Situation Analysis

The physical situation of the sample studied was distressingly similar. On average, the women earned Rs 15-20 per day. If they worked 30 days, it worked out to Rs 450-600 per month. The amount was mainly spent on food. The men occasionally supplemented this by bringing meat or vegetables depending on their religious leanings. On their return from work, a certain amount was spent on drink, beedis, or on wayside snacks like samosas or jalebis. The major portion was put away for a house of their own and later for the daughters' 'dahej.' Immediate nutritional requirements were not given much weightage. The entire family (average family size 6) subsisted on the woman's earnings. There was rampant borrowing from the moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest.

Food was cooked twice a day, usually roti with chutney, vegetables or dal were cooked three times a week and meat about twice a month depending on payments received. Except on festivals, nothing special was made in the house, either for the children or for the pregnant or lactating women. The value system was the decisive factor for the spending of scarce resources. The idea of investing in nutritious food for young children was not thought about. The relation between clean nutritious protein-rich foods and better mental and physical abilities was not understood. This is mainly due to the illiteracy of the parents especially the
mother. So long as the child was quiet, may be apathetically so, and its stomach full, everybody was satisfied.

The child till it began to walk, precariously clung on to the ill-fed and very often pregnant mother. Once it started to walk it was relegated to the background while the mother went on with her various household duties and her income generating work. Immunization, regular health check ups and balanced diets are not paid much attention to. As most families were large, one child’s illness did not assume the significance it does in small families. One child more or less was not a matter of grave concern, more so, if the child happened to be a girl.

The flood of information by the national media does not seem to have made any perceptible change in the lifestyles of the majority of the economically weaker sections. The observable changes were the acquisition of multi-colored talcum powders, garish electronic gadgets that stopped functioning almost as soon as they were bought but helped to enhance the prestige of the buyer among his peers. The ubiquitous T.V. set was a necessity in most homes of the sample studied. The justification for its buying was quick to be offered. It was not right to send grown up daughters to neighbors’ houses to watch T.V programmes. Most of the programs avidly watched were the film based ones. Any useful information regarding childcare or health of women were rarely if ever watched. 90% of the working mothers...
were involved in economically productive home-based work. Only about 10% went to the factories nearby. Home-based work seemed to fit in with their time use patterns and was more flexible. In almost all the cases the woman was not the only one involved with the hand press, who ever was free pitched in to help. It usually became a home-based occupation for the women and their children. Increased production meant increased income. This translated into more food for the family.

The nutritional status of the children depended more on the food availability in the family rather than the accessibility of the mother. Children seemed to grow up by themselves without any noticeable help from the family. Nobody had the time to spend on special childcare activities.

It suited the factory owners not to encourage women workers to work at the factory premises. They were free to come and go as and when they wanted to. Home-based and piece rate work meant that the employers did not have to provide water, toilets or crèche facilities to the workers. Moreover they were treated as casual labor not on the rolls.