

# WHO CARES?

A Study of Child Care Facilities for  
Low-Income Working Women  
in India

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New Delhi

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*All views expressed are the author's own and she takes responsibility for all errors and omissions.*

Edited and produced by Kali for Women, N 84 Panchshila Park, New Delhi 110017, for the Centre for Women's Development Studies, B 43 Panchsheel Enclave, New Delhi 110017

Printed at Indraprastha Press (CBT), Nehru House,  
New Delhi – 110002

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## PREFACE

Since the submission of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India in January 1975, the one major strategy for women's development on which there has been remarkable consensus and agreement – among women's organizations, women's studies scholars, and concerned people within the government – is on child-care facilities as an essential support service. Whether it is women's illiteracy, or dropping out from school that has to be reduced, enrolment of girls in schools that has to be increased, vocational training to be provided, employment opportunities to be expanded or political participation to be made more effective, child-care has emerged constantly as the most needed support. Every working group appointed to recommend new strategies for women's development from 1975 onwards, every conference on women and development – local, national, regional or international – has reiterated this recommendation. Finally, on the demand of several national women's organizations, a national policy for promotion of child-care services was incorporated in the Sixth Five year Plan.

Indian labour laws lay an obligation on employers in factories, mines and plantations to provide maternity benefits and creche facilities to their women workers, following the ILO conventions in this regard. The committee on the Status of Women in India had, however, pointed out that this right is available only to about 3-4% of women workers, who are in the organized sector. Even the other 3% of organized sector women employees – who are primarily in services – are not entitled to creche facilities since the labour laws do not apply to them. As for the majority, the 94% of women workers who are in agriculture and other occupations in the informal sector, child-care or maternity benefits have never been within their reach.

Over the last two decades some voluntary organizations had tried to meet this need. Some of them (and individuals within them) have combined concern for such children with considerable professional expertise in child development. Mina Swaminathan is one such person. In her case, concern for the well being of children and developing their full potential through imaginative methods of play and education preceded her concern for women's equality and development. Like many of us who belonged to the first generation beneficiaries of the equality clauses of the Constitution, she had believed the women's question to have been settled at the time of Independence. The recognition that the problem still remained and had even increased since independence came to her with the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India. Since then she has shared our efforts to promote the women's cause and joined us in establishing the Centre for Women's Development Studies in 1980. But her first commitment as a scholar and an activist has remained to children, and particularly children who do not ordinarily receive the care and support that is their due from society.

In spite of the recognition of child-care as an essential service, very little data exists about the quality or quantity of services that are now in existence. Our Executive Committee decided that we cannot think of a better person than Mina to undertake a review of child-care facilities available for low-income working women in India. While initially discussing the project with me, Mina made it clear that she was going to write it from the perspective of the child's needs, and not from that of women. But her conclusions prove what our probing into the obstacles to women's equality and development at various levels – economic, social, political, and ideological – had inferred, that the same forces also help to explain the neglect of the needs of children, in spite of a national policy for the rights and needs of children, and social responsibility for their development. The ideology that tries to project the women's right to equality as contradictory to the rights of children is the enemy of both.

We hope that this review will help to weaken the power of some of these myths that are skillfully used to explain away social irresponsibility, and will strengthen the hands of all those who taken their responsibilities seriously, whether they are inside or outside the government.

The Centre acknowledges its debt to Mina Swaminathan for undertaking this study in spite of various other pressures and commitments, and completing it in record time, as a 'labour of love'. I must also thank Kali for Women for undertaking to bring out the publication, also in record time, because of their commitment to the women's cause.

*Centre for Women's Development Studies.*  
*New Delhi,*  
*21 May 1985.*

VINA MAZUMDAR

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to place on record my deep and sincere appreciation to the following:

Vina Mazumdar, for initiating this study and for her persistent interest and support till its completion; Narayan Banerji, and colleagues at the Centre for Women's Development Studies for assistance in gathering and checking much of the data; R. C. Sekhar, for introducing me to the coal mines; M. P. Varma, A. N. Singh and other officers of Bharat Coking Cole Ltd. for enabling me to visit the colliery crèches; Sreelakshmi Gururaja, Rosalind Wilson, Jacqueline Singh, K. G. Krishnamurthy and M.S. Swaminathan for their insightful and helpful criticism of the draft manuscript; all my colleagues at Mobile Creches for years of discussion and working together which have formed my understanding of the subject; Lettie Quintos, for her cheerful availability and accuracy in typing the manuscript; Kali for Women for editing and production; and many more people, impossible to list, for their contributions through fruitful interactions over the years.

MINA SWAMINATHAN



# THE PROBLEM

## RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

With the increasing recognition of the role of women in development, the provision of appropriate facilities for the care of children of working women gains importance. In the developing world as a whole, there is a growing awareness of rapid change in the economic and social spheres as well as in the traditional arrangements for the care of children. However, there are sharp differences between the responses of the Socialist countries and those of the others. The former proceed straight from the large induction of women into the labour force to the need for institutionalized child care arrangements; in the latter, the corollary to women's work is neither so clearly perceived nor acted upon. In addition to irrational fears and the constraints of traditional attitudes and perceptions, the genuine concern that institutional arrangements may be damaging to the development of the young child is also used as a reason for dragging feet on this issue. Any clear recommendations for policy must therefore be based on a description of the extent and nature of arrangements currently prevailing, followed by analysis of their implications and identification of gaps in information. It is with this in mind that the present study, an evaluative review of the current position with regard to child care facilities for low-income working women in India, has been prepared.

It is becoming clear that the needs of women and children cannot be considered in isolation from each other. The demand for child care facilities for working women is not a new one in India. It has been expressed from time to time with varying degrees of urgency especially by leaders like Nehru who had been influenced by socialist thought. In fact, it has been enshrined in the Directive Principles of the Constitution, as early as 1947, and reflected in the labour legislation of the early post-Independence period. Programmes for children have also been developed, but usually under different auspices, and justified at first by the need for child welfare and education, and still later by a more inclusive view of child development. Because of the relative isolation of those advocating each of these demands, the programmes have grown separately, and in some cases, in such a manner, that the needs of women and children almost seem to be in conflict.

With the increasing recognition that women and children need to be seen together and the needs of families considered as a whole, it becomes imperative to bring the two strands together. This assumes urgency because of the awareness of women's situation generated by the Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women (1975) and the International Decade for Women which have highlighted the consciousness of the changing role, status and situation of women, the impact of the rapid and far-reaching changes of the last three decades in demography, migration, education, employment, family size and composition, and various other factors intimately affecting the lives of both women and children, and the growing understanding of the links between all these. *Facilities for children of working women can no longer be seen in isolation from the needs of child development and education; children's programmes can no longer be seen in isolation from the changing position of women and families. The two must converge and be placed in the large framework of social and economic change and development.*

### Why Now?



1985 marks the end of the First Women's decade which will be formally recognized through the Nairobi Conference on Women. This seems an appropriate time to draw the threads together and present a situation report which will be both evaluative, placing the problem within the broad context suggested, and also prescriptive. It aims to document the situation as it is now and also become a basis for advocacy and a tool for strengthening the programme. Hence, it is addressed both to those concerned with women as workers, and to those concerned with the welfare of women and children as persons.

### **Structure of the Report**

The study begins with a brief demographic review to assess the magnitude of the problem, and indicate the perspective for interpretation. Next, each of two main sectors, statutory and voluntary are considered in depth. For each sector, a general overview is followed by intensive case-studies of two contrasting examples within the sector, to enable sharper and more insightful conclusions to be drawn at the end. The last chapter attempts a final evaluative picture, drawing on comparisons with other countries, and goes on to discuss the implications and theoretical issues, placing the discussion within the broader social perspective. Programme prescriptions and proposals for alternatives are also made, followed by suggestions for research and documentation in the future.

The study draws largely on available data, supplemented by interviews and discussions with informed persons in the field, and personal observation and field visits by the author.

## **EXTENT OF THE NEED**

### **The Child's Needs**

The need for child care can be assessed from the standpoint of both child and mother. Considering the child first, it can be said that childhood is not only a sensitive and vulnerable period of life, but crucial from the standpoint of development. The first six years of life are now known to be of crucial significance in the development of the human being, and damage done at this time can have profound and long-lasting consequences. The foundations for the future are laid at this time.

Among the needs of the young child for satisfactory and healthy development are adequate health care and nutrition, the presence of a safe, healthy and supportive environment and other ingredients which can be measured in tangible terms; equally necessary are the less tangible psychological prerequisites. These include the intellectual stimulation and guidance necessary for optimal mental growth and development of cognitive abilities, and the warmth, affection and loving care necessary for emotional security, the bedrock on which personality development, social adjustment and emotional maturity are founded.

In the earlier period of life, which may be designated as infancy, the basis for all learning and development is contained in a combination of nurturant qualities which can be summed up in the concept of "mothering" or the close bond and interactions with a primary caretaker. In most societies and at most times, the primary caretaker who provides "mothering" in the first few years of life, is the biological mother. However, it need not necessarily be so. Available evidence indicate that provided the child gets adequate and suitable mothering from substitute caretakers capable of providing of these needs, no harm is done. If the mother has to be absent from the child for long periods every day, substitutes must then be found to provide "mothering".

A new look at the demographic data may cast light on what kind of “mothering” is provided to the children of working mothers in India, especially those belonging to the poorest strata, and by whom, and also on the extent to which the child’s needs are met. Who cares for children, and how?

### *Child Caretakers*

In a traditional society like India, all the adult members of the family, and some of the younger ones, have a hand in child care and child rearing. The mother usually has the primary role, especially with infants below two, but men are by no means missing from the scene, and the tasks are shared not only by the father, but also by grandparents, aunts and uncles and older siblings. The nature, timing and quality of attention and care given by other persons may vary, and indeed in a country of India’s size and diversity, there are tremendous variations related to economic class, caste, occupation, ecology and life-style. In the higher income groups, where a more leisurely life-style and the joint family is more prevalent, young children receive warmth and attentive care from not one but several caretakers, and early childhood has been lovingly documented in many works of fiction as well as scholarly studies. In such cases, older males in the family may actually spend more time with child than the fathers, while in nuclear households and simpler ecologies, the father may devote more attention to the young children, and participate in many more tasks. In the more specialized groups with their own unique life-styles, such as nomads, tribals, or seasonal migrants, the pattern is likely to vary to suit the requirements of the demands made on the parents, but in all cases, all members of the family tend to contribute, though the mother is usually the primary caretaker. Does this pattern alter in response to the pressure of poverty, and in what way?

To take the overall picture first, Census data about the size and composition of the household (and it is the household which is significant in this context rather than the family) are discussed (see table 1.1.).

**Table 1.1 Distribution of households by size 1951-71(%)**

No. of persons	1951	1961	1971
1-3	33.00	32.00	25.5
4-6	43.00	43.00	29.1(4-5 members)
6+	24.00	25.00	45.19(6-1)
Total:	100	100	100
Average size	5.08	5.22	6.7

The data in Table 1.1 are not strictly comparable, since the 1971 Census has taken a different basis for grouping, but it appears that in the last 30 years, there has been a decline in the proportion of smaller households and an increase in the proportion of larger households. Even now, 55% of households have six or less members. But these figures say nothing about the numbers of adults and dependent children living in these units, about the presence of elderly persons within the household nor about special groups.

Small-scale studies and sample surveys, however, indicate (1961 data) that 58% of households are nuclear or unitary, consisting of husband-wife and their unmarried children. Other type of households including one or more other adults (or extended family households) were next in frequency (23%), while the traditionally defined “joint family” was least frequently found (14%). Thus while the extended and the joint family are very important sociologically – in terms of relationships, obligations, economic, social and emotional ties – they are not salient as units of *residence* and this is what matters for child care. Changes in household size and composition are often cyclical in nature, with units living together at certain periods, particularly when there are young children to be cared for, and breaking up later.

Data about the size of household in relation to income levels or occupational categories are not easily available. But small-scale studies as well as everyday observation indicate that the size of the household tends to become smaller at lower economic levels. This is mainly because of economic considerations – a smaller number of dependents can be supported at lower incomes, and all able-bodied adults are required to engage in productive or income-producing labour. Labouring families cannot afford the luxury of adult “extras” or hangers-on, so typical of the more affluent large Hindu families. A typical labouring family would consist of husband and wife, both working, and their children. There are also other factors in household composition, connected with caste, social structure and patterns of residence typical of various communities, but almost all these have their roots in economic factors. It would seem that at the lowest economic levels where it is most likely that women are engaged in full-time productive work if not employment, it is least likely that there are other adult caretakers present in the household who can take over the vital tasks of mothering for the young child. It should also be mentioned that there is a trend for nuclearization of households even among the middle classes and urban families, because of migration, nature of work, housing, education, rising living costs and other factors, so that more and more women, with or without work responsibilities, find themselves living in nuclear households. Information in these areas is still inadequate.

### *Pressures on Women as Mothers*

The broad situation is that it is in low-income families where the pressure on young mothers to earn is greatest that it is most likely that the men will also be out earning or looking for the work, that all the able-bodied will similarly be earning or looking for work, that there may be fewer elderly members of the family available for child care, and that hence the danger of neglect of children is the greatest.

In this context, two important economic changes of the last 50 years need to be taken into account that affect child care which is still related to traditional sex role division. The first is in the changing agrarian situation, which has pauperized more and more families, and thus thrust more and more women into seeking wage labour, where they are bound by time for several hours a day. Thus, in families of small or marginal farmers in which women may have earlier contributed unpaid family labour while managing their home and children at the same time, women are now tied to the time schedule of wage labour. The men folk either work alongside the women, or may have migrated to distant places in search of work and are not available to offer support even if they wished to do so. The characteristic male-less economy of the traditional source areas of migrant male labour, like Garhwal and Kumaon, the Santal Parganas, etc., places a heavy burden on women who have to function as providers, homemakers, child caretakers, and sometimes as heads of households as well.

Where rural-urban migration is of whole families, the migrating families tend to be nuclear, with both parents working and the young child is perforce neglected.

The second less noticed feature is the process of ecological degradation and the drying up of natural resources. Women in many parts of the country now have to travel long distances and/or spend several hours in tasks like fetching water, fuel for the family and fodder for animals if they have any. In the urban slums, the corresponding burden is the time spent in queuing for water, rations, kerosene and other necessities. There are economic chores, which keep women away from home for several hours a day, leading both to neglect of children and at the same time to pressure on girls who are kept out of school to attend to these tasks. There is evidence from developing countries of the damage such inadequate “mothering” may do to children. There is thus a pincer movement in which the child is trapped. On the one hand, social change has not moved fast enough to alter sex role division of family tasks and offer support services; on the other economic and ecological pressures have forced even the women who worked at home out into the job market and to perform time-consuming chores. Studies of women’s work loads and daily time schedules corroborate this conclusion. Thus while all children have certain basic needs, the children of the poor are most likely to lack proper attention to health, nutrition, education and to be brought up in a less than a adequate environment. Among these, the children of working mothers, are worst off since they may be denied even the most essential non-material components of “mothering” described earlier.

### *The Hidden Caretakers*

Who then cares for the children of working mothers in low-income groups? Apart from the situation of home-based work, and of cases where children are carried along by the mother to the place of work, it appears that the primary caretakers are older siblings, generally girls. Lack of large-scale data on this subject has long made it an “invisible” area for discussion, an area which, perhaps, most needs exposure. If the major caretaker is the older sibling, usually the girl, this seriously affects the education and development of young girls, as well as raises questions about the nature of child care provided.

The enrolment of girls in primary education has been growing slowly. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 illuminate the issue.

**Table 1.2 Growth in girl’s enrolment 1971-81**

	No. of girls in age-group 6-11 years	Enrolment of girls in primary school	Enrolment of girls as percentage of age-group
1971	44,999,884	22,033,816	48.96
1981	52,621,344	28,586,643	54.32

Source: Ministry of Education, Government of India.

What are half the girls doing out of school? Table 1.3 dramatically points to the differences in school enrolment between boys and girls below 14:

**Table 1.3 Enrolment by sex in 1979-80 (Classes I to V)**

Boys	Girls	Total
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Source: Ministry of Education, Government of India.

While 79.8% of boys in age-group are enrolled, only 54.32% of girls in the equivalent age-group are enrolled.

A number of reasons have been advanced for this differential enrolment in primary education, including social prejudices, religious taboos, and the perceived inutility of formal education for girls. The role of girls as child caretakers as well as housekeepers/family workers has not been sufficiently appreciated. The same argument holds good in regard to the heavy rate of drop-outs, or of wastage, during the years of elementary education. Table 1.4 contrasts the rate of decline in enrolment of all girl children (figures in brackets indicate percentage of enrolment in each grade to total enrolment in Grade I).

**Table 1.4 Class-wise enrolment by sex (1978-79 ('000))**

	Total	Girls
Class I	21425 (100)	8668 (100)
II	15844 (74)	6043 (69.7)
III	12771 (59.6)	4820 (55.6)
IV	10281 (48)	3837 (44)
V	8476 (39.6)	3011 (34.7)
VI	7094 (33)	2296 (26.5)
VII	6587 (30.7)	1954 (22.6)
VIII	4988 (23.3)	1563 (18)

The contrast will be still more striking of boys and girls were compared directly. As it is, it is clear that even in the first year of school, girls' enrolment is only two-thirds of boys' and in each year the decline is more rapid among girls.

It is reasonable to assume children are withdrawn from school for sound practical reasons, foremost of these being the pressure of poverty and the need to utilize their services in productive chores. Children are rarely pulled out of the school to sit idle at home; boys are usually involved in chores like grazing or care of animals while girls perform a great variety of tasks, including collection of water, fodder and fuel, home tasks, animal care, assistance in home based crafts and child care. These are of a generalized nature, and can be performed when quite young. Because of sex role differentiation, more such home-related tasks are allotted to girls than boys. In other words, girls are *more useful* at home than boys. There is also evidence from anthropological studies of child-rearing that in many cultures, girls are specially reared to have more nurturant and responsible attitudes. The high utility of girls at home, in relation to boys is one reason for the differences both in enrolment and in later drop-out. Evidence from everyday life will corroborate this view. One study in the seventies found that 60% of children below the age of six in a tribal area where all men and women sought work as labourers, were taken care of by their siblings. Further, in about 15% of the cases, the caretakers were themselves below the age of six.

### The Women's Needs

So far the subject has been approached from the standpoint of the young child, and in this process, attention has been drawn to the needs and pressures on the older child. What about the woman?

Social reformers and political thinkers, arguing from the standpoint of women, have noted that women with young children need to have arrangements for child care if they are to be effective and full-time workers. Even a woman's physical presence at the place of work may depend on the availability of child caretakers. In cases of home-based work, it is true that women manage to attend to their chores and to their children more or less simultaneously, but at a cost to themselves and to their children which no one has attempted to measure so far. On the other hand, in many instances, children are taken along to the place of work for lack of alternative arrangements, and usually to the detriment of both work and child. Lack of alternatives may also prevent many women from contributing effectively, for example, from seeking work outside the home, or it may restrict them to part-time work or work of a nature which can be adjusted to the demands of child care. Little empirical data are available about such questions. In the absence of concrete child care alternatives, it is futile for researchers to put such questions.

Psychologically, the mother of young children also needs the assurance that the child or children are safe and in proper care, without which she cannot attend to her work. The stresses and strains on the mother of young children include anxiety connected with children, as well as the need to be absent from time to time to attend to them. All of these are important factors in reducing women's participation, effectiveness, work satisfaction, wages and motivation.

It is customary to speak of the "double burden" of women especially in societies where they are expected to carry the full burden of caring for home and housekeeping in addition to their work responsibilities. However, in the case of mothers, it is more appropriate to speak of the "triple burden" – work, housekeeping, children – since the care of young children represents, in both physical and psychological terms, something that cannot be included in housekeeping. Socialist countries have accepted the principle that child care is essential to liberate women for the work force.

The important point here is that mothers who belong to the poorest strata of society need special attention, because of their limited resources and hence their inability to either hire help or pay for labour-saving devices or get the support of other members of the family, solutions which those with larger financial resources can resort to. *Thus in addition to the general need for child care for all working women, there is also a more specific and strong need for child care for those belonging to the poorest sections of society.*

It can be tentatively concluded, then, that a very large proportion of the children of working mothers belonging to low-income groups need arrangements for their care while their mothers are at work for three reasons:

1. As an input for the development of young children who are doubly deprived, firstly because of relative poverty, a deprivation they share with other young children in similar economic circumstances, and secondly, because of their enforced neglect by their mothers.
2. As an essential step to liberate young girls in the age-groups 6-14, who are deprived of opportunities for education and development by reason of being child-caretakers. This dimension is most dramatic in the Indian context, for there is evidence that in some other cultures, the impact on young girls is not so severe.
3. As a service for working mothers, to enable them to contribute effectively as workers.

## **DEFINITIONS AND DEMOGRAPHY**

A study of facilities for the care of children of low-income working women must begin with an attempt to estimate numbers. How many working mothers are involved? And how many young children do they have? What care do children need and who cares for them?

### Identifying Working Mothers

The first difficulty in estimating numbers is that of definition. The number of working women would vary depending on the definition chosen. Then comes the question of deciding how many of them are mothers. From one standpoint women have always been working. From time immemorial they have been involved in productive chores of immense variety – whether this meant working in farms or garden plots, helping with trades and crafts, caring for animals, collecting or food processing. There is hardly any area of economic life in which women are not involved, in traditional subsistence economies and those in the transitional phase. The difficulty arises when concepts drawn from modern monetized economies are used to describe these traditional or transitional economies. As a result, till recently, the economic role of women has not been recognized in full. Census and other formal studies tended to include as “workers” only those who were employed for wages or salaries outside the home, and to ignore or downplay household labour. Up to 1971, the Census estimation of the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of women was as low as 11.9%.

On the other hand, recent small-scale studies indicate that women work very long hours, and that most often their work load is heavier than that of men. But because such work did not bring a cash return, they were not included as “full-time workers” in older definitions. With the swing of pendulum, academic thought originating from the feminist sector would now place women’s LFPR at a very high level indeed, by extrapolation from small-scale studies. To steer between the two extremes is a very delicate matter. This study will take the figures provided by the 1981 Census as a base, with some reservations (see Table 1.5).

