

Functioning of Mahila Mandals (Mahila Samitis)
in Nagaon District of Assam

By

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Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
	LIST OF TABLES	
	LIST OF FIGURES	
	LIST OF APPENDICES	
I.	INTRODUCTION	.. 1
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	.. 4
	A. Women and Development	.. 4
	B. Highlights of Research on Mahila Mandals	.. 8
III.	METHODOLOGY	.. 18
	A. Selection of the Area	.. 18
	B. Selection of the Sample	.. 21
	C. Selection of the Method of Study	.. 21
	D. Conduct of the Survey	.. 21
	E. Analysing the Data	.. 21
IV.	RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	.. 22
	A. Background information about the Respondents	.. 22
	B. General details of functioning of the Mahila Mandals	.. 24
	C. Evaluation of the Mahila Mandals	.. 35
V.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	.. 46
	REFERENCES	.. 52
	APPENDICES	.. 58

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

I. INTRODUCTION

Constituting almost half of the Indian population, women impart of a highly valuable human resource material which with proper training and education can bring about phenomenal changes in desirable direction. If public participation in process of social and economic change has to be ensured, it is the women who have to be awakened. Once they are awakened and given the needed orientation, they will be on the move, with them the family, the household and the village will move, and ultimately the Nation will move towards the progress and prosperity.

Women by all means can be very effective agents of change for a better home, for a better society and for a better economy. It is important therefore to develop and to put to proper use their potentiality by improving their health status, their literacy levels, their working environments, their skills and knowledge and ultimately above all their social status.

The Government has been emphasising the need for development of rural women and their involvement in the developmental activities. Government has initiated several women's programme to transform the rural areas and thereby to increase the living standards of rural women (Reddy, 1988).

The rural women have made a significant contribution to the socio-economic and cultural development of the rural society. They have plenty of potentials and promises. Only they have to be encouraged to participate fully and effectively in the various rural organisations and institutions.

Organisation means strength and strength is a prerequisite for taking action. Grass-root level organisations can greatly enhance the opportunities for women to participate in development programmes. By organising, working together, sharing experiences and resources, women can find new opportunities for their well being. The initiative of forming organisations for women should come from women themselves. It is, therefore, essential to organise women into groups through women's clubs and youth clubs (for girls).

Women have been participating in village administration through their organisations and it varied from state to state, block to block and village to village. It has been realised that from the points of view of economy, people's participation and involvement of women in village administration, Mahila Mandals should not only be promoted but the existing ones revitalised (Jain and Reddy, 1980).

With initiative of the nationwide Community Development Programme in 1952, aiming at rejuvenating the entire village community and promoting the status and welfare of women, the grass-root level community organisations have become the core of Community Development.

Women's clubs (Mahila Mandals) and Youth Clubs are among those grass-root organisations for bringing women together and keeping them together by creating a common interest for success and progress. In accordance with the policy laid down by the government from time to time, a number of Mahila Mandals have been organised in different states. In 1981, there were 61,400 Mandals with an estimated membership of 17.2 lakhs. The average number of Mahila Mandals per block is only 13 with a membership of 382 (Devadas, 1986).

Thus quantitatively the Mahila Mandal do not give an encouraging picture. Qualitatively also, the level at which these grass-root level organisations are contributing to the total development of the women and their communities is far from satisfactory.

Scientific studies are therefore essential in this direction to assess the functioning of these women's clubs, the factors contributing to their success the bottlenecks they face and the future trends.

It is with this objective in view this micro level study has been undertaken to study the functioning of selected Mahila Mandals (Mahila Samitis) in Nagaon District of Assam State.

Review of Literature

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature pertaining to the study were reviewed under the following headings:

- A. Women and Development.
- and B. Highlights of Research on Mahila Mandals.

A. Women and Development:

Gangrade (1966) analysed the results of critical study of women's participation in a centre in one of the Delhi Villages and observed that for some development activities especially those related to home and family, the real workers are women, without their co-operation the job cannot be done. There are several instances where women are not involved in any decision making process of development programmes. In one village, where it was claimed that there was total participation of all adults in the village development, it was found that women were now here.

Development is a total process in which all aspects of human life-aspirations, education, health and nutrition, are involved and evaluated on the touchstones of economic growth and living standards(Devadas, 1975).

No country could progress where women were left behind, said Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India. Women constitute nearly one half of the country's valuable resources. Hence, emancipation of women is considered as an

essential prerequisite for economic development and social progress. They must be recognised as a power in development. They must be involved actively and productively as partners in the development process for economic and social advancement (Devadas, 1976).

Menchor (1982) in a study of predominantly landless household in a sample set of villages in Kendra in Tamil Nadu regions demonstrated that women work for long and hard hours, contributing all of their incomes for household maintenance in the context of substantial poverty.

Devadas (1983) reported that rural women in our country share abundant responsibilities and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the household and the family (like child care, collection of fodder and fuel, cooking, washing, and sewing) as well as attending the farm activities, kitchen gardening, dairy, animal husbandry and extending a helping hand in rural artisanship and handicrafts.

When women are viewed as automatic beneficiaries through a household approach, such policies do not resolve the problem of ensuring equal status for the women. In a male headed household, the role of the women continues as invisible unless she is an independent wage earner. The invisibility or the lack of status for women in rural society is the result of both structural and attitudinal factors.

Development should be understood as a process designed progressively to create conditions in which every person can enjoy, exercise and utilise under the rule of law, all his human rights - whether economic, social, cultural, civil or political. Every person has the right to participate in and benefit from development (Gangrade, 1984).

Since women constitute 48 per cent of the human resource and workforce in India, their effective participation in all walks of life would go a long way towards improving the national economy, besides liberating women and actualising their potentials. Infact, women should share with men the life, problems, interests and trends of time (Ramanamma and Bambawale, 1984).

The two facets of the role of women in production and reproduction should be conceived as complementary and interactive. In order to release women's potential for fuller participation in the productive and decision making processes, there is need not only for a sharing of parental responsibilities but also for a sharing of institutional provisions which would benefit children and families (Document on Women in Development, 1985).

A remarkable change is currently visible in the occupational arena in India. Women in this country today are seeking education that would equip them for jobs outside their homes. All the same, the vast majority of women in rural India continue to carryout traditional domestic and agricultural tasks and adhere to the accepted normative structure of by-gone generations (Ramanamma and Bambawale, 1984). There-

fore, there is an urgent need to involve the hitherto neglected rural women, in all the rural development programme(Namdwani, 1985).

Gopinath and Kalra (1985) studied the economic activities and work pattern of village women in Gujarat. Their study shows that women are typically involved in agriculture, domestic and community related activities.

Throughout the history and in many societies inequalities of women and men have become part of the accepted male dominated culture. One of the basic factors causing unequal share of women in development relates to division of labour between sexes. Distribution of tasks and responsibilities between men and women in a society have mainly restricted women largely to the domestic spheres while the women's child bearing functions are respected in many countries, there has been very little recognition of women's actual or potential contribution to the economic, social and cultural activities.

Graphically while women represents nearly 50 per cent of the adult population and one third of the labour force, they perform nearly 2/3 of all work but receive only 1/10 of income and even less than one per cent of the property(Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, 1986).

According to ILO estimates, women constitute 35 per cent of the world's labour force and this is likely to increase steadily in the year 2000. Women have the sole responsibility for the economic support of a large number of the

world's children (Approximately one third) and the numbers seem to be raising. While the women's total input of labour in the formal and informal sector will surpass that of men by the year 2000, they will receive an unequal share of the world's assets and income (Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1986).

Development efforts should begin with improving the conditions for those who are most disadvantaged, providing education, employment and health for all, thus enabling people to be productive citizens who can control and contribute to overall development (Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1986).

Women contribute to development through their productive activities and through their motherhood role. Not only do they produce the individuals without whom the economic system could not operate, but their conditions during pregnancy and their understanding of the child's needs determine its survival growth and future productive capacity (Badra, 1986).

B. Highlights of Research on Mahila Mandals:

Kher (1971) studied the functioning of Mahila samaj in Bhilai. The greatest achievement of Bhilai Mahila Samaj in its industrial centre which provide means of livelihood to nearly 500 women and make them self reliant. The activities under the industrial centre are embroidery, stitching etc. The samaj has also established a soap manufacturing unit. One of the most important activities of Bhilai Mahila Samaj is the mid-day meal scheme for school children.

The Jhansi Rani Women's Club located in Alampatty village (Madurai) is one of the several Mather Sangams in Athoor Block in Madurai. The activities include programmes to encourage small savings, scientific cooking practices, change in dietary habits, leadership among women etc. The members have also taken been interest in the effective functioning of Balwadi by frequent visits, securing parents, active participation in parent education programmes, cleaning and decorating the Balwadi on occasions of anniversary etc. (Saraswathi, 1976).

An evaluation study carried out at the National Institute of Rural Development by Muthayya et al. (1977) in six states disclosed that the involvement of the Mandals in the ANP was rather marginal. Their participation in the implementation was a discretionary rather than obligatory. The potential of the Mandals had not been utilised fully in the management and supervision of the programme.

