

Development Work Among Rural Women

A GUIDE BOOK

Krishna Bai Nimbkar



INDIAN ADULT EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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PREFACE

Ever since 1951, considerable thought is being given to the problem of enlisting the participation of rural women in our various programmes of rural development. Our success in this direction, however, appears to be limited because of two major difficulties. One is that the situation that is developing in rural areas is quite unique to the rural woman who, hitherto, had managed to somehow make-do to the best of her capacity without the services and amenities essential to even a meagrely decent life or in the alternative had conditioned herself to an existence bereft of aspirations towards it. The second difficulty we appear to face is that of projecting programmes for her which, to be appropriate, need to be simple enough for her to grasp and which at the same time, besides being practical enough for her to adopt, would be capable of improving her life. This difficulty is all the more complicated because any programme we may evolve needs also to be related to a rich tradition to which she is heir and which it is neither possible nor desirable to deny.

These two major considerations, it appeared to me when I was in the United States and Canada observing the working of the Home Economics Extension Services, would impart their own special characteristics to similar services we might desire to organise here in India. Our extension service, I was convinced, could not *merely* be Home *Economics* Extension Service but something more—much more—which would encompass and influence a much wider sphere of the rural woman's life than similar programmes do in the United States or Canada. This conviction was more than confirmed in the course of my visits to Community Development and NES areas in the various States during my brief but exciting and enlightening assignment with the Community Projects Administration (now Ministry of Community Development). In my tours of the project areas, I saw workers, enthusiastic and intelligent, often helpless in evolving programmes because they were unable to

go beyond the narrow groves of formal concepts which constituted the terms of reference for their functions. Thus, I feel, if our work among rural women is to be really effective, it is necessary for us to give concepts a meaning that will be peculiarly ours and one that will not be foreign to our rural women. This, I feel, too is the task that devolves on the worker in the village and this little book is an attempt to define how that task can be accomplished.

Many would wonder whether the village worker with her limited qualifications would succeed at all. I believe she would, given of course, the right perspective and an understanding of the rudimentary principles governing the changes we wish to bring about in the ways of our rural women. This booklet, if it serves the purpose of providing her with a perspective to blaze a new trail, I feel it would have achieved its purpose.

In parenthesis, I might permit myself the liberty of hoping that this booklet will be read not merely by workers but also by others who administer programmes. In my experience, I have come to feel that the administrator's understanding of the problems of rural women matters as much as the workers' understanding ; what is more, unless there is, among those who administer programmes, a concern that success in this aspect of the programme is atleast as important as in any other aspect of the Community Development Programme, there is little hope that we will succeed in enlisting the participation of rural women in our development plans. The woman village level worker has been called the little woman with a big destiny but whether she realises her destiny or not would depend as much on others who preside over *her* immediate destinies.

Krishna Bai Nimbkar

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INTRODUCTION

THE LAMPLIGHTER

It was in the home of a Regar (chamar or shoe-maker in Rajasthani) in a village near Jaipur. I was in a fervour of admiration for the beautiful pair of red gold-embroidered slippers! Unlettered, untaught man and wife had together turned out a thing of beauty, which could put to shame any skilled craftsman trained in more sophisticated school of art and craft !

In my broken Hindi I asked the man, "Who taught you this workmanship and how do you pass on your knowledge to your son?" Pat came the reply, direct, uncalculated, and spontaneous, in his Dhundari dialect, "The stomach which taught me, will also teach my son."

I felt dumb for a moment ! In country reeking with a history of traditional heroism, with the effulgence of the Sun to symbolise the unconquerable spirit of Bappa Rawal and Rana Pratap, with an industrious people who worked like very bees for bread, but in whose blood, there yet flowed an irrepressible and instinctive creative genius so evident in every walk of their existence in spite of grinding poverty. Was it not a tragedy that such an answer should be forthcoming? Yet it is true! Art and craft and beauty have been left to thrive merely on the "necessity" of the craftsman to adjust to pressing needs of his own stomach and the mouths he has to feed! It defeats imagination how the Chamar and his wife so assiduously and so sincerely pursuing an honest calling, yet unconsciously keep alive the heritage of centuries with none to nurture and sustain their spirit !

I next addressed the wife; "Where do you cook your food and put your baby to sleep if you are using this pial of the cottage as your workshop?"

She took me by the hand, happy to show me round her little domain.

At the door step I stumbled, but recovered my balance as the darkness inside restored my vision to see the outline of things. It was a small 8-ft, square mud-walled room with a thatch. In one corner were stacked raw leather hides; in another corner were earthen pots stored with grain and dried vegetables; in a third corner was the *choolah* with no smoke outlet; and in another corner was a small hammock slung on to a rope in which was her baby, blissfully cradled in sleep. In the centre of the room, hung by a string, was a square packet tied carefully in a rag; in front, opposite the door, was a niche where the family Gods reposed.

"And what is this packet" I asked.

She ran out and led in by the shoulder a lad of ten years. Proudly gesticulating to make sure that I understood her Dhundari dialect, she said, "They are his school books. He can read them!"

"And where is the light that can show him what is in those books?" I asked

Foolish question that! So I hurriedly changed the topic as her husband joined us. He was apologetic about the darkness. "If we put in a window for light, the draft blows in and sends out sparks from the *choolah* which will threaten to set things afire. Moreover, the pressure of strong winds might blow off the roof. Not the least, it might permit the entry of evil spirits! So we do not have windows to our houses!"

I nodded understanding, but persisted in the line of conversation. "Don't you light lamps on Divali Day? Why?"

“So that Lakshmi can come in,” he answered.

“Is it sufficient if she comes to make your home her abode for one day in the year only?” I asked.

“No, we want her always,” he said, “but we cannot afford the oil to light so many lamps daily.”

“The sun is the best light giver and its warmth is good. Will not a window bring in light daily and invite Lakshmi daily to stay on in your home for always?” I continued.

Man and wife admitted the truth of this contention. So I drove home the point further: “Do you know the Gram Sevika who will tell you how to make a window that will let in light and warmth and yet keep out the drafts of rude winds and the entry of evil spirits? She will help you to get assistance for re-modelling your home and arrange it so that you can have more space for your workshop. She will tell you how to separate your kitchen from your baby’s sleeping corner. She will tell you how to make storage space for leather hides separate from the place where you store your foodgrains. She will tell you how to prevent smoke from the *choolah* troubling you. She will tell you a nice way of making the baby’s bed. Let her help you to light up your abode! Let her help you to invite Lakshmi to come and stay with you for always! She is the Gram Sevika, the lamplighter!”

And man and wife smiled in understanding and turned round to welcome her!

Gram Sevika, are you aware of the great work that awaits you ?

OUR RURAL WOMEN AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

All the world over, there is an awakening of the new age and an awareness of its urgencies. This age, with its scientific advancement, bears promise of a high degree of material prosperity. Though its full impact is confined only to a certain section of the world's population, its technological developments are tending to act as a great lever, turning the sods of this earth in distant and less advanced regions, ushering in the prospects of a better life to the millions who had not dared to aspire for anything more than the meagre minimum for their subsistence.

Impact of Science

In India, a manifestation of this is the attempt at planning to provide our people with the "basic ingredients of a decent life"—through which scientific advancement is being utilised to enhance the quality of the life of our people. In this attempt, because the tremendous possibilities of science can become acceptable only to an awakened people, rigid and conventional ways of thought have to be, and are being, discarded. New ways are being evolved; new concepts are being defined and new values are taking root. "An irreversible process of social transformation" is, thus, in the making.

The Challenge before Our Rural Women

This process poses a challenge before our rural women. Their life, hitherto isolated and oblivious to the happenings beyond the world of their household, is now laid open to the

impact of science and of improved technology. Their response to this impact will determine not only their future and happiness but also the entire nation's striving for a better life; for, if our society is to continually grow and provide material security and social significance to its members, it will be only when it is educationally advanced enough and is capable of handing down scientific knowledge to the coming generations. Since rural women constitute the core of our society, our success or failure will depend on the measure of *their* acceptance of the needs and demands of a dynamic and progressive culture.

Our Objective and Purpose

The objective of our work among rural women is, therefore, to help them equip themselves to participate in the process of social transformation that is being generated in rural India.