From table 1.5 it appears that 6.63 crore women out of a total female population of 31.82 crore may be counted as “workers”, giving a LFPR of 20.85%, as against 53.19% for men, and

**Table 1.5 Employment and work participation rates 1981 (in crores)**

	Persons	Male	female
Total Population	65.81	33.98	31.82
A Main workers	22.00	17.41	4.59
B Marginal workers	2.70	0.66	2.03
A+B	24.71	18.08	6.63
<i>Work Participation (in percentage)</i>			
Rate:			
Total	37.55	53.19	20.85
Rural	39.46	54.32	23.89
Urban	31.41	49.70	10.64

37.9% for both together. In contrast, the work participation rate of women in 1971 was only 11.86%. Some part of this improvement can be put down to a change in definitions.

However, as mentioned earlier, many women engaged in productive but unpaid economic chores in house, garden and field, family labour in crafts, cottage industries and trades, and those engaged in collecting firewood, water and fodder for animals, may still not be included. Hence it may safely be concluded that 66.3 million represents an estimate of the lower limit, or to put it differently, atleast 66.3 million women are workers. These 66.3 million women represent 26% of the total labour force, 29% rural and 13% urban.

Women of child-bearing age (15-49) in the labour force are 49.23 million. Of these 85% are classified as “ever-married” women, including those divorced, widowed or separated. Since those widowed, divorced or separated may also have children, this group may be defined as “working mothers” or mothers in the work force, who number 41.86 million.

How are working women employed? The industrial categories used by the census are as follows:

1. Cultivators
2. Agricultural labourers
3. Livestock, fishing, forestry, hunting and plantations
4. Mining and quarrying
- 5a. Manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs (household industry)
- 5b. Manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs (other than household industry)
6. Construction
7. Trade and commerce
8. Transport, storage and communication
9. Other services including professions

Table 1.6 shows the distribution of working women (15-49) in the various industrial groups.

From Table 1.6 it is clear that the majority of working women belong to categories 1 and 2, which account for 88% of rural working women and 85% of all working women. Category 9, which is most significant in urban areas, and includes most of the “white-collar” professions, and occupations traditionally acceptable as formal employment for women, such as teachers, nurses, saleswomen, clerical workers, etc., accounts for less than 6% of the total, but 35% of urban working women. Many of these belong to the middle classes and are hence not taken into account in this study, which will be concerned mainly with low-income women.

Another way to analyze this situation is to distinguish between the organized and unorganized sectors of the economy. Roughly speaking, the organized sector may include the following:

	(in '000)
Category 3 (Plantations)	417
„ 4 (Mines)	80
„ 5b (Factories)	514
„ 7	835
„ 8	164
„ 9	2845
	-----
Total	4855
	-----



Thus 4.86 million women (or 9.8% of the total female work force) may be in the organized sector, while 90% are in the unorganized sector.

**Table 1.6 Industrial distribution of women workers (15-49) in '000 and %**

	1	2	3	4	5a	5b	6	7	8	9	Total
Rural No.	17918	21097	744	123	1646	919	216	423	49	1076	4421
%	40.52	47.72	1.68	0.28	3.72	2.08	0.49	0.96	0.11	2.43	100.00
Urban No.	334	826	96	26	581	717	144	412	115	1769	5020
%	6.65	16.45	1.91	0.51	11.57	14.28	2.86	3.20	2.29	35.23	100.00
Total No.	18252	21923	840	149	2227	1636	360	835	164	2845	49232
%	37.07	44.53	1.71	0.30	4.52	3.32	0.73	1.70	0.34	5.78	100.00

This is only an approximation and indicates the broad outlines of the picture.

Thus it may be said that the largest proportion of working women in India are in low-paying, unskilled and low-status jobs in the unorganized sector. They are among the neediest sections of the population and at the same time, among the least visible, and the least articulate.

### Children of Working Mothers

The next question to consider is how many young children below the age of six are working mothers likely to have, and how many women would actually be the mothers of these young children? There are only approximate ways of answering this question, but these estimates would give some idea of the orders of magnitude involved.

This can be done by working out some ratios and applying them.

$$\text{If R 1} = \frac{\text{Ever-married working women aged 15-49}}{\text{Total number of ever-married women 15-49, or}} \\ \frac{\text{Working mothers}}{\text{All mothers}}$$

then R 1 = 32%, on the basis of Census figures.

$$\text{If R 2} = \frac{\text{All children 0-5 years}}{\text{All mothers}}$$

then R 2 = 79%, on the basis of Census figures.

Interestingly, the Census (1981) ratio (R 2/Census) is 55%. However, here a different method has been used. This ratio is called child/woman ratio and "child" includes only the age-group 0-4, while "woman" takes all women in the age-group 15-49. In the case here, only "ever-married", who constitute about 85% of all women, are included. Thus, the numerator (children) in this calculation is larger, and the denominator (woman) is smaller, and hence the ratio is considerably larger.

The third important calculation is to work out how many women would constitute the mothers of a certain number of children 0-6. For this, it is necessary to assume a figure which may be called the mean birth interval or the time difference between births on average, and from this work out the number of children likely to be born to a woman within a six-year period. As can be seen, this is full of pitfalls. Firstly, birth rates vary so much within the country, that the concept of the mean birth

interval for the whole country is almost meaningless. Secondly, it does not account for first and last births, wider intervals, etc. However, for the sake of calculation, if we take one example, drawn from a study of a Delhi ward, the mean birth interval turns out to be 32 months, or 2.7 years. In six years then, a mother may give birth to a maximum of  $6/2.7 = 2.2$  children. Though very rough and ready, this may be taken as indicative. If the figure is not precisely appropriate, it may be taken as tentative, until more definitive figures are available.

Applying these ratios, the following figures now emerge. If there are 104 million children (0-5) in the total population these must belong to  $104/2.2$  or 47.3 million mothers.

Of these 47.3 million mothers of the below-sixes, how many are working mothers?

Applying R 1 or 32%, the answer is 14.1 million, who between them have 31 million children (using 2.2 as an average).

So in this case, 33% of working mothers (who number 41.86 million have young children, and 30% of all young children (104 million) have working mothers.

An alternative method is to proceed by applying R 2. Then, 41.86 million working mothers would have 34 million young children, and applying the 2.2 ratio again, they would be born to 15.05 million women. In this case, 37% of all working mothers have young children, and 33% of all young children have working mothers.

These calculations mask vast regional differences. Besides, distribution of children in different sectors of the population – rural-urban, working and non-working women, and other groupings – is likely to be great, which is also masked. However, they are sufficient to indicate very broadly the orders of magnitude involved. It may be said that 30/33 million young children (0-5) have working mothers, and that 14-15 million working women, mostly belonging to the low-income unorganized sector, have young children.

### **The Need and the Response**

Judging from the overall picture, what then is the extent and quality of response to this vast need for child care?

It must be pointed out that the word “need” here is being used to describe the basic needs of the children, girls and women concerned seen from an outside perspective. They may not be necessarily perceived as needs by those involved, or articulated as “felt needs”. Thus in situations where there are no alternatives and where all women in the locality are in the same situation – mothers, who though aware of the harm caused to their children by neglect, may have no option but to leave them uncared for or in the care of older siblings, and may not articulate child care as a “felt need”. Similarly, where it is taken for granted that young girls should perform a variety of home-related tasks including child care and help the family by doing so, it may be taken for granted that they cannot be given the luxury of a formal education. While this perpetuates the status of women as one of the most deprived sectors of society, it may not be perceived as such as by those concerned at the time.

Social response at any given time is only in relation to what is perceived as a need. The mass of working women have been socially “invisible” till very recently, with a slow change in perceptions beginning in the last decade dating from the publication in 1975 of the epoch-making report of the Committee on the Status of Women. At the same time, the needs of young children also have received low priority attention in the last three decades, while the problem of girls’ education has only perfunctorily been related to the other two aspects.

Nevertheless, there has been a slow growth of facilities for the care of children of working mothers. Such provision can be seen to fall into two broad categories – the statutory and the voluntary sectors, the first responding to the women in the organized or “visible” sector, and the second to the needs of children, and thus indirectly to the needs of women in the unorganized sector. The statutory sector may be said to be woman-oriented, in terms of the preceding discussion,

and the voluntary sector, child-oriented. Chapters 2 and 3 will present an overview of each of the sectors, considering specific instances in greater depth in order to throw light on important issues.

*Insert Picture*

## The Statutory Sector

### AN OVERVIEW

The statutory sector of child care has its origin in the concern for working women, and places the burden of responsibility squarely on the employers. By definition therefore it is concerned with the organized sector, especially units employing large numbers. Available information relates mainly to women in Census industrial categories 3, 4 and 5b, that is, plantations, mines and factories, which employ 1.01 million women out of the 4.5 million in the organized sector.

#### **Rationale for Child Care**

Pre-Independence industrial legislation followed the British model. In the industrialized countries, the demand for facilities for working women was only part of a larger working class movement to protect the rights of workers. The low profile of women in the Trade Union movement in the early part of the century in the industrialized West, the social structure of those countries, the composition of the British Parliament and its concerns and traditions, are all reflected in the low emphasis placed on institutionalized child care in those countries and consequently in early legislation in India.

However, leading thinkers in the freedom struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, were profoundly influenced by the tenets of Fabian Socialism and even more by the enormous social upheaval brought about by the October Revolution and its aftermath in Russia. During the twenties and thirties, the USSR became an Utopian model for India and other colonized countries, who were looking not only for freedom from imperial rule, but also for models for restructuring and rebuilding stagnant ancient societies. The various planning exercises, manifestoes and documents brought out by the Congress Party prior to 1947 all reflect this powerful urge to build a new society and enter the Golden Age with the advent of freedom. Freedom meant, to the leaders of the freedom struggle, not merely political independence but an opportunity to cast off the shackles of the past and the stifling rigidities of Hindu society.

Immediately after Independence, these noble and idealistic strains of thought, combining Socialism with an older nineteenth century liberalism, and taking the USSR as a model, found expression in the legislation that was to lay the foundation for a new India. Foremost among these documents was the Constitution and its Directive Principles, which guaranteed the right to work, the right to education and to protection within the family for the child, and spoke about the various welfare provisions which an enlightened State would be bound to attempt to provide for its citizens.

The Constitution was to remain the ideal and inspiration for the industrial legislation which followed rapidly in the early fifties. The concept of child care as an essential element in the liberation of women into the work force was a pillar of early Socialist thought. Creches thus found a place in all the industrial Acts – the Factories Act (1948), the Plantations Act (1951) and the Mines Act (1952). The first laid down that creches were a statutory obligation wherever 30 or more women were employed (later revised to 50) and the second laid down a minimum of 50. The Mines Act, however, specified that a creche was to be provided wherever women are employed, regardless of their number, making it necessary if even one woman was employed. Other rules for the protection of women included the prohibition of women working underground (Mines Act) and at

night, and in certain jobs specified as hazardous, and a ban on women carrying weights in excess of certain specified limits. Besides these, general welfare measures concerned with the provision of drinking water, latrines and urinals, wash rooms, rest rooms, canteens, medical facilities, etc., were expected to benefit both women and men.

Later legislation of significance to women were the Maternity Benefits Act (1961) and the Equal Remuneration Act (1976). A series of other laws, though not referring specifically to women, were expected to protect them also. These were the Workmen's Compensation Act (1923), the Minimum Wages Act (1948) and others.

In keeping with Socialist philosophy and the adaptation of the pattern of advanced industrial nations, all this legislation dealt only with labour in the organized sector. For example, the relevant clause in the Factories Act, which is replicated in the Plantations Act and Mines Act, is as follows:

“In every factory where more than fifty women workers are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under six years of such women. Such rooms shall provide adequate accommodation, shall be adequately lighted and ventilated, shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition and shall be under the charge of women trained in the care of children and infants”.

The Acts further laid down that the State Governments concerned should make rules prescribing standards in respect of all these. The Factories Act went further in requiring the provision of free milk or refreshment or both for children, and also in requiring employers to provide facilities for mothers breast-feed children at necessary intervals. The Mines Creche Rules, which are considered in depth in the next Section, are an example of how detailed rules were developed as guidelines.

Behind this kind of thinking lay the assumption of overall Socialist control, which has, however, rarely held good in India. Implementation was left to individual employers in a capitalist framework, hence making it almost inevitable that the laws would be obeyed more in the letter than in the spirit, and that mere ‘paper’ compliance would result rather than a satisfactory welfare activity.

### Quantity of Child Care

It is necessary first to glance at the factual picture indicating the growth in the number of crèches since the fifties. In 1969, the Malaviya Commission on Labour Welfare made a study of the facilities provided to labour (see table 2.1):

**Table 2.1 Facilities provided to labour**

Date	No. of factories employing more than 50 women	No. of factories providing crèches	No. of children utilizing creches
1952	6,319	431	11,316
1954	6,369	487	13,628
1959	8,312	800	22,760
1964	10,167	763	23,576
1974	11,009	790	23,043

( Figures updated to 1974)

All tables in this section, except where the source is mentioned, are drawn from the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour.

This is a pitifully small number, considering the number of women employed in these industries. There has been little significant change since then. The highest number of creches was 935 in 1966. There has been a steady decline since then continuing in the last decade. In contrast, the figures for women workers in 1979 are as given in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2 Women's employment in selected sectors**

Occupation	Numbers	Percentage of Work force
Factories	514,000	10
Mines	80,000	11
Plantations	417,000	45

For Plantations, the number of creches reported by the Labour Bureau in 1980-81 is a given in table 2.3.

**Table 2. 3 Number of creches in 1980-81**

Assam*	4513	Tripura	64
Karnataka	44	U.P.	5
Kerala	400	W.Bengal	633
Tamil Nadu	184		

(\*Figures for Assam cannot be taken at face value, as there is evidence that they indicate merely legal compliance. No creches were actually found to be running when visited.)

As regards mines, the Malaviya Commission reported the existence of 450 creches in coal mines and 358 in other mines (as against the number of 1229 statutorily required). The corresponding figures were 210 for coal mines (1983-84) and 310 for other mines (1980-81), thus showing a positive decline rather than the improvement expected.

In terms of sheer numbers, then, the conclusions are not very encouraging. More than a million women are employed in this part of organized sector, represented by factories, mines and plantations. Taking the same methods of calculation used in chapter 1, and assuming that all the women are of child-bearing age, 85% or 860,000 women would be mothers and one-third of them would be mothers of young children. Thus in this sector alone, there may be 280,000 mothers of young children with 616,000 children below six. Even taking into account that as far as factories are concerned, the numbers employing more than 50 women may be few, the provision is very limited in relation to the need. This is the situation after three decades of protective legislation.

### **Quality of Child Care**

The quality aspect of the question, or the nature of services provided may, now be considered, followed by a study of the reasons for the picture that emerges.

In the last three decades, several studies of creches in the industrial sector have been made, chief among them being the Malaviya Commission (1969), the studies conducted by the Labour Bureau about women in mines (1977) and some selected industries (1978), a study of creches on plantations by NIPCCD (National institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development) in 1980-81, as well as a number of smaller studies by concerned scholars which will be drawn upon for their observations. Plantations and coal mines will each be considered in greater depth in the next two sections. Here, mines in general and factories will form the main basis of discussion.

Three outstanding conclusions emerge sharply from these studies. Firstly, the overall poor quality of care provided, though there is considerable variability ranging from a few excellently maintained creches in the private sector to some providing the barest minimum only to show compliance with the law. Secondly, the high degree of under-utilization (or non-utilization in some

cases) by the female labour for whom the services are intended. Third, the sharp differences in the views of labour and management, on this issue.

A study of mines in 1977 which took a sample of 87 units found that of 70 units which were statutorily obliged to provide creches, only 35 were actually doing so. But in the case of coal mines, 12 out of 17 units obliged to provide creches were doing so. More than half of all creches were found to be unsatisfactory when assessed for adequate lighting, ventilation, furnishings and equipment, cleanliness, sanitary facilities, etc. and the majority were unsatisfactory on more than one count. In half the cases, there was an absence of items like soap, towels and linen and of refreshments for the children. Milk was usually available but inadequate. The staff was inadequate in 83% of the cases studied in terms of numbers and in all cases in terms of qualifications. Everywhere only untrained women, termed “ayahs”, were employed. The rate of utilization is indicated in Table 2.4.

In utilization, as well as in terms of facilities and standards, conditions were found to be better in the coal mines than in others.

This reflects the lack of awareness of what constitutes proper conditions from the point of view of child growth and development as well as indifference to the needs of children.

**Table 2.4 Utilization of creches**

	Children below Six of women Workers	Children attending	Utilization rate	Average attendance of children per creche
Coal mines alone	2533	200	7.9%	13
All units together	6031	431	7.2%	11

The lack of awareness or interest in basic needs such as food and sanitary equipment is disturbing. Yet finance was not a limiting factor as discussions with management invariably brought out. Finances were available, but little thought had been given to their proper utilization.

The Malaviya Commission, while not going into such detail, noted that standards were far from satisfactory and commented on the different views expressed about non-utilization by labour and management. The Commission also noted that while in some cases like the cotton textile industry, provision was extensive, there was none in other cases such as municipal scavenging workers, port, dock and cement workers. A study of the women in public sector industries (1968-75) (including textiles, electronics, pharmaceuticals, heavy electricals and watches) also did not go into details on creches but observed that where they existed they were often unsatisfactory. They particularly noted lack of trained staff and poor conditions and equipment.

A study conducted in Bombay in the early seventies presented similar conclusions. Most of the units studied were in the textile industry which at that time was notable both for being in a state of serious economic decline and for a trend to reduce the employment of women labour. The study found that most of the factory creches maintained the minimum standards laid down by the Factories Act in relation of lighting, ventilation, space, equipment, salaries of workers and presence of trained nurses. None, however, attempted to provide any form of preschool education or stimulating activity for children above the age of three. In all cases, the size of the crèche was very small, the average attendance of children being only 11. Three-fourths of the 16 units studied in detail had less than 10 children, while three creches had only one child each! The study also brought out that for every 100 working women in the factories concerned, there were only 7.1 children in creches.

At the same time, it should be noted that outstanding day-care services have been provided by certain firms in the private sector which have a long tradition of labour welfare and of excellence in

all fields. The names of the houses of Tata, Godrej, Glaxo particularly come to mind. The pharmaceutical industry in Bombay has a good record, in this respect.

The almost uniformly poor conditions (with a few notable exceptions), and the poor utilization of creches raise many questions about the validity of the type of model adopted, the kind of legislation passed and the machinery for its implementation, and the adequacy of the supporting rules and regulations. The last point can be illustrated in numerous ways, but as an example one may take the nature of qualifications required for creche workers, variously termed attendants, nurses and ayahs. The rules specify that the creche in-charge should be "a woman trained in the care of infants and children", but do not lay down what kind of training is necessary or desirable. In the great majority of cases, since no such category of trained worker exists, untrained persons are employed, those with some modest educational qualification being referred to as creche workers, in-charges, attendants and the like and the semi-literate or illiterate, who do most of the work, as ayahs.

In some cases, specially in the industrial units in Bombay, nurses or midwives are appointed, also inappropriately, as a nurse is trained to care for the sick and a midwife to assist in childbirth. Neither is qualified to be in charge of the development of young children, though many may be personally interested in doing so, especially if they are mothers themselves. Thus the lack of child-oriented perspective, coupled with the unthinking assumption that "any" woman can take care of children, has led to the curious situation that after 30 years or more of legislation requiring trained child caretakers, no such category of training has emerged. In fact, in India today, there is no formal training course or school for the training of child caretakers.

To understand the reasons for this state of affairs, and the different views expressed by women workers and managements on this issue, it is necessary to examine the daily programme in a creche from a child-oriented point of view. Almost all the studies and the commentators have noted the absence of any organized programme of activity for the children, or of adequate and suitable play facilities, space, equipment and materials. These two features usually go hand in hand.

As has been mentioned earlier, the first six years of life are most significant from the point of view of development. Play activity is the very foundation and medium of child's learning and development. The child explores and experiences the world through play, which is the primary medium through which his intellectual, sensory and emotional development is mediated. The absence of a good programme of play activities, whether it be termed preschool education, informal education, play-way or any other name, for the three-to-six-year old is a very serious deficit which adversely affects the child's normal development. Besides, infant development especially before age three, is based on a close one-to-one relationship with an adult care-taker (and later on with others both adult and of his own age). A nurturant one-to-one relationship characterized by constant interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, language and motor play activities with and without objects, and constant protective and affectionate care is essential for the child's satisfactory emotional and social growth on which all later development is based.

Descriptions of most creches indicate that the three elements mentioned above, namely, organized developmental activity, appropriate equipment, and appropriate interaction with an adult are missing. The description usually mentions that few or no toys and play materials are present, and if present hardly or ever used; few or no activities are provided and children are mostly left or their devices, sitting idle and aimlessly all day; interaction is kept to a minimum and is related to physical tasks; language activity, formal or informal, games, gesture, non-verbal interaction, body contact, etc. are all minimal. Yet, for the development of the child, these are as important as milk or food. The developmental situation in creches is thus very discouraging. Perhaps the greatest weakness has resulted from exclusive concern with needs of women to the neglect of the needs of children.



## The Explanation

What are the causes underlying this state of affairs? And what is the explanation for the disturbing decline in the number of creches in the last two decades, even though the absolute number of women employed has not declined correspondingly? Table 2.5 shows the broad picture, but the overall figures tend to mark the sharp decline in the case of some industries, such as coalmines and textiles for example. To understand the true picture, it must be studied sector by sector. The quantitative side will be considered first.