Umopathy (1977) conducted a study of Mahila Samaj in a small town of Huvana^hadugalli, Bellary district of Karnataka state. The Samaj was formed in 1962 and it was registered under the name Sri Sarada Mahila Samaj in 1963. The organisation is mainly interested in the welfare of women and children. The success of Mahila Samaj is mainly because of tailoring school. The Sarada Mahila Samaj also helped women get training in many field of deputing them to different institute in the state. It also gives nutrition food to pregnant women belonging to weaker section.

Shah(1978) studied the functioning of Mahila Samities in Gujarat. The activities of Mahila Samithies range from balwadi, craft classes, literacy classes, sewing and embroidery etc. The samities receives aids from the Central Social Welfare Board as also generous grants from Gujarat Government.

Jain and Reddy (1979) observed that the activities of Mahila Mandals Centre around nutrition, child care, tailoring and embroidery, socio-economic composition of the members revealed the dominance of higher classes of society in terms of caste, occupation and financial status.

Jain and Reddy (1979) reported that, 14, out of 15 Mahila Mandals studied in Delhi. The activities under these Mahila Mandals had undertaken craft work such as tailoring and embroidery, 13 nutrition education, child care and family welfare programmes, 11 economic activities and 7 each took up adult education and recreation-cum-cultural activities.

Khan and Ayesha (1982) observed that extent of awareness among respondents of the various formal organisations varied widely. There was complete awareness in respect of village panchayats and the village schools among the rural women. While the rural bank accounted for 85 per cent the PHC had 80 per cent, the least was in the case of Mahila Mandals where the percentage was about 50. A little more than half of the respondents were not aware of the importance of PHC. As regards participation it was found that non participation in co-operative bank and Mahila Mandals was

to the intent of 80 per cent in each case.

In Andhra Pradesh, there are about 85 women welfare centre working in different parts of the state. Mahila Mandals are functioning at block level and district level since many years. There is a Women's Co-operative Finance Corporation, a state level federation to which all the mahila mandals functioning at samithi and district levels are affiliated. This Corporation extends financial support to all member organisations. As many as 42,000 women have availed financial benefit from this Corporation so far. Loans are given to women, to set up small household industries, purchase of sewing machines, cloth for dress making, and for such other avocations which help in their earnings. The aim of the Women's Financial Corporation is to make the mahila mandals at district, block and village level self reliant and stable(Rao, 1982),

In Madhya Pradesh, 37 Welfare Extension Projects covering 825 villages and a population of about eight lakhs were functioning. These activities were handed over to 96 local voluntary organisations and Mahila Mandals, the State Social Welfare Board has been giving them grants upto 75 per cent of the estimated expenditure as in case of other aided institutions. Till the end of March, 1982, grants amounting to Rs. 13.76 lakhs were sanctioned for conducting activities at 96 centres(Jaip, 1982).

Tellis (1982) reported that, in the district of Raigarh, Ranchi and other in North-Eastern India, tribal women

participate in hundreds and at time in thousands to find ways of improving themselves spritually educationally and economically through the Mahila Sanghs.

Gangrade (1982) studied a centre in one of the Delhi village. The centre is located in a village of 2500 people, 14 kms away from Delhi. The most vital group directly concerned in the Mahila Mandal, which has naturally grown out of the popular kirtans(weekly group prayer singing) organised by the worker.

Gopalan (1983) studied the functioning of Manaanthala Mahila Samajam in Trivandurm District. The samajam was established in 1967. The main objectives of its establishment was the welfare of women and children. The activities of the Samajam include the conduct of a balwadi, distribution of food under the Nutrition Programme, conduct of educational courses and tailoring classes for girls and women and implementation of certain income generating programme for women.

Mehra and Sardamoni(1983) found a best Mahila Mandal in Dhiraj village in the Mehsana district of Gujarat. In 1975-76 it was adjudged the best Mahila Mandal in the district. The Mahila Mandal was started in 1962 and by 1978 boasted a membership of 218 women representing all castes. Meetings of the general body and the executive committee were held at regular intervals and were well attended. The activities includes library facilities , tailoring classes, the ANP, poultry rearing, health education etc.

In Mangalore Mahila Mandal is organised to educate the women to develop leadership qualities(Koya, 1984).

Hanumappa and Sujatha (1984) attempted to assess the functional impact of Mahila Mandals in the process of socio-economic upliftment of rural women of Bangalore. They observed that more than 75 per cent of the presidents of Mahila Mandals are the wives of village headmen and majority of the participants were in the age group of 30 to 50 years, were rich belonging to families having more than 25 acres of land from higher castes and had studied upto high school with the introduction of Mahila Mandals there was increased awareness among rural women and certain improvement in their way of talking and self-care behaviour.

Thomas (1984) reported the success of Mahila Mandals in village in West Godawari district of Andhra Pradesh. A tailoring centre was set up for 10 members, each member get a sewing machine and 2 teachers were appointed for teaching the adults. All the 10 members were able to stitch all types of dresses for children and ladies and were able to get a minimum of Rs.5.00 per day through the programme augmenting the income of their family.

In Karnataka, the Mahila Mandals were formed to act as a nucleus or centre round which a number of activities for women were organised to improve the social and economic status of the rural women. By 1973-74, there were 56 Mahila Mandals and four Voluntary Institutions serving 22 Centres under Karnataka Social Welfare Board. In order to improve the

economic conditions of the women it has introduced a number of work and wages programmes. These include the selling up of production units, like the ancillary units of the Indian Telephone Industry, garment making, leather work, envelop and printing, self toy-making and kasooti unit(Rao, 1985).

Jaganathan (1984) studied the oldest Mahila Mandals of Kanyakumari in the Harijan village of Puliangulam. The activities under these Mahila Mandals are poultry rearing, agricultural practices, stitching, feeding programme, classes on farming knowledge.

In a study of family and child welfare project the Delhi School and social work found that Mahila Mandal emphasize economic activities, mother craft, family nutrition, home craft and clothing care in that order and pay scant attention to literacy first aid, agriculture, and community nutrition(Kapoor,1986).

Rao (1986) reported the functioning of Indira Mahila Mandal in Visakhapatnam city of Andhra Pradesh. The Mahila Mandal started with 12 members in 1976, is now having 285 members. The Mahila Mandal on its own and with the help of various departments is taking up many development activities. A sewing centre with 50 trainees is functioning in the Mandali. The Mandali has an Adult Education Centre with 50 uneducated ladies who are interested in reading and writing. The Mandal has a library for ladies. Another important activities of the Mandali is mid-day meal. The Mahila Mandali

also conducted different camps for the benefit of women. The Mandli in the month of March, 1985 had conducted training camp on women and children health care for 30 members.

In Assam, there are about 87 welfare organisations, besides two organisations involved in the rural development and appropriate technology in the state. There are 18 number of other agencies also working for women in Assam.

The Assam Social Welfare Board has advanced grants to Voluntary organisations also to run Balwadies and craft centres, health programmes for children and women. Programmes of the Social Welfare Board are family and child welfare projects, Demonstration Project, Balwadi Condensed Course of Education for adult women, Nutrition feeding Programmes, grant-in-aid programme, Family Welfare Programme, Motivational Camps for opinion leaders, creche programme, Mahila Mandal programme, Socio-economic Development programme, working women hostel, vocational training programme and scheme of training of Rural Women in Public Corporation (Saikia et al., 1986).

Kamalakshan (1987) studied the pachapoika Mahila Samajam of Kerala. The Pachapoika Mahila Samajam was started in 1976 with the assistances of the Kulhuparam National Extension Block. The Samajam has set up a Dairy unit under the socio-economic programme of the CSWB. The Samajam has been conducting condensed course of education for women. In 1983, the Samajam started a Coir Yarn manufacturing unit under the socio-economic programme of the Board. The Samajam has been conducting Health and Family Welfare Camps for the last

few years successfully.

Shova (1987) was conducted a study on Mahila Mandals of Warangal district. The Applied Nutrition programme, Integrated Child Development Service and Composite Programme for women, production oriented activities non-formal education were some of the activities taken under the Mahila Mandal scheme stitching, embroidery and training in crafts are another main activities of Mahila Mandals.

Vasu (1987) studied the functioning of Mahila Samajam in Kerala. The Mahila Samajam have taken interest in the implementation of the Applied Nutrition programme over the year. The programme covers children in the age group of 0 - 5 besides expectant and nursing mothers. Many rural women have volunteered to run balwadi under Mahila Samajam. The Government provides grants to the Mahila Samajam to enable them pay the salary to the balwadi teachers. Mahila Samajams in Kerala also receive financial assistance in starting agro industries such as goat rearing, poultry farm, kitchen gardening etc. The Mahila Samajams running CPWP centres also receive assistance for the construction of the balwadi building provided they own five per cent of land and undertake to construct the building at a cost of Rs.13,748 (the quantum of assistance given is Rs. 7,000 from CARE and Rs. 3,000 from the Government of Kerala and the remainder of Rs. 3,748 has to be raised by the Mahila Samajam itself). The Mahila Samajams in Kerala are also taking great interest in social forestry schemes.

