spite of the fact that they put in so much of their hard, honest labour? Why on earth do the women have to work at the cost of their self-respect? SEWA has been working with them since five years. Our achievement is small but significant. But I feel frustrated when I experience the futility of the struggle against the tremendously strong vested interests, including the government. How to shake them is *the* question!"

Niruben, 39, the wife of a textile worker and the mother of three children, living in a labour housing colony, is a mature-looking, middle-aged, typical Gujarati woman. A member rarely hesitates to confide in her. She is non-compromising in matters of injustice, humiliation or exploitation. Aptly, she is heading the complaints' section, and is most sought-after by the members.

Maya Aacharya: "Before I joined SEWA in 1971, I was engaged as a fieldworker in the Family Planning Unit in rural north Gujarat. I was touched by the problems of rural women regarding social constraints, low and unequal wages, exploitation by the landowners. While moving in the city, I was unconsciously observing the working women. When I was seeking work, I happened to meet Shri A.N. Buch, President of TLA, who directed me to Elaben who had recently taken up a survey of Co-operative Credit Societies of Textile Mills. I joined as an investigator for TLA, and later was absorbed by SEWA in 1972."

One of the three early pioneers of SEWA, Maya, a matriculate, is hardworking and quick to understand problems and find solutions. Today she is the chief organizer heading a team of ten other organizers. The group organized by her is that of hand-cart pullers and headloaders. She is at present involved to trying to determine a fair wage for hand-cart pullers and headloaders under the guidance of IIM, Ahmedabad. She aims at forming a wide-based labour cooperative of them. She has also been instrumental in organizing the vegetable growers of the village of Gyaspur.

Maya, who is 37, is taking lessons in English. "I easily get

upset, and lose my patience when I see that our members do not realise their own power getting generated through organization."

Pallavi: "I deposit my daughter with SEWA. Train her or destroy her, as you like," said the father of Pallavi when he first brought her to the SEWA office. Pallavi, very very small, thin, simple, a graduate in sociology, having lost her hope for the future, had reluctantly joined SEWA. Her handwriting being good, she was assigned part-time work in the SEWA Bank. For a long time she worked without any remuneration. Gradually Pallavi started opening her mouth to talk of the exploitation of women, opening her heart to welcome the poverty-stricken Muslim women. She has natural affinity with the Muslim community, has a good command over Urdu. She has been instrumental in organizing 685 *chindi* workers, raising their wages and helping the victimized members in getting alternative employment. Today she is managing their workshop.

Last year, she got an opportunity to attend a course in trade unionism at IIM, Ahmedabad. "It was a memorable experience for me." She loves quiet and monotonous work. She is the colleague who offers maximum hours of service in SEWA, from 9.00 A.M. to 7.00 P.M., entirely voluntarily.

Milk Producers of Kaira

THE BIRTH OF AMUL

AMUL, an abbreviation of Anand Milk Producers' Union Limited, is a federation of 846 village-level milk cooperatives of Kaira district. These primary village-level cooperatives are federated to the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union Limited. The headquarters of the union are in Anand (population, 85,000), 266 miles south of Bombay.

Kaira district, one of the 18 districts of Gujarat, has been traditionally associated with milk production. There are 957 inhabited villages in the district, so the union covers almost 90 per cent of them.

In the mid-forties the colonial government contracted a private milk dairy to purchase milk from Kaira and to supply it, pasteurized and chilled, to Bombay (266 miles north of Anand). However, the milk procurement price was not fixed at the time and the milk producers continued to receive low and fluctuating prices.

The dairy-farmers resented the system, but were trapped by a state of resourcelessness. A small group of farmers sought the assistance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a prominent Gujarati and a leader of the national freedom struggle. T. K. Patel, a dairy-farmer from a village in Kaira, led the delegation. The Sardar urged them to boycott the state-supported marketing link with Bombay, and to establish their own access to the urban market.

The small dairy-farmers, who were traditionally subservient to the system, went on strike. As the foreign contractors watched and waited, they formed the first primary-level milk cooperative in 1946 with T. K. Patel a its chairman. Born in an environment of tension and resentment, the cooperative was the first attempt by rural milk producers to reach across to the urban market on their own.

With Independence, in 1947, the national government inaugurated a new scheme to supply pasteurized milk in bulk by rail tanker from Kaira to Bombay. The new union of milk producers, which had just 432 members and eight village milk cooperatives in 1948, started collecting and pasteurizing 5,000 litres of milk

(at the dairy in Anand) and supplying it to the Bombay Milk Scheme.

From the earliest days the union introduced a system of daily cash payments to dairy-farmers. A single donation of Rs 40,000 was also received, which was the single most attractive feature of the cooperative endeavour, and the union organizers sustained it by establishing an efficient supply line through trucks which plied on fixed routes twice a day to collect milk from member producers. The union also introduced a package of services which raised the productivity of the milch animals; this included veterinary care, improved cattle-feed, better breeding stock and so on.

The union attracted more village cooperative affiliates and in 1956, barely ten years after its inception, it had a membership of 26,759 dairy-farmers in 107 primary village cooperatives in the district. But growth brought problems in its wake. The Bombay Milk Scheme was not able to absorb the high "flush" season milk production. Private milk contractors again cornered the surplus at throwaway prices.

The AMUL Union turned to the manufacturing of milk products—butter and milk powder—and the new modern dairy was built at Anand in 1955, with assistance from UNICEF, New Zealand and FAO. The new dairy created a demand for additional milk supplies, and many more village cooperatives were organized. Expansion of the new dairy in 1958 and 1960 created a fresh capacity for the manufacture of sweetened milk, baby food and cheese. In 1966, there were 1,20,000 members in the AMUL Union and 867 village cooperatives in Kaira.

The cooperative movement spread to Mehsana, an adjoining district. Village milk cooperatives were established and a well-equipped dairy (called Dudhgagar) was set up at Mehsana town, 50 kms from Anand. The dairy included a milk powder plant to meet requirements of the defence services.

AIMS, ORGANIZATION AND ACTIVITIES

The stated aims of the union are to "flood" India with milk. India has the world's largest cattle herd, but ranks twentieth in milk production. The vast majority of dairy-farmers are rural folk, and value an animal as much, if not more, for its use for draught

purposes as for its milk yield. Over 60 per cent of milch animals are owned by "single-animal" households. The narrow resource base of these small household units denies them access to critical dairying inputs such as balanced cattle-feed, green fodder, veterinary care and opportunities for stock improvement. Their animals are seasonal calvers with high inter-lactation periods and low yields which seldom exceed 1½ litres per day.

On to this scenario, the AMUL venture adds an organizational instrument which services the rural dairy household at both ends —production and marketing. Milk is collected twice a day from the cooperative societies and processed in a modern dairy plant at Anand—the district headquarters of Kaira. At the same time the system is oriented to providing critical inputs to dairy-farmers on a scientific basis so that milk production in enhanced.

The First Operation Flood was launched on 1 July 1970, and completed on 30 June 1978. Under its aegis one million milk producers in India's rural milksheds have joined the 5,000 village dairy cooperatives. These cooperatives are managed by the producers themselves, enabling them to market their milk efficiently and avoid the depredations of traditional milkmen who had hitherto monopolized most of the profits earned on milk in India. As a result the milk producers benefiting from the First Operation Flood are already earning 50-100 per cent more than before the operation started, and the task of Operation Flood II is to increase this number to 10 million producers. Operation Flood II, put into practise on 1 July 1978, is to be completed by 30 June 1985. It is designed to create a viable dairy industry to serve the nation's needs for milk and milk products during the 1980s.

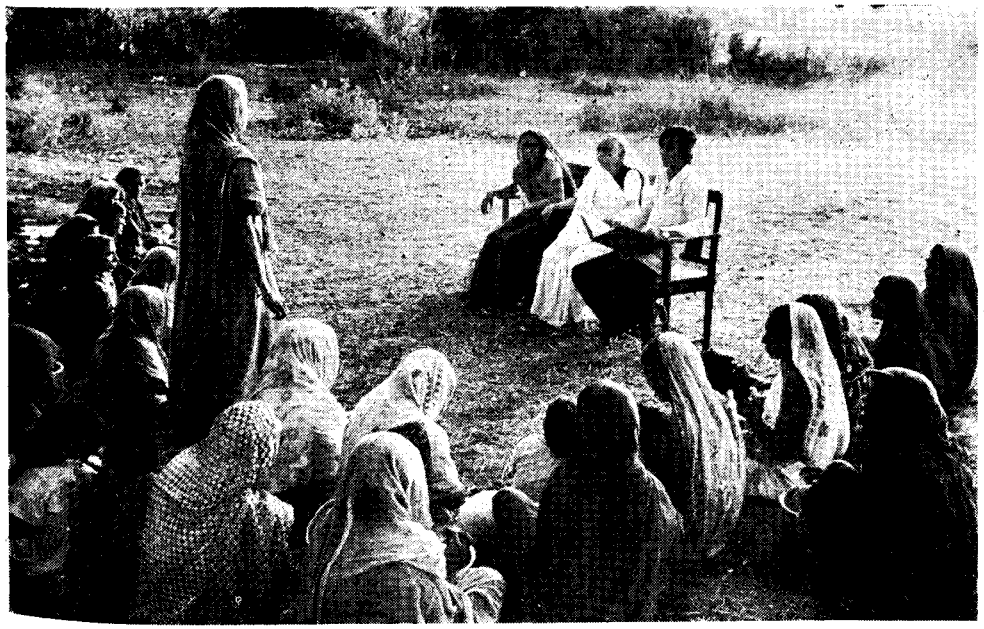
Operation Flood I replicated the Anand pattern of village dairy cooperatives, the union of village cooperatives and the federations of dairy cooperative unions in 18 of India's best rural milksheds. Operation Flood II will carry the pattern to 25 milksheds, bring the number of dairy cooperatives involved to 155 and enable groups of 5-7 unions in contiguous milkshed areas to form dairy cooperative federations. Over a period of three years, Operation Flood II will assist in the formation of 25 of these cluster federations, which will have 151 member unions. Four separate unions will also be assisted, bringing the total to 155, which is sufficient to cover all the major milksheds in India.

The objectives of Operation Flood II are:

(*a*) To enable some ten million rural milk-producer families to build a viable, self-sustaining dairy industry by mid-1985.

SEWA members marching for their rights 27

Discussion at a cooperative society meeting in Kaira



Ritual decoration of home in Madhubani district

Dough preparation at the Lijjat centre

Night patrollers at a conference in Manipur

(*b*) To enable the milk producers to rear a national milch herd of some 14 million cross-bred cows and up-graded buffaloes during the 1980s.

(*c*) To erect a national milk grid which will link the rural milk-sheds to major demand centres, and help them reach urban populations totalling some 150 million.

(*d*) To erect the infrastructure required to support a viable national dairy industry: this would include a national frozen-semen system; a vaccine production and delivery system; the indigenous development of dairy processing and conservation methods for traditional and modern dairy products, with enlarged facilities for indigenous design and manufacture of dairy equipment; the provision of manpower-development programmes, with special emphasis on professional, managerial and technical cadres for the rural industry, such as dairying; ad-interim programmes to supply butter-oil as a cooking medium and extruded foods as the basis for infant supplementary-feeding programmes, especially in integrated rural-development programmes based on the Anand pattern; and the setting up of a management-information system to provide timely information to local decision-makers involved in the development of constituent parts of the national milk grid.

(*e*) By means of the improvements thus achieved in milk production and marketing, to enable milk and milk products to form an appropriate part of a stable, nutritionally adequate national diet—currently estimated at an average per capita availability of 180 gms of milk daily, which is to be achieved for a population of 750 million during the 1980s.

ORGANIZATION

A village, or a group of two or three villages, forms the basic unit of the primary cooperative with a bulk supply of 500 litres. A minimum daily milk collection of 100 litres supplied by 25 dairy-farmers is the necessary requirement for a cooperative to register with AMUL. Upon registration the cooperative might obtain an initial grant of Rs 11,000 from the central AMUL organization, and also equipment for milk testing. A dairy-farmer can enrol as a member of the cooperative after he has supplied milk for three consecutive months to the society, and undertakes a commitment of exclusive supply of milk to the society. The enrolment fee is Re 1, and the member buys a share in the cooperative worth Rs 10. Although in AMUL milk cooperatives there is a provision for the

Table 1: Projected impacts of Operation Flood II in milksheds

	Pre-prog	*'78 '79*	*79 80*	*80 81*	*81 82*	*82 83*	*83 84*	*84 85*
No. of milk producers' families participating (in millions)	1.5	2.4	4.1	5.7	7.4	8.7	9.8	10.2
No. of improved milch animals reared (in millions)	0.8	1.4	2.6	3.9	5.6	7.3	8.9	10.2
Milk procured and marketed by cooperatives, daily average (in million litres)	2.3	3.9	6.4	8.4	10.8	13.5	16.0	18.3
Milk production per capita, daily, in India (in gms)	107	107	108	112	118	125	135	144

purchase of two shares by a household (one in the name of a male in the family and the other in the name of a female), most often dairy households purchase only one share in the cooperative, held in the name of the male head of household.[1]

The cooperative is headed by a seven- or nine-member elected managing committee which frames policy. (One-third of the members retire each year.) The managing committee elects a chairman. The day-to-day functioning of the primary cooperative is managed by salaried employees, numbering six to 11, who are selected locally. The employees include a secretary, milk-tester, accountant and cleaner; the rest depend on the size of the cooperative.

The primary cooperatives are federated in the Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union. AMUL is a trade name which has been adopted for the sake of convenience as an abbreviation of Anand Milk Union Limited. The federal union has a board of directors, consisting of 18 members. Twelve of these are elected by the constituent primary cooperatives, and of the remaining six, two are elected by individual members of the

[1]No member may "have any claim or any interest on the shares of the society exceeding 1/5 of the paid-up share capital or Rs 1000, whichever is less" (model byelaws for a primary milk-producing cooperative, NDDB, Anand).

organizations. One member is nominated by each of the following organizations: the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, the Financing Agency and the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Limited. The sixteenth member is co-opted by the board. The board of directors elect a chairman, vice-chairman and secretary from among their ranks.

The executive wing of AMUL comprises a cadre of professionals which include dairy technicians, veterinary staff, managers and extension workers. There are approximately 2000 salaried employees at Anand, and an estimated 6000 salaried employees at the primary cooperative level.

The AMUL organization has created a vast physical asset base at Anand, which services all the primary cooperative affiliates. A modern dairy with a daily processing capacity of 6.5 lakh litres of milk, is located centrally in the 200-acre AMUL complex in the centre of the town. An artificial insemination unit, a bull-breeding centre for improving cattle stock, well-equipped laboratories and mobile veterinary units are also situated in the campus. Balanced cattle-feed, *Amuldan*, is manufactured at the AMUL factory in Kanjari, a mofussil town 5 kms. from Anand. A 78-strong fleet of trucks, contracted from private individuals by AMUL, provides the life-line of milk-collection operations.

A team of 50 veterinary doctors and other specialists is available to the member dairy-farmers for emergency service, as also for general animal care and stock improvement. A cadre of specialists in rural extension work regularly canvass in Kaira to assist villages in the formation of milk cooperatives, or to resolve operational problems in existing cooperatives. Similarly, the organization has a team of well-qualified production and marketing managers.

ACTIVITIES

(*a*) *Milk collection:* Each member of an AMUL primary milk cooperative delivers milk twice daily to the village cooperative, which is generally housed in a *pucca* structure at a central place in the village. The milk is transported from the house to the cooperative in clean vessels. At the cooperative, it is tested by the milk tester for S.N.F [2] and fat content, and daily records of supply

[2]S.N.F.: Solid-not fat. This method of testing removes the motivation for dilution of milk by adding water and leaves no room for dispute on technical grounds.

per member are maintained at the cooperatives. Simultaneously, at another counter, payment in cash is made to each for the milk supplied in the previous shift.

The milk is collected from the primary cooperatives by pick-up trucks which ply on fixed routes twice daily. The milk, transported in large aluminium containers, is delivered to the AMUL dairy at Anand, at an average collection of 4-6 lakh litres per day, depending on the season.

At the dairy, a major part of the milk is chilled and processed into liquid milk to be supplied to Bombay, while the rest is converted into milk products such as baby food, cheese, condensed milk and chocolates. Processing into milk products has been a means of utilizing surplus milk in the winter season, as also a tool for subsidising the low-profit production of liquid milk.

Liquid milk is transported in specially insulated rail tankers to Bombay, where it is retailed through the network of *Mother Dairy* outlets all over the city.

The supply of milk from Anand is augmented by milk which is reconstituted from raw materials, that is, powdered milk and butter-oil, at the Mother Dairy plant in Bombay. The raw materials are received as aid under the Colombo Plan from Dairy Corporation, a Government of India undertaking. This is the organization which receives the commodity aid and distributes it to dairies in the country under the Operation Flood Programme. Each dairy being established under Phase II of Operation Flood is expected to receive indigenous supplies of milk from primary milk cooperatives in the milk-shed of its geographical hinterland, and also to supplement its milk production with reconstituted milk,[3] as in the Anand pattern. In time, supplies from the local milk-sheds are expected to account for the entire production of milk, and reconstituted milk supplies are to be phased out.

AMUL is pledged to accepting all milk supplies from the primary cooperative affiliates, and by association, the cooperative must accept all the milk supplied by members. The collection and marketing of this milk represents only a part of the involvement of milk cooperatives and of AMUL with the dairy-farmers. Some other services provided to the dairy-farmer members are:

(*b*) *Artificial breeding:* In the traditional method of breeding

[3]In the initial stages while local milk-sheds are being organized on the Anand pattern, the new feeder dairies are programmed to "flush" the urban and semi-urban markets through supplies of reconstituted milk.

practised in Kaira district, prior to the formation of the Kaira Milk Union, average pedigree *surti* bulls were used. One breeding bull was available for 220 buffaloes. The calving interval of the milch animals was 21 months. After the introduction of the artificial insemination technique by AMUL, the inter-calving interval has been reduced to 16 months, and lactational yield has increased substantially on account of the carefully nurtured pedigree of the bulls. AMUL surveys have revealed that milk production has increased by 30 per cent in the area.

(*c*) *Animal health cover:* AMUL ensures that every milk producer in the area obtains veterinary services for his animals at a nominal cost, and at his door, to maintain productive stock in the milk-shed. The union employs qualified veterinary doctors and trained stockmen, with supporting staff, in its verterinary section. There are well-equipped mobile veterinary dispensaries (21), which visit each member village once a week and treat members' animals free of charge. Each dispensary carries modern medicines, drugs and injections and has on its staff a veterinary surgeon and trained assistants. Another fleet of 27 mobile veterinary dispensaries provide 24-hours' emergency service to all member villages at a rate of Rs 15 per call. The service is also available to non-members, who pay double charges.

(*d*) *Supply of cattle feed and development of fodder:* Till 1964, dairy-farmers in Kaira fed their buffaloes with cotton-seed concentrate, millet straw and grass from common grazing lands. Cotton-seed was wasteful and expensive and the common grass was not nutritious. Also, the supply of these products was erratic. AMUL set up a cattle-feed plant at Kanjari, and *Amuldan*, the compound cattle-feed produced at the plant, is based on a multi-ingredient least-cost formula with a high nutritive value. Strict quality control is maintained at every stage, from the purchase of raw material for the cattle-feed to the storage of the final product in fumigated godowns.

A regular supply of *Amuldan* to the cooperatives is maintained throughout the year. The cattle-feed is retailed at the milk cooperative in the village, where it is delivered by the milk truck contractors at additional charges. The cooperative marks up the price by Rs 20 per tonne, but even so the retail price is well below the corresponding price of the conventional cattle-feed.

In order to promote the use of greed fodder, which is the cheaper source of feed nutrients (including protein) and which enhances milk yield, AMUL introduced lucerne fodder in 1962-63. The

union distributed superior quality lucerne seeds, and encouraged the small farmers to grow fodder on small patches. According to a conservative estimate, approximately 1.2 lakh farmers grow lucerne on 30,000 acres today. The addition of lucerne to cattle-feed enhances milk yield by 10-20 per cent, raising the income from each animal by Rs 400 per annum.

(*e*) *Credit:* This is not among the services offered by AMUL cooperatives to their members. This departure from the traditional role of grass-roots cooperatives is based in the belief that cheap credit is appropriated by the alert rural elite, and weakens self-reliance among the poorer dairy-farmers.

OPERATIONAL TECHNIQUE

THE ANAND PATTERN

The Anand pattern is more than a description of structures and activities. It is based on certain values and techniques—and ideals.

The fountainhead of these ideas has to be traced to the intellectual and spiritual collaboration between a pugnacious dairy technologist called Verghese Kurian and a gentle but determined Gandhian visionary, Tribhuvandas Patel.

There is a rural bias, translated in taking services to the peasantry, a faith in the peasantry's ability to self-manage, and, of course, abiding confidence in the cooperative form of organization as a participatory institution. They have engineered a system where professional managers and technicians complement the work of social mobilizers from the cooperative division.

The methodology is to build a system of collection and sale of milk as an alternative to the traditional *dudhia*, or milkman, on whom dairying households were dependent for income. Building this alternative system requires both struggle at the socio-political level, as well as an infrastructure at the technical-managerial level.

Woven into this backdrop, however, is an uninhibited policy of massive increase of milk production. Typical of the hard-headed approach of the "Anand pattern," the strategy starts from the demand side. The pull of a large and growing but unsatisfied demand or market is the first postulate. Large metropolitan cities

are milk-oriented and yet have no access to it. That market is captured and linked to the rural producer; the rest of the operation then becomes one of good management. The life-line of production, namely sales (market demand) is established. The commercial security of filling in a market gap makes the operation economically viable, apart from providing a dynamic challenge to the managers and technocrats who have to engineer this linkage to suit the producer and a ready consumer.

The second principle of the approach goes deeper. This is that there can and should be only one entry point, in any one phase, when trying to reach and develop rural areas. Milk production, that is dairying, is the entry point here. The entire resources of the scheme are mobilized towards this objective.

What does this imply?

The professionals—engineers, veterinarians, other extension personnel, the managers, the marketing system—all concentrate on this one objective. Their work need not be integrated—their specialization ensures it. They are all interlinked automatically, just as a team in an operation theatre works in coordination towards a successful surgery. But this only takes care of the management side.

At the production end, that is the rural household, it is more manageable for the families. They are usually busy people, using almost all their time and energy for a means of livelihood. They cannot spare the time to absorb a great many "services" all at once and so tend to be indifferent when "packages" of developmental services are sought to be delivered to them. But here the situation is different. It is a single item and it directly affects their household either through sale of milk or self-consumption.

There is a third pillar to this approach in the use of the cooperative form of organization. Every village has to bind itself together into a milk cooperative if it wants to enjoy the facilities of management. Here the element of social change, putting the instruments of power into the hands of the producer, is built-in—the solidarity being a pre-condition for displacing the traditional milk trade.

A method by which they have tried to keep the cooperative more leavened is to avoid financial transactions. Cheap credit or a relatively high price of milk would have attracted the alert rural economic elite. But neither is offered. In fact the private dairy offers a higher price for a litre of milk. But to the small farmers (or even the badly off household) who keep cattle to

augment income, the access to fodder, to veterinary help and to a regular impersonal sales outlet is more valuable than the additional but irregular income. The message is: "Produce as much milk as possible, we will sell it all."

REPLICATION—NDDB STYLE

The AMUL dairy project is not only replicating itself vigorously but moving into other products such as cotton and groundnut, and more recently, fish. The original organization, the Anand Milk Producers Union at Kaira, has been able to give birth to a "mother": the National Dairy Development Board. What are the elements in the organizational structure and in the "philosophy" which have made its replication possible? The critical components are:

(*a*) A philosophy or approach.
(*b*) The market.
(*c*) Professional managers.
(*d*) Spearhead team.
(*e*) Local team.
(*f*) Village cooperative.
(*g*) Supporting system.
(*h*) Live-lab technique of training and development.
(*i*) A fast communication system.

(*a*) *Philosophy:* The philosophy behind the programme has been described already. The momentum that carries the programme forward, claiming product after product into the Anand pattern, is the firm faith of its leaders in the fact that rural development—or the small rural producer—needs not a bureaucratic pile-up, but the services of professional managers and technologists. A recent analysis of problems of reaching the weakest at the grass-roots level in Indian development uses the Anand pattern to suggest that while small is beautiful, small is not powerful. Micro-level action needs macro-level power to be brought to bear on the micro-level problems of conflict. This power is provided by the federated cooperative structure, grasping markets and offering political and economic clout.

A new product like chocolate may not always be floated for commercial reasons but to resist market domination by, for example, multinationals.

(*b*) *The market:* Milk is a basic consumption good—though it

is still basic only to the urban population, where there is a broadening market gap. In that sense it is different from cereals and oil-seeds. The unselfconscious development of milk-sheds to cater to this demand, to explore this market gap, has provided the commercial life-line. If the goal had been to expand the production of milk for local (rural) consumption or for other groups of the poor the operation's buoyancy may not have been so phenomenal.

Demand studies and projections for the output of the milk-shed are constantly estimated. At every step economic viability is assessed and the size of the operation is phased to keep this aspect ensured.

To develop a market, a consumer taste for this supplier, milk outlets are set up. These are fed by milk which is a mixture of the output of milk-sheds and the foreign-aid milk. The consumer is thus induced to shift his allegiance to this source of supply through an advertisement campaign. This aspect of the project has been contracted out to Voltas—a firm which specializes in distribution and sales-promotion techniques.

(*c*) *Professional managers:* Obviously, the dynamism of the AMUL venture is its ability to produce and multiply its technicians without losing quality. Several well-thought-out techniques are involved in this, such as the spearhead teams and shadow teams (see following pages) that are used for new sites and the live-lab technique of training new recruits.

The NDDB (National Dairy Development Board) was able to build its services (in engineering, veterinary care and farmers' organization, particularly) because it was able to recruit large batches (20-50 at a time) of young Indian graduates of high calibre and commitment. Much of the NDDB's senior officers' time was initially spent in selecting and inducting these young people.

(*d*) *Spearhead team:* The National Dairy Development Board sends out a "spearhead team" consisting of five to seven professionals, headed by a veterinary doctor, to a village where a cooperative has to be established. The spearhead team discusses the importance of a cooperative, of the villagers organizing themselves, and the importance of professional services required for improved productivity and incomes. The spearhead team performs the "consciousness-raising" function and opens the doors to farmers for further action. The team is conscious of establishing a relationship of trust with the villagers before they can

initiate a process of self-organization and change. The process of establishing trust is very fragile in the early stages.

(*e*) *Local team:* The spearhead team helps select a local "shadow team" from members of the village community, who visit Anand, talk to the farmers there, discuss with them the fears and doubts they may have, see for themselves the functioning of the cooperatives, learn about the veterinary service and its organization, and several other related matters. In general the "shadow team" goes through an excellent self-learning process. On their return home to their village it is these villagers who, with the help of the spearhead team, organize the village cooperative and the various activities associated with it: for example testing of fat content, organizing the milk route, keeping accounts and artificial insemination services. The process of learning, leading to developmental activities, has started. Learning about animal husbandry opens the way, by analogy, to learning about family planning. Balanced rations of animal fead lead to new understanding of nutrition and veterinary services to human medical care.

(*f*) *Village cooperative:* The members of the new milk producers' cooperative elect a managing committee in its general body meeting. The managing committee elects its own chairman, appoints a secretary, milk-tester and milk-collector from the village community. The members learn the beginnings of organization and management. Twice a day the cooperative pays its members in cash for the milk they bring to the centre, an important aspect, especially for the poor, who need daily cash for their various requirements. Such an institution replaces the more exploitative structures that have kept the poor in a state of dependency. With such an institution functioning in their midst the villagers can see that their own actions have made a difference, that it is possible to improve their lot, and that it is worth the effort and the risk. The twice-daily cash inflow generates a new hope and confidence in their own worth.

(*g*) *Supporting system:* The organization and efficient functioning of village-level cooperatives would quite likely not have survived traditional vested interests if it was not supported by a strong infrastructure with committed young professionals, as also strong governmental and political support.

NDDB's animal husbandry division has a mobile veterinary route for every 10 to 20 village-level societies. Other divisions serving the village milk cooperatives are the planning division, which surveys potential milk-shed areas, the engineering division

which builds milk-processing and fodder plants, a purchase division which does bulk buying for various projects under construction, the R and D division for new products, and the national milk grid which keeps information on the demand and supply of milk connecting all the state-level federations. The three-tiered cooperative structure is powerful enough to deal with complex village-level problems, including those which are social, technical and political.

(*h*) *Training technique:* The "live-lab" technique of training is to provide a process of learning "on the job" for all concerned. New recruits are inducted into the job through being plunged into the field. AMUL, or the Kaira district cooperative union at Anand, is the live-lab for NDDB. Here farmers, administrators, mobilisers and technicians all learn the skills of work and coordination. However, theoretically speaking, the live-lab approach depends on a successful "lab" at which the new recruits can build their skills. The live-lab is a tested ground, where after three to five years of experimentation a development programme has learnt to select its strong point, reject and eliminate its weaknesses and offer a "model."

(*i*) *Communication system:* Hardly any literature on the project mentions the impact of the milk van which visits every village twice a day and returns to base, namely the head office at Anand. Messages, whether on mobilization (to call a meeting, to announce a visit), or about the sickness of animals, shortages of fodder or cash, or anything else, reach the villages from Anand, the *hub*, quicker than telegrams and almost like telephones. The impact this has had on making the district like one large village or community, has been one major technique in the successful operation of the pattern.

Poor communication between focal points and Indian villages is well-known. What is also bitterly known is how very little "extension" reaches them due to shortage of roads, jeeps and so on. In Kaira district the villages are connected twice daily with their technical parent. This lack of isolation has congealed the union, so that it does not seem too farfetched when films like *Manthan* talk of a million farmers of Kaira as if they were one body.

WOMEN IN THE ANAND PATTERN

FIELD SURVEY

In April 1978, a quick and modest field survey, covering 124 households from ten villages, was conducted in Kaira district. The intention was to understand the role of women in dairying and the impact of the Anand pattern on the women of dairying households. The survey was designed with the help of the Research and Development Division of the National Dairy Development Board. The board already has base-line data on the villages, divided into ecological zones.[4] The zones represent different agro-

Table 2: Distribution of AMUL cooperative societies in Kaira district (by proportion of female membership based on ecology zones)

Percentage of women members in cooperative	Ecology I	Ecology II (No. of Societies)		Ecology III
0- 5	32	63		30
5-10	38	66		25
10-15	23	61		43
15-20	13	33		18
20-25	6	12		4
25-30	7	12		4
30-35	—	3		—
35-40	1	3		—
40-45	1	—		—
45-50				
50-55				
55-60				
60-65				
100%	1			
	122	254		105
Total membership	28,352	99,627	43,359	171,338
Total female membership	3,066	10,766	4,325	18,097
Female membership as proportion of total membership	10.6%	9.25	10.62	10.56%

Source: Data for 481 milk cooperatives, AMUL 1978.

[4]The ecology zones are: (*a*) Kapadwanj and Thasra, (*b*) Nadiad, Borsad, Mehemdabad and Matar and (*c*) Anand and Potlad.

climatic features. In selecting the villages it was initially thought that these zones might be relevant to the participation of women. However, this sampling design was abandoned because on the basis of data from 486 milk cooperatives, it became evident that with a few exceptions, female membership was below 20 per cent. More than half the cooperatives had a female membership of less than 10 per cent.

Further, there was no relationship noticed between ecology and women's participation.

The village selection design was then modified to include with "high" and "low" female membership in absolute terms. In each ecology zone two villages with 50 or more female members in the milk cooperative, and one village with less than 10 female members, were selected. The all-women cooperative at Khadgodra village was also selected. In addition to the selection criterion of female membership, a second criterion of annual milk turnover of the cooperative was also applied. It was attempted to include two large milk cooperatives (with an annual milk turnover of 4.5 to 5 lakh litres) and one small cooperative (annual milk turnover less than 0.5 lakh litres) in the village sample in each ecology zone. No association between village turnover of milk and percentage of female participation was noticed.

Within each village, households were selected at random from four asset categories to represent variations in household resour-

Table 3: Profile of sampled villages: female membership and milk production (ISS field survey)

	Village name	Total membership	Female membership	3 as a % of 2	Annual turnover
	1 Vadali	364	125	34.3	1.5-2
I	2 Chipadi	753	70	9 4	3.5-4
	3 Biladha	138	8	5.7	0-0.5
II	4 Khadgodhara	231	231	100.0	1.0-1.5
	5 Alasra	1222	93	7.5	4-5
II	6 Dhobikui	128	3	2.3	0.5-1
	7 Keriavi	534	80	14.9	1.5-2
III	8 Isnav	255	10	3.9	1.5-2
	9 Sundarna	613	70	11.2	2.5-3
	10 Khankuan	756	111	14.6	1.0-1.5

ces and, therefore, income. The categories were landless agricultural labour households without buffaloes (NLNB), landless households with buffaloes (NLB), small-farmer households with land below five acres and buffaloes (LBI), and bigger cultivators with over five acres of land and buffaloes (LB II). The first category, the landless and non-dairying agricultural labour households, comprised 258 per cent of the sample and the landless dairying households (the second category) accounted for another 25 per cent of the sample. The cultivator households constituted 50 per cent of the sample.

In each household surveyed the respondent was an adult female, generally the woman who controlled the dairying operations in the household. The survey was conducted by an all-woman team of six members, including one sociologist and five final-year students of the S. M. Patel College of Home Science, Vallabh Vidyanagar. Interviews with respondents were conducted in their homes, and a questionnaire was prepared on each respondent. The average time taken to canvass a questionnaire was 30 minutes.

FINDINGS

While there is no noticeable association between ecology zones and women's participation in cooperative societies, what is noticeable from Table 2 is that the second ecology zone, which is Nadiad, and other areas contiguous to Anand, have the largest number of societies. To that extent a greater number (approximately 11,000 women) are members of the cooperatives in this zone but the percentage in relation to total membership remains in the range of 10 per cent, in fact in 9.25, in this ecology zone. In other words, even in areas where cooperativization has been intensive (even twice the usual number), the share of the women in membership remains the same.

The attempt to relate female membership with milk turnover, to see whether milk production was in any way influenced by the sex of the membership, did not yield any fruitful results, as can be seen from Table 3. However, no inference can be drawn as there are very few women in any given cooperative to be able to record any impact.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Patels seem to be the predominant caste and they were mainly found amongst the bigger cultivators. Amongst the landless there were Rajputs, and amongst the small cultivators, farmers. However, no particular caste seems to have any striking share of the sampled population in any of the villages (Table 4). As is to be expected the largest number of households were clustered around the family size of three to five, followed by six to eight. Family subsizes above 12 were found amongst the small and large cultivators, whereas one- to two-member families were only found amongst the landless. This is also a usual pattern in rural India (Table 5). The sex ratio, as estimated by the 1971 census for Kaira district, was 894 females per 1000 males (Table 6). The average, as calculated from the 134 households surveyed in the villages, comes to 905, more favourable than that for the whole district. However, what is interesting and not surprising is that the sex ratio drops dramatically to 774 per 1000 when calculated for the landless, no buffaloes household, rising to 943 for NLBs. It is now well established that amongst the poor, women are the most vulnerable to death and disease. Disaggregating this information, it appears that amongst the NLNB households the sex ratio for adults above 11 is extremely unfavourable to women, though from these figures on no inferences can be drawn (Table 7). the figures for the age-group 0-10 and the explanatory information is not adequately investigated as the sample is too small (Table 8).

The proportion of males unmarried is equal to those married and this phenomena seems to be reported for with regard to females, whatever the land class (Table 9). On the other hand there is a dramatic drop in education between males and females amongst the landless, whereas amongst the bigger cultivators there seem to be more women than men who have completed primary and secondary education (Table 10). Female participation rates are as usual lower than male participation rates, increasing with a decrease in land size and reaching the peak amongst those who are totally resourceless. The increase in the female rate is from 40 per cent in large cultivator households to 51 per cent amongst the landless without buffaloes. Children, i.e. those under ten, do not show any important difference in participation based on sex (Table 11).

Most of the households belong to cultivator or agricultural labour occupational categories, with agriculture as the primary source of income and dairying as the secondary source. Amongst the landed classes the majority of women work at dairying (Table 12).

Those among the landless who have buffaloes have a 40 per cent increase in income over those amongst the landless, who have no

buffaloes. Correspondingly, their expenditure rises by 32 per cent (Table 13).

On an average, women from landless households who work only at dairying or only at agriculture, work for about 11-12 hours per day at these economic activities. But women from the same landless households who combine agriculture with dairying by acquiring a buffalo, add two hours more to their working day. These additional hours seem to be provided by cutting into time spent in domestic activity. This phenomenon comes out clearly when their time disposition is compared with women working in single occupations (Table 14).

While moving up from ownership of one buffalo to ownership of two buffaloes, the time spent in dairying by a woman from a landless household increases by 45 per cent, whereas the increase in time spent on dairying for a woman from a large cultivator household is only 22 per cent. This difference can be explained by the fact that households of large cultivators would use domestic servants, who would naturally help in the dairying activities and thus reduce the increment, in time, of a better-off woman to 22 per cent or half of the landless woman (Table 15).

While the work burden may increase, compensation is provided by the addition that is made to family income when a landless household also owns a buffalo (Table 16). The per-hourly earning from dairying for a landless woman is four times the per-hourly earning from agriculture. Recalling Table 13, there is a 40 per cent increase in the household income of a landless household by the addition of a buffalo.

This impact, both on household income as well as on opportunity cost for women working on dairying, in contrast to agriculture, is an extremely important factor. Agriculture, especially as its technology changes, tends to push out women, while it absorbs men at higher and higher wage rates. Women's contribution being therefore marginal, they get very low wage payments. It is now well recognised that in such a situation it would be important to absorb women in occupations allied to agriculture, where their earnings may be much higher than what they could get in agriculture. The field survey supports this proposition.

Unexpectedly, households which are landless report debt in greater number than those with land (Table 17).

WOMEN'S PERCEPTION

There was a fairly even distribution of households amongst (*a*) those who have never visited Anand, (*b*) those who have visited Anand with their husbands and (*c*) those who have visited it alone. A slight increase in the number of households where neither males nor females had visited Anand could be noticed amongst the landless households (Table 18). In ownership of shares, not surprisingly, landless households predominated against those who owned one share (82 per cent), whereas those who have some land were ranged across households owning upto seven shares (Table 19). The response to the question of benefit to the household from the society was not clear and strong. Those who answered seem to have had help in animal sickness more identifiably than any other benefit (Table 20). In answering questions regarding the attitude of the AMUL cooperative staff to the enrolment of women members, the consistent response from all classes was that they were hostile. Other questions asked on impact of the project were usually answered enthusiastically in favour of the project. But in this case there is a clear indication given by the women, who group themselves into the following categories: (*a*) indifferent and (*b*) hostile, whatever the land class (Table 21).

A long list of possible changes resulting from the project have been summarized in Table 22. Broadly, the women seem to feel that there is no change in most of the indicators except in terms of food consumption and health care, where they report improvement, whatever the class. This in itself is an important positive impact of the project, as food and health are part of the minimum needs of any household.