The immediate purpose of our work among them, in this context, is to secure among rural women:

A conviction that their life need not be the toilsome burden that it is today but one in which labour is neither needlessly dreary nor its fruits scanty; that domestic life is not all drudgery bereft of exuberance but one of joy and fulfilment; that their place in society not a passive one but one in which they have an imprint to make;

An acceptance of newer ways which development plans will make it possible and stimulate for the purpose the ingenuity to devise better practices;

An understanding of their role as better farm wives, housewives, mothers, citizens and, above all, women.

The problem before us, is to evolve a method whereby it would be possible for us to extend the knowledge, skill and know-how which will be in tune with the new order.

THE HOME AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development and national reconstruction, should they mean anything at all, must have primarily an impact on the home. But the experience we have gathered in the course of the implementation of the First Five Year Plan shows us that the various activities conducted under the Plan have left our rural women untouched and consequently, rural homes have not been brought in the ambit of developmental activity. It would thus seem inadequate for us to assume that rural development would naturally lead to better homes—to improvements in living habits, resulting from a rational exploration of the improved facilities for a better life that accrue from development envisaged in planning. The question before us however, is, how is the link between the rural home and development to be established? What has been the experience of other nations which have planned for prosperity? How have they succeeded in reaching to the homes, specially in rural areas, the knowledge obtained in books on Home Economics or Home Management and how can we do this?

One method which has been tried out with great success in the United States and which has become popular in some of the other countries is the extension method. Let us examine what this method is and how it has been applied in the countries where it has achieved a signal success. We could then survey the situation in our own country and modify its application suitably.

What is Extension ?

The philosophy behind extension is to discover to people

the ways to help themselves; its objective is to approach each new generation with fresh techniques—with techniques which are constantly revised so that they appeal to each generation. Its maxim is to start where people are. It accepts people as they are, and does not demand that they should be educationally advanced. Accordingly, its principle is to work with the people to persuade them gradually to accept improved and scientific practices in order to effect a continuous betterment of living standards. Its technique is the adoption of modes and procedures of work which will be best suited to prevailing conditions of rural life. The application of extension methods is based on experimentation and its evaluation on how many people have been reached and how many of them come to accept improved practices. Training for competence in extension methods is based on pattern the “in-service” for extension is not only to do things, but constantly try to do them better, utilising in the process the latest knowledge and the best available techniques. Extension as an educational agency, thus, will not only help rural people increase their efficiency and their incomes and with it improve their living standards, but it will also help them to grow into understanding, accomplished and self-confident men and women.

Home Extension Work in United States

In the United States, prior to the development of Extension Services, the education of rural people consisted of attempts at inviting them to join a centralised college and avail themselves of the chances of getting the education they needed. But, just as in India, a great mass of farmers there, were never able to get to the colleges. The few that did so, did not prove influential enough to introduce improvement of a lasting nature on rural progress. So the State Colleges decided that sending out trained persons into farms to live in the farming community and learn the farmer's needs on the one hand and at the same time teach the farmer better practices would be a better way. Out of this developed the vast network of extension services of which Home Economics Extension forms a part.

The organisation of Extension Services, in a little over 3,000 counties, comprises of about 9,500 extension agents in addition to the 2,500 in agricultural colleges and 75 members in the Directorate of the United States Department of Agriculture at Washington. The agents on an average of three per county represent the three lines of work—namely, Agricultural Extension, Home Extension and the 4 H Club. One of the three agents, is a man trained in agricultural extension who works with the farm man; another is a woman; trained in home economics who works with women, the third is either a man or woman, who works for boys and girls in the 4 H Club. Thus, these three take care of the whole family—the father, mother and the children. The 4 H Club which works for boys and girls between the ages 10-21 years, aims at an overall development of the young people—the 4 Hs standing for the Head, Heart, Hands and Health. Since the extension programme is one of helping the people to help themselves, the entire organisation functions on the sanctions it derives from the local leadership. Thus, this nationwide professional staff of 12,500 derive the authority for their work as much from about the 7 million unpaid local leaders—i. e. leading farmers, leading farm women and the leaders of the 4 H Club as from their Departmental Heads.

The extension agents make more than twenty million personal contacts with the farm people and others interested in agriculture and home economics. They explain and demonstrate better practices in meeting which in all are attended by about seventy-five million men and women. They help to train and inform a million voluntary local leaders. Thus, they carry out the mendous nationwide drives, reaching constantly large numbers of people. Thus because their work has found "grass roots" and derives nourishment from the people themselves, the extension agents are successful in their work.

Home Extension Service

The Home Extension Service is a vital limb of the extension movement that carries the educational process to women in

their homes. From the Federal to the State, from the State to the District, from the District to the County, there is an easy chain of a whole cadre of home extension agents. From the peoples' end there are voluntary organisations like Farm Bureaus, Farm Women's Bureaus, Women's Institutes, Home Makers Clubs, Home Demonstration Clubs, Future Homemakers' Associations, Home Economic Associations, Dietetic Associations etc. All of them put up their best effort to improve homes and their surroundings, to serve the community and the Country. In the Department of Agriculture, Washington D.C., the Federal Field Agent who is responsible for the most of the co-ordination of the work of the Home Demonstration Agents, receives report filtered through local organisations. In consultation with the specialists attached to the Federal Extension Service, these reports along with the appropriate suggestions are again referred back to the Director of Home Extension in each State, who through their State Home Demonstration Agents, in consultation with local organisations, formulate their own programmes.

Content of Programme

The scope and content of the Home Demonstration Programme have broadened progressively through the years. In the history of home demonstration, in the beginning, emphasis was largely laid on simple skills like canning, cooking, and sewing. By 1950, the approach was to the family, as well as to the individual, and the programme came to include health and health facilities, economics, consumer education and marketing, family relationship, recreation, in addition to food, clothing, home management and home furnishing. As a direct result of home demonstration, 28% of the farm families of the nation and a large number of non-farm families as well, were so influenced as to make some improvements in their homes and living conditions. These improvements ranged all the way from planning family meals according to health needs or making winter coats for mother and daughter, to rearranging the kitchen for greater convenience or installing electricity in the homes.

Rural women and girls learn much that is cultural as well as practical in such home demonstration work. There are many opportunities for the individual to discover her own abilities and to receive training in leisure time pursuits. Farm women sing together in choruses ; they do more reading now than before because they are able to obtain good books through their clubs and libraries ; they take part in dramatics; they attend camps of short courses sponsored by the Extension Services. Group work provides an opportunity for association with other women; for exchange of ideas on home problems and for tours to improved homes of their neighbours. These influences lead to an active desire for higher levels of health, housing and family living.

The institution of Home Economics Extension as part of the Cooperative Extension Services can be traced to the early twenties of this century. In the course of about 30 years' existence, it has opened out an endless vista of a variety of careers for girls and women. This is an important aspect of its development. Home Economics as a subject is actually developed in the community and the family, as an answer to the perpetually changing social and economic requirements of the rural people. It finds its scientific handling in the classification of these needs into a programme of teaching and training that is instituted in almost all the schools, colleges and universities of America. This teaching of Home Economics has been developed along a great many branches, both along general as well as specialised lines. It offers a vast range of employment; commerce and industry, hospitals and schools, hotels and restaurants—all employ large numbers of Home Economics graduates to fill up a variety of posts. Hospitals and schools, for instance, employ large numbers of Home Economics graduates as specialists in Dietetics. Manufacturers of electrical goods employ Home Economists to popularise their latest appliances like refrigerators, pressure cookers, improved kitchen gadgets etc. Thus, with a whole variety of openings before the graduates in Home Economics, an impetus is given to girls to take to the subject.

From the people's end, women's institutes and home makers' clubs are always on the look-out for Home Economic specialists who assist them in their voluntary programmes of social service, like school lunch programmes, club projects and to help to formulate fresh lines of activity for 4 H club boys and girls.

Thus, the Home Economist is in great demand and constitutes the link between research and the home, between national development and the rural family.

Home Economics in Japan

Another country, approximating more nearly the conditions in our own, which provides the services of Home Economists, is Japan.

