

Grassroots Developments in Women's Empowerment in India:
Case Study of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad (1959-2000)

Malathi Ramanathan¹

Introduction:

Concepts of feminism and empowerment acquire different connotations in different cultures, though the universality of the gender issues is an accepted fact. Feminism, as understood in the west, needs to be adapted and remolded to suit the different cultural parameters in the south Asian context. In the developing countries, the fulfillment of the basic requirements of food, clothing and shelter determines the paradigms of life for a vast majority of the population. Since India became independent in 1947, the democratic government has tried to introduce measures to empower women. Yet the expected measure of success has not occurred due to reasons like bureaucratic delays, political compulsions, social and cultural constraints and the continuing poverty of the masses. Obtaining some measure of economic self-sufficiency and independence is a prerequisite to any advancement of women at a social, cultural and political level. Only then do the discourses on feminism become relevant to their lives. The silver lining in the cloudy sky has been the development of several grassroots movements initiated by women themselves, especially those from the lower sections of the society.

Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad is an entrepreneurial organization resulting from one such movement by women. It is primarily a cottage industry, urban in its origin, which has eventually spread to the rural areas and to the other cities and towns in several states of India. A study of the manner of its origin, growth and spread gives an insight into the self-propelling process of economic empowerment of women that is taking place. It also gives rise to several questions. Since it involves the basic housekeeping and cooking abilities of women, does it reinforce the traditional concept of woman's work being primarily centred on home? How far have these women, many of them illiterate, been able to gain the power of agency over their lives? The concept of trusteeship (the worker also being the owner), first enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi, is the basic philosophy professed by the organization. How far has this concept sustained itself as a

¹ Department of History, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, India.

working proposition in the past forty years? Lastly, has the organization contributed to bring a constructive change in the lives of the people in and around its orbit of work? This paper probes the functioning of the organization to find an answer to these questions in the final analysis. The source materials for this research are the official files, annual reports, the in-house monthly newsletter published in English from 1979, newspaper articles, a biography and oral interviews of women working in the organization.

Origins

Mahila (in Hindi) means women, griha is house, udyog is work/industry, lijjat is tasty (in Gujarati) and papad is a flat, thin, dried roll of kneaded flour mixed with spicy ingredients, like the tortilla. Papad has a reasonably long shelf life, can be toasted or fried in oil and it serves as a snack or is taken along with food. Throughout India, there have been varieties of papads made and stored at home. Hence, if anyone chose to make it on a large-scale, the market for the product was assured. All women, in general, know the art of rolling the papads and thus from its origin, both the workers and the market were readily available for this venture.

It all began on 15 March 1959, as a united effort by seven women at making papad, on the terrace of their flats in an old, large, residential building, one of the five buildings known as Lohana Niwas in Girgaum, a thickly populated area in South Bombay. They were Jaswantiben Jamnadas Popat, Parvatiben Ramdas Thodani, Ujamben Narandas Kundalia, Banuben N. Tanna, Laguben Amritlar Gokani and Jayaben V. Vithalani and one more whose name is not available. Of them, only Jaswantiben is now around to tell the tale of those early days. She has studied till second class, though she did not pass the second class examination.² She was in her early twenties with two young children in 1959. She explained how one Laxmidasbhai had started the making of papads but was soon running into a loss. These seven women, who were friends, decided to take over his venture along with its loss amounting to Rs.80, which they paid to him. Buying the needed ingredients, the measures of which she explained during the interview, they rolled out the papads. After drying and packing them in a plain plastic bag, they gave them to a known merchant in Bhuleshwar. Gradually they bought a cupboard to keep their stores and utensils in the terrace. During the first year, they had to stop production during the

rainy season, as it rains in Bombay for over four months. But by the next rains they had the stove and a cot over it, where they could dry the papads. They tried using coal for heating, but it colored the papads. Being very thin, they would dry very soon. In fact, one of them told that it has been so standardized that it now takes only fifteen minutes to dry. The quantity of flour also increased with time from one seer (unit of weight) to three to six and so on. The broken papads were distributed to the neighbors. In three months, there were about twenty-five women working in their group. In two years, there were over a hundred to hundred and fifty women working with them.³ Jaswantiben said that they got them through word of mouth and later through advertising in the local vernacular newspaper. In six months, with the profit that they made, they bought half a 'tola' (gram) of gold for each one of them⁴. This was to become a standard practice of the organization, extending to this day. Two men, whose wives were among the first seven women, helped them in keeping accounts. The Lohana Niwas was renting rooms to tenants and as rooms got vacated, they took them on rent and so they soon had four to five rooms, and eventually eight rooms for their purposes.⁵ By the end of the third year, the kneaded flour was distributed among the three hundred and odd women, to take it to their homes in the morning and bring the dried papads in a day or two, since the terrace could no longer accommodate so many of them. Lijjat, the name suggested by Dhirajben Ruparel, was chosen in a contest held for the purpose, with prize money of Rs.5/-.

Chhaganlal Karamshi Parekh, popularly known as Chhaganbapa, one of the reputed elders of the Lohana community, became their guide and philosopher, a little after a month or two of their commencing operations. He told them not to make two different qualities of papads as they were doing originally (in order to sell the inferior one at a cheaper rate) but to make one standard papad and asked them never to compromise on quality.⁶ From the beginning, the women had decided that they would not approach anyone for donation or help to run the organization, even if they incurred losses. Again, it

² Oral testimony by Jaswantiben, 17 April 2000.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Oral testimony by Jaswantiben Popat, 11 December, 2001

⁵ Ibid.; Lijjat Patrika, Vol.7, Issue 11, Jan. 1986, p.2

⁶ Pathak, Ramnarayan Nagardas, Punyashlok Chhaganbapa, translated into English by Prof.V.T.Yardi, Published by Shri Mahila Griha Udyag Lijjat Papad, Jan. 1980, p.114 ; Oral testimony by Jaswantiben Popat.

was Chaganbapa who emphasized to them the importance of running it as a business enterprise and of keeping an eternal watch on every facet of its working and maintaining proper accounts.⁷ The salient features of the organization were laid in these first few years, as will be shown through its later developments. There are no written documents for these years, only the oral testimony of the women, who set up the unit in those days. Initial attempts to start branches in Malad in Bombay in 1961 and Sangli in Maharashtra in 1966 were unsuccessful.⁸ However, in 1962-63, the annual sales of papad rose to about Rs.1.82 lakhs.⁹ In July 1966, the institution registered itself under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 as a society. On Chaganbapa's recommendation, U.N.Dhebar, Chairman, Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), Government of India personally inspected the institution in July 1966. In September, a formal recognition was granted to it as a unit belonging to the 'Processing of cereals and pulses industry group' under the Khadi and Village Industries Act.¹⁰ The KVIC granted a working capital of about eight lakhs of rupees and tax exemptions.¹¹ The institution was registered under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950 as a Public Trust. In the General Body Meeting, the member-sisters adopted the first written constitution. Thus the formal organization of the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad was completed by the seventh year of its existence.