Indira et al. (1987) reported that, the activities of Mahila Mandal at Baroda were mainly to give handicraft training and recreation. There were two Mahila Mandals one is the Harijan Section and another in the Rajput Section and they came together under one roof only when Bhajans or Garba dances were held.

Kaur (1987) conducted a study in Haryana and revealed that, more respondents belonging to higher socio-economic status were taking part in Mahila Mandals. The emphasis of Mahila Mandals seems to be on social and cultural programme and those women who were working outside the home either in their own farms or as agriculture labourers considered it unless to waste their time on activities which were not generating income preference for activities which were not raise their earning ability has been expressed by women.

Methodology

III. METHODOLOGY

The procedure for the study on "Functioning of Mahila Mandals(Mahila Samitis) in Nagaon District of Assam State", consists of the following steps:

- A. Selection of the Area
- B. Selection of the Sample
- C. Selection of the Method of Study
- D. Conduct of the Study
- and E. Analysing the Data.

A. Selection of the Area:

Twenty five villages from Khagorijan and Rupohae blocks of Nagaon District(Assam) were selected for this study.(Figure 1 and 2)

The criteria for selection of the villages were

1. The area of the study is the native of the investigator.
2. Co-operation and interest shown by the people.
3. Easy to communicate with the respondents for the investigator.
4. Easy accessibility and transport facilities to the villages.

The list of the villages is given in Appendix I.

LOCALE OF THE PROJECT (KHAGORIJAN BLOCK)

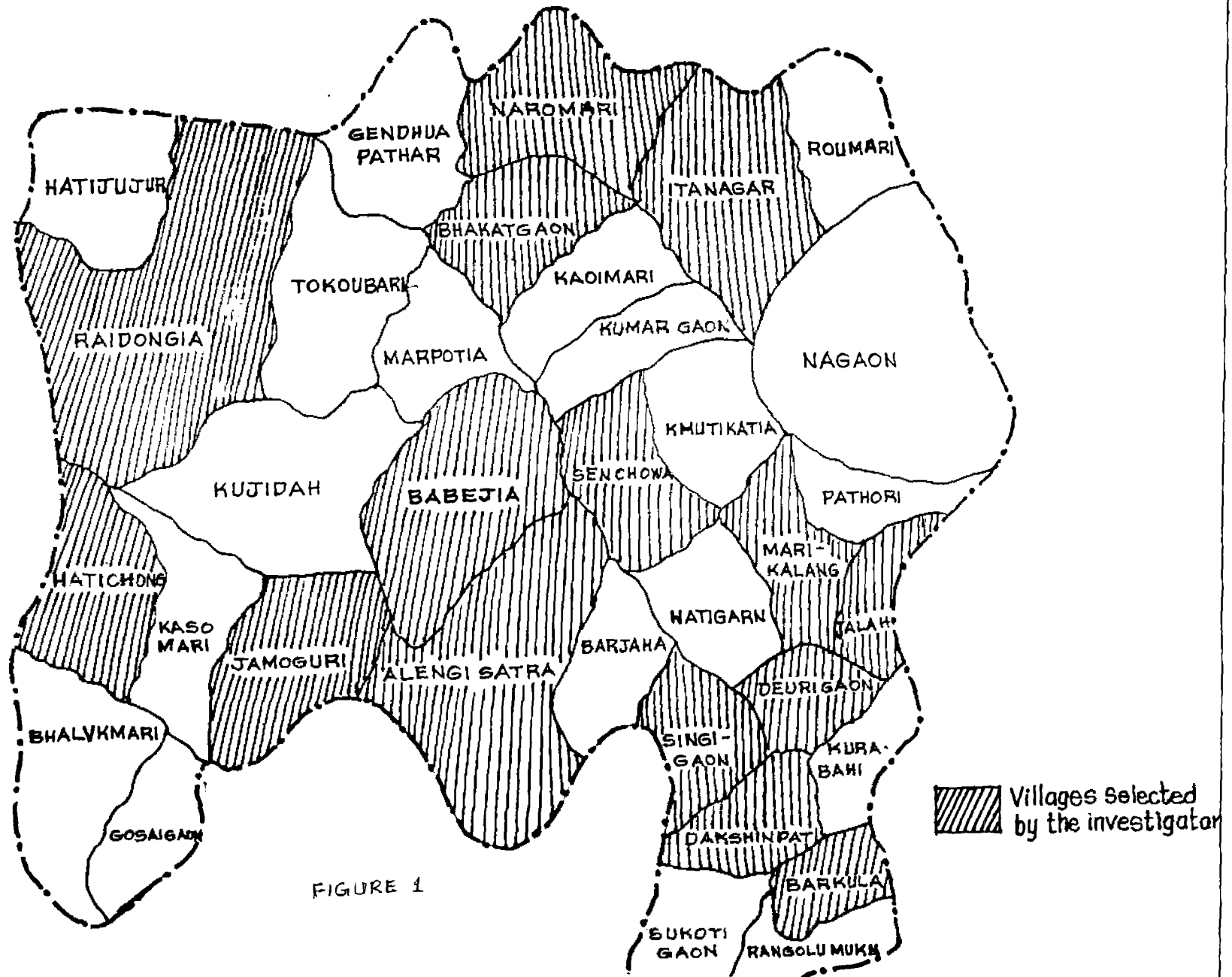


FIGURE 1

LOCALE OF THE PROJECT (RUPOHEE BLOCK)

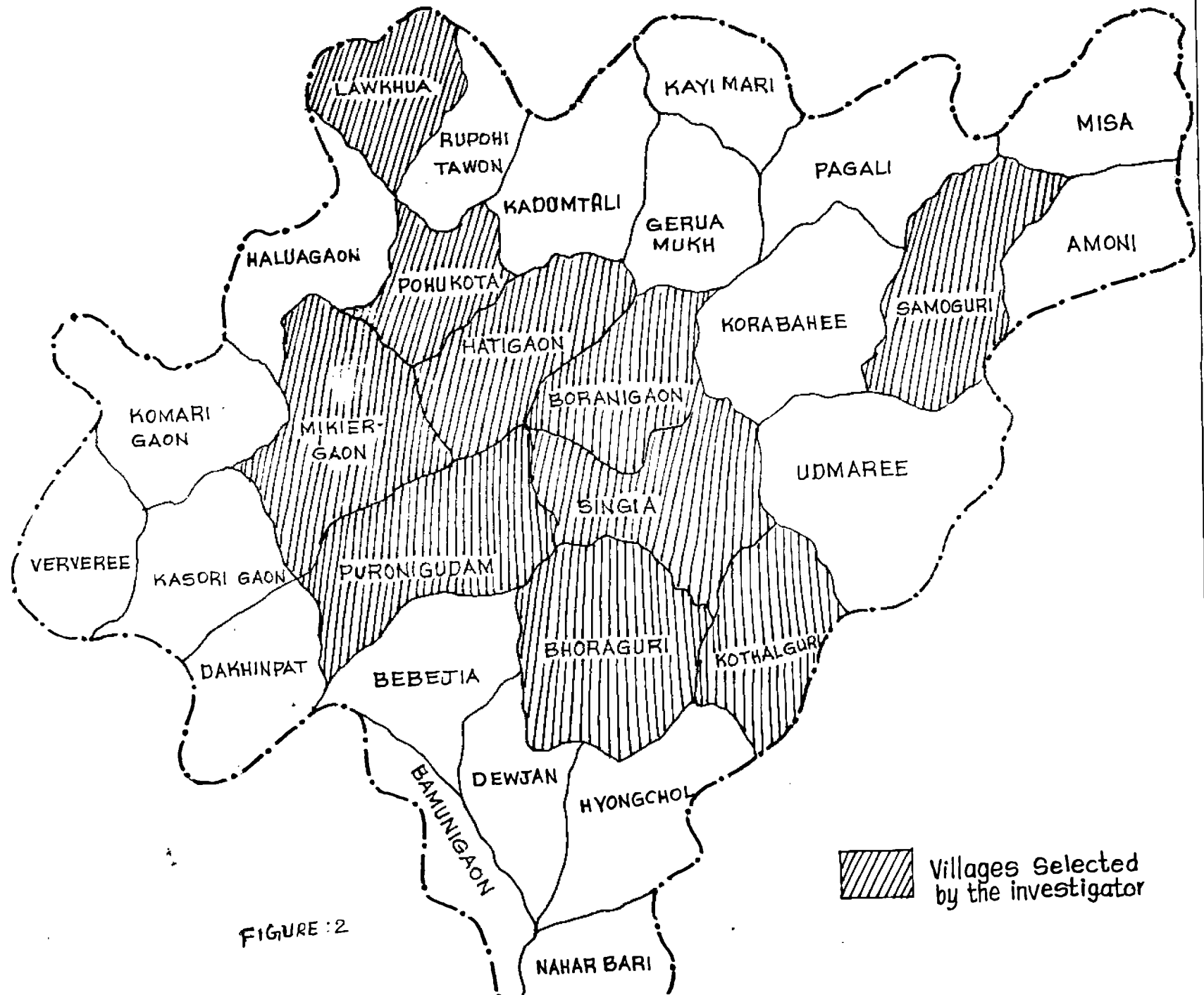


FIGURE : 2

B. Selection of the Sample:

The sample for this study were 100 from 50 Mahila Mandals(each two) from two Blocks.