Japan is foremost among the Asian countries as far as industrialisation is concerned. One would have expected that the impact of industrialisation would have led to a rational modernisation of woman and her home to the same extent as in Western countries. But Japan too like many of her Asian neighbours has yet a long way to go.

Impact of War

Till the last war, the Japanese way of life was largely based on the tenets to Shintoism and a social order of a semifudal conception. Women, by and large, in such a scheme of things, laboured under social disabilities of several kinds and their position in society was no better than that of women in the rest of Asia. Little or no attempt had been made at any revolutionary changes or radical social reforms. During the war, however, with large masses of men mobilised into soldiery, women, perforce, had to shoulder a wider range of responsibilities and this marked the beginnings of a new status for women and newer modes of life in their homes. Furthermore, shrinking space with a rapidly growing population forced a hard-pressed country after the war to step up trends in the direction of radical social reforms as well. For the first time

in the history of Japan, her women acquired the right to vote and in the first elections held after the promulgation of the post-war constitution, several women were returned to the Parliament. Since the war, women have made such remarkable progress that it might now be said that there is no occupation in Japan in which women are not found. Some of the foremost women's organisations acted as spearheads in the introduction of these reforms and helped the Japanese women to meet the challenge that their new responsibilities demanded. Alongside the activities of these organisations, international exchange visit programmes sponsored through various international bodies gave a great fillip to women's welfare work in Government Department and Legislature and in the fields of voluntary social work. Thus, by the compulsion of circumstances following war and post-war conditions and the work of voluntary agencies, the ground was prepared for the philosophy of extension. The post-war Japanese Government wisely took the important step of establishing and developing home improvement work allied to the agricultural extension activity of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Japanese Government.

Extension Methods in Japan

Methods of extension, however, had to be adapted to suit the requirements of the conditions in Japanese homes. In the rural areas, over 8-million women were engaged in farm labour and thus substantially supported the agricultural sector of the economy of the nation in fifties. Most of these farm women work on an average about 12 to 13 hours a day, including their work in the home. They over-work so much that they have hardly any time for recreational and cultural activities. But the farm women are coming to realise more and more that unless the whole economy of farming is improved, pressure on their lives cannot be relieved. They are, therefore, participating more and more in such agricultural cooperative activities as will help reconstruct the farmers' economy. In the task of reconstruction, the Home Adviser, the counterpart of the Home Economist in U.S., plays a very important role by encouraging

aspirations for a better planned life and more modernised ways of living and family management.

The adaptation of extension methods to suit the peculiar conditions of Japan was made easy by a few pioneers in its Home Economics Extension Service. They made a studied approach to the problem facing their people and evolved such techniques as were most suitable for the rational introduction or progressive betterment of standards in the homes. This, along with the radical land reforms introduced by the Government and the encouragement given to rural industries, covered all aspects of improved practices in the farm and the home. Village life, starting from the home kitchen to community amenities like recreation, health, education etc. were brought under the influence of extension methods.

The Home Improvement Adviser

The House Living Improvement activities are directed, at the State headquarters by the Chief of the Home Improvements Section who works through Home Improvements Advisers at the prefectural i.e. provincial, as well as the district level. Home Living Improvement Extension Organisation in Japan is mainly divided into six blocks and each block holds a short course of training for Home Advisers twice a year. Representatives of Home Economics Specialists and Home Advisers who are already in the field service participate in short course training meetings which are held under the sponsorship of Home Improvement Section of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Tokyo. Those who participate at such meetings take the experience of their training to each prefecture and relate them to other home advisers for the districts. Annual meetings of home Advisers and Home Economics specialists are held in Tokyo where they exchange experience of work with farm wives and village women.

The Home Adviser attends office but the major portion of her time is spent in home visits and organising housewives' group meetings for various purposes. The Home Adviser's

green bicycle which is the hallmark of the Extension Service and which therefore, offers a protection to the woman worker, is a popular symbol which is welcomed by the villagers both rich and poor. She advises farm families about cleanliness in the home and surroundings and actually demonstrates to the housewife the best methods to adopt. She very judiciously introduces improved amenities without rousing prejudices and works with the housewife to solve her daily problems. She demonstrates improved methods of cooking nutritious foods, the use of utility garments, the wearing of aprons while at work, the making of working clothes and children's dresses. She instructs about washing and mending. New crafts like machine knitting as a hobby and home industry to add to the cash income, are also taught. Farm women who raise sheep are shown ways of self-sufficiency in their requirements of woollen clothing and are induced to earn incomes by selling surplus wool. While the mother and the housewife are participating in demonstration meetings, discussions or study groups, the Home Adviser organises nurseries alongside and demonstrates better care of children. Lack of forest land and the need for conserving mineral coal for industry impells the Japanese housewife to devise measures for the frugal use of fuel in her home. The Home Adviser's constant problem with farm wives is to teach them fuel-saving devices.

Community Centres

While the farming women are working in the field, the Home Adviser takes steps to organise creche for their children at Community Centres. These Community Centres serve the members of the community for many common purposes. They have common baking arrangements where wheat is popularised in the form of baked bread to supplement rice shortage. Methods of food preservation, laundry and sewing demonstration are also held at these Community Centres. Very often they also serve as places for holding social and ceremonial functions. Farm wives, home makers as well as farmers and their children visit the numerous fairs and exhibitions which are organi-

sed for demonstration purposes. Working in co-operation with the Agricultural Extension Worker, the Home Adviser organises demonstrations in improved housing and in remodelling homes. Assistance is offered to rural industries, rural co-operatives for improved milk supply, fish breeding, poultry keeping, vegetable farming and other rural occupations.

Home Improvement Service, thus, constitutes a vital service functioning among all sections of the rural population of Japan. The success of this is largely dependent upon the high percentage of literacy among Japanese women which, in turn, is made possible by the adoption of a very unique system of educating children in rural areas. Children are not excluded from work even during school-going age but state laws provide compulsory attendance for at least three hours at the nearest primary school. Not any less true is the fact that the success of home improvement methods in Japan is largely due to absence of factors like caste barriers, class exclusiveness and inhibiting religious differences.

III

EXTENSION SERVICES IN INDIA

The success of the extension service in the United States and in Japan is an indication that if such extension activities could fulfil a vital role in keeping the rural women abreast of modern developments, we in India, too, could adopt similar methods. If we are to be successful, however, it is essential that we should impart to such extension programmes, characteristics peculiar to our conditions. Only then would our programmes acquire roots among the masses of our rural women.

In adapting the extension service in a manner suitable to us, we must bear in mind one cardinal fact that our rural women are shrewd, practical and realistic. The problem we have to tackle is the problem of their isolation from progressive ideas. Our success in tackling this will depend on the extent to which we are able to suggest to rural women newer ways of living which will be in keeping with their environment and which will at the same time be an improvement on the present.

Our method, under the circumstances, must be such as will introduce gradually better and more improved ways of living. It is not a whole armful schemes from the top or sophisticated views of what is "good" for the rural women conceived by people outside the pale of understanding of rural problems that will strike a responsive chord in the minds and hearts of rural women, but one which will help the rural women explore and exploit the simpler forms of nature's gift in which our country still abounds. Our method, consequently, must evolve out of a two-way traffic between science and the life of the masses of our rural women.

U.S.A., Japan and India

To begin with, the outstanding difference between India and either United States or Japan is that we have here a scarcity economy and the problem we have to tackle is that of under-development. We are not likely to advance in the foreseeable future to an extent wherein this situation in the country would be remedied. Thus, scarcity, almost perennial for sometime to come, will compel an adjustment of human needs to those conditions. It is in this context that we have to evolve our pattern of home improvement extension.

The first vital difference in regard to content of programmes between some of the Western countries and India which is conspicuous is that our programmes would include a range of activities, much wider and much more basic in character than in either U.S.A. or Japan. Thanks to centuries of stagnation, our rural homes have not kept pace in evolving in a manner which would make a link with the present, easy. Our poverty has constricted the concept of a "home" and very often the home even in the barest sense of a physical shelter is absent. Consequently, the concept of "home needs" assumes a wide range of categories. It may vary from the need of shelter to innovation for convenience; from requirements of environmental hygiene to a sense of aesthetics in habitation; from basic dietetic requirements to the fulfilment of the needs of the taste; from a knowledge of child care to education among adults. Home improvement, besides implying extension of knowledge in better domestic practices, would also have to deal with the problem of augmenting the family's resources.