The Basic Philosophy of the Institution

In spite of, or rather because of, its simple origin, Lijjat grew as a concept and the reason for its rapid growth was due to its basic philosophy and pragmatic approach. It was a voluntary organization of the sisters. From its inception, the member-sisters had started sharing the profits or losses among themselves. It was in their interest to strive for the growth of production and sale and to run the business wisely.¹² Thus the organization grew on the basis of collective ownership. Its essence was to provide for self-employment, dignity of labor and earning capacity for women, working from their

⁷ Ibid., p.117

⁸ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 3, March, 1979, p.6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pathak, R.N., op.cit, p.119

¹¹ Almeida, Irene, Administration dept., Oral Interview, 29 August 2001.

¹² Basic Philosophy and Practices of our organization, Symbol of Woman's Strength, Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, Lijjat Press, Nov. 98, p.6-8.

homes. With time, this was consciously developed as a discourse and an ideology, based on the concept of Trusteeship, as conceived by Mahatma Gandhi.¹³ Trusteeship considers all assets as belonging to the society and thus business becomes a refined form of service. Hence, the ownership of any business devolved on everyone engaged in its functioning. In other words, there are no employers or employees and all member-sisters became owners of the institution. This idea was frequently emphasized in all meetings, gatherings and newsletters, year after year, all through the forty years of its existence. All decisions were based on consensus and any sister-member had the right to veto any decision taken by the organization.¹⁴ All profits had 'to be shared in a judicious way depending on the needs of the person and her contribution to the business. This is a concept which is very difficult to practice and Lijjat is an experiment in this direction.'¹⁵ There was a general feeling that the sisters understood this philosophy and were undertaking more responsibilities to ensure the success of the endeavor. This also provided for mobility of labor and access to going up the ladder, in terms of responsibility and position in the organization. The present President, Mrs. Jyoti J. Naik, started her career at the age of ten by rolling out papad during the day and studying in the night school, through which she passed the S.S.C. examination.¹⁶ At fifteen, she was a storekeeper, then rose to become Sanchalika, in charge of a branch having five hundred sister-members and eventually the President of the organization. Another central philosophy, practiced from the very beginning, was that the Institution would never accept any charity or donation from anybody.¹⁷ This helped in a large measure to develop the self-confidence of the member-sisters and to retain the independence of the institution from any outside agency influencing the policies of the organization. A corollary to this was the concept that the organization was not meant for 'poor sisters', meaning that the objective was to remove wrong notions of pity, sympathy or charity.¹⁸ Most of them came from the lowest economic sections of the society, yet this philosophy gave them a sense of pride in

¹³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.6, Issue 7, September 1984, pp. 4-5; Lijjat Patrika, Vol.10, Issue 4, July 1987, p.4; Lijjat Patrika, Vol.1, Issue 13, March 1980, p.4

¹⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 10, Dec. 1984, p.4-B

¹⁵ Ibid.,p.4

¹⁶ Smt. Jyoti J. Naik, President, Oral testimony, 17 April 2000.

¹⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 4, April 1979, p.1; Lijjat Patrika, , Vol.17, Issue 11, Nov. 1996, p.5

¹⁸ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 3, March 1979, p.4; Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 3, Dec. 1998, Vol. 1, Issue 3, p.5

themselves and their capability to earn their livelihood independently. Only women could be members, and thus owners, of the organization and the few men, like the accountants in the offices or drivers of buses and vans, who were employed, as the salaried staffs were not members of the institution. Thus Lijjat, as it evolved, was very much more than a mere cottage industry providing gainful employment to women. It was 'a symbol of women's strength' as its logo proclaimed, a concept, a view and way of life and at its core was women, conceived beyond the particularities of their work, providing for their growth beyond the confines of the existing borders. Through its discursive practices, it helped to create an Indian slant to the discourse on feminism.

Organization and Management

Member-sisters owned the enterprise. Any woman, irrespective of caste or religion, willing to work in any capacity could become a member by signing a pledge of devotion to the basic tenets of the organization. It was a commitment to earn 'legitimate' honest income, through work on a cooperative basis. Initially even younger girls could join, but later eighteen was fixed as the minimum age of entry. Renouncing of membership was entirely voluntary. No one could be asked to leave unless she had violated the tenets of the organization. Men could only be salaried employees and not members of the organization, since membership implied ownership. The central office at Bombay was responsible for coordinating the activities of the various branches. It shifted from Girgaum, which saw the beginning of the institution, to Kamal Apartments in Bandra, a suburb of Bombay. The purchase of the premises was initiated by the end of 1987 and the registered office shifted to Bandra with effect from July 1988. The Central Office dispatched raw materials to the branches and conducted business with the various exporters and suppliers. All branches were to send their accounts to it on a regular basis, since it was here that the final auditing of accounts was done. The office housed the accounts and the advertisements departments. The running of the organization was entrusted to the Managing Committee of twenty-one members, including the President, the Vice President, two secretaries and two treasurers. They were all chosen from among the member-sisters on the basis of consensus once every three years, thus acknowledging their leadership qualities. Any member-sister could write her willingness to be a managing committee member and be selected by due process. There were a few salaried

employees, both men and women. There was decentralization of authority in the day to day running of the branches throughout India. Yet in view of its ever-increasing expansion in size, it was made clear that all the outstation branches and persons connected with it must, without fail, take the approval of the Managing Committee of the Institution, before committing to commerce any new project or starting a new product.