**Table 2.5 Employment of women in selected sectors**

		1971	1974	1979
Factories (1965)	394,456	370,104	440,432	514,000
Mines (1966)	100,700	75,212	97,600	80,000
Plantations (1967)	173,919	377,015	375,883	417,000
Total	-	822,331	913,915	1,011,000

An important reason for the relative stagnation in the employment of women in the organized sector has been the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), as a result of which there is no special advantage to employers in employing women, while some extra burdens may result. The prohibition of women from working night shifts (and underground in mines) and from certain categories of jobs, and from carrying weights, has also tended to operate against their employment. With the increasing pressure of unemployment and poverty, there is greater and greater pressure from men, more of whom are now prepared to take up jobs considered traditionally women's such as headloading in coal mines. All of these help to explain why the employment of women in the organized sector has failed to keep pace with the growth of the sector and of total employment. However, they cannot account for the surprisingly small number of creches in relation to women and their continuous decline.

Another reason, frequently put forward as an explanation for both phenomena, is that protective legislation, by increasing the costs and burdens of employing women, has worked against them. Oft-mentioned examples are the higher rate of absenteeism among women related to family problems, the drop-out rate among women resulting from marriage and subsequent migration, their lower educational qualifications and consequent unsuitability for advanced training or retraining in the case of mechanization leading to more skilled jobs, the need to provide extra benefits such as maternity leave and creches.

To a very large extent this is true. The provisions of the Factories Act are such as to allow employers to avoid unnecessary and costly services by various means such as employing women in numbers below the limits laid down (50 or 30 women as the case may be), employing women on a temporary or daily basis, employing only unmarried women and so forth. Besides actually cutting down the total number of women employed, facilities like a creche are seen as unnecessary by many employers precisely because they are underutilized, though few employers connect this with the quality or nature of services provided. At the same time, the low interest shown by women workers or by trade unions in demanding creche facilities or insisting on a higher standard of care is also an outcome of the same thinking – the workers rightly perceive that this will lead to lay-off of women in the long run, whether gradual or sudden.

As far as cost is concerned, it may be pointed out that creches are costly on a per head basis precisely when they are least used. In terms of absolute costs, few figures are available. The Bombay study estimated (in 1972) that the cost of setting up a well-equipped creche for 50 children

would be Rs 10,000 and the annual recurring cost per child would be Rs. 950. However, this figure would vary widely depending on the extent of use.

A criticism of the law sometime made is that because the entire financial responsibility for welfare is placed on the employer this leads to evasion whenever possible. How heavy is the burden of welfare services actually? The study by the Labour Bureau of welfare services in mines found the following:

*Average annual expenditure per woman worker*

	Creches Rs.	All welfare services Rs.
Coal mines	23.00	219.00
Range among units	1.03 to 36.15	1.03 to 219.00
All mines	18.00	84.00
<i>Percentage of welfare expenditures to total wage bill</i>		
Coal mines	0.054	0.40
Range among units	0.02 to 0.56	0.02 to 1.80
All mines	0.07	0.31

Figures for other industries are not available, but these are sufficient to illustrate the point. The actual expenditure is so small as to be pitiful, yet is often quoted by management as a reason for not employing women. Clearly, it is not so much the expenditure as the extra burden, the administrative, technical and legal headaches which make it hardly worthwhile for so small an expenditure. It seems, therefore, undeniable that welfare legislation has not only severely discouraged the employment of women in the organized sector, and contributed to the slow growth in their numbers, but has also encouraged the growth of smaller units which are exempt from some of the provisions, and of countless other devices for evading the law. The lack of or weakness of a proper inspecting and enforcing agency is further factor in evasion.

### **The Vicious Circle**

What are the reasons for the poor quality of services? Some of it again can be traced to the inappropriate provisions of the law. For example, a critique of welfare provisions in the Contract Labour Act (1970) shows that the rules and regulations are often unrealistic and incapable of implementation, that there are no creche staff with the requisite qualifications and that above all there are not enough inspectors, leave alone those with the qualifications necessary to ensure proper implementation. Thus most of the provisions, though well-intentioned, remain unimplemented.

The nature of requirements also suggests that the rules are drawn up by those with little understanding of the practical difficulties of application or of the needs of young children. The absence of a child-oriented point of view is glaring. There is little evidence that women workers or even trade unions have been consulted before the rules are drawn up; in any case, the trade unions are still highly male-dominated and may not adequately represent the women's point of view. If other women, or professionals concerned with child care, have ever been consulted, it appears that they have somewhat unrealistic standards drawn from middle class or professional points of view and have neither the experience nor the imagination to apply themselves to thinking out what is required.

The case of the factories (in contrast to contract labour) is somewhat better as they deal with a stable and permanent labour force, can have permanent buildings, staff, etc. Nevertheless, there is considerable similarity in the fundamental weakness of the rules and their low practicability. All of this contributes both to poor quality and low utilization.

Another important reason for low utilization is the location of creches, which are usually sited on or near the factory premises. Except in certain exceptional cases where the labour lives very near the place of work (as in the case of plantations or migrant labour on construction sites) women may have to carry their children considerable distances in order to leave them in the creche. This procedure may range in difficulty from inconvenient to impossible. Many women workers when consulted said they would like to have a creche facility nearer to the place of residence rather than at the place of work. This brings up two questions, whether the factory or industrial establishment is the best agency to run the creche, and whether it is the most salubrious location. In terms of health, safety, space for play and recreation, clearly, it is difficult to argue that an industrial establishment is the best site for the location of a creche for children. Nevertheless, so long as the establishment has the primary responsibility for the service, the location of the service will naturally be where most convenient to it. Thus a larger question is involved here, of who should actually run the creche.

What are the other reasons for non-utilization? A summary of the kinds of evidence found in the various studies shows that women workers generally mention the following: lack of adequate facilities for the children, improper care, unsuitable location, indifference on the part of employers to standards in the creche, harsh or rude behavior on the part of attendants, untrained and poor staff, neglect of children, etc. In some cases, so great is the indifference of the staff that the women workers were expected to provide an adult member of their own families to actually take care of the children!

The total absence of education, of stimulating or indeed any kind of activities for the children no doubt profoundly influences the perception of mothers, though they may not articulate it in those terms. Every mother, no matter what her level of formal education, is aware of the importance of an affectionate, nurturing and one-to-one relationship with the child, close and individual attention to the needs of the infant and the establishment of mutuality for the development of the child, though again she may not choose or be able to say so in such language. Thus instinctively, mothers are aware that the creche which functions as an impersonal institution, with a large ratio of children to adults, minimal standards of physical care and a cold uncaring attitude, is unsuitable for infants, while sitting idle all day is not appropriate for a preschooler. It is these complaints which are phrased by mothers as lack of proper care or improper behavior on the part of attendants. Thus the very function of a creche, to act as a substitute for the mother during the time she has to be away from the child, is negated, if no attempt is made to create a home-like atmosphere or at least somehow to meet the needs of the young child by appropriate if different means.

Curiously enough, the same conclusion can be reached from another angle – the point of view of employers. The reason usually advanced by employers for non-utilization, apart from distance, tend to cluster around one theme: the traditional or superstitious nature of the workers, their illiteracy or low level of education, their adamant clinging to traditional values, the inability of mothers to trust their children to any but their own family, the cultural norms and values of the worker community and so forth. In other words, they lay the blame squarely on the labour for their refusal to take advantage of the services provided.

While many employers privately confess that the creche is not up to the standard required and that the creche staff are far from perfect or from providing the right kind of care, few make the connection between the two sides of the matter. Very few employers are willing to accept that the mother is quite capable of evaluating the standard of care for herself even if she is illiterate; that she may be making the right judgments in preferring to leave the infant with a member of her family (though possibly in unhygienic or unsatisfactory physical conditions) than to trust the child to an unsatisfactory institution. The majority of working mothers in this sector have had to revert to other means of child care even when creches exist. Some officials with long experience of creches contend that it is impossible to persuade Indian working mothers to leave infants in an institution, (though this may work out for three-to-six year olds) and are convinced that the entire legislation is

a mistake, copied from Western ideals. Persons who argue in this way also will not accept that it is possible to run institutions in such a manner as to capture the confidence of mothers and enable them to leave infants in the creche. Thus all forces at work seem trapped in a vicious circle – poor quality leads to low utilization which perpetuates poor quality.

The concept of mere custodial care is deeply rooted in all endeavours which start from what was earlier described as a “woman-oriented” standpoint. Significantly, when the Malaviya Commission brought up the question of suitable preschool education (and indeed of primary education in cases where establishments were located in remote areas and the children could not avail of the local schools), the employers replied that education was the business of the state and not theirs. This is in a sense a perfectly justifiable argument, for indeed industrial establishments are neither equipped nor intended to enter into the business of education.

Yet care without an educational component, or a developmental component, is meaningless and self-defeating, and likely to be little used except by those who have no other recourse. The woman-oriented concept negates itself, since a service which is child-oriented is rejected by the mother. The dilemma can be resolved only by transcending it and combining the two. The questions have to be asked: for whom are the services intended – the child or the woman or both? And who is capable of running them? This will lead to a new look at the areas of training of workers, programming and the existence of independent agencies for these purposes. These possibilities will be discussed in the last chapter.

### **A: CASE STUDY – CRECHES IN COAL MINES**

Why is a detailed look at the situation in the coal mines worthwhile? To begin with, there are more women in the coal mines than in any other mines; they have been traditionally engaged in it for a long time; and there is considerable information about them. Second, there has been a steady decline over the years in the number of women in the coal mining industry, and the trend is continuing. Third, studies show that the record of the coal mines in regard to welfare services for women, including creches, has been steadily better than that in other sectors of the industry. The study may thus illustrate the best and worst aspects of the present situation, the limitations of the law and of actual practice, and suggest what can and should be done. This section is based on the information and comments of Labour Bureau studies, the Malaviya Commission Report and a personal observation visit.

The position of women workers in the coal mines is shown in Table 2.6.

Women in coal mines are about 47% of women in all mines, and are hence important for this reason alone. The next single group, in iron, limestone and manganese mines, accounts for only 12% of all women in mining.

**Table 2.6 Employment of women in mines**

		1946	1975	1979
All mines together	Total workers	412,000	766,900	742,100
	Women workers	101,000	97,600	79,500
	Percentage of women to all	24.7	12.7	10.7
Coal mines alone	Total workers	324,000	522,000	498,900
	Women workers	77,800	45,300	42,500
	Percentage of women to all	24	8.7	8.5

## **Profile of Women Workers**

Women have been working in the coal mines since the last century, along with their men folk. Figures show a slow decline in the numbers of women from 1921 up to the beginning of World War II. However, during the war, the ban on women working underground and at night was withdrawn and there was a sudden spurt in the employment of women in the mines because of the sharp rise in demand and the need for extra production. Since 1946, the trend towards decline has continued. However, at the time of nationalization there were about 45,000 women in the coal mines. A slight increase was shown after that because of the policy of making permanent some labour who had been till then employed on a temporary or casual basis, but there has been no change in the policy or in the long-term decline. At this time, there are 45,774 women in the coal industry, making Coal India Ltd. the largest single employer of women in India.

The reasons for the decline in the employment of women are important. The prohibition on women working underground and at night accounts for a considerable part of this, since it confines women to certain categories of jobs and those which do not require to be worked on regular shifts. The Equal Remuneration Act, the subsequent rise in women's wages and the various labour-saving devices and new technologies make it less and less profitable to employ women. Either men are available and willing to do jobs once considered women's work, or machinery is being put to use. In either event, women are no longer needed. This situation has become inevitable because of the confinement of women to unskilled jobs. In the coal mines, 71% of women are in unskilled jobs and 29% in semi-skilled jobs which turn out on examination to require no very great skills. (In other mines the unskilled form as much as 90% of the female labour force). On the other hand, no women are found in skilled jobs, and none in administrative or supervisory jobs. Women are mostly engaged in loading and also in quarrying (45% of the work force in the former and 16% of the work force in the latter case). In those occupations in which women are found at all, they constitute 50% of the work force in the occupation. With the growing tendency for mechanical loading, it is clear that women are about to be pushed out of these remaining jobs too in the near future. Coal India has a scheme of voluntary retirement in which special benefits are offered to women employees who retire in lieu of a job given to a male relative. There has been no talk of retiring in favour of women relatives.

The literacy rate among women workers is 3%, thus making it difficult if not impossible to retain women for other categories of jobs in the mines. Anyhow, many of the skilled jobs are below ground. Women have not objected to working underground, and in fact, some women claim that working conditions below ground are better than above, especially in summer when it is likely to be cooler underground than above. However, this is a closed issue because of international agreements under the UN charter and ILO, and it seems there is no place for women in the coal mines in the future.

It is in this context that we have to look at the provision of welfare amenities and services for women. The costs of welfare are usually named as reasons for unwillingness to employ women, but as noted earlier, welfare amenities account for only 0.4% of the wage bill and the inconvenience of providing the facilities rather than their cost is the factor to be considered. As regards amenities other than creches, in the majority of cases, there were no special wash rooms, latrines, rest rooms, transport or housing provided for women, and very few lady doctors in the hospitals. It is claimed by the authorities that women labour refuse to use the washing places provided since they are obviously inconvenient. Studies have shown that absenteeism is only slightly higher among women than among men and efficiency is the same. It appears though that no studies have been conducted on the prevalence of alcoholism among men and women and its likely impact on absence from work and/or efficiency. Though the conclusion seems fairly predictable, such issues are never touched upon by managements. Yet reluctance to employ women is evident.

The low level of education of women workers is a matter that requires comment. It appears that no effort has been made by the coal industry to educate the labour force. About 25% of the coal mines are running elementary schools, mainly by provision of buildings. However, most of the buildings are in a state of disrepair, attendance is low and utilization of educational facilities is poor. What is to be noted is that after more than 30 years of availability of elementary education supported by both state and employers, 97% of the women workers are illiterate, as compared to less than 50% of the men. No serious attempt appears to have been made to educate them through non-formal approaches, though social workers have been appointed in many mines to run adult education and sewing classes for the women. Little information is available about the kind of programmes operated and the authenticity of the records maintained, but the dismal results speak for themselves.

The record of the trade unions does not seem to be much better. Women members account for about 8% of trade union membership, slightly less than their proportion in the work force as a whole. There are no instances of women being involved in the leadership cadres of trade unions or playing an important role in policy-making decisions. Some of the left-wing unions have involved women in several militant actions, mostly for tactical reasons, but there is little evidence that women are seriously involved in longer term planning and policy-making in the unions. The trade unions have a dismal record as far as education of workers is concerned, and have even less interest in the education of women workers. It is hence not surprising that they have not shown special concern for welfare provisions either, especially those concerned with children.

### **Welfare Services and Creches**

Among officials and management in the coal mines, welfare is seen in terms of infrastructure, and budgets are conceived in terms of capital expenditures. Thus, the major headings under welfare include housing, hospitals, dispensaries and clinics, education (elementary schools), creches, bathing and washing places, recreational/social/cultural activities and adult education, of which the lion's share goes to medical services and housing. Other works and buildings put up from welfare funds include banks, canteens, post offices, clubs, roads, parks, playing fields, and cooperatives. The concept of welfare has been interpreted in an extremely broad and general manner and relates to buildings and facilities rather than to services. The expenditure relating to Bharat Coking Coal Ltd. (BCCL) Dhanbad, given in Table 2.7 is illustrative.

**Table 2.7 Expenditure on welfare (in lakhs)**

Year	Housing	Water	Other	Total
74-75	84.00	-	-	84.00
75-77	-	69.00	35.00	418.00
79-80	341.00	78.00	125.00	548.00
81-82	576.00	131.00	217.00	834.00
83-84	857.00	80.00	150.00	1087.00

The total number of labour employed in 1983-84 was 176,000 of which 16,500 are women. The expenditure on welfare is not inconsiderable, but the bulk of it goes towards housing as there is a severe shortage of housing. Other welfare gets only about 10% of the welfare budget, and this, as has been mentioned, is mostly on infrastructure.

Separate figures were not available for creches, but looking through the records it is obvious that creches play a very small part in the whole picture. At BCCL, there are now 64 creches catering to 16,500 women workers. The very marginal nature of the creche operation is what is most to be noted. It is a microscopic fraction of the total, not only in terms of budgets but in terms of concerns, priorities and interests. Labour Welfare Officers and Inspectors concerned with implementing,

supervising, monitoring or evaluating welfare activities give creches a very low priority in their scheme of things.

The number of creches at present (1984) in the nationalized coal industry is as follows:

Area	No. of creches	No. of women workers
ECL	88	15,106
BCCL	64	16,443
CCL	23	10,556
WCL	35	3,669
TOTAL	210	45,774

There are thus 200 creches to meet the needs of about 45,000 working women.

### **The Creches**

A glance at the actual situation in creches and the nature and quality of services they provide follows, based on information collected during a short visit by the author to BCCL (Dhanbad) in late 1984. Two collieries near Dhanbad were visited and discussions held with a number of officials of the collieries, Labour Welfare Officers, officials of the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Board (CMLWB) and others. Though only two creches could be visited, they may be taken as fairly representative in the light of the comments made by officials.

All the officials looked upon the creches as a building or place rather than as a service or function. They also stated that creches were being maintained solely because of the statutory obligation. The use, non-use or capability for use of the creches was not a matter which seemed to cause any great concern. The classification of creches into Types A, B, C and D also related to the numbers of women employed and the standards of size, equipment, staffing, etc. required, and bore no relation either to the numbers of children or to the nature of programme expected. As regards nature of programme, it was confirmed that all creches operated only for half a day from 7.00 or 8.00 a.m. or even 9.00 a.m. up to about 12 noon, dispersing after the distribution of the mid-day meal. That this was in sharp contradiction to the purpose of the creche, namely, to care for children during the mother's hours of work, did not seem to be noticed, leave aside cause any concern. Most of the women employed lived in outlying villages and suburbs and commuted to work, generally on foot or occasionally by official transport.

Regarding women's employment, officials mentioned that the decline in women's employment resulted from several causes – the ban on all new recruitment, the fact that only skilled jobs were available, and with very few opportunities for the unskilled, the lack of education and skills in women, and the policy of increasing mechanization. They also mentioned that due to the ban on recruitment, the average age of women was going up each year, and fewer and fewer women in the work force had or would have in future young children requiring creches. Further, the distance to be travelled from home made it inconvenient for woman to carry infants to the work site and discouraged them from using the creches. Officials repeatedly mentioned that social and cultural factors were behind the low level of utilization of creches. Even a brief visit however confirmed that the creches were unsuitable for the care of young children. Yet this conclusion was not drawn by those in authority, nor did they relate it to the low level of use.

Two creches were observed during the visit. Creche A served a mine with a work force of 1,564 of whom 49 were women. The age and size of family of the women could not be verified. The creche was of Type B (for 50 women) staffed by an incharge and an ayah, with a part-time cook, all paid at statutory wage rates. The creche was in a pleasant building, consisting of two large rooms, a bathroom, toilet, kitchen and store all fronting a verandah and with a large open-air courtyard which

could have been used as a play space. The furnishings consisted of several cribs placed end to end in one of the rooms with simple bedding, a first-aid kit and a few charts on the walls. There was no sign of linen for changing, spare clothes for the children or any other equipment required for handling young babies nor any toys or play equipment. In the kitchen there were a few utensils for cooking and for eating, but little evidence of their use and no coherent information could be obtained from the creche staff about the quantity or kind of food cooked and served each day. Most interestingly, there were only three children present, and from their behavior, it seemed possible that these could not have been regular attendees. All three of them were 4+ and were apparently going to spend the whole morning sitting quietly until food was served. There was no indication of any health programme, though health cards were said to be maintained for individual children. There was also no evidence whatever of any regular contact with parents for educative or other purposes.

Creche B was in a mine with a work force of 1,397, of whom 112 were women. It was also a Type B creche, with 11 children on roll of whom 9 were present, all of whom were 4 + and two of whom were infants in arms. The space lighting and ventilation were adequate. The creche had a large hall, furnished with cribs, a verandah and some open-air place for potential play, a store, office, kitchen, bathroom and latrine. Water supply for washing was adequate, but there was no sign that either linen or children were washed on the premises. Probably only utensils were washed. There was no extra linen or clothing or soap for washing them, and minimal supplies, no medicines or first-aid equipment. It appeared that stores for cooking were bought on daily basis. There was no sign of play materials or toys, no daily programme of activities, no preschool education. The timings were from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and it appeared that the children usually collected a little before the mid-day meal and dispersed immediately afterwards. There were also no signs of parent contact of any kind, educative or otherwise.

Both creches visited were fully staffed. Both the in-charges had been on the job for nearly 30 years, the ayahs for a shorter time. The in-charges both claimed to have attended a short training course many years ago, being the first batch of trainees when creche training was started by the CMLWB long ago, but neither could remember very much about the content. No refresher courses appear to have been given, nor was there any technical monitoring, supervision, or guidance by professionally qualified persons. Creche staff are paid at Category II level, with ayahs on category I. (Cat. I is Rs. 21 a day at present or monthly equivalent, and Cat. II is Rs. 23 or equivalent.) Most of the women workers, however, were in Category III, earning Rs. 24.50 per day. The creche workers had uniforms and in Creche A the in-charge proudly displayed a starched white sari. An interesting fact was that she was Bengali-speaking and admitted that she knew little Hindi. How she communicated with the mothers could not be established. The in-charge in Creche B was a Punjabi woman (a refugee widowed during Partition and rehabilitated). She appeared to be personally a very sympathetic, motherly and pleasant person, concerned about the children in her care. Neither worker had much concept of what a programme for young children should include, but conceived of their job as child-minding. There was no evidence of any health programme. Sick children were not brought to the creche and would not be kept there. The regular dispensaries, clinics and hospitals were expected to take care of the problems of the sick. There was no mention of immunization, preventive health, regular check-ups, nutrition etc. If a child was taken sick in the creche, it was taken to the nearest dispensary and the parents sent for. The Medical Officer was supposed to inspect the creche regularly, but it was not clear how far this was actually being done.