The Need of a New Method

Another factor to be reckoned with is that while in the Western countries much thought has been bestowed on the various problems that face rural women and solutions found for extension to the rural house-wife, in India beginnings are yet to be made in this direction. Our work, therefore, will be of a pioneering nature and we will have to use our ingenuity, and possibilities through experimentation. Undre

these circumstances the first thing that is necessary in evolving a suitable programme is a study of:

The range and nature of activity of the woman as a housewife; the standard of performance of the average housewife and improvements thereon; limitations to such improvements and the measures necessary to remove them; and the range and nature of activity of the woman as a wage-earner—as a partner of the man or independently by herself. In the case of the former ways and means could be indicated so that her participation yields greatest results. In the case of the latter, instruction could be imparted on the means available for engaging farm practices and other allied activities.

Chalking Out a Programme

This study would enable the worker to discover how the village housewife could be better than she is. The housewife's role is manifold—she is a house-keeper, mother, wife and in most cases a wage-earner as well. At the moment the problem of the woman worker in a village would be to suggest ways and means whereby the housewife could perform her role better than she does at present in these various capacities. The village worker's function would have to be :

1. To bring about an awareness of the needs of the household;
2. To indicate ways and means of fulfilling those needs; and
3. To introduce rational and to the extent possible, improved techniques in home practices;

In organising appropriate programmes, the worker's aim should be to :—

- (a) Lead the housewife on to adopt conditions of living one step better than she does at present;
- (b) Relieve the pressure on her energies and time;
- (c) Help create for her a little more leisure by discovering

for her how her labours can be performed under more favourable conditions; and,

- (d) Help her fill the leisure thus created by a new hobby or utility craft which will get her mind absorbed on to new pursuits of an uplifting kind, and at the same time, contribute to a betterment of the family standards.

Perhaps it would be useful if we listed the points on which our data needs to be collected. These may be broadly stated as the following:

1. Concerning the Housewife: Her Functions

The several functions that the rural women fulfils such as:

- (a) Housekeeper;
- (b) Manager for her domestic budget;
- (c) A teacher educating her children;
- (d) A wife, mother and hostess in her home;
- (e) A toiler in the fields along with her men;
- (f) A worker at a supplementary industry, at cottage craft or at possessing work of agricultural produce of attending to work on the farm like the care of livestock, milking of milk cattle, disposal of farm products etc.
- (g) As a sanitation worker, in charge of the cleanliness of her home and surroundings.

In this connection note the extent to which the housewife meets the needs of the household, the extent of skill and efficiency she shows and the extent to which she undertakes her duties with understanding. Note whether she takes an interest in performing her functions or whether she merely acts as a drudge and toiler.

II. Shelter

Generally observe:

- (a) Whether the houses are grouped close together or are separate habitations.
- (b) The state of sanitation inside and in the surroundings.

- (c) State of upkeep, whether well preserved, dilapidated or neglected.
- (d) Whether the house is constructed on a plan; whether it can be improved upon and if so, what alterations can be effected within the limitations.
- (e) What attention has been paid to light, fresh air and water.
- (f) Within the prevailing conditions, suggest any suitable improvement which the family can adopt with a little persuasion and guidance.

III. Home Improvement Activity

Observe:

The manner in which the house is maintained. Make note of any improvements that may suggest themselves from the point of view of space saving, sanitation, convenience and labour saving. Observe the kitchen, the cradle, the bathing place, the cattle shed, poultry, goat and sheep pens, granary or stores, the door fronts, the well-side, the back-yard, the water closet and the portion of the pavement or street in front of her house. Remember whatsoever improvements can be suggested must, at the moment, should be within the limitations under which she has to live and the gram sevika has to work.

IV. Food

The following questions the worker needs to keep in mind:

- (a) What is the nature of the food the family consumes? Is it balanced?
- (b) What modes of cooking does the housewife adopt? Does she adopt preservation methods to put by food to serve during scarcity times?
- (c) Does the house wife distinguish children's food needs separately from those of the adults?
- (d) Does the house wife possess a knowledge of processing food stuffs and if so, to what extent?

- (e) Does the housewife know how to cook a sick person's diet?
- (f) List the improvements you could effect in various directions, all within the limitations of facilities you can provide.

V. Clothing

Find out:

- (a) What are the dress habits of the family?
- (b) What washing facilities do they possess?
- (c) To what extent, can the housewife stitch simple essential garments and what knowledge of mending does she possess?
- (d) Does she know to distinguish between baby clothing, children's clothes, out-door or utility or working, clothes for occasions and seasons?
- (e) List the directions in which you could guide her in the above connection, all within the capacity of her understanding and facilities available.

VI. Crafts or Subsidiary Occupation

Find out:

- (a) Whether the housewife possesses any particular hobby inherited or mastered.
- (b) What amount of leisure or time, away from the tasks in the home and in the field, does the housewife get to engage in such craft or hobby?
- (c) What seasonal subsidiary occupation does the family engage in or about which information can be obtained.
- (d) Is sufficient raw material available nearby? If so, does it need processing and if so, who processes them?
- (e) Is there any indigenous craft which can be given encouragement by offer of better facilities to pursue the craft?
- (f) Does the house-wife show any special preference for any particular type of handicraft?

Approach and Techniques of Work

As regards techniques of approach, the worker must equip herself to face the many difficulties that she might come across in reaching the maximum number of families. She will have to vary her activities within a very wide range but the sounder way will be for the Gram Sevika to build round a basic standard pattern of the humblest household and then make adjustments so as to suit divergent households. She would have to take into account the resources available to the households and must keep in mind that the modes of living between different categories of economic groups are often divergent. Social stratification on the caste basis has led to differing social groupings and a diversity in living habits. Furthermore, inhibitions due to various economic and social factors tend to be stubborn and persistent. All these problems can be solved only in the course of the actual implementation of what could be termed as a rock-bottom programme, a minimum pattern which could be applied to various homes. Half the problems may be deemed to be solved if the worker is able to determine what can be changed and what cannot be changed and what needs to be changed and what does not need to be changed in a complicated maze of beliefs, prejudices and traditions.

Avoid Conflicts

In the context of the evolution of a programme, there is bound to be a perpetual conflict as to what aspect should receive precedence; whether it should be the provision of social services, or whether it should be education and more education for better living. The emphasis will have to vary from place to place, house to house and family to family. It would be perhaps easier to evolve a programme round the actual study of the functions performed by the rural women in her home, in her fields and at her cottage industry. It would then be a practical one. This programme must be distinguished from organisation of extension of essential social services. It should also be distinguished from the introduction of social welfare activities aiming at the redressal of existing defects or social ills.

The Home Improvement Programme, while touching all these things, should do more; it should stimulate resourcefulness, self-help and social leadership towards an effective utilization of the essential social services offered. Such a programme should also be flexible so as to suit local circumstances, and related to the needs of the population served. Consequently, the programme should be based on any one or more of the obvious needs of the housewife in relation to her home and the environment of her work in the field or at cottage industry.

IV

ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITIES AMONG RURAL WOMEN

The need for women's organisations

There are various agencies carrying out constructive field activity among rural women and village housewives. These agencies, at a certain point, find it necessary to devise a programme which will keep the interest of rural women continuously focussed on efforts for their own betterment and induce them to shoulder more responsibility on themselves. For this purpose, unless local leadership is stimulated to undertake more and more responsibility to organise and conduct their own institutions, to plan their own programmes and turn out constructive activity of a character that is directly beneficial to them, inspiration for self-development is not likely to be continuous.

The introduction of a programme of home improvement extension among rural women, necessitates also the creation of an appropriate psychological atmosphere for it—an atmosphere which will induce rural women to aspire for higher and better standards of life. Only when such aspirations are kindled among rural women, will they feel the urge to seek out and utilise the services and accept ideas of improved living which the village worker is in a position to provide. One of the important tasks before our worker, therefore, is to make the beginnings of an organised movement for a fuller utilisation of the facilities for better living now at the disposal of the village communities.