Sanchalikas, selected through consensus by the member-sisters from among themselves once every three years, were placed in charge of each of the branches of the institution and its different divisions. The Sanchalikas could be transferred to different branches. To manage its affairs, each branch had a committee of eleven member-sisters, again chosen by consensus. There were Branch Coordination Committees and Area Meetings of the various branches in a region or a state. At the all India level there were the Annual General Meetings attended by member-sisters from all the branches and divisions, from all over the country. The responsibilities of every office-bearer and member-sister were laid down in the constitution and were modified with changing times and increasing growth of the organization.¹⁹ Active participation by the member-sisters in the running of the institution was sought through open meetings with the sisters at the Head Office on all days from 12 to 1 p.m..²⁰ The responsibilities of attending and conducting the area meetings were to be delegated to other members in the branch, by respective Sanchalikas.²¹ It was in these meetings that the practical difficulties, with regard to supplies, production and inter-personal relationships, were discussed. The area meetings became less important with time. The Sanchalikas, along with the accountants and cashiers, were to verify the inventories of inputs and finished goods at their respective branches and divisions.²² An important decision of the Managing Committee in Feb. 1988, placed the responsibility of handling all cash amounts, sales proceeds and other receipts only by the sisters and not by accountants or any other staff member at any branch in Bombay or out station. 'One sister in each branch' was 'to take the entire

¹⁹ For Better Administration and Management of the Trust of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, P.T.R. No. F-1460 (Bom), Assistant Charity Commissionar, Office of the Charity Commissioner, Maharashtra State, Bombay, dated 24 July 1990, pp.1-25.

²⁰ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 7, Issue 3, May 1985, p.6.

²¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.2, Issue 1, March 1980, p.6.

²² Lijjat Patrika, Vol.7, Issue 2, April 1985, p.3

responsibility of handling the cash amount and go to the bank to deposit it.²³ This is significant because many among the member-sisters had had very little school education and they learnt through direct experience.

Each branch was to act as a self-administering unit, sharing its profits and losses among its member-sisters. Thus they were all directly responsible for the profitable functioning of their branch. In case of mismanagement or loss due to negligence, the concerned Sanchalika or other member-sisters would be relieved of their membership, if the charges were severe or be relieved of the responsibility of the position that they had mismanaged, though they could continue to perform other functions.²⁴ In case of losses due to fall in standards of quality, the member-sisters bore the loss by reducing their vanai (daily rolling charges). Similarly when any branch was financially doing well, they not merely increased their rolling charges but also obtained additional rolling charges in terms of cash, varying anywhere between Rs. 300/- and Rs. 3000/-, or as gold coins, gold rings or gold chains of a particular weight and purity. Several issues of Lijjat Patrika, from 1979 to 2000, enumerate the names of the branches as well as the names/numbers of the member-sisters, who took these additional rolling charges along with the specific amount in rupees or grams of gold.²⁵ It is important to note that all member-sisters, irrespective of their position in the organization, received the same amount. In the past three years, the additional rolling charges have been given in money and not in gold. The application of the concept of trusteeship is witnessed in this practice of equitable distribution of profit/loss among all the member-sisters, who were also owners of the organization.

The daily routine in all the branches began early in the morning by five. The sisters arrived at their specific branches by the institution's transport from their homes with the

²³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 10, Issue 12, March 1988, p.3.

²⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 7, Issue 6, August 1985, p.5; Lijjat Patrika, Vol.7, Issue 12 Feb. 1986, p.6; Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 8, Issue 1, March 1986, p.4; Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 8, Issue 6, August 1986, p.4.

²⁵ Lijjat Patrika: example of some of the issues that carry the details: Vol. 1, issue 14, April 79, p.5; Vol.2, Issue 2, April 80, p.4; Vol.2, Issue 4, June 80, pp.2-3; Vol.2, Issue 5, July 80, pp.5,7,8; Vol.2, Issue 6, August 80, pp.5-7; Vol.2, Issue 9, Nov.80, p.5; Vol.2, Issue 10, Dec. 80, pp.3-4; Vol.2, Issue 12, Feb. 81; pp.3,6; , Vol.5, Issue 11, Jan. 84, p.5; Vol.5, Issue 12, Feb.84, p.3; Vol.6, Issue 3, April-May 85, p.5; Vol.6, Issue 5, July 84, pp.4,6; Vol.6, Issue 8, Oct. 84, p.3; Vol.6, Issue 9, Nov. 84, p.2; Vol.6, Issue 11, Jan. 85, p.3; Vol.7, Issue 1, March 85, p.6; Vol.7, Issue 2, April 85, p.2; Vol.7, Issue 4, June 85, pp.2-3; Vol.14, Issue 8, Nov.93, pp.8,11, Vol.15, Issue 11, Nov. 94, p.3; Vol. 16, Issue 11, Nov. 95, p.5; Vol. 17, Issue 2, Feb. 96, p.3; Vol. 17, Issue 8, Aug. 96, p.4; Vol. 17, Issue 10, Oct. 96, p.4, Vol. 17, Issue 12, Dec. 96, pp.8,14; Vol. 18, Issue 2, Feb. 97, p.7; Vol. 18, Issue 5, May 97, p.5; Vol.18, Issue 8, Aug. 97, p.6; Vol. 18, Issue 11, Nov. 97, p.4; Vol. 20, Issue 10, Oct. 99, p.5; Dec. 2000, Vol.21, Issue 12 p.5.

papads that they had prepared the previous day and got their rolling charges paid. All payments were made on a daily basis. Flour was kneaded using a specific formula, divided by kilogram weight to be taken home for that day's rolling and drying. 'Veteran members took home as much as 25-35 kgs per day. Wages were cut for papads that did not meet the standard quality. Finished papads were brought back to the unit for weighing and packing.'²⁶ Each member-sister was expected to roll out at least three kilograms of kneaded flour per day. There were groups of women designated to perform each core function through the day, like preparation and distribution of the raw material, packaging, payments etc in each of the branches. They were fetched from their homes, along with the prepared papads, by buses or vans early in the morning and left back in their homes with the kneaded flour to be rolled for that day. There are frequent references to the purchase/disposal of vans or buses by the various branches.²⁷

Expansion of the Institution: Branches and Divisions, Sales and Export:

In May 1968, the first branch of the institution was founded in Valod, in Gujarat. Initially, a few member-sisters from Girgaum went by turns and stayed at Valod, for a couple of months at a time, to train the new member-sisters who joined in the new branch. Once they had learnt the ropes of running it, they were entrusted with the administration of the branch.²⁸ This was the basic manner in which branches in Bombay and in other states of India were opened, through the ensuing years. Jaswantiben said that it was easy for her to go for the required few months to Valod, because she had her mother-in-law to hold fort at home ever since she started to work in 1959. The first branch that opened, in any particular state of India, took care of the other branches that opened in the state, especially in their initial stages. Later, they were allowed to manage their own affairs. Thus from the very beginning, the member-sisters were entrusted with responsibility for the proper functioning of the institution.. The central office was the main promoter of these branches and had the over-all responsibility. The pace of growth of the organization is evidenced in the opening of several branches in different parts of India. The 21st branch was inaugurated at Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh in Nov. 1979²⁹, 50th

