

## Training Basti Women for Self-employment

PAMELA SINGLA

*“Aisa hunar seekhna hai, jis se paise mile” (Want to learn that skill which fetches some money). The persistent mention of earning by the bastiwallas set the team members thinking of a new vocation for them. We asked ourselves, “What should be started which needs lesser amount of skill, investment and training and brings immediate results without any social resistance from the basti residents.” Regular interaction with the Basti mothers revealed their felt need of supporting their family income. This need was expressed in the form of a desire for vocational training.*

This desire was expressed by the women of Indira Basti. It is situated at the end road going towards Timarpur near Delhi University.

The community has been adopted for work by the members of Delhi University Women's Association, popularly known as DUWA. It was founded in 1964 by the founder member, late Dr. (Mrs.) Durga Bai Deshmukh, wife of the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi, Prof. C.D. Deshmukh. The primary objective was to render social service and to work for an overall upliftment of poor women.

Three years ago, the members of the Association thought of venturing into community work and thus “Sahyog” was born. The interested group included social workers, lawyers, university teachers and housewives. The above-mentioned community, i.e. Indira Basti was chosen by the Association and a process of rapport building was started by the members. This was done by way of making visits and having interaction with the residents. The members believed that social development could overcome the effects of poverty, ignorance and ill health. Recognition of the need for

growth had to be aroused within the Basti residents.

Initially the voluntary members were very enthusiastic in visiting the Basti. Soon most of them lost interest due to their other commitments. Only three members continued to visit the Basti on a regular basis. These included the author (a professionally qualified social worker) and two others who were housewives. Two social work students from Delhi University were also placed in the Association for their field training. These students were taking keen interest in this project. Thus this group of five constituted the project team.

The present paper is based on a real-life experience of the author as a member of the DUWA. It tells how the income generation programme for a low-income population of a slum Basti was initiated. Problem solving by social workers is described step by step: entering the Basti; building up rapport with the Basti residents; identifying needs and planning programmes; overcoming reluctance of the Basti women.

### **The Basti – A Profile**

“Indira Basti” is a cluster of 200 jhuggies, each a one-room home for a family. It is an unauthorized habitation, but the chances of its removal in the near future are remote seeing the soft-corner approach being adopted by the Government. The walk through the Basti is an eye-opener for those not exposed to a tough life. There are no roads, only small lanes on both sides of which are these one-roomed poorly ventilated jhuggies. These jhuggies are made of mud or bricks and the roofing is of sundry material. These roofs are covered with plastic sheets and polythene bags and placed on them are pieces of bricks and stones to keep them from flying off in winds. A small number of *pucca* houses scattered here and there can also be seen.

The families hail from different States like Bihar, Rajasthan, and U.P. They are in varied sectors of employment with different income levels. Many families from Bihar are employed as daily wage earners at an average income of Rs. 1,200 per month. Those from U.P. and Rajasthan are often employed in better jobs in small establishments and shops earning around Rs.2,200 per month. The average family size is five persons. Most of the residents are young parents. Most of the women belonging to the better income group feel that their monthly earnings are just sufficient to manage the family. Still, at the end of the month they borrow amounts up to Rs.50 from those better off. For every Rs.50 they may end up paying Rs.10 as interest a month. Women from the lower

income group report that their income cannot support their families. At times their children have to go to school without any “roti” to eat. The Basti also has a “Pradhan” to take care of the trivial matters of the Basti arising out of civil conflicts.

The women of the Basti observe the traditional life-style. It revolves round their domestic life. Their day begins at 5.30 a.m. and ends at 10 p.m. First they wake up their husbands and children, then make tea and prepare lunch, clean the house, wash clothes and utensils, visit neighbours, go to the market and bring water from the common tap.

Gambling and drinking are common among the men of the Basti. These two vices cause consequential damages. A loss of money may result in an argument at home and with neighbours, wife and child-beating, miscarriages, poor scholastic performance, high crime rate, etc. The list can go on because the effects of gambling and drinking are seen everywhere.

### **The Starter Activity**

It was decided to begin with what the residents were already comfortable. This was expected to serve two purposes. Firstly, it would give them a feel of their own talents and, secondly, it would expose the team to the nature of the problems that would be encountered when a new vocation within the Basti is introduced. The visits to the Basti were now planned with a different perspective. It was now a search for a local skill, a skill that could be used for their benefit. The methodology adopted was to visit them at their homes. Meticulously embroidered pillow and TV covers were the two activities known to these women that caught our eye during the visits of the members. But these were kept as alternatives and the search of a less costly and more simple vocation continued.

### **An Art Identified**

Beautiful flowers made from paper kept as decoration pieces in one of the houses, led the team to enquire into its genesis. It was heartening to know that these had been made by the lady of the house – Shanthi. Luckily, one of the two students had a good hand at crafts. She quickly learnt the art. She together with Shanthi made around 50 flowers. These were then put in small earthen pots in bunches of seven. The money for the raw material used, i.e. paper and pots, was provided by the Association.

