

PREFACE

The Co-operative movement in India with over three lakh cooperative societies of all types and at all levels is perhaps the largest in the world. The movement, since its inception in 1904, has spread its tentacles to almost all spheres of socio-economic activity and has tremendously, expended and diversified its operations.

The consumer cooperatives can play a vital role in procurement and distribution of essential commodities. Consumers' cooperative means an association of consumers having a common aim of buying pure, unadulterated and better quality goods at reasonable prices. The movement carries with it a universal appeal because every citizen is a consumer and is interested in getting his requirements at a reasonable price and good quality. Perhaps, this is the only potent weapon in the hands of consumers who, as a class are completely disorganised and not in a position to fight against the nefarious activities of a highly organised market structure. In this context consumers cooperatives have a great role to play in consumers' protection by ensuring for the consumers a steady supply of commodities of good quality and at fair prices and also promote the collective well being of the members.¹

Although the cooperative movement has made considerable progress over the years, cooperative societies still suffer from many weaknesses such as too small

membership, inadequate share capital, poor organisation, inefficient management etc. All these factors undermine the strength of the movement and hamper its expansion. The movement has to depend to a great extent on voluntary workers for the day-to-day running of activities. A search in this direction has led to focus our attention more and more on the involvement of women who have, upto now remained largely an untapped potential source in the field of cooperation. There is today in cooperative circles, a growing realization that given proper education and training, women can make valuable contribution to the field of cooperative activity.

In India efforts are being made to increase the scope and participation of women in cooperatives of direct relevance to them. As a part of this effort, the National Cooperative Union of India organised a seminar on 'Women and cooperation' in March 1965. As a result, one of the recommendations of this seminar, the Government of India sanctioned the setting-up of women's wings in the various Indian states, to work for the promotion of women's involvement in the cooperatives. A point which often arises when women and cooperation is discussed, is whether it would be better to form exclusive women's cooperatives, or to enroll more women members in existing general cooperatives the emancipation of women has, in many cases, come about after a hard struggle, and as women are now being given

increasing equality with men according to law in a number of fields and are just beginning to take their rightful place in society, to segregate them from men would seem rather like going back into the past. Besides, to encourage women to work in isolation within the co-operative movement would be defeating the very purpose of the movement. Further more a segregation of this kind would limit women from branching out into new fields of cooperative activity, and would hamper them from taking of positions of responsibility within the movement.

As far the relationship between industrial cooperatives and women it needs to be examined how does the need for involving women in this form of cooperative activity arise. Broadly speaking it may be said to stem from the following three factors.

1. The changing social outlook about by a variety of causes such as, for instance, franchise for women, freedom to vote, right to public office and equal privileges under the law with men.
2. Less women are now content to stay home. and play the role of a house and mother. The two main reasons for this are the growing spread of education and modern amenities coupled with increased knowledge, have made it possible for the house wife to manage her household chores quickly and efficiently, leaving her with more leisure.

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3. The rising cost of living with which increasing income and wages can hardly keep pace has made it very difficult for housewives to manage their households within fixed budgets. Hence many families find that only by increasing their incomes can they maintain a decent standard of living.

For reasons mentioned above, more and more women are seeking paid employment. However, here too they are at a disadvantage. Although educational opportunities are increasingly being thrown open to women, not all of them take advantage of such opportunities. For one reason or another many leave school fairly early to get married and the number of these who reach the University are few when compared with men. Large number of women have not been trained in any particular skills, as they were never before faced with the necessity to seek gainful employment. As a result, even when they secure paid employment outside the home, they are often poorly remunerated as they can undertake only work requiring unskilled or semi skilled persons.

The interest Polish societies take in women's problems, the problems facing women farm producers in particular stems from the conviction that cooperation open up before women a broad field for activity enabling them to raise their general level of knowledge and to acquire vocational skills. Cooperative societies can do much to

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facilitate the vocational and housekeeping tasks incumbent on women. Women are quick to learn progressive methods of work, an ability which becomes one of the driving motives promoting the economic social and cultural advancement of the rural milieu in which women live and work hence also of the country as a whole.²

Warana Bazar is a first cooperative consumer store in which majority of the women are members. It has made a revolution in cooperatives by giving more preference to women. In this context the present study aims at examining the participation of women in Warana bazar, a cooperative consumer store.

R E F E R E N C E S

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