C. Selection of the Method of Study:

The interview is defined as a systematic method by a person enters more or less imaginatively into the inner life of a comparative strength. It can be successfully employed to collect a wide range of information relating to a person's inner striving and attitudes, values and believes, past experiences and future intentions(Devadas, 1976).

Hence an interview method was opted as the method for fact finding in this study. An interview schedule(Appendix II) was prepared and administered to the samples selected.

D. Conduct of the Survey:

The interview was personally conducted by the investigator with the help of extension officers and village leaders.

E. Analysing the Data:

The data obtained from the members were consolidated, tabulated, analysed and presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER - I V

Results

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the following information:

- A. Background Information about the Respondents
- B. General Details of Functioning of the Mahila Mandals
- and C. Evaluation of the Mahila Mandals.

A. Background Information about the Respondents:

- 1. Educational status of the members
- 2. Occupational status
- 3. Income level of the members.

1. Educational Status:

Table I gives the educational status of the respondents.

TABLE I
EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Educational level	Percentage (N:100)
1.	Illiterate	12
2.	Upto primary	24
3.	Upto Middle school	27
4.	High School	28
5.	College education	9

It is encouraging to note that 88 per cent of the respondents were literates. A majority having the education at middle or high school level.

2. Occupational status:

Table II indicates the occupational status of the respondents.

TABLE II
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

S.No.	Occupation	Percentage (N:100)
1.	Not employed	34
2.	Weavers	41
3.	Teachers	10
4.	Agricultural(owners)	9
5.	Labourers	6

Sixty six per cent respondents were gainfully employed with 60 per cent as weavers, teachers and farm owners and 6 per cent as wage paid employees.

3. Income level of the members:

Table III shows the income level of the respondents.

TABLE III
INCOME LEVEL OF THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Monthly income in Rs.	Percentage (N:100)
1.	200 - 400	41
2.	401 - 600	27
3.	601 - 800	13
4.	801 -1000	16
5.	1001 -1200	3

Forty one per cent of the sample were below the poverty line. A majority of the members were in the income range of Rs. 401 - 1000 per month.

B. General Details of Function^{ing} of Mahila Mandals:

The general details of functioning of the Mahila Mandals included the following:

1. Number of years of functioning of Mahila Mandals.
2. Membership in Mahila Mandals.
3. Frequency of meetings.
4. Activities undertaken.
5. Types of training.
6. Supervision and guidance.

Out of the 50 Mahila Mandals studied 44 were registered under the Societies Registration Act.

1. Number of years functioning of Mahila Mandals:

Table IV shows the number of years functioning of Mahila Mandals that were selected.

TABLE IV

NUMBER OF YEARS OF FUNCTIONING OF MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Number of years of existence of the Mahila Mandals	Percentage (N:100)
1.	1 - 5	56
2.	6 - 10	24
3.	11 - 15	6
4.	16 - 20	12
5.	21 - 25	2

It is evident from the above table that 20 per cent were functioning for more than ten years. A majority of 80 per cent were functioning between 1 to 10 years.

2. Membership in Mahila Mandals:

The membership in the Mahila Mandals is as shown in Table V.

TABLE V

MEMBERSHIP IN MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Number of Members	Percentage
1.	5 - 15	24
2.	16 - 25	34
3.	26 - 35	14
4.	36 - 45	16
5.	46 - 55	12

It is encouraging to note that 76 per cent of the Mahila Mandals had more than 15 members. However, how many of them were active members is a question to be answered. (Figure 3)

3. Frequency of meetings:

Table VI shows the frequency of meetings considered by the Mahila Mandals.

TABLE VI

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

S.No.	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Monthly once	62
2.	Monthly twice	28
3.	Weekly once	10

NUMBER OF MEMBERS ENROLLED IN THE REGISTER

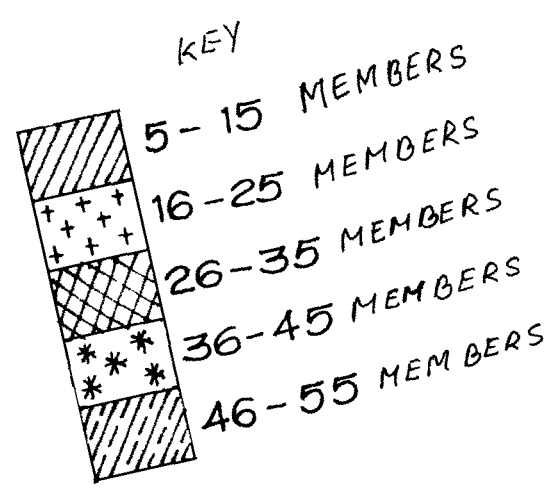
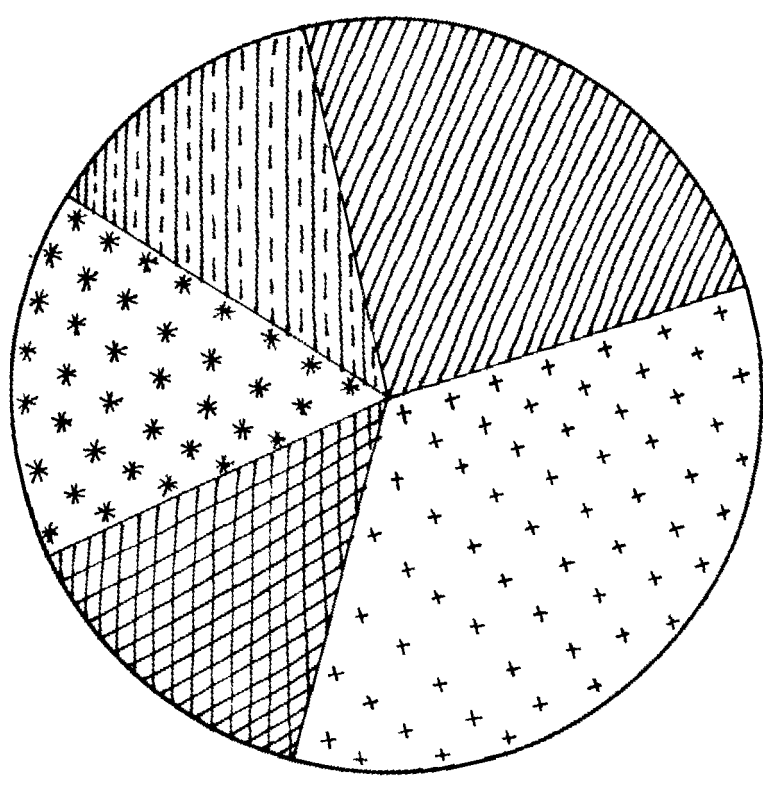


Figure. 3



FIGURE:4

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS
OF A MAHILA SAMITI

Sixty two per cent Mahila Mandals reported of regularly monthly meetings 28 per cent had fortnightly meetings and the rest had weekly meetings.

4. Activities undertaken:

The activities carried out by the Mahila Mandals are discussed in Table VII.

TABLE VII
ACTIVITIES OF THE MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Activities	Percentage
1.	Handicrafts	94
2.	Nutrition and Health Education	34
3.	Education on resource management	26
4.	Income generating activities	26
5.	Literacy classes	18
6.	Cultural and religious activities	12
7.	Family planning activities	6

The specific activities undertaken were weaving, embroidery, knitting and preparation of art pieces which gives money to raise their socio-economic status. The education programmes included that on health, nutrition, child care, personal hygiene, use of labour saving devices, home food production and food preservation. The cultural