Subsequently a small orientation programme was organized in the Basti. This programme could be called a success in that many came and

expressed appreciation for the flowers. It was sad, however, to see that no one turned up to learn how to make flowers. Visits to the houses of some revealed their lack of interest in learning. This was revealed through sentences like, “time nahi hai” “munna ki tabiyat nahi abhi theek”; “khaana banana hai” (no time; the child is not feeling well; food has to be cooked). The basic reason behind this response was that these women, at the back of their minds, found it difficult to accept flower-making as a source of income and for some it was “bachon ka khel” (game for children).

### **First Taste of Success**

In the meantime the Association organized a Diwali Mela, its annual feature. Flowers were made for sale in one of the Sahyog stalls. Seven vases were also made each priced at Rs. 15. It was a happy moment for the group when all the seven vases were sold. The total profit that was credited to Shanti’s account was Rs. 65. Subsequently it was decided by all that handing over the money to Shanti quietly at her residence was not enough to make the occasion. It was decided to organize a Sports Day in the Basti for the children along with a ceremony to hand over the money. There was a big gathering and Shanti was presented with the money in the presence of all the bastiwallas. The response was immediate and marvelous. The women gathered around and expressed their desire to learn how to make flowers. With the festive season around, it looked like flower sales would be a big success.

But only four women joined the training sessions for a total of five flower makers which was considered not bad. The art was quickly learnt. A small exhibition was organized at one of the hostels of the University and the flowers sold like hot cakes. A total profit of Rs.100 or Rs. 20 per head accrued. It was certainly not a big amount given today’s economic indicators. But more than the money value was the initiative taken by the women and this small amount was actually a big incentive to generate further activity.

### **Pilot Phase—Candle-making as vocation**

The efforts to identify an income generation trade which could be more sustainable went on. A vocation was needed which required less investment, lower level of skill, brought good returns, and preferably involved every member of the family. We had learnt that unless the whole family was

involved the women did not get support at home. We had also seen that among the bastiwallas there was poor decision-making, resistance to change, bad planning, strong group feeling and influence of neighbours and peers on all decisions. We knew we had to work harder to find a line of work fitting these conditions.

As the coordinator of the Orientation Programme for the final-year social work students the author visited two Delhi Administration residential homes. One was for beggars and the other for the mentally retarded. At these homes the residents were trained for several vocations including candle-making. The market for candles was the Super Bazaars and melas organized by the Delhi Administration. "If they can do it, our members can too" was our response. Candle-making fulfilled the conditions we were looking for and was adopted by us as a goal.

At a meeting for all the residents of the Basti they were told about candle-making and its advantages. After an hour's discussion the question was put off till the next day. When we talked to women they raised genuine questions — market for the candles, cost of wax, etc. These were answered to their full satisfaction.



PLATE 4 : Indira Basti Women make Candles

**Liaison**

Shramik Vidyapith is a training institute which teaches candle-making along with many other vocations. We hired an instructor from the Institute for Rs. 60 per day. But he advised us that candle-making could be taught in three days through three lessons of 4-5 hours each. So we changed our plans and decided that the team members learn the art in the Institute and then teach it to others in the community. Also it was not feasible for the Basti women to be away from home for such long periods. So waxes and moulds were purchased wholesale in the Chandni Chowk and the training began.

The team members after finishing the training organized teaching sessions for the women in the Basti. Many women came with their children but very few men. The moulds and waxes were used for the training. The women were again assured that the Association would help them sell the candles.

**Enlargement Phase**

After the training was over the women were told to buy their own wax. The rate for the best quality wax was Rs. 32 per kg. They were given a brief explanation of how to pool their money and buy wax. Time was given for the collection of money. But we were in for a surprise. On the scheduled day, none had put in his/her money. Discussions revealed their anxieties. It was too expensive. No time to go to the market. Maybe the candles would not sell. This was despite the fact that all these things had been explained over and over. They had furthermore approved the candle project and shown interest in learning. Further the Association moulds were supplied to them free. Despite all this, subsequent talks and visits were futile. The women did not buy wax. We held still more meetings and assured them that the Association would also help sell candles. But to no avail.

The Association could have supplied money for the wax but that would have defeated the basic purpose of the programme. The Basti women have limited horizons and little or no ability to take risks. Still we believed they wished to learn some vocation and earn some money.

The sale of paper flowers, meanwhile, had been successfully concluded. Total profit was Rs. 100. The members now revised the plan of distributing profits among the Basti women. They now planned, with the women's consent, to invest the profit in buying wax and other materials

for candles. Fortunately the five women who were most active in making flowers were also active in learning to make candles. They readily agreed to the proposal.

The students together with two women of the Basti visited the houses to collect money from any interested women. Five more women showed interest. Two paid the requested amount and three more promised to pay within a week. Their share was advanced by the Association. A total amount of Rs. 150 was collected in this way. The wax was purchased. A total of 228 candles in two sizes and three colours were shortly produced.