²⁶ *Labour with Dignity*, Maharashtra Woman's Herald, Saturday, Dec 3, 1988, p.1

²⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.1, Issue 11, Feb. 79, p.5

²⁸ Popat, Jaswantiben, Oral interview, 11 December, 2001

²⁹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol,1, Issue 11, Jan. 1980, p.2

branch at Borivili, Mumbai in March 1996³⁰, 55th branch in Baroda, Gujarat in April 1997³¹ and 59th branch in Rahuri, Maharashtra in Dec.1998 and 61st branch in Veerayatan, Rajgir, Bihar in Dec. 1998.³²

Apart from making papads, the institution soon started to diversify in allied or other areas that seemed feasible as a cottage industry. Of these, the Cottage Leather Division (1979), the Match Industry Division (1979) and Agarbathi (Incense sticks) Division were eventually closed down, as they were not viable. The processing of those ingredients that were needed to make or to sell the papad, were the first to begin functioning. E.g. the Khakra Division in 1974, the Flour mills in 1975(to grind lentils etc), Masala (Spices) Division in 1976, Printing Division in 1977 and Polypropylene Packing Division in 1978.³³ In 1979, the institution entered into the production of Bakery Products.

A very significant field of diversification, started by the Lijjat institution, was in the making of soaps. In 1988, the Managing Committee gave approval to the launching of the new Detergent Powder Division at Dahisar, near Bombay.³⁴ The soap industry had shown a consistent growth of 15% per annum since 1983 and it was likely to continue. The synthetic detergents were cheaper and more efficient than ordinary soap. The raw materials were locally available. The process enabled manual production and so was ideal as an appropriate technology to provide employment for rural women. These were the reasons for entering this field of production.³⁵ Like the papads, soaps had a ready market and availability of labor and raw materials. It was proposed to initially start 20 centres on an all India basis. It was estimated 'that about 2000 to 2500 sisters will get direct benefits as earning members and another 1500 will get direct/indirect employment opportunities, so as to support about 15000-20000 family members at large.'³⁶ The entry into the field of soaps with the introduction of powder and later liquid soaps and soap cakes, under the brand name of SASA, was to see tremendous expansion in due course of time. 'The total quantity of SASA detergent powder sold by five centres in Dahisar, Pune, Rajkot, Valod

³⁰ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 17, Issue 4, April 1996p.3

³¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.18. Issue 5, May 1997, p.1

³² Lijjat Patrika, Vol.20, Issue 1, Jan. 1999, p.5

³³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 3, March 1979, pp.7-11

³⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 11, Issue 8, Dec. 1988, p.7.

³⁵ *Why Lijjat Entered Detergents?* Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 11, Issue 11, March 1989, p.6

³⁶ Ibid.

and Calcutta till June, 1989 was over 1,000 tons, averaging around 150 tons per month from Dec.1988 to June 1989.³⁷ The Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad had expanded to have 32 Divisions and 61 branches of papad manufacturing. Among the divisions were the Sales, Export, Advertising, Printing, Polypropylene and the rest. The branches and the divisions spread over fifteen states of India, with Bombay itself having 17 branches. The strength of the member-sisters swelled to more than forty thousand from the original seven, who had literally and metaphorically set the ball rolling.

The total sales figure of the institution for Feb.1980 was rupees forty lakhs, five thousand and two hundred,³⁸ averaging to about rupees forty-eight to fifty lakhs for the year. The total sales of the Institution for the 12 months till 31 March 1999, the end of the financial year, was Rs.25866 lakhs, showing an increase of Rs.1729 lakhs over the previous year.³⁹ It included the export sales of Rs.850 lakhs as compared to Rs.794 lakhs of previous twelve months.⁴⁰ In 1980, the exports had amounted to Rs.3.42 lakhs.⁴¹ The member-sisters' earnings, in the form of vanai (rolling) charges and additional vanai charges had risen from Rs.2954 lakhs of the previous twelve months to Rs.3134 lakhs during the year ending in March 1999.⁴²

Broadening Horizons

It was but natural that as the working environment enlarged, the vision became more sweeping in its orbit. The interaction among the member-sisters was greatly facilitated by the occasional Area Meetings of the Branches of a region, Annual General Meetings and the All India Conventions of the Branches. Several issues of interest pertaining to maintenance of quality, inter-personal and other administrative problems were dealt with in these meetings.⁴³ For example, at the All India Convention at Valod, held in Dec.1984, topics for discussion included steps to increase production, reduce expenses, maintain quality, have an uniform accounting system and fixing of rolling charges for the sisters.

³⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.12, Issue 5, August, 1989, p.2

³⁸ *Monthly Sales Figure for Feb.1980*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 2, Issue 2, April 1980.

³⁹ *Annual Report of the Managing Committee for the year ended 31 March 1999*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol.20, Issue 10, Oct. 1999, p.5

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Monthly Sales Figure*, op.cit.

⁴² *Annual Report of the Managing Committee*, op.cit.

⁴³ *All India Lijjat Branches Convention at Valod, Gujarat*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 11, Jan. 1985, pp.4-5

Apart from this, the travel and the exchange of ideas, for three days at a stretch, were a learning experience for them.

Lijjat, and hence the member-sisters, also sponsored or participated in workshops and seminars. With the assistance of UNICEF, Lijjat organized a seminar in Bombay on Child Care and Mother Welfare, as part of the International Year of the Child celebrations, in which many women including member-sisters were present.⁴⁴ Several papers pertaining to children and mothers like health care, diet and nutrition were presented and discussed. Lijjat sent as its representative, Bhadraben Bhatt, to participate in the UNESCO sponsored international workshop on 'The role of women in the assimilation and spread of technological innovation' held in Oct. 1984 at NITIE Auditorium, Pawai, Bombay⁴⁵. Similarly, Alkaben Kalia took part in the national level meeting on women convened by the National Commission on Self Employed Women, constituted by the Government of India, to investigate the problems and needs of unorganized women labor.⁴⁶ Ms. Ela R. Bhatt, a Member of Parliament and the renowned activist who had promoted the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of Ahmedabad, Gujarat, chaired the Commission. This participation gave an exposure and a voice to the Lijjat member-sisters to relate to others, who were similarly situated and enter into a dialogue with them for further improvements. Also, the experience gained by the practical functioning of the Lijjat organization could be put to use to promote welfare measures and remove hurdles to facilitate women at an all India level.