ACTIVITIES OF MAHILA MANDAL

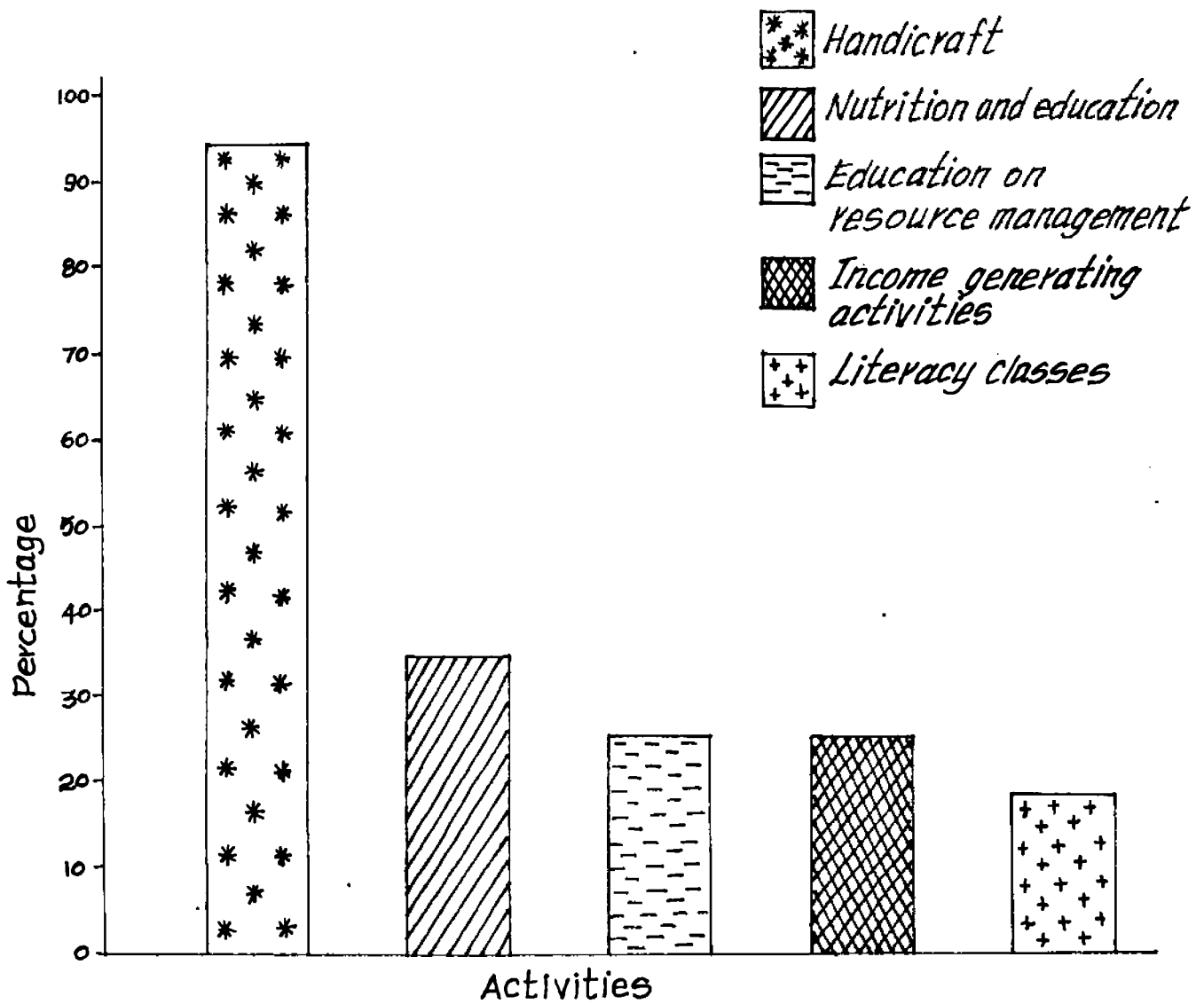


Figure.5

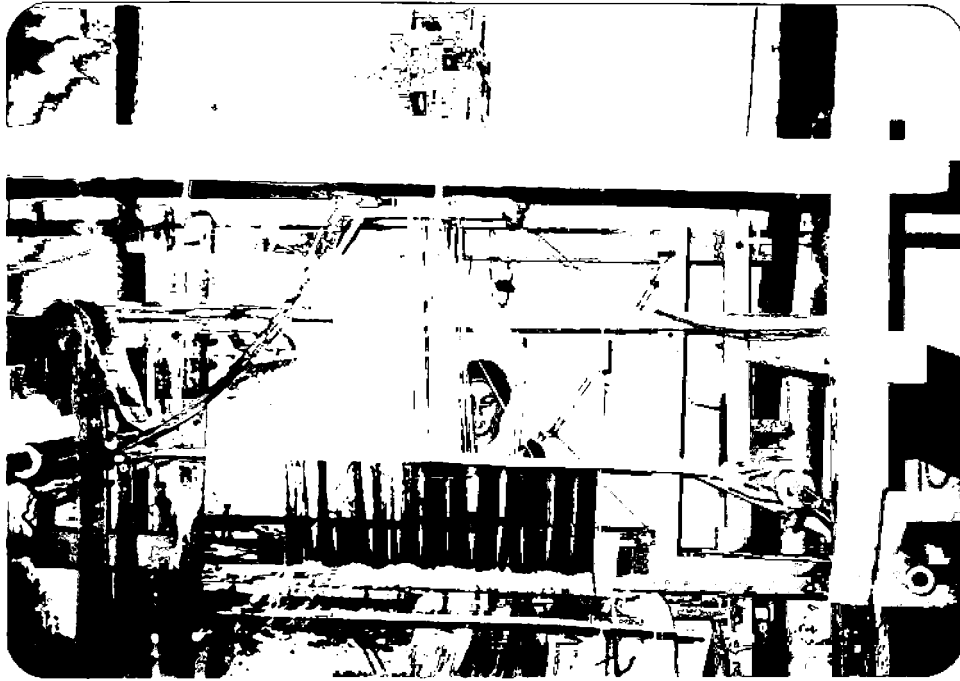


FIGURE : 6
SPINNING ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN
BY THE MEMBERS



FIGURE : 7
EMBROIDERY ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN
BY THE MEMBERS

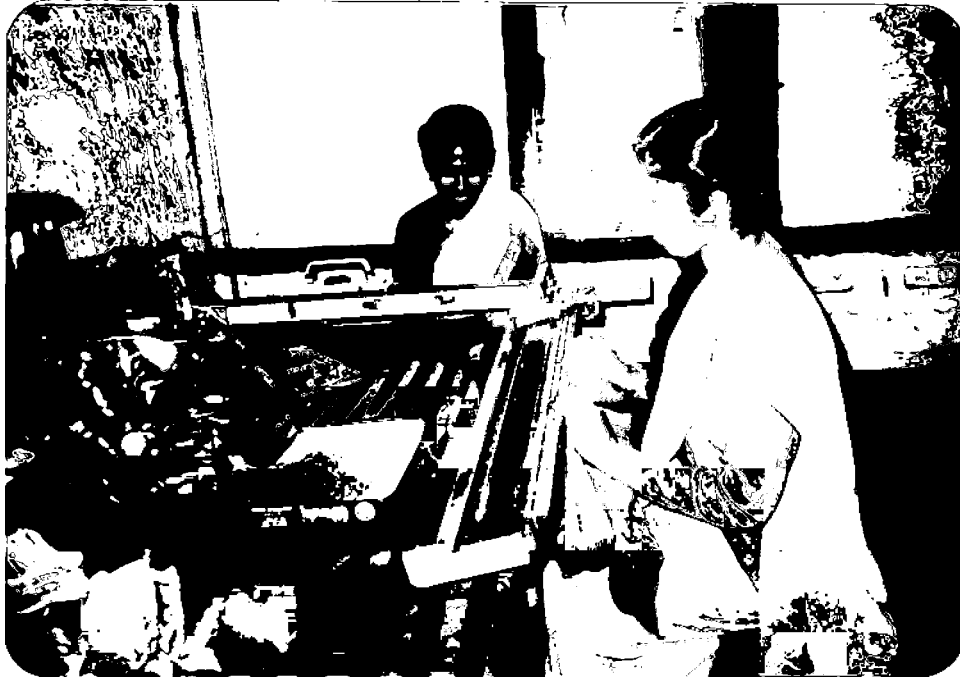


FIGURE : 8
KNITTING ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN
BY THE MEMBERS



FIGURE : 9
UNDER ONE ROOF MAHILA SAMITI
IS FUNCTIONING

and religious programmes included conducting special poojas, bhajans and celebration of National days and functions.

Handicrafts seemed to be undertaken by a large majority of 94 per cent of Mahila Mandals. Twenty six per cent had income generating activities and 6 per cent were activity involved in Family Planning activities. It is encouraging to note that 18 per cent were conducting literacy classes in the centre. (Figure 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

5. Types of Training:

Table VIII gives the types of training obtained by the Mahila Mandal members.

TABLE VIII
TYPES OF TRAINING

S.No.	Types of Training	Number of members
<u>A. Educational oriented</u>		
1.	Smokeless chulah	35
2.	Adult Education	22
3.	Health education	57
4.	Pest control	21
5.	Kitchen garden	60
6.	Family planning	32
7.	Bio gas technology	21
<u>B. Skill oriented</u>		
1.	Social forestry	17
2.	Juice, Jam, Squash, pickle preparation	35
3.	Weaving, knitting and embroidery	82
4.	Tailoring	78
5.	Basket making	42

The training programme conducted by the Rural Welfare Officers were of two main categories skill oriented and educational. The skill oriented training programmes were given in the Block office by the expert personnels.

The educational programmes included education on health, nutrition, family welfare, thrift and leadership development.

6. Supervision and guidance:

Table IX points out the guidance obtained by the Mahila Mandals.

TABLE IX
GUIDANCE FOR MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Persons guiding	Percentage
1.	Extension officials	68
2.	Mahila Mandal convenors	22
3.	Head of the village	6
4.	Local leaders	4

While 68 per cent mentioned of guidance from the women extension officials, 22 per cent received guidance from the leaders of Mahila mandals. It was encouraging to note that in 10 per cent cases the village leaders and the president of the villages were given guidance for the Mahila Mandals.