For this purpose, workers need to strive to create local organisations of rural women which can be tapped not only for

securing their cooperation, but also to ensure that the initiative for implementation of programmes derive from rural women themselves. Therefore, the home improvement worker must devote herself also to programmes which will help to bring out leadership qualities which will enable rural women create and conduct their own institutions for their welfare.

In India, among the urban women, such organisational activities have had a fairly long history and tradition. More than one national organisation functions with the purpose of galvanising women on issues which affect them. These women's organisations, however, have grown up on issues pertaining to questions like franchise, removal of social and legal disabilities, reforms in education, social emancipation etc. These issues, though of great import to women universally, have had appeal only to the more advanced and urban sections of women as such.

In our effort to launch on a programme of activities for setting up an organisational structure for the rural women to express themselves, we have to remember that the same impulses which helped to develop organisations among urban women may not be appropriate or adequate in the present context. The programme of community development and other such activities which provide for social services, place our rural women in a different situation altogether. In this new situation, organisational methods and activities too, would need to assume a different orientation. A specific sense of direction and clear definition of goals is essential and building up an organisation of rural women will be successful only if the programme of activities can provide as much opportunities to stimulate mental activity as for better physical living

Ways of setting up primary units

There are many ways through which we could set up Grameen Mahila Mandals or primary units of rural women's organisations which would help rural women solve their problems. There are two approaches which can be adopted by

a worker through which rural women can be helped to organise. One of these is the indirect approach and the other the direct approach.

Indirect approach

This would consist of linking the services of any agency in the area, whether voluntary or official, with the felt-needs of the rural women and on this plank build up a primary unit. For instance, the worker may take up one or two felt-needs of the rural housewife and solve them with the help of appropriate welfare agency in the locality. Having done so, it would be possible for the worker to crystallise a small group based on activities of a simple nature which would hold the interest of the rural women and which would readily influence her. In such efforts, the professional cooperation and joint efforts of women service personnel working in that area like the primary school teacher, health visitor, mid-wife etc. would be of great help. Such persons will find it to their advantage to build up relations of an informal nature with the village women. This will enhance not only the popularity of their work, but their personal popularity as well. Hence it should not be difficult for the worker to secure cooperation of such personnel and set up the nucleus of a women's institution.

In this attempt, however, it must be borne in mind that the establishment of a formal unit of a Grameen Mahila Mandal is not an end in itself nor should such an attempt be made at the commencement of the worker's activities in the village. It should follow as a natural corollary to a certain measure of basic field activities of an informal character carried over for a period of at least three to six months. These may consist of a gramodyog programme, an educational programme, a cultural programme or the like which will involve a definite measure of social action leading to a conscious and voluntary coming together of women for common purposes. Such programmes, it is obvious, can be successful only if they are related to the daily needs of the people, their surroundings, their locality or their village. Such social action is of prime importance before

a Grameen Mahila Mandal can function in a vital way. Otherwise premature efforts at group work will prove abortive.

Another point about which a worker should be cautious is the tendency towards centralisation of groups or mixing up of *mass* work with *group* work. The group should not be unwieldy and should not have more than ten or so of participating members. The worker must guard against getting involved in controversy or stirring up problems of caste and class. To avoid this it would be better to organise groups, mohalla-wise, so as to encourage the spontaneous coming together of women in the natural grouping first. Later on when understanding becomes established these groups may take character and responsibilities of functional groups. Only when such natural groups begin to get active and adopt programmes of such social action as will lift them out of a position of indifference and isolation to a position of conscious endeavour for self improvement, only then would the implications of national reconstruction through community development become meaningful.

The Direct Approach

The direct approach by which a movement among rural women will stimulate the formation of functional groups would be:—

- (1) By getting to know the women in their home environment. This should be done by undertaking systematic home visits and establishing personal contact. The worker may commence with the housewives who, in one way or other, even in a remote manner have been brought under the influence of some kind of village reconstruction activity. Later on such visits could be extended to other homes as well.
- (2) By trying to understand the exact nature of functions which a rural housewife performs in her home or outside. This could be done by undertaking surveys based on fact finding questionnaires which would throw light on the real position of a rural woman in present society. This data would also help the worker to arrive

at an understanding as to how to adjust her work to the prevailing situation and to the level of village woman.

- (3) When home visits and surveys have made the worker welcome into the rural home as a friend, she will be in a position to undertake simple demonstration jobs with the housewife which would secure for her the response and the confidence of the housewife. Such home demonstration work would consist of working with the housewife in her kitchen, helping with the baby, sharing the household jobs connected with farming and processing, sharing in the pursuit of any hobby or recreation and generally working as a member of the family.
- (4) After a certain time the worker would also be able to discover what the priority problem requiring solution is before the housewife. This should be taken up by the worker and pursued with greater intensity until the problem finds solution. The worker with whatever resourcefulness she can command, should try to devise methods for finding a solution.
- (5) The number of visits undertaken to a number of homes with this object of discovering prior needs of the housewife, would enable the worker to derive an overall picture of what would constitute certain commonly shared problems facing the rural housewives as a whole. Groups of women with certain common problems should be brought together very casually, and the problems brought into discussion. Methods to find a solution may now be discussed from the point of view of the rural women themselves, the worker stimulating and guiding the discussion where necessary. A "Programme Drive" based on these common problems may then be undertaken with the full co-operation of the housewives by fixing an intensive period during which all the women, to whom these problems are common would be willing to tackle the question together and largely by their own efforts

When sufficient interest has been stimulated among the rural housewives to enable them to come together in groups to tackle certain common problems, the group could be named as Grameen Mahila Mandal. The immediate programme of such a Mandal would be based on the needs which have brought them together. But this may not be sufficient or attractive enough to keep the group as a cohesive unit, unless certain additional interest is tacked on to the immediate programme. Therefore, group activity, which would shift the focus to fulfilling certain common needs besides fulfilling individual needs in a collective way, may be introduced casually and the whole group made responsible for the fulfilment of these needs. For example activities connected with stitching, mending, washing and laundering of clothes, food preserving, pounding, grinding and other simple household functions which could be performed by a group for mutual benefit may be undertaken. When such group efforts get strengthened and interest is created, first by individual action, then by group action, interest then may be casually led on to more complicated types of programme involving co-operative action. Working jointly to fulfil specific community needs besides working for individual and collective needs, will reveal that the women's common interest can be served by cooperative effort. Through a process of discussion, conversation and exchange of ideas the precise programme of group action may next be taken up. Thus the organization of Balwadi Units or creche for children of working mothers would provide a programme requiring a higher degree of organisation. Simultaneously while working with groups, demonstration work in the homes of the individual group members in the direction of equipping a model kitchen in one home, a model toilet in another, equipping a model baby corner in another home, preparing for maternity in yet another home where a woman is expecting her baby, preparing a girl for marriage in a home where a girl is about to be married, etc. would all constitute practical work. The worker, thus, in co-operation with the village women, could take their co-operative efforts to a higher order of achievement for self-improvement. Thus, it would be seen that the whole programme assumes a character of self-inspiration, involving self-effort

and finding sanctions arising out of the felt needs of individual housewives or groups of rural housewives, and of the rural women community as a whole. In this way, by a judicious stimulation of a sense of awareness and of appropriate responses to them, the rural women will come to adopt practical and simple action programmes for self-improvement.

There will, however, come a stage when a group which has just begun to function as such, will begin to feel the need of comparative knowledge and supporting experience of similar bodies to reassure itself. In order to carry out sustained activity and keep the group stable the worker should create a broader interest in their institution by relating the history of other rural women's bodies in the country and elsewhere, and describing how they function. This will inspire them to try to function like-wise and keep working as a cohesive group which will soon achieve stability, personality and a sense of purpose. The group can now be christened as a Grameen Mahila Mandal.