Food, then, seemed to be only conceivable remaining activity in the creches and possibly the only attraction which brought some children, if at all, to them. It was very difficult to get any information about the amount and kind of food given to children. There were no menu charts or records of the amounts provided. Repeated enquiries failed to bring out the existence of any standards or limits either on a cost or calorie basis per child or of guidelines laid down by health authorities. Khichiri or rice and vegetables and milk were probably provided when numbers and



ages were appropriate. Chenna, murmura (puffed rice) and other snacks were the commonest food distributed, also biscuits and sweets. The staff mentioned that toffees and sweets had to be given out to bring children to the creche and to keep them there. How often this was done and whether anything else was provided was not clear. All workers and officials, however, maintained that food and milk are served as and when needed at the discretion of the in-charge who is free to make the menu, purchase foods and milk in the required quantities, and get bills reimbursed, and that finance was not a constraint. There were, however, neither set procedures quoted, nor records visible, and considerable vagueness about what was actually being done. It was fairly clear that the programme was not only not child-oriented, but was possibly not even existent as a programme. Creches existed as defined, as buildings, not as programmes. Mothers having evaluated the situation accurately, preferred to leave young children at home in the place of residence, supervised by older people (out of work) and / or older siblings (not attending school?).

### **Some Comments**

However, the most astonishing thing about the whole venture, in a setting which started out from “woman-oriented” legislation, was its complete lack of orientation to the women workers themselves. They were never visible, and their needs, wishes, preferences seem not to have been taken into account. There was no attempt to use the creches as a means of communication or education with women workers, to link it up with other aspects of social welfare, or as a focal point for health care and health education, or in any one of a diversity of ways in which the creche could interact with the community. In fact, interaction between creche staff and mothers seemed to be minimal, and the former did not regard it as their business to have anything to do with the mothers; though as will be seen later, the Rules define the task differently.

It may not be out of place to mention that the management was almost wholly male-dominated. All the officials concerned, from pithead and works managers and production staff to Labour Welfare Officers, from the highest to the lowest levels, were men. As far as women in mines are concerned, there were no women in administrative, supervisory or even clerical positions, and none in the Trade Union leadership. The only women visible were the creche in-charge and the ayah in the creche. Even lady doctors were few. It is not surprising therefore that the concerns of women have been given such low priority. Seen in the light of the policy to phase women out of the industry altogether, and their lowly position in it at present, the combination of factors working against good quality care is almost too powerful to be resisted.

### **Mines Creche Rules**

A study of the Mines Creche Rules (1966) drawn up as guidelines for work in the mines and as a model for others, is instructive, because it casts light on the assumptions, orientations, concepts and practical applications and brings out most of the basic issues. The Rules (see Appendix I) form the theoretical background against which the existing creches must be assessed. Are creches what they should be doing according to these Rules? And are the Rules themselves adequate?

The following points were observed:

First, from the beginning the creche is visualized as a place or room, and not as a service and this influences all subsequent thinking and practice.

Second, since the competent authority may allow the erection of a temporary structure, or of a single creche to serve neighboring mines if the circumstances warrant, many mines have escaped the provision by showing that space is not available, that numbers are inadequate or that the mine itself is expected to work only for a short duration, in addition to other available methods of evasion

such as employing women only as temporary, casual or “badli” labour or employing only unmarried girls.

In the study by the Labour Bureau, in most cases, lighting, ventilation and maintenance in a clean and sanitary condition were found inadequate. This may reflect both an eagerness to cut costs by utilizing a low-priority building and lack of interest in maintenance. There is neither any mention of the scale of the latrine and indication that child-size latrines should be built nor any suggestion for the use of alternatives such as chamber pots, commodes, seating frames, stools or indigenous arrangements of any kind. Thus even if one goes along with the concept of the creche as a building, the building is not designed for the use of children.

No mention is made of water storage and it is left to the authorities concerned to provide the water. Almost all the provisions enlisted are not so much inadequate as unbalanced, and indicate lack of understanding of the programme and the needs of children. For example, cots and cradles are mentioned, and bedsheets, pillows and pillowcases (size not mentioned). But there is no mention of napkins, sleeping mats, or linen for children. Soap and individual towels for the use of children are mentioned, but no laundry soap, detergent or disinfectant, which are necessary for cleaning. Combs are plentiful, but no oil. Cooking and storing utensils are also inadequate. The creche in-charge is given a writing table, chair, stool, cupboard, clock and wastepaper basket. For the children, benches and desks are suggested for Type D, and nothing else for the others. No mention is made of mats, durries, or other floor covering for the children to sit on. The first-aid kit is set up only for dealing with cuts and bruises, which are hardly likely to occur in this setting. No mention is made of toys, play equipment or materials, out-door play space or equipment, or any item which could be linked in any way to child activity. “Usual Montessori apparatus” is suggested for Type D, but no further indication is given of amount, type or cost. Custody with minimum expense is what is suggested. There is no mention in the Rules of the basis of a nutritive and balanced diet for different age-groups, calorie requirements, individual variability, selection from a variety of possibilities, food substitutes, sample menus; nor is there any concept of regular monitoring and adaption to requirements. There is also no indication how malnourished children are to be identified and treated.

Although it is clearly stated that the creche shall remain open at all times both day and night when the employees are working, there is no mention of the timings of the duty hours of the staff. Are they to be on shifts? Or to work continuously around the clock? What is the relation between the mother’s work day and the creche staff’s work day? Further, since women are forbidden to work at night, the need for the creche to remain open at night seems absurd.

The medical arrangements laid down do not provide for any follow-up or referral programme in case of serious illness or of treatment in the creche of children mildly ill. Clearly, it is not envisaged that sick children will be kept in the creche or handled by creche staff. Subjects like immunization, preventive health or health education are not mentioned at all, nor does toilet training, sanitation or environmental hygiene find a place in the schedules.

It is stated that “only such women as have successfully undertaken training as a creche *nurse* at an institution approved by the Central Government shall be eligible for appointment as creche-in-charge”, with provision of exemption for those appointed before 1963, and for temporary appointments in cases of need. However, research does not reveal the existence of any such course of training for creche nurses in the country, leave alone courses recognized by the Central Government. It appears that short-term courses were organized by the CMLWB shortly after its inception, but these were discontinued when recruitment stopped or even earlier. Normally, such a provision, if adhered to strictly, would in itself stimulate the starting up of such courses. At least a few such should have been conducted by the CMLWB as an example, and assistance given to Government or private agencies for setting up such courses. None of these things have in fact occurred, partly due to the stagnation in recruitment. Realizing this gap, the Rules were amended in 1972 to permit the appointment of nurses or midwives. But only a thorough survey of the creche in-

charges would bring out what kind of qualifications they actually have. Possibly, many of the older ones, may have attended the early short course, while some of the younger once may be ANMs, nurses or *dais*. Training therefore appears to be one of the biggest lacunae, being still an unfelt need. The content of training is nowhere mentioned in the Rules.

The duties of the creche in-charge ensure the minimum custodial concept – children are merely to be washed, fed and watched over. There is no mention of activity, play, stimulus or education and the concept of child development is absent.

If the work is envisaged in these terms, it is clear that no special knowledge or training is required. However, it is interesting to note that the in-charge is expected to teach clean and healthy habits to the nursing mothers. This is the first and only mention of any contact with the parents but is not followed in practice. Since the staffing pattern provides for an ayah and a part-time sweeper in all types and for a woman-cook in the two larger types, it is clear also that the in-charge is not expected to handle the children or the cleaning operations herself. Human relationships, nurturance, upbringing, or child rearing, and such issues do not find any place whatsoever in this scheme of things.

The last paragraph refers to the maintenance of records and gives directions on attendance records, particulars of children and medical records. The later are very skimpy, merely recording weight and disease, if any, with suggestions for treatment. No indication of follow-up is provided nor growth charts. The attendance record is adequate but not full enough to draw any conclusion from.

## Conclusions

The guidelines given by the Rules, and the earlier description of the practice, together complete the picture of the situation of creches in coal mines. Before discussing reasons or prescriptions, it is necessary to mention that several studies have been made and commissions of enquiry held since 1952. Most of them have made similar recommendations: that *the locations or creches should be made on merits to suit the convenience of workers, that an educational programme should be introduced for the 3+, that stricter enforcement is necessary, that all the amenities should be provided, that standards should be reviewed and revised from time to time, that community creches should be developed by the Labour Welfare Board or municipal authorities, that common creches should be developed for all contiguous units, that training programmes should be established and only well-trained staff employed and more along these lines*. Yet few or none of these recommendations seem ever to have been implemented.

What are the reasons for this and what conclusions may be drawn? The inability of managements to implement recommendations cannot be interpreted solely as unwillingness, indifference or lack of concern for workers, though these no doubt play a role. Many of the problems are inherent in the scheme itself and in the unrealistic nature of the rules. The single most important reason is the total absence of a child-oriented or programme-centred approach. The lack of involvement of women workers, whether directly, or through financial contributions, or through unions indirectly is another major reason for the sorry state of affairs. A scheme which is intended to provide support services for women workers but which does not involve them at all is doomed to failure. At no level are women workers involved either physically, personally or financially, directly or indirectly. This in turn is interpreted as indifference by the managements, which are by and large male-oriented.

Third, placing the whole burden of responsibility, financial, legal, administrative, organizational and educational on the employers is unrealistic, to say the least. They are not prepared either by training, time, resources, or attitude to cope with the burden. A good case can be made out for *an independent agency to run the services, involving both employers and workers in various ways*,

*drawing financial support from both but functioning autonomously under the law.* Indeed, for some time this was the case, when the CMLWB or the Commissioner was in charge of all welfare programmes. This was in many ways a wise and healthy procedure, with potential for development. However, the role of the CMLWB was envisaged in this way only at the time when the coal industry was in private hands. On nationalization, it was assumed that its functions could be integrated with management. Its role has been slowly whittled away until today all welfare functions are expected to be carried out by the nationalized mines themselves. This, unfortunately, is hardly satisfactory. Any future attempt to restructure the programme must squarely face this issue of responsibility.

The case study of the coal mines clearly reveals that neither women nor children benefit from this kind of programme. What might be put in its place is an obvious question that arises. An immediate answer is that *preschool education or developmental services with a strong preschool component for all children of all miners, men and women, seems both a stronger need and a more plausible programme* than the existing one, while children of women working in the mines may need some additional attention.

## **B: CASE STUDY – CRECHES ON PLANTATIONS**

Day-care for the children of women workers on plantations is in many respects substantially different from that on mines, even though both are the outcome of the same rationale and legislation. A detailed study will be followed by a discussion of the reasons for the differences and the lessons this has for the future.

Though the Plantations Act came into being in 1951, there was a very slow development of facilities in the early years. A decade later, the Rege Committee pointed out that in Assam, creches were practically non-existent. In W. Bengal, in many places, only some kind of shelter under a tent was provided. In the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, the situation was somewhat better, with separate places designated for the creche and two of the women labourers, generally older women, deputed to look after the children. Nevertheless, the situation was unsatisfactory. The study of the Labour Bureau in 1961 found that though 91% of tea and 37% of rubber estates were statutorily obliged to provide creches; in reality only 74% of the former, and 33% of the latter were doing so. In 1962, a special Committee was appointed to review the provision of welfare amenities on plantations in Assam and a number of recommendations made. Progress in the next two decades was somewhat better, especially in those estates where the UPASI (United Planters Association of South India) had taken a lead.

Keeping all this in mind, NIPCCD undertook a study of plantation creches in 1980-81 to review the legal provisions and rules, assess the extent of the implementation, evaluate the services and make recommendations for improvement. The following is drawn from the findings and conclusions of this study.

### **Profile of Plantation Workers**

The Plantation industry is the second largest organized industry in the country. Further, of all industries it has the highest proportion of women in the labour force – 46% of the work force in tea, and 37% in rubber estates consist of adult women. The figures for employment are to be found in Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8 Employment of women in plantations -1981**

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No. of	Percentage of
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	women workers	work force
Coffee	6,746	16.12
Tea	372,295	46.14
Rubber	12,715	36.94
Others	8,951	50.36
Total	417,013	46.3

The reasons for this high employment of women are traditions connected with the nature of work. The picking of tea leaves, rubber tapping and curing, and to a lesser extent, the picking of coffee berries are skilled jobs calling for fine work, close attention, patience and stamina. Traditionally, women have been preferred for certain categories of jobs in these industries. The wages of men and women are equal.

However, only men are employed for certain other categories of jobs. In the sample taken for the study, the number of men and women were found to be roughly equal. Recruitment to plantations is on a family basis. As the plantations are often very large and far away from villages and other settlements, the usual practice has been to recruit whole families and settle them on the plantations. Housing has thus always been provided by the employers. Along with housing, certain other facilities such as medical facilities, elementary schools for the children, clothing and blankets or rugs, rations and some kind of entertainment are also usually provided to the “captive” labour on the estates. This kind of provision varies from estate to estate and also from one part of the country to another. The main clusters of plantations are found in the hilly areas of (a) the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and (b) in the eastern states of Assam, W. Bengal and Tripura.

It is thus natural to expect that in a typical labouring family on a plantation, both the husband and the wife of child-bearing age would be employed, though in some cases, women’s employment may be seasonal. It would also be natural to expect, particularly on estates where schools are provided, that children of school-going age would be attending school. Thus there would be a strong case for creches to take care of children below six, who would otherwise remain neglected, unless older members of the family were especially brought in by the labour to help care for the children.

### **The Case of Assam**

The NIPCCD study had originally intended to include some estates from the eastern and some from the southern states. However, a preliminary visit to Assam revealed that creche facilities did not exist at all, so Assam was dropped and only the three southern states were studied. The state of affairs in Assam which led to this decision is important and provides a classic example of the divergence in perceptions of labour and management.

The 1962 Committee had recommended two kinds of creches to be established on the tea estates of Assam – central creches for the children aged 3+ with arrangements for kindergarten education of some sort, and satellite creches spread over the work area for the infants below three, which would be convenient for mothers to visit for feeding during the working day. Numerous other recommendations including qualifications of staff and nature of equipment to be provided had also been made.

What NIPPCD found was that in practice, there was solely “legal” compliance. Everywhere the two different types of creches had been constructed, but nowhere were any children to be found in any of them. The creche rooms were invariably found locked, and when opened were either empty or found to be used as stores, with no sign of any equipment or material having been kept there which would be considered necessary for a creche. The rooms were also dirty and in obvious disuse. The satellite creches were just thatched roof areas with an abandoned look which were

sometimes used for storing the tea leaves plucked during the day. Creche attendants were either non-existent or were one of the labour women themselves. None of them had ever received any training.

NIPCCD estimated that there were between 500 and 1,000 children below six on each of these estates. In almost all of them, both husband and wife were working as labourers and during the peak season their older children were also employed as temporary hands. Rations and free medical services were provided but most of the labourers lived in huts built with their own efforts. Other facilities and amenities were also minimal. All the estates had a primary school and a medical officer, and belonged to well-known tea companies.

When questioned as to the reasons for the non-existence of the creches, the managements invariably replied that the labourers did not wish to send their children to the creche but preferred to keep them at home, and that there was no purpose in equipping or staffing the creches since there was no possibility of their use. They also mentioned the apathy, illiteracy, lack of awareness of the importance of education, indifference, and limited social education of the parents. However, the parents and labour leaders had a very different story to tell. They mentioned the lack of equipment and facilities, lack of trained workers, and unsuitable timings of the creche. They felt that the management was not interested in running the creche. Many of them said they would like to use a creche if properly run. This stark contrast illustrates what can happen when the law is unrealistic and enforcement measures poor. The officials concerned – labour inspectors, medical officers, the Secretary of the Assam Tea Association and the Labour Commissioner’s staff – all agreed that the legislation was inappropriate and that the answer did not lie in attempts to prosecute or compel the employers to obey the law. They all repeatedly mentioned the apathy and indifference of labourers towards the creches but none of them related it to the poor standard of care.

### Plantations in the South

The situation in the southern states however, was quite different and far more encouraging. NIPCCD studied 15 large estates covering the three states, five from each State, and found creches to be functioning in all of them, in several cases with more than one creche per estate. Regrettably, the study does not mention the figures relating to coverage, the number of children on each estate and the attendance of children or to estimate the coverage over the entire plantation sector in South India. However, it describes the creche facilities, and creche workers in depth, and also summarizes interviews with 150 women, mothers of children half of whom were using creches and half not and goes into the reason for use or non-use.

Table 2.9 below gives an idea of the total number of plantation estates in India. (Source NIPCCD Report.)

**Table 2.9 Total number of plantation estates in India**

	District	Tea	Coffee	Rubber	Total
KERALA	Alleppe	-	-	8	8
	Cannanore	12	51	208	271
	Ernakulam	-	4	122	126
	Idikki	128	19	66	213
	Kottayam	64	32	214	310
	Kozhikode	20	166	312	498
	Malappuram	1	-	92	93
	Palghat	5	25	275	305
	Quilon	37	3	128	168
	Trivandrum	5	-	74	79

Trichur	-	-	70	70
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Source: NIPCCD Report

KARNATAKA	District	Tea	Coffee	Rubber	Total
	Chikmagalur	12	700	12	724
	Coorg	1	429	3	433
	Hassan	-	61	-	61
	Mysore	-	-	10	10

TAMIL NADU	District	Tea	Coffee	Rubber	Total
	Coimbatore	31	12	1	44
	Kanya Kumari	6	4	101	111
	Nilgiris	434	97	-	531
	Salem	-	92	-	92
	Tirunelveli	2	2	-	4

ASSAM	District	Tea	Coffee	Rubber	Total
	Cachar	114	-	-	114
	Darrang	93	-	-	93
	Gaolpara	10	-	-	10
	Kamrup	180	-	-	180
	Lakhimpur	15	-	-	15
	Nowgong	23	-	-	23
	Sibsagar	236	-	-	236
	U. Mikir and north Cachar Hills	12	-	-	12

It is not clear how many of these were statutorily obliged to provide creches and how many were in fact doing so, and how many men and women altogether were employed on these estates. The statewise distribution of female plantation labour is given in Table 2.10.

**Table 2.10 Women labour in plantations – 1979**

	Men	Women	Total
Karnataka	36,027	N.A.	-
Kerala	53,672	54,248	107,920
Tamil Nadu	34,125	37,141	71,266
Assam	266,483	207,070	473,553
India	484,007	417,013	9,10,020

The Labour Bureau figures quoted earlier give the following number of creches for 1980-81.

Karnataka	144
Kerala	400
Tamil Nadu	184

In the 15 estates studied, 43 creches were being run. The daily employment picture is given in table 2.11.

**Table 2.11 Daily employment picture in Southern States**

States	Male			Female		
	Min.	Max.	Average	Min.	Max.	Average
Karnataka	49	116	88	87	120	96
Kerala	27	701	319	62	963	394
Tamil Nadu	88	785	341	167	1100	492

(Source: NIPCCD Report)

In the estates studied, the numbers of men and women workers were roughly equivalent. It is significant that educational levels were far higher than found either in the mining industry or in the Assam tea plantations. As far as educational levels of mothers were concerned, only 57.3 were illiterate (ranging from 92% in the Karnataka to 28% in Kerala), 8% were literate (0% in Tamil Nadu to 16% in Kerala), 22.60% had elementary education (0.00% in Karnataka to 36% in Tamil Nadu), and 6.6% had middle school education (0.00 in Karnataka to 12% in Kerala).

There were no sharp differences among mothers of children attending the creche and others. On the other hand, there is a sharp contrast as between States, with Kerala having the highest levels and Karnataka the lowest and Tamil Nadu falling somewhere in between on all scores. The educational level of fathers is also high. Only 32.4% were illiterate (ranging from 68% in Karnataka to 8% in Kerala), 4% were literate (range 0.00% in Tamil Nadu and Kerala to 16% in Karnataka), 24% had elementary education (8% in Karnataka to 33% in Tamil Nadu), and another 24% were educated up to middle school (ranging from 4% in Karnataka to 40% in Kerala), 87% of the families studied were nuclear. There were no significant differences in educational levels between users and non-users of the creches.

## **The Creches**

In the creches themselves, the buildings in most cases were found to be adequate and according to standards laid down, with playgrounds available for the older children, and sufficient washrooms and toilets (though not appropriate for the use of children). The location was such as to be accessible. Other equipment for cleaning, water, feeding, etc. was also adequate, but the two great gaps were in relation to equipment for infants below 2 years of age and even more so in relation to indoor and outdoor play equipment and materials. In all these matters, there was considerable variability as between estates, with the best situation in Kerala or Tamil Nadu and worst in Karnataka.

The average number of children per creche worker was 1:25. This is unsuitable if infants are taken into account, since younger children require more attention, hence more workers to children. The ratio between infants(-2) and older children (2-6) was generally found to be 1:3, but this would have been more in favour of infants if creches were run as they are meant to be. The worker/child ratio is therefore an important issue.

The timings of the creches were found to be suitable, opening half an hour before and closing half an hour after the mother's hours of work, though this made it burdensome for the creche staff. A feeding programme was present in all the units studied but varied from satisfactory in both quantity and quality in Kerala to inadequate and unsatisfactory in Karnataka. A health check-up was being conducted but records were unsatisfactory. Immunization and preventive health programmes were non-existent, and the approach to health was curative rather than preventive. The creche was



not being utilized as a delivery point for health services and health education in the way it could have been.

Of the creche workers studied, 80% had received some kind of training. However, half of them had balsevika training, which equips them to conduct preschool education with 3-6 years-olds rather than function as day-care workers or handle infants, while the others had only undergone a short course for creche attendants conducted by UPASI. In Karnataka, only one of the workers was trained. Each creche worker was assisted by a helper, known as ayah, who performed most of the manual tasks connected with feeding and cleaning. Creche workers were paid at the same rates as the female labour. The way the creche workers viewed their roles throws light on the functioning of the creches. Most of them saw their primary tasks, in addition to cleaning and feeding of children, as imparting some sort of education, as conceived by them, to children aged 3-6. On examination, this turned out to be a rather formal idea of teaching the three Rs, backed up by teaching of songs, rhymes, games and stories. The programme was both didactic and formal.