Care was taken that the candle-making was done in a public park of the Basti which many people passed through every hour. As a result many showed interest. A remark was often heard, "Aap bana lo phir hame bhi sikhana!" (First you make then you train us also). In order to avoid chaos the children were assigned small duties. One was taking the candles out of water and arranging them. Another was taking care of the collection of candles, some others were finishing the candles and counting them. These chores not only kept the children busy but made their mothers more contented and motivated to learn.

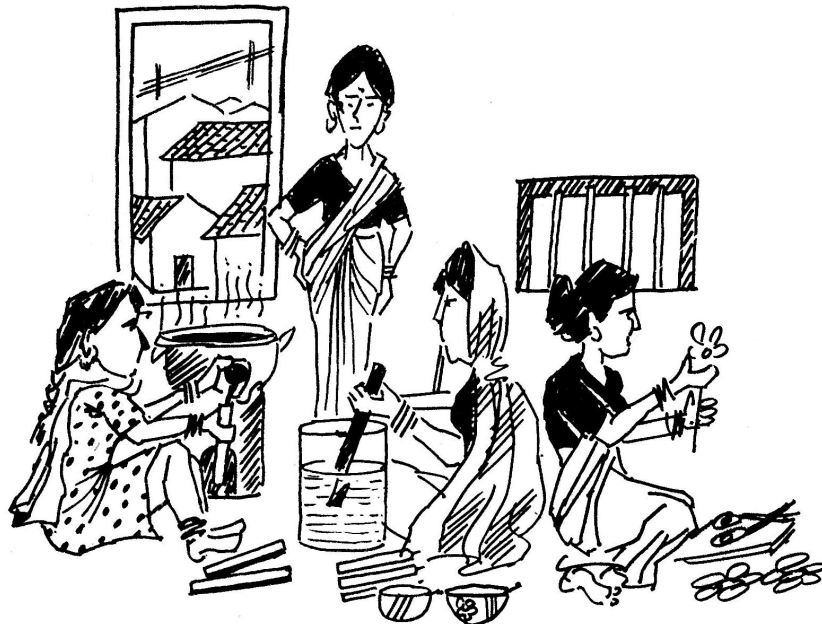


FIG. 3: Creating New Horizons – Social Worker Helping Develop Ways of Employment among Poor Women

The finished candles were packed right in the Basti. The participants and other interested women did the work.

These candles were displayed at the Delhi University Annual Flower Show. Shanti, Beena and Sharon were the three women who attended to the stall at the Show. They dressed in their finest clothes and the sale of these candles, products of so much hard work, was an immense joy for them. The excitement was quite evident on their faces.

### **Present Scenario**

The women active in candle-making were eager to go on and make more candles for sale. In later meetings attended by entire families one of the men spoke up. He said they would like to have their family money invested in candle-making. Other families endorsed this idea. Interested families were told of the plan for a workshop in the Basti to plan for further work. The question of a market for the candles was of great concern and the Association promised it would help locate an outlet.

After two or three fruitless attempts the University Cooperative Stores of Delhi University proved to be a possible outlet. The store provided specifications for the size, colour, etc., and the Basti women agreed to this.

### **Follow-up**

The work reported here is considered just the beginning of this new project. The success will depend on the follow-up by the team and even more on the dedication of the involved families. Our aim will be to involve others from the Basti in the candle-making vocation.

### **Significance of this Case**

We believe this case has a unique importance for social work. It was through the teamwork and mutual understanding that the Association members were able to give these Basti families a new direction. The active families have learned to work together on their problems and have the prospect of additional income. On our side, we had to work with only a few resources but are proud to have helped these families move to a higher level of functioning.



## Empowering Rural Women Through Employment

V. VAISHNAVI

*My name is Parvati (not real name). I have studied up to XII standard. I belong to a poor family. My father has struggled to educate me. I could not study further as my father could not afford it. I am the eldest of eight children. My father owns an acre of dry land. We cannot grow paddy on it. My family's monthly income can be calculated to be around Rs. 350 with which my father managed. When I became 21 years old, my parents wanted to marry me off. But the bridegroom's family which approached my family demanded 10 sovereigns of gold as dowry. My father could not afford it and so I was married off to my father's sister's son with three sovereigns of gold, and other essential utensils as dowry. I obeyed my father and got married though I did not want to. My husband is the eldest of three children. He has two younger brothers. He has also studied up to XII standard. My in-laws also own one acre of land, and I live with them. I heard about the work being offered at Kasturba Kushta Nivaran Nilayam (KKNN) through my friend and I thought I could also work to contribute to the family, as my husband is unemployed. Till now I have earned around Rs. 500. I hand over the money to my mother-in-law. I am planning to deposit some money in a bank in the future.*

*My name is Susheela (not real name). I am 18 years old and have studied up to XII standard. I am the eldest of three children. My father is a farmer and owns an acre of dry land. Since it is dry land we can harvest only once a year. As my younger brother and sister are also in school my father could not afford to educate me further. After*