By a simple process of education, the worker can teach a Grameen Mahila Mandal, how to conduct meetings; how to make its own rules and by-laws; how to frame a simple constitution; how to define a programme of work for its members; what kinds of activities it could undertake as an organized unit; what subscription dues should be levied either in cash or kind etc. Having done so, the worker could explore ways and means of linking local units with each other to form village units; of affiliating Village units with those of the District, State or National organisations. As soon as such an organized or primary unit begins to function as the Grameen Mahila Mandal the programme too would become more defined, more specific and more objective. The Grameen Mahila Mandal could extend its interest and integrate its programme with activities of other village institutions like the local schools by organizing school lunch programmes; with the local day-nurseries or creche by organizing child care programmes; with the local Balwadi by helping to prepare necessary simple equipment; with local sanitation drives by helping to organize soak-pits, sanitary latrines

common washing and bathing places, etc. All this would now help to line up the programme and activity undertaken by the primary unit or the Grameen Mahila Mandal with those of the development programmes sponsored under Community Development and other schemes for rural reconstruction and social welfare. These officially sponsored programmes would thus have a base on sanctions and responses evoked from the people; and arising from basic field work with the rural women in their homes and in the fields, will spring up the primary units or Grameen Mahila Mandals which will be reservoirs of responses for progressive ideas and development activity by social action, and constitute the broadbase on which should rest the whole of the extension programmes for rural women.

It would thus be seen how work among rural women involves a planned approach, and how vital is the role which the worker has to play in the process. Her success consists in bringing about that awareness among rural women which will render them sensitive to the changing times that is fast overtaking them. If thereby, the rural women learn to change with it, and yet succeed in preserving those changeless and eternal values which have made them the custodians of an imperishable culture and a magnificent tradition which the ages cannot destroy, the worker would then have truly fulfilled her role as the little woman with a big destiny.

LAMPLIGHTER

I asked the village worker in a Mysore State Project : "Why are the villages that you are to work in, demarcated as *Cherak* and *Becherak* villages?" He replied, "*Cherak* is where there is sufficient population in the village to till and bring the surrounding fields under cultivation and *Becherak* is where villages have become depopulated due to occurrence of pestilence, famines or water scarcity and the surrounding fields have become waste lands." Then it dawned on me that the word *Cherak* was really a colloquialism of the original Hindi word *Chirag* meaning "Lamp" !

Chirag ! The word started off a trail of thoughts in my mind ! Here was the village worker, the Social Education Organiser, and the Home Improvement agent, each faced with the great task of converting the *Bechirag* in *Chirag* villages ! It seems to be such a little thing—just the removal of one letter or two in the face of it but what herculean efforts are involved in the actual accomplishment ! My thoughts led me on to picture a *Chirag* village. I thought of waving green fields, lush with corn; of flowing streams rippling in sunshine and song; of tinkling anklets of country belles at village wells; of tastefully decorated homefronts with leafy festoons; of the music of the *shehnai* and the drum on festive occasions; of angelic infants in the arms of smiling healthy mothers; of exuberant children busy with mischief and laughter; of grandpas and grandmas, watching over everything in blissful acceptance of contentment !

Working my mind's eye onward to the waning of the day, and with it the day's pursuits, I saw the twinkle, twinkle of the lamps being lighted up, against the greying skies beyond, one after another. It looked as if stardom had decided to descend into the valley to take permanent abode in the happy home of men ! Soon, in the growing darkness, glowing hearth-fires became visible, and, as day light waned, night light waxed as night descended with its hush, one heard the lowing of the herds calling to their young, the crooning of lullabys over rocking cradles, and the air becoming filled with all such sounds of

quietitude and well earned slumber. The toiler rested, but the *chirag* continued to twinkle, sending out its rays deep into the dark long night. The tired and dust-stained traveller, brightened up to see the beckoning rays light his path to warm welcome shelter.

And now ! The *Chirag* has become *Bechirag* ! The lamps have been extinguished. The happy picture is wiped out and stark realism of poverty and desertion stands out ! Desolation mocks at the defeat of man ! But is man ever really defeated ? Who shall light those lamps once more in these homes ? How shall we guard against rude gusts of wind and storm from extinguishing the light out of the lamps ? What kind of niche can we construct to shield against the tempest, yet permit the lamp to receive its life giving air, and still shed its benevolent light ? Where is the Lamplighter ? Why does he tarry ? The traveller is tired and is seeking for shelter. Hurry, Lamplighter this is no time to tarry. A nation is in travail. There is need for light. Light the lamps, Lamplighter, and let there be light. and with it better homes, improved homes, proud homes, happier homes, where the peasant mother, while she toils, can find some leisure; while she cooks, can cook in comfort; while she feeds the child, can do so in the much needed privacy and shelter from scorching heat, dusty winds and pouring rain; while she washes and dresses the child, can do so with at least a rudimentary intelligent concept of the basic principles of hygiene; while she puts the child to sleep, can sing her lullabys in her own dialect and for which she can hope to find expression in the script and language of culture and civilization, from which she has been compelled to retrogress due to so many pressures.

Let the village workers, both men and women and at all levels, realise the key position that they occupy, and whose efforts alone can render effective, the social revolution we have to achieve for rural prosperity. Let them find inspiration again in their mission which is to convert *bechirag* villages into *chirag* villages and to carry the light of knowledge to the last man, woman and child.

Some Hints on Conversation with Rural Women

Approaching the Housewife

The Gram Sevika, specially if she happens to be new to rural life and ways, visiting the village housewives for the first time will be beset with a number of problems which might baffle her. How to elicit necessary information or how to break the ice and build friendly relations would be the foremost problems. Some other agency or individual might have approached the women in some other connection and they may look upon a second visit as a nuisance. This specially is likely to be so, if a proper approach had not been made previously. If this has happened, the housewife might put off the worker on some pretext and be unwilling to impart any useful information. Even otherwise, village women are inclined to be timid by nature, and are naturally shy of being seen speaking to a stranger. Accustomed only to rare visits by officers, they may not know that there is a new person now coming to village—the Gram Sevika.

Conversation Techniques

The extent to which the housewife is prepared to be receptive or is inclined to reject any kind of approach made by the Gram Sevika depends on the carriage, dress, personality, friendliness, simplicity and the frank manner she has of winning over the confidence of the village women.

The Gram Sevika should not impress as one concerned mainly with doing her own "bit of job", but must give an impression of a visitor calling on a friend. Before actually taking up any questionnaire or survey work, she should try and make conversation of a sundry kind which may be of immediate interest to the village woman herself. She may enquire after the village woman's family, her work, about her children, the distance to the bazaar, the market days, who does her pur-

chases for her home, are there any schools nearby, whether there is woman teacher in the school, etc. If any other family member is seen becoming interested in the conversation, she may enquire about the relationship. If there is a pregnant woman in the house, the conversation may be led on to inquire what date she expects her delivery, who usually conducts the deliveries in the village, whether she is accustomed to visiting any hospital nearby, where the nearest hospital is and so on. The Gram Sevika may ask what is done, if any member of the family gets ill, how far the nearest dispensary is etc. If there is any young girl of marriageable age, the conversation may be shifted to the customs of marriage, whether there is any problem of finding bridegrooms, whether there is any practice of dowry, whether the girl is still attending school or awaiting to get married. If she was attending school and has stopped, how many years is it since she has done so, and what she had been doing in the interval till the actual date of marriage. What preparations would the family make if her marriage is decided upon, what are the customs, obligations and conventions, etc. If there is a child, the Gram Sevika should try and fondle the child, ask the child its name and make the mother feel that because of the Gram Sevika's interest in the child, the other questions concerning her house and way of life are absolutely friendly and that she can with confidence, furnish the answers without any reserve.