The opinions of users and non-users corroborate this picture. Of reasons given by mothers of users for sending their children to the creche, the most frequent was the absence of anyone at home to look after the children, but the second most frequent reason was that children learned to read and write. Mothers also felt that the main benefits for children were learning to be neat and clean, being socialized properly and getting nutritious food, while complaints were usually about the quantity and quality of food served. On the other hand, the mothers of non-users mentioned their lack of trust in the creche worker and her ability to handle young children, the lack of equipment, facilities and food (especially in Karnataka), unsuitable location and untrained creche workers as reasons for not sending their children to the creches.

The overall picture which emerges is that of functioning creches, inadequate in coverage, and varying greatly in quality of services, with Karnataka as the most backward and Kerala as the most satisfactory. Taking into account the programme, equipment, ratio of infants to older children, etc. the creches were largely functioning as balwadis or nursery schools for the 3-6 age group, providing a formal kind of education conceived as an introduction to the three Rs. Ironically, this feature is perceived by parents as most positive. The lack of training of creche workers and their orientation to their tasks, as well as the absence of any form of professional monitoring, guidance or supervision emerge as two important lacunae. Various loopholes in the law, briefly analyzed in the study, and the lack of effective machinery for enforcement are other weakness.

## **Labour and Management**

The role and attitude of labour unions and managements needs comment. As far as labour unions are concerned, the study mentions that in most of the estates surveyed there was more than one union and that almost all the unions were linked to some political party. However, it does not mention the extent of membership, the involvement of women workers or the differences as between unions in membership and female involvement. Thirty labour leaders were interviewed, all men. All of them were aware of the existence and functioning of creches and had clear views about their objectives. But none of them mentioned the maintenance or improvement of creches as one of the major objectives of the unions, nor had they ever taken it up as an issue with managements. The unions in Kerala saw their major role in relation to creches as being watchdogs over management, while in Karnataka, they considered it to be to educate the parents about the various services and benefits. Tamil Nadu union leaders mentioned both. A few said unions had no role to play in this matter. Most of the union leaders took interest in the creches, visited them regularly, and were especially concerned about supervising the feeding programme. Thus it is clear that labour unions, though male-dominated, take interest in the welfare of children and the maintenance of services, but

do not consider it a primary objective or a cause for militant action. Union leaders were also not as well informed about the legal provisions and facilities connected with the creche as they were about other matters of more immediate concern to them. Significantly, unions in Kerala took more interest in the children's welfare activities than those in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

As regards the management, though all the managers were aware of the statutory obligation, and were of the opinion that statutory provisions were necessary, most were only vaguely aware of the detailed provision of the law. Those who knew more about the details were also able to point out some defects and loopholes in the law as perceived by them and commented adversely on the lack of machinery for implementation, supervision and guidance. Nevertheless, in all the estates studied, selected by a random sampling procedure, creches were functioning, though inadequate in quality and less than satisfactory in quality.

Importantly, quality was significantly better in those estates where the comprehensive labour welfare scheme launched by the UPASI was in operation. UPASI has, in this scheme, introduced the concept of link worker, a voluntary community-based health worker. The link worker is expected to disseminate health information, motivate families towards better health practices, monitor health problems and communicate with the health authorities. Wherever this scheme was in operation, greater health awareness was observed. But linkages need to be established between this health worker and the creches. The creches can be used far more effectively for community health work. Unfortunately, in the creches, community contact, parent education and preventive health work were lacking, not being perceived as functions of the creche by any of the groups concerned – workers, creche staff, unions or management. The weak relationship with mothers is a continuing irony in a programme ostensibly designed to serve women.

In its concluding chapter, the study has made a number of useful recommendations. These relate to broader coverage and *the need for "feeder" or satellite creches for infants at suitable locations, a higher worker / child ratio especially in relation to extending care for infants, special training for creche workers and better emoluments for them, improved equipment and facilities particularly in relation to play and developmental activities, improvement in the nutrition and health programme particularly in relation to preventive health, improved community contact, parent education and linkages with other welfare schemes, the need for a professionally oriented cadre of "Welfare Officers" to supervise and guide the programme, changes required in the legislation and greater and more aware involvement on the part of both management and labour unions.*

## COMPARISON AND CONCLUSIONS

What insights can be drawn from a comparison of the two case studies dealing with creches in the mining industry and on plantations? What are the differences and the similarities?

To start with differences, clearly there is a marked difference in the extent and quality of services available and in their utilization by the labour, dramatically in favour of plantations. Undoubtedly, the quality of programme in plantations, though variable and ranging from good to indifferent is on the whole superior to that in mines, and the rate of utilization is higher. Unfortunately, since figures of coverage and utilization rate for plantations are not available, this can only be an estimate from other indicators.

Part of the difference can be attributed to differences in the nature of the two industries and yet another part to regional disparities. In the coal mines, women form a mere 10% of the work force; they are steadily declining proportion and there is an expressed policy to phase women labour out of the coal mines altogether. On the other hand, in the plantations women form nearly half the work force, married couples are regularly engaged and creches are clearly more important to keep the labour satisfied. Managements in the later case would undoubtedly have more reason to be concerned about women's welfare and provide whatever is deemed necessary. It is not simply then

a case of a more enlightened management in the plantations. The conditions of the one industry exert pressure on the management in ways which are lacking in the other.

On the other hand, the questions of regional disparities explain why the creches in the Assam plantations are far worse than those in the coal mines. The higher level of education in the southern States as compared to the coal belt (58% female illiteracy in the southern plantations as against 97% in the coal mines); the higher degree of political consciousness especially in Kerala (note the differences between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala even within the plantation sector); the size, political alignment and style of the labour unions – all reflect the regional differences. This would explain why in these matters Assam has to be lumped with coal mines (in the North-East) rather than with plantations (in the south). A large number of unions do exist in the coal mines; but intense inter-union rivalry and conflict have characterized these unions for many years. Further, they have little interest in women, the workers as a whole are less educated (both men and women), and union leaders have been preoccupied with different issues. On the other hand, the unions in Kerala (which has the highest level of education among workers, both male and female), have a strong militant left-wing tradition and / have shown greater concern for both workers' education and workers' welfare.

Another interesting regional difference is in the matter of girls' schooling, which can be seen as both cause and effect. On the one hand, the high level of enrolment of girls in elementary schools in the south, especially in Kerala, may mean that girls are not available as infant caretakers and that there is hence a greater pressure on employers to provide creches, and greater utilization of creches when available. With the low female enrolment characteristic of the North and North East, and the non-availability or poor quality of schooling, more girls may be around in Assam and Bihar to take care of the babies. But it could also be partly a result. Perhaps, the very availability of creches in Kerala enables the daughters of plantation workers to go to elementary school.

Other differences and contributing causes: On the plantation the families live on the work site in large clusters, thus making it more necessary for management as well as more convenient to provide services and to be visibly serving the entire family. The greater availability of trained creche workers, of whatever sort, in the southern States because of higher education and mobility of women even in rural areas; the perception of the creche as a kind of school or preschool by the parents, encourages them to send children there. This perception rests on the possibility of the creche worker offering some sort of educational programme, however inadequate it might seem by professional standards. This last is also both a cause and effect. The expectation that the creche will function like a school makes it a school, while the fact that it is like a school supports parental expectations and affects attendance. The two reinforce each other.

It would therefore seem that slight though the differences are in the larger view, the plantation creches do in many respects have an edge over those in coal mines, and for distinct reasons. The plantations seem a little way nearer the threefold objectives defined in the first chapter, namely, to provide a service for working mothers, to provide for the development of young children and to enable girls to attend school.

An irony of the contrast between creches on plantations and mines is that it exposes the limitations of the law linking provisions to the number of workers. Creches are legally mandatory only on plantations employing 50 or more workers, thus discriminating against women employed in smaller units, while encouraging employers to avoid provision by various devices. The Mines Act, however, insists on a creche even if only one woman is employed and thus, in theory at least, defeats the would-be evader. Yet the reality is that this has been made a mockery of, while the services on plantations, where they exist, are superior.

Yet the differences are of degree only; the commonalities remain. The two represent the best and worst within the given framework, but the best is still very far from what could be defined as ideal or even optimal. The differences between the best and worst pale into insignificance when considered against a standard derived from principles. Clearly, even for the very limited numbers of

women who can be categorized as “organized labour employed in numbers of at least 50” the situation is discouraging. Coverage is meagre; programme quality is poor; utilization is low. All three aspects are closely interrelated as cause and effect. And this is without attempting to answer the questions: What happens to the children in units where less than 50 women are employed? How many women fall into the latter category rather than the first? How many children are affected?

The fundamental weaknesses are three: the whole exercise has been conceived in a perspective in which the child as the focus is sadly missing; second, the law is unimaginative, narrow and unrealistic; third, the responsibility has been placed incorrectly on employers. From these three all else follows. Because the perspective is not child-oriented, programme quality is poor and hence the need for training has not been felt, a training cadre has failed to emerge, and there has been no professional monitoring, supervision, or guidance. Because the law is inadequate, there has been no emphasis on programme quality and enforcement, such as it is, gets only nominal compliance. Employers are ill-fitted to cater to the needs of children, having neither motivation, skills nor resources to do so.

Recommendations for the future therefore must begin with the realization that the “woman-oriented” approach needs to be replaced with a “child-oriented” perspective from which all else flows. It is reasonable to say that *all* young children of plantation workers, mine workers and factory workers and other workers in the organized sector (and not merely the children of women workers) need attention to health and nutrition and opportunities for social, intellectual and emotional development, while those of working mothers need, in addition, some custodial care. This would suggest that *the present model be replaced by services which are inclusive (in the sense of non-discriminatory) as well as more flexible – providing basic developmental services of health, nutrition and child education to all children, with a variety of arrangements for day-care for those who need it.* An independent agency to run such child services with built-in safeguards to serve the needs of working mothers as well as built-in provision to ensure the support and financial contribution of employers, where they exist, would lead to a better fulfillment of the objectives of serving women, children and girls. Before defining in depth such services it is necessary to look at the record of the voluntary sector.

*Appendix*

## **Mines Creche Rules, 1966**

### 1. Short title and application:

- (1) These rules may be called the Mines Creche Rules, 1966.
- (2) They shall apply to all coal mines and metalliferous mines to which the Mines Act, 1952 applies.

### 2. Definitions: In these rules, unless the context otherwise requires,

- (a) “competent authority” means, in respect of coal mines, the Coal Mines Welfare Commissioner and, in respect of metalliferous mines, the Chief Inspector of Mines, and includes any person authorized in writing in this behalf by the said Welfare Commissioner in the case of coal mines or by the Chief Inspector in the case of metalliferous mines to perform all or any of the functions of a competent authority under these rules;
- (b) “creche” means a room or rooms with ancillary accommodation reserved for the use of children under six years of age, of women employed in a mine;

- (c) "Medical Officer-in-charge" means a qualified medical practitioner employed, whether on a whole-time or part-time basis, by the owner of a mine to perform the duties assigned to such officer by these rules.

3. Provision of creches:

- (1) Save as otherwise provided in this rule, the owner, agent or manager of every mine (hereafter in this rule referred to as the said person) wherein any women are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months, shall within such period as may be specified by the component authority, construct thereat a creche in accordance with the standards prescribed under rule 4:

Provided that where the competent authority is of opinion the situation, nature and extent of the workings or other places where women are employed are such as to render compliance with provisions of these rules not reasonably practicable, the competent authority may by order in writing exempt the said person from the provisions of these rules for such period as may be specified in the order, subject to the condition that the competent authority may require the provision and maintenance of a suitable room or rooms with an attendant and necessary equipment at or near any working place or part of the mine.

Provided further that if the competent authority is satisfied that by reason of shortage of building material or of labour, the said person is unable to provide within the stipulated period a creche in accordance with the specifications in these rules, that authority may approve of the erection of a temporary structure to be replaced by a permanent structure within such time as he may prescribe.

- (2) If the competent authority is of opinion that the conditions in any mine or part thereof are such as to render compliance with the said rule unnecessary, he may by order in writing and subject to such conditions as he may specify therein exempt the mine from the provision of a creche.
- (3) If in any case the competent authority is satisfied that no inconvenience will be caused to the employees concerned if a single creche is provided to serve neighboring mines, he may authorize by order in writing the owners, agents or managers of such mines to provide jointly a single creche and on such conditions as he may specify in the order.
- (4) On the production of a certificate from the Chief Inspector of Mines that the productive capacity of a mine will be exhausted within three years from the date of the certificate, the competent authority may on condition that the said person shall provide a temporary structure to serve the purpose of a creche and on such other conditions as the competent authority deems fit, grant by order in writing exemption from the construction of a creche in accordance with these rules.
- (5) Subject to such relaxations as may be considered necessary by the competent authority the provisions of rules 5 to 13 shall also apply to every room or rooms provided under the first proviso to sub-rule (1) and to every temporary structure provided under the second proviso of sub-rule (1) and under sub-rule (4).

4. Standards for creches:

- (1) There shall be four types of creches according to the number of women employed, namely Type 'A', Type 'B', Type 'C' and Type 'D'.
- (2) The plinth areas of different types of creches and the type of creche which shall be provided shall be as specified in Schedule 1.
- (3) Every creche shall conform to the following standards:
- (i) It shall be contained in one building, built of brick and mortar, adequately lighted and properly ventilated and affording effective protection from all kinds of weather: Provided that, with the previous permission in writing of the competent

authority, it may be built of any other material which the said authority may approve.

- (ii) It shall be constructed on a suitable site selected by the mine management with the previous approval of the competent authority.
- (iii) The flooring shall be of cement or stone and the ceiling shall not be less than 4 meters high from the floor.
- (iv) The interior walls shall be lime-washed once in six months and the wood-work shall be painted or varnished once in every three years.
- (v) It shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition to the satisfaction of the inspection staff

Provided that the competent authority may permit variations in the standards specified in clauses (iii) and (iv) having regard to local conditions.

5. Provision of latrines:

- (i) There shall be provided one latrine in each 'A', 'B' and 'C' types of creches and two latrines in each 'D' type of creche:

Provided that a separate latrine or commode shall also be provided in all types of creches, wherever considered necessary by the competent authority, for the use of children affected by any infectious disease.

(2) The latrines shall be kept in a sanitary condition to the satisfaction of the inspecting staff.

(3) The competent authority may permit variations in the standards specified in sub-rule (1) having regard to local conditions.

6. Provision of bathroom:

(1) In every creche there shall be provided a closed bathroom with separate space for washing and drying soiled clothes or bed linen. The bathroom shall be equipped either with a sink or masonry tubs and the quantity of water to be provided shall be on a scale of at least 15 litres per child attending the creche.

(2) The competent authority may permit variations in the standards specified in sub-rule (1) having regard to local conditions.

7. Amenities to be provided at creches:

(1) Medicines for first aid, cradles, cots, beds, linen, bedding, feeding bottles, cooking utensils, toys, furniture and other equipment for the use of children shall be maintained at each creche on the scale specified in Schedule II.

(2) A supply of cool and wholesome drinking water shall be provided for each creche on a scale of at least two litres per child attending the creche.

(3) Milk and diet of children attending creches and clean clothes for the creche staff shall be supplied on the scale specified in schedule III.

(4) The competent authority may permit variations in the standards envisaged in sub-rules (1), (2) and (3) if considered necessary.

8. Time when creches shall be kept open: The creche shall remain open at all times, both by day and by night when women employees are working at the mine and it shall be properly lighted at night.

9. Use of the creche: The use of the creche shall be restricted to children, their attendants, the supervisory staff and such other persons as may be related to or concerned with children in the creche.
10. Medical arrangements:
- (1) A medical examination of the children attending the creche shall be made every month by a qualified medical practitioner and a record of such examinations shall be maintained in Form A.
  - (2) A medical examination of the nursing mothers attending the creche shall be made once in every two months by a qualified medical practitioner, preferably a woman. When the examination is conducted by a male doctor, it shall be made in the presence of the creche nurse. Records of such examination shall be maintained in Form B.
  - (3) The Medical Officer-in-Charge of the mine, or the Welfare Officer of the mine, shall be responsible for the general supervision of the creche.
11. Provision of Staff:
- (1) The owner, agent or manager of a mine shall employ, at every creche, staff on the scale prescribed in Schedule IV; Provided that only such women as have successfully undergone training as a creche nurse at an institution approved by the Central Government shall be eligible for appointment as a creche –in-charge:
- Provided further that in the case of a woman in employment on the 1<sup>st</sup> June 1963 as creche-in-charge in a mine, this provision may be relaxed with the approval of the competent authority subject to such conditions as may be specified.
- (2) Where by reason of temporary absence, illness, or any other similar cause, the full time creche-in-charge is unable to perform her duties, the owner, agent or manager of the mine shall authorise in writing any one whom he considers competent to act in her place:
- Provided that no such authorisation shall have effect for a period of more than thirty days except with the previous consent of the competent authority.
- (3) The creche-in-charge shall ensure that the creche is kept in a clean and sanitary condition, that all children attending it are properly looked after, washed and fed in accordance with the provisions of these rules and that they and the nursing mothers are taught clean and healthy habits.
12. Maintenance of records:
- (1) A register giving particulars of children attending a creche, shall be maintained in Form C.
  - (2) A register of complaints shall be maintained for inspection by the Medical Officer-in-charge and by the management of the mine.
13. Inspection of creche – A creche may be inspected at any time by the competent authority or by an officer authorized by the said authority for the purpose.
14. Repeal – The Mines Creche Rules, 1959 are hereby repealed except as respects things done or omitted to be done before such repeal.

**FORM A**  
[See Rule 10(1)]

*Form for recording the results of the medical examination of children attending creches.*  
Date, month and year of examination.....

Serial Number	Name of child	Age (Date of birth if	Mother's name and occupation	Weight of child on the date of	Weight on the date of	Disease or abnormality found,	Treatment suggested, if any	Remarks
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available) last examination if any examination

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
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(signature of the qualified medical practitioner)

**FORM B**

[See Rule 10(2)]

*Form for recording the results of the medical examination of the nursing mothers*

Date, month and year of examination.....

Serial Number	Name of woman and occupation	Age	Weight on the date of last examination	Weight on the date of examination	Disease or abnormality found, if any	Treatment Suggested, if any	Remarks
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(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
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(signature of the qualified medical practitioner)

**FORM C**

[See Rule 12(1)]

*Form for recording the particulars of the children attending the creche*

Name of Mine.....

Month and year .....

Serial Number	Date of admission	Name of child with mother's full name and Occupation	Sex	Age	Date of the month (attendance to be marked each day)	Remarks
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(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
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**SCHEDULE 1**

[ See Rule 4 (1)]

*Standards for creches*

Number of women currently employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months whichever is greater

Type of creche

Coal mines	Metalliferous Mines	Notations	Minimum plinth area (in square metres)
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10 or less	30 or less	A type	00.5
11-50	31-100	B type	90.0



51-100	101-200	C type	140.0
More than 100	More than 200	D type	325.0

**SCHEDULE II**  
[See Rule 7(1)]  
*Equipment and medicines for first aid in creches*

Description of equipment, First Aid articles, etc. (1)	A type creche (2)	B type creche (3)	C type creche (4)	D type creche (5)
<b>1. Dormitory</b>				
1. Cots	2	6	9	15
2. Cradles with railing	2	4	6	10
<b>2. Sick Room</b>				
1. Cots	-	1	1	2
2. Chamber pot	1	1	1	1
<b>3. Montessori Room</b>				
1. Benches	-	-		2
2. Desks (long)	-	-		2
3. Chair	-	-		1
4. Almirah	-	-		1
5. Table	-	-		1
				and usual montessori apparatus.)
<b>4. Store</b>				
1. Dustbin	1	1	1	1
2. weighing machine (for infants)	-	1	1	1
3. Enamel jugs	1	1	1	2
<b>5. Bath</b>				
1. Bath tubs	-	1	1	2
2. Buckets	1	2	2	3
3. Enamel jugs	-	1	1	2
4. Aluminium mugs	1	1	2	3
5. Towelrack	-	1	1	1
6. Soaps		Two cakes of soap per month per child		
7. Soap dishes	1	2	3	4
6. Infant combs	3	10	15	20
<b>6. Creche attendant</b>				
1. Writing Table	1	1	1	1
2. Chairs	1	1	2	2
3. Stool	1	1	1	1

4. Pens, ink, etc.		As specified by the competent or inspecting authority.		
5. Waste paper basket	1	1	1	1
6. Cupboard	1	1	1	1
7. Clock	1	1	1	1

#### 7. Dining

1. Enamel cups or mugs	6	15	20	50
2. Enamel plates	6	15	30	50
3. Feeding bottles	3	4	6	10
4. Spoons	5	10	15	20

#### 8. Kitchen

1. Kettles	1	2	3	4
2. Frying pans	1	1	1	2
3. Milk containers	1	1	2	2
4. Buckets	2	2	2	2
5. Tumblers	2	2	2	2
6. Spoons (Big)	2	2	3	4
7. Knife	1	1	1	1
8. Meat safe	-	1	1	1
9. Saucepans	1	1	2	3

#### 9. Linen

1. Bedsheets	4	15	25	40
2. Pillows	4	10	15	25
3. pillow cases	4	15	25	40
4. Towels	3	8	12	15
5. Shirts	10	20	40	50
6. Knickers	10	20	40	50
7. Mosquito nets	-	8	12	15
8. Blankets	4	10	15	25
9. Mackintosh	4	10	15	25
10. Bed size durries	1	2	3	4

#### 10. First aid equipment and medicines

	A type	B, C and D types
1. Ounce measure	1	1
2. Throat sptula	-	1
3. Eye dropper	1	1
4. Thermometer	1	1
5. Kidney dish	1	1
6. Rectangular tray	-	1
7. Scissors	1	1
8. Tincture iodine	0.5 hectogram	1 hectogram
9. Tincture benzoine	0.5 „	1 „
10. Boric acid	1.0 „	2.0 „
11. Bandage cloth	1 metre	2 metres
12. Cotton wool absorbent	0.5 kilogram	0.5 kilogram
13. Gauze plain	1 metre	2 metres
14. Dettol	0.5 hectogram	1 hectogram
15. Adhesive plaster	1 spool	1 spool

#### 11. Miscellaneous

( for every type of creche)

1. Brooms or scrubbing brushes      2
2. Dusters                                      2
3. Toys                                      Adequate number of toys as specified by the competent or inspecting authority
4. Electric lights                      As required by the competent or inspecting authority.
5. Torch and lantern                  One each

**SCHEDULE III**  
[ See Rule 7(3)]

Diet, clothing and other amenties

1. Diet

Age group of children	Time, measure and nature of food		
	9 A.M	12 Noon	3.30 P.M.
1. 6 weeks to 6 months	0.25 litre Milk	0.25 litre milk	0.25 litre milk
2. 6 months to 1 year	-do-	0.25 litre milk with suji	0.50 litre milk
3. 1 year to 2½ years	0.25 litre milk with suji or porridge or puffed rice (muri)	Rice, vegetables	0.25 litre milk with one chapati & gur or khir with gur (pudding)
4. 2½ years to 6 years	0.25 litre milk, puffed rice with gur	60 grams minimum rice with vegetables or meat curry	0.25 litre milk with chapati

1. Children who are underweight and unhealthy or who are found to be suffering from marasmus and rickets should be given one quarter-boiled egg in addition to the diet prescribed above.
2. Seasonal green vegetables both raw and cooked should be provided each day for supplying sufficient vitamins.
3. If the competent or inspecting authority is satisfied that milk is not available for any reason, then the said authority may allow Nespray or Glaxo powdered milk prepared according to the directions. In the alternative the said authority may also allow the use of germinated grain in place of milk for children of the age group of 2½ years to 6 years. The quantity of germinated grain as a substitute for milk should be 0.1 kilogram for 0.25 litre of milk.