The Lijjat Patrika, published in English, Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi, worked as a cementing factor since it published the happenings of significance in the Lijjat institution from all parts of India. It also dealt with other topics of interest to promote awareness among its readers. It wrote on the launching of 'A Women's Bank for Women' in Nairobi, Kenya⁴⁷ and on 'the Working Women's National Organization' in Madras,⁴⁸ which aimed at promoting employment of economically or socially deprived women.

⁴⁴ *UNICEF-Lijjat Seminar of Child Care and Mother Welfare*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 10, Dec.1979, p.4

⁴⁵ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 9, Nov. 1984, p.7

⁴⁶ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.10, Issue 9,Dec. 1987, p.3

⁴⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 5, July 1984, p.4

⁴⁸ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.5, Issue 11, Jan.1984, p.5

As an entrepreneurial institution, Lijjat took part in several trade fairs and exhibitions held in various parts of India.⁴⁹ This participation not only improved the sale of its products but also made the brand name of Lijjat well known among the people.

Tremendous organizational abilities were involved in all these efforts and they proved to be a training ground for the innumerable member-sisters, to become active agents in the functioning of their institution, thus indirectly increasing their own self-confidence. Advertising was undertaken from the initial years through the vernacular newspapers, television and radio. The institution sponsored programs and gave away gifts for the winners of specific shows in the television.⁵⁰ The cost of advertising was borne by all the branches and divisions of the Lijjat institution through an ingenious method. The money for advertisements was spent by the Polypropylene Division, which recovered the same by adding it to the price of the bags that it supplied to all the branches and divisions throughout India.⁵¹ Thus all of them shared the cost of advertisements equitably, according to their individual productive capacity.

Once well established, Lijjat attracted attention due to its unique development. Several foreign visitors and officials thronged to see its functioning or to promote similar organizations in their countries. At the All Branches Convention held in Golan in Dec. 84, one teacher from among the group of twelve teachers from Sweden, then in Valod in Gujarat, gave an outline of the voluntary work being conducted by the group.⁵² The Vice-President of Uganda, Dr.Speciosa Wandira-Kasibwe, visited the Central Office in Jan. 96, since she wanted to start a similar institution in Uganda.⁵³ Visitors came from far and wide, from Israel, UK, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Iran etc. The Lijjat exports to all these and other countries had a hand in the increasing popularity of its name and products, both in the east and the west.

⁴⁹ *KVIB exhibition in Bombay*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol.2, Issue 1, March 80; *KVIB exhibition in Goa*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 5, Issue 12, Feb. 84, p.1; *Bhavnagar Industrial Fair, Gujarat*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 7, Issue 4, June 85, p.2; *Dassera Exhibition Stall, Mysore*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 11, Issue 8, Dec. 88, p.7; *International Trade Exhibition, New Delhi*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 10, Issue 11, Feb. 88, p.1; *KVIC Exhibition at Ahmedabad*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 17, Issue 4, April 96, p.4; *Exhibition at Bandra Reclamation*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 18, Issue 5, May 97, p.8.

⁵⁰ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 18, Issue 3, March 1997, 8

⁵¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 7, Sept. 84, p.6; Vol. 8, issue 2, April, 86, p.3; Vol. 9, issue 10, Jan. 87, p.3.

⁵² *All India Lijjat Branches Convention at Golan, 29-31 Dec. 1984*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 11, Jan. 85, p.3

⁵³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 2, Feb. 96, pp.1, 4.

Contribution to Social Service, Health Care and Education

Beginning as it did on the principles of trusteeship, it naturally followed that the member-sisters made it a policy to return a little of what they had gained, back to the community, as a share in their earnings, either in cash or in kind. Also, they used their organization as a medium to promote their and their families' welfare, by increasing the availability of health care, by providing scholarships for their children who showed promise in their studies and by cooperating to build houses and promoting their own bank. It was a multifaceted policy that contributed much to raise their own image and that of the organization in the eyes of the society. In the Valod centre, Gujarat, the very first branch of the organization, they set up an educational and hobby centre to provide the rural women, who lived there, to acquire new skills. Orientation courses in typing, cooking, sewing, knitting and toy making as well as other courses like child welfare, first aid and hygiene⁵⁴ were taught. The first ever pucca (tarred) road in Valod to be built and inaugurated in 1979 was with the help of the Lijjat, Valod branch.⁵⁵ Thirty member-sisters of the Golan sub-centre of the Valod branch participated in a camp organized by the Rural Protection Force at Golan.⁵⁶ In the Catering Institute in Bombay, three member-sisters gave demonstrations of making papad, along with the technology involved. When Mother Teresa met a few of them during her visit to Bombay, she exhorted them to take part in some activities of Asha Dhan, an institution to care for destitute women, set up by her in Bombay, which they eventually did.⁵⁷ One of the most creditable works undertaken by the Lijjat was the rehabilitation in Chincholi (Jogan), the earthquake affected village in the Latur district of Maharashtra. The institution provided the finance and supervised the work of construction of fifty-eight houses for the people of the village.⁵⁸ Again in 2001, after earthquake in Kutch, Gujarat, Lijjat built forty houses for the rehabilitation of the people of Bhujpur, (Bhachau) in Kutch. It spent 49 lakhs of rupees, obtained as contributions from the several branches.⁵⁹ On special occasions, the member-sisters

⁵⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 12, Feb. 1980, p.7

⁵⁵ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 6, June 1979, p.7

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.1, Issue 10, p.4; Vol. 2, Issue 2, April 80, p.1; Vol. 2, issue 7, Sept.1980, p.4

⁵⁸ Lijjat Patrika, VI.14, Issue 8-9-10, Nov. 93- Jan.94, pp.1 &3; Vol. 17, Issue 1, Jan.96; p.; Vol.20, Issue 7, July 1999, p.1: Sister- members had donated money from their daily vanai (rolling charges that they earned)

⁵⁹ Bhujpur Punarvas, Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad.