Just about this point, the Gram Sevika can state the object of her visit in a very simple casual way, leading on by further simple explanation, to the nature of the work that she is engaged in. The Gram Sevika can describe how that work involves visits to a number of homes of other village housewives like the one she is talking to, and whom she will be meeting with a view to studying their way of life with which the Gram Sevika is not familiar. If the Gram Sevika makes the village woman feel that she is deeply interested to know something of village life, specially because her own life has been of a different kind, she will find that the village woman will slowly come out of her shell and begin to describe, in her own special way, some aspects of difficulties or good or bad points of

village life generally. No survey or questionnaire work should be attempted, before getting to know the woman and her family. It is always good to get to know the men-folk also, so that the Gram Sevika's access into the house can have the necessary sanction. In the village setting, in most parts of India, the man's "permission", most often, is very necessary, so that the housewife's co-operation is not refused from fear or other social inhibitions which govern the village woman's conduct. Having come up to this point, the Gram Sevika may tell the housewife her problem and say that she is engaged in a task of eliciting information connected with specific work that has been allotted to her. Frankly and in the simplest terms, the Gram Sevika should describe to her the nature of her work. She should have studied the questionnaire beforehand and should not produce the paper on which it is written or attempt to make any notes of her answers in the village woman's presence. The whole process of eliciting information must be by observation and committing to memory all that the worker wants to ask her and recording in her own mind the answers she receives. When the end of the conversation is reached then the Gram Sevika can tell her that she is not quite sure of her memory and so would like to refer to some paper which she has with her and whether she minds her making notes before she leaves. She can ask her for a little comfortable place where she could do this work. This will be highly appreciated by the housewife because she would like to feel that a visitor—rare visitor to the village—is making herself perfectly at home with her. While recording the findings, it is good to be brief, to the point, and not to spend much time in writing. Check up any point that might have been left out of the questionnaire and if necessary, refer back to the housewife and jot the answers. It must be remembered that village housewives are very busy. They have no time for leisure, much less to spare for a protracted talk, so the conversation must be rehearsed beforehand.

Time for visiting village housewives will also have to be determined, after gaining a little experience as to what would be the most suitable part of the day during which time the

housewife will have leisure enough to give time to the Gram-Sevika even in the midst of her tasks.

It will be better if the visit is taken up in the presence of the male members of the house as a whole, and so the time chosen will need to be so adjusted that both the members of the house will be at home. The average housewives usually do not like to part with any information or talk to strangers without their husbands knowing about it beforehand. They are also not willing to go into too much of intimate details in front of their menfolk. So a judicious choice of time and manner of questioning will have to be attempted which might entail even more than one visit. Thus the first visit may be of an introductory character where the men-folk sanction or give permission, so to speak, to the housewives to talk to Gram Sevika and get to know her better. It is only in the second visit, therefore, that information as such may be secured in the way the worker wants to secure it.

The language of the village woman is a very important factor in helping to cement friendships between Gram Sevika and the housewives. I have always found that not knowing a language need never be a bar to good work among a people. It all depends on how much pains one takes to establish communication with the people, one wants to get friendly with. But all the same, it is good to master the local dialect and know the broad humour it contains and to smatter the essential exchanges to say the daily how-do-you-dos.

Mental Equipment of the Worker

Working in villages, a Gram Sevika should be well equipped with, firstly, resourcefulness; secondly, mental preparation to meet any situation on the level and with poise; thirdly, be prepared herself to adopt and adapt to the attitudes she may not have known in relation to caste, class, married or unmarried status, meeting with strangers, facing criticisms, perhaps even ridicule about her work and her capacities. In all these, she will have to remember that it is a man-dominated world from

all sides, and so she has need to carry a special understanding of her work among rural women. She will also find, that no sooner she takes over, the people and her authorities begin to build up expectation of results and will almost be exacting in the nature of these expectations. All these, too, she will need to face with poise and tolerance and find her place and her depth and keep her good humour all the while, without forgetting her objective. With this as a capital to commence her work, other things will follow. Her knowledge of work also will constantly require to be replenished. There are opportunities for training and refreshment education, which she should not fail to avail herself of wherever possible. But all the same, she must remember that learning by doing will be her greatest mainstay at all time.

The Basis for a Job Chart

Home Improvement Programme

- Job No. (1) To get a village programme for women formulated by the village women themselves or in active consultation with them.
- (2) To assess the needs and resources of the area in which Project workers are posted by making a detailed survey so far as it relates to women's educational needs and welfare programmes.
- (3) To create a better understanding of development programmes among rural women:
- (a) By organising home visits and working with the housewife.
 - (b) By contacting women in the fields during work or recess hours and participating in her tasks to enable the worker derive a proper appreciation of her problems.
 - (c) By undertaking simple demonstrations of Home Economics activity so as to encourage women to learn new ways of doing their home chores.
 - (d) By organising simple recreational programmes where women could shed their reserve and participate for spontaneous relaxation.
 - (e) By observing common festivals and melas in such a manner as will help to strengthen social and group ties among women and help to break caste and class barriers.
 - (f) By organising exhibitions of simple articles of immediate interest to the housewife, so as to help to attract her interest to new things creating new demands for which supply lines could be organized with advantage.

- (4) To build up a programme of informal group activities in terms of:
 - (a) Grameen Mahila Mandals.
 - (b) Balika Mandals and
 - (c) Shishu Mandals which will create the climate for the introduction of social welfare activities.
- (5) To lead group work on to higher forms of community work where housewives can have opportunities to discuss informally, all about care of health, about better methods of processing of foodstuff and better methods of nutrition and food preservation, problems of pregnancy, maternity, and child care, problems of finding or creating leisure by adopting labour-saving devices.

Competence for the Job Chart

To implement this job chart, a worker should develop deeper knowledge of subject matter (a) by reading books and improving her present knowledge (b) by attending lectures and talks whenever opportunity offers and (c) by availing the experience gained by observation and learning-by-doing methods. The directions in which a worker could build up subject matter knowledge to enable her to successfully advise and educate the village housewife, can be as follows:

I. Food

- (1) To understand the significance of nutritious food for normal health.
- (2) The study of food customs and habits of the people.
- (3) To plan diets for village families in relation to their come.
- (4) To preserve seasonal foods.
- (5) To prepare foods for the sick, for children and for other vulnerable groups.
- (6) To understand the utility of simple cookers and time saving methods of food preparation.
- (7) To understand the nature of advice that may be given

regarding national wastage of food and of the need to increase food production.

II. Clothing

- (1) To make essential clothing for the various members of the family.
- (2) To understand the nature of advice to be tendered regarding clothing material in relation to swadeshi, under limitation of per capita income; of national efforts to increase cloth output for self consumption and for export.
- (3) Care of clothing including mending, washing, laundry and storage.

III. Housing

To understand the principles of healthy housing, remodelling, re-arranging, providing adequate sanitation, reserving space for kitchen-gardens, allocating of space for different needs of the family and home decoration.

IV. Health

Health education including prevention of diseases, sanitation, family planning, maternity and mothercraft.

V. Child Development

Education in child care including organising of children's activities like creches for children of working mothers, day nurseries, pre-basic schools, play centres, mid day meals of school lunch programmes etc.

VI. Community Development

- (1) Occupational education including hobbies, handicrafts and cottage industries.
- (2) Education in community activities like Home Econo-

- mics Demonstration, recreation and excursions for women.
- (3) Education to assist women in farm work like milking, feeding the cattle, storing the grains, preserving seed grains, poultry and other live stock care, compost pits, soakage pits etc.
 - (4) Organisation of activities like the establishment of common village wells and latrines and washing places, common bakeries and kitchens, common grinding and pounding places, common workshops etc.
 - (5) Creating local leadership which will carry out activities organised by the Gram Sevika and which will consolidate the extension programmes introduced by her along with the social services.

VII. Co-operative Development

1. Co-operative societies for producing, consuming and marketing.
2. Thrifts societies.
3. Small savings.

Targets

In order to translate felt needs of village women in terms of jobs to be performed by the project worker; in order that a job may be performed in relation to a programme of activity; in order that a programme may be implemented with reference to certain targets of achievements, so that they could be measured in relation to the plans drawn and resources utilised, the following list of targets is suggested as basis. While making this suggestion it is presumed that one Gram Sevika will not be working in more than 3 villages at a time, will not need to cover more than 3 miles of walking distance between villages, and will not need to work more than an average of six hours a day. Also a Gram Sevika, it is presumed, is more a public worker between the specialised social service on the one hand and the people on the other. Her workload, therefore, will

be considerably relieved by working in close collaboration with the service personnel.

I. Surveys

A worker should possess record of having participated in the surveys undertaken prior to the commencement of project activity and this record should show visits to at least 40 homes.

II. Contacting the Housewives

1. At least 1/6th of the total housewives in the village homes visited should be drawn in to the Home Living Improvement Programme.
2. At least 1/6th of the total working housewives should be contacted in their fields, outside their homes to study their needs.
3. Each home should be visited at least twelve times during the month.
4. At least 8 months of total work should be put in during the year in one village.