2. Uniforms for creche staff

1. Creche in-charge
  1. Four cotton white sarees with red borders.
  2. Four white blouses of long cloth.
  3. Four white petticoats of long cloth.
2. Ayah
  1. Four cotton white sarees with black

borders.

2. Four white blouses of long cloth.
3. Four white petticoats of long cloth.
4. Six white aprons of long cloth.

3. Cook

1. Six white aprons of long cloth.
  2. Six white caps of long cloth.
- 

**SCHEDULE IV**  
[See Rule 11(1)]  
Staff in creches

Designation	A type Crèche	B type creche	C type creche	D type creche
1. Creche in-charge	1	1	1	1
2. Ayah	1	1	1	2
	Ayah-cum- cook	Ayah-cum- cook		
3. Woman-cook	-	-	1	1
4. Sweepers	1	1	1	1
		(part-time)		

Note: - Staff is to be engaged whole-time unless otherwise indicated.

Insert Picture

## **An Overview**

Till recently, the voluntary sector in child care was seen as a response to the needs of children, and concerned itself only indirectly with women. What facilities developed from a predominantly child-oriented perspective have achieved for children, women and girls will now be examined.

## **Early Ventures in Child Education**

Before 1947, provision for the young child was confined to the private sector and aimed at children aged 3-6. The first kindergarten school in India was set up in 1879, and the first organized training programme in 1924. Outstanding educators like Gijubhai Badheka, Tarabai Modak, S.N. Namle, Dr. G. S. Arundale and Rukmini Arundale included the young child in their concerns. This pioneering efforts helped up a tradition of preschool education, which was however, geographically confined to the west and south of the country, and sociologically to the more affluent sections in the urban centres of population. The movement received further impetus with the arrival and stay in India during the war years of Madame Maria Montessori. Since that time, the Association Montessori Internationale has been established in India and has been conducting regular training courses and propagating the Montessori philosophy of education.

Throughout this period, the emphasis was on the social, intellectual and mental development of the child aged 3-6, and based on the theories of Western educationists like Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Montessori herself. The Report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on Post-War Educational Development in India (1944), known as the Sargent Report, was the first official document to take cognisance of the preschool child. Recognizing the significance of this vital period of life the Report called for the widespread adoption of a system of preprimary or nursery education. However, this recommendation was not to be acted upon for many years, and similar recommendations were made by the Kothari Commission in 1966.

Meanwhile, Tarabai Modak, one of the founders of the Nutan Bal Shikshan Sangh, was growing increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations of work in education in urban Bombay. In a bold step, she moved in 1946 to Kosbad Hill, a tiny hamlet in the midst of a forested tribal area in the coastal hinterland of Bombay, and there began her educational experiments with the children of the poverty-stricken tribals. The most well-known of these was the Meadow School which embodied the non-formal approach, in which the teacher went to the meadows where the young tribal boys were busy grazing and tending their animals, and taught them basic literacy, using the natural outdoor environment for all the teaching aids and materials required. "Sermons in stones and books in the running brooks" aptly describe this experiment which later closed when regular elementary schools were set up. Tarabai also developed the "balwadi" or children's garden (a term which has now passed into everyday usage in India) for the 3-6 year olds in the same setting.

She soon realized the need for creches or infant care to relieve the hard-working tribal women, most of whom sought work as daily labourers in the orchards around Dahanu, turning their young daughters into child caretakers. Thus was born the "vikaswadi", or development garden, in which the infant, the preschooler and the older children of elementary school age were catered for under the same roof. To meet the needs of those who could not come to a

central place, she pioneered the “anganwadi” or courtyard centre. Teachers carrying a small educational kit walked miles to set up simple play activities for a few hours each day in an “angan” in the tiny hamlets around Kosbad Hill. Using the simplest of settings, close to the conditions of the people she worked for, and with the cheapest and most abundant of locally available materials, Tarabai made history in several directions. She was the first to move out of the towns, to think of the needs of the rural poor, and to apply systematic educational thought to solving the problems she perceived. Basing herself firmly on the Montessori approach, she nevertheless initiated the process of Indianization.

The vikaswadi continues to this day as a model for a low-cost integrated approach to the education of the poor. Yet the experiment has had only limited influence outside the immediate region, for a variety of reasons. In later years financial pressures forced Tarabai and her devoted helper Anutai Wagh to accept Government assistance for training, thereby tying them down to the conventional training models visualized by the authorities, like the 11-month Balasevika Training Course, and the Maharashtra Government’s two-year integrated preprimary and primary training course. Thus began the dilution of the basic concepts underlying the original work at Gram Balak Shiksha Kendra which was based on the principles of responding to the needs, the situation and the environment of the child rather predetermined concepts. The strength of the voluntary agency as an innovator and model for others to follow, was thus partially eroded.

On the Governmental side, a major step was the setting up of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1953, with the objective of “giving assistance to voluntary social welfare organizations throughout the country to maintain and develop their programmes”. The Board’s activities ranged over the whole field of what was then seen as social welfare – including women, children, handicapped, aged and infirm, tribals – but from the beginning the Board placed considerable emphasis on programmes for the preschool child. It initiated and sponsored the nation-wide development of balwadis, both directly through its schemes like the Family and Child Welfare Projects, Integrated Preschool Projects and Welfare Extension Projects, and through financial assistance to voluntary agencies. Several other government departments – Women’s Welfare, Labour Welfare, Tribal Welfare, Community Development, etc. – have developed balwadis as part of their programmes. Some local authorities and municipal governments also began to move in this direction during the sixties. Outstanding among these was the Delhi Municipal Corporation which initiated a large programme of preschool education attached to its primary school in 1969.

### **Rationale of Post-Independence Child Welfare**

CSWB programmes were essentially conceived and developed from an urban middle class perspective and applied to the whole country. The preschool programme was intended for 3-6 year olds – there was little awareness of the needs of the younger ones. Women were seen essentially as housewives and mothers. Hence a half-day programme for the children was perceived as quite adequate. Other welfare and training programmes for rural women also proceeded from the assumption that women’s main (or even sole) role was as housekeeper, wife, mother and home-maker. Training was for conventional sewing, tailoring and embroidery, other household skills and crafts, cookery, preserving and pickling foods, improved household gadgets and measures to reduce household drudgery. There was little intent to make women productive or capable of earning their own living, so income generation skills were, if ever introduced, hardly taught seriously even in areas like animal care or dairying where women have always played a major role. This approach was carried over even to conventional skills. Though lakhs, perhaps millions of rural women have attended the tailoring and embroidery

classes sponsored by the CSWB in the last three decades, there are records of few women having become professional tailors. Training was seen as a way of saving the time, money and scarce resources of housewives or of spending their time usefully, it being assumed that rural women, like urban middle class women, had plenty of afternoon time to spare.

The same standpoint assumed that women were the major caretakers of children up to the age of school entry, that all children entered and stayed in school after that age, and that hence women needed at best friendly advice on what used to be termed “mothercraft”. It was the beginning of the era of Home Science, with college educated Home Science graduates teaching home management and mother craft to the rural poor. The question of the resources available to poor women in the rural areas to practise mothercraft and home management was not taken up. Awareness of poverty and of rural realities was still below the surface, or seen in terms of “improving the poor”.

The composition of various State Social Welfare Boards sufficiently explains this state of affairs. Most of the members were recruited from the ranks of the old-style voluntary “social workers” – women of conscience, education and ability belonging to the affluent sector, not yet professionalized and into the job market, and hence available for honorary work. Many had a political background and a history of participation in the freedom movement, almost all were concerned with some charitable cause or the other. At a time when social welfare was based on “charity” rather than development, it was natural that programmes were developed by this group, many of whom were dynamic, dedicated, even visionary by their own standards, yet limited by their class background and with little understanding of the poor.

The first schools of Social Work, patterned on the British model, appeared only in the late fifties. The CSWB set up its own training programmes at village level to train multi-purpose workers, whose duties included care of the preschool child. In 1961, the newly-formed Indian Council of Child Welfare launched the first Bal Sevika Training programme with two centres (now expanded to 16). This was the first attempt to train child welfare workers and represents a major landmark. However, this emphasis on training was not consistently sustained in later years. The training itself was expected to prepare multi-purpose workers who would deal not only with the preschool child, but also conduct recreation programmes for older children, work with handicapped, advise and assist parents, etc. This broad range of functions naturally reduced the attention that could be given exclusively to the young child and emphasis on infants was very low in this training.

### **Achievements of Two Decades**

At the end of the sixties and in the early seventies, there was a network of balwadis around the country. How many, and where? And, to whom did they cater? What services did they provide? Did they help working women? Estimates of how many vary from 6,000 at the lower limit to 12,000 at the upper. There is still considerable vagueness on this score, because of non-reporting in some instances and duplication in some others. In 1970, CSWB was assisting or directly running about 6,500 balwadis. In addition, there were balwadis or very similar child education centres run under the auspices of various Ministries, Departments, State Governments, local and municipal authorities. There were also about 1,200 preprimary schools recognized and aided by the Ministry of Education, performing similar functions. Many of these institutions may have differed in their approaches and methods, but could be broadly grouped under preschool education for the 3-6 year olds. At about this time, the estimated number of preprimary/nursery/Montessori/Kindergarten schools in the private sector, unaided, stood at about 10,000. However, as no census or survey exists of these, it is difficult to be sure of the

numbers. Altogether about 20,000-25,000 centres may have existed, catering to 6-7 lakh children.

Although the scheme of balwadis was intended to promote child education in the rural areas, many of the centres were located in urban or semi-urban areas. Also the private sector was concentrated almost entirely in the larger urban conglomerates, especially the major metropolitan areas.

It again appears, from location as well as the other indicators, that by and large the balwadis catered to the more affluent even in rural areas, and to the upper castes. An evaluation of the national programme of balwadis (unpublished) conducted by NIPCCD in 1976 states that though intended to benefit the weaker sections of the community, the dominant castes and other socially and economically privileged groups tended to use the facilities the most. Children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes were found to be few. Further, most of the balwadis were located in the "mohallas" of the privileged classes, far from the Harijan "mohallas". As the majority of working women in the rural areas would belong to the Scheduled Castes, the balwadis did not benefit them. No particular efforts were made to admit children belonging to under-privileged groups or to working mothers. Further, a survey of parental attitudes showed that those belonging to the lower socio-economic groups viewed the balwadis as a programme for the privileged classes. It must, however, be stated that only 150 balwadis scattered over six states were studied, and the methodology of the study has numerous weaknesses. Hence the findings may not be regarded as conclusive but do give some indication of trends which are also supported by the views of observers. It is significant that the work status of mothers or the need for day-care is not even mentioned in studies prior to this period.

The quality of programme in the balwadis at this time needs special comment in view of the fact that it was based on a child-oriented approach. How well did balwadis cater to needs of children? The reports and views of informed observers corroborate the picture drawn up by the NIPCCD study mentioned earlier. Play space was not available in one-third of the balwadis studied, and inadequate in another one-third. Facilities for indoor play were found in all, with formal teaching playing a big part. 90% had alphabet and number teaching and story telling as main activities, while 70% mentioned nature study. Creative activities were largely lacking with little flexibility in routines or use of equipment. Play equipment and materials were few and far between; where they existed they were often in a state of disrepair, broken or locked up and unused. Low-cost or no-cost materials like sand, clay and water were found in only 28% of the balwadis. Only half of the balwadis had furniture or equipment for storage; only one-seventh of balsevikas when asked reported that they had sufficient equipment to carry out the activities as they conceived them.

Thus, though the balwadis were set up from the beginning to cater primarily to the social, emotional, and intellectual development of children aged 3-6, they were lacking in equipment, orientation and training of the staff, space and materials to carry out even this objective properly. At the same time, attention to health was poor. There were few places in which medical checks were regular or records maintained properly. Immunization was unsatisfactory almost everywhere and this was put down to lack of cooperation by local health authorities or shortage of vaccines or both, by the balsevikas.

For obvious reasons, the feeding programme always ran better. Parents as well as local authorities took interest in it, viewing it as the most obvious advantage of their balwadis, and incentive to attend. Even so, the diet provided was often limited or unbalanced in many respects and the educational value of the programme was rarely fully realized. Nutrition education to mothers, for instance, was reported in only 10-30% of cases. Funding showed a similar pattern. 30-50% of the expenditure was on salaries and another 30-40% on food. Purchase or maintenance of equipment or play materials received very little attention. The overall impact on children's development has never been measured.



## New Trends

During the sixties, however, another kind of movement more rooted in grassroots reality, began to emerge. In 1962, rural pre-schools were launched in 787 villages of Tamil Nadu (the number has now grown to cover almost all the 13,000 villages in the state). These “kappagams” or child care centres were conceived as the most elementary and low-cost form of child care possible. Housed in thatched huts or sheds, staffed by local women with little or no education who were paid at the modest rate of Rs. 20 a month (later raised to Rs. 60 and now to about Rs. 100) and equipped with the barest minimum of play materials, the centres were intended to care for children 2½ to 5 years for half a day or the whole day as the need may be, *while their mothers worked in the fields*. This was one of the earliest recognitions within the voluntary sector of the needs of the working mother, and of the poor. With very limited resources and no training, the workers were mostly mere child-minders. Some activity of songs, stories and games and a little of the three Rs were thrown in for the older ones. There was still no concept of infant care. After 1971, the programme was strengthened with the addition of supplementary feeding, but the foundation had been laid well before awareness of the importance of nutrition came to the foreground. At least the beginnings of a day-care facility for working mothers can be seen here and recognition of them as a category worthy of attention.

The sixties also saw a growing awareness of the importance of nutrition in early childhood, and a corresponding growth in nutrition programmes. A number of studies, world-wide, had drawn attention to the possible dangers of malnutrition in early childhood, and some studies also drew attention to the extent of poverty and child malnutrition in India. The Third Plan for the first time introduced several nutrition programmes. With the Fourth Plan a nutrition policy as such was laid down, India becoming the first developing country to have a nutrition policy. Special attention was to be given to “vulnerable” sections of the population defined as “pregnant women, lactating mothers, infants and young children”, and the existence of widespread malnutrition among certain sections of the population was recognized. In 1970, the Special Nutrition Programme (earlier known as the Crash Nutrition Programme) was launched, to cover 1 million children in urban slums and 1 million in tribal areas. Later the Programme definition was enlarged to include all children 0-6 and pregnant/lactating women. The programme has grown steadily from year to year, and at present 11.7 million beneficiaries receive supplementary feeding, of whom 6.5 million receive it through the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS). At the same time, other programmes such as the Applied Nutrition Programme and nutrition feeding in the balwadis received a shot in the arm. Till that time, health and nutrition were neglected areas in balwadis, which had concentrated on the socio-psychological aspects of development. With the introduction of supplementary feeding and nutrition education and more attention to health care, the popularity of the balwadis also grew.

In the end-sixties and early seventies, two important movements grew, starting from very different directions, which were to change completely the approach to the care of children. The first was the growing awareness of the impact of poverty on the lives of children, among academics, professional and government officials, and a gradual understanding of the possibilities of countervailing intervention strategies. This was to culminate in the launching of the Integrated Child Development Services in 1974 -75. The second was the individual initiative of one woman, Meera Mahadevan, who began to experiment with caring for the children of women labourers in construction, and set in motion a chain of events that was to lead to the Government’s Scheme of Assistance to Creches for Working/Ailing Mothers. These developments will be documented in turn below.

## **The Concept of Disadvantage**

The late sixties and early seventies were considered conducive to the development of such a concept. Poverty now became something that could be talked about. Economists defined the poverty line: there was a growing awareness of the numbers of people still below it. Planners and professionals began to get concerned about it; so did politicians.

On the educational and developmental side, the introduction of the well-known Project Headstart in the USA influenced many. This concerted attempt to deal with the impact of poverty by an intervention strategy aimed deliberately at the young child caught the imagination of academics. So did the subsequent Great Society and War on Poverty programmes of Lyndon Johnson. Unfortunately, many academics tried to apply the conclusions and theories applicable in an affluent society to the very different situation in India. For example, poor educational attainments of children below the poverty line were attributed to “deprivation”, “cultural deficits” or “cognitive disadvantage”. While these concepts may well describe the situation of a tiny minority of ethnically different and poverty-ridden people in an affluent society (13% of Americans at the time were described as poor by their standards), they are hardly suited to describe the conditions, life-styles, needs or problems of the vast Indian masses. Thus the solutions suggested, like compensatory preschool education, were unrealistic in the Indian context. Nevertheless, this represented the beginning of a thought process, of concern for children whose main problems stemmed from poverty, and an attempt to begin, even with partial solutions.

At the same time scientific findings suggested serious, sometimes irreparable consequences, for physical and intellectual growth of severe malnutrition in early childhood. Combined with the awareness of large numbers of children subject to severe or moderate malnutrition, this led to an outburst of activity mentioned earlier. Besides the Special Nutrition Programme, a number of other nutrition programmes were launched ranging from Vitamin A prophylaxis and direct feeding to attempts to upgrade the nutritional quality of foodgrains, fortification of salt and renewed emphasis on kitchen gardening. Nutrition education began to be talked about seriously and Home Science graduates were in demand to meet new challenges.

A series of studies, committees and commissions of enquiry began to spell out the elements of a child intervention programme. The Study Group on the Preschool Child (1972) defined the concept of “vulnerable” sections of the population as urban slums, tribal areas and underprivileged rural areas, and stressed the need for an integrated and holistic approach to the young child, in contrast to the earlier fragmented approaches to different aspects of the problem. The Committee on Preschool Child Feeding also, in 1972, made a number of suggestions for feeding programmes to be more effective and cost-benefit favorable. Inter-disciplinary teams were sent out to study the infrastructure available at different locations for action programmes on an experimental basis. Scientific opinion from all quarters was emphasizing the importance of infancy, particularly from the health and nutrition standpoints, and the need to reach the infant before the age of three. From this background came the scheme which was launched formally in 1975 as ICDS.

## **The Coming of ICDS**

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched in 1975 in 33 projects and has grown to 1,000 projects at the end of the Sixth Plan (1985). The chief beneficiaries are children 0-6 and pregnant and lactating women. ICDS has six elements: supplementary nutrition, immunization, health check-up and referral service for all children below six, expectant and

nursing mothers, non-formal preschool education for children 3-6 and nutrition and health education for women, with a special component of functional literacy for women (later discontinued). The scheme covers urban slums, tribal areas and backward rural areas, thus concentrating on poverty pockets. The focal point is the anganwadi (one for every 1,000 population in rural areas and urban slums or 700 in tribal areas) staffed by an anganwadi worker who is expected to be a local woman or girl. We may assume that in 1985, when all the 1,000 projects are launched there will be about 1 lakh anganwadis, reaching 40-50 lakh children 0-6 and nearly 10 lakh women, with nutrition and allied services, and providing preschool education to 20-25 lakhs of children.

This is a stupendous operation, the most comprehensive and far-reaching attempt to reach women and children of the most disadvantaged sectors. The scheme is significant for its magnificent conception and integrated approach, its awareness that the welfare of the young child cannot be treated as an isolated issue but must be simultaneously tackled on a number of fronts, and its realization that community involvement is central to its success. Any scheme which operates on such a vast scale and through the medium of the bureaucracy is bound to be variable in its effectiveness and to have numerous defects and shortcomings in implementation, even from a purely administrative angle. Also, a monolithic framework cannot meet the vast diversity of the Indian situation. It is not these all too natural shortcomings which will be highlighted below. Rather the focus is on some theoretical weakness in the conceptual framework and the assumptions behind it.

ICDS has never claimed to be a programme of day-care for the children of working mothers. In fact, its approach is based on the assumption that the mother is available to care for the child below three. It is the mother who is the target and focus for health and nutrition education, and it is mother who is expected to collect the nutritional supplements provided for the infant. Only 3+ are expected to attend the preschool education centre, from where they are to be taken home after half a day. Again it is assumed that mothers who are poor and working, as many may be in the target group, can participate?

It is reported that in a few places, the anganwadi has been obliged to act as a day-care centre, keeping the child while the mother is at work in the fields, and that in many others, mothers are pressing for such a service. But none of this is well documented and we cannot be sure how widespread it is. In any case, the anganwadi is not equipped, neither is the anganwadi worker at present trained or capable of performing the function of a caretaker effectively so this may only reflect a real need.