undertook specific activities of social service. E.g. Planting of trees,⁶⁰ distributing nutritious food for poor children,⁶¹ donating money (Rs.5000/-) for conducting community marriage,⁶² instituting prize-money for spread of primary education,⁶³ undertaking blood donation drive (1977)⁶⁴ and donating a Kiosk computer with information on the city of Bombay to the Postal Authority (which was to be kept at the General post Office, Mumbai).⁶⁵ In 1988, sisters of the Rajkot branch, Gujarat, donated 27000 life-saving mixture of salt-sugar packets to the Municipal Corporation, for distribution among the cholera victims in backward areas of the city.⁶⁶ In the previous year, they had contributed voluntarily from their vanai (rolling charges) a sum of Rs.3,524 to purchase green fodder for the cows, as a measure towards draught relief work. They cooperated in the community effort in Rajkot by organizing to supply one tanker of water to the surrounding villages, till the arrival of the next monsoon.⁶⁷ They participated in the cleanliness drive by the Municipality of Rajkot by taking over a ward to clean it.⁶⁸ In 1996, they also donated Rs.10,000, as a one time payment, to the T.B. Hospital for food expenses of one patient.⁶⁹ In 1994, the Ramania branch distributed 5000 anti-malaria drugs. The Lijjat institution donated packets of papads to the mountaineers, who were attempting to scale the Kanchenjunga,⁷⁰ in the Himalayas. Thus there grew a strong tradition of giving donations, in cash or kind, by the member-sisters to social causes.

The cooperative effort of the member-sisters at earning a livelihood also translated itself into helping each other, in times of need and in promoting measures for health care. Initially, in each of the branches, they started an investment plan by which they set aside a small sum from their daily earnings, which were given back to them as a lump sum at a

⁶⁰ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 16, Issue 2, April 1996, p.4

⁶¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 4, June 96, p.7

⁶² Lijjat Patrika, Vol.18, Issue 3, March 1997, p.8

⁶³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol 20, Issue 2, Feb. 1999, p.2

⁶⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 3, March 1979, p.9

⁶⁵ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 20, Issue 10, October, 1999, p.9

⁶⁶ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 11, Issue 6, Oct. 1988, p.3

⁶⁷ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.11, Issue 2, May 1988, p.4

⁶⁸ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 10, Issue 8, Nov. 1987, p.8

⁶⁹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 12, Dec. 1996, p.20

⁷⁰ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.10, Issue 10, Jan. 1988, p.6

later date.⁷¹ This was scrapped with the alternative promotion of a cooperative bank, where individual savings were promoted and loans would be made available. The bank was started in some branches and others were also asked to promote it. However this too was not very successful and had to be closed.. Different branches promoted housing schemes for its members on a cooperative basis. In 1977, the first medical check up of the member-sisters along with their family members was begun. In Valod, in cooperation with the Navsari Rotary Institute, an eye camp was arranged.⁷² Similar camp was arranged in Bhopal, in 1980. In course of time, better facilities were set up, such as the Medical Care Dispensary, started at the Detergent division at Dahisar.⁷³ When a member-sister or her family needed costly medical help, like heart-surgery or treatment of cancer, the other sisters contributed a sum of money towards the expenses.⁷⁴ The Ramania branch at Bhuj organized a T.B. detection camp for the member-sisters and a hundred and forty-five likely T.B. patients were examined and necessary treatment was given to them free of charge.⁷⁵ Talks by doctors on various aspects of health care were organized for the member-sisters in the urban and rural branches of the institution.

Work brought an awareness of the importance of education as a means to advancement in life. Initially the effort was towards promoting the education of their children, especially the daughters. Monetary help and awards were given in recognition of excellence in examinations in schools and colleges. Scholarships were set up in the name of Chhaganbapa, who had been a source of moral support to them from the beginning. From the year 1980, several issues of the Lijjat Patrika listed the names of the girls, daughters of the member-sisters, who were given Chhaganbapa Smruti Scholarships.⁷⁶ These were for XI, XII standards and for university courses. Initially these scholarships were granted only in the Bombay branches, but slowly the idea spread to the other branches elsewhere too.⁷⁷ Daughters of Lijjat sisters who secured above 60% in the S.S.C. examinations were

⁷¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.2, Issue 9, Nov.1980, p.4

⁷² Lijjat Patrika, Vol.2, Issue 3, May 1980, p.5

⁷³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 6, June 1996, p.8

⁷⁴ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 7, July 1996, p.6; Vol. 17, Issue 6, August 1996, p.3

⁷⁵ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 18, Issue 4, April 1997, p.5

⁷⁶ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.2, Issue 6, August 1980, p.5; Vol.2, Issue 7, Sept. 1980; Vol. 6, Issue 4, June 1984, p.4; Vol.6, Issue 7, Sept. 1984, p.3; Vol.7, Issue 7, Sept. 1985, p.3; Vol. 7, Issue 8, Oct. 85, p.6

⁷⁷ *General Meeting and Scholarship Distribution Function of Ramania Branch*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 10, Oct.1996, p.5

to be given a token prize of Rs.101/- and successful candidates were asked to send in their marksheets along with their photo, their name and their mother's name. These were published in the Lijjat Patrika.⁷⁸ The student, a boy from a municipal school, who topped the S.S.C. list in the city of Bombay was given a token gift of Rs.2000/- by the sisters.⁷⁹ The Lijjat Patrika printed an appreciative article regarding the pledge to remove illiteracy taken by a group of women social workers of the Gandhi Memorial Trust.⁸⁰ One major development made by the Lijjat institution was the policy decision to sponsor computer education for the daughters and sons of member-sisters from Mumbai-Thane area⁸¹ and this was pursued with great vigor by the institution through the following years. This is significant because though many of the sisters were not educated, the furthering of the education of their children, especially the daughters, was felt to be vital for their future.⁸² Computer classes were organized at Dahisar for the daughters of the sisters from May 1997.⁸³

Another important milestone was when the sisters began a literacy campaign for themselves. Literacy classes were started in the various branches in Mumbai and Bhubaneswar (Orissa). The Managing Committee decided to start similar classes in all the branches in India.⁸⁴ The canvassing for the literacy program was in consonance with the ideology of Lijjat. From the commencement of the institution, distribution of grams of gold, as chain or ring, to member-sisters had symbolized their share in profits and hence was a sign of prosperity. The circular for the call to literacy read, 'Each one Teach one! Literacy is a gold chain, Lijjat presents it to all its bens (sisters)!',⁸⁵ thus equating literacy to progress and prosperity. The first step for this program began on 18 June, 99 in Girgaum, from where the Lijjat movement had begun. The teaching started in the various