C. Evaluation of the Mahila Mandals:

This aspect is dealt with under the following headings:

1. Objectives of the Mahila Mandals as enunciated by the respondents.
2. Benefits from the Mahila Mandals.
3. Annual income of the beneficiaries.
4. Activities liked by the members.
5. Awards received.
6. Problems faced by the Mahila Mandals.
7. Suggestion for the improvement.
8. Awareness about the developmental programmes.

1. Objectives of Mahila Mandals as enunciated by the respondents:

The objectives of the Mahila Mandals as conceptualised by the members of Mahila Mandals are as shown in Table X.

TABLE X
OBJECTIVES OF THE MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Objectives of Mahila Mandal	Percentage
1.	To improve the condition of women	100
2.	To provide recreational opportunities	46
3.	To create income generating activities	42
4.	To remove social evils	38
5.	To eradicate illiteracy among women	34

It was interesting to note that 100 per cent of the members were aware of the objectives of the community organisation, namely improving the conditions of women. Forty six per cent stated that the Mahila Mandal helped to provide recreational activities. Forty two per cent mentioned that the Mahila Mandal motivated them to start income generating activities which raise of the status of women.

2. Benefits from the Mahila Mandals:

Table XI gives the benefits received from the Mahila Mandals.

TABLE XI
BENEFITS FROM THE MAHILA MANDALS

S.No.	Benefits	Number of members
1.	Improvement of socio-economic status	82
2.	Increase in income(through self employment	42
3.	Removal of social evils	30
4.	Improvement of Literacy level	24
5.	Group action	12

Improvement of social economic status was the obvious benefit as realised by the members. The other benefits were increase in income, removal of socialevils, improvement of literacy level and group action. (Figure 10)

BENEFITS FROM THE MAHILA MANDALS

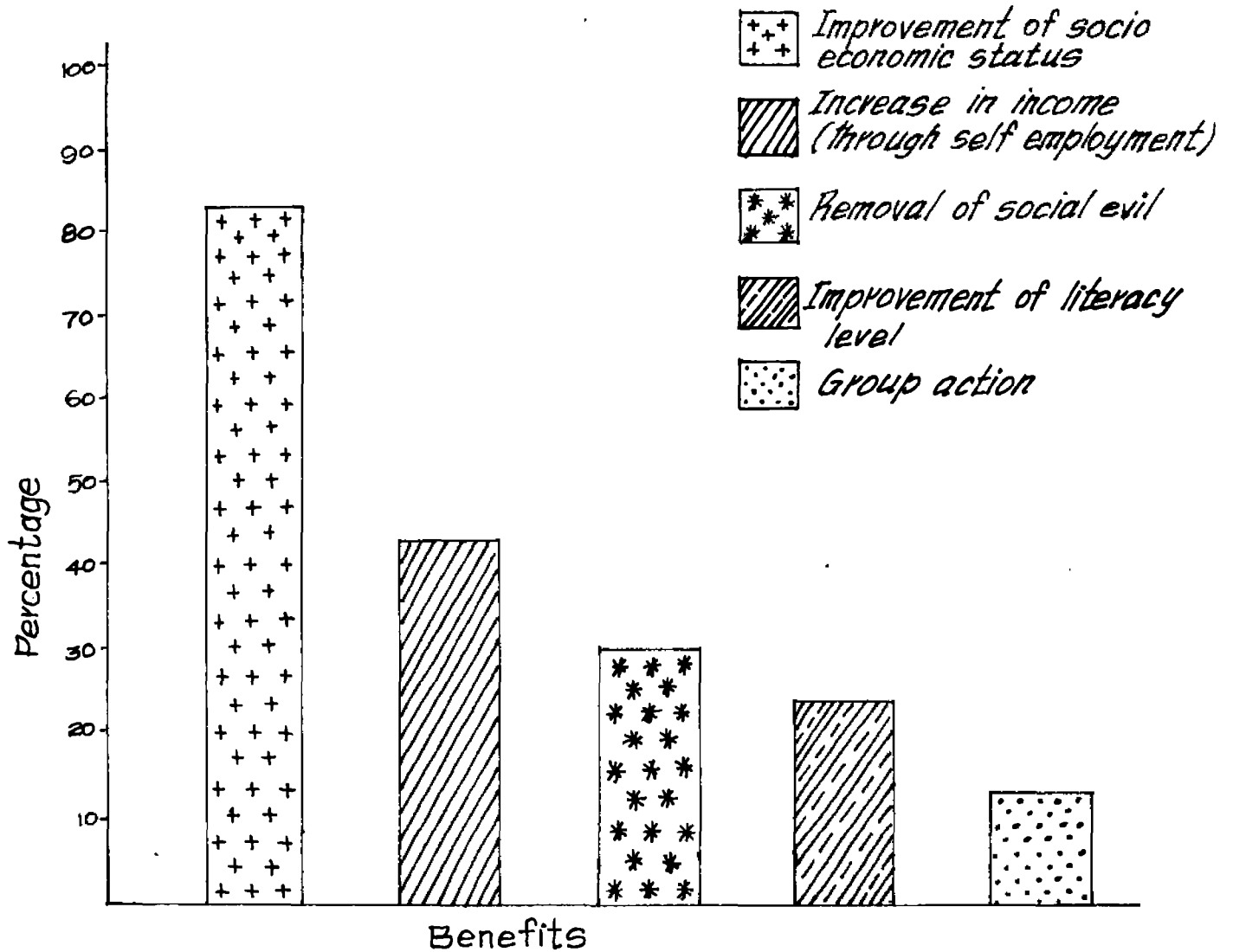


Figure. 10

3. Annual income of the members:

Table XII gives the increase profile of the members before and after participation in the Mahila Mandal programme.

TABLE XII

ANNUAL INCOME OF THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Annual income	Percentage of respondents N: 100	
		Before	After
1.	Below Rs. 2,500	64	42
2.	Rs. 2,501 - 3,500	36	54
3.	Rs. 3,501 - 5,000	..	4

From the table it is apparent that 64 per cent of the members had derived below Rs. 2,500.00 as their annual income prior to join the Mahila Mandal against 42 per cent in the same range after joining the income generating activities of Mahila Mandal.

On the other hand, 54 per cent of members had received Rs. 2,501/- to 3,500/- as their annual income against only 36 per cent in the same range prior to join in the activities of Mahila Mandals.

Four per cent had also moved to the category of Rs. 3,501/- to Rs. 5,000/- (against none prior to join in the income generating activities of the Mahila Mandal) which is heartening.

4. **Activities liked by the members:**

Table XIII shows the activities liked by the Mahila Mandal members.

TABLE XIII
ACTIVITIES LIKED BY THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Activities liked	Number of members
1.	Income generating activities	74
2.	Educational activities	28
3.	Cultural and religious activities	24

This table reveals income generating activities were liked by the majority of the members. This points out independent through group activity, educational crafts and cultural activities get the next priority.

5. **Awards received:**

It was encouraging to ~~note~~ that 16 Mahila Mandals had won prizes for their outstanding performance. Four for knitting, seven for the income generating activities, three for maintenance of best kitchen gardens, two in cooking demonstrations.

However, the fact that a large majority could not give positive response to this question reveals that Mahila Mandals suffered from lack of opportunity to enter into healthy competitions and interactions with each other. (Figure 12)

6. Problems faced by the Mahila Mandals:

Table XIV illustrates the problems of Mahila Mandals.

TABLE XIV
PROBLEMS FACED BY THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Problems	Number of members
1.	Lack of profitable activities	22
2.	No separate building	46
3.	Lack of co-operation	16
4.	Lack of motivation	12
5.	Meeting place away from residence	10

The problems pertained mainly lack of profitable activities lack of co-operation and motivation and lack of separate building to meeting place.

7. Suggestions by the members to improve the conditions of Mahila Mandal:

The suggestions given by the members to improve the condition of Mahila Mandals are given in Table XV.

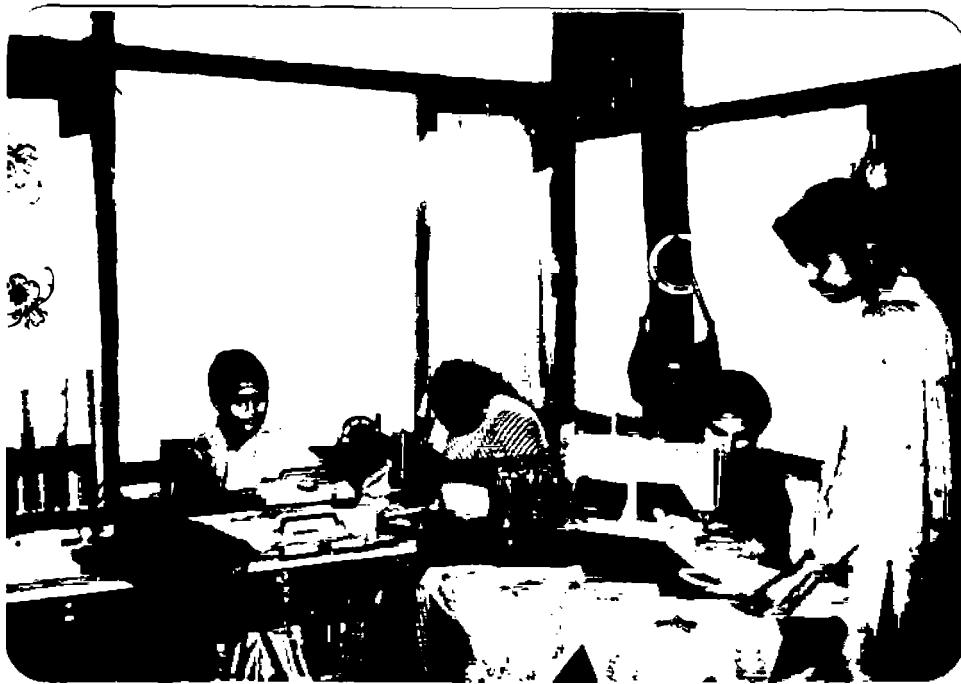


FIGURE :11
INVESTIGATOR WITH THE MEMBERS



FIGURE:12
AWARDS RECEIVED FOR MAINTENANCE
OF BEST KITCHEN GARDEN

TABLE XV
SUGGESTIONS GIVEN BY THE MEMBERS

S.No.	Suggestions	Number of members
1.	Income generating activities should be enhanced	74
2.	Varieties of activities should be introduced	46
3.	Separate building and facilities should be provided	28