It is possible that in some cases, some of the target population has not even been reached. This is probably because the neediest families are also those in which the mother is working and has to be out all day and so is unable to take the children to the anganwadi for the health, nutrition or other attention they may require. Often, children collect just before the food distribution and disperse after the meal. Preschool education for the 3-6, it appears, is in itself a desultory affair, an activity that takes place while the food is being readied. Younger infants are usually brought in by older siblings, in the absence of the mother, to eat at the centre. What does this say about the continuing lack of school attendance of the siblings? Figures are not available to answer such queries.

How well-reached are mothers of the sick or the stay-aways? Regular home visits and close contact with families is prescribed as one of the basic strategies of the programme. The programme at the anganwadi is rightly seen as only partial, while the contact with the mother is critical. Yet the plan for home visits is not likely to be fully effective unless the timings are such as to fit the routine of a working mother's day. Has this been taken into account? Most meetings and visits seem to be scheduled for the afternoon. All of these are questions which still do not have final answers. Studies of the impact of ICDS on the development of young children have already been undertaken showing positive results, but studies in relation to the work status and

conditions of mothers have yet to be undertaken, and the reality of the working conditions of poor mothers has yet to be accepted. Much of the data even now available could probably be analyzed from this standpoint.

It is necessary to ask: how effective is ICDS for the children of the market women and fish vendors who leave their homes in the early hours of the morning, the hill women who have to spend most of their waking hours in the long search for water, fuel and fodder, the tribals who toil in the forests and headload firewood all day, the migrant labourers in their seasonal cycle of travel? Also others whose patterns do not fit into bureaucratic time schedules? Yet all of them add up to a substantial number of the poor and the working. An illuminating example can be found in the relation between ICDS and migrant labourers in an urban area like Delhi. The Union Territory of Delhi has 19 ICDS projects with 2,100 anganwadis, most of them located in urban areas. Delhi is also characterized by heavy building activity in the last two decades and has a large population of construction labourers (1,09,719 men and 13,985 women) as of 1981, many of them transients living in makeshift shanty colonies, and constantly moving. How well does ICDS serve the shifting population whose children are even more deprived and at risk than those of other poor, and many of whom have working mothers, since 11% of the construction work force is female? Can these parents bring their children to the anganwadis, or do the anganwadis have a suitable outreach programme? Only a survey that sets out to ask such questions can provide clear answers, but indications are that few migrants benefit by ICDS services. The same question can be asked about other specialized groups too. How flexible is ICDS? Can it adapt itself for day-care or should alternative programmes be devised? What impact does this have on the young girls in the community?

### **A Leap into Day-Care**

The second important strand in the fabric of the seventies was the emergence of Mobile Creches, an institution identified with day-care for the children of the poor working mothers. It began almost accidentally, from the response of one woman, Meera Mahadevan to the plight of the young children of migrant Rajasthani women who worked on the large construction sites of New Delhi. She began with a simple shelter under a tent, a handful of well-intentioned volunteers, no theories, no money, and an unswerving determination. Soon she found herself caring for more than infants; she had a complete integrated programme going, tending babies, educating the school-aged through informal means, providing low-cost but exciting developmental activities for preschoolers, working with parents and older siblings through adult education at night. A few professionals were drawn in, fascinated by the challenge; an innovative system of on-the-job training was started to prepare the women who flocked in looking for jobs, more out of necessity than any grandiose plan; labour officers and inspectors, building contractors, government officials and politicians were besieged by intensive and continuous barrage of requests and pleas; legislation which had been gathering dust was dug up from the archives; funds were sought from a variety of sources; slowly an institutional framework became visible and grew. The process was one of continuous experimentation, rejection of ideas found unpractical, innovation and exploration; the objective was always clear and unchanging – to better the lot of the child and serve the working mother. For the first time, the two objectives were fused.

Mobile Creches has had an impact out of all proportion to its size. In 1973, there were only about 15 centres in operation at any given time in Delhi – though already about 30 centres had been run over the five year period since inception. In 1972, a branch was established at Bombay and worked along the same lines, with about five centres at a time. The whole operation was managed by a handful of volunteers, on a shoestring budget of less than Rs. 5 lakhs. And it is not much larger today. Yet it was so radically different, so imaginative and so compelling a

programme by its very simplicity, low cost and effectiveness, that it began to attract notice in many places.

A programme which was comprehensive and integrated at two levels – vertically integrating all age-groups from birth to adulthood and horizontally integrating all sectors from child health to adult education was rare enough; but a programme which supported the working mother by delivering services at her doorstep, which flaunted no theories, indigenous or imported, and which did all this at low cost seemed almost too good to be true. Soon Mobile Creches began to be flooded by visitors, academic and amateur, and written about in books, reports, periodicals, both national and international, and discussed at learned seminars and conferences.

Partly because of such exposure but more because of the relentless pressure brought by Meera and her colleagues, their constant pleading for Government funds and their demand that Government funding was the right of the children, a new line of thinking emerged. In 1973, when the Fourth Plan was being framed, the Planning Commission and Ministry of Social Welfare began to give thought to the special needs of children of poor working mothers and of the means of providing them with effective day-care.

Thus the Scheme of Assistance to Creches for Working/Ailing Mothers in 1974, was launched in the Fourth Plan. The scheme was a direct outcome of the experiences of Mobile Creches in the previous five-year period. The scheme made several naïve assumptions, did not work out conditions carefully enough and so led to misunderstanding and misuse. Yet it was an epoch-making step. For the first time, assistance was being provided to agencies to run day-care for the children of poor women working in the unorganized sector.

In 1974, 10 voluntary agencies (Mobile Creches included) received funds to run 247 creches. From these small beginnings, the scheme grew to its present size. It seems that nearly 2 lakhs of children are now receiving day-care. But, as will be seen later, not all of these are the children of working women, or of the poor, and not all of them are receiving day-care. A detailed evaluation of the working of the scheme will reveal both its achievements and its limitations. But after a decade of its operation, it can certainly be said that there is wider awareness now of both the needs of the working mother and of the child, and of the extensive nature of this need. How well these needs have been met, and by what means and methods, and how the lessons can be applied to developing programme for the future will be the subject matter of the following two sections.

### **C: CASE STUDY – MOBILE CRECHES**

Mobile Creches is a single institution which is fifteen years old, with its entire budget for 1984-85 standing at a mere Rs. 27 lakhs. Today, Mobile Creches runs 50 centres at any given time in the cities of Delhi and Bombay (the latter includes Pune). Between them, these centres take care of about 4,000 children on any given day. While the population in slums and resettlements is relatively stable, on construction sites, mobility is high. So the total number of children who pass through Mobile Creches, or make use of its facilities over the course of one year, is much higher, perhaps three or four times the average daily attendance.

Studies conducted between 1978 and 1980 showed that 70% of the children on construction sites attended the centre for eight months or less. How useful is day-care when the turnover is so high? What impact does such short attendance have on children's development? How long do the effects last? How long does it take for migrant mothers to realize the value of a service like this and make use of it? What long-term consequences does it have on the education, skills and viability of the migrant labour community as a whole?

These are questions to which there are no definite answers yet, because the data do not exist. And they are legitimate questions which should not be ignored. Much can be gained by studying

this experience as a case. To do so, it may be best to begin by looking at the work of Mobile Creches described in its own terms, from a recent publication.

Mobile Creches had its origin in the plight of children of migrant workers, so the story begins there.

### *Profile of a Migrant Community*

Construction workers in Delhi are unskilled labourers driven to the city from the surrounding rural areas in search of work, seeking refuge from bad harvests, debt and poverty. They live in temporary shelters on the edge of large construction sites. Employed on daily wages, both husband and wife must work to make ends meet. They could be employed on a particular work site for only a month or for as long as nine months, depending on many factors. There is no guarantee of continuous employment. Rain, shortage of materials, delays in plans and a host of other causes can interrupt construction work. They then have to seek work on another site, commuting on foot, carrying their young to distant places within the city. Most of these workers tend to return to their villages once or twice a year for a couple of months, spending the remaining time seeking work in the city.

It is therefore, a life of constant movement within the city itself as well as between the village and city. The labourers are brought to the city in groups by a labour contractor, often a man from their own village, who secures work and camping facilities for them. Each labour contractor or 'jamadar' sets up his cluster of huts, rarely mingling with other similar clusters. There may be four or five such separate camps on a work site, each controlled by its own 'jamadar'. He advances loans, disburses payments, maintains discipline, in close contact with his group. The workers give him roughly 10 per cent of their wages in lieu of his services.

The labour camps are just a row of makeshift huts – piles of bricks without mortar for walls, old tin sheets or meagre thatch for roofs, an opening hung with sacking for a door and the earth for flooring. A man cannot stand to his full height in a hut and the space is barely sufficient for a string cot, a *CHULAH* and a few utensils. The availability and quality of water varies from site to site. Sanitation and drains do not exist. Rubbish piles up. The huts are cramped and there is no shelter or shade to sit under when the weather is wet or hot.

A whole generation of children is being nurtured in these circumstances. Even though schools, hospitals and other amenities exist in the city, migrant workers cannot take advantage of them due to illiteracy, lack of confidence and constant mobility. Schooling systems do not bend to their needs and civic authorities do not consider that this population has any claims to responsible action on their part.

### *Effects of Migrancy on Children*

The sharpest and most obvious impact of this environment is on the young child. Not only is he affected physically, but he often has to do without his mother's affection. Burdened with household chores on top of a heavy working day, the mother hastily 'dumps' her infants in the charge of older siblings, who may be no more than 6-7 years themselves. There are no elders, as in an extended family, who can help out. Babies are given heavy *rotis* and spicy chutneys to eat before their system knows how to cope with such a diet. Dust, exposure to the elements and enteric infections take their toll and many succumb. Others are severely malnourished and have a variety of deficiency diseases.

Children who have survived this period are tough. The parents grew up in a rural situation, poverty-stricken, but where the physical environment was healthier. On urban work sites,

however sugar is substituted for jaggery; grain is more expensive, vegetables and milk beyond the reach of most families. The condition which laid the foundations of physical sturdiness for the parents are denied to the children. The migrant way of life is constantly eroding both physical status and those features which provided the parent group with psychological and emotional stability. These strong cultural entities are part of rural communities that have drawn sustenance and stability from a life close to agricultural rhythms, religion and traditional values. They have a well-defined code of behavior which gives them their fearlessness, their strength and their pride. For the child these vital stabilizing factors do not exist. He is plunged into a situation of transience. The faces around him keep changing. Many of his companions speak other dialects and friendships are difficult to form. The only constants are his immediate family – a nuclear situation made more severe by frequent movement. As a result, children with little experience of group interaction tend to react more strongly to the pervading drift and tension, and to be affected by the stresses of their precarious economic status. In the rural setting, even if the child did not go to school, he had areas of experience to sustain him. On the worksites, children are felt to be a nuisance, getting in the way of work. They can pick up few skills. With learning opportunities severely limited and the possibility of entering schools closed, the migrant child is more vulnerable, more exposed and less equipped to deal with the harsh factors of marginal existence.

### *Evolution of the Mobile Creches Programme*

In 1969, the year of the Gandhi Centenary, Meera Mahadevan, a housewife and a writer, was appointed to a women and children's sub-committee for observing the centenary year. She was a woman of warm responses and rich imagination, and sensed an ironic contrast in the plight of the workers who were toiling to build the Centenary pavilion amidst the fanfare, the expenditure, and the seminars on Gandhian thought. The first step seemed to be simply to provide some shelter for these young ones, perhaps only protection from the elements and a watchful eye to soothe them when they cried and prevent them from straying to the water tanks and earthworks.

So, the first creche was set up in a tent. It hardly measured up to the concept of a creche. Dirty, ragged children, a rather lost creche worker, a few toys, a charpoy and a tent that kept falling down – that is all it was! But from this simple act sprang the exploration of a small group of women into the lives of unskilled migrant workers, and from this exploration grew an organization – people, methods, knowledge and an understanding of what programmes for these disadvantaged children need to be.

The organization soon found itself facing a number of problems. First, the poor health and sanitary conditions in the labour camps called for clinical and preventive health care, nutrition and the creation of basic standards of child care. Second, the older children also needed attention and this meant developing a programme for nursery and primary education which would not only keep the children occupied but also suit the special needs and requirements of the situation. Third, the virtual absence of workers trained to deal with such a wide variety of activities and situations led to the evolution of the system of training and management which is characteristic of the programme today. In addition, there were the usual teething problems of recognition, funding, accommodation, etc. besides those of working with building contractors and coordinating with several government departments. Later on, the organization carried the programme to resettlement colonies, catering to the needs of children of working mothers belonging to the lowest economic groups, engaged in such occupation as – domestic service, scavenging, hawking and vending, and ragpicking.

### *The Programme Today*

Mobile Creches today is a chain of day-care centres. On a construction site, each centre exists so long as the construction lasts. The centres are housed in tin sheds, or incomplete parts of buildings – any available temporary accommodation. The facilities are the barest minimum – the floor of bricks roughly laid or just sand, the windows without shutters, and very often no running water. In resettlement colonies, low-cost structures using local materials have been put up to house the centres. At any given time there are about 50 centres in operation in Delhi and Bombay (including two or three in Pune). At each centre, a team of four or five workers organizes a day-long programme for 50-150 children in the age group of 0 to 12 years, six days a week. A similar programme operates, with slight modifications, at resettlements.

The children are divided into three groups for convenience: creche (0-3 years), balwadi (3-6 years) and those above 6 in non-formal primary education. In practice, however, the groupings are not rigid and there is considerable freedom of movement. This enables the older children to take care of and comfort the younger ones, keeping the infants on their laps or beside them as they study or play. The daily creche routine emphasizes cleanliness, habit formation, nutrition and affectionate interaction with adults. Mothers come in to breastfeed once or twice a day or the infants are carried to them by siblings. One of a panel of doctors visits each centre once a week to treat ailments and give assistance on preventive health. The follow-up is done by the staff at each centre. Advice to mothers on health, nutrition, family planning and child care is usually given informally when the staffs go around the labour camp in the mornings, or when mothers come in to collect children or feed infants.

The daily programme for the 3-6 consists of a wide variety of structured and unstructured play activities using simple, low cost, easily available and replaceable materials. Educational programmes, arts and crafts, songs and dance form the core of the programme which gradually prepares the child for school. The 6+ get more formal lessons in language, mathematics and social studies and are helped to acquire the basic skills of numeracy and literacy through informal methods, stressing play, games and handwork. Older children who have been helped to enter local municipal schools usually come back to participate in activities like art, music, games and sports.

The daily routine is as follows: Between 8.00 and 10.00 a.m. the centre is cleaned and set up by the staff members; some of the staff then go to the homes of children who have not yet arrived to bring them and also spend time with the parents. Washing and bathing of the younger children is followed by preparation and distribution of milk, and prayers. Between 10.00 a.m. and mid-day there are organized activities of each age-group; at 12 noon a supplementary mid-day meal of *dalia* with vegetables is provided to the children, followed by group 'clean-up'. The afternoon is spent in a variety of informal activities with emphasis on arts, music, gardening, story-telling and reading followed by games and sports. Work with the adults in the family includes regular meetings and mothers, community events, educational camps and shows by an educational theatre group on relevant themes. Formal literacy classes and libraries too were run for many years. A variety of strategies is used to relate to the adults.

### *Identifying the Tasks*

The first was to reach the children and communities on the work sites, the second to set up the essential care services at their doorstep and third to do so in a manner that could be taken advantage of.



The first task has been extremely difficult one. It has meant a long and slow struggle with contractors and authorities, without whose help the labourers on the work site cannot be reached. The children are a part of the landscape on worksites and contractors, engineers and government officials hardly notice them. The only method that has proved successful has been relentless, patient persuasion and sheer determination. Confrontation, when dealing with unorganized sector, can-be counter productive. The second objective was equally difficult to achieve. It meant that each team of workers had to be able to teach, provide medical care, cook, deal with tensions and fights, soothe infants and channelize the mental energies of older children.

The third objective implied that essentials like healthcare and education should reach the migrant child in a shape and form that he could use. Only then would the availability of literacy, skills and opportunities form the basis of change. A school or health service is nothing in itself and can lead nowhere unless the service rests on an approach which seeks positive interactions at every point. The child has to be given experiences that make him confident, to know the pleasure of concentrated activities and the pride of competence, to deal with people with ease. Programmes which concentrate on doling out food routinely and providing mechanical medication will not pull the child out of his situation. These are wasted inputs – basically well-meaning actions flung into a void. Psychological boosting and solid skills are required to alter a situation. A successful programme is dependent on those who carry the essentials with them – medicate while drawing out positive reactions, teach while developing positive relationships. The need is for people who can *relate*, and not just for the skills they possess.

### *Developing a Methodology*

“Mobile Creches” methodology has been to find people, test their human relations and, if they relate, give them the skills they need. Mobile Creche workers are mainly non-professionals, people with no specializations, acquiring the skills as the work. Women – housewives, mothers and students – form the backbone of the work force. Many of them are from socio-economic backgrounds where they are not used to many physical comforts, or remote from the situation of illiteracy. The majority are young people with high school education who are continuing their education while they work. They can laugh and sing with the children and yet work very hard.

### *The Structure*

The present structure, procedures and organization of recruitment, training and management have evolved over a period of 10 years, through a process of trial and error, and largely guided by non-professionals with no preconceived notions of management. The constraints of the situation have also played a part in this evolution.

The structure of the organization is at three levels: field staff, supervision and management. The field staff in a centre function as multipurpose workers. Each has to be able to perform several tasks, be adaptable and flexible, but may as a result never become highly skilled in any one particular activity. A worker’s major asset is the ability and willingness to participate in an atmosphere of sharing and equality. There is no hierarchy within centres, though each centre is managed by an in-charge, who is usually someone with several years of experience. Workers are selected for their basic aptitude and then involved in a continuous process of on-the-job

training. Recruitment is by a process of self-screening: aspirants are sent to work in a centre and those who feel uncomfortable usually drop out within the first few days or weeks.

Training, which is practical and field-oriented, is in four stages. The first stage is that of exposure to the field programme with limited participation, a few weeks in duration. The second stage is field training under the guidance of experienced and senior staff, and consists of acquiring basic skills, procedures and routine through a process of drilling and repetition over a year.

The third stage is that of rationalization. Through a series of discussions and workers sessions, the worker explores the basis of the various routines, the need and relevance of the various skills, and the objectives and meaning of the programme. The process is an inductive and participatory one, in which the trainee starts with the immediate and concrete daily experience, analyzes it and thus arrives at the underlying principles. The fourth stage is that of problem-solving – an on-going process in which people at all levels are continually involved.

The second level of workers, known as trainer/supervisors, performs the double role of training and field supervision. All supervisors have had a minimum of five years experience as field workers. There is no direct recruitment to this cadre. They play a key part in maintaining communication and participate in policy-making.

The third level is the management, or Governing Body which consists of 10-15 members of the society, entrusted with the responsibility of policy-making and guiding the affairs of the organization. Members of the Governing Body, who are directly recruited, as well as recruited voluntary workers and resource people also double up as executive heads of different departments and supervise operations.

### *Funding*

Funding has been from a variety of sources – grants from Government providing a substantial one-quarter. Donations from national and international agencies, firms and individuals, contributions from employers, contractors and parents provide the bulk of the resources. Fundraising ventures include the sale of greeting cards designed from children's creative work, occasional charity premieres and souvenirs, jumble sales and collections in kind. This wide base and lack of dependence on any single source strengthens the autonomy of the organization but requires constant and tireless effort.

### **Elements of the Design**

It is now possible to consider the unique characteristics of Mobile Creches which may be responsible for its success, to explore the underlying principles and approaches, and finally to comment on the possibility of replicating such experiments on a larger scale.<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, limited though the scale, there is no doubt of the consistently high quality of the programme. All observers have commented on two outstanding features; the dovetailing of the twin objectives of working for the development of the whole child while serving the needs of the working mother at her doorstep, and the excellent quality of care which is offered, far from the drab custodial regimes described earlier. A day at Mobile Creches offers a rich, diverse, multi-faceted and satisfying mix of activities, using the simplest of materials and at low cost.

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary, however, to state here that the author has been associated with Mobile Creches for a long time and this should be kept in mind when reading what follows.

It is necessary, however, to go a step further and ask in what exactly this “excellence” lies. It is made up of several strands: first, a multiple, comprehensive and integrated approach, which simultaneously attacks all age levels and all aspects of work in a holistic manner, responding to the needs of child, mother and family as a whole rather than trying to attack partial problems. This is possible because of the high worker/child ratio which enables close individual attention to children and interaction with families. Second, its relevance, offering what is acceptable, necessary and also perceived as needed, and communicating in a style and manner in harmony with the community and at the same time scientific. Third, a conscious attempt to achieve continuity and reinforcement, by following the child through different stages and by reinforcing each aspect of the programme carefully by other aspects. If the question is asked in what ways this is programme different from, or better than, the Vikaswadi or the Tamil Nadu Preschool Project, it is in the recognition and deliberate acceptance of the complex, interrelated and mutually interacting nature of these elements.

Is it possible to identify the elements of the approach which have resulted in this synergistic mix? The following seem important.

First, the small size, which in itself is conducive to high quality as it enables close monitoring and rapid course-changes when needed. In fact, small size is essential for speedy and sensitive response and is the essence of the difference between a voluntary agency and the vast impersonal bureaucratic machinery. Optimal size has been a deliberate decision on the part of the organizers, and expansion has been resisted in order to safeguard quality. Awareness of scale is also shown in the high worker/child ratio, which has been consistently maintained.

Second, the flexible, innovative and experimental approach, constantly self-critical and as ready to reject the non-functional as to attempt the untried. This flexibility and response is partly a consequence of size and partly reflects a deliberate approach.

Third, as a reading of the description will show, a pragmatic, inductive strategy responding to need rather than working outward from givens. The design is “location-specific” in the best sense – each new activity is a response to a situation rather than the mechanical achievement of a predetermined goal. Theories have been subjected to the severest testing of reality; professionals have been subordinated to the purpose. Hence, though the quantitative achievement is small, the methodology is significant.