⁷⁸ *Congratulations to Brilliant Daughters of Lijjat Family*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 10, Issue 4, July 1987, p.2; *Successful Students presented cheques of Rs.1001/- each*, Vol. 18, Issue 8, Aug. 1997, p.6; July 1997, p.8

⁷⁹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.11, Issue 4, July 1988, p.8

⁸⁰ *Angutha Bandh (No thumb impressions) –A Novel Campaign*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 6, Issue 1, March 1984, p.5

⁸¹ *Lijjat to Sponsor Computer Education of Daughter & Son of Member- Sisters from Mumbai & Thane*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 17, Issue 11, Nov.1996, p.3

⁸² *President's (Smt.Rukminiben B. Pawar) Address to 31st Annual General Meeting*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol.17, Issue 12, Dec. 96, p.5

⁸³ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.18, Issue 5, May 97, p.8

⁸⁴ *Minutes of the Managing Committee Meeting held on 10-7-99*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 20, Issue 8, Aug.99, p.2

⁸⁵ Literacy campaign, Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, 1999

branches in Mumbai and in Orissa too on 28 June, 99. When the sisters came to their respective branches to collect their share of the kneaded flour at 5.30 a.m., they were taught for about thirty minutes each day by volunteers or by the daughters of the member-sisters, who were educated. The flier of the program declared, 'it is very important for anyone to be literate and more so, for a woman. Today a woman cannot be totally independent, unless she is literate. An illiterate woman has to depend on others, even for reading a letter. She cannot write her own letters, do her own accounts, go to the bank, pay the bills etc. on her own. A literate woman can teach her children, can help her husband in his work, can live respectfully without depending on anyone's mercy. Lijjat is very ambitious about this project, to our ambitions, sky is the only limit now!'

Settlement of Disputes

Disaffection and dispute are ingrained in human affairs. It is but natural that in the forty-two years of its history, Lijjat faced quite a few discords. From the written records in the office of the Lijjat, it appears that in July 1979, the general secretary of a trade union made certain demands on behalf of a few sisters, who had enrolled as its members.⁸⁶ The President, Mrs. Shashikala More, issued an appeal in Marathi to all the sisters that in case of grievances they should approach her to solve the same, after discussing it with the Committee appointed for the purpose. They were requested not to allow any outsiders to interfere in the matter of grievances of the sisters and they must try to sort out and solve their problems after mutual discussions.⁸⁷ Shri L.C.Joshi, Labour Advocate of Bombay and a well-known industrial relations expert, was called for consultations. In his observations on 'Who owns Lijjat?', he clarified that 'whilst it may be conceded that the women concerned are doing skilled, unskilled or manual work and they are being paid remuneration for the work done by them'⁸⁸, under the Industrial Disputes Act, a workman had to be employed to do work in an industry and that there should be a relationship between the employer and him as between employer and employee or master and servant. This relationship of the employer and the employee was constituted by a contract, expressed or implied between employer and employee. Apart from providing the raw material as per the requirement of each member and to exercise a periodic quality control

⁸⁶ *Irresponsible Trade Union Activities in Lijjat*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 11, Jan.1980, p.3

⁸⁷ Ibid.

when the papads were brought for delivery at the Lijjat premises as per specificities provided, the organization had no control over them. The members themselves decided on the valuable articles given as gifts they may receive in six months, one year or two years as the case may be. He thus concluded that ‘it appears that there is no master and servant relationship existing between the members and the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad and their relationship does not constitute a contract of service.’⁸⁹ It was therefore open for the members collectively to decide how to improve their remuneration and get other benefits. As partners of the organization, ‘they were competent to take a decision for their own’ and it was not ‘open for an outside agency to interfere with the internal working of the Mandal.’⁹⁰ Repeated appeals were made to the members in meetings and in the Lijjat Patrika, not to allow those, who had been formerly connected with the organization, specially in the outside branches, to harass it. To damage its reputation was to harm themselves.

The Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh branch, was taken over by one Shantilal Shah as his own unit, which he ran with the help of a Sanchalika, a wife of his employee. The organization went through tremendous pressures and court stay orders to retrieve the situation.⁹¹ The main approach of the institution in similar cases was to disassociate with the concerned branch and file cases for protecting its brand name. On the constructive side, it promoted an active participation by the sisters so that there could be better understanding and a sense of deeper involvement in the progress of the institution. As the number of women increased in the branches, specially the outstation ones, there was the tendency ‘for one or two individuals to take the initiative in all matters, not involve the other sisters and dominate the show’.⁹² Hence repeated requests were made to the sisters to take keen interest in the activities of the branch because it was ‘their right as well as their duty.’⁹³

Conclusion

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.5

⁸⁹ Joshi, L.C., ‘Who Owns Lijjat’, Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 1, Issue 12, February, 1980, p.5

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol.6, Issue 12, February 1985, pp.5-6.

⁹² *An Appeal to some outstation branches*, Lijjat Patrika, Vol.6, Issue 8, Oct. 1984, p.7

⁹³ Ibid.

The growth of the Lijjat institution has to be seen in the larger canvas of women and their empowerment, within the framework of progress in the developing countries. The concept of development kept changing in the second half of the twentieth century. The integration of women into development was considered essential, through improving their skills and capabilities, along with the removal of impediments created by in-built patriarchal biases. In India, the main emphasis, in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, was on the establishment of institutional framework for facilitating this enhancement. Women were to be recipients of benefits, through the trickling down effect of the welfare measures. In the eighties, the emphasis shifted to enabling women to become active agents of their empowerment. The vision of development broadened to include physical, moral, intellectual and cultural growth of every individual. This necessitated, as well as, established the vital link between the development of society and the advancement of women. These were two inseparable sides of a coin. However instead of homogeneity, there had to be multiplicity of strategies for change, which were specific to the needs of women, belonging to different sections of a given society, region or nation. Basic to this concept was the creation of individual as well as collective self-reliance. Mere economic empowerment would be insufficient, unless accompanied by the social power of agency over the spending of that money and over other facets of one's life. The capacity to earn one's livelihood and the resultant self-confidence was necessarily the first step in the ladder to empowerment.