FIELD SURVEY IN KAIRA
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLED HOUSEHOLDS

Table 4: Caste

	NLNB	NLB	LB I	LB II
Rajput	7	3	5	4
Vankar	2		5	
Solanki	5	3	2	
Bhoi	2		2	
Thakur	3	3	4	1
Chamar	3			
Vaghada	3			
Panchal	2			
Parmar	2	7	1	1
Vasava	2			
Baniya		1		
Zala		4		
Patel		1	8	22
Rabari		1	1	1
Vaghari		2		
Chanada		2		
Baziya			1	1
Rathod			1	
Brahmin				1
Muslim	3		1	1
Total	34	27	31	32

Table 5: Family Size

Family Size	NLNB	NLB	LB I	LB II
1-2	5		4	2
3-5	19	13	13	8
6-8	9	11	6	13
9-11	1	3	5	5
12+			3	4
Total	34	27	31	32

Table 6: Sex Ratio in Surveyed Households (Total Sample)

	Males	Females	Females per 1000 males (Kaira District 71)
NLNB	93	72	774
NLB	89	84	943
LB I	98	96	979
LB II	123	113	918
Total	403	365	905 894

Table 7: Sex Ratio of Adults (Age 11 and above)

	Males	Females	Females per 1000 males
NLNB	80	51	637
NLB	71	71	1000
LB I	78	76	974
LB II	90	84	933
Total	319	282	884

Table 8: Sex Ratio of Children (0-10)

	Males	Females	Females per 1000 males
NLNB	13	21	1750
NLB	18	13	722
LB I	20	20	1000
LB II	23	29	1260
Total	74	83	1121

Table 9: Marital Status

	NLNB		NLB		LB I		LB II	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Married	43	22	40	44	49	48	62	53
Unmarried	49	45	49	36	47	45	51	56
Widow/ Widower	1	5		4	2	3		4
Total	93	72	89	84	98	96	113	113

Table 10: Education

	NLNB		NLB		LB I		LB II	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Illiterate	43	68	35	64	33	68	34	40
Primary	36	3	38	17	35	19	30	40
Secondary	14	1	16	3	28	9	35	33
College					2		14	
Total	93	72	89	84	98	96	113	113

Table 11: Work-participation rates

	No. of	*Adults*		*Children*		*Workers*[5]	
	House-holds	*M 11 and above*	*F 11 and above*	*M 10 and under*	*F 10 and under*	*M*	*F*
NLNB	34	80	51	13	21	60 (75.0)	26 (50.9)
NLB	27	73	71	18	13	57 (78.1)	35 (48.2)
LB I	31	78	76	20	20	54 (69.2)	36 (47.3)
LB II	32	90	84	23	29	64 (71.1)	34 (40.4)
Total	124	321	282	74	83	232 (72.3)	136 (48.2)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate work-participation rates.

[5]Workers include all those who are engaged in activities that generate family income.

Table 12: Occupation

	NLNB		NLB		LB I		LB II	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Cultivation					38	18	48	3
Labour	53	26	48	35	6	3		
Agriculture and non-agriculture								
Service	4		5		7	1	9	
Business	3		4		2		3	
Teaching							4	
Dairying					1	14		31
Total	60	26	57	35	54	36	64	34

The above is a breakdown of occupational distribution of "workers." The totals correspond to total workers in table on work-participation rates.

Table 13: Income, monthly expenditure on food and incidence of secondary education

Type of household	*No. of households*	*Primary source of income*	*Secondary source of income*	*Average household income*	*Average monthly expenditure on food*	*Incidence of secondary education in sampled population*
				Rs	Rs	%
NLNB	34	Agricultural wage labour	—	181	176	9
NLB	27	Agricultural wage labour	Dairying	255	261	11
LB I	32	Cultivation	Dairying	595	317	19
LB II	31	Cultivation	Dairying	833	491	36

Table 14: Average work burden on female respondents in landless households

Sub-category of respondent	No. of respondents	Average time in			Total hours worked during a day
		Dairying activities (income-generating)	Agricultural activities (income-generating)	Domestic work (hours)	
1. Dairying-cum-agricultural-wage-earning respondents (double occupation)	11	2.6	7.40	4.00	14 hrs
2. Only dairying respondents (single occupation)	16	3.32	—	8.1	11 hrs
3. Only agriculture wage-earning respondents (single occupation)	28	—	6.71	5.48	12 hrs

Table 15: Comparison of hourly earnings from dairying and agricultural labour for women landless households

Type of household	No. of respondents	Average earning of women in dairying per hr (in rupees)	Average earning of women in agricultural labour per hr (in rupees)
NLNB	34	0	0.43
NLB	27	1.93	0.38

Table 16: Average time spent in dairying by women respondents by number of cattle owned and land classes

No. of Buffaloes owned	NLB	LB I	LB II	Average for sample (1+2+3)
1	2	3	4	5
1	2.55 hrs	2.70 hrs	2.26 hrs	2.05 hrs
2	3.70 hrs	3.05 hrs	2.76 hrs	3.27 hrs
3	—	—	—	2.79 hrs
4	—	—	—	2.25 hrs

NLB Landless households owning buffaloes.

LB I Households owning less than 5 acres of land and owning buffaloes.

LB II Households owning more than 5 acres of land and owning buffaloes.

Note: The decrease in the average time spent by the women respondents in 3/4 buffalo households is due to the assistance rendered by servants.

Table 17: Debt

Type of household	No. of households that responded	No. of households with debt	Percentage
NLNB	20	13	65
NLB	16	12	75
LB I	23	9	39
LB II	26	8	36.7

Table 18: Visits to AMUL Dairy at Anand

	NLB	LB I	LB II
Households where only males have visited Anand	3	6	6
Households where only females have visited Anand	4	5	9
Households where males and females have visited Anand	7	10	12
Households where neither males nor females have visited Anand	13	8	4
No response		3	
Total	27	32	31

Table 19: No. of shares obtained by households

No. of shares	*NLB*	*LB I*	*LB II*
1	22 (82)	14 (45)	9 (29)
2	5 (18)	12 (39)	7 (23)
3		3 (10)	4 (13)
4-5		1 (3)	5 (16)
6-7			6 (23)
No response		2 (2)	
Total	27 (100)	32 (100)	31 (100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage to total number of households in that category.

Table 20: Main benefit of milk Cooperative Society to the households

	NLB	LB I	LB II
Increase in income	2	4	6
Regularity of income	3	5	7
Cattle fodder	5	4	3
Help in animal sickness	7	11	9
Bonus	1	2	5
No response	9	5	2
Total	27	31	32

Table 21: Attitude of the AMUL cooperative staff with respect to enrolment of new members and women members

		NLB	LB I	LB II
(Total no. of households)		27	31	32
Enrolment of new members	E	18	27	26
	I	2	2	2
	M	1	1	2
	T	21	30	30
Enrolment of women members	E	18	11	16
	I	8	8	7
	M	7	11	7
	T	25	30	30

E—Enthusiastic I—Indifferent H—Hostile
T—Total number of households that responded.

Table 22: Impact since inception of milk co-operative

No who represented		*NLB (29)*	*LB I (29)*	*LB II (31)*
Food consumption of household	I	17 (59)	18 (62)	26 (84)
	NC	9 (31)	6 (21)	5 (16)
	D	3 (10)	5 (17)	5 (16)
Food consumption of respondent	I	15 (52)	16 (55)	21 (68)
	NC	9 (32)	8 (28)	9 (29)
	D	5 (17)	5 (17)	1 (3)
Health care of household	I	16 (55)	17 (59)	22 (71)
	NC	12 (41)	9 (31)	9 (29)
	D	1 (4)	3 (10)	
Availability of clothing to household	I	14 (48)	18 (62)	20 (65)
	NC	13 (45)	11 (38)	11 (35)
	D	2 (7)	—	+
Available of clothing to respondent	I	10 (34)	15 (52)	20 (64)
	NC	14 (48)	13 (45)	11 (36)
	D	5 (17)	1 (5)	—
Attendence of school by male children	I	14 (48)	9 (31)	25 (81)
	NC	14 (48)	18 (62)	6 (19)
	D	1 (4)	2 (7)	—
Attendence of school by female children	I	9 (31)	13 (45)	25 (81)
	NC	17 (59)	16 (55)	6 (19)
	D	3 (10)	—	
Treatment of respondent by husband	I	6 (21)	12 (41)	23 (74)
	NC	18 (62)	17 (59)	6 (19)
	D	5 (17)	—	2 (6)
Treatment of respondent by in-laws	I	6 (21)	9 (31)	23 (74)
	NC	18 (62)	20 (69)	5 (16)
	D	5 (17)	—	3 (10)
Status of respondent in the house	I	8 (28)	12 (41)	22 (71)
	NC	17 (59)	17 (59)	7 (23)
	D	4 (14)	—	2 (6)

Figures in brackets indicate percentages.
I—Increased NC—No Change D— Decreased

REVIEW

GENERAL

The Anand pattern demonstrates the effectiveness of certain methodologies: the single-product entry point, the delivering of income and supporting services to the rural community at site (hence reducing the pressure on villagers to leave traditional habitats), and the separation of mobilization for people's participation from technical management.

It has also shown that income-enhancement of peasant households with middle and low levels of resources cannot be done without offering an "umbrella" of support. In the case of AMUL this includes backward linkages to inputs like fodder and veterinary services in dairying, and forward linkages like roads, vans and markets.

Most of India's milk is produced by small producers: landless cultivators, widows and farmers with less than two hectares of land. They have little protection from exploitation by the local powerholders, who are skilled at manipulating and dividing the poor. To unite in the form of a cooperative, to stand up against exploitation, to refuse to sell milk to the *bania* moneylender—all such actions require self-confidence and staying power, an asset which the poor and the underprivileged do not possess.

It is argued that the federation of cooperatives, with the managerial capacity to replace or occupy the territory of traditional olygopolistic or monopolistic industry, offers powerful support to these small producers. Hence the Anand pattern will now be used for wresting control of groundnut-oil manufacture from the "100" oil monopolists in Gujarat.

Dairying is popular amongst those who are planning employment for rural women. It is the only rural-oriented programme of, for example, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB). The Board is an important instrument for finding programmes for the socio-economic development of women in India. Dairying is also one of the possibilities offered under the Small Farmers Development Association (SFDA), Marginal Farmers Agricultural Labourers (MFAL), the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), the Antodaya and other bank-financed economic opportunities for the poor in rural areas.

Reviews made of dairying under the CSWB scheme or the SFDA/MFAL scheme or the DPAP, have revealed that the rural

household was not able to grasp the opportunity offered through the cow or the buffalo. The infrastructure for making the investment viable is not accessible except to those with large resources.

As a result, the cattle die or are "absorbed" by the large herd-owners after some months of indebtedness, or as in the case of the bank programmes, the transfer of the cattle is only a book transfer from the cattle stock owner to the "beneficiary." The input services and markets are in the hands of the better-off.

This point—that while small may be beautiful small is not able to assert the necessary power against the existing structures which are usually dominated by a few with economic and political power—is well recognized. Other programmes being developed currently, such as the rural marketing centres of the Handicrafts Board, are based on the umbrella strategy whereby the individual small artisan is serviced with raw materials, credit, design and markets, so that he/she can sustain his/her production independent of traditional systems of dependence on moneylenders and private traders. While these strategies and achievements are significant, several issues remain which have to be further investigated and discussed.

Since the markets to which the dairying household caters are far away, they depend on the decisions of the marketing and processing managers to guide their decisions on price, retention of milk—apart from product-mix. The cooperatives vying with each other for higher outputs and profits may, in a sense, only be responding to decisions handed down to them from the commercial and other wings of the managerial class.

This is not a new concern. The global trend is for managers to be the central decision-makers—whether the prevailing political ideology is capitalism or socialism. In fact the growth of the power of the managerial class reflects the complexity of the systems of production and exchange—and debunks the value of these ideologies.

Mahatma Gandhi, who is also the fountainhead of the endeavour, supported the idea of keeping a close, direct connection between producers and consumers, as much to avoid intermediaries as to make village-based societies independent, and consequently self-reliant. The greater the distance between the decisions of a consumer community from the producer community, the greater their inability to work in harmony. The global economic crisis in the world is often attributed to distortions caused by this distance between producers and consumers, and the intervention of those

who exploit the distance.

Milk output in Kaira has increased, and its increase has drawn small dairy-farmers into regular durable employment. But the question needs to be asked whether the possibility of self-reliance, of participation in decision-making would have been greater if the project was more low-keyed and had a simplicity in style more akin to the rural life-style. Is the alternative system that is being developed, namely the Anand pattern, unintentionally replacing one type of domination or dependence by another? Are the small milk producers more independent and self-reliant now, and if so in what way?

The question of support from imported milk powder and butter-oil has also been raised as a concern by those who are thinking of self-reliance. The justification for these imports is to start off the main pipeline and give it a momentum while the domestic milk-sheds are being deepened. For reasons which are understandable, milk-shed development in terms of supplies has not been as rapid as was planned.

Looking at the problems sympathetically, it can be perceived that replacing entrenched power structures by effective cooperative structures, and streamlining their production process is an extremely difficult task—especially if it is to be worked within a democratic system of social change. Such structural changes are in a way easier when accompanied by violent revolutionary processes, especially the use of force. It is not only more difficult but more time-consuming to achieve the same results through the process of intervention based on reformist ideals within a "mixed economy."

However, the concern of even those who are sympathetic to this social-reform aspect of the programme only gets deepened when they are confronted with the ambitious plans for replication. These plans and their pace may not be able to accommodate the type of structural changes that are supposed to be part of the package. If that basic institutional strength cannot be firmly located on the ground, the rest of the structure loses most of its moral base; there is also the added danger that the delays may deepen dependence on imported surpluses from abroad.

WOMEN

In traditional economies, where the world's largest populations are clustered in agriculture, dairying activity is usually associated with women's labour. These countries are now focussing on dairy-

ing as an important element of employment-planning, as also of health programmes. In particular, the "white revolution" is expected to draw a large catchment of the rural poor, and among them home-bound women, into the pool of the "gainfully employed" work force. The 7.5 million women of the dairying households will be affected profoundly by Operation Flood II.

Dairying is one of the most popular components of many support programmes for rural women. An examination of the role of women in dairy development—in the Anand pattern, for example—can identify the conditions under which dairying is a *real* support programme for women.

The Anand pattern obviously brings an increment to the dairying household—including the landless dairying household. To that extent it is a reward to the woman who works to bring in this increment; however, the question remains whether this is a sufficient goal for a women's support programme—and whether there are other costs she bears in order to bring in this income.

A traditional division of labour exists within the Indian household with respect to dairying chores. Women are generally associated with animal husbandry activities which are performed at home, for example stall feeding, milking, fodder preparation and cleaning of shed areas, while the men might engage in tasks which are performed outside the home, for example procurement/collection of cattle-feed and fodder, pasture-grazing and watering of animals. There are variations in the intra-household pattern of allocation of dairy work between different communities although, generalizing for the country as a whole, it may be stated that women tend to spend longer hours than men in dairying activities. In the state of Gujarat, women have traditionally been central to dairy management in the household.

The starting point for a women's endeavour should be the proposition that there is inequality between men and women in access to opportunity, to power and, among the resourceless, to even food, health and education. Women provide the survival kit for afamily in destitution. To that extent their involvement in decisions regarding the family's needs, capacities and commitments would not only have the hard edge of realism but enhance the possibility of fulfilment. Taking the more mundane but important goal of production expansion, it is now being recognized in the Operation Flood programme for developing hybrid cows that the chances of success depend on how well the extension services reach women. Formerly, the practice was to

expose the farmers to the various aspects of veterinary technology. But the organizers found that hybrid cows were not flourishing. A similar insight is being offered as the cause for the delay in the rice revolution in India—that the failure of the revolution is because extension has ignored the fact that women play a critical role in rice cultivation, as they prepare the seed bed and transplant the seedling.

Hence the question arises that when the main operatives in the process of production are women, should they not be the target for attention? Should not spearhead teams address themselves to women? Should not women have gathered at meetings, to whom the message should have reached and to whom the institution, the key instrument to power from milk, namely, the cooperative, be given?

Some of the attitudinal questions asked in the field survey revealed that the women were aware of the fact that spearhead teams did not make a special attempt to reach them. A larger number of women from all land classes have responded by saying that the spearhead teams were indifferent, or hostile.

Suggestions have also been made that where women are the main workers, mobilization as well as extension would be more effective if women were on the staff. In the case of the Anand pattern, this could be staff at the level of spearhead teams and mobilizers for the cooperative, and staff at the level of the headquarters in processing and management.

As it stands now, there are no women in the structure. There is a belief that women may not be willing to work in the milk-collection centres out of traditional inhibitions. This is to be tested. It is now recognized that women of the age-group 30 and above, especially from the scheduled castes and/or landless labour households, have no inhibitions in undertaking economic and social roles which require them to be in public and to handle relationships with men and women. It is also possible to suggest that using male staff for supervision, as for example milk-measuring, testing and cash-paying, further deepens the traditional attitude of men to women, that they cannot undertake supervisory and management roles.

With spearhead teams there is the question whether women veterinarians can be as mobile as men veterinarians. But for other members of the spearhead team this may not be a requirement. As for the field core managerial staff, there arises again the question of finding qualified women. However, the question of availability

of women is often related to the question of their being in demand for certain positions. So acceptability of women is the starting point.

The Anand pattern's single-pronged approach to programme design is consistent with the handling of the women in the dairying households. Its leading organizers, both at the professional management level and at the institutional mobilization end argued that the programme cannot take on two conflicts or challenges at the same time.

They said that organizing cooperatives to bypass the entrenched *dudhias* (or traditional milk traders) was a difficult struggle, requiring all the psychological and political energies of the organizers. To undertake to change the local society's attitude to women, that is to let them play the major role in cooperatives and administration, would have distracted and dissipated this effort, which required the soild support of the farmers.

In their view it is better to do this in phases. Let the "great struggle" be completed, then the "little struggle" can be launched. That is, let the vested trading class be eliminated—then the question of women's subordination can be taken up. They also said that once the resource-base of the household improved, the inequalities internal to the household would automatically diminish.

These considerations reveal the complexity of grassroots mobilization in a society riven not only by class difference but by caste and sex. Yet the organizer's arguments do not settle the issue. Their first proposition is similar to the orthodox Marxist view that class-based solidarity should not be distracted by sex-based struggle, as it would divide the class. The second supports an oft-heard theorem that growth automatically smoothens out inequality.

But as many official and research documents have revealed, it is amongst the poorest in India that the inequality between males and females is greatest. The field survey in Kaira district referred to in this chapter provides immediate evidence of the drop in the sex ratio and in female education levels from landed to landless households. If nutritional status and infant mortality statistics could also have been fathomed across land classes, they would have shown the inequalities (between men and women within a family) increasing with increases in poverty.

Building a programme in which women are treated as equal to men in the institutional framework, in the decision-making processes, in the vanguard of struggle, in the appointment of staff—all requires, more than anything else, a perception in the minds

of the leaders of the programme that women are, in fact, as capable as men. In recent Indian history it is only Mahatma Gandhi who had this perception, and with his usual ability to demonstrate his principles constantly, he tried to infuse this perception into the rest of Indian society.

Gandhi used women in the vanguard for the struggle on the economic and political fronts. His approach was based on his faith in women's power and in their ability to come together and offer resistance to exploitation and oppression. Studies reveal that women are easier to organize than men, as they are not as subservient to caste and other divides as men and see the wisdom of collective action.

Other programmes, even while they may be based on some of Gandhiji's principles, such as *sarvodaya*, do not always draw women into focus except in the traditional roles as mothers, wives, invisible powers and supplementary workers. This skin is still to be removed from the Anand pattern's ideology.

PROFILES

JASUMATI METHA, SARPANCH (KHADGODRA)

Jasumatiben is a slightly built, somewhat weather-beaten woman, always dressed in white. She moves around in the village looking tired, but charged with the motivation to get the village on the move. She lives in a mud-walled house with a verandah and two rooms, one of which is the living-room, partitioned into a clean kitchen, and another part where she can wash her clothes and have a bath.

Born in 1910 in Nadiad (a town about 35 kms from Anand) in a Nagar Brahmin household, Jasumatiben was married at the age of 13 and widowed at 28. She had two daughters, one of whom died in childbirth. The other lives in Ahmedabad. She has no family links or responsibilities and seems to fill up this isolation with public work.

She is famous in Kaira for being the woman who started the one and only women's cooperative in this district, where of the 976 villages 846 are covered with primary milk-producer cooperatives.

From a tender age she was interested in doing things for

other people. Although she studied only till the fifth class, she gave medicines to the sick and advice to the people around her from the little she knew herself. From the very beginning she seemed to have a social conscience.

Due to natural calamities like widowhood and lack of attachment to a large family, she was free to devote herself to non-family matters. However, her own experience in mobilizing other women into the women's cooperative and her experience with men in the *panchayat*, she said, revealed to her that men were no better than women in managing public affairs. She finds the men who sit with her on the *panchayat* ignorant, petty, incompetent—the things men say women are. She thinks they are not interested in the village and would rather see in what way they could make the *panchayat* serve their own purpose. She has fought a tremendous battle trying to ensure that a recent scheme, by which land has been allotted for housing the poorest Harijans, is not misused and taken away by the more powerful sections of the village.

While she finds the men no more literate than the women, her views on women are equally depressing. She thinks they are not really interested in running the women's cooperative, though she has helped them get involved and the cooperative is still there. On the other hand, she does not find it difficult to get them into cooperatives—a reason given by other organizers and social workers. It is just a question of making the effort. It is essential for women to enter into these areas, she says, for the experience it gives them in community affairs. She thinks it will open their minds to social issues, which will change their attitudes within the family.

It must be mentioned that Khadgodra (which is a backward, fairly dirty village with dusty roads, scattered households and no electricity), with a larger proportion of Muslim and Harijan households than the average for the district, did not have its own milk cooperative initially, and it was Jasumatiben, as *sarpanch*, who persuaded the AMUL officials to bring them one to their own village. Muslim women from buffalo-owning households were not allowed to take the milk to the neighbouring villages and the idea of bringing the cooperative into their own village obviously had its direct implications, especially for the Muslim and Harijan households.

This mingling of Muslim, Harijan and Patel women into a cooperative has, she thinks, solved some of the problems about

women mingling between different communities. This in turn will make women bring up their children with fewer inhibitions and set the ball rolling for a less prejudiced society.

Walking to the *panchayat* building Jasumatiben said: "I try to forget what I did yesterday and only remember what I have to do today and think about what I should do tomorrow."

For tomorrow she has plans of starting a *sewa sahakari mandal*, and a controlled-price shop with essential commodities.

With the usual visitor's eagerness I asked her: "But Jasumatiben, how can we get more women into the cooperative in Kaira district? Do you think there is some way in which you could help in this?" "Of course," she replied. "I do not mind going to the neighbouring villages and if I am allowed to do this, I am sure within a few days I can have women enrol themselves as shareholders to participate in meetings. They can do it as well as the men, and since they are the ones who work on the cattle they ought to manage the cooperative. They are the ones who determine the values within the household, and this education of belonging to a public institution may have a stronger and deeper impact on the future generations than having the men sit on the cooperatives, since nothing that they learn really comes into the home."

GOVINDBHAI PATEL, SECRETARY, ISNAV MILK CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY, KAIRA DISTRICT

Govindbhai Patel is the secretary of the Amul Milk Cooperative Society at Isnav, a small village 35 kms from Anand (5 kms from Potlad), with approximately 450 households. He was appointed to this post in 1963, when the milk cooperative started, and has held this post ever since.

Dark and large-built, Govindbhai is well-known in the village for being one of those responsible for starting the cooperative. Prior to the setting up of the cooperative, a few of the villagers used to go to Pipda, which was at a distance of about two miles, to give the milk in the AMUL cooperative. In Isnav itself, there was the agent of a private dairy concern who used to give Rs 500 annually to the village to encourage more people to give milk. Govindbhai felt this money was given to certain influential people, who used it as they pleased, and it gave no benefit to the village. He resented this. With a few others, Govindbhai went to Anand to appeal to the AMUL authorities for a milk cooperative in their village. Their appeal was accepted and

Isnav established its own milk cooperative, appointing Govindbhai as its secretary.

Govindbhai spends approximately five hours in the cooperative every day. He spends between 2-2½ hours in the morning and about the same time in the evening. His task as secretary involves entries in the cash register, and giving out the money (this job in most societies is performed by another employee, but being a small society, the staff at Isnav is smaller). Also, at the request of the villagers, payment is not made twice a day but once in 8 days. At times when the tester is not present Govindbhai takes it upon himself to test the fat content also.

He feels that the villagers are happy with the cooperative as it has been doing fairly well and making a profit. Last year (1977) the village cooperative made a profit of Rs 5572.87. However, the shareholders would be still happier to get a larger bonus.

The only grievance they have is that they feel that a lower fat content is recorded than is the case in reality. Gobindbhai says he tries his best to satisfy them by re-examining the fat content, showing it to them, and asking them to check it.

The salary that Govindbhai draws for his work is Rs 254. In addition he is entitled to a bonus.

His activities, however, do not end with his role in the milk cooperative.

Govindbhai is also a farmer, and owns *bighas* of land in the village. He spends the rest of his time supervising the labour. He pays the labourers Rs 3 per day (for seven hours' work) plus tea, *bidis* and lunch. The chief crops that are grown are *bajra* and wheat, mainly for home consumption, tobacco being the cash crop.

In addition to farming, dairying is another source of income for Govindbhai. He owns a buffalo, which gives approximately four litres of milk a day. The buffalo is looked after by his mother and a servant. About 2-3 litres of milk is sold to the cooperative. No milk was sold prior to the establishment of the milk cooperative, and was instead made into *ghee*. Govindbhai was one of the persons responsible for the setting up of the Sewa Sahakari Mandal in 1960. This was a ration shop, a controlled-price shop selling grain, fertilizers, cloth, oil and so on (at controlled rates). From 1966 to 1976 he was also the village *chowdhry*, his job being to report cases of murder, arson or loot to the police, or call on them if there was violence or lawlessness in the village. For this he used to earn Rs 150 per year.

Being educated to the tenth standard himself at Vallabhbhai High School at Sunav, half a mile from Isnav, Govindbhai strongly believes in education; two of his children are in high school at Piplan and one goes to college.

LALITHABEHN, MEMBER, ISNAV MILK COOPERATIVE

Lalithabehn is a young widow, living in the Patel section of Isnav village in Petlad *taluk*, 35 kms from Anand. Lalithabehn and her brother-in-law own 13 *bighas* of land in the village. However, since they are not able to cultivate it themselves, they have leased it out, and get half the produce from the tenants. Most of the *bajra* and wheat is kept for household consumption, and tobacco is sold. She is one of the few women who is a shareholder of the Isnav Milk Cooperative Union.

Amod, 4 kms from Isnav, was Lalithabehn's natal village. She studied in a primary school there till the fourth standard. She gave up school not because her parents wished her to get married early or because there was too much housework to be done, but because she says she was not interested in studying. "What is the use of it," she asks, "afterwards one has to cook and care for the children and work in the fields."

Lalithabehn married in 1962. She lost her husband ten years after they got married. She has one son, who does not live in the village but in Potlad, with one of Lalithabehn's relatives.

Although a member (shareholder) of the Isnav Milk Cooperative Union, Lalithabehn has never wanted to stand for election to the managing committee. She feels it would take up too much of her time. Lalithabehn became a member after the demise of her husband three years ago, the share getting transferred to her name. The fact that Lalithabehn has become a member herself has not changed her life in any way. "I still do the same work as I did before I became a member of the cooperative." She does the milking, cleaning and cutting of fodder, and takes the milk to the centre.

She realizes that she can now stand for election and become a member of the managing committee, but she has never wanted to. She is happy relating her problems, whenever she has any, to one of the managing committee members.

The two buffaloes kept by Lalithabehn give her 7-8 litres of milk per day, of which she keeps 1 litre of milk per day for the house and gives the rest, i.e. about 6-7 litres, to the AMUL cooperative. The income from milk she finds is useful for meet-

ing her daily expenses such as vegetables, oil and sugar.

Apart from spending 2-3 hours per day looking after her buffaloes, Lalithabehn spends most of her time cooking, cleaning and looking after her sick brother-in-law.

Dr S.N. SINGH DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL DAIRY DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Dr S.N. Singh, Deputy Director at the northern regional office of National Dairy Development Board at Delhi, did his B.Sc. in natural sciences with biology as his major subject from the University at Gorakhpur, which was then part of Agra University. After his graduation, Dr Singh enrolled for a four-year degree in veterinary science, BVSc, at the Mathura Veterinary College.

On obtaining his degree Dr Singh began his career as a veterinary doctor with the State Animal Husbandry Department, where he had field duties for approximately ten months on the Indo-Nepal border. They carried out mass vaccination against rinderpest, a disease which was rampant among the cattle in the area. This campaign succeeded in controlling the disease in the epidemic belt of Deoria district, where he camped. However, dilatory procedures of government departments triggerred off resentment and frustration, and Dr Singh sought a change of work environment.

He sat for the all-India AMUL competitive examination in 1962, and was one of the three persons selected. Here he led a team of seven veterinary specialists to attend to emergency calls in the villages of Kaira district. Their aim was to win the confidence of the farmers and rush medical aid to animals in distress.

After three years with AMUL, in 1965 Dr Singh opted to do his postgraduate studies and re-joined the Mathura Veterinary College for his MVSc.

A little later a large private corporation, which manufactured baby food, had developed its milk-shed in the villages of Aligarh, Bulandshahr and Mathura. They had just started a cooperative milk union called *Dudh Utpadak Sahakari Sangh*, and were in need of a person who could organize a development programme for them and set up a farmers' milk cooperative on the AMUL pattern. They found such a person in Dr Singh, who joined them in 1967.

However, within a short period Dr Singh discovered flaws in the cooperative structure. He felt that it was a cooperative

structure which did not benefit the dairy-farmers but the middlemen. As Dr Singh put it, it was a *dudhia's udhar sahakari samiti* —a cooperative for the uplifting of the middlemen. All activities were channellized through the *dudhia*, who was not really interested in the development programmes.

Dr Singh, who held strong views on the exploitation of dairy-farmers over decades by politicians, bureaucrats and middlemen, took the initiative to recommend corrective steps to his employers. He advised his company, which collected 15,000 tonnes of milk daily, to set aside 2 paise per litre of milk for developmental activity aimed especially at the dairy-farmer. (AMUL spent 5 paise per litre of milk on technical input). However, he discovered that the company was willing to spend much less on development, and that they went through the exercise of "helping the rural masses" more in the expectation of winning approval with policy-makers, and less in the spirit of strengthening the dairy-farmer. Additionally, this investment also brought income and was therefore a financially attractive proposition. Unable to fight the system on his own, Dr Singh resigned in 1974, and joined NDDB, despite a substantial loss in salary.

After spending a couple of years on NDDB headquarters in Anand, Dr Singh was appointed Deputy Director, Farmers' Organization and Animal Husbandry at the Delhi office in February 1977. During this period NDDB opened three regional offices to facilitate monitoring, coordination and follow-up of Operation Flood I. Dr Singh was placed in charge of three spearhead teams operating in Bhatinda, Rohtak and Meerut.

Explaining the nature of his duties, Dr Singh says that he has to organize the farmers, and create an atmosphere conducive for the establishment of a farmers' organization with state authorities.

While Singh does not really do veterinary work any more, being a vet, he says, is most useful. His spearhead team always consults him when an animal is unwell and on many occasions he still goes to treat the animals whenever the need arises.

At present Dr Singh is busy getting ready to launch Operation Flood II, which is one of the largest projects of milk production and distribution to be set up in the country. Dr Singh explains that the fundamental objective of Operation Flood II is to interlink the supply and demand of milk and set up a national milk grid to even out seasonal and regional imbalances.

Speaking highly of the commitment and dedication of the NDDB staff, Singh cited an instance as an example of their devotion. When a truck carrying cattle-feed reached a particular village late at night, some of the farmers resented the arrival of the team so late and refused to unload it. Singh and his colleagues unloaded the cattle-feed bags themselves through the night.

Singh also prides in the rigid quality control of AMUL and other unions of the Anand pattern. An illustration of the high-quality production of milk relates to 1964, when the Narbada bridge broke down and two filled tankers bound for Bombay, each containing 40,000 litres of milk, were stranded en route and finally had to be transported back to Anand. This took six days. Expecting the entire milk to be curdled, the entire AMUL staff was mobilized for clearance of the tankers. Yet when the tankers were opened the milk was found to be in perfect condition.

A rare combination of a social visionary and technologist, Singh has abiding faith in India's peasants. He maintains that it is the farmers' mass support which has inspired Operation Flood II, and underlies the programme for replicating the Anand pattern in other states. It is only a farmer's union such as AMUL which "allows all its resources to be exploited by another agency," he claims. And, it would appear, it is only the missionary zeal of staffers like Dr Singh which translates the farmers' dreams into a thriving reality.

Pappad Rollers of Lijjat

INTRODUCTION

Almost 6,000 women living in seven states of India are linked together in an organization called Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Pappad. The seven states are Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The women are members of a registered society which has provided them with self-employment by harnessing a common household skill in India—the rolling of dough into various types of breads or snacks.

Starting with seven women and an annual sale of approximately Rs 6,000 in 1959, the organization has not only grown in membership but its turnover in 1977-78 was above Rs 34 million. Its export sales increased from Rs 4 lakhs during 1969-70 to Rs 39 lakhs in the financial year 1977-78.

Table 1 : Growth in Membership

Year	*1965-66*	*1969-70*	*1973-74*	*1977-78*
Growth in membership	285	1838	2800	5000
Member's earnings during the year (Rs in lakhs)	2.6	10	27	80.6

GENESIS

Girgaum, a congested South Bombay residential locality, has a cluster of one-room tenement buildings where live several thousand families of small traders, salaried office workers and blue-collar workers, most of whom are of Gujarati origin. *Lohana Nivas* is one such building, owned by the Lohana Trust. The Lohanas are a trader community who are third-generation descendants from Saurashtra (the peninsula in western Gujarat), and migrated to Bombay in search of higher incomes. A large number of the members of this community have established

small, profitable trading businesses with small investment outlays. A certain austerity, bordering on abstemiousness, and a keen commercial sense are intrinsic characteristics of the community.

The Lohanas have strong ethnic links and have established a supportive network of mutual aid, which assures succour to any member of the community in distress. The "benevolent" orientation of the community appears to be a reflex reaction to the complex structure of Bombay, the "alien" city.

The women of the community are thrifty housewives who possess a range of household skills, but who, twenty years ago, were unable to earn an income due to traditional taboos on manual wage work, and the lack of educational qualifications and training for white-collar employment. They were eager to supplement the household income and some made experimental forays into the commercial world with their existing skills. Their men too deprecated the women's "waste of time" and were eager to harness their time for supplementing the family income.

The interaction of the women's eagerness and the men's perception of their marketable skills resulted in the choice of *pappad*-making[1] as a potential source of income-generation by women. Initially, a group of seven housewives assembled on the terrace of the block of flats, and rolled out eight packets of *pappad*. The day was 15 March 1959. The packets were bought over by the trustees of the Lohana Trust.

Prominent among the trustees was a social worker, Shri Chagganlal Karamshi Parekh (Chagganbapa), who held a distinguished record of rehabilitation work with the low-income groups in Bombay and Gujarat. Other social workers were drawn to the women's venture, and undertook the task of promoting the new product. They took the *pappads* to leading retailers and wholesalers and used their goodwill and contacts to overcome the shopkeepers' initial resistance to the product of "a few housewives."

The group of women borrowed Rs 80 as seed capital from the Lohana Trust. This was returned as Rs 200 within a period of six months. In time the group took the name of Shri Mahila Grih Udyog Lijjat Pappad, which translates literally as "Women's Cottage Industries Tasty Pappads."

The homogeneity of the social and income strata of the

[1]A flat sheet of dough prepared from pulse flour, which is fried or roasted as a snack and accompanies the Indian meal.

founder-members as well as the tradition of mutual help in the community was manifest in the basic guidelines which the new organization adopted, which were that all women members would enjoy an equal status in the organization, and that commitment to the common good would supersede self-interest. Chagganbapa and other social workers assisted the women members with the formulation of the basic framework of the organization. It is learnt that they originally enunciated some of the ideas of co-ownership, equality of status, self-reliance and the individual's power of veto. The women, who held the social workers in high regard, were agreeable to the suggestions—which were a formalization of values they were familiar with, and cherished, in the community.

During the first seven years, from 1959 to 1966, the Lijjat organization functioned as an unregistered *mandal* (organization). In 1966-67 it was registered as a public trust and the same year it was recognized by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. The registration of the enterprise as a public trust formally defined its functions as an institution for "women's welfare through self-help" and also obtained exemption for it from income tax.

Within a short time the Lijjat brand of *pappads* established a considerable clientele in Bombay and Gujarat, despite competition from existing brands. The consistently high quality of the product and the reliable supply line of Lijjat contributed to market penetration. Home-rolling of *pappads*, which was common in the middle- and upper-level income groups, also yielded to the quality product from Lijjat. As demand for Lijjat *pappads* outstripped supply, new branch centres were opened in Bombay, and later in other areas of the country.

AIMS AND ORGANIZATION

As stated by the organization, Lijjat is an attempt in the quest for *sarvodaya*, a philosophy of social action that was practised by Mahatma Gandhi. The Lijjat people see their attempt as an experiment in trying to put into practice effectively, some principles of Gandhian philosophy, such as self-reliance, co-ownership, faith in the dignity of labour and devotion to work. Through

the organization they want to show that it is possible to synthesise three different concepts: the concept of family, the concept of business and the concept of devotion and service. Another Gandhian belief that the organizers wish to prove is that women can generate self-help movements and can manage organizations successfully. Hence the membership of the organization is open only to women.

Lijjat is unique as an organizational model. It is a women's organization, a public trust, a registered society and a cooperative. It is also a commercial enterprise which manufactures and sells selected consumption goods. Legally, Lijjat is registered simultaneously under the Societies Registration Act and the Public Trust Act in Bombay. But functionally, it has imbibed all the features of a cooperative society which rests on the participation and control of membership. Operationally, it has organized its business activity in a manner generally associated with commercial enterprises.

LIJJAT AS A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

Any woman above the age of 15 can become a member/co-owner of the Lijjat organization. The only condition for her entry is the signing of a pledge where she agrees to certain principles, such as religious devotion to work, cooperation for the maximum benefit of all members, rolling of *pappads* only for Lijjat, rolling of a minimum of 3 kgs of dough each day, and the subordination of self-interest to the larger interest of the Lijjat organization at all times. A new member joins the organization as a full-fledged member with all rights of co-ownership and a right to participate in the meetings of the general body of the centre and the wider Lijjat organization. Each member, including a new member, has the power to veto any decision taken by the majority of members.

Lijjat centres are bound in principle to accept all women aspiring to membership of the organization (since "all may offer worship at a temple"). If the centre is unable to cope with more members, the new aspirant is advised to wait. However, on any day when a centre has received a visitor, it is bound by rules to accept as members all women who apply for membership on that day. This is done out of deference for the "auspicious" visitor.

Not only the managerial cadre but also the leadership at the level of the managing committee is composed of women. The personnel who knead the dough, those who check the *pappads*, weigh them and pay the women, the accountants, and finally the

sanchalika—all are women drawn from the same social milieu and neighbourhood as the *pappad* rollers.

The organization has a few male employees to look after office work, but male staff cannot become members and whether working on an honorary or salary basis, have no right over the institution.