It is welcoming to that 74 per cent of the members had suggested to increase the income generating activities, 46 per cent had asked for varieties of activities to be introduced and 28 per cent had suggested for separate building. (*Figure 13*)

8. Awareness about the Developmental programmes:

To know the awareness of the members of Mahila Mandals about the developmental programmes a set of questions was prepared the following are the answers.

SUGGESTIONS GIVEN BY THE MEMBERS

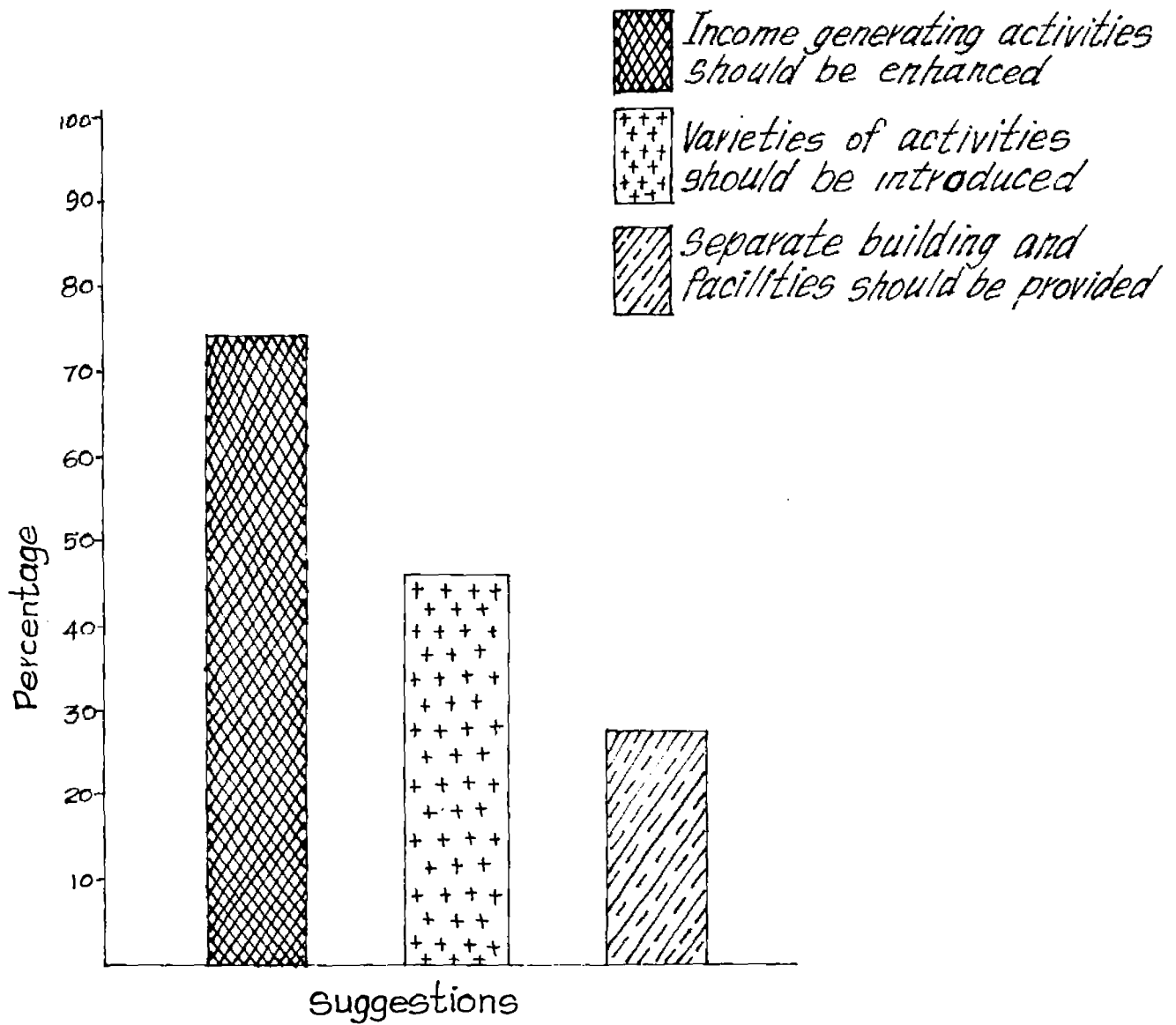


Figure .13

TABLE XVI

AWARENESS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES

S.No.	Awareness about the Programme	Yes Percentage	No Percentage
1.	Anganwadi(ICDS)	61	39
2.	Non-formal Education and Functional Literacy Programme	74	26
3.	Health centre	94	6
4.	Agricultural Development Programme(IRDP)	41	59

It was found that majority of 61 per cent of the respondents were aware of the presence of anganwadi(Under the scheme of Integrated Child Development Services(ICDS)). Seventy four per cent of the respondents were aware of the presence of the Adult Education Centres in their villages and knew about the programme. It is revealed by the data that 94 per cent of the respondents were aware of the presence of the Health Centre in their villages. It was observed that the awareness of women about programmes related to agriculture (like Integrated Rural Development Programme(IRDP) was very low(41 per cent).

CHAPTER - V

Summary

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study on the functioning of Mahila Mandals(Mahila Samitis) was conducted in 50 Mahila Mandals(Women's clubs) of Nagaon District of Assam. The convenors or senior members of the Mahila Mandals constituted the sample(100) for the study. The findings of this investigation summarised thus:

1. Out of the 50 mahila Mandals studied 44 were registered under the Societies Registration Act. Among 50, 20 per cent were functioning for more than ten years. A majority of 80 per cent were functioning between 1 to 10 years. Seventy six per cent of the Mahila Mandals had more than 15 members. The frequency of meetings was reported to be once a month by a large majority.
2. Handicrafts seemed to be undertaken by a large majority of 94 per cent Mahila mandals. Educational activities on nutrition and health, thrift and resource management also were mentioned. Only 26 per cent had income generating activities. Cultural and religious activities was given less importance undertaken only by 12 per cent clubs.

3. Training and acquisition of knowledge and skills was obtained by considerable number of clubs by the expert personnels in the block offices.
4. Guidance and supervision were reported to be rendered by women extension officials of the block in 68 per cent cases and in 22 cases alone, the convenors of Mahila Mandals interest in the conduct of Mahila Mandal activities.
5. The objectives of the Mahila mandals as stated by the respondents were improve the condition of women, provision for recreational opportunities, creation of income generating activities, removal of social evils and eradication of illiteracy among women.
6. The outcomes of participation in Mahila Mandals as stated by the respondents were increase in income, removal of social evils, improvement of literacy level and group action.
7. Sixty four per cent of the members had derived Rs.2500/- as their annual income prior to join the Mahila Mandal against 42 per cent in the same range after joining the income generating activities of Mahila Mandal. Fifty four per cent of members had received Rs.2501/- to 3500/- as their annual income against only 36 per cent in the same

range prior to join the activities of Mahila Mandals. Four per cent had also moved to the category of Rs.3501/- to 5000/-(against none prior to join in the income generating activities of the Mahila Mandal) which is heartening to note.

8. As for interest in activities for the members, income generating activities were ranked to be the best liked, followed by educational and social programmes.
9. It was encouraging to note that 16 Mahila Mandals had won prizes for their outstanding performance. Four for knitting, seven for the income generating activities, three for best kitchen gardens and two in cooking demonstrations.
10. Lack of profitable activities, lack of separate building, lack of co-operation and motivation and long distance of meeting place were the problems stated by the respondents.
11. Introduction of income generating activities, adding variety to the programmes and offering physical facilities such as building were the major suggestions put forth.

Findings of the study regarding the awareness of members about rural development programmes revealed that

a large number of members were aware of the rural development programmes running in the villages. Maximum awareness was found regarding the health centre which was followed by non-formal education literacy programme, anganwadi and agricultural development programmes.