Herein lay the importance of the growth of Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad. The forty-two years of its life synchronized with the drawing up of the theoretical framework of feminism, both of the western and Asian model, along with its practical implications. In the Asian model, the rights of women and questions of equality in the personal and public sphere were compounded by factors like poverty, social disruptions and patriarchal biases in the government policies as well as in the society. The primary need was a spontaneous grassroots movement by women that, however small in its origin, was capable of self-sustaining and self-propelling growth. Moreover, it was important that these women belong to the disadvantaged section of the society, so that the driving force came not from above, but from below. The Lijjat organization grew out of this need felt by women to become active agents of change in their lives. It was the result of a

spontaneous beginning made by seven women to supplement their family earnings, by using their natural talent in the art of papad making. It provided for dignity of labor, besides the earning power of women to improve their standard of living. Their collective strength enabled them to tide over difficult times through mutual monetary and moral support.

The character of work belonged to the traditional model of woman's work. This was a double-edged sword since it reinforced the traditional role of women working from their home, with kitchen as the centre of operations. At the same time, it was best suited to the largely illiterate women who formed the work force till almost the mid-nineties, as it involved a known expertise and they easily learnt the other aspects of work with hands on experience in the job.⁹⁴ Kamal Dhandore, the Vice-President, has studied only till the fourth class. Jyoti J. Naik, the President, as has already been mentioned, had studied till the tenth standard in the night school, while rolling out papads during the day. As Jaswantiben remarked, she could easily calculate the statistics of the usual operations, though she had studied only till the second class. Jyoti J. Naik remarked, during the course of the conversation, that since the last four or five years almost all women who become members have basic literacy, with the ability to sign their names. Women, as member-sisters, were solely in charge of the organization as workers, managing committee members and heads of divisions and branches. Lijjat became unique as an organization started by women, managed by women and for the benefit of women. There were also women who were educated and were employed by the organization to take care of administration and legal matters and also as telephone operators.⁹⁵ It was definitely a cooperative effort and a serious attempt at implementing the ideology of trusteeship.

Cracks did appear in terms of disputes and disagreements among its member-sisters, yet the organization was well able to withstand the pressures. Its strength lay in its office-bearers, who had risen from the ranks and were aware of every nuance of the functioning of the organization.⁹⁶ The members of the Managing Committee had often been with the Lijjat organization for over thirty years and more, working in various capacities. It is

⁹⁴ Oral Interview with Jyoti Naik, the President, Kamal Dhandore, Vice-President and Pratibha Sawant, Sanchalika of the Wadala Branch, Mumbai, 2 Jan. 2002,

⁹⁵ Almeida, Irene, Oral Interview, 29 August, 2001; She has been with the organization for 19 years, in different capacities and is now in charge of administration

possible and it did happen that the newer member-sisters and some others felt that they were relegated to a minor role, giving rise to frustrations.⁹⁷ One of the contentions was that the organization exploited women's labor because several family members had to take part in making the papad to enable a single woman to acquire a decent target and in spite of so many participating, only a single person got paid. Though when they first became members and took the pledge, it specified that they would roll out the papad single-handed, yet often the other women in the family pitched in to help in the work of rolling out the papad. Since the production costs, like fuel, oil, mats and the expense of damaged papads were borne by the member, it was felt by some that the organization saved on these costs as well as the cost of maintaining a factory premise, to provide a place for work.⁹⁸ The costs of production also reduced the actual take home pay of the sisters. It was argued that since Lijjat organization did not come under the Factory Act and therefore under the Unfair Labour Practices, when legal cases came up in the court, it took a long time to fight the worker's cases. This critique arose due to the opposing constructs of the words 'worker' and 'member-sister'- while the first implied an employee, the second meant an owner. This dichotomy lay in the very concept of Trusteeship, the professed philosophy of the Lijjat organization, and the common failure to understand it. It is also an evidence of the practical difficulties to be overcome, in translating an ideology into a workable reality. Nevertheless the efficient functioning of the organization is a proof of the viability of the ideology, in spite of the criticisms.

The positive contributions of the Lijjat organization to the empowerment of women more than neutralize the negative criticisms directed against it. It established its credentials in the society as an organization with a goal, promoting a specific way of life. Its impact is to be measured not merely on the forty thousand and odd member-sisters throughout India who own and work for it, but on their families too. The individual lives of women were transformed by the new work ethics that promoted their self-confidence and taught them self-reliance. They realized the importance of education and used the organization to promote not only their own literacy but also the education of their children, especially the daughters, through monetary and other help. The various branches of the organization

⁹⁶ Mrs. Naik, Jyoti, President, Oral Interview, 2 Jan. 2002.

⁹⁷ *Labour with Dignity*, Maharashtra Women's Herald, Saturday, Dec. 3, 1988, p.1

left their imprint on the society around them, through promotion of social services, building of roads, donations to deserving causes and building of houses in the earthquake hit areas. All these measures were the result of individual decisions, taken by consensus by every member-sister of the organization, through donations taken from their individual earnings. These positive contributions were recognized and appreciated by the society and the government. The Mumbai City felicitated Smt.Rukminiben B.Pawar, Lijjat President, as an outstanding woman in the field of social work.⁹⁹

Just as the growth and spread of the Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad lay in the dynamism of the women who promoted it, the nature of the organization and its products, it was constrained by that very nature in a unique way. The lack of retirement benefits in terms of savings or pensions seems to be a major drawback, especially to an observer. There is no retirement age and Jaswantiben Popat, one of the first seven founder member-sisters, still works as a Sanchalika of the Girgaum branch. When questioned about this anomaly, especially after working for the institution for three or four decades as was frequently the case, Jyoti J. Naik, the President, answered that but for the institution, they would not have achieved a secure economic and social position in their lives. They had been fortunate in this and there was no point in worrying about the future. She assured that given the nature of the working of Lijjat with its ideology, there was no possibility of making such a provision.¹⁰⁰ The emphasis obviously was on earning one's bread through daily work, all through one's life. Rather a hard decision, but given the circumstances of its origin, it reflects the philosophy as well as the hard core reality of life of its member-sisters.

The grassroots movements initiated by women in India in the latter half of the 20th century were economic, social, political or cultural in their content, depending on the section of society to which the women belonged and their specific needs. Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad is a model attempt to make women economically self-independent, thus paving the way for their concurrent empowerment in the other facets of their lives. As evidenced from its organization and functioning, it symbolizes the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Lijjat Patrika, Vol. 18, Issue 10, Oct. 1997, p.16

¹⁰⁰ Mrs Naik, J.Jyoti, Oral Interview, 2 Jan. 2002

beginning of a slow, but steady, process of women taking an active agency over their lives and that of the society around them.