Lijjat members refer to each other as "sister," a term which is applied also to those of them who are selected for, or appointed to, managerial posts in the organization—*sanchalika*, supervisor and so on. These office-bearers retain their membership of the organization but cease to earn a remuneration for *pappad*-rolling or any other task, for which piece-rate payment is made to the members. Instead, they earn a fixed salary. These women, therefore, occupy a distinct position in the organization, one which assures them relatively high and fixed earnings and which retains for them the constitutional rights of membership. Yet this position does not confer rights of dominance over other members.

Sanchalikas often emerge from the body of *pappad* rollers themselves (see profiles at the end of this chapter). A *pappad* roller who has shown some leadership qualities is selected by other women leaders in the organization to perform this task. Hence a sense of identification as well as a certain pride in being selected motivates the *sanchalikas* to extraordinary devotion in their jobs. They are the ones who open the centres in the dark hours of the morning, issue the stores, supervise the kneading as well as the issuing and receiving counters. They are also the ones who take decisions on the production and distribution of goods from that centre for that day. In the age-group of 35 and above, the *sanchalikas* are usually women with secondary-level (or even less) education, and definitely have a gift for bearing responsibility.

The *sanchalika* is expected to be fully familiar with all aspects of the running of the centre, and to participate in all physical and managerial operations conducted on the premises, as described earlier. Simultaneously, with the management of physical operations, the *sanchalika* is also expected to interact with government agencies such as the Registrar of Societies, Sales Tax Commission and so on.

The managing committee of the Lijjat organization is the only authority which can remove/dispossess *sanchalikas* from their posts on the basis of actions committed by them which are prejudicial to the interests of the organization. There is no other authority which may "dislodge" a *sanchalika* in office, since she enjoys the status of co-owner.

Salary scales of *sanchalikas* may be considered high in comparison to corresponding managerial jobs in small-scale enterprises. Salaries range from Rs 500 at new or small centres to Rs 1,200 at the larger, well-established centres. *Sanchalikas* are entitled to air-fare when they visit other parts of the country on behalf of the Lijjat organization. The provision of air-fare is applicable to other members too.

While payment is made to the *pappad* roller, 20 paise per rupee is saved on her behalf through the pasting of a stamp on her "pass-book." This saving is called the Sisters Saving Fund, which provides for both loans to members as well as resources for the enterprise. The Sisters Saving Fund is administered by a *sanchalika* with assistance from other members, and all members are informed of the balance of the fund through the monthly statement of accounts.

LIJJAT AS A COOPERATIVE

Lijjat, though not registered under the Cooperative Societies Registration Act, has many attributes of a cooperative. One example of this is the active involvement of its worker-members in management and day-to-day operation. Mutual trust, which is fundamental to the successful working of a cooperative, is reinforced in Lijjat by a rigorous and up-to-date accounting and information system which is no less important than the efficient conducting of business operations—manufacturing and marketing.

FRAMEWORK OF MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION

A woman who joins the Lijjat organization as a member inherits a gamut of rights and responsibilities, as also codes of conduct. The right to participate in all decisions relating to the centre, the right to elect members to the managing committee and the right of permanent membership are only some of these.

By tradition, members try to reach a consensus on all decisions which have to be taken by the general body of members, as for example the form in which bonus should be distributed or the

revisions in rolling charges. All members tend to fall in with the majority but there are instances where a single member might stall a decision. In this case, attempts at persuading the member might be made to accept the majority decision, but no steps can be taken to compel her to change her view.

A member cannot be asked to leave the organization by any other member or employee. In cases of damage to the organization or disregard of its basic principles, the current member can only be requested by another to respect the institution. But if the member persists defiantly, no form of pressure or coercion can be used. The managing committee, however, reserves the right to expel a member.

The codes of conduct which circumscribe women's participation in the Lijjat organization reflect the core of the "Lijjat way of thinking" which emphasizes the equality of all members and recognizes each member in the single dimension of a *pappad* roller, a woman who is earning an income by participating in the Lijjat organization. Since the organization draws women from several income slabs of the middle- and lower-level households in both urban and rural areas, the organizers have framed a set of rules which ensure that differences in terms of resources, caste, education and so on do not create invidious distinctions among members. For instance, members are not expected to talk at the centre about their personal problems or grievances, either with other members or with the employees. As nothing is considered confidential, all conversations are public, and hushed tones are discouraged, even between two individuals. In instances where members do engage in private conversation, other members are free to object and to advise the women concerned to share their conversation with all others present.

Rules do not permit employees and members to visit each others' houses. Members are expected to maintain professional contact with employees, so that personal familiarity does not expose differences in the life-styles/education/resources of the two groups, to the disadvantage of either group.

Social contact between members is also guided by certain rules. When members attend a function organized by the Lijjat centre, they are not expected to wait for each other at pre-appointed places to form a group, but to proceed to the venue of the meeting directly. This is a practical measure to ensure that the tardiness of a few does not delay a large number of other members. Strict adherence to time schedules is observed in the

Lijjat organization. For instance, at the recent inauguration of the Lijjat branch centre at Muzaffarpur (in Bihar), when the invited chief guest (a central minister) did not arrive in time, the ceremony was performed by a new member, and the centre was declared open at the appointed time.

Members are entitled to loans from the Sisters' Saving Fund, as mentioned earlier. As co-owners, they are not expected to divulge the reasons for borrowing or to sign any receipt for the advance taken. The fund is administered by a *sanchalika* with assistance from other members, and all members are informed of the balance of the fund through the monthly statement of accounts. At most centres, members may take loans which amount to more than their total savings, provided they do not have prior outstanding debts to the centre. Loans may be re-paid in cash in easy instalments or recovered through deduction in rolling charges. All applications for loans cannot always be processed simultaneously, since funds may run short. In such cases, members are serviced in sequential order on a first-come-first-served basis.

LIJJAT AS A COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

Lijjat organizes its production through the put-out or dispersed factory system of work. Raw materials and specifications are given centrally and the workers process these at home and deliver the finished product to the factory.

Decisions as to what is to be produced and how much, the product specifications, and the responsibility for marketing the final product are made at the "factory" level, that is the central or branch-office level. The shape the system has taken has been determined by the fact that marketing is centralized and is not the responsibility of the individual producers. Such an arrangement requires that quality be rigidly adhered to for the sake of successful marketing, which depends on product reputation, especially in a food-consumption item such as *pappads*.

The various facets of the manufacturing and marketing arrangements and operational practices described here have evolved to suit its peculiar central-decentral mode of marketing and manufacture.

PRODUCTION AND ITS MANAGEMENT

A centre in the Lijjat organization basically distributes dough, receives the final product and pays for it.

Work at the centres starts before dawn. The institution's vans go to nearby stations and residential localities to fetch the workers. At 4.15 A.M. the work starts. The respective *sanchalikas* grind and sieve the flour and the various ingredients for the *pappads* by the evening. Early morning the *pappad* mixtures (various *dals*, flour and spices) are pounded and kneaded with salt water to prepare large balls of soft dough. The balls are further kneaded with groundnut-oil.

The dough balls are weighed and distributed to the workers, who collect them from different centres in the morning and roll out *pappads* at home during the day. They bring back consignments of neatly rolled out and dried *pappads* in two standard sizes the next morning. These are again weighed (deductions for loss of water content being allowed). Payments are made on a daily basis. On an average the payment amounts to Rs 7.20 for 6 kgs of *pappad* with Rs 1.20 deposited in the compulsory savings account. A woman can earn anything between Rs 4 and Rs 40 per day.

Pappad-rolling is never done at the premises. The women collect dough at the centres and do the rolling work at home. By 8.30 A.M. work at different centres is completed and in the evening the *sanchalikas* and the accountants settle the daily accounts and bills.

After their daily household chores women roll out *pappads* in the afternoon, as the sun is hot at this time, and if the *pappads* are put out at that time they dry quickly, become hard and are ready to be taken back by the time the sun sets.

Most of the rolling of *pappads* is done in individual homes. However, when members find that there are constraints at home, arrangements are made for them to roll them out either at the centre or any convenient common place. For example, one of the centres in Bombay has a roof which is used by women for *pappad*-rolling.

An important feature of the system of production not commonly being followed by most social institutions, especially those which believe in austerity (such as the Gandhian institution), is the use of modern mini-buses and vans to pick up members from railway stations or neighbourhoods where they are clustered in large numbers. For women who have to come to collect their

"work" at hours of the days such as 4 in the morning, this van service is a great convenience.

One of the reasons for this early-morning activity is that the women can come back and complete their morning household work such as getting the children and the males off to work with breakfast and lunch and so forth. In other words, their daily routine in the home is not dislocated. Another reason is that in cities like Bombay, congestion in traffic can make travelling across the city extremely time-consuming and strenuous after 8 A.M.

To also have the women members receive the *pappads* to scrutinise as well as reject them on agreed terms, has given the transaction at the collection centre a texture which is quite different from the usual relationship between the contractor and the home-bound worker noticed in other put-out work. *Pappad* rollers being as much the owners of the enterprise as the supervisory staff, the question of one of them attempting to get the better of the other does not arise. Overall production has advantages for all of them, equally, independent of the roles they play. Hence, there is collective interest in maximizing production.

The Lijjat *pappad* centres do not register separately. These units function with fair autonomy but have effective operational links with the central office. The central office exercises supervision/guidance in general matters relating to policy, product lines, quality, publicity, interviews with the press etc., and also specifically with respect to supply of raw materials, assistance with initial investment and subsequent expansion, and accounting and management practices.

QUALITY CONTROL

Quality checks are conducted at various stages of production at the centre, and later the finished product is subjected to tests by the central office, including chemical composition tests at the Lijjat Laboratories at Cotton Green in Bombay.

Each centre is required to send a sample packet of *pappads* to the head office every week. Here the packets are marked with code numbers to conceal the identity of the centre. Four *pappads* from each of the packets are sent to all the centres for testing. Experienced members taste the roasted/fried *pappads* for their flavour, crispness, colour, freshness and so on. They record their comments and send them back to the head office, noting,

particularly, the extent to which the samples conform to the Lijjat standard. The head office also sends 4 pappads to the Lijjat Laboratory at Cotton Green for chemical analysis (moisture content, salt, soda bicarbonate, thoroughness in mixing, fibrous texture and so on).

Based on reports from the branch centres and the laboratory, the head office determines the corrective steps necessary to align sub-standard quality of a particular centre with the Lijjat standard.

All Lijjat centres follow a strict procedure with respect to sub-standard *pappads*, which include those *pappads* which are rejected at the testing stage in the centre itself, and also those which are returned by wholesalers or retailers. All such *pappads* are destroyed most often by dumping into the sea or nearby rivers.[2] On the average, the Lijjat marketing network is so oriented that there is a maximum production-to-consumption lag of one month in the output of each centre.

RAW-MATERIAL SUPPLY

The crucial physical dependence of the branch centre on the central office is represented by the supply of raw material from the central godown at Bhankarbhari Lane (Bombay) to the centres. The godown stocks both processed and unprocessed raw-materials (pulses and spices). The godown staff, headed by a store *sanchalika*, regularly purchase raw-materials in the wholesale market through appointed commission agents.[3] This raw-material is ground and processed at the Lijjat-owned mill at Cotton Green, Bombay,[4] and supplied to the branch centres on demand.

About 16 of the 19 branches regularly purchase raw-materials —pulse powder, spices and soda bicarbonate—from the godown at the central office. The practice of supplying raw-materials from a central godown ensures uniformity in quality and taste, since the flavour is largely determined by raw-material composi-

[2]The Lijjat organizers contend that this is the most efficient form of disposal of rejects, since it provides sea-food and does not add to atmospheric pollution, which would be an inevitable by-product of burning rejects

[3]The agents are paid commission by the Lijjat organization at the rate of Re 1 per quintal of pulses purchased. Agents undertake to procure quality pulses, mainly from the neighbouring pulse-growing districts (Jalgaon, Modhi and Valod)

[4]The mill uses ½h.p. and 1 h.p. machines which are permitted under the KVIC schedule (Khadi and Village Industries Commission schedule).

tion. The mixing of the raw materials in dough preparation is also conducted according to strict formulae, prescribed by the central office.

MARKETING

In a pragmatic departure from the accepted practice of cooperative endeavours to rely on official marketing outlets or on other semi-official organizations, Lijjat adopted strictly commercial marketing techniques from the very beginning. It appointed agents at a commission basis, ensuring that only those agents were selected who had previous experience and enjoyed a reputation for successful business dealings. By offering a commission per packet of *pappads* sold, the Lijjat organizers involved the agents directly in the sale of *pappads*, and created conditions in which maximum sale would be ensured.

For export sales too, the Lijjat organization appointed commission agents; in this case a single firm was selected which had an established reputation for export of processed edible products to Europe, Africa and other countries.

The deliberate choice of a commercial marketing network rather than the use of existing official outlets (for example the emporia of the KVIC and state government retail outlets) reflects the instinctive commercial orientation of the Lohana community, who founded the Lijjat enterprise. Familiar with the ways of the marketing world, its channels and its margins, the founder-members, and particularly the males associated with the venture, made a purely commercial decision in appointing commission agents. They decided to use the expertise and contacts of traditional traders to sell their product in the commercial market, in preference to evolving their own export system, and this choice lies at the core of the commercial penetration of Lijjat *pappads* in a closely contested market.

The appointment of reliable and motivated commission agents at each of the Lijjat centres in other parts of the country has now created a Lijjat trading network in most states. Lijjat salesmen hold an annual convention in Bombay, and keep in close touch with each other as well as with the organizers.

Each Lijjat centre has a clearly delineated marketing territory within which there is no competition from another Lijjat centre. Commission agents are "attached" to almost all centres, and they account for a major part of Lijjat sales. Agents are appointed on the basis of personal contacts of Lijjat organizers or on

the recommendation of social workers. In several centres, the commission agents are contacts of trusted agents in Bombay, generally traders of the Gujarati community who dominate the cadre of Lijjat agents.

Typically, a centre might appoint four to five commission agents and demarcate marketing territories for each person. The rate of commission is a maximum of 35 paise per large packet of 500 gms, and 25 paise per small packet of 200 gms sold.[5] These rates, inclusive of transport costs, are borne by the agent. The Lijjat centres supply the *pappad* packets to their salesmen at the following rates:

Table 2 : Profit margins (as on 23 December 1978)

Pappad size	*Average price realized by Lijjat pappad centre*	*Agent's commission (inclusive of transport and maintenance costs)*
Large *pappads*: 200 gms	Rs 4.85- Rs 5.10	0.10- Rs 0.35 (Max.)
Small *pappads*: (*a*) 250 gms	Rs 2.35- Rs 2.60	0.10- 0.35
(*b*) 200 gms	Rs 1.95- Rs 2.15	0.10- 0.35

The commission agent picks up supplies of *pappads* daily or on alternative days, depending upon the pattern of demand and the geographical spread of his marketing territory. He uses the transport of the Lijjat center to supply *pappads* to retailers and wholesalers in the city. Each center has at least a van or a tempo for the delivery of *pappads*; there are over 25 mini-buses and tempos in the 19 branches of the Lijjat organization. The petrol and maintenance charges are borne by the commission agent, and the centre pays the drivers' salary. If the agent choses not to bear the transport charges, the commission is reduced to 15 paise per large packet and 12 paise per small packet. In general, commission agents find it more remunerative to bear the transport charges.

The commission agents supply *pappads* to both retailers and

[5]There are variations in the rate of commission paid out to the agents. In general, new centres which have not achieved financial viability tend to pay a little less to the agents, and sometimes might even supply directly to wholesalers/retailers, thus saving commission charges.

bulk buyers in wholesale markets of the cities in which they operate. Wholesalers are supplied a *pappad* packet at 10 paise below the retailers' purchase price. The retailers are obliged to sell Lijjat *pappads* at a uniform retail price throughout the country.

Approximately 90 per cent of the turnover of the Lijjat organization is marketing through commission agents. The rest is supplied directly to large hotels, restaurant owners and some other large purchasing organizations. No discount is made in these cases, and the price is maintained at the uniform level applicable to retailers, that is Rs 5.20 per packet of large *pappads* and Rs 2.70 per packet of small *pappads* (250 gms).

Payment from wholesalers and retailers is realised either on the spot, usually by cheque, or within seven days of delivery of consignments. The commission agent is paid each month according to the actual sale made.

In order to protect their image in the market, and also in pursuance of the policy of fair-play, Lijjat centers are pledged to replacing all packets which are returned to retailers by customers as unsatisfactory, or which deteriorate on the shelf. The shop rejects are collected by the commission agents and returned to the centre, which provides replacements free of charge. The rejects are dumped in the sea (for Bombay centres) or in a nearby river in the presence of the centre *sanchalika* and at least one witness. On the average, the rejects account for 1 per cent of the annual turnover of Lijjat centres. In the initial months after its establishment, a centre often has a higher proportion of rejects.

Lijjat *pappads* have been exported since 1962-63. The organization exports through commission agents in Bombay who have sole overseas distribution rights. *Pappads* are distributed to the commission agents at the domestic dealer's. The commission agents export the *pappads* to wholesale importers in USA, UK, Canada, France, Kuwait, UAE, Tanzania, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong. The Lijjat organization does not enter into export agreements directly with any foreign importer. Generally, importers are traders of Indian origin, who supply to a network of shops dealing in Indian goods, Indian restaurants and delicatessen's shops in these countries.

FINANCIAL POLICY

The Lijjat financial policy has two important characteristics, internal financing of working capital requirements and high profitability. Working capital requirements are kept low by the

policy of a weekly or bi-weekly turn round of production and the realization of sales receipts from wholesalers and retailers on the spot. Sales on credit are avoided. In this manner, funds are continuously re-cycled into the organization. In addition to the sales receipts, the Sisters' Savings Fund is also available to each Lijjat centre as working capital. These self-generated sources are augmented, whenever necessary, by borrowings from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). In the five-year period 1971-76, KVIC has extended loans of the order of Rs 8.94 lakhs under its PCPI Scheme (Processing Cereals and Pulses Industry Scheme) for purposes of expansion of existing branches, establishment of new branches, and for the purchase of equipment for the Masala Unit in Cotton Green, Bombay. The rate of interest is 4.5 per cent.

The gross profit margin on a packet of Lijjat *pappads* is approximately 20 per cent; net profit ranges between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of FOB value of the ex-factory value of the *pappads*. The relatively high profit margin has tended to inflate Lijjat prices beyond the retail prices of other competitive brands of *pappads*, on the average by about 20 per cent. Yet Lijjat has pursued this pricing policy, which has contributed significantly to the commercial viability and self-reliance of the organization.

ACCOUNTING PRACTICES

Rigid rules govern the maintenance of accounts at the Lijjat branch centres. A daily record of sales and payments is maintained, and a statement of accounts is prepared every evening by the accountant and vetted by the *sanchalika*. The items included under daily payments are wages distributed to member *pappad* rollers, dough kneaders, the collection and packaging staff, petrol expenses and raw-material costs for local purchases of material. As stated earlier, if a centre does not complete its accounts on any evening, it does not open the next day for business until such time as the accounts of the previous day have been finalized. At the end of each month a profit and loss statement is prepared. Cyclostyled or printed copies of these monthly account statements are circulated to all members of the centre, and also dispatched to the central office in Bombay for their records. As in the case of daily accounts, the centre remains closed for business until accounts for the previous month have been prepared, passed by internal auditors and submitted to the central office.

The accounts of the Lijjat *pappad* branches are available for

inspection to any interested individual or institution.

PAYMENT

In some centres, the rolling charges vary with the amount rolled, so that those who roll 5 kgs or more per day are paid at a higher rate. In other cases, the members who are part-time employees of the centre voluntarily accept lower rates for the *pappads* they roll, and sometimes they gift their labour to the centre in the spirit of *shram-dan*.

Payment is made to the members at the time they take rolled *pappads* to the centre, either daily or on alternate days according to the convention followed at each centre. The counter-girls who keep a record of each member's collection of dough and return of *pappads* are also generally in charge of the distribution of payment to members. Some centres appoint a part-time helper, either a member or an "outsider" with knowledge of accounting to assist with the distribution of payment for rolling, kneading, packaging and so on.

Members do not sign a receipt for the payment they receive as labour charges. This practice is an affirmation of their status as partners, rather than employees, of the Lijjat organization.

MONITORING OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE/AUDIT

Regular monitoring of financial performance and centralized auditing are other formal links of the branch centres with the central office. Auditors appoined at the annual general meeting of Lijjat members service all constituent Lijjat branches by rotation. For the last 17 years the Lijjat accountants have been a Bombay-based firm,[6] who maintain close links with the branch centres and the managing committee. The committee is kept informed of the commercial performance and profitability of each of the branches by the auditors, as also through the monthly statement of accounts circulated by each branch. In addition to the statement, the central office makes an internal assessment of the physical performance of each branch by comparing its raw-material purchases with the production of *pappads* by applying a productivity norm of 300 packets of *pappad* for 100 kgs of dry flour purchased. In cases of a shortfall in productivity

[6]The Lijjat accountants were changed in late 1978, following a decision taken at a meeting of the managing committee and approved at the annual general meeting on 24 November 1978.

or sluggish growth, the central office reserves for itself the right of intervention. This is constitutionally preserved. "If the managing committee of the central office finds that the basic principles of the institution are violated or the branch/branches is/are not administered properly, or there is deterioration in the quality of the products, then the managing committee or the central office itself or by person/persons appointed by them get the same examined and if necessary, may take upon itself the administration of such branches or may appoint an administrator. The managing committee or the central office, however, will have the power to close down such branch/branches at any time" (Articles of Association 3A (c)).

In order to assist a sick unit the central office deputes a team of experienced women managers/staff members/well wishers from the central office or one of the Bombay branches. The management of the sick unit is obliged to modify/revise its operations on the basis of the recommendations of the visiting team.

In specific instances where the principles of the Lijjat institutions are violated by the behaviour or conduct of an individual or a group of persons, the central office can effect the removal of the members of any of the Lijjat branches by recommending suitable steps to the managing committee. This is an important privilege enjoyed by the central office, since members cannot be dismissed by any authority at the level of the branch centre.

INFORMATION SYSTEM

The central office performs the role of an information dissemination centre to keep each branch aware of developments in other branches and at the central office. A monthly newsletter in Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and English is produced by the editorial staff at the head office and circulated to all the branches as well as sympathisers of the organization. The newsletter is printed at the Lijjat-owned printing works in Bombay. The press is also available to all the branch centres for their own printing requirements—price lists for dealers, wholesalers, cash-memo slips, ingredient slips and so on.

PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING

Publicity and advertising is centrally managed by the Lijjat advertising department located in Bandra (Bombay). This department is staffed by three professionals who devise and launch promotional programmes regularly in different cities. For instance,

all publicity attendant on the opening of a new branch is handled by the Lijjat publicity department. Subsequently, publicity for new expansion plans, recruitment drives, sales promotion etc. is also organized by this department. The centralized management of publicity ensures standardisation in image-construction, both of the product and the organization.

Each branch centre conducts advertisement campaigns on its own too, including press conferences and advertisements on the radio, newspapers, cinema slides and hoardings. The head office prescribes a certain format and outlay on publicity and "proper" projection of its product and the ideals of the organization. In the earliest days when the total production of the organization was less than Rs 1 lakh per annum, 5-7 per cent of sales revenue was spent on product promotion. At present the annual outlay on publicity is approximately Rs 10 lakhs for the entire Lijjat enterprise, or approximately 4-7 per cent of the annual turnover of a branch centre.

OPERATIONAL TECHNIQUE

Lijjat has not only expanded in terms of turnover and employment but is diversifying into both edible and non-edible products. In the market its name is associated with high quality, a standardized reliable product and efficient management. It is also multiplying—not on the scale of the Anand pattern, but yet on an impressive scale nevertheless.

The momentum for this expansion seems to come from the following elements:

(*a*) *Commercial sense*: The keen commercial sense of its leaders and well-wishers who have, in some ways, broken the conventional boundaries of Gandhian action programmes and entered the market with all the teeth of a private firm.

(*b*) *Support* : The back-up of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, which is the sponsor for *all* Lijjat activities, old and new, was established in 1957. The Khadi and Village Industries Commission is responsible for planning, organizing and implementing programmes for the development of (*a*) *khadi* (*b*) processing of agricultural and allied produce (*c*) manufacture of agricultural inputs and (*d*) consumer goods industries such as handmade paper, fibre (other than coir), lime manufacturing and cottage pottery. The executive functions of the Commission include purchase and stocking of raw-materials, production of goods and commodities, designing of tools and instruments and

manufacture and supply thereof, technical advice, training and so on.

The KVIC, which receives grants and loans from the central government, disburses, in turn, grants and loans to the state boards, registered institutions and cooperative societies for implementation of the programme. The Commission receives, in addition, repayments of past loans, in instalments or otherwise, and re-funds of unspent grants pertaining to past years.

(*c*) *Choice of products* : Lijjat's choice of product draws upon a common household skill, *pappad* rolling, which is akin to *chappati* rolling, a daily chore for Indian housewives in the northern states of the country. Additionally, the raw-materials used (pulses and spices) are also commonly available in many parts of the country, and form a part of the average diet.

(*d*) *Demand-based entry* : Lijjat centres are opened under various circumstances, but definitely in response to fairly uniform pulls. The existence of clusters of women (a minimum number of 51 women is stipulated) of the lower-income groups who have no steady sources of income, but are relatively hygienic in their living conditions, is the primary condition for the establishment of a Lijjat centre.

(*e*) *Mobilization through social workers* : The idea for establishing a centre may be mooted by social workers of the area and then conveyed to Lijjat organizers in Bombay. This is the more common experience. Alternatively, the organizers themselves might identify a marketing territory yet to be explored by Lijjat Pappad and decide to establish a *pappad* centre in a suitable location. In either event, the Lijjat organizers ascertain the prospects of commercial viability before taking a final decision on the setting up of a new centre. Local social workers are involved with the centre from its earliest stages, and work in cooperation with Lijjat organizers.

After the decision to set up a new centre, advertisements are placed in local and regional newspapers to announce its establishment and to invite interested women to join. The announcement usually carries a summary statement of the Lijjat objectives and pledges and proposes membership to women as partners in a cooperative endeavour. Social workers assist in spreading the word of the new centre in neighbourhoods of middle- and lower-income groups where, involuntarily, "idle" housewives are known to be seeking/available for an opportunity to earn an income.

(*f*) *A cadre of house-trained women mangers* : A team of 25 or more experienced organizers from Bombay nuture the new centre in its early stages. They are deputed by the head office and possess skills of management and training in the "Lijjat system." This team generally consists of female *pappad*-rollers-cum-*sanchalikas* (*pappad*-centre managers), and male "well-wishers" and mentors of the Lijjat organization.

A suitable site is selected for the new centre, generally in a locality/colony which is easily accessible to women in the target group and has facilities for water and power. A simple, airy structure with a large, covered area is best suited to the requirements of the Lijjat centre. Premises are generally rented, although in some cases (as at Poona) the buildings are owned by the organization.

The initial investment for a new centre is made by the Lijjat head office in Bombay. Investment includes outlay on advance rent for the centre premises, vehicles, office furniture and salaries, as well as on raw-material stocks. On an average, the initial investment outlay is Rs 2-3 lakhs per new centre, disaggregated as below on the basis of rough estimates relating to the New Delhi centre (estimates at 1977 prices).

Table 3 : Estimated initial investment in Lijjat branch centre

	(Rs)
Vehicle	
Mini bus	58,675
Delivery van	51,610
Weighing equipment	5,000
Furniture	8,500
Rent for building (6 months)	48,000
Salaries for staff (6 months)	30,000
Working capital (3 months)	45,000
Total	246,785

In the initial stage experts from the head office provide a hydra-headed service to the centre. They enrol members, receive visitors and potential members, set up the dough-preparation unit and the collection/distribution system, and establish marketing links with commission agents. Usually, these agents are trader contacts of commission agents of the Lijjat organization in other

parts of the country. In all these activities the organizers are assisted by local social workers, especially those who have some prior links/association with Lijjat or its branches.

(g) *An addiction to quality :* This quality level, which has given Lijjat a successful entry in a product market known for having an infinite number of suppliers to an infinite number of tastes, and further, an entry at a price higher than the normal market price, cannot be a by-product of management alone. Its roots are in the ethical base that have been provided—and above all the ethical base for the mobilization strengthened through the worker-member concept. It is to make the ethical base workable even when extended, that rules and procedures have been evolved and followed rigidly.

PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT

The general body of a Lijjat centre elect a branch committee of eight members and empower them to take decisions relating to the conduct of daily business at the centre. A general body meeting is expected to be held every month, although in practice the frequency of these meetings has been somewhat less. Special meetings of the general body can be called at any time to discuss urgent issues.

Each branch committee co-opts one member to the all-branch coordination committee of the Lijjat organization. In addition to the branch representatives, the coordination committee includes three members of the central managing committee of the organization. The coordination committee is the formal forum for interaction of the central managing committee and the branch committees. The *sanchalika* is a permanent invitee to the coordination committee. The committee is expected to meet three times a year and to forward its suggestions to the managing committee. One of the primary tasks of the committee is to promote uniformity of working methods in all branches.

A quorum of five branch committee members is sufficient for decision-making, and the constitution deprives absent members from the right of calling a decision taken in their absence into question. These provisions translate to represent an unmediated monopoly over decision-making by a few prominent members of the centre, including the *sanchalika*. This appears to be a paradoxical by-product of the democratic form of decision-making adopted by the Lijjat organization.

Under the established system, routine decisions relating to the

magnitude of production, local sources of raw-material procurement, and marketing, are taken by the *sanchalika*, the accountant, a few other members who might be working as dough distributors, account clerks and other "well-wishers." All members present at the time these matters are being discussed are free to offer suggestions, which have to be considered by the *sanchalika* and other staff. A member may communicate her suggestion to the *sanchalika* or to a member of the branch committee.

The general body of members in a Lijjat branch tend to participate actively in matters which affect their income or remuneration directly. Thus, for instance, the fixing of rolling charges is determined collectively by members at a general body meeting of the centre. Advice may be sought on the financial repercussions of a revision of rolling charges from the accountant or other "well-wishers" closely associated with the centre, but the final decision rests with the general body of members. There have been instances such as those in Valod, when higher rolling charges were voted at a general body meeting of the members but had to be revised downward at a subsequent meeting, because of losses registered by the centre.

Decisions relating to the manner of distribution of profits also elicit a wide response from members. By convention, profits are distributed between three item-heads—bonus or increased wages to members, reversions to the centre's reserve fund, and the fund for expansion of the centre's activities. The proportional distribution of profits between these heads is generally decided by the *sanchalika* and other branch committee members, and although this decision is put to the general body for ratification, the members tend to accept this allocation as given and passed. In the specific matter of the form in which the members' share should be distributed, there is active participation of a majority of the members. They vote in favour of one of the various alternatives—increase in rolling charges, cash payment as bonus, distribution of brass or steel utensils, distribution of gold ornaments (rings, necklaces, etc.). In the case of expensive items such as gold ornaments, the item is given to members in a "queue." In some centres, as in Bombay and at Poona, members have demanded and obtained gold ornaments. At other centres such as Valod, the members opted for kitchen utensils.

The managing committee also controls the *sanchalikas*. It is the only authority which can remove/dispossess *sanchalikas* of their posts on the basis of actions committed by them which

are prejudicial to the interests of the organization.

TASK-ALLOCATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Lijjat has evolved a system of operations in which there is maximum allocation of production tasks to members, so that they are provided opportunities to maximize their earnings, and the need to hire help from outside is reduced to a minimum. The object of this policy is to channellize the flow of payments predominantly towards the members, such that their earnings form an overwhelming share of the total wage/salary bill of the organization. An example of such an in-house appointment is the *sanchalika*, who is the overall incharge of the Lijjat centre, and is a member who runs the centre while retaining her membership of the organization; another example is that of the distribution and collection staff who are also Lijjat members, who opt for, or are assigned, full-time duties as distributors of dough and collectors of rolled *pappads*. They receive daily wages, ranging from Rs 4 to Rs 5, related to the quantum of dough distributed and *pappads* collected. Similarly, packagers are generally members who also receive daily wages of Rs 4-5 for packaging the *pappads*. Sometimes the tasks of *pappad*-collecting and packaging are performed by the same individuals. Members are also directly involved in the various processes of dough preparation (mixing, kneading, etc.). For all jobs performed in the process, members earn a remuneration on a piece-rate basis.

The constitutional provisions of the Lijjat centres allow any member to opt for any of the extra-rolling jobs performed at the centre. But in the event of a lack of vacancy in these job-tasks, the member has to wait since none enjoys higher authority/privilege than other members. A member who holds any of these "posts" may not be asked to resign since she is an equal partner with the others.

Lijjat centres are autonomous units with respect to production, sales, procurement and deployment of financial resources, hiring of staff and local publicity, and are also discrete accounting units. Constitutionally, all decisions relating to the running of business in the Lijjat centres must be taken collectively by member-rollers; a consensus of views has to be reached between members before a decision is taken.

The apex decision-making body in the Lijjat organization is the 21-member managing committee which "administers and controls all activities" within the framework of the objectives of

the organization. The managing committee is constituted of elected members from Lijjat *pappad* centres and appointed well-wishers/advisers. The election is valid for a one-year term of office, and four members retire annually by rotation; out-going members can, however, seek re-election.

Elections to the managing committee are held at the annual general meeting of the all-India Lijjat organization, which is usually held in Bombay within six months of the termination of the accounting year (from Kartik Sud 1 to Aso Vad 30). Each member of the Lijjat organization is eligible to stand for election to the managing committee, and has the right to vote at the annual general meeting.

Members of the managing committee elect the following office-bearers from among their ranks: president, vice-president, two secretaries and two treasurers. Each office-bearer is required to be a member of the Lijjat organization, and must have actual experience in *pappad*-rolling as well as management of the Lijjat centre. The office-bearers are also elected[7] for a one-year term of office, although reappointment is common. The first president of the organization, Premkunwar Davda, held the post for a period of 16 years (1961-77), and retired voluntarily to take up another post in the organization.

Internal Organization

President

Vice-President

Secretaries (2)

Treasurers (2) (Elected)

21-member Managing Committee (Elected)

Coordination Committee (Appointed)

Branch Committees (4) (Elected)

Lijjat Branch Centres (4)

10 Branch Centres

[7]In the past a proper election has not been held for these posts since the committee has easily reached a consensus with respect to the appointments of the office-bearers.

The managing committee is empowered to reject applications for membership of the Lijjat organization without assigning a reason, and is the final authority in matters relating to protection of the "dignity and honour" of the organization.

The committee can also appoint individuals who are non-members, but are regarded as supporters and sympathisers of the organization, to its ranks, and fix an honorarium for each of them. These individuals are generally referred to as "well-wishers" in the organization.

Issues are decided in the managing committee on the basis of majority vote, with the president (who is concurrently chairperson of the committee) having the casting vote in the event of an equal division of votes. Most often, however, a consensus emerges on major issues and the committee tends to function as a mature body of experienced elders, who are zealous guardians of the fundamental principles of Lijjat—its equality and co-ownership, its meticulous accounting and its principle of self-reliance.

The managing committee meetings are not attended exclusively by the committee members. Social workers and the *sanchalikas* of the Bombay branches often attend the meetings if they are present at the head office or branch premises, wherever the meeting is being held. The meetings also usually include male social workers. The latter's experience in commercial ventures and their knowledge of trade and public institutions is an oft-used resource in these meetings.

The annual general meeting is the only major occasion on which all "ordinary" Lijjat members participate as empowered members. The meeting is presided over by the president of the organization. It is held 14 days after written notice is served on the members. The quorum of the general meeting is 51 members.

FIELD SURVEY

During November 1977, a field survey was conducted at the main centre at Shankarbhari Lane, and at Wadala centre, two of the 5 branches at Bombay. Forty-one *pappad* rollers were interviewed. These *pappad* rollers were selected on the basis of those

available on the day of the visit. The aim was to investigate the overall impact of the project on the women.

A second phase of field investigation was done in March 1978. Again, two centres were chosen—the main centre is Shankarbhari Lane and the Bandra centre. Forty *pappad* rollers were interviewed, again on the basis of those available at site on the day of the visit. The second phase used a briefer schedule; information was sought on control and allocation of family income, an aspect that was absent in Phase I.

FINDINGS

Of the 81 women who were interviewed, more then 50 belonged to the age-group 20-45, and about 20 above 45 (Table 4). Sixty-two were married (Table 5), at least 50 had had primary and secondary education, while 22 were illiterate (Table 6). The family size of the majority of the women ranged from five to ten members (Table 7). About 50 of the women came from households earning Rs 300 to 700 a month (Table 8) and a similar number contributed about Rs 100 to 200 per month to the family income from *pappad*-rolling (Table 9). Their husbands and men-folk, by and large, worked in factories and shops, the largest number of 23 working in government offices (Table 10). Over 75 of them contributed 15 to 50 per cent of the family income (Table 11). About 50 of them had worked in *pappad*-rolling for 2-10 years, and about 15 of them 10 years and above (Table 12). On an average, *pappad*-rolling seemed to occupy them for about 5-6 hours, though 17 of them reported working 6-8 hours in *pappad*-rolling (Table 13). They used this time to roll out *pappads* from about 3 to 10 kgs of dough a day (Table 14). It seemed that this was the maximum capacity they could undertake (as Table 15 shows) and that the majority of those interviewed were not willing to undertake more dough for rolling. Table 16 reveals that the number who inherited the skill of *pappad*-rolling equalled the number of those who were trained at the centre. More than 50 of them said that they handed over their income to the head of the household (Table 17). Those who spent it themselves seemed to spend on general household expenditure (Table 18).

The majority of them did not take loans and those who did seemed to take not more than Rs 50 to 100 (Table 19). There were as many women who seemed to spend on their own health out of their income as those who did not spend on their own health (Table 20). Similarly, there were as many who did not

care to send their daughters into the profession of *pappad*-rolling as seemed to want to send their daughters into this profession (Table 21).

THE LIJJAT PAPPAD FIELD SURVEY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

Table 4: Age of respondents

Age	*Number*
Below 15	1
15—20	11
20—35	21
35—45	30
45	18
Total	81

Table 5: Marital status

Unmarried	9
Married	62
Widowed	9
Separated	1
Total	81

Table 6: Education

Illiterate	22
Primary	17
Secondary	27
High school	15
Total	81

Table 7: Family size

1—4	14
5—7	39
8—10	11
Above 10	1
No response	6
Total	81

Table 8: Total monthly earnings of family

Rs per month	
300 and below	9
301—500	21
501—700	28
701—900	16
901 and above	5
No response	2
Total	81

Table 9: Monthly income from pappad-rolling

Rs per month	
100 and below	13
101—150	32
151—200	13
201—300	12
301—350	7
351 and above	1
No response	3
Total	81

Table 10: Occupation of head of household

Salaried service	
At Bombay port	6
In factories	15
In shops as salesmen	14
In Government offices	23
Self-employed (Mechanic, Carpenter, Tailor or Vegetable seller)	6
Self-employed-business	1
Wage labourer	6
Unemployed	1
Unspecified	9
Total	81

Table 11: Contribution of income from pappad-rolling to total family income

	Percentage
Below 15	7
15—25	32
26—50	31
51—75	2
76 and above	7
No response	2
Total	81

Table 12: Average no. of years in pappad-rolling

Years	*No. of respondents*
Less than 1 year	6
1—2	12
2—5	24
5—10	22
10 and above	14
No response	3
Total	81

Table 13: Average no. of hours per day in pappad-rolling

No. of hours	*No. of respondents*
3 and below	4
3—5	10
5—6	39
6—8	17
More than 8 hours	8
No response	3
Total	81

Table 14: Amount of dough rolled per day

Kg	*No. of respondents*
3 and below	4
3.1—5	9
5.1—7	4
7.1—10	8
10.1—20	3
No response	13
Total	41

Table 15: Willingness to roll more dough

	No. of respondents
Willing	3
Not willing	22
No clear answer	16
Total	41

Table 16: Training in pappad-rolling

	No. of respondents
Home experience	14
Neighbours or other acquaintances	7
Training at centre or by organizers living in the neighbourhood	16
Not specified	4
Total	41

Table 17: Control over income from pappad

	No. of respondents
Spent by women	6
Handed over to head of household for pooling into family income	23
Not specified clearly	11
Total	41

Table 18: Distribution of income from pappad between different uses

	No. of respondents
Food	2
Education of children	1
Food, education of children and clothes	8
General household expenditure	25
No response	5
Total	41

Table 19: Outstanding loans taken from pappad centre

Rs	*No. of respondents*
No loans	23
50 and below	3
51-100	8
More than 100	1
Loan taken, but amount not specified	3
No response	3
Total	41

Table 20: Expenditure on own health

	No. of respondents
Spends on own health	17
Does not spend on own health	17
No response	7
Total	41

Table 21: Plans for introducing daughter to pappad-rolling

	No. of respondents
Would like daughter to join Centre as *pappad* roller	15
Would not like daughter to join centre as *pappad* roller	18
No clear response	8
Total	41

For the above tables the sample size was 41. The second phase of the field survey did not canvass these questions.