Apart from the above factual information obtained from this study the personal interactions of the investigator with the various convenors and the Mahila Mandal members revealed certain insights about the actual status of the women's clubs at the grass root to be in association with each other through these clubs.

However, only when continuous motivation and guidance are available to the leaders, the activity could be made interesting to the members.

Income generation through collective action seemed to offer the greatest incentive for the proper functioning of the clubs. Training in social inputs was offered along with vocational training which included on education, health and nutrition, resource management, thrift etc. which aim at improving the quality of living of the families concerned thereby contribution to better community living.

Whenever, such guidance and motivations were lacking from the official side and the activities also lacked variety and interest. The clubs were either reported to be merely existing on records or were catered to only a

limited number of rural women who tried to achieve the benefits on individuals basis.

To conclude, all services and training for women in rural areas should be integrated and offered as a package programme. The centre of all these services - agriculture, animal husbandry, education, health care, nutrition, family planning and vocational training must be directed towards improving women's earning capacity through women's clubs, increasing their productivity and making work done in home and outside less burden some.

To sum up, this study has thrown light on the great potentials the rural women's clubs have in fostering development of women in the community. Rural women who have hitherto been 'invisible' should be empowered to become partners in rural development. Women's organisations have vital contribution to make to empower these 'invisible' forces. Therefore, concerted efforts should be made by all planners, policy makers, social workers, feminists and other interested to organise women at the grass root levels and equip them with the necessary knowledgeskills and attitudes to come forward and participate in development efforts.

The local organisations if properly initiated and strengthened, would be in a position to identify the programmes meant for them, obtain detail procedure in getting the benefits of the various programmes and continue to give feed back in terms of success and bottlenecks experienced. All the programmes contemplated for

development of women and children must be routed through the women's organisations.

To give more strength to local level organisation these may be federated with national organisations of repute such as Bharathiya Grameen Mahila Sangh, All India Women's Conference etc, for recognition and information dissemination.

The goal of rural development is the development of the people, essentially women who constitute 50 per cent of the population. The current efforts for massive awakening of women and mobilising them for collective action are highly encouraging. This trend should be used as the fulcrum for onward march of the women, their families and the communities in the path of progress. .

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Appendices

APPENDIX - I

LIST OF VILLAGES IN SELECTED BLOCKS

Village	Block
SENCOWA	
BABEJIA	
JAMOGURI	
ALENGI SATRA	
MARIKALANG	
JALAH	
	KHAGORIJAN
DEURIGAON	
SINGIGAON	
DAKSHINPAT	
BARKULA	
BHAKATGAON	
NAROMARI	
RAIDONGIA	
HATICHONG	
ITANAGAR	
LAWKWUA	
POHKOTA	
HATIGAON	
MIKIRGAON	RUPOHEE
BORANIGAON	
SINGIA	
BHORAGURI	
KOTALGURI	
SAMOGURI	
PURONIGUDAM	

APPENDIX - II

SCHEDULE TO ELICIT INFORMATION ON MAHILA MANDAL BY THE
MEMBERS OF THE MAHILA MANDAL

I. GENERAL BACKGROUND:

1. Name of the Interviewee:
2. Age :
3. Address :
4. Panchayat/Village :
5. Block :
6. Religion :
7. Occupation :
8. Income per month :
9. Mother tongue :
10. Marital status :

=====

S.No.	Name	Sex	Age (yrs)	Relation to the head	Educational level	Occupation
-------	------	-----	--------------	-------------------------	----------------------	------------

=====

II. QUALIFICATION OF MEMBERS:

=====

Name	Read only	Read & write	Primary	Middle	High/ Higher secondary	Graduate and above	Illiterate
------	-----------	--------------	---------	--------	------------------------------	-----------------------	------------

=====

III. CASTE GROUPS OF FAMILY:

Please indicate by a tick(_/) marks.

=====

S.C	S.T	B.C	Others
-----	-----	-----	--------

=====

IV. TYPE OF RESIDENTIAL HOUSE

(Please indicate by a tick(_/) mark:

=====

Katcha	Pacca	Mixed
--------	-------	-------

=====

II. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT MAHILA MANDAL:

1. What is the name of your Mahila Mandal?

2. When was the Mahila Mandal started in your village?

3. Who are the persons(indicate leaders, officials or other factors) responsible for the establishment of the mandal?

4. Is your Mahila Mandal registered?
If Yes, give details of registration:

Date	Year	Institution

5. What are the source of income to your Mahila Mandal?

6. What are the objectives of Mahila Mandal?
 - To improve the condition of women
 - To educate them of their duties and responsibilities
 - To eradicate illiteracy among rural women
 - To creat interest in women to work for common cause
 - Remove social evils
 - To provide recreational opportunities

7. How many members are there in your Mahila Mandal?

8. How long have you been a member in the Mandal?

Member

Secretary

President

9. What are the activities of Mahila Mandal?

Religious []

Classes on cleanliness []

Home decoration []

Family Planning []

Literacy []

Child care []

Income generating activities:

i) Tailoring []

ii) Knitting []

iii) Weaving []

iv) Basket making []

v) Nutrition education []

Nutrition programme []

10. Position held in Mahila Mandal:

Ordinary member []

Member of execution []

Treasurer []

Joint Secretary []

Secretary []

Vice President []

President []

11. Have you undergone any training?
Yes [] No []
If yes, what type of training?
12. How often do you Always Seldom Never
1. Attend meeting
 2. Initiate discussion
 3. Participate in decision making
 4. Participate in follow up
13. Do you have proper building facilities?
Yes [] No []
If Yes, rented,
Yes [] No []
14. Do you pay any membership fees to the mahila mandal?
Yes [] No []
If Yes, what is the amount per month?
15. Do you attend the Mahila Mandal regularly?
Yes [] No []
- a) If Yes, how many days a week/month?
 - b) What are the reasons for the increase in the membership?

If No, reasons for irregular attendance

1. Occupational problem []
2. No separate building to
conduct activity []
3. Inadequate number of equipment []
4. Lack of motivating from outside []
5. Lack of interesting activities []
6. Far distance from the residence []

16. Does your Mahila Mandal have a bank?

Yes [] No []

17. Does the Mandal have a general body?

If Yes, what is the size and composition?

18. What are the functions of the general body?

19. Function of the executive committee

20. How many are regularly participated in Mahila Mandal programme?

21. Who is guiding the programme?

- a) Gram Sevika []
- b) Mukhya Seveka []
- c) Bala sevika []
- d) District Social Welfare officer []
- e) Any Other []

25. Do you have any problems in your Mahila Mandals?

Yes [] No []

If Yes, give reasons:

Problems:

1. Lack of time
2. Lack of building
3. Lack of transport facilities
4. Absence of the members
5. Lack of profitable activities and co-operation

26. What are the benefits derived from participating in Mahila Mandal?

27. What are your future plan?

- a) Expansion
- b) Additional activities

228. What measures can be adopted to increase the effectiveness of Mahila Mandal?

III./ ANGANWADI/BALWADI KNOWLEDGE

a) Is there any Anganwadi/Balwadi in your village?

1. Know []

2. Do not know []

b) Do you know its

Location know []

Do not know []

Incharge

Know []

Do not know []

Beneficiaries:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Objectives:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Facilities provided:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Participation:

c) Do you send your children to Anganwadi/Balwadi?

Yes [] No []

Not applicable []

e) To what extent he/she has availed the facilities provided?

To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

f) Suggestion:

If do not send:

g) Reasons for not sending

IV. Non-formal education and functional literacy

programme knowledge:

a) Know []

b) Do not know []

c) Do you know its

Location know []

Do not know []

Incharge: Know []

Do not know []

Beneficiaries:

Know to a great extent []

Do not know []

Know to some extent []

Activities:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

c) Have you/your daughter joined the centre?

Yes [] No []

If Yes,

d) Do(es) you/she regularly attend classes?

Yes [] No []

e) To what extent you or your daughter have/has learned

Reading:

To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Writing:

To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Cutting and stitching:

To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Knitting:

To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Interior decoration:

- To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Basket making:

- To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

Any other activity:

- To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

f) To what extent you/your daughter are/is making use of these knowledge and skill?

- To a great extent []

To some extent []

Not at all []

g) Suggestion:

If not joined or sent your daughter

h) Reasons for not joining or sending daughter

V. DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME:

a) Is there any programme related for the development of women(eg. IRDP, TYRSEM, DNCRA)

Know []

Do not know []

b) Do you know its objectives?

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Functionaries:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Beneficiaries:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

Facilities provided:

Know to a great extent []

Know to some extent []

Do not know []

c) Suggestions

d) Do you think that women should be included in such Development Programme?

Yes [] No []

e) If Yes, in which areas?

VI. HEALTH CENTRE:

a) Is there any health centre in your villages?

Know []

Do not know []

b) Do you know its:

Location

Know []

Do not know []

Facilities provided:

Know to a great extent []

To some extent []

Do not know []

Participation:

c) How often do you visit health centre?

Always []

Seldom []

Never []

d) Are you using health centre for minor

ailments: Yes [] No []

Vaccination: Yes [] No []

Parental and Postnatal care:

Yes [] No []

For all ailments: Yes [] No []