III. Organizational

A worker should show record of having organized or assisting to organize:—

1. At least one rural women's association or Grameen Mahila Mandal.
2. At least one Infant Welfare Centre.
3. At least one Balwadi for children 3 to 6 years.
4. At least one day-nursery for children of working mothers.
5. Domestic science and home making demonstration course for girls of middle school age.
6. At least one hobby, one craft and one cottage industry.
7. Community interests in any one common pursuit like food preservation etc.

8. A collection of local indigenous indoor games and placing them on organised basis.
9. At least five model homes by persuasion of the housewives to enter competition for "Adarsha Griha" prize.

IV. Recreational

A worker should show proof of having organized the following:

1. At least one common recreational programme per month in the form of social or national festival or *melas* or *Bhajans* or *Kirtans* or Cinema shows, should be organized per village.
2. At least, one exhibition or competition or excursion or picnic should be organised per village once every year.

V. Leadership

A worker should show record of at least two village programmes which have been formulated by village women themselves at which the worker was merely present, without actually taking active part, and which programme later was implemented mainly by the efforts of the village women themselves.

What is a Community Centre?

The Second National Seminar convened by the Indian Adult Education Association defined a Community Centre as follows :

“The Seminar feels that a Community Centre will be the most suitable agency for Adult Education as it can provide activities necessary for making realistic adult education programmes for the improvement of the community as a whole.

- (a) Community is defined as having reference to people who live in a neighbourhood and who have common needs and interests.
- (b) Community Centre is defined as a place where people who live as neighbours come together on equal footing to participate in social, recreational and cultural activities and to organise services for their welfare. Any agency which serves the welfare needs of the community and provides common meeting place, may therefore, be regarded as a Community Centre.

Objectives of a Community Centre

The Seminar laid down that the objectives of a Community Centre are as follows:

- (a) To foster a sense of community through serving the social, cultural and economic needs of a neighbourhood or a locality;
- (b) To inculcate a sense of national unity and good citizenship and to build up a democratic community in which every member takes active interest and plays an effective role;
- (c) To stimulate interest in and provide facilities for the proper and enjoyable use of leisure; and
- (d) To arouse the spirit of self-help.

The functions of the Community Centre should be:

- (a) To provide a common meeting place in which people

belonging to different caste, creed and political opinions can gather for realisation of the objectives stated above;

- (b) to eradicate illiteracy, to promote adult education, to develop local leadership, to organise cooperative life and to carry out projects for improvement of health, hygiene, sanitation and housing conditions.

Educational Activities of a Centre

There is no one method of organising educational activities in a Centre. At the same time it is not possible to list successful methods of informal education. Each method has its own possibilities and limitations and what is possible with a particular group or in one situation may not succeed in another. Successful informal education with adults is the result of imagination, constantly applied and re-applied to particular circumstances.

Most Centre members do not spontaneously demand much educational activity. The idea of participating in an educational group or class is strange to them and the kind of social entertainment for which they will ask is limited by custom. In most Centres, however, there will be a few enthusiasts for something and the Centre can often help them to interest sufficient members to start group. An efficient information service which ensures that everyone who may be interested knows about the proposed activity is of greatest assistance.

Whatever attractive demonstration or show is possible in connection with a particular subject should always be organised; e. g. a craft class may spring from an exhibition of the work of a neighbouring Centre. A series of lectures can be organised following an exhibition which creates enthusiasm for it; the lecturer can come to the Centre several times and meet Centre members and discuss a plan for a series of talks.

Educational groups which meet an obvious practical need such as craft classes as well as lectures and talks on subjects

like cooking, marital relations and child-care etc. are among the easiest to organise in a Centre. The Centres should take the existing interests as starting points from which they can build their educational programme.

It is always advisable to find out the interest of the people of the neighbourhood before starting a new programme. A questionnaire which lists the activities which could be organised by the Centre should be prepared and circulated to invite neighbourhood residents to indicate those in which they are interested. Such a survey provides useful publicity for Centre besides giving guidance in the activities which are likely to be most popular. A survey can be made into a popular educational activity for Centre members.

The link between education and entertainment should be exploited as much as possible when efforts are being made to arouse interest among the members. Some educational activities such as brains trust and quiz, play, educational films and folk dances are obviously in themselves nearer to general ideas about what constitute entertainment. An example of successful informal approach may be of interest.

It has been experimented that in one regional community, where there was considerable dissatisfaction with local municipal service, monthly meetings were arranged which began with half an hour's often acrimonious and amusing and usually informative interrogation of local municipal commissioners from the floor. The interrogation was followed by a half-hour talk by a local official on some aspects of local government generally related to people's immediate interests e.g. opportunities for secondary education, housing prospects, health and sanitation etc. and there was then another half-hour of questions. These sessions attracted a consistently high attendance in an otherwise "difficult" neighbourhood. This meeting was such a success (it lasted for three hours) that a series of further talks and discussions with guest speakers followed and led to people's greater interest in civic affairs and their improvement.

Such educational activities, as lectures, discussions and classes in local government affairs are therefore particularly important to a Centre in its purpose of strengthening local democracy. Activity will attract greater numerical interest and are well worth developing. Visits to local government establishments with related talks by the heads of different government departments are another useful means of increasing public interest in local government activities.

Informal educational activities can always be developed through a programme which also provides for social contact and recreational occasions. Activities such as Brains Trust, film shows, visits, demonstration, discussions and short courses of lectures can easily be fitted with socials of different types into the programmes of men's and women's groups. When an interest is discovered in which the group will take a series of talks and delve deeper into the subject matter the opportunity must be seized.

Entertainment and Education

If we think of education in terms of individual development in a community setting, the distinction between those activities which are educational and those which are not, becomes increasingly difficult to draw. All activities can be educational at any rate for some people at some times ; and organisations should not over-emphasise the distinction which is usually drawn between education and entertainment. Organisers should examine the programme from time to time and ask themselves what possibilities their activities have of influencing the development of those who participate in them and to what extent these possibilities are being used.

Entertainment activities should be reviewed from time to time from this point of view. How far are people taking the opportunity which the existence of a Centre brings of entertaining themselves instead of passively buying entertainment? Is a variety of such opportunities of enjoyment offered and are there some activities which appeal to the mature and of wide

experience? Do a number of members join in producing items for social, or is such entertainment left in the hands of a few, perhaps semi-professional, concert parties? Are the dramas which are produced always those written by outside play-wrights or do members sometimes make up their own sketches? Are the different sections encouraged to put on an item of their own at socials as a contribution to the common enjoyment? Do the plays which are produced sometimes at any rate make a very real demand on the understanding of the audience and tend to develop their appreciation and understanding of the drama? Is everything which is done always the best of its kind and are higher standards constantly encouraged?

These and similar questions are worth while asking from time to time, and though no Centre will survive if it always sets out to be "improving people", it will not be doing its job if it does not recognise that it also has this function and that its entertainment activities cannot be left out of account in connection with it.

Education through Organisation

The manner in which social activities are organised is also useful. There is an opportunity for constructive education which should not be missed. Even the running of a table-tennis tournament or performing of a drama, can provide a practical exercise in democratic organisation and social responsibility which is none the less valuable for being unnoticed by those who are benefitting by it. Proper running of an activity involves, among other things, a certain amount of committee work, clerical work and simple accounting as well as solution of minor administrative problems. The work ought not, for educational as well as for other reasons, to be permanently concentrated in the hands of a single individual or group of individuals but should be spread as widely as possible and regularly passed from one member of the section to another, younger or less forthcoming, who would benefit from taking it on.

This is true of all the activities at the grass-root level

and it is the duty of the organiser of a Centre to pass responsibilities for the running of the group to different members who would benefit from doing the work. Organisation and functioning of groups if entrusted to a few willing persons would work out to the betterment of individuals, and groups concerned, as well as for the expansion and growth of a Centre.

Occasionally, a short term training programme or a series of lectures or a seminar of the group leaders and prospective leaders can be organised jointly by a number of agencies working in the area. Such short course, lectures, or seminars can give the Centre leaders and those interested in particular subjects, ideas on ways and means of developing different activities in a Centre to get a maximum of interest and participation in the Centre's activities.