REVIEW

GENERAL

Evaluated by economic criteria, the Lijjat performance has been outstanding. It has created low-cost yet remunerative and durable employment for thousands of women using existing skills. Its annual turnover has increased steadily over the last 20 years, beginning in 1959 from Rs 6,196 to Rs 34 million in 1977-78, and expecting to touch Rs 36 million by the end of 1979. Export sales have increased from Rs 4 lakhs in 1969-70 to Rs 39 lakhs in 1977-78. Starting with seven women, it is now able to provide self-employment to over 6,000 women with total earnings amounting to Rs 80.6 lakhs for the year 1977-78.

An illustration of the progressive commercial policies of the Lijjat organizers is provided by the nature of diversification undertaken by the organization, and the links it has forged with official institutions to obtain support—both financial and infrastructural. In cooperation with the KVIC, the Lijjat organization has branched into the production of matches in home-based units, as also into the manufacture of leather goods in conjunction with Shantiniketan, West Bengal. Lijjat started a Masala Division three years ago, and is going into the production of *khakras*, an Indian food delicacy that can be preserved over several days and is therefore a good travel snack. It proposes to set up *aggarbati* (incense-stick) units as well as a bakery unit—both with the overall support and guidance of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

Several *pappad* centres include an element of welfare programmes. For instance, in the Valod centre scholarships are awarded to children of those members who cannot afford school/college fees. A library has also been constructed for members' use. Excursion trips and picnics are regularly organized for the members to provide a change from their daily routine.

The facility of loans offers members a source of succour in times of personal distress. The "gift" received as bonus is generally a cherished addition to the members' homes—an item which could not have been easily purchased from their own resources or by adjustments in the tight household budgets.

The Sisters' Saving Fund offers a model for other agencies as the women usually do not have direct access to any saving in their households, especially those who belong to the lower-income

groups. When the women of AMUL were told of this programme at Lijjat, they were eager to have it incorporated in their own programme. They said they had no access to money in times of need, even though the cooperative is supposed to be their own.

The Lijjat organization offers a modality by which the odium of the put-out or dispersed factory system of production can be reduced, if not removed. The put-out or dispersed factory system of production is associated with women's work not only in India, but all over the world, especially in the developing countries. One of the characteristics of these economies is that there is a fairly unlimited pool of idle labour, both male and female, though available only in certain parts of the year or certain hours of the day due to the seasonal demand of agriculture or the informality of the non-agricultural sector. The classic illustration of this idle labour is provided by women. Whether in Hongkong, Korea, Mexico or India, female labour is most easily mobilized in the dispersed factory system.

The system provides advantages to both the employers and the employees. For example, women from households where supporting services like cooking and child-care facilities (or even domestic arrangements for the care of the old on the homestead) are not adequate, working at home is psychologically and physically less of a strain than working away from home. The constraints are not only physical (in the sense that if creches and pre-packed food was available the women could work in factories); there are other aspects such as the value placed on the family, on protecting and tending old people and infants within the home.

From the employers, point of view, giving put-out work to women is cheaper. For instance, there is no need for a building, for providing decent conditions of work or for observing the rules of the Factory Act and so on.

Usually the system' when it is organized by the private firm, works through contractors; for example in *bidi* manufacture the firm disburses tobacco and the leaf to the contractors dispersed in the area from which the labour is drawn. These contractors mobilize the labour, distribute the raw-material and collect the final product and provide supervision in terms of wage, numbers, quality and so on. The labour is only paid the fixed rate per unit of product. The local contractors are usually men, whereas the workers are women. Apart from the many harassments that women endure from the local contractor, there is the additional

one of sexual exploitation, where the preference is given to women who are willing to offer sex also as a price. This has been reported even by tea-plantation workers in their relationships with their supervisors.

In Lijjat, all the intermediaries are women, and even more significantly, they are members, most of them originally *pappad* rollers. Decisions are taken through meetings, and there is a monthly newsletter which every member receives containing all the transactions of the organization (the performance of each centre and other news pertaining to members). As mentioned before, profits and dividends belong to the members who are the workers.

As the Lijjat pattern mobilizes *pappads*, so too the Anand pattern mobilizes milk through the dispersed factory system. Piece-rate for labour gives the system an element of voluntariness—though the stipulation of 3 kgs of dough per day in Lijjat, and a similar minimum in AMUL, puts a limit on the degree of this voluntariness. But the Anand pattern does not have the sociological homogeneity between the staff and the members, nor does it use women for managerial tasks, nor the constant communication and consultation in the decision-making process that has evolved at Lijjat.

Hence, for women who are still not able to leave their homes for long hours and, therefore, prefer work which can be done at home, Lijjat offers a methodology by which this work can be carried on without having to endure exploitation or domination.

Some of the operations of the Lijjat organization may look over-burdened with dos and don'ts. However, in assessing this apparently harsh structure, it is important to see the degree of shareholders' participation in day-to-day management. The organization seems to have successfully overcome a serious problem which continues to plague cooperatives where member-participation in management is usually ineffective and at best indirect through managing committees. Lijjat has built into the framework of members' participation processes and procedures which ensure constant consultation with members. Time-bound accounting procedures—such as daily balancing of accounts and monthly circulation for members' scrutiny—has educative as well as democratic components which maintain participation. In handling a vast membership of worker-owners spread over seven states, these processes and rigid adherences appear to be preconditions for participation.

The Lijjat leaders insist on an ideological commitment by members. The commitment is not only to work honestly and in harmony but to avoid bringing to the place of work domestic issues. Almost all successful attempts at mobilization—whether political or social—have required a strong base in ideology, religious or otherwise. To that extent it is understandable that to keep the organizations straight in spite of the fact that its members are scattered across the city, and across rural areas, the system of being pledged to some ethic has to be incorporated.

However, comparing Lijjat with SEWA, one or two problems emerge which, while not insuperable, reveal the complexity even of adopting ideologies when it comes to women's emancipation. While Lijjat insists that the women are pledged to honesty and self-supervision, it does not provide any vehicle for them to either share or articulate any aspect of their own life which might be pressing upon them *as women*. In other words, its sisterhood organization ignores the development of women's power within and outside the home. While the skills and ability of women as producers and as managers are strengthened, their skills as social agents or revolutionaries are not visible.

Another aspect of Lijjat which reflects the gap between radical and traditional perceptions of women's roles is that the tasks of overall management, and liaison with the wider commercial world—as well as the developmental agencies such as KVIC—is handled by a handful of men. While these men believe in the strengthening of women's participation in economic and social life, and serve the organization with total dedication, it is still a relic of the traditional division of roles—the top positions being still the prerogative of men.

Women, specially in the Indian context, have not come into the field of accountancy and management to the same extent as men, and to some extent the fact that men are holding these positions is a reflection of the poor supply position, that is the unavailability of women who can fill such roles. But it is an area which needs to be strengthened and will get the required attention only if there is a perception in the organization's leaders that women should be brought into that critical position as well as absorbed into the boards of commissions like the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, which support programmes such as Lijjat.

Some aspects of home-bound work, especially production of edibles, preclude moblization of the poorest into the work force,

as has been revealed by the socio-economic background of the women worker, members. The field survey offers a glimpse into the occupational category of the households. The women are usually wives of blue- and white-collar workers, not necessarily manual labour. However, here also, there is an exception in the case of groups such as those in the rural area of Valod in Gujarat, but the system of production necessarily gets transformed when such groups are taken into the fold. They are given sheds to work, as their homes are not capable of providing the space or the cleanliness for food processing. The extension of Lijjat into other activities such as matches, *agarbattis* and leather-work may mean that this constraint is overcome.

The concept of family, which is taken more seriously among some Gandhian activists than others, is often interpreted by them as precluding differences amongst categories of society. The family concept would presume that there is a common interest, and the presumption is made into an insistence that there are no differences. This is suggested in the Lijjat doctrine that words like "poor" should be avoided. That the poor, being preoccupied with poverty, can hurt themselves rather than move forward with their effort and make something out of their lives, is an attitude which they promote as part of the *sarvodaya* philosophy.

The concept of family further presumes that within the household men and women are equal. However, women members of families, especially amongst those with scarce resources or no resources, are known to be experiencing harsh inequalities in their access to nutrition, health and opportunity. Families are not collectives of equals but groups of unequals where women are given less than men of the scarce resources. At the same time women often have to provide the survival kit for a family and extend themselves to keep it from destruction. Hence, there is not only inequality in access but there is unequality in responsibility too, which makes the men or women within a family different in what they receive as well as what they give.

In a society these classifications are not only real, but where they operate and tend to inhibit social levelling, rigid belief in such ideals can inhibit fulfilment of stated goals.

The concept of family interpreted in this way can thrust constraints on the participation and growth both of the weaker amongst the members as well as of women within their own families.

Hence it can be suggested that while Lijjat has adopted some

of the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, such as self-discipline and the work ethic, it has not observed another strong drive in his philosophy—which is towards the emancipation of women from household and attitudinal constraints. This aspect of the Gandhian approach to social change has been adopted by SEWA, which seeks to empower the women through their participation in non-family issues which impinge on their family life. The Lijjat pledge insists that women do not chat when they come to the centre, but just do their business and go home. While this certainly must be assisting the productivity of the organization, it loses an opportunity for generating women as a force towards social and economic change.

PROFILES

PRABHABEN, PAPPAD ROLLER

A short, stocky lady, Prabhaben (55) is one of the oldest members of the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Pappad Society. She has been rolling *pappads* for the last 18 years.

Educated till the fourth standard, Prabhaben lives in a large family with her husband, son, daughter-in-law and her grandchildren, fairly close to the head office at Shankarbhari Lane. Rolling *pappads* at home at an average of seven hours a day, she is able to roll 4-5 kgs of *pappad* daily. In this task she is assisted by her daughter-in-law and grand-daughter and between them they roll out an average of 10 kgs, earning approximately Rs 400 per month, of which Prabhaben's personal contribution is Rs 175-200. Her domestic work is light, since the younger women carry the main burden of housework. Her husband and son both work in the cloth market as salesmen and draw a salary of Rs 250 each per month.

Most of the *pappad*-rolling is done in the morning and afternoon, and simultaneously the rolled *pappads* are spread in the sun to dry. By sunset the *pappads* are hard and ready to be taken back to the centre, either the same evening or the next morning.

Speaking glowingly of the Lijjat organization, Prabhaben says the only savings that the family has been able to accumulate are through the compulsory deposit scheme, where a sum of 20 paise per kg of dough rolled is deposited into the Sisters' Saving Fund.

Rolling 10 kgs of *pappad* daily, Prabhaben is able to save Rs 2.00 every day and has a current saving of over Rs 1000.

Prabhaben spends the money as she likes, and buys whatever is required for the home. At least 80 per cent of the monthly income is spent on food. Clothes are not purchased daily, but in bulk once or twice in the year. Three of her grandchildren study in school, but that education is free. Luckily, says Prabhaben, the Lijjat *pappad* centre, the cloth market where her son works, and the school where her grandchildren study are close, so they do not have to spend on transport, except occasionally when they go to meet their relatives or attend other social functions.

She definitely feels that the Lijjat *pappad* society has made her self-reliant. She feels that she is capable of earning as much as any other member of the family, and this has given her strength and self-confidence. "Lijjat has made us women the *seths* [meaning lords] of the households," she laughs.

JASWANTIBEN POPAT, SUPERVISOR

Jaswantiben (45), who at present is a supervisor at the head office in Shankarbhari Lane (Bombay), was one of the seven ladies who started the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Pappad Society in March 1959. She has the distinction of being the only founder-member to be still associated with the Lijjat organization.

Recalling the days when the institution began, Jaswantiben said: "The initial days were difficult. Finance was scarce. The institution started on a capital of Rs 80 borrowed on the condition that a sum of Rs 200 will be returned within a stipulated period. As a matter of principle no monetary help was to be sought from any quarter. Even voluntary donations were not accepted. Work was started on a commercial footing as a small-scale venture right from the beginning."

In her present job Jaswantiben visits homes of the *pappad* rollers (associated with the head office branch) to check the standards of hygiene and cleanliness maintained by the members. She visits each member at least once a month and occasionally pays surprise visits to *pappad* rollers from other Lijjat branches. Being one of the oldest and most experienced members, it is also Jaswantiben's job to explain the functioning of the organization and to teach members the art of rolling *pappads* whenever a new branch is inaugurated.

Jaswantiben observes flexible hours of work but she is usually in the branch from 11.30 A.M. (after completing her domestic

work) to 8 P.M. On occasions when the *sanchalika* is not present, Jaswantiben takes on the responsibility of distributing the dough from 5-9 A.M. Although educated only till the second standard in a primary school, Jaswantiben has also acquired adequate experience to keep accounts for the Lijjat centres when the need arises. She earns a fixed monthly salary of Rs 600.

According to Jaswantiben, most of the Lijjat members join the Lijjat organization after they hear of the happy experiences of relatives and neighbours.

She feels that it is necessary to impress upon the women the fact of co-ownership of the organization, and one which they should treat as their own. She admits that there are occasions when the women quarrelled: "After all, there are only women here," she says, but usually they realize the need for cooperation and patch up their differences amicably.

Jaswantiben lives in a small, neat two-roomed apartment in the premises of the Lijjat *pappad* society with her 17-year-old daughter, Daksha, who is studying in high school, but who rolls out *pappads* in her spare time. This she has been doing since the last five years and is able to earn approximately Rs 150 per month. Jaswantiben occasionally helps her daugher but rarely gets the time with her busy routine at Lijjat and her domestic chores at home.

Spending about Rs 400 per month on food and Rs 30-40 on clothes, Jaswantiben is able to save a little money each month, with which she hopes to get her daughter married. A present she has a saving of Rs 1,400 in the Lijjat organization, apart from the bonus of utensils cash and the gold chain that she has been receiving in the past from the centre.

SAVITABEN JAMNADAS DAVADA, CASHIER

Savitaben is a cashier of the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Pappad Society, located at the head office in Sankarbhari Lane (Bombay). She was appointed to this post in June 1972 and has held it ever since.

Savitaben (24), belongs to the Lohana community. Hers is a small family, and they live in the premises of the Lijjat *pappad* centre. All three members of the family work there. Savitaben's mother, Premkuvar Jamnadas Davada, was the president of the Lijjat *pappad* society from 1961 to 1977. She is now the *sanchalika* of the godown and an active member of the managing committee. Widowed at an early age, she raised her family on her

earnings from the Lijjat organization. Ill-equipped to work in a white-collar job (she had only nominal schooling), the young mother found the Lijjat organization an ideal work place where her household skills would be remunerated well, and with dignity. Sheltered from the strict professionalism of the outside job market, women like her considered Lijjat a haven and cherished its "clean" environment.

Savitaben's brother, Jayantilal, is the storekeeper at Lijjat, who also works at the head office at Sankarbhari Lane. With her mother and brother in the organization it was quite natural for Savitaben to get interested in the activities of the organization at an early age. She began to roll *pappads* in 1967, when she was only 13. This she did in her spare time, right through school and college, particularly during holidays. She was able to earn Rs 100-150 per month by rolling *pappads*. In June 1972, Savitaben became the cashier. She recalls how resentful some members were at her appointment since they felt she had got the job because of her mother's eminence in the organization. Clarifying the issue, Savitaben states that her mother was not responsible for the appointment, but certain other members had urged her to become the cashier since a responsible and reliable person was required for the job.

Savitaben's work is only part-time in the organization—from 6.30 A.M. to 8.30 A.M. every morning, since she also attends to domestic duties to enable her mother and brother to work full-time with the Lijjat organization. At the centre she has to maintain a cash-book and pay and receive cash. The importance of her job can be understood in the light of the organization's emphasis on scrupulous accounting with a daily finalization of accounts. Savitaben has to keep abreast of the daily expenditure at the *pappad*-rolling centre on items such as wage payments to *pappad* rollers, dough kneaders and packagers, petrol expenses, raw-material costs and so on.

Commenting on members' participation in the Lijjat organization, Savitaben states that there is a general appreciation of principles of mutual cooperation among members. However, now members who are unaware of their status in the organization raise some problems, since they demand an increase in the rolling charges. As soon as they comprehend their role as owners of the organization they understand their responsibilities. They also realize that they stand to gain from increased production. As the profits of the centre increase, the members' loan applications are

processed more promptly and the annual bonus payments are higher.

For Savitaben and other organizers like her, life revolves around the activities of the *pappad* centre. There is total identification with the organization, and the boundary between personal and professional lives is obscure. Savitaben recalls an incident when a consignment of *pappads*, dispatched to Rajkot, was considered missing since there was no acknowledgement from the addressee. A few organizers of the *pappad* centre spent a tense night tracing the consignment, although none of them bore direct professional responsibility for the goods. It was only when the consignment was finally traced to the addressee in Rajkot (who had failed to communicate the message of its arrival) that the night-long vigil was called off.

LILY GOPALDAS RABHER, ASSISTANT SANCHALIKA

Lilyben is a petite, fair girl who is recognized in all the Lijjat *pappad* centres in Bombay, especially in the headquarters at Sankarbhari Lane, for her organizational skills and her motivation and dedication to the organization.

Born in 1954 in a Lohana household, Lilyben completed her undergraduate studies in Bombay in 1969. She joined the Lijjat *pappad* centre at Sankarbhari Lane as a *pappad* roller while still a student and rolled *pappads* until 1972. She was drawn to the Lijjat centre in the neighbourhood because of its reputation as an organization where everyone was equal. This attribute won the approval of her family, and she was allowed to join the organization.

Lilyben's is a fairly well-off joint family of 11 members, where her two brothers are engaged in wholesale soap business. Another sister is a *pappad* roller. The income of her family is about 2,600 per month, of which Lilyben's contribution is Rs 1,000.

Lilyben did administrative and liaison work at Lijjat until 1977, at a salary in the range of Rs 300-600 per month. Her obvious organizational capabilities were recognized and in August 1977, at the age of 22, she was made assistant *sanchalika*. She has been given a wide range of responsibilities, which include purchase and distribution of raw-materials to the various branches, maintenance of accounts, action on consumer complaints, distribution and sale of products, expansion of branches by conducting area meetings, supervision of quality control, personnel welfare, and the organization of exhibitions for sales promotion. For all these tasks she assists Premkuvarben the *sanchalika*.

Although fairly satisfied with her performance at the centre, Lilyben expresses the desire to attend training courses in personnel management, production management and administration. She feels that such exposure would improve her capabilities and help her in running the centres more efficiently. Lilyben would like to increase the range of products to include not only edibles but other hand-made manufactures, with production and marketing organized on the same principles as those established in the Lijjat *pappad* enterprise.

Lilyben has no fixed hours or days of work in the month—there is a continuous run of work, and organizers like her do not believe in taking Sundays off or observing other public holidays on a regular basis. The only time when they are absent from the centres is in case of illness or other pressing personal/social engagements. Lilyben has been averaging a 10-11 hour working day, extending to as much as 14 hours on some days.

Lijjat has permeated the personality of Lilyben and her colleagues deeply, so that misrepresentation of the organization evokes a prompt rejoinder from them. For example, the *Hindu* of Madras carried a report late in 1976 on the "widows and poor women" who had found employment in the Lijjat endeavour. Lilyben states that: "This was not liked by us organizers. It is against the principle of the Lijjat organization to consider anyone working with us as poor. The 'poor' are only those who are selfish and these 'poor' are not allowed in our organization. So we went to the newspaper office and explained to them the sentiment behind our objective."

Lilyben speaks with pride of her trip to Delhi for the inauguration of the Lijjat *pappad* centre at Delhi. She spent about two months in the capital, training women to roll *pappads* and teaching them the method of distribution, packaging, weighing and accounts, as was being done at the Bombay office. This she found an interesting experience.

She attended the Agri-Expo Exhibition held in Delhi in December 1977, where Lijjat *pappads* were retailed. They were asked to garland the prime minister, who spoke to them praising their efforts and organization. This she felt was her biggest reward.

The major strength of the project, Lilyben feels, is that every woman who is a member can earn a steady income with respect,

can share in the profits, and does not have to beg and borrow from an unsympathetic society in personal emergencies. This enables women to stand on their feet, which in turn makes them feel stronger both as members of the family and of the community.

Painters of Madhubani

INTRODUCTION

More than 400 women in four villages in the Madhubani district of Bihar have turned the traditional skill of wall and floor painting into a source of income generation. In the last 10 years several of them have earned over Rs 100,000 each through the sale of paintings executed on hand-made paper. The commercial hub of this activity is centered in Jitwarpur and Ranti, two villages flanking Madhubani town within a distance of 5 kms, although commercial painting has spread to at least 16 other villages in Madhubani district. With a population of over 2,000 each, Jitwarpur and Ranti are relatively large villages. Schools, dispensaries, post-offices and tube-wells are located in the villages. Metalled roads have established easy access to both.

GENESIS

Soon after independence, India launched a vigorous programme for the revival of traditional crafts. The main inspiration and initiative for this renaissance came from the dynamic national leader, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. The wide impact of this effort is generating employment and income for craftsmen. The substantial demand for this craft at home and abroad is well-recognized. But it was the tragic circumstance of the Bihar famine in 1967, following a period of drought, that brought the women painters of Madhubani into the limelight.

Normally, drought-relief measures in India are confined to cultivators and seldom cover craftsmen and other rural artisans. It was for the first time during the Bihar famine of 1967 that the relief was extended to craftsmen. The drought-affected craftsmen, and especially the women, were asked to paint their traditional ritualistic paintings on cloth or paper (normally they paint on their walls) for money. The idea was to find a market through agencies working under the umbrella of the All India Handicrafts Board.

A joint team of experts from the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB), Handicraft and Handloom Export Corporation (HHEC) and Bihar State Small Industries Department toured the area in

1967. The group, led by Upendra Maharathi, the noted designer and scholar, consisted of experts in rural development, fine art, handicrafts, marketing and administration. The team decided to select those items or skills which would have a high wage component, so that the needy received aid in the form of earnings, and not as dole. The crafts identified were Mithila folk-paintings, *sikki*-grass items and bamboo-ware.

The HHEC was designated to spearhead the development programme for Mithila craftsmen. This corporation posted a field officer, Bhaskar Kulkarni, to Madhubani in the summer of 1966 (see profile of Kulkarni at the end of the chapter). This proved crucial to the evolution of the art, which was market-bound for the first time. Kulkarni cycled 60 kms out of Madhubani town, to villages in the famine belt. He explained his mission to men belonging to some high-status Brahmin villages, where the skill of painting was highly developed. Their reaction was hostile. The prospect of allowing their women to communicate with strangers was as abhorrent as the implication that they would live off their wives' earnings. They considered it more honourable to starve to death. Kulkarni was chased out of these villages.

Respecting this resistance of the higher caste Brahmin villages, Kulkarni selected Jitwarpur, a village with a large population of Mahapatra Brahmins, the lowest of the five Brahmin sub-castes, whose women were accomplished artists. In this village of low-status Brahmins he was welcomed. Men were willing to experiment with any avenue of income generation, since their own earnings from death ceremonies[1] had dwindled.

As an outsider Kulkarni was not allowed beyond the verandah. Men or older women took the paper and colours he distributed, and gave them to the younger women artists. He gave his instructions to the men, always conscious of "her" who was listening anxiously, watching from behind the broken walls of the house. The men, he found, were dispirited and escaped the reality of the famine by talking to him about great Mithila kings of the past. Meditation and *bhang*[2] were the focus of their

[1]Amongst the Hindus there are rituals associated with death, and those who perform them for Hindu families are the Brahmins. This has been one of the latters' major source of income.

[2]*Bhang* is made from the dried and crushed leaves of a variety of the hemp plant that grows wild in Mithila (canabis sativa). It is related to, but different from, the species from which hashish is made.

existence.

All paintings were purchased from the artists under the drought-relief programme and fresh paper was provided every time. These paintings were dispatched to the HHEC head office in New Delhi. In the early months, almost 90 per cent of the paintings were destroyed[3] and only a small proportion of quality paintings was retained for the market (as will be explained later), so that only the finest product would be exposed to the public.

Kulkarni remained in Jitwarpur for nine months, and during this time the framework of organized procurement and marketing of paintings evolved. The artist households, who had no prior experience of dealing with accounts and production schedules, started learning these skills from the artist officers of HHEC and the State Cottage Industries Department. Their patience and warmth instilled confidence and enhusiasm in the withdrawn artists, and this was the single-most important factor for raising a cadre of dependable artists in the villages.

In the winter of 1967 the first large-scale exhibition of Mithila paintings was held in New Delhi, organized jointly by HHEC and the Central Cottage Industries Emporium, at the Kunika Chemould Art Gallery. It received enthusiastic press publicity. Soon after, some exhibits were also taken to the Montreal Expo Fair of 1967, and thus the paintings entered the international market.

After the first year or so, the "Madhubani project" ceased to be a relief project, and has continued as a normal development venture in one form or other, though with fluctuating fortunes (periods of high income for women artists, followed by idle weeks).

BASIS FOR THE ART : TRADITION

Mithila, the traditional name for the area embracing Madhubani district, was the seat of Raja Janak, the father of Sita, the

In Mithila *bhang* is taken at festivals by almost all men (especially at the time of Holi, which is usually also the only time women take it). It is also customarily taken at other times by retired men.

[3]This information has been gathered from officials of HHEC in conversation with an ISS research associate in June 1977.

Mithila princess who wed Lord Rama. Their epic saga, the *Ramayana*, which is a holy book for the Hindus, includes a poignant 14-year sojourn into the forests by the youthful prince of Ayodhya and the princess. The *Ramcharitmanas*, written in the vernacular by the poet-saint Tulsidas in 1633, is now a popular version of the epic. The rich Mithila setting is described in several places. At one point, as the poet follows Lord Rama, his brother Lakshman and their guru Vishwamitra on their way to Janakpur for Sita's *swayamvar*,[4] they note that the houses in the town are painted vividly with figures and motifs.[5] This is perhaps the earliest recorded reference to the tradition of painting in Mithila.

In more recent times the area has been dominated by the rulers of Darbhanga, an erstwhile princely estate of north Bihar. Maharaja Darbhanga and the *zamindars* (landlords with local fiefdoms) patronized the arts, and exerted a marked influence on the development of visual arts and music. In the common tradition of the day, the patrons commissioned artists to craft a particular product/item, retained craftsmen at an honorarium to perform at court on demand, or invited them to the court. The *maharaja's* palaces in Darbhanga and his country houses in the Mithila area are adorned with specimens of local art. Frescoes and panels of wall paintings of the Mithila folk-style are visible in almost all buildings of the estate.

Rigid traditions determined the code of conduct of the royality, the nobility, the professionals and the laity—or the *ryot*. Many of these traditions have survived to the present day, and operate in today's Mithila. The functions of individuals with respect to intra-household behaviour, occupation, marriage, social contact, inheritance, education and so on are clearly delineated by convention. Social status is a compound of caste, wealth and ethnic purity, and the extent of the seclusion of

[4]Wedding by choice.

[5]See *Ramcharitmanas*, *Bal-kand*, Chaupai following Doha 212, by Goswami Tulsidas (Publishers: Geeta Press, Gorakhpur). The verse reads (according to the original in the Avadhi dialect): *Mangalmaye mandir sab keren; Chitrit janu Ratinath chittre, Pur nar-nari subhag suchi santa; Dharamsil gyani gunvanta.*

Translation:

Everyone's house has been made auspicious; on them are paintings seemingly painted by Kamadev the Artist himself. Men and women of the town are beautiful, pure, saintly, noble, learned and talented.

women. The last variable, the deliberate limitation of contact of women with the outside world, is emulated first by a household moving up the status ladder. In the higher castes women fulfil their traditional role not by contributing to the family income but by displaying keen adherence to ritual in prayers, ritualistic cooking, supervision of the household, frequent motherhood, child-care and demonstrative care of the sick and elderly.

Family and kinship override caste in the Mithila area. The family is the operational unit for cultivation of land (although ownership may be on an individual basis); the determination and performance of life-cycle rites such as marriage, fertility rites, death ceremonies; decisions relating to education; migration in search of employment, and so on. The head of the household is almost always a male patriarch and with respect to many issues his authority is final.

Households are clustered together, generally on the basis of clans or sub-castes, and a large group comprises a hamlet (*tola*). Typically, a village might have one *tola* of scheduled-caste households, a Brahmin *tola*, Kayastha *tola*, and one or more sub-caste hamlets.

Each caste (and sub-caste, in some cases) in a village lives by an intricate calender of rituals whose observance is compulsory, although the scale might vary according to the resources of the household. For a special occasion such as the wedding, the first arrival of a wife in the husband's home, births, initiation rites of boys and so on, there are long and complicated series of rituals. Most of the rituals are attended by special songs and symbolic drawings, designs and paintings. There are differences of detail between the observance of rituals by different castes, so that each caste or sub-caste has its own sequencing of ceremonies, repertoire of appropriate songs and illustrative drawings. In the Brahmin and Kayastha caste there is evidence of a more intensive use of paintings and drawings in the celebration of an event.

Illustrations which accompany rituals are roughly classifiable as those which are used in the Vedic observance of the ritual, and others which govern the ritual, but are not central to its religious observance. Yet in the perception of the rural Maithil there is almost no significant distinction or ranking of the two sets of illustrations, and each component of a ritual is considered equally crucial in its correct observance.

The interest in this distinction stems from the fact that whereas

the core Vedic rites are performed by male priests and attended by men, the "frill" or marginal rites are generally performed by women. The two series of ceremonies are held simultaneously in different sections of the house, so that one group is often ignorant about the ceremonial details of the ritual performed by the other group. For example, in a Brahmin wedding ceremony, the traditional pounding of unhusked paddy by eight men while reciting a Sanskrit *mantra* to Lord Vishnu, is performed only in the presence of male relatives, while female relatives in another part of the house participate indirectly in the ceremony by singing about it in the colloquial Maithili dialect.

Or again, during the Dussehra celebrations, men of the village sit in the inner sanctum of the temple and chant Sanskrit verses in praise of the goddess Kali, while the women sit behind a screen outside and interpret the ceremony for themselves through Maithili songs![6] Since the knowledge of Sanskrit is almost non-existent among women, their perception of the ceremony deviates significantly from its actual content as performed in the presence of men.

Some rituals are performed exclusively by women. For example, the traditional bathing of the bride-to-be at the village pond and the worship of Gauri, the divine wife (of the ideal celestial couple Gauri-Shankar), is attended only by women.

The exclusion of women from religious ceremonies of the "Great Tradition," and the emergence of women-dominated "Little Tradition" ceremonies has been an important factor in developing women's skills at painting. Unlike Vedic rituals, which are strictly defined, and in which the priest makes the preparations, the women's rituals have a relatively free format. Women themselves collect the items required for the ceremony, prepare the place ritualistically by swobbing, decorating and festooning, and perform the ritual.

As the audience and participants are all female, the rituals reflect the natural female predilections for ornamentation and colour. Vivid paintings are basic to the decoration of the place prepared for the ritual, and intricate traditions have evolved over time with respect to the symbolic content of the paintings and drawings. The most common themes of women's paintings in ritual decorations are fertility and invocation of blessings for

[6]See also Naomi Owens: "Wedding Songs of the Brahmin Painters of Mithila," 1977 (unpublished research report).

conjugal happiness as portrayed in the exploits of Krishna with Radha and the *gopis*, the divine pair Shiva and Gauri, Ganapati, the epic of Rama and Sita, the ten *avatars*, the sun and the moon.

A theme which is a favourite with Mithila women, and constantly occurs in their commercial paintings, is the *kohbar* chart with which the walls of the nuptial chamber are decorated. Steeped in symbolism and innuendo, symbols in *alankar*[7] and of fertility crowd the walls of the secluded inner room where the groom will first meet his bride. A frame of lotuses encloses a bamboo forest in which the newly-wedded couple are placed. Depicting their pictorial union are symbols such as the bee and the flower, which might recur in the corners of the chart embroidering the frame.

The *purain* (lotus-pond) is juxtaposed with the bamboo forest, drawing female-male symbols from flora. Fish motifs remind the couple of the channels of the visual transmission of energy, the tortoise flops indecorously in the paintings as a powerful symbole of the psychic transmission of energy. The sun, the moon and ten *avatars* witness the union, and other deities are represented by their symbols, such as the snake and the plough. Even as these auspicious symbols of union are drawn, the tenuousness of life is represented by the lotus frame, which suggests that the painting is submerged in water, for in the end "all is water." The vivid *kohbar* chart transforms the mud walls into grand tapestries.

There are two traditions in the ritual painting of Mithila—wall paintings and floor designs. Both coexist, and often reinforce each other's thematic content. Wall paintings are representative and narrative, and might include a few highly stylized symbolic features. The main function of wall paintings is to paint god-witnesses to the ceremony so that their blessings are secured for the auspicious ceremony. These paintings are made both on the outside and in the inside of houses.

Floor designs or *aripana* are energy-filled geometrical diagrams of patterns which serve as altars on the floor for the performance of a ritual. They include astrological charts based on the lunar cycle. *Aripana* are ritualistically determined, and represent the convergence of Hindu ritual and art. These diagrams are drawn on the floors of houses (both inside and in courtyards), at ponds, under sacred trees, or other pre-determined auspicious locations.

[7]Decoration.

Floor paintings are made many times a year in accordance with the festival cycle, but wall paintings are executed more occasionally at special ceremonies. In almost all 90 per cent of these rituals the artist is a woman—both for wall paintings and floor designs.

Another category of diagrammatical motifs is made in the Mithila area, not by women but by Brahmin priests. These are diagrams (*yantras*) based in *tantra*, and representative of *shakti*. There is a wide variation of Tantric subjects, each with an aura of potent properties. *Yantra* or mystical diagrams supposedly possess occult powers, and are considered to be instruments of metaphysical influence.

FROM TRADITION TO COMMERCE

Mithila folk-paintings have the distinction of being one of the rare, low-cost, indigenous art products to gain international recognition in a short span of two to three years, and to emerge as a significant source of income-generation. These paintings invaded the world art scene almost overnight, as a result of the intensive development programme mounted jointly by two all-Indian organizations in cooperation with the Bihar state promotional agencies. The central organizations were the Handloom and Handicraft Export Corporation (HHEC) and the All India Handicrafts Board (AIHB). The year was 1966.

Prior to this, art connoisseurs had "discovered" the dramatic wall paintings of the Mithila villages, including the English historian and sociologist, W.G. Archer, who toured the villages in the early decades of the present century. Later in the 1930s Upendra Maharathi, then a book illustrator of Gandhian persuasion, who was interested in the development of cottage industries, held a series of exhibitions which made use of paper reproductions of motifs from wall paintings. When he joined the Bihar Cottage Industries in the 1940s he was more directly involved in developing the commercial possibilities of this art. During 1952-53 he began distributing hand-made paper to villagers for the production of paintings, and held an exhibition of some of the resulting works at the Folk Arts Museum in Patna in 1955. Pupul Jayakar of the Handloom and Handicraft. Export Corporation attended

that exhibition and later toured villages with Maharathi to see wall and floor paintings for herself. She says of this visit:

> I was dismayed to find that the glory to which Archer referred had seemingly vanished. The bleak dust of poverty had sapped the will and the surplus energy needed to ornament the home. The walls were blank or oleographs and calenders hung in the *gossainghars*.[8] There were only traces of old paintings here and there—fragments that bore testimony to the existence of powerful streams of inherited knowledge of colour, form and inconography.[9]

As referred to earlier, famine relief brought the pull of markets into this scenario.

Today, wall paintings and *aripana* have been commercially developed and are internationally famous as "Madhubani paintings." *Yantras* and Tantric diagrams are the least commercialized of Mithila paintings, although there is striking visual similarity between floor designs and *aripana* from thematic rigidity, and there are no sacrosanct rules which govern the content of paintings made for urban consumers. There is a strong tendency to make the paintings more illustrative and picturesque. For example, it is now unusual to find blank spaces in commercial Mithila paintings in response to market feedback about the buyer's disappointment at a sparsely illustrated folk-painting, although in the pure artistic tradition of the region, blanks are "pools" of tranquillity.

Before the painting boom, women used vegetable dyes or colours prepared from local materials. Black was obtained from burnt *jowar* or *kajal*, (colirium), yellow from turmeric or from *chuna* (lime) flower, red from the *kusum* flower or the red earth, green from the chlorophyll-rich foliage, white from rice flour. The colours were first pounded into powder and then dissolved in goats' milk to prepare a paste. For floor drawings the rice flour was mixed with water for the motif, and dots of vermillion were added later.

Colours from the local bazars are now frequently used, especially for commercial painting. Women purchase the cheapest chemical colours (of the group of basic dyes) and dissolve them

[8]Prayer rooms.

[9]Pupul Jayakar: *The Eastern Drum: an Introduction to the Rural Arts of India.*

in gum paste. Modern colours are available in a much wider range of hues than self-prepared colours, and are more vivid. Commercial Mithila paintings fully reflect the brightness of the modern powders, but run the risk of fading within a period of 2-3 years, since the cheap colours are vulnerable to atmospheric corrosion. Steps are now being taken, however, to reintroduce indigenous, but non-fading colours. (By the time this is read the Master Craftsmen's Association of Mithila should be in a position to guarantee that the colours it uses are fast.)

A degree of specialization among women artists of different caste groups is evident, especially with respect to commercialized paintings. In the paintings of Brahmin women there is a prominence of vibrant colour—scarlets, yellow, tangrine. "The theme is narrative, and colours convey the energy and passion of the artist's imagination. Colours create the moods, establish the pulse and tempo, divide the space and provide the background."[10] On the other hand, Kayastha women artists are masters of the line contour—confident and bold lines convey artistic inspiration. Taut strokes create an *aripana* design or a narrative illustration with precision and fineness of detail. The outlines are etched in black and occasionally filled with muted ochres and earth colours. Harijan women formerly specialized in abstract illustrative motifs, which drew their content from the routine of daily life, and not from any religious or mythological tradition. In the last year Harijan leaders have focussed attention on the epic of Lord Sailesh, who is worshipped in their temples, and his life has become a dominant subject of Harijan painting.

Commercial Mithila paintings belong to the category of the so-called "domestic arts," or those aesthetic products which are crafted by individuals from local raw-materials for use in their cultural-religious traditions. They are not considered as "art." Other items of domestic art produced in the Mithila area are objects made from *sikki*-grass, day, cotton rags, papier mache, lac, embroidery and so on. Some of these items have been commercialized but success has been limited in comparison to the phenomenal popularity enjoyed by folk-paintings.

[10]Pupul Jayakar: *op cit.*

THE INTERVENTION OF DEVELOPMENT

MARKETING—THE CENTRAL PIVOT

The commercial success of Mithila paintings has hinged on the sophisticated marketing strategy and techniques adopted by HHEC and the other developmental agencies. From the earliest stages the paintings were introduced as a component of the artistic tradition of India, and an expression of the country's cultural heritage. Professional expertise was used in publicizing the "new" find, in enforcing strict quality control, and in establishing a steady supply line—all of which contributed in making Mithila paintings popular, both abroad and at home.

Quality control: To begin with, the organizers ensured that only the finest paintings were displayed so that the newly-aroused interest of buyers was sustained. The rejects were often burnt at the HHEC offices in New Delhi. This was a precaution against the emergence of a parallel supply line of shoddy paintings in the domestic market. The paintings were destroyed discreetly, so that the artists would not learn of it.

Display in art forums: The world's prestigious art-display forums were selected for introducing Mithila paintings, despite their "folk" genre. The paintings were displayed at the Museum of Fine Art in Paris, in art exhibitions in New York, and at Indian "cultural" exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro and Osaka (Expo 1970). Later, they were displayed in prominent department stores in USA (Bloomingdales, New York), Switzerland (Globe, Munich) and so on. Characteristic of the restrained marketing strategy, the paintings were displayed as art, but not offered for sale.

Such aesthetic displays stimulated interest in the art world, and several art journals and other popular magazines with wide circulation carried features on Mithila paintings. These helped to catapult the paintings into the critical eye of connoisseurs and wholesale art buyers.

Art buyers: On the strength of its trade network in Europe and USA, HHEC established contact with museums, art collecters and department stores. The advance publicity had already aroused interest and acceptance of the paintings. Wholesale buyers in Europe, USA, South America and Africa booked orders, and the export of paintings was under way.

HHEC retail shops: HHEC also used its own retail shops in New York, Paris, Nairobi and Tokyo for displaying the paintings.

The bulk of the exports went to France, UK and Germany, where the GSP system prevails for Indian imports. No duty was levied on Indian imports. In the US, where too a significant proportion of the exports were routed, hand-made paintings attracted a duty of 10 per cent.

Shipment: For the initial export shipments Air India provided concessional haulage rates. Paintings enjoyed an advantage over other bulkier crafts in transportation, since they could be neatly rolled and efficiently packaged in insulated plywood boxes. This packaging aspect has contributed significantly to establishing the product in foreign markets.

Publicity: Imaginative brochures and publicity literature on Mithila paintings was prepared in the New Delhi office and circulated to HHEC buyers abroad. In the winter of 1974, HHEC greeted 200 of its buyers with specially-made Mithila paintings, packed in cylinders, like scrolls. Each packet contained an explanatory card on the painting. The pay-off on this was high, and numerous buyers who had missed the trade publicity, picked up the product. After 1971, HHEC greeting cards bore miniature Mithila cut-outs as a routine. In the years 1971-73 the cards were 6″ by 6″ in size, re-usable as small Mithila panels.

Publicity costs: According to estimates of the HHEC publicity department, the total outlay on promotion of Mithila paintings in the period 1973-74 in the form of greeting cards, brochures, gifts of painting, distribution of notebooks and so on was Rs 18,000. In the next four years, between 1975 and 1976, the expenditure on promotion was Rs 7,000. These estimates do not include the out-lay on exhibitions and displays abroad.

Pricing: On the average HHEC exported each painting at 4 dollars, which was double the purchase price of Rs 12-16 in the village. The average retail price abroad was approximately 16 dollars. A four-way pricing system was evolved by some of the early organizers, inculding Maharathi, and this endures to the present day. Paintings are graded as A, B, C, or D, depending on a combination of attributes, that is originality of design, decorative value, colour rhythm and the artist's reputation. Grades are assigned at the time of purchase by the assistant director of the Marketing and Service Extension Centre (MSEC) at Madhubani, or other persons such as Maharathi, who are recognized by the artists as knowledgeable and non-partisan assessors. Prices of different grades of paintings are shown in the following page:

Grade		1977 *Sale price in Jitwarpur (Rs)*
Colour Paintings		
(22" by 30")	A	12
	B	8
	C	6
	D	4
Line Drawings		*Sale price in Ranti (Rs)*
	A	35
	B	20

The institution of the grading system facilitated purchases by bulk buyers, but it also led to under-grading by unscrupulous middlemen. Since grading is based on qualitative assessment, it became a method of exploitation of artisans, who often resorted to panic sales when their paintings were adjudged sub-standard by the middlemen.

National awards: The Government of India gave national prominence to Mithila paintings by awarding the prestigious National Award for Craftsmen[11] to Jagdamba Devi in 1970. Elevation to the status of a nationally feted craft reinforced interest both within the country and abroad for Mithila paintings. In the following years other Mithila painters have won the award, the last to have done so being Ganga Devi from Rasidpur village, in 1976.

The steady build-up of Mithila paintings by HHEC proved spectacularly successful. During the period 1968-74, exports though HHEC amounted to approximately Rs 10 lakhs.[12]

On-site commissions : In addition to these paintings, the artists also received commissions for on-site mural paintings in hotels, airports and railway stations in several Indian cities. Government-

[11]The award was instituted in 1965 by the All India Handicrafts Board to honour excellence in craftsmanship. It carries an honorarium of Rs 2,500.

[12]There are no authentic records of the actual production or export of Mithila paintings. The AIHB furnishes statistics of handicraft exports to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), which in turn records the exports of Mithila paintings under a motely group (code 896.100 of the Revised India Trade Classification), which includes "all paintings, drawings etc. executed by hand." This category includes several genres of hand-paintings such as the Nathdwara paintings of Rajasthan, the Pichwai of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh and the Mithila paintings themselves. With respect to domestic sales, the AIHB has not maintained a record of sales even through official agencies; private sales have, naturally, not been documented.

owned hotels of the Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), such as the Akbar in New Delhi and the Pataliputra in Patna, have made intensive use of Mithila motifs and paintings in their interior decor. Airports and railway stations in several northern cities also have Mithila murals. Well-known designers and decorators of HHEC collaborated with ITDC and played a crucial role in introducing Mithila into the interiors of important public buildings in numerous cities.

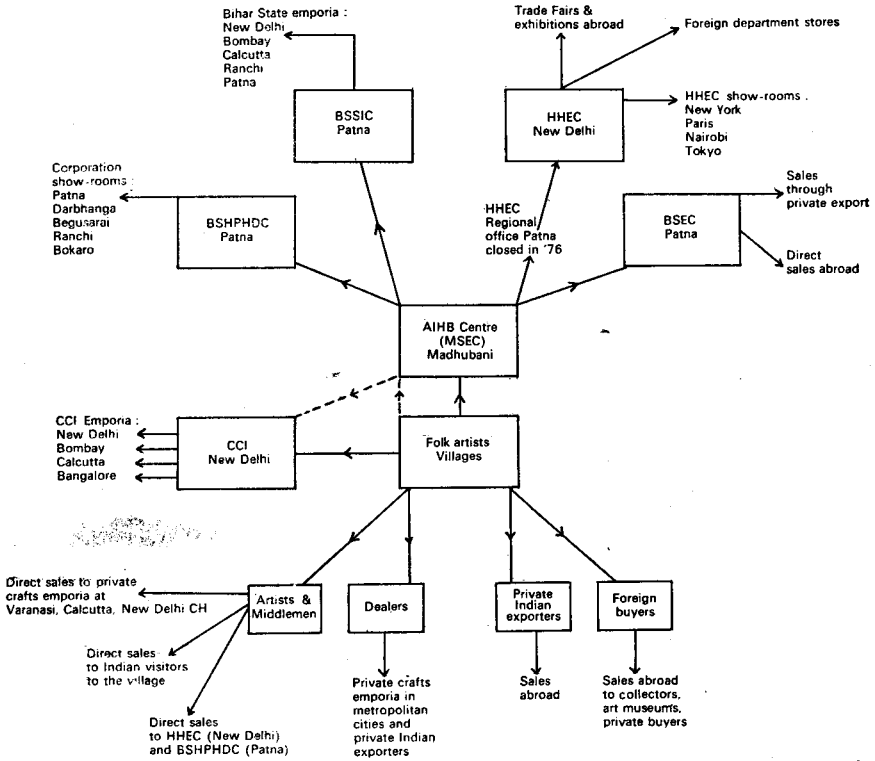
Domestic marketing: Attempts at marketing the paintings in India were less systematic, less institutionalized than export sales. In the days when Kulkarni was collecting the paintings in the Madhubani villages, a proportion of the collection was routed to the government-owned Super Bazar in New Delhi for sale (the practice was discontinued later, on account of poor demand in the general store). Some were also sent to the Central Cottage Industries Emporium (CCIE) for retail in its emporia at Delhi, Calcutta and Bombay. These shops still remain important retailers of the paintings.

Two state-level organizations are also actively involved in the marketing of Mithila paintings in the domestic market. These are the Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom and Handicraft Development Coporation (BSHPHDC) and the Bihar State Small Industries Corporation (BSSIC). These agencies retail the paintings through a network of show-rooms and emporia in Bihar and other cities of the country. BSHPHDC emporia are located in the towns of Patna, Darbhanga, Begusarai, Ranchi and Bokaro in Bihar. The BSSIC retails paintings at the Bihar state emporia in New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Ranchi and Patna. Occasionally, the BSHPHDC makes purchases on behalf of other official agencies such as the BSSIC and CCIE. In this case BSHPHDC levies a 10 per cent service charge on the organization for which it buys the paintings. Parity is maintained in the counter prices of painting in all state emporia, i.e., 20 per cent above the purchase price in the village. (See flow-chart of the marketing organizations dealing with Mithila paintings in the country, both for indigenous sales and export, page 178.)

WIDENING THE BASE

As the product became internationally known and also appreciated in the domestic market, HHEC relaxed its policy of exclusive and restricted supply of Mithila paintings. There was a trend towards introducing products that combined utility with decora-

Table 1: Flow-chart of marketing channels of Mithila paintings



BSHPHDC : Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom, and Handicraft Development Corporation, Patna

BSSIC : Bihar State Small Industries Corporation, Patna

BSEC : Bihar State Export Corporation, Patna

CCI : Central Cottage Industries; emporia at New Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta

HHEC : Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation, New Delhi

MSEC : Marketing and Service Extension Centre, Madhubani

tive valve. Thus there was a proliferation of the Mithila motif on notebooks, diaries, writing-pads, desk calenders, greeting cards, scarves and table-mats. Designers at HHEC (Handloom and Handicraft Export Corporation) introduced new uses for the folk motifs, and also experimented with variations in the size of the paintings.

The innovations in product and design had mixed repercussions on the market. On the one hand the diversification widened the market, but at the same time the profusion of Mithila stuff eroded its novelty. Foreign markets became saturated and there was a decline in interest in Mithila paintings.

The taut and tightly-reined marketing strategy of HHEC seemed to have been ideally suited for the commercialization of the folk-art. With a dilution of the exclusive marketing strategy, the product appeared to lose grip over the market. Thus there is the paradox of a decline in demand even when the artist's expertise—in terms of colour, design and finish—has improved considerably. This contradiction, however, underscores the importance of marketing technique in the commercial success of Mithila paintings.

The Mithila experience suggests that the demand for an art product or craft item is a result of its quality, of the quality of product promotion, and the maintenance of a dependable supply line.

PRIVATE TRADE

It is estimated that about 60 per cent of the total sales of Mithila paintings are conducted through private channels. The impetus provided by the marketing success of HHEC and the institutional support extended by AIHB, attracted private entrepreneurs of many interests: exporters of handicrafts, dealers in handicrafts for domestic sales, representatives of foreign wholesale/retail organizations, foreign buyers for art museums, private foreign traders and tourists. Within a short period the artists developed independent links with private traders, and either sold paintings in the village, or took their work to dealers in various cities.

Significantly, the Marketing and Service Extenstion Centre and representatives of HHEC and other official organizations encouraged the entry of private traders in the marketing of Mithila paintings. Private buyers brought with them the diverse contacts of their own markets, and offered a steady demand

which would supplement official attempts at probing new markets.

With the advent of private trade, commission agents emerged. These agents, some of whom belonged to the villages, exploited the artists by under-payment or non-payment for paintings. Typically, that middleman would collect the work of many artists and then leave for Varanasi, New Delhi or other north Indian cities to supply them to private dealers. On his return to the village he would report "loss" of some paintings or quote fictitious selling prices to the artists. These middlemen continue to operate in the villages and control a significant proportion of private trade. Established artists too fall prey to the agents, who brow-beat the artists into lowering prices on grounds of quality, which is difficult to establish.

Sales depend entirely on the strength of the contacts with the middlemen. Since paintings, unlike an item like *khadi*, can only be assessed subjectively, earnings are not ensured by the mere act of production. Complex relationships have to be cultivated to win a share of the private trade in paintings. Consequently, the artist households set a high value by maintaining their association with official buyers. Artists continue to sell through middlemen because they provide a marketing outlet which supplements sales to official agencies. For the lower-order artists who have not succeeded in selling regularly to official agencies, the middlemen represent the sole marketing outlet.

Private traders, both foreign and Indian, usually sell at phenomenal mark-ups to the dealer/wholesaler/retailer, whatever their initial purchase price in the village. It is learnt, for instance, that a painting which was bought for Rs 40 in Jitwarpur was sold for 3000 francs in Paris. The Gift Shop at the University of Pennsylvania sells Mithila paintings for 150 dollars. Some London galleries price the paintings at 200 pounds.[13] An English trader was able to commute every month between Europe and Madhubani for a year on the profits be earned from his trade in the paintings.

Local traders purchase the paintings at very low rates, sometimes less than Rs 3 per piece, and sell them for at least Rs 9 to the dealer. The dealer's/wholesaler's mark-up ranges from 25

[13]National Programme of Talks (All India Radio), interview with Dr Raymond L. Owens, social anthropologist, by the author, 23 December 1977.

per cent to 50 per cent.[14]

Official agencies have not intervened to correct these rampant trends in the private trade network due to three reasons; firstly, the operations of the middlemen are subtle and difficult to nail down; secondly, there is acceptance of the middlemen in the community of artists due to their ethnic affinity or kinship with the artists; and finally, in the present conditions of declining demand the middlemen continue to provide a trickle of orders all round the year, and a living wage to some artists.

Since 1977 a novel off-shoot of private trade has emerged. Some leading artists, prominent among them being Sita Devi (one of the National Award winers), have taken up semi-permanent residence in metropolitan areas such as New Delhi. The women are accompanied by their husbands or grown-up sons. The family rents or shares a room, often with a village contact who holds a salaried job in the city, and they obtain commissions from private and official organizations for paintings or for decorating buildings by mural painting. This is an interesting case of art reaching out for the market. But it carries within it the danger of a sterile compromise with the market, for uprooted from the rhythm of rural life which generates this art, the quality of work might become synthetic. This urban-based "rural art" would have to market at the doorstep, and therefore could exert a crucial influence on market assessment of Mithila paintings and the demand for them.

THE SUPPLY LINE

In the Mithila villages the household is the unit of production. Each artist household is a discrete entrepreneurial unit and is recognized as such by marketing agencies, private buyers, credit institutions, training schemes and so on.

For the artist households the most prominent official organization is the MSEC. In 1972 the All India Handicrafts Board set

[14]ISS field survey. For artists' selling price the source is conversations of ISS research associate with Sita Devi and Jamuna Devi (New Delhi, February 1978), for wholesaler'/dealer's mark-up the source is Upendra Maharathi (Patna, June 1977).

up a Marketing and Service Extension Centre (MSEC) in Madhubani town with the objective of coordinating the facilities extended to the artist by agencies of the central and Bihar governments. Their services include marketing, credit, product design and innovation, durability, supply of raw materials, quality control and so on. Constitutionally the MSEC is committed to "generating employment opportunities and increasing present earnings of poor artisans by improving marketability and promoting markets for their goods." The MSEC is headed by an assistant director, and has a technical staff of three, including a field officer, a technical assistant (marketing) and a designer. The staff are in daily contact with the centre for information about the purchase programme of buying agencies. The MSEC serves as the informal head quarters for marketing, and is the venue of bulk purchases by official purchasing agencies. There are four major official agencies which buy paintings through the MSEC: the HHEC (for export sales), the Central Cottage Industries (for retail sales through its emporia), and two Bihar state organizations—the Bihar State Export Corporation (BSEC), and the Bihar State Handloom, Powerloom and Handicraft Development Corporation (BSHPHDC). All three agencies are, directly or indirectly, linked to the All India Handicrafts Board which was set up by the Government of India in 1953 to provide development assistance and support to traditional handicraft industries throughout the country. In 1974 the HHEC opened a regional purchase office in Patna for the procurement of Mithila paintings and *sikki*-ware. Maharathi, who had retired from state service, was appointed the regional representative. However, the office was closed after two years in 1976 as international demand for the paintings shrank, and the administrative expense of a purchase office could not be justified.

Each of these agencies sends a purchasing committee, comprising of departmental buyers and experts, to Madhubani periodically (although the frequency of such purchases has declined sharply in 1977 and 1978), following an advance notice to MSEC about the magnitude of the target and the quality of purchases. The MSEC informs the artists in Jitwarpur, Ranti and adjoining villages of details regarding the orders and the impending visit by purchase committees. The announcement is not formal and the community learns of the visit. The venue for the buyers' meet is the MSEC building and interested artists (both men and women) take their paintings there. Cash payment is made on the spot to the artists by the representatives of the purchasing agencies. Paintings worth Rs 10,000 were commonly purchased at these meets until 1974; since then the purchases have been much smaller.

For smaller requirements the purchasing agencies send an expert to the villages. In this case purchases are made directly from the artists in their homes. The buyer is usually accompanied by a staff member of the MSEC. News of the arrival of a buyer in the village is transmitted quickly, and within minutes several artists roll out samples of their paintings for the visitor. In this manner every artist has access to the buyer, although only the talented artists might be able to sell regularly.

In the artists' perception the MSEC is a symbol of official authority, with power over the magnitude of purchases, supply of credit, selection of artists for awards, recommendation for out-of-town assignments and so on. They tend to regard the centre as a non-partisan institution which is genuinely interested in promoting employment of craftsmen. A professional tool-room relationship has emerged between the centre and the artists. Both as a cause and as a result, the centre does not involve itself with welfare or social consciousness-raising programmes, and neither do the artists look up to the centre as a potential change agent in their social lives.

In the post-'66 years there have been several scholars who have visited the Mithila villages, withr esearch interests ranging from the purely artistic to a study of the impact of the "Mithila boom" on sociological behaviour. Three or four scholars are prominent in the group—Erika Moser, social anthropologist from West Germany who lived in Jitwarpur village for four months during 1973-74; Vyes Vequaud, from France, who has stayed in the villages to make films on Mithila art; Dr Raymond Owens, social anthropologist from USA, who resided in Jitwarpur for a 12-month period (December 1976 to November 1977; and Gauri Mishra, Maithili scholar and university teacher, and resident of the nearby town of Darbhanga. Other young scholars, most of them from universities in Bihar, have also done research work in the Mithila area.

Some of these scholars have felt drawn to the people of these villages, and also disturbed by the negative by-products of the commercialization of this art, which have made the community of artists insecure and vulnerable to external market-induced fluctuations in demand. Two of them, Moser and Owens, have evolv-

ed programmes for the future development of the people, the area and the art, in association with Indian counterparts.

The objective of the scholar-activists is to formulate an overall programme of rural development for the villages, and simultaneously to preserve the tradition of art and culture, centred around the concept of maximization of benefit to the artists. They foresee a long-term involvement in the villages, including prolonged physical presence, to develop Jitwarpur as a kind of model village which offers its people a stable livelihood with dignity, and its women a change to demonstrate their art to an appreciative world-wide audience.

Their programmes consist of two broad components: *income-enhancement* in agriculture and the creation of non-agricultural sources of employment, and *promotion of the art tradition*, including protection of the artists' interests.

Some segments of the economic programme have been activated in the last three to four years. For instance, guidance from the team, and through them, the intervention of the sub-divisional agricultural officer, has encouraged three farmers to adopt the green revolution technology on their foodgrains crops. This had a demonstrative effect when in a year of drought, these crops flourished while others failed. Another five farmers have taken to banana cultivation, and are expecting to earn Rs 10-50,000 per acre, which is nearly 30 times their earnings from traditional subsistence farming. Other farmers from neighbouring villages have also made enquiries about banana cultivation.

Consolidation of land holdings is also being attempted by the team. Till recently, one acre was commonly fragmented into seven or eight units, each belonging to a different owner. This prevents efficient land utilization. The team proposes to purchase half-a-dozen two- and three-acre plots in the village, and then to use these holdings as trading stock for their consolidation plan.

With respect to creating additional employment opportunities, the team has already activated a forgotten state scheme for providing buffaloes to landless households. It also proposes to start a dairy scheme, which might be linked to Operation Flood (see Chapter 2) at a later stage. A fine ceramics industry with hand-painted Mithila designs and a carpet-weaving centre with Mithila motifs is proposed for the area. A furniture-making unit, using indigenous materials, has also been planned for the area. A mango-processing plant, which will utilise the major agricultural resource of the area, is also being considered.

Jitwarpur is seen by the scholars as a nodal point for the development of rural art and craft in the region. Built on a foundation of agrarian reforms and increased opportunities for wage and self-employment, the artistic role envisaged by Jitwarpur is a transmission of ideas and services to other villages in the area.

For the art tradition of Mithila, the team has worked out a detailed reinforcement strategy which would, essentially, aid in the enrichening of the environment in which the artists live, through the construction of schools, libraries and museums (so as to bring to the artists "expressions of beauty as great as they give to others"). Secondly, the strategy would also help in the organization of artists into a fraternity which eliminates exploitation and revitalizes the art form. At the core of this programme is the conviction that artist households need their own institution, and that the cultural heritage of the area should have its own central point around which to enrich itself, apart from "delivering" products to the outside world.

The organization of artists has been conceived as an association of the best artists. Membership of this organization is open to women artists who have won national awards or their equivalent for their skill in Mithila paintings. The researchers' objective in forming such an elitist organization is to develop a steady, invulnerable market for top-quality paintings and to return a maximum proportion of the earnings to the artists. Second-grade artists are not expected to receive any direct benefits from the organization, although indirectly, it is claimed they stand to gain from the pricing structure to be adopted by the organization. The work of the master-craftswomen is expected to be retailed at rates considerably higher than the rates at which such paintings have been sold to date, and this might exert an upward pull on the general price-level of paintings made in the villages. Also, a large proportion of the turnover of the organization (approximately 40 per cent) has been earmarked for community-development projects, such as a museum-cum-hostel building and workshed, which can be used during the rains, when most mud dwellings leak. These facilities would be available for use by all artists.

A beginning has been made in organizing artists by the formation of the Master Craftswomen's Association of Mithila (MCAM), which was set up in October 1977. The MCAM is expected to generate orders through exhibitions (in the country and abroad), and through the cultivation of personal contacts with art buyers and art galleries abroad. The MCAM brochure explains the func-

tioning of the organization representationally through three deities—Ardhanarishwar for the equal importance of men and women in life, Lakshmi for wealth, and Saraswati for learning, art and music.

THE IMPACT

Problems of measurement and classification make it difficult to assess the impact of commercialization of paintings in Mithila. There are unquantifiable trade-offs between well-being and income, success and competition, renown and frustration, all of which obscure the answer to the question: has commercialization benefited the women artists and their community?

IMPACT ON WOMEN ARTISTS

The ability to earn an income within the given social framework has clearly enhanced women's status. Women reported during the survey[15] that the income from painting had won them recognition in the family and community, beyond their ritual status as wife, daughter, grandmother and so on. They have been transformed from the "dependent partner" into the vital contributor to family income. This fact alone has endowed the women with a certain distinction and esteem.

There is a decline in the incidence of wife-beating, which is a manifestation of the "coming out" of repressed women in Mithila. As in other parts of the country, violence on the wife is often sparked off by the husband's unreasoned heeding of complaints against her by his mother and others in the family. In Mithila, the men seem to have paused to consider... especially in the light of the women's unexpected economic significance. In some households joint wife-husband artist teams have formed, one sketching, the other colouring.

Ganga Devi's story provides a poignant illustration of the impact of commercialization on Mithila paintings. Rejected because she was barren, Ganga Devi chafed under a life of physical want and emotional unhappiness in her husband's home in Rasidpur village. After seven years of marriage his sister-

[15]ISS field survey.

in-law, wife of her husband's brother, encouraged him to remarry. When the second wife came to the house, Ganga Devi left for her natal village, Ranti.

Here she took an unusual step for a married woman—she sought *diksha* (initiation vows) and became a *sadhu* of the Vaishnav sect of Hindus. She subsisted on the scant earnings from painting, which she was just beginning to learn from Mahasundari Devi, a well-known Kayastha painter of Ranti. Gradually, Ganga Devi's paintings took on an ethereal radiance. The discovery of Ganga Devi the artist was heralded as a major event by officials of the HHEC and state agencies. Since then her paintings have won her many awards and brought wealth. "Five years ago I didn't have a wrap for the winter, and I used a straw mat for covering myself. Today I have six shawls."

The Madhubani MSEC made her in charge of a training school for artists in Rasidpur, her husband's village. She returned to the village covered in glory, wealth, and with a name as a saint-artist. Her husband urged her to stay in his house, where she stays now as a *sadhu*. She readily agreed to the enrolment of her sister-in law as a trainee, and has helped the woman at a critical period in her life. In the village Ganga Devi's story is cited as an instance of divine reward for a pious life through the bounty of painting.

Another prize-winning artist, Sita Devi, remembers that as a child, she had a passion for painting. She drew on the ground, on her slate, on her arm, on whatever was handy, and was as often punished by her parents for wasting time, even as she was praised by her teachers. After coming to Jitwarpur she made beautiful wall paintings as favours for her friends, achieving a certain renown in the villages that compensated somewhat for her poverty. In 1945 she began to earn small sums by weaving elaborate boxes made from *sikki*-grass in the shapes of elephants, turtles and birds. (She never earned more than Rs 125 per month for her *sikki*-work.) By this means and with the help of her father she managed to barely pull on, but it was a very hard life. Four of her children died in infancy and early childhood. They might have been saved had she been able to afford adequate medical care. Only three sons lived to adulthood. Then in 1966, Bhaskar Kulkarni came to Jitwarpur. He paid well for her paintings (she chould earn as much in a month as she earned in a year making *sikki* baskets), and he insisted that each painting

be identified with the name and address of the artist.

In 1966 an exhibition was held in Delhi, where paintings by Sita Devi and a number of other Mithila painters were shown. Sita Devi and her son have received numerous commissions in Delhi, in addition to that of painting the panel in the VIP room at Delhi Airport.

When Sita Devi first began to go out of Jitwarpur to do commission work in Patna, Ahmedabad and Bombay, she was criticised for doing such an "unfeminine" thing. Now all who get such offers go. Though none of Sita Devi's four daughters lived long enough to learn painting from her, she has seven disciples in Jitwarpur; and almost all painters there now flatter her with immitation. She has earned more than one hundred and fifty thousand rupees from her paintings since 1966, and raised her family from one of the poorest to one of the richest in her village.

In August 1976 she and Surya Dev (her son), along with several other Indian folk-artists, represented India at the American Bicentennial Folk Life Festival in Washington D.C. They later spent a week in New York and nearly a month in East Berlin. When Sita Devi was recently asked about her life, she told me how hard the early days had been, how she had often wept, especially when her first daughter died of cholera at the age of five. When I asked her how she felt now, she said: "I am fearless; I can do anything."

One of the most interesting paintings produced by Sita Devi and one which carries important meaning, not only for the women painters of Mithila but for women everywhere, is the *Ardhanarishwaram*. (This symbol, in a version painted by Ganga Devi, has recently become the trademark of Master Craftsmen's Association of Mithila.) It illustrates, particularly, the important inter-relationship between the theology, folk-tales, folk-music and folk-painting of Mithila. Ardhanarishwaram (literally: the god who is half-female), usually represents half Shiva and half Parvati.

In the Maithili-speaking region of northern Bihar and southern Nepal there is a prevailing theological tilt towards women. Goddesses are considered to be the source of power (*shakti*) and the active element of all creation. Male deities, on the other hand, have an essentially passive role, albeit an important one. Without stabilization by Shiva, Parvati would always be fickle and changing, but without the power deriving from Parvati, Shiva would be nothing. Thus, Shiva and Parvati are always worshipped together.

MAHASUNDARI DEVI, ARTIST

Mahasundari Devi, another well-known artist, is a Kayastha, from the caste which has traditionally served as scribes and accountants, and therefore has behind her a different cultural tradition than that of the Mahapatra Brahmins. Kayasthas, for instance, marry late; first marriages are arranged as late as, or later than, the second marriages of the Mahapatras.[16] In Jitwarpur at present there are many Kayastha girls, seventeen and eighteen years old, who have still not had their first marriage, and no one is worried. Mahasundari Devi, however, was married first at thirteen and then at sixteen.

The Kayasthas, compared to other caste groups in the region, have very high standards of literacy. Eighty per cent of the Kayastha women in Jitwarpur are literate, and there are several matriculates and one graduate. Almost all graduates and post-graduates in Jitwarpur are Kayastha men. Other castes recognize the Kayasthas' educational achievements, but poke fun at their supposed lack of physical strength. For example, there is a folk-tale about five Kayasthas who were unable to pull up a radish from the garden.

Although the Kayasthas have traditionally made coloured wall paintings and rice-flour floor paintings that are fairly similar to those of the Brahmins, they also have a special cultural tradition that has influenced their paintings; they make fine pen drawings, which are presented to the bride's family by the groom's family at the time of the first marriage.

Mahasundari Devi was born in 1932 in the interior, Kayastha-dominated village of Chatara, about 20 miles north of Madhubani town. (Chatara was also the natal village of Ganga Devi.) After she married she moved to her husband's village at Ranti, about one kilometre east of Madhubani town. She had two daughters over the next four years. Then her husband became the headmaster of a high school where he worked for ten years. During that period three sons were born. Then her husband became seriously ill with chronic asthma, and perhaps tuberculosis. After prolonged treatment he recovered, but in 1966

[16]The "first" and "second" marriage is to the same person. The girl is married when a child, but begins to live in her husband's home as his wife when she grows up. This is marked by the second marriage.

once again suffered a relapse. It was in this wretched state of affairs that Kulkarni found her in 1966, and pressed her to paint. Six days later, when she had completed two paintings, he paid her ten rupees each, the most important money she had received.

After three months he began paying her fifteen rupees per picture, and after ten months it went up to Rs 25. In the first year she earned about Rs 1,500. She also received her first award: a copper plate, a shawl and Rs 20. Her prizes and earnings have increased since that time; in 1973 she received the Bihar Rajya Ke Rajkiya Pratham Puraskar, which included a cash award of Rs 2,500.

Her income hovered between Rs 1,500 and Rs 2,000 per year until about 1972, just barely enough to support her now large number of dependents. During the period 1972-75 her income rose to about Rs 4-5,000 per annum. She received a four-month commission in November 1975 to do paintings for the new Pataliputra hotel in Patna, in which effort she was assisted by her three sons and earned a total of Rs 12,000. In 1975 she also made the largest painting of her life (five feet high and sixty-eight feet long) for Parliament House in Delhi, for which she received Rs 3,000 as well as the travelling and other expenses of four persons in Delhi while she was making it.

During the ten years she has worked as a painter she has been the sole support of her family (including the family of her daughter), as her husband has never recovered his health. Today she has managed to begin construction of a house for her family, at the cost of Rs 11,000, and has also educated her three sons.

As is to be expected, in the artist households the supplementary income has also caused an improved standard of food consumption.[17] The frequency of meals and the quantities eaten have both increased, although there is no impact on the nutritional value of food since the dietary composition remains unchanged.

A part of the women's income is also spent on higher education for boys[18]—one artist has put three sons through college on her earnings from paintings. But there are no changes with respect to the low value assigned to girls' education. Women artists view

[17]ISS field survey: conversations with women artists, June 1977.

[18]ISS field survey: conversations with women artists, June 1977 (Poona) and April 1978 (New Delhi).

education for girls with disfavour because of the irrelevance of the school curriculum for earning an income, the fact that it interferes with the girls' participation in domestic work, and also because it jeopardizes chances of finding suitable grooms who must necessarily be more literate than their brides.

Restoration of family lands has been financed in part by the earnings from painting. Calamities such as house collapse need no longer be endured without help. Five of the leading women artists have fixed deposit accounts in Madhubani banks. Although the savings are small, tremendous prestige has been accrued to them on account of their bank savings.

Aesthetically, the commercial recognition of Mithila paintings has brought a greater meaning and fulfilment to the women artists. Admiration from *badra log*, or the important people (officials, tourists, well-wishers), has freed the hand and eye of hesitation. The stark lines of famine and drought years have yielded to a colour-filled fertility. As one artist observed, "Paints are streaming out of my courtyard today, where yesterday there was caked earth. My mind is full of wild colours, and picture-ideas race through the head all the time. I have no time for grief."

The women are self-assured and confident as artists and proud of the signature that they put on their paintings. They explain their themes animatedly to visitors, offering well-thought-out explanations for seeming inconsistencies in the interpretation of a mythological incident,[19] or application of colour.[20]

However, improvement in status appears to be a purely income-related phenomenon which may last only as long as paintings generate income. There does not appear to be an enduring improvement in future prospects for female artists in terms of integration in the development process. The community seems to consider it unnecessary to upgrade the quality of the women's lives through inputs in terms of education, health and nutrition, and does not associate these inputs with their ability to perform

[19]For instance, Baua Devi has depicted the Matsyavatar, the divine part-human-part-fish incarnation of Lord Vishnu, as Lord Vishnu in his full form inside the stomach of a large fish. She finds this more credible than the half-human and half-fish form.

[20]The face, hands and feet of the deity are often painted in different colours (blue, yellow, red), according to the functions assigned to the limbs of the deity in the depiction.

as painters. The women themselves concur with this, and hold the view that their personal requirements are low-priority.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Annually, Rs 2.5-3 lakhs have been funnelled into each of the two villages, Jitwarpur and Ranti, in the last decade by buyers (both official agencies and private buyers from home and abroad). A large proportion of this has been spent in the village itself on things like food, house repair and construction, and purchase of land. There is visual evidence of this prosperity in relation to other villages in the neighbourhood. More children are clothed, more adults wear shoes, more eyes are healthy. Homesteads appear to be somewhat more sturdy and reinforced; some village lands are cropped with high-yielding varieties of foodgrains which have been introduced on an experimental basis by well-wishers.

The influx of visitors from other parts of the country and abroad has brought fragments of the world to these forgotten villages. The venturesome among the villagers have gained a foothold in the cities through the visiting buyers and art experts. A few artists have travelled to USA, USSR and Europe as guests of Indian and foreign governments. These visits have helped question the moribund values of the community. At times there is a hint that the travels of a few are infecting the rest of the community with contemporary values, such as the non-observance of strict traditions with respect to inter-caste dining and inter-class social contact. For instance, Sita Devi accommodated in her New Delhi room the scheduled caste family of Jamuna Devi for three nights in the summer of 1978. This enabled Jamuna Devi to see the city after a prolonged stay at the rural art workshop, Naika, situated 20 kms from Delhi. This event has divided the community into approvers and condemners, but has at least set a precedent.

A negative by-product of the Mithila boom has been the creation of a sociological divide between the successful and the ordinary artist. The meteoric rise of a few artists looms as an uncomfortable and unattainable reference point for the rest of the community of artists. The prominence and celebrity-status seem to have belittled the minor achievements of the others who comprise the majority. The latter have developed a fatalism about the fact that the lion's share of the market will go to the "famous few." They are not convinced about the superior skill of their peers, and suggest the use of cunning by them to win

fame. A certain resentment against the successful artists exists in the community which admires and envies them.

A city import into Jitwarpur and Ranti is uncontrolled consumerism. There is a rampant demand for wrist-watches, multi-brand transistors, synthetic clothing and bicycles. Sometimes this is indulged in by the males of well-off artist households at the expense of necessities such as expenditure on food, medical care and children's education.

Because of the fluctuations in demand for paintings in the last decade, uncertainty and doubt pervade the community of artists, who feel incompetent to reinvigorate demand on their own.

In sum, the success of the paintings has torpedoed the villages of Mithila out of anonymity and want, and brought dignity to some women as artists and members of society. Other crafts of the area have also moved into the limelight—*sikki*-ware, bamboo baskets, traditional embroidery and lac items. How enduring this change proves to be, however, remains a question-mark.

FIELD SURVEY

The Institute of Social Studies has the benefit of field investigations conducted by research scholars—notably Raymond L. Owens and his research assistants, Subodh Jha and Gauri Mishra.[21] A survey was also conducted by the Institute.

RAYMOND OWENS' SURVEY

In 1977, in conjunction with the founding of the Master Craftsmen's Association of Mithila, a marketing association, all artists who wished to have their paintings considered were asked to register. In addition to registration in Jitwarpur and Ranti a party travelled by jeep to outlying villages to register artists. In all, 181 artists were enrolled. The villages covered are mentioned in the following table.

FINDINGS

Seventy-one per cent of those interviewed were residents of

[21]Gauri Mishra, who was then conducting research in Jitwarpur, serves as secretary of that organization.

Table 2

Village	*No. of Respondents*	*Percentage*
Jitwarpur	99	(55)[22]
Ranti	29	(16)
Rasidpur	9	(5)
Satagarh	8	(4)
Khajauli	6	(3)
Haripatti	3	(2)
Pahi	2	(1)
Harinagar	2	(1)
Koko	1	(1)
Laherganj	1	
Sighuoi	1	(1)
Rampatti	1	
Salempur	1	(1)
Raiyam	1	
Chattura	1	(1)
Pandaul	1	
No response	15	(11)
Total	181	100

Jitwarpur and Ranti (Table 2) and 94 per cent of them women (Table 3). Eighty-four per cent of the women were married (Table 4), half of them totally illiterate (Table 5), and a third just literate. The maximum number of the artists painted 5-10 paintings a month (Table 6) and income from the sale of paintings made a substantial contribution, more than 30 per cent, to the total household income of more than 50 per cent of the artists (Table 7).

Actual earnings seemed about Rs 2000 per year for the maximum number of women (Table 8).

Total earnings over the working period are naturally greater amongst those who have taken part in the commercial process from its inception. Eighty-nine per cent of the artists began to participate in the process from 1963, and their total earnings for the period 1963-77 range from Rs 1,000 to Rs 50,000 (Table 11).

Subodh Jha's Jitwarpur census reveals that more than 50 per cent of the households were earning Rs 1000-4000 per annum

[22]Figures in brackets indicate percentages.

with 46 per cent in the range of Rs 1000-2000 (Table 9)—45 per cent of the households owned livestock, and of them more than 50 per cent only one head of cattle, either a bullock or a cow (Table 12).

Agriculture, painting and *jajmani*[23] are the three dominant income sources in the village (Table 10). They provide 25 per cent of the total yearly income to the largest number of households. Painting actually has an edge over the other two, in that there are more households earning 75 per cent and above of their income from painting than either from agriculture of *jajmani* (Table 13).

Of the 30 women interviewed by Nalini Singh of the ISS, 56 per cent were Mahapatra Brahmins, 28 per cent Kayastha and the remaining 16 per cent Sudra and Harijan (Table 14). They were evenly distributed across the age-range of 15-50 years (Table 15); 65 per cent of them were married and living in their husband's homes (Table 16), their family size ranging between four and eight members (Table 17). Painting took three to five hours of time daily for about 70 per cent of them, while 30 per cent worked five to eight hours (Table 18). Sixty per cent of them were illiterate, and 30 per cent just literate (Table 19). Painting provided about Rs 50-100 per month for 60 per cent of the women, while 30 per cent of them earned Rs 100-150 per month from it (Table 20).

Table 3: Age and sex of respondents

Age	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
10-19	2[24]	20	22
	(1)	(11.0)	(12.0)
20-29	5	42	47
	(3)	(23)	(26)
30-39	2	46	48
	(1)	(25)	(26)
40-49	1	29	30
	(1)	(16)	(17.9)
50-59		20	20
		(11)	(11)
60+	1	11	12
	(1)	(6.0)	
Total	11	170	181
	(6.0)	(94)	(100 0

[23]A system by which payments in kind were made to Brahmins for carrying out certain rituals, or even on a permanent monthly basis.

[24]Figures in brackets indicate rounded off percentages of total sample.

Table 4 : Marital status

Marital Status	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
Unmarried	4	12	16
	(2)	(7)	(9)
Married	7	152	159
	(4)	(84)	(88)
Widow/widower		6	6
		(3)	(3)
Total	11	170	181

Table 5 : Education

Education	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
Illiterate	2	69	71
	(1)	(49)	(50)
Just literate		44	44
		(31)	(31)
Middle school	1	15	16
	(1)	(11)	(12)
Matric	1	7	8
	(1)	(5)	(16)
Intermediate	1	1	2
	(1)	(1)	(1)
No response	6	35	41
	(×)		
Total	11	170	181
	(6)	(94)	

Total number of respondents: 140 (figures in brackets indicate rounded-off percentage of those that responded).

Table 6 : Number of paintings per month

No. of paintings	*No. of respondents*
5	28 (15)
5—10	53 (29)
10—15	36 (20)
15—20	26 (14)
20—25	23 (13)
25—30	6 (3)
30—35	6 (3)
35—40	1 (1)
Not responded	2 (1)
Total	181 (100)

Table 7 : Percentage of contribution from paintings to house income.

Percentage of Contribution	*No. of respondents*
Negligible	8 (4)
Upto 20	21 (12)
20—30	40 (22)
30—50	35 (19)
50—75	39 (22)
75—100	30 (17)
100	7 (4)
No response	1 (1)
Total	181 (100)

Table 8 : Earnings for year 1976-77

Rs	*No. of respondents*	*As % of total*
200	9	(5)
200— 300	14	(8)
300— 500	18	(10)
500— 700	39	(22)
700—1000	7	(4)
1000—2000	56	(31)
2000—3000	16	(9)
3000—4000	12	(7)
4000—5000	2	(1)
5000—6000	4	(2)
6000—7000	—	
7000—8000	1	(1)
8000—10,000	—	
10,000	3	(2)
Total	181	(100)

A second phase of the field survey was carried out by Subodh Jha, also in 1977. He conducted a census of 135 households out of a total of 268 in Jitwarpur village, of which data pertaining to 135 households is given below. Information was sought pertaining to family size, assets, household income and so on.

Yet another field survey was conducted by Nalini Singh of the Institute of Social Studies in June 76. Thirty artist households were interviewed in Jitwarpur and Ranti. The artists were selected on the basis of those available on the visit.

Table 9: Annual income of surveyed households

Rs.	*No. of respondents*
1000— 2000	30 (23)
2000— 3000	20 (15)
3000— 4000	20 (15)
4000— 5000	6 (4)
5000— 7000	15 (11)
7000—10000	8 (6)
10,000—15000 1,5000	5 (3)
Total	135(100)

Table 10: Main occupation (in terms of earnings) of surveyed households

Occupation	*No. of respondents*
Agriculture	33 (24)
Pointing	27 (20)
Jajmani	12 (9)
Agricultural labour	4 (3)
Priest	7 (5)
Service	40 (30)
Business	5 (4)
Pottery	2 (1)
Compounder	1 (1)
Rikshaw Puller	4 (3)
Total	135 (100)

Table 11 : Year in which respondent started painting for sale and earnings since begun

Year	Upto 500	Rs 500-1000	Rs 1,000-2,500	Rs 2,500-5,000	Rs 5,000 10,000	Rs 10,000-25,000	Rs 25,000 50,000	Rs 50,000 75,000	Rs 75,000 1,00,000	Rs 1,00,000 or more	Total No. of respondents
1959	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
1960	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1961	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
1962	—	—	2	1	11	16	11	2	—	1	44
1963	—	—	—	1	1	1	2	1	—	—	5
1964	—	—	2	1	2	1	2	1	—	—	9
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1966	—	—	5	2	5	15	1	1	—	—	31
1967	—	2	—	—	3	—	3	—	—	—	6
1968	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1969	—	—	—	1	4	4	—	—	—	—	11
1970	1	1	—	2	3	1	—	—	—	—	12
1971	—	1	5	2	7	2	—	—	—	—	25
1972	—	—	9	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	7
1973	—	1	4	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	7
1974	—	—	2	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	5
1975	1	1	4	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	7
1976	1	1	5	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	10
1977	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Total	4	8	40	21	36	44	20	6	—	2	181

Table 12: Ownership of Livestock

Livestock	Number owned				Total
	1	2	3—5	5	
Bullocks	12	6	1		19
Buffaloes	8	3	1		12
Cows	16	3	2		21
Goats	1	6	1	1	9
Total	37	18	4	1	61

Note: Only 61 of the 135 households surveyed owned some livestock.

Table 13: Percentage of income from different occupations

Occupation	Percentage of income					Total
	25	25-50	50-75	75-100	100	
Agriculture	46	23	12	8	5	94
	(41)	(25)	(13)	(9)	(5)	(100)
Painting	23	18	7	16	2	66
	(35)	(27)	(11)	(24)	(3)	(100)
Jajmani	33	11	5	4	2	55
	(62)		(9)	(7)	(4)	(100)
Rickshaw pulling			1	3		4
			(25)	(75)		(100)
Priest		1	3	2	1	7
		(14)	(43)	(29)	(14)	(100)
Agriculture labour	2	1		7	1	11
	(18)	(9)		(64)	(9)	(100)
Cultivating orchards	10	1				11
	(91)	(9)				(100)
Garland making	9				1	10
	(90)				(10)	(100)
Pottery					2	2
					(100)	(100)
Business			1	3		4
			(25)	(75)		(100)
Sikki	7	1				8
	(84)	(12)				(100)
Service	3	7	10	22	7	49
	(6)	(14)	(20)	(45)	(14)	(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage of income earned to total number of households in the occupation. Totals exceed 135 due to multiple occupation by households.

Table 14: Caste percentage

Mahapatra Brahmin	56
Kayastha	28
Sudra	8
Harijan	8
Total	100

Table 15: Age percentage

15 Years	15
16—35	20
35—50	25
50+	30
Total	100

Table 16: Marital status

Married (living in husband's home	65
Married (living in natal home	14
Widows	21
Total	100

Table 17: Family size

1—3	—
4—5	40
6—7	30
8	30
Total	100

Table 18: No. of hours worked at painting

No. of hours	*Percentage*
3 hrs	Nil
3-5 hrs	70
5-8 hrs	30
Total	100

Table 19: Education

Illiterate	60
Just literate	30
Primary	10
Total	100

Table 20: Average earnings from paintings per month

Rs	*Percentage*
50-100	60
100-150	30
150-250	10
Total	100

REVIEW

GENERAL

In India, as in other countries, employment policies have,, as a result of overcrowding in agriculture, incorporated handi-

crafts as an important source of self-employment, particularly for women. The development of crafts and craft-related skills as a means of employment, however, is charged with dilemmas.

Too frequently, the commercial market propels crafts away from the ethnic tradition, endangering both the art form and the artists' livelihood because of mass-production by the craftsmen. Stereotyped and lacking in innovativeness, this trend gradually eliminates artistic inspiration. Also, the efficiency and high level of productivity demanded in large-scale, standardized production changes the life-styles of the craftsmen to a point where the cultural bloodlines, which generated the inspiration, dry up.

Their exclusivity, on the other hand, pre-empts the crafts from generating employment at any significant scale. A few of the most skilled craftsmen and their families are alone benefi ed by the demand for the crafts, while the rest of the populat on in which the skill is under-developed or latent cannot aspire to a share of the market.

Isolating the craftsmen from the market might have an equally unnatural effect, since conditions of "hot-house growth" rarely stimulate an artistic tradition. Should these skills and their expression remain moribund and preserved in their original setting? "Preservation" connotes changelessness, and where the whole environment is changing it may be artificial, and perhaps cruel to attempt seclusion of art. Ideologies (including the Marxist), theories (including those of Verrier Elwin) have discussed the place of tradition in the dynamics of change, but no clear directions appear which overcome the complexities of the issue of handicraft development.

A consequence of well-intentioned attempts to promote economic regeneration through craft training and craft promotion has often been the exploitation of these skills by traders—domestic and foreign, private and public. Because of acute economic pressure craftsmen or others work for low wages, under rough conditions of work. The products are retailed at prices unrelated to the prices received by the artisans. Apart from the evidence in Madhubani itself of such a trend, other documented evidence is available,[25] for example on the lace

[25]Case study of Narsapur lace workers prepared by Abha Bhaiya and Laxmi Rao (in 1977), unpublished report available with the Institute of Social Studies.

workers in the Narsapur district of Andhra Pradesh. Private commission agents and contractors provide consumption loans at usurious rates of interest, as well as raw-materials to thousands of women who are skilled in making lace with the crochet needle. Their products are then picked up by the agents and exported to countries such as Belgium, where hand-made lace is in demand at high prices.

Yet if art and craft are to be strengthened as part of a living tradition, then the economic life-line provided by the market has to be kept pulsating. This life-line, however, is being twisted by intermediaries, whether religious bodies, art dealers or Government extension workers. These intermediaries, while providing the sale, also subordinate the producers unless the latter have some market strength.

Faced with such experiences, those interested in handicraft development attempt to evolve forms of organization for the artisans, and vital linkages with inputs and markets in order to avoid the consequences stated above.

But associating craftspeople is complex, as they are the most individualistic people in any community. The value of their production depends on individual identity. To merge this identity would be a contradiction to the mainspring of their inspiration—as well as a threat to their earning power. Masters among them would find it even more uncomfortable to join as equals with those less skilled than themselves.

Thus the development of self-managed marketing organizations by these individuals would require much more conscientization, and mobilization efforts, than usual.

A cooperative society was started in Jitwarpur in 1978 through the stimulus provided by the availability of one lakh rupees that a local official could provide from his budget. Artists became members on the payment of a rupee each; no other qualifications were demanded. The chairman was the official and the secretary a local personality. The society attracted artists, as it became a collection point for buyers from outside the district. The artists would leave their paintings at the society, and the buyers, whether they were from official agencies or private trade, would scrutinize them for selection. The Jitwarpur Cooperative Society offered no other service, and in due course the initial funds were exhausted and the society is now defunct. However, the individual who acts as secretary continues to use the office space to stock painting—buyers go through his stocks and artists

supply it as it offers them hope. No special grading techniques were followed (as for example in MCAM, where only master-craftspeople are given membership).

The history of this society provides insight into the problems of developing local institutions. The painters had no particular exposure to either the concept of cooperation or the institution's responsibilities to them, or its accounts. The institution was born before their participation could become meaningful. However, pressure to sell being great, the artists can readily be made to route their goods through these centres. But collection points cannot be considered self-managed institutions.

As it stands now, the society called MCAM suffers from the same lack of conscious participation by the artists, even though it restricts membership. In fact many of the artists belong to both the Jitwarpur Cooperative Society and the MCAM. They also sell to the Handicrafts Board extension officer, and perhaps to anyone else. To the artists such institutions just widen their option. The commitment involved in collaborative effort is still to be understood and practised. It is such experiences that pose difficult questions to those attempting to promote handicrafts without carrying the burden of the legacies of earlier socio-economic sysems.

In the case of the Madhubani painters—their product being a hard-sell item, their culture being highly evolved yet ritual-bound, as is their sex—added hurdles have to be overcome. Promoting a tradition requires promoting the work of the most talented, which promotes elitism and pre-empts the use of the cultural mode for benefiting a wider segment of the population.

Adding to these complexities the solution that presents itself in the case of this art or craft is that "democracy" or a wider base can be introduced into MCAM by separating the cultural forms of the upper castes—the Brahmins from the art-forms of the Harijans. The "relief" type of folk-art that is the fort of the Harijan women in and around Jitwarpur has a distinctive quality, or a closer approximation to folk-art than the Brahmin ritual-based painting. If this distinction, based on caste, is given importance in the market promotion campaign of MCAM, a route for the escape from elitism can be found.

Another suggestion emerging from those who are facing these dilemmas—while attempting to revive original crafts and improve the living conditions of the craftspeople—is for development efforts to reach the artisan indirectly through environmental

improvement rather than directly. For example in Madhubani district it is suggested that if opportunities and incomes from employment in cultivation could be increased through massive land-improvement programmes, it would ease the pressure on the artisans to paint for survival. Strengthening of health, education and other civic and social amenities, along with the exposure to economic opportunity, could further remove constraints on the artists, and release the time and the spirit to create inspired and beautiful objects. The women would not need to pour their skill into a survival income. They could still sell their skill, but without pressure.

Following such a strategy, however, could eliminate the widespread production of the handicraft. It would, in a way, remove handicrafts as an option for employment generation.

The latest innovation in India is the rural marketing centre,[26] each to be located within reach of 100 villages or so, where handicrafts are a predominant traditional skill. The role of the centres is to provide the inputs and pick up the products of the artisans (but without the element of bondage and exploitation), and market crafts as well as arts, that is they will serve broadly the entire community, not simply the finest artists—through organizations like MCAM will also be included. An additional element built into these centres, which is supposed to precede the establishment of the service centre, is to organize individual artisans into associations which would be linked with the centres. The presumption is that their collective strength and united action would sustain them against exploitation, whether by private or official agencies. From the sons and daughters of craftsmen and craftswomen, craft organizers are being trained in various institutions by the All India Handicrafts Board, to help mobilize and maintain them in these organizations.

In India, in the post-independence era, the support to craft was spearheaded as much as a part of the liberation movement and a cultural renaissance, as for economic development. The ethic was part of the Gandhian *swadeshi* movement. While handspinning and weaving, and hand-made village products, were being promoted as part of the economic recovery strategy for rural India by Gandhi, artistic objects made by hand, as well as folk-theatre and dance and music were revived and made into a

[26]Scheme evolved by the All India Handicrafts Boards (Ministry of Industry, Government of India), in 1970.

trend by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay as part of the same rural revival. Economic development thus became a part of cultural development, and handicraft production and sale a cultural expression.

Hence the Handicrafts Board did not undertake aggressive commercialization, but instead adopted a low-profile support strategy. With the setting up of exhibitions, design centres, technology-improvement centres and museums, craft was made part of culture. It is only against such an overall idealogy that schemes, organizations, and attempts to promote a handicraft product can have enduring success.

WOMEN

Craftswomen work in a special framework and the issue of generating employment for them through handicrafts has distinctive features. Women are generally unpaid workers whose economic contribution is under-rated, whether as artisans or farm helpers. Regardless of their skills, women in traditional societies may be kept at a distance from "outside" marketing agencies, so that they are denied the opportunity of modifying and innovating on the basis of market feedback. In most cases the earnings generated by them are appropriated by the male heads of households, and they do not enjoy the power to allocate them between different uses according to their own judgement. The traditional intra-household power structure operates to "fix" them in their roles as artisan-cum-household workers.

Once again the solution that appears is to build institutions or organizations of craftswomen so that they may continue to use their skills, without necessarily losing their incomes. By organizing themselves they may be able to aquire direct access to the various facilities available both in terms of inputs as well as markets. Through this access to public power they may be able to improve their position within the household and have greater power over their income and its distribution. The experience of the women who belong to the Self-Employed Womens Association in Ahmedabad (SEWA) offers a source of encouragement to such a view (see Chapter I).

Another related issue has been highlighted by the experience of the women of Manipur. In Manipur, as in some of the other states of the country, not only those in north-eastern India but also some of the countries outside (Thailand, Malaysia, Phillippines and the Pacific Islands), women predominate in retail trade.

They sell not only what they produce but also what others produce. They also provide services such as cooked food, tailoring, and repairs in the marketplace. One hypothesis that seems to be emerging (from studies[27] made of women in some areas of South-east Asia and the Pacific, as well as the north-eastern states of India), is that being in the market gives these women self-confidence, an understanding of collective strength, and access to power over their own earnings as well as their social behaviour. It is possible to see this pattern in the Ahmedabad experiment also as the members of SEWA are largely traders rather than family workers.

Being in public places, being exposed to the environment (whether it is the police, the customer, or the administrative laws), being together with other women in the marketplace, which offers a kind of club during the slack hours, brings about a bond of association as well as knowledge, adding to self-confidence, which seems to be the basis of power. It is only in market transactions that money/cash passes from hand to hand. Too often in household production, whether of garments or of handicrafts, the sale is done by the men. Women are the invisible workers. Hence they are not only hidden from the money but from market knowledge[28] as well.

In the case of the women artists of Madhubani, however, the the organizational solution to the problem of exploitation faces some special problems. The family structures and the strength of traditional relationships within the structures has raised some doubts about whether the artists can be organized as women. Many of the women artists expressed their first loyalty to the family and were doubtful that they could find any source of support outside it. They could not visualize themselves uniting around the skill, across the bounds of caste, inter-family disputes, inter-family differences in assets and so on.

[27]Review of research related to the status of women in the Asian and Pacific Region prepared by Dr Leela Dube, for the Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

[28]Reference to discussion with Muslim *zari* (gold-thread) embroiderers from Jama Masjid, Delhi, Gandhi Peace Foundation, April 1979. These women have always had to market their products through the men and boys because of seclusion. *Zari*-work is in great demand outside the country, especially from the Gulf countries. But except that they work harder and that more girls are getting engaged in the work, the women, as a sex, do not see its benefits accruing to them.

Hence the additional complexity in such societies of developing handicrafts as much as a source of income generation as a source of emancipation. How far the MCAM can be used to fulfil both objectives depends very much on how well it is grounded in ideologies such as a feminism, how much mobilization and conscientization precedes the establishment of the institution, how well meetings and discussions and the sharing of transactions and other knowledge with members are established. Such practices are the precondition for women's organizations to be able to change the relative status of women, as has been shown by the difference in self-confidence between the women of SEWA (Chapter I) and the women of Lijjat (Chapter III), the women of these organizations and the women of AMUL (where professional management, by and large, makes the market decisions).

PROFILES

The Harijan deity, Sailesh, is the theological reality of Harijan lives in Jitwarpur village. The horse-faced deity, who is somewhat of a maverick in the Hindu pantheon of gods, is associated with rebellion and struggle against oppression. Balmiki, the dacoit-turned-divine who wrote the *Ramayana* and crusaded against the perfidy of caste, is another deity worshipped in the community. However, the militancy of these heroes is in sharp contrast to the tragic social reality of Harijans in north Bihar. Recently, however, the spirited work of some Harijan folk-painters has displayed a rejection of their inferior social status, and promises a commitment to the revolutionary ideals of their deities.

JAMUNA DEVI, ARTIST

In her late forties, the wife of a landless agricultural labourer (and part-time painter), Jamuna Devi is a celebrated artist in the Harijan *tola* of Jitwarpur, whose mud frescoes and paintings were displayed in Japan during Expo '70. Her themes are powerful, and executed with a certain economy of line and stroke. With a sparing use of colour, she etches vivid symbols of strength and power. A lion sketched in black generates a sense of menace with its long red tongue; while a serpent speeding through paddy fields

is a poetic metaphor based in actuality. Jamuna Devi paints on paper and burlap coated with cowdung. The cowdung coat is an innovation introduced by this artist, and despite attempts by others to use this technique, it remains unique to her.

The success of the last 10 years has wrought fundamental changes in the life-style and hopes of Jamuna Devi and her family. As the girl-bride of Ramji, Jamuna Devi was discredited by her in-laws for lacking the common skill of paddy transplanting. In her natal village in Rohika block, 40 kms away, transplanting was traditionally conducted by males. Young girls are introduced to the job when their spine is supple enough to adjust to the long hours of onerous stooping. For Jamuna Devi it was too late, and she could only obtain lesser-paid agricultural work such as bunding and watering the fields. She also performed odd jobs for prosperous households in the village—sweeping, scavenging—and eked a pittance. Competition for odd jobs was keen, especially in the lean agricultural season.

Sustaining her status on the earnings of marginal occupations, Jamuna Devi sensed a deep frustration. Her young family of two sons and two daughters were deprived the privilege of a regular meal each day because of their mother's inability to contribute to their father's income. The eldest daughter was married under "shameful" circumstances. Ramji raised a small loan from cultivators by pledging his services until the amount was repaid. Two cast-off sarees and light silver anklets were the girl's trousseau, and a meagre wedding feast with only two preparations was provided.

All that has changed now. Jamuna Devi is frequently commissioned for on-site mural painting at exhibitions and locations in New Delhi, Patna and Varanasi. Ramji, who colours her paintings, always accompanies her. Their combined earnings on these commissions average Rs 80 per day. Jamuna Devi has stopped agricultural work, and now concentrates exclusively on paintings. Ramji, however, paints only in his spare time because despite his wife's celebrity, the income from paintings is irregular.

Their elder son, Basudev Mochi, is a palm-tree tapper. He earns a regular wage of Rs 4 per day for six months in the year, and works as an agricultural labourer for the rest of the year. His wife and children live in a separate establishment in Jitwarpur. The younger daughter's wedding two years ago was an extravaganza of feasting and exchange of gifts. Kishori Mochi, the teen-aged youngest son, studies at the Jitwarpur High School. He

is the only literate person in the family, and is slated for a life "free of toil in the fields."

Painting has brought status to Jamuna Devi in her community. Theirs is the leading Harijan family in the village. Ramji treats her with transparent affection, born of companionship. He insists, and she agrees, that her ability to earn is not material to their regard for each other.

Yet this leading Harijan family of folk-painters is strangely vulnerable. At a recent exhibition in New Delhi, Jamuna Devi's paintings fetched a price of Rs 100 per mount. A month later, back in the village, she was again selling her paintings for Rs 5 per piece to the local middleman. "Whatever God gives" is the explanation offered for the disparity by the guileless couple. Less than four years ago, Jamuna Devi pawned household brass utensils to raise Rs 11 to enrol as a member of a village cooperative of artists, which has been a virtual non-starter. She dismisses this experience as another instance of the "ordained" exploitation of their resourceless community by the other castes.

An incipient cataract seems to be diminishing Jamuna Devi's vision. She has not thought of visiting an eye specialist. "Who will take me? It's not like before. Once I had injured my foot with a hoe and the leg swelled like a balloon. Bhaskar Babu himself took me to Kailash *dagdar* (doctor) and spent the money." Bhaskar Kulkarni, the sensitive artist/officer of the All India Handicrafts Board who piloted the relief programme in the sixties, is remembered with affection and gratitude. "He was one of us. He cared, he loved us."

In contrast to the sense of comraderie with Bhaskar, Jamuna Devi regards all other officials and high caste individuals as *maa-baap* or all-purpose providers. Mistakenly investing this interviewer with authority, she hesitantly recommended her case for a National Award. She is not sure if she deserves an award, but says she needs it. Not for status, but for money and for the fine shawl that goes with it.

BAUA DEVI, ARTIST

Baua Devi, mother of four children, is an artist in Jitwarpur whose paintings are currently acknowledged as among the finest representation of Mithila art. Vibrant colours, bold contours and the novel themes of her paintings produce an electrifying effect. As she displays her work in the mud-coated courtyard of her hut, the visitor is engulfed in a sense of drama. Several village artists

stand tip-toe at the boundary wall to take a glimpse of her paintings for inspiration, while her husband or other male relatives monitor the visitor's reactions for later use in settling prices. All the while Baua Devi is silent, alert for a spontaneous word of praise or criticism, and also for the visitor's inclination to buy. She appears reluctant to talk, and seems to prefer to deal through her husband.

Yet her withdrawal is a sophisticated subterfuge for maintaining harmony in the family, particularly with her husband. She instinctively wears the scowl of the detached-hermit-cum-foolish-woman so that her success does not become a threat to males and older women of the household. Her perception of the delicate balance of human relations in a family is a measure of sensitivity.

Baua Devi belongs to a family of Mahapatra Brahmins. In the drought of 1966-67 this family was amongst the worst sufferers. Income from *shradh* ceremonies for the dead dried up completely and they lost the little land they still possessed when her father-in-law made distress sales to raise money for consumption. Baua Devi and other women could not contribute to the family income since tradition forbids Mahapatra women from wage employment, even from helping on the family farm. For Baua (which is the vernacular for "boy," an affectionate pet-name by which she was known in her parents' home) the horror was compounded when her year-old daughter went hungry.

When HHEC launched its drought-relief project, Baua Devi displayed a rare determination to avail of the opportunity to earn. Her school education (she had studied till the fourth class), and the half-knowledge of Sanskrit transmitted to her by her priest father made her paintings different to the work of most others. She was diligent and persevering and had an innate sense of form, which she had inherited from her father's mother, an accomplished painter of her village.

Bhaskar Kulkarni, HHEC field-officer, recognized Baua Devi's potential and, via her husband, instructed her in the finer details of painting. Although she and Bhaskar did not communicate directly, a complete rapport developed between them. In time the family allowed Bhaskar to meet her freely and her art thrived under direction from him, as also from well-wishers like U. Maharathi, officer of the Bihar State Small Scale Industries Department.

With an average income of Rs 100 per month from the sale of paintings, Baua Devi became the primary bread-winner of the

family. Sensing the premium value commanded by her paintings, she increased her output by asking her husband to help her with the colouring. The latter, who was engaged for only short spells during the year of *jajmani* (service of clients) or in cultivating the small patch of leased-in land, took up the job with enthusiasm. A painting which earlier took Baua Devi five or six days to complete, was now completed in two days by their joint effort. But she remained the leader of this team, the artist who carried the germ of Mithila art in her psyche.

With an increase in the popularity of her paintings, Baua Devi found it necessary to delegate household work to others so that she was allowed the maximum time to paint. She hired a maidservant to assist in household chores—sweeping, washing, fetching water and fuel. The maid, who still works for her, is paid 50 paise per month in money along with some foodgrains, and occasionally she is given old clothes. The family had no tradition of hired domestic help and appointment of the maid was a characteristically bold step by Baua Devi. Help with housework has enabled her to spend five to seven hours each day in painting.

The theme for a painting evolves in the night hours, often unfolding dramatically in a dream. The next morning, when she is cooking or feeding the children, Baua Devi finally selects one of the many pictures that she sees in her mind, and prepares a sketch in the afternoon. Seated on a mat on the floor with the white hand-made paper stretched before her, she is not tentative or hesitant, but definitive and self-confident. The stooped figure concentrates, as if in prayer.

The income from paintings is managed by both wife and husband. They have invested it—largely in land and in the construction of a new house. The loss of land through indiscriminate sale by the father-in-law has been more than made up. The new, large hut is provided with mud grain-storage drums, which are brimming with unhusked paddy and pulses. Baua Devi is house-proud and the dwelling is meticulously clean. Rolls of paintings wrapped in plastic sheeting hang like exotic lamp-shades from the ceiling, and festoons of auspicious mango leaves border doorways in graceful arcs.

Her enhanced authority in the home is strangely truncated in certain areas. Last year, Baua Devi's eldest daughter, ten years old, was married against the mother's wishes and without any family consultations with her. There was no means of resisting, so Baua Devi accepted the marriage as *fait accompli*, and consol-

ed herself that she could buy happiness for her daughter through the earnings from painting. They spent more than Rs 2,000 on the wedding feast. When the daughter leaves her natal home a few years from now, the parents expect to spend Rs 4,000 on gifts to the groom—consumer durables such as a cycle, wrist-watch and transistor radio.

Baua Devi has been invited to exhibitions all over India, and also commissioned for on-site assignments. She has so far only accepted invitations to travel if they included a ticket for her husband. They have attended exhibition-demonstrations in Bangalore, New Delhi, Patna and Varanasi. But earlier in March this year Baua Devi talked enthusiastically about a trip to Chicago in a small party of artists without her husband.

The celebrity status of his wife has affected her husband Jagannath in many ways. Accustomed to total obedience from his wife, whom he married as a child-bride, he also had the additional lever of dominance on account of the fact that Baua bore four daughters in a row. Her meteoric rise to fame and money unnerved Jagannath in the beginning, but he enjoyed it when he started sharing the bounty. However, the local community regards him as somewhat of a parasite. A rebound reaction might have affected the marriage adversely but Baua Devi's sophistry and understanding averted an unhappy turn in marital relations.

Sublimation of personal ambition and the traditional finality of marriage appear to be the corner-stones of Baua Devi's approach to family life. Yet there is a hint of compromise, a suggestion that the artist exists in an uninhibited private world, while the woman inhabits the conventional world.

Mithila folk-art is evolving rapidly, and Baua Devi is prominent among the "evolvers." She had the capacity to propel the art in a new direction, and also has the capacity to organize the women into a fraternity of artists—a woman to watch.

BHASKAR KULKARNI, FIELD-OFFICER OF HHEC IN MADHUBANI

Bhaskar Kulkarni is a self-confessed drop-out from society. Part mystic, part artist, Bhaskar has devoted himself fully to interests which might appear nebulous to the conventional observer. He pursues with love and zeal concepts such as the source of light, the content of energy, the metaphysical nature of man-woman conflict. His day might include a religious conversation with the sun or a tender exchange with a patch of earth.

The capacity to lavish love is Bhaskar's most outstanding personal quality. At 48 he is a total romantic, for whom relationships are delineated simply in terms of love or hate. He carried this pristine quality to Madhubani in 1966.

Born into a Maharashtrian Brahmin family in Satara district, Bhaskar grew up in Bombay. His businessman father and visionary mother encouraged their sons and daughters to develop individual interests. When Bhaskar emerged a peripatetic vagabond, his parents did not attempt to check his waywardness. While other sons attended school, Bhaskar took to travelling in the rural neighbourhood of Bombay. "But I got upset when ticket clerks asked me where I wanted to go. How did I know?" So he acquired a bicycle to pursue his uncharted travels, which started taking him away from home for several months. The impressions and visions of those days served to nudge the latent artist in him. He embarked on a programme of informal education in fine art, including a spell at the J J School of Art in Bombay.

Sustaining himself on earnings from short assignments as a commercial artist, Bhaskar continued to travel. He alternated between a "straight" life with advertizing agencies (he also) worked for Air India), and an uninhibited bohemian life. "An abundance of beautiful ideas, friends and liquor. This is what I lived for then, and still do."

He went to HHEC originally on deputation from the National Textile Corporation, where he worked as an art designer in the Weavers Service Centre. Pupul Jayakar, the then Chairman of HHEC and adviser to the Textile Corporation, hand-picked Bhaskar to spearhead the HHEC programme of handicraft promotion in drought-afflicted northern Bihar. In appointing Bhaskar to the Madhubani area, the HHEC seems to have acted counter to the rigid recruitment policy of government agencies. Lacking in brilliant professional art degrees, Bhaskar also adopted a take-it-or-leave-it stance about his taste for liquor. Yet the appointment was an unqualified success, as manifested by the "Madhubani painting boom" of the sixties and seventies.

Behind the unscheduled commercial success of the folk-painting project in Madhubani lies a poignant human drama of despair and faith. Drought conditions had caused men to leave the villages in search of employment in cities, forsaking their young families. The women watched helplessly as the children and elders of the village went without food. Everybody waited, just waited for either the rains or the postman. "At this time the

colours dried up inside the women. They were without their men —you understand." Sensing that their emotional frustration compounded their poverty, Bhaskar reached out to them with love. He lodged in a small hotel in Madhubani and visited Jitwarpur every day.

He distributed paper and colours to each artist, and collected all paintings executed in the previous week. Using a personal formula of affection, encouragement, innuendo and instruction, Bhaskar revived their "inner pallettes." "I unlocked the rainbows in their hearts and colours flowed freely. I told them that I cared for them and they felt human again. The rapport was so perfect that they would dream of me a day before I visited them. Even the children would dream of me."

Bhaskar also become a one-man succour institution who occasionally met medical bills and school-fees of families in acute distress. This was done sincerely and without a sense of patronage, and he is remembered fondly in the village for this.

For nine months Bhaskar visited Jitwarpur and the adjacent village of Ranti, enthusing the women to paint. His keen eye assessed the artistic merit of each painting, and although he "purchased" the entire lot from the women, he sifted them carefully in the seclusion of his hotel room. "Paintings which were pure and based on the artistic tradition of Mithila were most valuable. Others were synthetic, drawn with the hands and not the heart." Every month or so Bhaskar would sling a bundle of paintings over his shoulder and take them to the HHEC offices in Delhi or Patna. The genuine paintings were exported, while the others were destroyed. Although this system was practised without the knowledge of the artists, Bhaskar emphasizes that it was the most effective ploy for stimulating folk-art under conditions of a relief programme.

After the intensive period of the drought-relief project, HHEC phased out of North Bihar. Bhaskar was withdrawn. Other HHEC projects in folk- and tribal-art were assigned to him. He divided his time between the Santhals of Bihar and West Bengal, the Worli tribals of Maharashtra, and the Bastar tribals of Madhya Pradesh. At each place he attempted to comprehend local art traditions by relating them to life-styles of the tribes. His experiences sensitized him to rural folk-art, but his insights were used intermittently by HHEC.

His approach to the issue of "development" of local folk-crafts reflects his respect for creativity. He believes that art

burgeons naturally and wilts in conditions of "hot-house" growth. What the artists need is a freedom from physical want, and not the allure and pressure of a commercially promising market.

After resigning from HHEC earlier this year, Bhaskar has taken up permanent residence in Ganjad, a small village of Worli tribals in Maharashtra. Here he has initiated the first phase of his project to enhance the physical well-being of the artists, and has begun work on providing water for field irrigation in the village. Characteristically, he shunned scientific techniques of water divining, and urged a small farmer to "feel" his land for water. However, water was not struck at the identified spot. Undettered, Bhaskar has initiated digging at another "felt" site.

It is not clear where the novel experiment will take Bhaskar or the villagers. But here is a man who has tenaciously viewed life through the preferred filter of romance, and rejected the society which rejected his vision.

H.P. MISHRA, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, AIHB MARKETING AND SERVICING EXTENSION CENTRE, MADHUBANI

The top resident civil servant directly in charge of craft development in the Mithila area is the Assistant Director of the AIHB Marketing and Service Extension Centre (MSEC) in Madhubani. Since the establishment of MSEC in 1972, the post has been held by H.P. Mishra.

Mishra is a career bureaucrat of the Orissa State Government cadre. His assignment with the State Department of Industries, where he served as extension officer, was related to the development of rural crafts and industries. Later he joined the All India Handicrafts Board as junior field officer of the AIHB in the eastern region. Here too his job was to identify industries and crafts which could be turned into viable sources of employment for craftsmen. Thus Mishra joined the MSEC with over ten years of field experience in rural crafts. During this time he had scoured the areas assigned to locate latent skills which could be converted into marketable commodities.

At MSEC, Mishra has used his skill of nurturing and promoting rural crafts with impressive results. During his tenure as the assistant director, there have been numerous revivals of folk-crafts and art traditions, both for protecting the folk-tradition as well as providing sustenance to its creators. Five major crafts of Mithila have been serviced intensively by the MSEC in the last five years with respect to both production and marketing.

Besides Mithila folk paintings, the crafts include *sikki*-work, embroidery (*kasida*) and doll-making.

Stout commonsense and an astute instinct for the practical are sensors with which Mishra picks up signals of commerce-cum-art from poverty-stricken Mithila villages. In contrast to other official and semi-official promoters who have worked with Mithila crafts in the recent past, he has cultivated a distance from the overwhelming romance of the cultural traditions of the area. His somewhat "blunted" artistic vision has proved an asset in that it has given him a commercial/practical perspective. He has evolved a special formula to divine the marketability of a craft, blending instinct and commonsense with a respect for official stipulations of least cost, maximum coverage of artists and so on.

The rural craftspeople served by the MSEC hold him in high regard. As he walks through the village, mild-mannered and placid, male craftsmen cluster around him for news of fresh orders, out-of-town assignments and demonstration trips. Women stand on the periphery of the group, occasionally aiming an anxious enquiry at "Misir Babu." Cups of tea are offered to him, a rare luxury in a land where food shortages are endemic. The offering is made only partially out of deference for the position he holds; for the most part, it is a measure of the affection in which he is held.

Imperturbability and a genuine modesty are distinguishing features of Mishra's personality. In a society where the male ego is omniscient and underlies all relationships, absence of machismo is a startling discovery, more so in the head of the local official organization. Whereas on the one hand he recognizes and abides by official hierarchies, at the same time he shows a capacity for accommodation, a willingness to give latitude. These qualities make him the ideal link between the practitioners of rural craft and its whimsical buyers. Impressively, both groups feel comfortable with him.

For rural women in the Mithila area Mishra's personal decency and his "clean" image of a family man have contributed significantly in melting their traditional reserve with strangers. These attributes have also been important in winning him acceptance in the conservative rural milieu of northern Bihar.

As Assistant Director, Mishra has to travel frequently and intensively in the Mithila villages. The centre does not have its own vehicle, so that he uses local modes of transport—buses,

bullock-cart, boat, rickshaw. His frequent travel trips leave his young family alone in Madhubani town. His wife and four children are generally supportive about his job. But there are times in the year when their loneliness overrides their enthusiasm for their father's job, and they wish for a tinsel-starred city appointment for him.

Mishra expresses dissatisfaction with the achievements of the MSEC in harnessing the potential of Mithila crafts. He feels constrained by the financial limitations imposed on the MSEC, and voices his concern at the wasted opportunities for craft development incident to this limitation. "In this line it is important to produce a lot of samples for dispatch to potential buyers. The Centre does not have the resources to finance the production of samples, and the artists are too poor to do so from their own resources."

MSEC ought also to prepare itself for marketing craft items directly, Mishra suggests. Its role of a servicing organization might be extended without difficulty into direct marketing. Contacts established by Mishra and other staff members of MSEC in wholesale and retail trade, particularly within the country, offers a readymade trade network which could be tapped for the benefit of the craftspeople.

The dedication and compassion that Mishra has brought to his job has chiselled a promising image of the Indian "field" bureaucrat. His performance has demonstrated the success potential of combining authority with a basic regard for human values.

Night Patrollers of Manipur

INTRODUCTION

During March 1975 and June 1976,[1] women in Manipur state mobilized themselves into what are popularly known as the night patrollers. Groups of thirty to fifty women patrolled the streets after dusk and were on the alert for an inebriated man returning home after an evening at the wine shop. After surrounding him, they extorted a fine of Rs 50, and marched him to the police-station for creating a public nuisance (there is no legal provision for committing a person to custody specifically for misbehaviour under the influence of intoxicants). If the offence was repeated the men were beaten up by the women.

The patrollers were sometimes accompanied by policemen or a few young men. But the extent of protection they got from the law varied with the political climate in the state. The movement had spread to almost all parts of the state in 1976, and although it had waned since then, patrol groups were still found at the end of 1978 in some localities of the larger towns.

GENESIS

The movement for prohibition took this vigorous form after a particular incident in early 1975, when an intoxicated man tried to snatch the earrings of a young woman after dark (the term "earring-snatching" might be a euphemism used to denote an attempt at assault). A group of women who happened to witness this act spontaneously reacted and struck the man. The effect of this action was to stimulate an organized attempt by women in Imphal and Kakching to prevent further incidents of this nature. In the following months there was a sharp decline in public misbehaviour by people under the influence of drink, a closure of breweries after repeated raids by the night patrollers, mobilization of public opinion in favour of prohibition, and above all a slight decline in the consumption of liquor.

[1]Much of the material for this chapter comes from research conducted by Sanamani Yamben, economic historian, formerly of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (Department of History) in Delhi.

MANIPUR

GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNICITY

Manipur is a small north-eastern state of India, with a geographical area of 22,356 sq kms. It is landlocked and wedged between Burma and three other Indian states.[2] Except for a picturesque and fertile valley covering less than 10 per cent of the area, the rest of the state is mountainous. Two-thirds of the population of 10.73 lakhs (1971 census) lives in the valley while only a third inhabits the surrounding hills.

This geographical dichotomony has led to two distinct cultures and ethnic groups—the Meiteis of the valley and the tribals of the hills. The Meiteis are the local population of the valley, being an amalgam of six ethnic groups who were converted to the Vaishnavite school of Hinduism in the sixteenth century by Chaitanya of Nadia district (Bengal). The tribals of the hills are divided into two main sub-groups—the Naga and (for lack of a nomenclature) the non-Naga tribes—composed of 22 recognized scheduled tribes and many other minority tribes yet to be recognized. The majority of the tribals of Manipur are Christians. Most of the recorded history of Manipur relates to the Meiteis and to those who settled in the valley. Historical reference to the hill settlers is scanty and sporadic.

The population of Manipur is almost entirely agrarian, with about 70 per cent of the population directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. The main crop and source of livelihood in Manipur is rice. The estimated production of rice during 1977-78 was 3.1 lakh metric tonnes, and of maize, which is the second major crop, 28,000 tonnes. In this agrarian society, flourishing in an isolated, landlocked and (until 1891) an independent kingdom under a considerably powerful *maharajah*, monetisation is of recent origin, and when introduced, it was handled predominantly by women.

The Meiteis followed an orthodox Vaishnav Hindu religious tradition which forbade the consumption of alcohol and did not permit non-vegetarianism. The *maharajah* was the religious head of the population and his directions with respect to religion were totally binding on his subjects. The strict regimen of the abstemi-

[2]Manipur's neighbouring states/union territories are Assam (to the west), Nagaland (north), and Mizoram (south).

ous life promoted by the religious traditions in Manipur continued for almost 350 years, from the sixteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. During this period this Meitei rulers preserved the taboo against drinking and guarded against a "loose life."

The Kabui Naga tribe is of special interest. This tribe, unlike the majority of the other tribal groups, settled in the valley area of Manipur in the early decades of the eighteenth century. It is believed that they came to the valley in 1735, when Maharajah Garibniwas ruled (1709-49). They settled in three major portions of the valley: Chingmeirong, Langol and Lanththabal. The Kabuis were obliged to render free service to the *maharajah*, such as *lallup*[3] and the collection of firewood, but were prevented by court law from social intercourse with the Meitei population so that the ethnic purity of the latter was preserved. Despite the ban, the Kabuis maintained a trading/exchange relationship with the Meiteis. Their settlements existed on the outskirts of the valley towns and they traded maize, potato and forest products for rice, clothes and other manufactured items from the valley. Their extended contact with the Meiteis induced the adoption of Meitei characteristics by the Kabuis, an affinity which proved to be an important link in the spread of the consumption of alcohol in the valley area.

Yet another ethnic group in Manipur, the Lois (classified under the scheduled castes in Manipur) also influenced the spread and sale of alcohol in the valley. Unlike the Kabuis who were traditionally involved in the brewing of alcohol, but not in the actual sale of the product, the Lois have been traditionally engaged in the manufacture and sale of alcohol. They were retained by the *darbar* (court) to supply liquor to a 2000-strong garrison, the Kuki Irregulars, which was maintained by the *maharajah* at the turn of the century.

[3]A system of forced corree labour which operated in Manipur till 1891 and has been abolished since.

MAINSPRINGS OF WOMEN'S POWER

Women in Manipur play a critical role in paddy production in the state. They are engaged in all operations related to production: paddy cultivation, harvesting, intermediate processing (which includes husking, pounding, parboiling), and in the marketing of rice. In addition to the retail trade in rice, women control a large proportion of the trade in other essential commodities. Handloom cloth, which is an important product of the state, is another activity in which women are almost exclusively engaged. Catering and the food "industry" is dominated by women who run tea-stalls, snack shops and hotels.

Women's economic significance is strikingly visible in the busy women's markets of most towns in Manipur. In Imphal, the state capital, the Sena Keithel or Golden Market is a bustling bazar where 2000 women "own" squatting spaces which have been cherished for generations and handed down from mother to daughter. An even larger number of women sell their wares just outside the market. The women trade in articles or commodities which they have produced themselves, as also in goods which have been bought from wholesalers and are sold at a marginal profit. The commodities sold in the Sena Keithel include rice, vegetables, fish, tobacco, salt, oil, baskets and hand-woven cloth.

The "market-women" manage the market and its administrative linkages with the state authorities entirely on their own. Each female retailer pays an annual rental (Rs 3 per vegetable seller and Rs 6 per cloth seller), and the elected managing committee of the *keithel* (market-place) ensures that the market area is provided with certain minimal civic amenities such as water supply and scavenging.

The markets are focal points of the women's community life. Researchers point out that the markets have served as the crucible of women's politicization in Manipur. The commonality of interest as traders and the constant mutual exchanges have bred self-confidence and instilled a crucial instinct for collective action amongst women. The "market-women" have led Manipuri women in mass movements earlier in the century, as described later in this chapter.

Commenting on the significance of women's economic role,

Sanamani Yambem[4] has noted: "A boycott of the market by women would mean a virtual *hartal*[5] of the whole bazar and could even give the economy a jolt."

The work participation rates of women in Manipur have been generally higher than the corresponding all-India female work participation rates. For instance, according to the 1971 census, the work-participation of women in Manipur was 26.00 per cent while the all-India female work-participation rate was 13.18 per cent. The average urban female participation rate in the country according to the 1971 census was 7.37 per cent, while the figure for urban areas in Manipur was 18.00. For rural areas in the country as a whole, the female work-participation rate was 14.55 per cent, while Manipur recorded a female work-participation rate of 27.22 per cent. In 1971, Manipur ranked first in the all-India state-wise ranking by female work-participation rates in urban areas, and fourth in rural areas.

The work-participation data for Manipur males in the 1971 census, in contrast, is lower than the all-India average. While the all-India male participation rate in 1971 was 52.53 per cent, the corresponding male participation rate was 45.68 per cent. The discrepancy is more marked for urban male-participation rates, namely, 48.62 per cent for all of India, and 38.93 per cent for Manipur. According to the state-wise ranking by male work-participation rates, Manipur ranked twenty-first in rural areas and twenty-second in urban areas.

Over 72 per cent of the males in the labour force were agricultural workers, predominantly cultivators. However, investigation shows that men participate actively only in specific agricultural operations, such as ploughing, which engage them gainfully for a six-month period, that is May to October. In the inter-paddy crop months (December and March) males are not engaged in the cultivation of a second crop (vegetables or mustard-seeds). This crop is raised almost exclusively by women.

A small number of the more enterprising males migrate to Assam in their winter months in search of contract labour at construction or road-building sites, although the majority remain comparatively idle or underemployed during these months. Winter visitors to Manipur are often met with the mid-morning sight of men

[4]Sanamani Yamben: "The Nupi Lan: Women's War of Manipur, 1939," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 February 1976.

[5]Strike or closure due to strike.

squatting in groups by the road-side, smoking and chatting, while women are in the fields or in self-owned small shops, or at home engaged in either silk-weaving or housework.

There are clear demarcations between men's and women's work in the house. Men assist in chores like house repairs, but the bulk of domestic work such as collection of fuel and water, cooking, cleaning and child-care is performed by women. As in other parts of the country, the "working women" have not only to earn a living, but also to keep house.

The nature of work-participation of males and females in Manipur is rooted in the economic and political history of the state. Prior to its penetration by the British in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Manipur was a landlocked, isolated kingdom under an independent *maharajah*. The kingdom was divided into six administrative areas (known formerly as *lups*, and later as *pennas*) which were governed centrally from Imphal through local chieftains who owed allegiance to the *maharajah*.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Manipur was a veritable battlefield. Wars were a constant feature and were fought within the country amongst ethnic groups, and also with neighbouring countries such as Burma. The entire state organization was therefore directed solely for military purposes and was "the instrument by which Manipur was able to exercise influence over her neighbours." There was compulsory drafting of the services of all males by the state in the militia. Under the draft or *lallup* system all adult males in the age-group 17-60 years were liable to ten days' service to the state in 40 days. The *lallup* operated equally on the Meitei and non-Meitei population. In recognition of the services rendered by the men, each household was allotted a *pari* (2.5 acres) of land for self-cultivation. The agricultural products cultivated on these plots are not liable to taxation. The nineteenth century thus presents a vigorous profile of the Manipuri male—militant, active, and deeply involved in affairs of state.

The involvement of the male in state service caused the Manipuri household to make unique adjustments in the traditional division of labour, which is characteristic of agrarian societies. Women started participating more and more actively in agriculture —especially on the family plot. They managed almost all agricultural operations, with some assistance from males in ploughing. It was during this period that trading passed into the hands of women, and the tertiary sector came to be dominated by them. The collective economic contribution of the women to their house-

holds accumulated, on the state level, to a substantial participation in the economy.

The following table from the 1881 census of Manipur provides an indication of the high economic participation of women, particularly in the commercial, agricultural and domestic classes. According to this census, women workers comprised 51.2 per cent of the population engaged in productive work. The female work-participation rate was approximately 71 per cent, and the corresponding male work-participation rate was 66 per cent.

Table 1: Population distribution in Manipur by occupation (1881 Census)

Class	*Males*	*Females*	*Both sexes*
Professional	12,169	2.858	15,027
Domestic	7,324	7,672	14,996
Commercial	572	14,861	15,433
Agricultural	51,057	52,880	103,937
Industrial	2,125	917	3,042
Indefinites and non-productive	36,310	32,315	68,635
Total	1,09,557	1,11,313	2,21,070

Source: Dunn, Gazeteer of Manipur, reprinted edition, 1975.

After the annexation of Manipur in 1881, the administration was regulated by the British through the British Political Agent and the Manipur *darbar*, which was presided over by an administrator of the Indian Civil Service cadre. The *maharajah* remained the titular head but was divested of independent decision-making powers in matters of state. Thus, autonomy and self-government in Manipur yielded to an ordered administration in which local initiative was at a discount. This was a setback for the men, who had, traditionally, been identified closely with state administration and service. Further, the British took charge of the defence of the state. This quelled the instinctive drive of the local chieftains to indulge in territorial wars, or to launch wars with neighbouring countries.

Ten years after the annexation of the state, the *lallup* system was also abolished. Ostensibly, the abolition came in the wake of the new rulers' recognition of the injustice of compulsory labour,

but researchers[6] have speculated on the motive for the abolition. They advance two hypotheses for the abolition of *lallup:* first that "the *lallup* was increasingly maladministered in the latter half of the nineteenth century, so that "most of the *lallup* workers idled away their time"; and second, that cheap daily wage labour was available locally for public-works' projects, which made *lallup* redundant. Whatever the causes of the abolition of *lallup*, its effect on Manipuri men cannot be underestimated. The men, who were accustomed to spending a substantial part of the year in the service of the state, were suddenly released from this commitment. Centuries of regimented service appears to have blunted the enterprise of the men, and they seem to have been unable to adjust to the liberation from the *lallup*. Their resumption to full-time agriculture-cum-trading was rendered unnecessary by the efficient management of these activities by the women. Other avenues of employment (namely, petty administrators, contractors) absorbed only a small proportion of the released male labour force. Trade and service outside the state was started by a limited number of men. The image of the "idle" Manipuri male appears to have burgeoned in this period and come into sharp focus in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The work-participation data for 1881 and 1971, although incomparable *per se* due to inherent inconsistencies, are indicative of the contrasting trends prevailing in the economic participation of females and males. Parenthetically, it may be noted that the long-term decline in the share of females in trade and commerce in the present century has been caused mainly by an influx of non-Manipuri traders from other parts of the country into the state.

The women's grip over the economy appears to have been the major contributory factor in establishing their *locus standi* as change-agents in society. Yet economic contribution alone did not provide the impetus or scope for involvement in public affairs —the fact of women's close mutual association in the market-place was equally crucial in empowering them as a political force in the community.

In sum, the mainsprings of women's power in Manipur stem from two factors—their high economic participation, and their mutual association in the market-place (or their involvement with a non-family institution). Although the network of the market is based on the women's economic participation and livelihood, yet

[6]Sanamani Yamben: *op cit.*

the strength generated appears to have transcended economic gain and sparked off political consciousness of their collective strength *as women.* Admittedly, this conscientization took place amongst the market-women, but penetrated the entire state across classes and geographical areas, since almost each household in Manipur has a market-woman or was linked to such a woman for the sale of its home produce.

AN ANOMALY

The Manipuri case provides an important illustration of the complexities of women's struggle and the limitations of the scope for collective action by them. The fact of their high participation in economic activities within the supportive framework of the women's market has ensured economic security to the women, and given them a political presence in society. This would suggest that when women have access to economic power, they naturally emerge into socio-political movements. However, social security still eludes women in Manipur despite their economic independence and political muscle. Social security is conferred only by marriage. The emphasis on marriage, and the traditional scorn of the unmarried female in the Hindu family permeates the Manipuri Meitei society, and this is apparent by the continuing practice of polygamy.

Historically, ever since the nineteenth century wars with Burma, Manipur has experienced an imbalance in the male-female ratio due to the depletion of the adult male population. For instance, the 1817 Manipuri-Burmese war was followed by seven years of marauding raids, during which the valley was de-populated. The male population was substantially reduced, and the women and children fled the valley for safety to the Cachar hills. The practice of polygamy is believed to have started in the Hindu population in Manipur about this time. Due to the overall "scarcity" of males, women accepted polygamy so that the experience of marriage and motherhood was not denied to some.

In the twentieth century there has been a gradual restoration of the male-female ratio (see Table 2) but this has not been matched with a corresponding decline in the incidence of polygamy. In fact, there was a marked increase in the incidence of polygamous marriages in the state, from 2.24 per cent in 1931-41 to 6.6 per cent in 1941-50 (estimates of the *Census of India*, 1961), after which there has been a decline in polygamous marriages.

Analyzing the apparent contradiction of high economic contribution by women and their retarded social status as evidenced in polygamy, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1975) observed:

> An important motivation for polygamy is economic gain. Where women are not a burden but are self-supporting and contribute substantially to productive activity like cultivation and handicrafts, they are real assets and a man can gain by having more than one wife. Thus polygamy in Manipur clearly indicates that sometimes, worth as productive workers may be a hindrance for their unopposed status in the family.

In the course of a field survey conducted in Manipur during the present investigation of alcohol consumption, qualitative impressions of selected polygamous marriages confirmed the general findings of the CSWI. The senior wife is expected to contribute towards the expenses of maintaining the junior wife/wives and the senior wives interviewed expressed a deep-rooted resentment against this practice. The threat of remarriage by the husband causes the wife to suppress the rights accruing to her as a major contributor to the family income, and to accept an "inferior" role in the household, in which she obeys all "reasonable commands" of the husband.

The parallel images of the economically productive Manipuri women, who are victims of sexual oppression, appear irreconcilable with their assertion in political movements in the state. Paradoxically, these women are, by and large, opposed to a popular movement against polygamy on grounds that this is a "personal matter." Why then have Manipuri women selected other cases of flagrant injustice or abuse in society (see the next section), against which they have mounted aggressive and successful campaigns? Perhaps a clue lies in the extent of the "spread" of the infructuous practice and the magnitude of the damage caused to society, as also in the instinct for preservation of the family at all costs, which the Manipuri women share with most women all over India.

WOMEN'S POWER AND BRITISH POLICY

The successful mobilization of opinion by women against the consumption of alcohol during the period 1975-77 follows a long history of women's involvement in the social movements in Manipur. The records show that in the twentieth century women have participated more visibly and vociferously than men in socio-political movements in Manipur. This is a reversal of the familiar intra-community agitations which are dominated by males in most other parts of India.

In the first four decades of the present century, Manipuri women displayed the force of their solidarity on several occasions. The issues they raised related, at least on two occasions, to injustice by the state against men specifically. It is important to note that even these protests were not initiated by the men-folk, although as the movement gained tempo, they joined the women. The men's low profile and the fact that there are no records of protests by women in the pre-annexation (1891) period would suggest that collective action by women *followed* the decline in men's socio-political roles in the affairs of the state. This may imply that the prominent economic role of women was not a sufficient condition for large-scale political manoeuvering, although the nature of economic participation (the close networks of the market-place) caused their politicization. Also, it is equally significant to note that when women did unite as a pressure group their tactics were militant and the state was the target of their wrath. They generally marched together towards the trouble-spot (for instance, the office of the Political Agent) armed with sharp instruments, such as the blade-edged wooden instrument used in loin looms, which they were willing to wield, if necessary.

In contrast to the women's belligerence in these movements in the present century, historical records present a lambent profile of men in protesting social evils even when they were "in power," i.e. in the nineteenth century. Here a distinction is being drawn between participation in territorial wards and intra-societal struggles against oppression or injustice. Researchers[7] ascribe this phenomenon to the deep involvement of the men in the *lallup* system, and wars, a preoccupation which left them with little time

[7]S. Yambem and G. Kabin (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Imphal, Manipur) in private conversations.

or initiative for popular revolt. Yambem records that all revolts in Manipur between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth were palace revolts, based on intrigues in the princely class.

The trail that women have blazed in popular movements in Manipur in the present century is novel, and unprecedented. The better-known mass movements led by women during the period 1905-39 are described below.

RESISTANCE TO REINTRODUCTION OF LALLUP

In 1904, thirteen years after the abolition of *lallup*, it was sought to be re-introduced in Imphal. In the course of a palace conspiracy in the winter of 1904, the house of the Assistant Political Agent had been razed to the ground. The Political Agent, Col Maxwell, imposed *lallup* for the reconstruction of the destroyed house. Before the men could comply, women of Imphal demonstrated violently against the proposed re-introduction of forced labour. The demonstrators were "market-women" who succeeded in foiling the agent's bid to use compulsory services of the male population. They made sure that the house was reconstructed by paid labour.

OPPOSITION OF INCREASE IN WATER TAX

Again in 1925, Manipuri women agitated collectively against enhancement of the water tax. The outstanding unpaid water tax amounted to Rs 30,000, of which the women allowed the collection of only Rs 7,000. They took out a procession in Imphal and organized noisy demonstrations near the *darbar* offices.

RICE EXPORTS AND THE NUPI LAN

The most dramatic of the women's agitations in Manipur was the Nupi Lan, launched in 1939. Nupi Lan translates as "women's war," and the chain of events commencing in December 1939 had all the characteristics of a civil war. A brief account of these events is discussed here.

It has been mentioned earlier that women were in almost exclusive control of the trade in rice, which was their major source of livelihood. Soon after the annexation of the state in 1891, the British "opened up" Manipur to trade with the outside world by constructing two roads linking the state to Kohima in the north and Silchar to the west. They also encouraged Manipuri traders to domicile in the state for purposes of exporting rice to Assam, Bengal and so on. These traders were settled in the terminal decade of the nineteenth century in the British Reserve Areas,

and therefore did not fall legally under the jurisdiction of the *maharajah*. The advent of the Marwari traders signified the beginning of the systematic export of rice from Manipur. The export trade was a novel feature for the hitherto closed economy. But from the earliest stages it caused apprehensions in relation to the local consumption requirements. In as early as 1898, the Political Agent had noted:

> I still think that when thousands of people are on the verge of starvation and there is no means of importing food to the valley, the export of rice, however small, should be prohibited. Let me express the hope that the occasion may not arise to fight out this disputed point.[8]

This observation proved prophetic.

The women rice traders felt threatened by the Marwari traders who had, within a short time, cornered a large share of the rice production for exports. In the period 1922-39 the overall increase in exports was four- to five-fold, whereas the cultivated area under rice increased by only 10 per cent.

By 1938 it came to be widely recognized that reckless exports of rice would cause a severe scarcity in Manipur, particularly in the event of a poor harvest. The harvest of 1939 was destroyed by inclement weather,[9] and there was unrest and panic in the population. Rice exports were banned by a decree of the *darbar* on 14 September 1939. But the rice trade sharks kept up constant pressure for a lifting of the ban on rice exports. The *maharajah* yielded to this pressure, and suddenly on 21 November 1939, the 40-day ban was lifted.

The price of rice escalated, and near-famine conditions developed. The scarcity of rice hit the population directly in terms of restricted availablity for consumption, but its impact on peasant-traders, mostly women, was the severest. Those households were deprived not only of their consumption requirements, but also of their income from trading in rice.

The women traders identified the *darbar* and the Marwari traders

[8]Administrative report for the State of Manipur, 1998-99 (as quoted by Yamben, *op cit*).

[9]"Rain in the last week of July 1939 and the first week of August damaged standing crops. Heavy rainfall, again in late September and early October, had an adverse effect on the harvesting of early paddy, and again in mid-November hailstorms destroyed most of the standing crops ready for harvesting." Yambem: *op cit*.

with the rice famine. They held them responsible for permitting the export of rice in conditions of severe domestic scarcity, and for establishing rice mills which substituted hand-processing of rice by women.

The "market-women" converged on the foodgrains market, Sena Keithel, on 11 December 1939. There was no rice for sale or purchase at the market. Disappointed and provoked, a group of 50-60 women decided to launch an agitation the following day. This was the germination of the Nupi Lan.

That night the women tried to prevent rice-laden bullock-carts and lorries from leaving Imphal for destinations outside the state. On the following morning, 12 December 1939, about 2000 women shouted slogans outside the *darbar* office where an emergency meeting was being held to consider the deteriorating situation in the supply of rice. The crowd demanded immediate banning of rice exports and closure of the rice-mills.

The Political Agent told the women that in the absence of the *maharajah* (who was away from Imphal on pilgrimage), he could not reimpose the ban on rice exports. Characteristically, the women, whose numbers had swelled to 4,000, marched with the Agent to the telegraph office, from where they expected him to send a cable to the *maharajah*.[10] The women confined the Political Agent, civil surgeon and some other officers to the telegraphic office for several hours, in an original enactment of the modern-day *gherao*.

The tense atmosphere outside the telegraph office in Imphal on 12 December 1939 echoed to nationalist/feminist cries, *Bande Mataram!* and *Manipur mataji ki jai!*[11] In order to disperse the thickening crowd, mounted troops charged at the women. The armed troops carried bayonets and it is reported that 21 women were seriously injured, several with bayonet wounds. The women yielded ground temporarily but soon pressed back into the compound. The *gherao* lasted well past midnight. This incident has since gone down in public memory on the day of the "Bayonet Charge."

Rice export was finally banned on 13 December 1939, after

[10]Significantly, their knowledge of state affairs was wide enough to enable them to remostrate with the Agent about the irrelevance of the *maharajah's* approval in the re-introduction of the ban on rice exports, since the latter enjoyed limited executive powers in his capacity as titular head of state.

[11]*Long live the Motherland! Victory to Mother Manipur!*

receipt of a message to that effect from the *maharajah*. The women then set about affecting the closure of rice-mills. A reported crowd of 10,000 women surrounded a large mill and dispersed only when the Political Agent removed the electrical connection from the mill.

The events connected with the Nupi Lan do not end here. Despite the achievement of their primary objective to re-introduce the ban on rice export, the women sustained their protest against the state, and gradually turned their attention to the basic malaise in the administrative and political structure of the state.

The Nupi Lan was oriented towards deeper and more far-reaching issues by a prominent male political worker of Manipur, Hijam Irabot Singh. Irabot, who was away from Manipur on the day of the Bayonet Charge, formed a splinter group, the Praja Sammelini, and broke away from the leading political party in the state, Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, which was reluctant to support the women's movement. He endorsed and encouraged the boycott of the Women's Bazar, which commenced on 13 December 1939, and exhorted women not to cooperate with the state until the fundamental administrative, political and legal redress systems had been altered. Under his influence other men supported the Nupi Lan, and the women leaders sustained the boycott of the bazar through the early months of 1940. Also, despite prohibitory orders in certain parts of Imphal, women defiantly flocked to meetings addressed by their leaders, including Irabot.

Meanwhile, the imperative of World War II affected the rigid stance of the Nupi Lan participants. Prominent leaders of the movement were jailed and *hartals* or strikes were deemed illegal. Incredibly, however, despite a threat held out by the then Political Agent, Gimson, in August 1940, to allot the market squatting spaces to others in place of the absentee tradeswomen, the Nupi Lan women did not return to the market-place. It was only at the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941 that women gradually started returning to their trading places. Although constitutional reforms had not been finally implemented by then, the process had started in the wake of the Nupi Lan protest. Yambem points out:

> The handling of the women's boycott, in contrast to the "bayonet charge," showed recognition by the authorities of the militancy of the women of Manipur. Gimson (the Political Agent) wrote after the Nupi Lan, "Economic distress or political excitement may lead the women of Manipur to take up other forms of agitations, as they have done in the past."

The dramatic events of 1975-77, when women spearheaded a strong movement against the consumption of alcohol, proved once again that Manipuri women had retained the essence of solidarity and violent struggle which their forebearers had exhibited earlier in the century.

WOMEN AND THE DRINKING HABIT

(*a*) *Alcohol consumption in Manipur* (*dimension of the problem*): A large proportion of the population of Manipur remained immune to the drinking habit up to the middle of the present century. These were the Meiteis, who observed the religious traditions of the Vaishnav form of Hinduism prevalent in the valley, and were under the moral influence of their *maharajahs*, who held strong beliefs against the consumption of alcohol. Raja Churachand (1906-42), who was deeply influenced by the Brahmo Samaj reformist movement in West Bengal, imposed an even stricter ban on liquor than his predecessors, so that at a time when the rest of British India had accepted western-style alcohol consumption as a social custom, the Meiteis were insulated against the habit.

For the tribal population, in particular the Kabui tribe and the Lois, the consumption of alcohol was a daily dietary habit, and an essential element of life-cycle rituals. Almost every tribal household brewed rice beer for household consumption. On festive occasions large quantities of the beer were prepared and drunk in communal gatherings. These practices have continued to the present day.

However, by the forties there was a slackening of the moral imperatives against drinking in Manipur. The death of Raja Churachand and the outbreak of the Second World War acted as powerful instruments in breaking certain social barriers, which resulted in the growth of permissiveness in the conservative Meitei society. This provided a strong stimulus to the spread of liquor consumption.

Among the earliest groups of Meiteis to become acquainted with western-style liquor were truck drivers, who plied trucks which bore rice and cattle for export, and imported iron and cement into the state. Contractors and soldiers who were in contact with the outside world also took to foreign liquor and introduced others in the community to alcohol. In a short time

the Meiteis discovered the traditional indigenous brews of the tribals, and found this to be a cheaper and more ample source of supply.

The tribals, prominently the Kabuis, responded with alacrity, and commercialized their traditional skill of manufacturing intoxicating drinks, mainly *atingha* (brewed from husked rice), *puk-zu* (fermented rice beer) and *ashaba*, which is equivalent to country liquor. Household breweries proliferated, and within a short period almost all localities of Imphal, Kakching and other towns had one or more household breweries. The liquor was generally brewed by women in the tribal households. Beer shops were opened in the major bazars of the towns by the Kabui brewers, and later even the Meiteis started vending liquor.

The easy availability and abundance of liquor was one of the major causes of the spread of the drinking habit in the Meitei society. The post-war economic prosperity of the people and the large remissions as war compensation[12] to the Meiteis provided ideal conditions in which the drinking idea fertilized. It has been pointed out that the relative under-employment of males was also an important contributing factor in the spread of alcoholism in the state. Drinking by a vast majority of men allegedly stemmed from frustration about their under-productive roles, which left them with much idle time.

Gradually the beer shops emerged as a focus of the Manipur males' community life, including teenaged boys. They often misbehaved and caused inconvenience to women returning home after dark from work in the fields or the market. The problem assumed acute proportions in the post-harvest season, when earnings were high. In the Kakching area, which is the granary of Manipur, there was an alarming rise in the number of young alcoholics.

Juvenile delinquency witnessed a sharp upswing in the 1960s. The free availability of liquor and its acceptance as a social custom induced some young men to take to drink, while other youngsters from homes of alcoholics turned to anti-social activities. Sociologists have pointed out that the "broken home"

[12]Researchers such as G. Kabui have noted that the substantial inflow of capital as war compensation largely flayed the local economy, save the expenditure on indigenous liquor, because of the lack of opportunities for "luxury" consumption and the absence of investment planning in the state. It is reported that Manipuris often flew to Calcutta to purchase luxuries on an extravagant scale in the post-war years.

syndrome was clearly reflected in the teenagers' frenzied response to certain western films at the time, and in their attempts to simulate foreign life-styles in the local setting.[13]

As alcoholism spread in the valley, claiming a male addict in almost every family, a piquant situation developed. Meitei women were resentful and hostile to the "liquor menace," but the Kabui women and others from tribal household breweries were jealous of their new-found source of income. Sale of liquor contributed substantially to family income in the tribal households, and in some cases, provided the sole basis for survival. Kabui women, therefore, had a deep interest in the continuance of the "drinking custom" among the Meiteis.

The conflict of interest between women of the Kabui and Meitei populations offers a challenge to the concept of "sisterhood," above all else, and questions the proposition that *sex* is always an adequate base for solidarity.

The Manipuri women's movement for prohibition was mounted in the framework of such a conflict, but has avoided a head-on collision because of the disparity in the numerical strength of the two groups. Reportedly, in 1971 there were 3.4 lakh Meitei women in Manipur while the number of Kabui women was 0.11 lakh. In other situations, however, the potential for conflict between women would have to be carefully considered and due allowances made before such a movement is launched.

STATE INTERVENTION AND LIQUOR CONSUMPTION

The problem of alcohol consumption assumed state-wide proportions in the sixties and liquor-related incidents of public misbehaviour became a common and visible phenomenon, stimulating the state government to take certain corrective measures. In 1958, the state government (Manipur was at the time a centrally administered territory) enforced the Bengal and Assam Excise Act of 1910, which permitted the arrest without warrant of any person apprehended (*i*) distilling liquor illicitly, or (*ii*) in possession of apparatus for distillation. In addition, Section 34 of the Police Act of 1861 was invoked, which authorized the arrest,

[13]The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency has not been documented in official sources or probed in depth by research scholars, although it has been widely acknowledged in the state as a social problem. The statement in the text is based on observations of Manipuri scholars, viz. Yambem, G. Kabui and N. Shyamakishore Singh (Secretary, Kakching Prohibition Council).

without warrant, within the municipal area of Imphal, of any persons for (*i*) drunkenness, (*ii*) riotous behaviour or (*iii*) incapacity to take care of themselves. The Criminal Procedure Code (Sec. 151) was available for use in apprehending inebriates in rural areas. For non-cognizable offences and to pre-empt breach of peace, the Criminal Procedure Code (Sec. 510) could be used. These two laws together represented an adequate legal provision for checking both production and consumption of liquor.

However, the police and intelligence network was reportedly not geared to the task of apprehending scores of illicit household breweries scattered over the major towns and rural hamlets. Few cases of illicit distillation were discovered, and when arrests were made, the offender was often awarded a small jail sentence (less than a week), and a token fine not exceeding Rs 50. These punitive measures were not effective deterrents, and did not make any impact on the manufacture or sale of liquor.

The All India Prohibition Council set up an informal branch in Manipur in the sixties. The state branch and its district constituents modelled their operations on the established pattern of the national body. The programmes were largely educational, and concentrated on imparting information on the evils of liquor consumption. Leading women social workers in the major towns were co-opted to the boards of the district prohibition committees.

The efforts of the Prohibition Council and the state government to stem liquor consumption did not evoke popular female support. The formal techniques of education against liquor consumption did not impress the women, who were, by now, convinced that a resolution of the problem required a frontal attack and not a genteel, persuasive approach.

In 1969, the Gandhi centenary year, the prohibition movement erceived a fresh impetus. Under the aegis of the nation-wide prohibition programme, the Manipur Prohibition Council formulated a 12-point programme against the consumption and spread of alcohol. The Council organized a Prohibition Week, during which a silent black-band march was conducted through the streets of Imphal. About 100 prohibitionists (who were social workers) joined in the peaceful march. Along the way, 100 "ordinary citizens" joined the march spontaneously. The Imphal press highlighted the march in its dispatches.

The demonstration march was an important event, which heralded a new form of protest against liquor consumption. It was the first time that the protest acquired a popular reformist orientation,

with people's participation, and more specifically women's participation. In contrast to the prohibition education programme, which was conceived and implemented by the state, the protest march represented the spontaneous response of a section of the population of the state capital against drinking.

Organizers of the 1969 Prohibition Week claim that the protest march created the right climate for popular involvement in the prohibition programme. The march had served to focus attention dramatically on the need for public protest against liquor consumption, and revealed the necessity of a consciousness-raising programme.

Following the march, other anti-liquor programmes were introduced in 1969. These included radio talks and distribution of leaflets. The organizers concentrated on conscientizing and mobilizing public opinion on the issue of prohibition. The social workers set a personal example by renouncing liquor, and even beverages such as tea and coffee. Some of the organizers were affiliated to other state-level voluntary organizations such as the All Manipur Women's Association (an affiliate of the All India Women's Conference), Mahila Kalyan Samiti, Sarvodaya Mandal and so on. The participation of these voluntary bodies in the officially sponsored prohibition programme appears to have introduced a wider section of the population to the programme, since each organization had its own constituent members and areas of operation.

The Prohibition Council and its district affiliates continued to hold meetings and occasional radio talks during the period 1969-74. But soon the format of the meeting became stereotyped, and the movement lost its original grip on the people. Typically, a prohibition meeting included a talk by an invited speaker, most often a politician. Popular participation in these meetings declined as the harangues became monotonous, and there was no attempt at emotional involvement of the sufferers—either alcoholics or their family members—through free and frank discussions.

The police did not extend steady support to the prohibition committees. On several occasions, it reportedly adopted a neutral stance when its assistance was sought to avert a potentially violent incident. With respect to violence in homes on account of excessive drinking, the police were not authorized to take any measure unless the incident was officially reported to them. As the reporting was almost nonexistent, the deterrent effort of the threat of police action was not felt by the home alcoholic.

ENTRY OF THE NIGHT PATROLS

As conditions deteriorated sharply with rising consumption of alcohol and the inadequacy of the existing state machinery to deal with the problem, some sections of the female population realized that they would have to rely upon themselves to combat drunkenness and rowdyism in society.

The "earring-snatching" incident which precipitated in the night patrols, described earlier, occurred against the background of the conscientization of some women in the major towns of Manipur. As news of the incident spread, social workers and women's voluntary organizations sought out women in different localities of the towns and extended their support to the new movement. The idea of patrolling the streets at night evolved spontaneously, partly in response to the incident of a few nights before, and partly as a result of the women's awkward insecurity on the streets after dark.

The first night patrols were organized in December 1975 in Kakching, 40 kms south of Imphal, and within weeks fresh patrols were being organized in other areas of Manipur. The movement struck root in Imphal at the beginning of 1976, and by February of that year the night patrollers were a common sight in the capital.

Organizers and leaders of the night patrol groups enlisted the support for the movement through various mobilization techniques. They undertook door-to-door canvassing, and also organized peaceful demonstrations and meetings. The format of the meetings was oriented to the socio-literacy characteristics of specific areas. In villages, for instance, the meetings included skits and plays on the theme of prohibition. Children were also given roles in these features and were often assigned the informal task of cheerleading a meeting.

The overall objective of the night patrollers was to introduce temperance in the drinking habit so as to ensure that alcoholism did not erode family life, children's health and the potential for productive participation by the consumer of alcohol.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NIGHT PATROL COMMITTEES

The patrols in Imphal, Kakching and other towns were organized around streets and localities or *laikais*.[14] The settlement

[14]A term used to denote a particular geographical area inhabited mainly by members of one particular clan, group. For instance, Salam Laikai would mean the area settled mainly by members of the Salam clan group, where Salam is the family clan name and *laikai* the area.

pattern of Manipuri towns displays ethnocentric groupings, with a *laikai* or locality being dominated by households of a particular clan. The night patrols, or the *nashabandi*[15] committees, as they came to be known later, were therefore generally representative of a homogenous socio-economic strata. Their kinship with the men they were "watching," gave them the authority to "apprehend" an intoxicated individual and their numerical strength of 30-50 women gave them protection against physical retaliation by the men who were caught.

A *laikai* patrol of 50 members has a steering committee of seven to eleven selected members. This committee organizes the patrols, allots streets as "beats," monitors the regularity of attendance of the patrollers, collects fines from the apprehended drunkards, liaises with the police and other official authorities, canvasses support for the night patrollers in the neighbourhood and generally supervises the functioning of the patrol.

Three or four *laikais* form a municipal ward in Imphal and other towns. The constituent *laikai* patrols of a ward elect a ward committee of 11-12 members, and these in turn send representatives to the *nashabandi* committee of the town. The ward committees are in constant touch with the *laikai* committees and at the peak of the patrolling movement in 1976, they held daily meetings of the representatives of the *laikai* committees. The office-bearers of the ward committees are often prominent social workers, most of whom are older women who have been involved in welfare activities in their municipal areas. Their social standing helps to invest the night patrollers with authority for extracting fines and imposing other punitive measures on men under the influence of alcohol. However, these prominent personalities, who also represent rival women's organizations in the state, sometimes generate friction between ward committees.

Enrolment to the *laikai* committees is voluntary and open to any woman genuinely interested in prohibition, and who can pledge herself to nightly vigil with the patrollers whenever required. There is no enrolment fee, and the new member's name and particulars are merely entered in the register of the ward committee. Thereafter, the member is expected to join the night patrol of her area.

[15]Prohibition. Also, abstention from addiction.

Almost each household in a *laikai* is expected to "supply" one woman to the night patrol as a token of the family's sympathy for the movement. The ward committees enjoy such wide-ranging support amongst women in Manipuri society, that subtle strictures are passed against a family which does not contribute a female member to the *nashabandi* organization, and the fear of disapproval induces some households to exhibit their support to the movement by providing one family member in the local night patrol.

FUNCTIONING OF THE NIGHT PATROLS

A *laikai* patrol often assembles at a central rendezvous in the area by 7 P.M. each evening (at the peak of the movement, from mid-1975 to mid-1976, patrolling was regularly conducted only in a few localities in the state). With long bamboo sticks in their hands and huge turbans on their heads, women patrol the streets of the *laikai*. As few streets of Manipuri towns are well-lit, one or two lanterns are carried by the party. Their turbans conceal upturned baskets which are lined with shock-proof material to prevent being hurt by stone-throwing violent men, and sometimes their docile women, from house windows.

The women, who break into merriment when asked about the purpose of their nightly patrols, from a happy and convivial group. Visually, the night patrollers present a scene which is poetic in its beauty. Women with large heads and long poles patrolling under the glow of the kerosene lantern, against the pitch blackness of the by-lanes, are an unforgettable sight.

They mount a two-pronged "attack" on the problem of prohibition:

(*a*) Intemperate consumers of alcohol are surrounded in the street and fined Rs 50 for being found drunk. In the harvesting season, when the paddy crop is sold, some patrols visit the fields in search of men who consume liquor in excess at the work and are unfit to return home without an escort. If the individual does not have the money on his person, he is escorted to his house to collect the amount. In cases where the required amount is not available even at home, the patrollers score the important point about the drain of alcohol on family resources, and make it obligatory to family members and the offender to pay within a fixed period. Thereby the family members are forced to abandon their attitude of resigned acceptance of the drinking habit of one individual, and are pulled into the operations of the

nashabandi committee.

On payment of the fine (for which the *nashabandi* committee issues a receipt) the offender is taken to the police-station and handed over to the authorities; sometimes the drunk individual is engaged in chatter by the patrol while the police is summoned on the telephone by one of the patrollers. The night patrollers do not intervene in police procedures, and the law takes its own course. Repeated offences by an individual under the influence of alcohol sometimes result in physical punishment by the night patrollers. The man is given a beating and then taken to the police-station.

In some cases drunkards are detained for the night by the patrollers in a community structure in the neighbourhood, usually a three-walled room with a roof, used in community gatherings. A few women keep guard over the man, and only allow him to go home when he is sober and after he has paid his fine.

(*b*) Manufacturers and vendors of alcohol are under constant pressure from the night patrollers to curtail production. The women often raid breweries, and break wine pots or empty their contents into street gutters, facing the wrath of the owners with equanimity. They are sometimes accompanied on these raids by a police party, but often they undertake a raid without any legal authority or sanction. There have been very few cases of reprisals by the manufacturers. This is a reflection of the moral authority the night patrollers enjoy in their society.

The *laikai* and ward committees also attempt to enlist support at the political level. Some of the organizers with a background of party politics lobby in the state legislature for introducing more comprehensive laws governing liquor consumption and resultant public misbehaviour. However, they have not always found a responsive audience in the politicians. An unconfirmed incident of 1975 relates to the organization of a massive women's rally in front of the chief minister's residence, when several hundred women were brought to Imphal in bus-loads from the rural areas. The buses were met with blockades on the outskirts of the capital town, and the rally could not take place. A few representatives of the demonstrationists were allowed to present a memorandum to the chief minister.

Attempts to introduce a prohibition bill in the state legislature have not succeeded so far. The organizers of the *nashabandi* committee hold the view that supportive legislation is a necessary

condition for a permanent impact of the women's prohibition movement.

FINANCE FOR THE NIGHT PATROLLERS

The movement is run on the basis of *shram-dan* or "gift of labour" by the women patrollers. The state government does not extend any financial assistance to the patrollers. The Prohibition Council gives an annual grant, but the sum is inadequate to sustain the movement. A major proportion of the funds required for the organization is raised by the women themselves through voluntary contributions. In some cases women have reportedly sold their jewellery to keep the organization from winding up on account of a lack of funds. The amount collected as fines from "offenders" also help to finance the operations. It may be noted, however, that there have been a few cases of dispute over the distribution of the funds between different uses in a *laikai* committee, and also some allegation of misappropriation of funds.

Although the organization does not hire any employees (all work is performed voluntarily without an honorarium and has no other overhead expenses)[16] funds are required for two major purposes. Firstly, the *nashabandi* committees launch publicity, programmes regularly, for which printed literature is required, and public meetings are organized. Secondly, the night patrollers have to be provided with minimal facilities such as lanterns and a light snack in the winter months.

FIELD SURVEY

Women who can commit themselves to a nightly vigil in the streets for several months at a stretch to check drunkenness could be justifiably expected to possess some extraordinary capacities which are not commonly associated with Indian women. Foremost amongst the constraints that women in a similar situation would normally face is disapproval of the family, particularly the husband. Children would present another valid reason for women's

[16]The *laikai* committees do not have any office. Some of the ward committees might have an office, but that is usually located in the residence of one of the office-bearers.

inability to join a movement which keeps them away from the home for the evening and night hours. Who then are the women who constitute the patrols in Manipur and what is their family-cum-socio-economic background? What is their motivation to join the movement, and what supportive framework makes their participation in the movement possible?

A field survey was conducted in Manipur[17] to construct a profile of women night patrollers, as also the organizers who channellized women's out rageat drinking into a collective demonstration of their strength. The survey was conducted in Imphal (urban) and Kakching (rural) pockets.

The sample was distributed across *laikais* according to the intensity of patrolling in earlier years. Two *laikais*, where patrolling is currently continuing, were also included in the sample.

Ninety-seven schedules were canvassed, of which 88 per cent were in urban localities, and 12 per cent in rural areas. The sample included female and male respondents, distributed across three categories of persons: (*i*) women night patrollers (*ii*) organizers of the movement and (*iii*) males of households of the night patrollers.

The incidence of incomplete response to the schedules was about 33 per cent, due largely to the fact that the questions probed sensitive relationships and attitudes. The night patrollers, who are vigorous participants of the movement, are unexpectedly reticent when describing the magnitude of the problem in their personal lives. Excessive drinking is associated with broken homes and frustrated lives, and the women do not seem to be ready to admit to a stranger that they carry the "shame" of alcoholism in their own homes. Male interviewees, no the other hand, were self-conscious in their responses because the women's action seemed to hit both at their behaviour as social beings, and at their sex-related authority in the home.

FINDINGS

Of the 68 participants interviewed, 39 belonged to the age-group of 46-60, while the other cluster was in the age-group 34-45 (Table 3). Most of them were married (Table 4), illiterate (Table 5) and came from families whose size ranged between three and 11 members, more or less evenly distributed in those size classes (Table 6). The majority of their husbands were cultivators, six of

[17]In November 1977 and March 1978.

them were in business, and an equal number were unemployed (Table 7). The women were either in business, i.e. selling in the market (utensils, sweets, clothes or tea) or they were weavers (Table 8). Most of them belonged to low-income families, earning Rs 300-500 per month (Table 9). A majority gave their own personal income as less than Rs 100 a month (Table 10). Thirteen reported that they contributed 25-50 per cent to their family income (Table 11). Most of them were reluctant to answer the question whether there were alcoholics in their households. Only 16 answered this question; and reported that these were either their sons or husbands (Table 12). They added that these men spent about 35 to 75 rupees a month on liquor (Table 13), and seemed to be in doubt whether such men could engage in gainful work or not (Table 14). They added that drinking was mostly done outside the home (Table 15). Only a few women could assess how far the movement against liquor has reduced liquor consumption. Those who reported said that there was a 50 per cent reduction in expenditure since the movement started (Table 16). Not surprisingly, they added that relationships within the household had improved where liquor consumption had fallen (Table 17).

Reacting to question on their mobilization and patrolling they said that demonstrations were the technique by which the movement got going, followed by meetings addressed by leaders (Table 18). At the peak of the movement they would meet mostly once a month, but also daily, if not several times a day (Table 19). Most of the adult members of the family seemed to encourage their attendence at these meetings (Table 20), which were held in the school compound (Table 21). The hours 6.30 P.M. to 11 P.M. in the night seemed to be the most active for patrolling (Table 22) and most of them patrolled every day of the month (Table 23), for three to five months (Table 24). There were usually 50-100 women in a patrol group (Table 25). The most intense activity seemed to have been between October 1975 and January 1976 (Table 26) and many of them feel that since then the movement has slackened (Table 27).

Joint action as a major source of strength was a firm belief of the majority of them (Table 29), who added that they would be willing to start a similar agitation and action against other evil social practices (Table 30). They did not see any difficulty in travelling outside the village for patrolling (Table 31).

PERCEPTION OF MALES OF THE NIGHT PATROLLERS' MOVEMENT

The "women's movement" has won the admiration of a large proportion of the males of the households of the night patrollers, although grudgingly in some cases. Seventy-five per cent of the men interviewed during the survey had initially disapproved of their women's involvement in the patrols as "unwomanly" and "unprincipled." But the wide acceptance of the movement by all sections of the community, particularly in their own clan, had deterred men from exerting undue pressure to prevent their women from joining the local patrols. With a decline in public misbehaviour on account of the women's action, the men began to regard the movement as meaningful.

Over a quarter of the males interviewed during the survey were openly hostile to the movement, and strongly opposed the participation of women from their households in the patrols. Their opposition stems from two factors—one, that patrolling is not consistent with the "rightful" role of women as housewives and "domestic workers"; and two, that patrolling by women is not an effective instrument for curbing alcohol consumption, which requires macro-level measures by the state. The men hold the view that women should concentrate on weaning addicts in their own families away from drink, and should not interfere in the lives of other males. Their hostility has caused the women either to drop out from the patrols altogether or to attend the patrols irregularly.

Some of the men interviewed also state that women were lured into the movement by political workers, and that the night patrols were being used by politicians as mobile constituencies. They predict a splintering of the movement when political conflict between rival groups surfaces.

On the whole, the night patrollers appear to have impressed the men by their potential for militancy and for securing justice through mass campaigns without any support from the state or law. The women's network is recognized as an organic and potent instrument for communication and change in society. However, the men also point out that whereas a group of Manipuri women is militant, these same women are docile and malleable as individuals. The significance of this statement is manifested in the male-dominated family life of the night patrollers.

ORGANIZERS

About 70 per cent of the organizers of the light patrollers' movement are women, and 30 per cent are men. The sample was distributed across female and male organizers in the proportion of their occurrence in the population.

The organizers are mature individuals, generally with a record of social service and with leadership qualities. About 10 per cent of those interviewed belong to families which had participated in the Nupi Lan. Socially, they are drawn from a varied background, including the princely class, salaried employees and the working class. The respondents range in age from 30 to 50 years. They all have at least middle-level schooling, with several matriculates and graduates amongst them.

Many of the organizers are professionals: teachers, paramedical workers, lawyers. Social work has engaged them in their spare time, and at times of natural calamities in the state they have, as a rule, performed social work in the spirit of service and without remuneration.

The prohibition drive, and particularly the women's contribution to the movement, attracted them as a worthy cause. They were drawn by the women's enthusiasm and the strength of their commitment.

The organizers regard themselves as peripheral to the night patrollers' movement, which has potential for self-propelling growth. They perceive their role as one of management of women's energy, and harnessing of their collective force. However, most of them have worked with dedication for promotion and extended personal resources—both physical and financial—to keep the movement alive.

The formation of women's patrol groups is regarded by the organizers as an important "gain" and some of them propose to use these groups to introduce action against other unjust social practices such as dowry and polygamy

IMPACT OF THE NIGHT PATROLLERS ON CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL

There is no conclusive empirical evidence of a decline in liquor consumption in Manipur since 1975, the beginning of the agitation by the night patrollers. In a situation where a large proportion of the manufacture and sale of liquor is illicit and beyond the purview of excise levies, quantitative data, as for instance on the sale of distilled alcohol in licensed shops, is perhaps not likely to

be accurate in monitoring trends in alcohol consumption, per capita or the total for the state.[18]

Table 2

Rupees (in crores)

State	*1972-73*	*1973-74*	*1974-75*	*1975-76 (RE)*	*1976-77 (BE)*	*Census 71 Total population (in crores)*
Andhra Pradesh	38.49	37.48	40.73	64.60	75.00	43.3
Assam	3.23	2.25	2.39	3.38	3.48	1.50
Bihar	12.78	14.65	19.85	29.48	31.50	56.3
Gujarat	1.12	0.89	0.77	1.00	1.07	26.7
Haryana	10.84	11.50	15.50	20.00	20.00	1.00
Himachal Pradesh	3.59	3.85	4.60	6.27	6 37	3.4
Jammu and Kashmir	3.10	5.19	5.70	6.80	7.40	4.6
Karnataka	28.60	29.30	38.00	53.00	56.00	29.3
Kerala	21.00	9.30	13.43	20.34	22.47	21.3
Madhya Pradesh	17.27	18.05	23.42	35.00	38.75	41.7
Maharashtra	7.72	19.59	25.92	31.37	32.89	50.3
Manipur	00.05	00.06	00.07	00.16	00.20	1.1
Meghalaya	00.07	09.07	00.16	00.26	00.27	0.9
Nagaland	1.32	00.55	00.65	1.45	1.30	0.4
Orissa	4.68	4.85	5.35	5.90	5.70	22.0
Punjab	24.18	29.12	35.41	43.00	45.94	13.5
Rajasthan	9.50	12.00	12.60	18.50	19·40	25.7
Sikkim	—	—	—	0.48	0.49	—
Tamilnadu	35.49	36.43	17.89	3.46	3.65	41.1
Tripura	00.18	00.14	00.16	00.18	00.20	1.6
Uttar Pradesh	23.29	27.69	32.36	08.32	50.63	88.4
West Bengal	18.03	19.65	20.90	26.50	26.60	44.4
Total	254.53	282.61	315.86	419.45	449.31	547.4

*RE: Revised Estimate. BE: Budget Estimate.

Source: Prohibition—Policy and Programme (Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare).

[18]The liquor excise revenues of selected state governments for the period 1972-73 to 1976-77 are tabulated above. Manipur's realization of revenues has been consistently the least in the country in this period.

Yet there are some telling changes in the pattern of alcohol consumption and the public behaviour of consumers in the post-1975 period, which relate to the efforts of the night patrollers. For instance, the field survey reveals that there is a decline in riotous behaviour in public by intoxicated men, a fact which is universally acknowledged in the state. The streets now offer a relatively safe passage to unescorted women at night in the urban areas. Some liquor shops have moved away from the busy market areas to the outskirts of towns and villages. There is a marked reduction in the location of liquor shops in the vicinity of educational institutions and religious places.

The venue of alcohol consumption has shifted more and more to the home. Men hesitate to patronize wine shops in anticipation of interception by women vigilators. This might have led to an increase in alcohol consumption at home, which in itself is not an unqualified achievement. But the reduction in public misbehaviour might be the first step in controlling general irresponsible behaviour by alcoholics, and the isolation of the "regular" might result in a further decline in misbehaviour at home.

In about 80 per cent of the surveyed households the average monthly expenditure on alcohol has declined. In the pre-1975 days the average daily expenditure on alcohol by a regular consumer was Rs 3-Rs 5. At the time of the survey in 1978 the daily expenditure per "regular" is Rs 1.50-Rs 3, a reduction by half. There appears to have been a corresponding increase in expenditure on food, clothing and education. Although there was poor response to questions in the survey relating to the comparative distribution of income between different uses in 1975 and 1978 respectively, there was sufficient data to indicate that there had been a reallocation of income from alcohol to survival needs.

In households with regular consumers of alcohol, there has been some improvement in family relationships. With a reduction in the consumption of liquor the alcoholic has shown greater ability and willingness to engage in income-earning activity, and this has added to the disposable income of the family by both increasing total earnings and reducing the outlay on liquor. There also appears to be some recognition on the part of the "regular" of the emotional stress caused by the drinking habit on family life.

Police action has been precipitated in many more cases than previously by the interception of drunkards by the night patrollers. In spite of alleged indifferences of the police, there has been a

greater application of legal deterrents against law-breakers with respect to liquor consumption since 1975. The increase in punitive awards to offenders have had their own demonstrative effect on potential law-breakers, especially under the influence of alcohol.

However, it cannot be stated with any confidence that the depressant impact of the night patrollers on liquor consumption is a permanent gain. There are signs already of a resurgence in alcohol cousumption. In most areas where the night patrollers have discontinued active night patrolling, there is visual evidence of a creeping return of the problem of drunkenness. This fact is acknowledged by the night patrollers and organizers, who have assisted the movement. Opponents of the movement, most of whom are males who consume liquor regularly, point to the recurrence of the problem as documentary proof of their belief that the impact of the women's movement is evanescent.

FIELD SURVEY OF THE NIGHT PATROLLERS OF MANIPUR

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE PARTICIPANTS

Table 3: Age of respondents

15	—
15-34	7
34-45	14
45-60	39
60+	7
No response	1
Total	68

Table 4: Mrital Status

Unmarried	45
Married	12
Widowed	6
Separated	
No response	
Total	68

Table 5: Education

Illiterate	52
Primary	9
Secondary	1
High school	3
College	1
Total	68

Table 6: Family Size

1-2	2
3-5	18
6-8	22
9-11	16
12+	10
Total	68

Table 7: Occupation of males

Business	6
Carpenter	3
Teacher	4
Cultivator	14
Shopkeeper	1
Banker	1
Social worker	1
Student	3
Unemployed	5
No response	6
Total	44

Note: The above questionnaire was canvassed on 44 respondents only.

Table 8: Occupation of Participants

Business (utensil-selling, selling & manufacturing sweatmeats, the tea shop and cloth-dealing	26
Weaving	24
Hand-pounding	7
Cultivation	10
Household work	1
Total	68

Table 9: Monthly household income of family (in rupees)

Below 300	25
300-500	24
500-700	6
700-900	2
900 and above	1
No response	10
Total	68

Table 10: Monthly income of participants

Below 100	14
100-150	5
151-200	5
201-300	3
301-350	3
Above 350	1
No response	13
Total	44

Note: The above question was canvassed only on 44 households.

Table 11: Contribution of participants' income to family income

Per cent	
Below 15	4
15-25	3
25-50	13
50-75	1
75-100	—
100	10
No response	13
Total	44

Table 12: No. of participants that stated the presence of alcoholics in their households and their relationship to the respondent

No of participants that stated presence of alcoholics in the household	16
Relationship to respondent:	
Son	7
Husband	6
Brother	2
Husband's brother	1
Total	16

Table 13: Amount spent per month by the household that stated presence of alcoholics in the household

Rs per month	*No. of respondents*
Less than 35	—
35-50	6
50-75	5
75-100	1
No response	4
Total	16

Table 14: Ability of alcoholics to engage in gainful work

Could engage in gainful work	8
Unfit to engage in gainful work	8
Total	16

Table 15: Place of consumption of liquor

Vendors	3
Outside	11
Friend's house	1
House	2
Total	16

Note: 11 respondents stated "outside" but did not specify.

Table 16: Reduction of expenditure 'since movement started' in households where liquor was consumed regularly

By 50 per cent	8
Did not specify	8
Total	16

Table 17: Change in family relationships in households where liquor was consumed regularly

Improved	12
No change	4
Deteriorated	—
Total	16

Table 18: Method by which prohibition movement started

Bhajan, Kirtan sessions	—
Dramas and plays	1
Demonstrations	16
Prohibition meetings addressed by leaders	9
Others	4
Total	30

Note: The total exceeds 24 since respondents reported more than one method. Four respondents stated other methods but did not specify.

Table 19: Frequency of meetings at the peak of the movement

3-5 times daily	4
2-3 times daily	4
Once daily	6
Once a month	9
No response	1
Total	24

Table 20: Attitude of adult members to attendence in meetings by respondents

Encouraging	13
Hostile	3
Indifferent	2
No response	6
Total	24

Table 21: Place of meetings

School compound	14
Public grounds	3
Office compound	3
Did not specify	3
Total	23

The above questions were canvassed only in the second phase of the field survey, on 24 respondents.

Table 22: Hours of patrolling

8-11 p.m.	2
10-11 p.m.	7
10-12 p.m.	2
6.30-11 p.m.	6
7-12 p.m.	6
Did not respond	1
Total	24

Table 23: No. of days of patrolling

30 days	15
15-16 days	3
13-14 days	1
Did not respond	5
Total	24

Table 24: No. of months for which patrolling continued

4-5 months	5
3-4 months	5
2-3 months	1
Still active	6
No response	7
Total	24

Table 25: No. of women in patrol group

50-100 women	18
30-49 women	4
Did not respond	2
Total	24

The above questions were canvassed only in the second phase of the field survey, on 24 respondents.

Table 26: Intensive period of agitation

January-March 75	2
April-June 75	
July-September 75	
October-December 75	24
February 75-January 76	19
January-December 76	3
June-August 76	2
June 76-May 77	1
March-July 77	2
June-November 77	2
Did not respond	9
Total	68

Table 27: Slackening of movement after initial effort

Did slacken	28
Did not slacken	7
Did not specify	33
Total	68

Table 28: Measures suggested to reactivate agitation to counter alcoholism

Public meetings, organization of women's committee, personal contact and daily vigilance	8
Abolishing unauthorized liquor shops and education that will teach consequences of alcoholism	2
Abolishing alcohol manufacturing areas and alcohol manufacture being taken up by the Government and supplied through cooperatives	2
Threatening and finding of vendors	22
Did not specify	10
Total	44

Table 29: Joint action as major source of strength

Joint action as major source of strength	39
Joint action not a major source of strength	2
Did not specify	3
Total	44

Note: The above question was canvassed only in the first phase of the survey on 44 repondents.

Table 30: Willingness to cooperate to start agitation against other evil social practices

Willingness to cooperate	64
No response	4
Total	68

Table 31: Travel outside village for night patrolling

Travelled outside village	39
Did not travel outside	1
Did not specify	4
Total	44

Table 32: Role of night patrollers in the movement

Night patrolling	44
House to house contact	13
Organizing village public meetings	6
Attacking unauthorized shops	3
Search and gheraoing of drunkards	11
Entrusting the drunken to police	10
Social education to youths	8
Total	95

Note: The total exceeds 44 since most patrollers have multiple roles. The questions for Tables 29 and 30 were canvassed only in the first phase of the survey, i.e. on 44 participants.

REVIEW

The night patrollers reached the peak of their activity during a period when there was a ban on public meetings—namely, India's emergency months (1975 June to 1971 January). This was also a period when prohibition was not a national commitment.

Today the movement is at a low key. As said earlier, when patrolling is reduced, breweries re-emerge and so too inebriate drinking.

The women leaders explain the low ebb in terms of depletion of moral and financial resources. They seem to think that unless the state, through its enforcement machinery, supports these efforts, they would be battling endlessly. They would like to see the police follow up their identifications, have the breweries close down, and not give licenses to new ones.

But such enforcement by itself has never been able to operationalize prohibition. Perhaps their case is that they offer a moral and powerful popular support—but such support cannot sustain itself without some official back-up. This should be easier now for the state government with the official line being what it is and half the revenue loss through excise being compensated by the Central budget.

However, a larger implication is—has the movement lost its momentum because of the official policy, because of the lack of "underground" enthusiasm?

Further, has the movement neglected to take into its consideration the deeper, underlying causes of Manipur's unusually high alcoholism?

For example, the Kabui households support themselves through the brewing and sale of liquor. What ideas have these night patrollers for alternative sources of livelihood for these families? It is quite possible that Kabui women dislike alcoholism amongst their men as much as the Meitei women, for it brings violence and hunger into the home. But their needs have not been a focus of the sisterhood of the night patrollers.

Similarly, the listlessness of Meitei men. This phenomenon, graphically illustrated by the presence of men and youth sitting idle in the squares of towns and villages in Manipur, is as much the result of the same historical process that accounts for the active participation of the women of Manipur in public protest. The men of Manipur felt strong as warriors while the women

minded their economy. Now that warring is not required they have become "displaced." What is the in-put—education, indoctrination, theory or myth or activity—that would help them out of this impasse?

If the answers to such questions were simple, then many of the problems of inequality between men and women would not have persisted. Paradoxically, the men of Manipur are experiencing some aspects of the problems faced by women in most parts of the world—though not all.

At one level it may appear that if unemployment amongst the men was removed (men's participation rates are unusually low in Manipur) their egos may pick up and their drink-proneness become reduced.

But this may be an oversimplification of the issue. Seeing this picture as a mirror image of what usually happens to women during social and economic transformation, it appears that the root of this problem may lie in role-allocation between the sexes, and the internalized difficulties of readjustment. Self-perception is as much an impediment as are social attitudes.

The picture gets even more complicated as land, the classical property, is owned by men in Manipur. This fact poses a question to the hypothesis that property relations determine power relations—a common explanation of women's subordination.

Two further explanations of female subordination also enter the scene: the "man-the-hunter" hypothesis and the "woman-the-reproducer" hypothesis. If the mainsprings of male authority were based on men, "ego" persists in the west even after the histroical change of roles[19] there. In Manipur it seems to have collapsed. Likewise, the woman is the reproducer in Manipur but she is active in some arenas of public power.

A further complex layer gets added to the problem by the fact that in Manipur women do fear men within the household, and abide by their authority; as well as the fact that women are not anywhere on the political scene in Manipur in spite of being the power behind its trade and commerce. In this aspect the Manipuri situation is very similar to the situation across the border in Burma.

These contradictions clearly indicate that neither economic

[19]Discussion at "Commission on Women," XI International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Science, New Delhi (December 9-16, 1978).

roles, nor participation in selected public arenas changes either in intra-household power allocation or in public power allocation. That the night patrollers, in spite of their extraordinary bravery during 1975-76, could not get through a prohibition bill is evidence of this Wall of China which constantly frustrates women's struggles, especially when it requires legislative and other official or "public-zone" changes.

The night patrollers' action also provides a sharp illustration of how the success of women's struggle for equality would depend on how far they are able to identify themselves with wider issues pertaining to economic and social insecurity and injustice. If the Manipuri night patrollers could have taken up the cause of the Kabui or tribal households who have been marginalized in the Manipuri economy, they would have a new source of strength. If they had gone further and evolved new roles for their men they could even have whittled away at the cause of male drinking.

A question was raised at the beginning of this chapter, whether women from other cultural environments could develop similar movements and, further, under what conditions they would be able to develop such strength. While it would be futile to try to simulate either the history of public protest or the strong presence in the commercial sector that Manipuri women exhibit, their experience does indicate that a strong economic base provides self-confidence, as do repeated experiences of successful public participation. It may not be all. But it is a beginning.

PROFILES

NG MOMON DEVI, GENERAL SECRETARY, ALL MANIPUR WOMEN'S SOCIAL REFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT SAMAJ

Forty-six-year-old Momon Devi is a well-built and short-statured woman whose life-sketch presentsa picture of how personal experience had made women in Manipur take to the prohibition movement, not merely as a movement against drinking but within the wider framework of social reform. It also shows how through this movement she is trying to add meaning to her personal life.

Though married, she has no children and her married life cannot be described as successful. This would also perhaps reflect

the casual and flexible marriage customs which prevail in Manipur. Momon Devi was married at the age of 17 through a custom known as *Kanya Katpa,* which is a simplified form of marriage and which does away with a large number of rituals associated with the usual wedding ceremony.

She lived with her husband for only three years. She said that as she was the eldest of three sisters and without any brother, her mother wanted her to stay with her. But soon after she returned to her mother's place, her husband married another woman. Since the age of 20 she has lived by herself and not re-married.

It was a strange sort of marital relationship, where they lived separately, not legally divorced, yet accepted each other on occasions. It is hard to visualize this and it reminds one of the feudal chiefs with concubines in several locations.

This separation from her husband had a deep impact on her life, for ever since then she became an alcoholic. She drank heavily. She also joined a touring theatre company. She signed up with the Rup Mahal Theatre and was there for three years, after which she began to "freelance." It was at this stage that she began to tour large areas of Manipur, wherever people wanted her to do roles.

She severed relations with the world of theatre when she was 34, and took to trade activities. She started by selling coconuts at the Kwairamband Keithel, after which she took to cloth and other items. She built up a thriving business which brought her in contact with various people from all walks of life. Among such people was Koirang Singh, a former chief minister of Manipur, who influenced her to join the Congress Party. However, her husband advised her to take to social work and not enrol as a full-fledged party worker.

Momon Devi admitted that prior to her joining the prohibition movement she did not have much experience as a social worker. Yet she was drawn to the movement because of her personal predilection for drink.

By the year 1975 the prohibition movement had picked up momentum in Manipur, and Momon Devi, who was a hard drinker, began to change her ways. She gave up drinking and began to join the rank and file of the women prohibitionists.

In a way very much like her break-up from her husband, which had such a deep impact on her that she began to drink, the prohibition movement drove her away from drinking.

Though she had joined the prohibition movement she remained in the background in the first few months. It was an incident in

January 1976, at a place called Ningthoukhong, which made her take the leadership. This particular incident involved some police personnel who were encountered by the women night patrollers, but because these women are mainly village-folk they wereal ways afraid of the *darugababu* (village constable). Momon Devi, because her husband is a police-officer, knew how to handle them more than the other women. Her leadership in the middle of the night against the police provided just the needed spokeswoman.

Her commitment stems out of her personal life and her feeling that a change by reforming herself would bring about a reformation of others.

NAOREM SHYAMKISHORE SINGH, SECRETARY, KAKCHING PROHIBITION COUNCIL

A teacher by profession, N Shyamkishore Singh lives at Kakching, a town 23 miles to the south of Imphal. Like in any typical Manipuri household, he lives with his parents and his wife and children in the same thatch-roofed, mud-walled house where the family has lived for a number of years.

Born in 1936 at Kakching, Shyamkishore Singh had his early education at Kakching. He graduated in 1964 and completed teachers' training in 1971. In between obtaining these degrees he earned his livelihood by working as a private tutor. He is married and has four children, three girls and one boy.

Considering the background which Shyamkishore Singh comes from, it is not surprising how he became involved with the prohibition movement. A teetotaller, he began his involvement with a social voluntary organization in 1958, when he became founder-secretary of the Popular Club (Kakching) in 1958. He is now chairman of this club.

He was also associated with the establishment of the Khunjao Leikai L.P. School, of which too he became founder-secretary. At present he is a member of the governing body of this school.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Shyamkishore's social commitment, and more so to the women workers and traders of Kakching, is the establishment of the Kakching Bazar Storekeeper Thrift and Credit Society, of which he is chairman. Established in September 1977, the society caters to the needs of women traders. He says that this is the first society of its nature to be established in Manipur and the beneficiaries of this society are exclusively the women. The society has, so far, extended credit to 250 women small-traders. He is also a member of the Bazar Board

Committee.

Being a teetotaller and a person who had resented drinking ever since his childhood, he joined the prohibition movement in December 1975. For him the nuisance created by the drunk, particularly to the women traders, was one of the main motivations for joining the movement. He also resented the quarrels which broke out among the people after they became drunk.

Since Shyamkishore Singh has distributed his time between Imphal and Kakching, he offered a comment on the comparative spread of alcoholism in the two towns. According to him, about five years ago, Imphal was a comparatively more "sober" town than Kakching. He further explained that in Kakching, where the local population had close links with the tribal population in the neighbouring villages, many young people had taken to drinking.

Kakching is a prosperous town with a population of 22,000 and is surrounded on three sides by tribal villages. On the west is Mantak village, which has a population of 500, followed by Litan, on the south-west, which also has 500 tribals. This is followed by Aimol on the east with a population of 1,500. There is also a small Maring village with a population of 450. All these tribal settlements brew both beer as well as country liquor. Of them Mantak thrives the most for its commercial production of alcohol. This is followed by Litan and Aimol. The Marings also produce, but purely for domestic consumption.

It is this engulfment of Kakching by the tribal settlement which leads to the widespread nature of liquor consumption. Singh pointed to an important difference in the consumption of alcohol by tribals and non-tribals. The difference lies in the fact that while for the tribals drinking is a matter of the daily diet, for the non-tribal it is a means of intoxication.

The problems and difficulties which the women night patrollers face centre around the lack of governmental support and follow-up action. The women are aware that without the help of the police they would not be very successful, and yet the police are not forthcoming to help the women. Shyamkishore Singh feels that the police should be clearly instructed by the government to render every assistance to the women night patrollers.

The lack of governmental action weakens the morale of the women. What these women require is not financial help but official recognition and legal sanction for the action which they take up.

RAJ KUMARI MUKHRA DEVI, SOCIAL WORKER AND INITIATOR OF THE PROHIBITION MOVEMENT

Raj Kumari Mukhra Devi was born at Imphal in 1932. Daughter of the late Dr Ibotonsana Singh, one of the first practitioners of allopathic medicine in Manipur, she had her early education at Imphal and completed her matriculation from Tamphanana Girls High School in 1951. She then went to Shillong, from where she graduated from Cotton College (Gauhati) in 1955. She received her master's degree from Delhi University in political science in 1957.

Born to a family with a tradition of education, she had the advantage of receiving education at a time when women's education was not popular in Manipur. From her very childhood she had been attracted and influenced by social work. Her attraction towards social work was partly the result of her Gandhian studies during her post-graduation course. The choice of this subject had a tremendous influence on her future convictions. She married Mohindra Singh, an advocate, at the age of 26 in June 1958.

Asked whether teetotalism was a factor in her choice of husband, she replied in the non-affirmative. She added that she has developed a maternal attitude towards her husband.

In September 1957, with her nomination to the Manipur Territorial Council as the first woman member of the Council, she entered the first phase of public life. She accepted this nomination with a certain degree of diffidence, as, given her inexperience in public speaking, she thought she would not make a successful politician.

Her first term with the Territorial Council ended in 1962, after which she was re-nominated in 1962 for a term of another five years. It was during her second tenure in the Territorial Council that she was made Chairman of the Manipur State Social Welfare Advisory Board. Apart from this she was associated with a number of other voluntary organizations.

She began to undertake the organization of women in various areas. In 1962 she founded the All Manipur Women's Association, of which she is the President. This organization is affiliated to the All India Women's Conference. In 1966 she founded the Mahila Kalyan Samiti. She also became a member of the Family Planning Association and the Citizen Volunteer Training Centre. She was also a founding member of the Manipur Home Science Association.

It was against this background of active social commitment and involvement that Mukhra Devi became involved with the prohibition movement. Her involvement dates back to 1969, the Gandhi centenary year, when she, in collaboration with the Sarvodaya Mandal, observed the Prohibition Week. However, despite the conception of the prohibition movement in 1969, in the period prior to the 1975 active movement for prohibition, there was no concrete plan being taken up by the prohibition committee.

Her commitment to prohibition was further strengthened after the visit of Justice Tarachand and his address to the All Manipur Women's Association in 1974. By the year 1975, the prohibition movement in Manipur was activised again and Mukhra Devi became President of the Manipur Prohibition Council. For her the prohibition movement is part and parcel of the general women's movement of Manipur. She believed that the prohibition movement, above everything else, made the women more conscious of their rights.

What motivated the women of Manipur to take up the prohibition movement? According to Mukhra Devi, human values are the most important factors in improving social life, and drinking affects and spoils every aspect of a person's social life. It also affects the person's character and participation in economic life. The way to check drinking, therefore, was by checking and controlling the conditions of their social life. This she believed would bring about a substantial contribution to the process of checking the drinking habit. And since the fact that the worst sufferers of men's drinking habits are the women, she took up the leadership of the women's crusade against drinking.

Mukhra Devi feels that the action of the Manipuri women may not be termed as revolutionary in bringing about social reform and change in society, but it has succeeded in bringing about consciousness.

What then are the concrete results of her action? Being a person substantially influenced by Indian philosophy, she is not too concerned with the results. What is important for her is the performance of her duty towards society. She also feels that irrespective of governmental assistance the work should be continued. "I am not concerned about the result of what I am doing. For me it is my duty. I am a *karma yogi*.[20] This explains her attitude towards life.

As a believer in non-violence how did she view the action of

[20]A believer in duty for the sake of duty.

the women night petrollers? She expressed her unhappiness when violence sometimes erupted—for instance when stones were thrown at the women or when untoward incidents took place. Mukhra Devi believes that for the women's movement to be meaningful, the operations must be non-violent.

As the main organizer of the women's prohibition movement she felt that the attitude of the government during night patrolling was one of indifference, and yet afraid of the women's action. The action of the women night patrollers made the government of Manipur take up certain steps towards the amendment of the Police Act. The Police Act was amended as applicable to Manipur, but was later repealed. The bill had attempted to make the offence of drinking in public non-bailable.

There can be no denial of the fact that the movement has now become a mass movement and spread over the vast area of the Manipur valley. It is now in a low ebb and the original vigour with which it had begun has now died away.

What, then, would be a permanent solution to the problem of drinking? Mukhra Devi feels that the way to solve this problem would be by conducting the following programme.

She felt that mass education is a necessity to bring about mass awareness. She is also aware of the plural nature of Manipuri society, with its large tribal population, for which the brewing of rice beer and country liquor is a traditional art. For these people, who would be directly affected by the prohibition movement, she wants to start a rehabilitation programme. For Mukhra Devi, therefore, irrespective of whether the movement is successful or not in the eyes of the public, she would continue to fight and carry the movement further.

As a leader of the women's prohibition movement in Manipur, Mukhra Devi portrays the picture of a person with long social involvement and a sense of dedication towards the majority of Manipuri women. Driven by her personal conviction and the support she received from the women-folk on the prohibition movement, she, at one time, occupied a very exalted position and was the recognized leader of the women. At a time when prohibition in other parts of the country was not taken up seriously, she took up the cause in response to the women's needs. Though perhaps not as popular now as she was during the height of the movement, she still commands respect as a pioneer in this field.

THANGJABAM MADHABI DEVI, NIGHT PATROLLER

Thangjabam Madhabi Devi, a 65-year-old widow, took part in the night patrol along with other women of her locality, at the phase when night patrolling was most acute in 1975. She belongs to an area called the Naoremthong bazar in Imphal. She lost her husband about 20 years ago, and lives with her son and her grandchildren. She runs a small tea-stall in the bazar near her house, and maintains her family with the earnings from this business.

Asked how a woman of her age took part in the movement, she replied that in Manipur there is a tradition where the elders provide an example for the young ones. In the same way, she said, her participation was a powerful example for the younger generation. The sight of an old woman moving at night had the desired effect of attracting the younger women, and at the same time deterring the men from misbehaving.

To Madhabi Devi, it really did not matter whether they had the sanction of the law behind their action. All she knew was that drinking was undermining the life of the males and this had to be stopped. When pointed out that she was doing something illegal, she replied with conviction that the law sometimes overlooked the most pressing needs of society.

She described how she, along with others, apprehended the drunkards and how they were sent to the jail. Although several drunkards paid fines in her presence, she is unaware of the manner in which the money was used. She also doubted whether the fines imposed by the police were entered properly in the cash register.

Madhabi Devi joined the movement not so much out of any ideal that what she is doing will radically transform society, but from the simple faith that if the government fails to stop the consumption of alcohol, the *praja*, or the people, will do so. To her the *praja* is the women.

SAKHI DEVI, NIGHT PATROLLER

Sakhi Devi of Tera Keithel (Imphal) has a household of five members, is illiterate, but runs a flourishing handloom trade business. She runs a shop at Gauhati and her supplies come from Imphal. She earns about Rs 600 a month. Five members of her household used to drink. Their monthly expenditure on drinks in the pre-prohibition days was Rs 500. After the prohibition movement, and more so after she joined as an active member of this movement, monthly expenditure on drinks has been reduced to

Rs 350. She admits that people in her household still drink, but with more caution and less misbehaviour.

It is rare to come across a woman like Sakhi Devi, who spoke without inhibition on drinking in her family.

LAISHRAM IBECHA DEVI, NIGHT PATROLLER

Family tension, created by excessive drinking, not merely led women to take part in the movement but also to be separated from their husbands. Laishram Ibecha Devi, a young woman of 34, is now separated from her husband as a result of her participation in the night patrol, which was a protest against her husband's drinking habits. Her husband, who used to work in the police department, consumed all his salary in liquior. This created such tensions that the only path left for her was to leave her husband and earn her own livelihood by weaving.

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