Fourth, the primacy given to field work, the knowledge of field conditions and grassroots reality, as indicated in the kind of qualifications required for supervisory workers and those in authority, the insistence on monitoring reality before arriving at solutions, and on participatory and consultative styles in management and planning.

Fifth, a rugged obstinacy and refusal to fall in with large monolithic schemes. The tendency to give in under financial pressures has led to the downfall of many good programmes. Because of the broad base of funding, Mobile Creches has been able to resist such pressure. For example, it has been doggedly standing by its own time-tested system of on-the-job training, termed internship or apprenticeship, and refusing to accept the standardized training courses touted by Government departments. There are signs that this obdurate hanging on is about to pay off.

Sixth, careful attention to training and structures of organization and management, which have built-in mechanisms of reward and punishment as in all institutions, but also elements which not only permit but actually foster interest, initiative, responsibility and decision-making.

Seventh, the variety of funding sources which has enabled independence from any one funding agency, especially Government funding, which forms about one quarter of the total. The institution has thus been able to use the freedom which all voluntary agencies are supposed to have in theory.

Eighth, the pattern of expenditure and cost-consciousness. A low-cost approach is followed in relation to material components like buildings and equipment, by using waste, indigenous materials and by keeping down administrative and operational costs through the use of

voluntary effort. Salaries have also had to be low, by necessity and not by choice, but this has had the effect of depressing costs artificially and placing the emphasis on human resources; not only is the worker/child ratio high, but so also is the supervisory ratio and stress on training.

Last, the lack of dependence on one charismatic personality, so characteristic of the most successful voluntary agencies in India. It is true that Mobile Creches was born of the dream and the will of one woman. But that the institution has grown in strength by adherence to sound principles is attested to by the fact that it has not only survived the death of its visionary and forceful founder, but continued to grow and flourish. To put the same point in a more positive way, Mobile Creches has learned both to evoke and obey collective leadership, a skill not easily acquired or stood by.

The question raised at the beginning, about long-term effects, cannot be easily answered now, except indirectly. One long-term gain is the beginning of an awareness of the possibilities for child care among migrant labourers, albeit still a few. This is important because action can only follow from a perception of alternatives, and a change in aspirations. Another gain, perhaps even more important is the wealth of insights and knowledge – about child care, about education, about health – which the migrants who have been in contact with the programme, carry away with them when they move. In the long run, this promises to do more for the children than a few months attendance at a centre. But can such experiments be replicated on a large scale? The question can be broken down into a more meaningful one: Can the elements described above be encouraged and supported on a large scale? And if so, how?

Probably, listed out in this way, many of the elements can be replicated. But it would be useful to see what other agencies in the field have been doing before coming to any conclusions.

But one conclusion can be reached straightway. Low cost cannot be achieved through low salaries. The realization that daycare is a full-time job and a skilled one, must inevitably lead to a rise in salaries. How this expenditure is to be met is another question.

It was pointed out earlier that Mobile Creches was largely responsible for the creation of the scheme of assistance to creches, it continues to draw benefit and support from the scheme, and has been able to use the grant-in-aid wisely and well to further its objectives. But how well has the scheme fared? Has it achieved its objectives with a reasonable degree of success? How well have other agencies been able to use the scheme? What are the loopholes? The other side of the coin must be examined before answering the question of replicability of services for mother and child along the Mobile Creches pattern.

## **D: CASE STUDY – CRECHES IN THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR**

This section will look at day-care as it has grown in the last decade, basically in response to the Governmental initiative of 1974, offering grant-in-aid to agencies willing and able to provide day-care (creches) for the children of working/ailing mothers. (The category “ailing” was added to include another disadvantaged group, but has not really been followed up.) Not tied to any particular industry or occupation, or related to the work place or employers of women, these creches were intended to serve women in the unorganized sector. How well have they done so? And has the scheme served its purpose? This section will first evaluate the network that exists today (see Table 3.1) and then examine the scheme in detail, analyzing both financial provisions and rationale, before making alternative proposals.

**Table 3.1 Creches of children of working/ailing mothers**

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of</i>	<i>No. of</i>	<i>No. of</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>
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	<i>agencies</i>	<i>creches</i>	<i>children</i>	<i>(in lakhs)</i>
1974-75	10	247	6,175	5.93
1975-76	52	741	18,525	28.36
1976-77	73	762	19,000	25.00
1977-78	97	929	23,225	45.23
1978-79	192	1,385	34,625	50.00
1978-80	494	1,971	49,275	78.91
1980-81	822	4,398	1,09,950	168.90
1981-82	993	4,985	1,25,000	219.21
1982-83	1040	5,616	1,37,000	304.00
1983-84	1458	7,628	1,85,000	362.00

Source: Ministry of Social Welfare

Significantly, the distribution of creches in the country as a whole is uneven. Five states (Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh ) have more than 400 units each and account for nearly half the total. Eight states (Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Gujarat, Bihar, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh) have between 200 and 400 units each while the remaining nine States have fewer than 200 units each. Among Union Territories, Delhi is outstanding with 343 units, followed by Pondicherry with 53, while the others are negligible. It seems that the development of day-care is confined to certain parts of the country. Even within each state, it may be concentrated in certain areas. Exact information about the geographical or rural/urban distribution is not available now.

In the first few years, the majority of creches were run by four major national voluntary agencies, namely the Indian Council for Child Welfare, the Bharatiya Grameen Mahila Sangh (BGMS) the Bharatiya Adimijati Seva Sangh (BAJSS) and the Harijan Sevak Sangh, while the other national voluntary agencies, like the Red Cross, the YMCA, Mobile Creches, some religious trusts and church-related organizations accounted for a sizable chunk of the rest. With the growth in numbers, naturally the picture has changed.

In 1978-79, for example, 192 agencies were running 1,385 creches. But of these BAJSS alone accounted for 144, or 10% while Mobile Creches had nearly 70 units, or 5%. Today, there are 1,500 agencies running 7,500 creches. How many of these are small localized voluntary agencies each accounting for one to five creches? The detailed breakdown of the number of agencies in each category (grouped by number of centres) is not available but would provide interesting insights.

This has very important implications, as the problems, the strengths and the weakness of large and small agencies are very different. While the smaller agencies may have the advantage of being close to the local community and hence more responsive to their needs and problems, they usually suffer from lack of professional knowledge, skills and guidance, and often even the most elementary skills of management, and lack access to national networks which might be able to help them. On the other hand, the large agencies have the advantage of financial and professional resources, a pool of experience and of workers at all levels, as well as the ability to handle essential overheads, but may suffer from remoteness from the field, distant supervision, operational problems, bureaucratization and lack of flexibility.

It is rash to assume that the same kind of schematic pattern could serve both sets of needs, and yet this is exactly what is being attempted. This already points to one of the basic shortcomings of the scheme. So far there has been no indication that Government is building up a supportive framework for the smaller agencies or even diversifying the scheme to suit different situations.

## **The Clientele**

Most of the agencies started off by setting up centres in residential localities to cater to families below a certain defined income level so that women could leave children in the centres before going to work. They could thus be described as community-based rather than work-based centres, and have a great potential to develop in that direction. However, since they were not definitely tied either to specific clientele in terms of occupations or to specific timings to suit women's work timings, or to specific locations, the scheme became diluted. Records of the exact work status of the users of the creches are not available, but even the fact that such records have not been maintained indicates that not much importance has been attached to this point. Even the break-up as between rural and urban creches is not immediately available. As a result, it is not clear how many of the children in these creches are in fact the children of working women, whether their mothers are in regular, casual or seasonal employment, in what occupations, for what timing or in what conditions, and in fact whether the creche meets their needs or not.

Exact figures are not available, but there are strong indications that many centres are run as half-day institutions similar to balwadis, catering mainly to the children aged 3-6 of both working and non-working mothers, and further that the balwadi approach is both cause and consequence of the small number of children below three availing of these facilities. Significantly, most of the institutions and agencies which have taken up this programme have a child-oriented perspective or see child care centres as a "welfare" activity rather than a developmental programme or employee need related to women. Available information does not indicate that many trade unions or women's organizations of a work-oriented type have taken advantage of this scheme to run creches. Most of the agencies are charitable and welfare-oriented ones.

Though it is difficult to draw general conclusions, there is some specific data to draw upon for insights. At the end of the first five years, Government commissioned a number of research studies to evaluate the programme and look into problems of implementation. Five such studies were undertaken by social science agencies relating to Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi, Kerala and U.P. What follows will draw from the findings of the first two of these. The Delhi study has so many methodological weaknesses that it is not an altogether reliable source of information, and the last two were not available at the time of writing, being unpublished. The findings are corroborated by personal observation and by the comments of informed observers from different parts of the country. It can therefore be taken that the two studies are fairly representative of conditions as a whole, though obviously some reservations must be made, and there would be considerable regional variation.

Though the overall figures of growth are impressive, the qualitative picture is discouraging. From the woman's angle, there is little evidence that day-care for the full day or the period of the woman's work is being offered. Infants below three seem to be scarce or missing altogether in creches. Are the poorest and neediest families with working woman being catered to? It is hard to say. There is evidence that in some cases, income-limits are not being observed, but how widespread this practice is, is not known. It seems that what we have is the traditional half-day balwadi for the 3-6s mostly in low-income residential areas, called by another name.

From the child-oriented perspective, the conclusions are equally discouraging. The kind of situation described is very similar to that found in the balwadis and the extent to which they provide for the all-round and satisfactory growth and development of children. A closer look at evidence from the available studies will provide clues to the reasons for this.

## **A sampling of Creches**

To take the case of Haryana, the first difficulty the study ran into was one of sampling. Of the 66 creches in the state, 60 were run by one agency, the Indian Council for Child Welfare (Haryana Branch) and the remainder by three different agencies, two of which ran only one each. These latter two turned out to be formal nursery-school type situations in highly urbanized areas, serving middle class parents. One of them also took care of the infants of working mothers, while the other was wholly conceived as preprimary education of a formal type. Both maintained good standards in terms of equipment, activities and educative offerings. How they had managed to avoid the income limit clause was not clear. Perhaps lack of monitoring on the part of the Government and ignorance on their part are the best explanations. The third agency, a state branch of the national voluntary agency, Harijan Sevak Sangh, was ostensibly serving women scavengers in the Harijan locality. Two of the four creches on its records turned out to be closed or non-functional for long periods. The other two were judged by the study team to be poor by all standards and not to be meeting any of the minimum requirements or criteria laid down for evaluation of a satisfactory child care service.

The study thus turned out to focus largely on the programme of creches of the Indian Council for Child Welfare. Most of the centres were rural, and there was considerable variation in the quality and nature of service offered, varying especially with the kind of Balsevika who was in charge. On the whole, the criteria regarding income level, work status of mothers and age-group of children were not adhered to. Infants below three formed less than 20% of the children attending. Most mothers worked in the fields but had less than a full day's work. They perceived the creche as half-day socialization centre for preschoolers and did not expect it to serve as an infant care centre also. The objectives of the programme were not clear to the workers, the Balsevikas and their helpers. When questioned, few showed knowledge of the objectives of the scheme or of the criteria for admission of children, or of the kind of programme they were expected to provide. As in the case of balwadis, lack of physical space, equipment and materials, lack of orientation to the nature of their tasks, inadequate supervision, guidance or professional help from the authorities, lack of resources to develop or maintain their own equipment, all contributed to the poor quality of the programme. Health care was very poor, but feeding programmes were being carried out except when funds or supplies dried up. Preschool education was a desultory attention to the three Rs complemented by some songs, games and story-telling. All the Balsevikas had undergone training but none of the helpers were trained and there was no supervision. Dissatisfaction with salary levels, benefits, supervisory support and guidance was high. Contact with mothers and attempts to promote health or nutrition education were conspicuously low.

The feature which stands out most is the ignorance on the part of parents, workers and agencies of the nature of the scheme and its objectives and purposes, on the one hand; on the other, the lack of any mechanism either for monitoring progress or for offering training, guidance or supervision. Thus even well-intentioned and well-organized voluntary agencies which are eager and willing to serve and learn are unable to provide optimum service, and this is especially marked in the case of training. The same conclusion emerges even more forcefully in the case of Maharashtra, where only the creches run by one organization, the Bharatiya Adimjati Sevak Sangh were studied. Of the 144 creches run by the BAJSS in rural and tribal areas of the country, 14 are found in Maharashtra and of these seven were studied. Again, considerable variation was found related to the nature of the persons involved, their experience, skill and knowledge, but the general picture is the same. Of the 209 children found in seven creches (average of 30) 16% were below the age of two, none below the age of six months, and only one between 6 and 12 months. The location and physical structure of the creches in most cases was inadequate, in terms of area, ventilation, materials, damp, lighting, etc. Equipment was poor, or often, if available, not well utilized. For example, cradles were found in some instances because they were required in the list of equipment supplied, but since there are no infants present, they

merely took up valuable space and were unutilized. There were no medicines even of the sort required for first aid, but school-type equipment like black-boards, tables, chairs, etc, were often found.

Salaries were miserable and complaints were heard that the amount set apart for nutrition was far too low to be effective. The qualifications of the staff ranged from illiterate to matric, but none had received training, nor was there any monitoring, professional guidance or supervision, and there was no record of staff development having been taken seriously. Records were poorly maintained, and did not contain the kind of information needed to assess the impact of creches on children's development. The programme was purely custodial and had no component of developmental activities. Supervision varied from none to poor, but was in all cases irregular, erratic and unsatisfactory. There were hardly any toys or play materials found and few activities besides some formal attempts to teach the three Rs to the older children. Some of the creches ran for the whole day, others for only half a day. Parents all belonged to the lower income categories, but no clear distinctions were made either between working and non-working mothers, or about their hours or seasonality of work, so no accurate information could be gathered on this score.

The health programme was uniformly poor. There was hardly any preventive health work or immunization nor attempts at health and nutrition education for parents. There was no concept of paramedics, of advice to parents or of special programmes for parents, siblings or community. Contacts with parents were in fact minimal. The budget for nutrition was inadequate, and in most cases the food served was unsuitable in both quantity and quality. The budget was often found to be wrongly spent with little attention from doctors. The study in fact suggested numerous changes in the pattern of funding and administration, including giving up the honorarium for doctors as considered too wasteful and expensive a method in rural areas, suggesting instead that creches make fullest possible use of the nearest Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and health infrastructure.

The perception of parents about the creches was that they were just one more government facility rather than an answer to a felt need of theirs. They expected their children to be fetched by the creche worker. No real difference between balwadi and creche was perceived by anyone nor was a need for a child care centre as such expressed. Again, the conclusion is that widespread ignorance about the nature and objectives of the scheme, among voluntary agencies, organizers, workers, and parents, lack of guidance, supervision, and monitoring, lack of training, etc. are the basic causes for the apathetic and inappropriate management of services that are not needed and the neglect of those that are. Wherever example of good work were found, they could be related to the presence of individuals who had experience, or skills or resources beyond the average.

Thus, there is good reason to believe that allowing for regional variations, the general situation as described here is likely to be true of the two studies (concerning U.P. and Kerala respectively) which could not be consulted in depth. It appears that in a large number of cases (it being difficult to quantify this statement at present) the creches are running like balwadis, but inferior in many respects because of the lack of training of workers, lack of play equipment and facilities for psycho-motor and cognitive development of children, lack of professional guidance or clarity about objectives. Thus even from a purely child-oriented standpoint the programme is unsatisfactory, while at the same time the needs of working mothers are clearly not being met.

### **The Grant-in-aid Scheme**



To what extent is the scheme itself responsible for this state of affairs? Is it faulty in conception, and if so, are there ways of rectifying the situation? An examination of the scheme in detail should be revealing.

To begin with, the scheme specifies an income limit. Creches are supposed to cater to working mothers whose family income is less than Rs. 300 per month. It is difficult to ascertain income in this manner, and for voluntary agencies to insist on income declaration. In fact, it has been noted already that in numerous cases, the criterion is being flouted with impunity, since there is no monitoring mechanism. Besides, with growing inflation, an income limit of Rs. 300 is quite unrealistic in the present situation. Either the figure must be revised every year, linked to a national index, or other more realistic criteria should be found. The scheme is silent on other criteria such as nature of mother's occupation, location and timing of mother's work. Since no link is established, the centres need not and often do not relate either to the women's place or times of work.

Even more significant, the scheme is silent about the needs of different age-groups. It merely states that day-care shall be provided for children 0-6, which has been interpreted in a large number of cases as preschool education for 3-6. Unless a definite proportion is laid down and reference made to this, it is unlikely that infants will be brought in, and it is the care of infants which is the mother's most pressing, delicate and sensitive area of need. This would also require changes in the scheme as a whole, since the proportion of workers to children, and the kind and nature of equipment and training would all need modification. If the environment is not conducive to the care of infants, infants will not be brought, no matter how many cradles are lined up for inspection.

The staffing pattern suggested in the scheme is wholly inadequate by any standards. Two helpers, or ayahs, alone are allowed. As the very term indicates, they must help someone; but who? There is no mention of, nor financial provision for, someone in charge of the creche who would hopefully be trained, or educated or capable of handling the job as whole. The concept of team work implied in the idea of two women in charge of 25 children is an admirable one, but at least one of them (or a third person) needs to be adequately equipped to handle the job. The meaning of child care is negated by this kind of staffing pattern. Again, the ratio between workers and children must be related to the ages of the children present, and different ratios laid down to suit the needs of different age-groups.

At the outset, no mention was made about the need for training, leave alone the nature of training required. It was only five years after the inspection of the scheme that the need for training began to be articulated. By that time, there were already 4,000 creches in operation, implying that about 8,000 women were already on the job, untrained for their function. A few short 'refresher' courses have since been run, but are hardly adequate to meet the requirements. Equally, the scheme makes no provision for any form of supervision, guidance or monitoring, or for the operational costs involved in such activities. Should an agency that runs several creches be able to provide these elements, and if so in what proportion and at what cost? Or should such services be provided by some other governmental or non-governmental agency and if so who, how and at what cost? Should a distinction be made between the larger and smaller agencies?

A glance at the budget points to these difficulties.

#### *Schematic budget*

<i>Recurring</i>	Rs.
(i) Two aya/helpers (Rs. 125 per month each)	250/-
(ii) Weekly visits by a doctor	

(Rs. 25 per visit for travel cost and fees)	100/-
(iii) Medicines (Rs. 2 per child per month)	50/-
(iv) Supplementary nutrition (30 paise per child per day for 26 days in a month)	195/-
(v) Contingencies (soap, oil, detergent, brooms, fuel, etc.)	25/-
<hr/>	
	620 per month

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*Non-recurring*

Equipment

(Cupboards, storage tins/drums, cooking and serving utensils, feeding bottles, 10 small cradles, a large mattress, 10 small cots, toys, registers, etc. )	2,500
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The salaries suggested for the two workers were, to begin with Rs. 90 each; at present Rs. 125 each and Rs. 250 each has been proposed for the Seventh Plan period. This is ludicrous by any standards, being far below the Minimum Wage prescribed in most States for unskilled manual work and below the supposed earnings of the mothers for whom the scheme is intended. On plantations and mines, it was noted earlier that the salaries of the creche workers are at least on the same level as that of the mothers they are serving, and even this has been criticized as being too low for skilled workers, by all the studies made so far. Thus the kind of salary proposed cannot attract trained workers, if such existed. Clearly the scheme has envisaged the work as a half-day activity requiring only an honorarium and not a full-time or skilled job. This anomaly has to be corrected if the scheme has to survive.

But this is not the only thing wrong with the budget. About Rs. 370 per month is expected to cover the rest of the recurring expenses of one unit of 25 children. No mention is made of materials for educational, stimulative or developmental activity, or of supervisory and operational costs. Nutrition can no longer be provided at the cost indicated. As mentioned earlier, there may be alternative and more economical ways of providing health care than through doctors, especially in remote areas where they are not easily available. The non-recurring grant of Rs. 2,500 for essential equipment is also clearly inadequate at present prices. The per child cost works out to Rs. 1.00 per child per day. Such a figure has only been arrived at by eliminating all inconvenient facts.

The Working Group on the welfare and development of children set up for the Seventh Plan had an opportunity to look into the schematic and funding pattern of the scheme but has failed to make any radical proposals. The basic weakness has not been examined in depth.

The nature of the criticism may itself suggest the lines along which restructuring needs to be attempted, if the scheme is to serve the purposes for which it was intended, and to serve them well. Some suggestions will be made in the next section and in the last chapter.

## COMPARISON AND CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions emerge and what insights can be drawn from a comparative study of the two cases?

To begin with, it appears that the voluntary sector in child care caters very poorly to working women in the unorganized sector. Even if it is assumed that all the children shown as beneficiaries in the scheme of grant-in-aid are those of working women, a mere 2 lakh are receiving day-care in 1985. In comparison to the number of women engaged in the unorganized sector, about 45.6 million, this is indeed a very small achievement. But from the case study it appears doubtful if all of these are in fact the children of working mothers or of the poor, or indeed receiving day-care properly understood. Also it appears that women agricultural labour, the largest and possibly poorest section of working women are the most neglected as far as day-care is concerned, because of the scattered nature of their work. So the progress achieved so far, though commendable in terms of a mere decade of work, is still seriously inadequate in quantitative terms, especially when it is noted that 90% of working women are in the unorganized sector.

### **Theory and Practice in Day-Care**

From the standpoint of the child, the picture is even more dismal. It appears that the quality of day-care provided is in general far below what would be considered optimal for development. There are also strong grounds for arguing that *no* care is better than bad care, that it is better by far to leave children to be brought up in the fields, pavements and lanes as they have been in the past, than to subject them to unhygienic and mentally and physically constricting conditions.

To keep a child for several hours a day in a small, dark, crowded and not very clean room, without activities appropriate for mental stimulation, sensory experience and motor development through play, without emotional nourishment through interaction with loving adults, and social development through interaction with all ages, while cutting him off from the community and experiences which he would have in his own environment, may be severely damaging, even if physical safety and health are ensured. Students of child development are agreed, that for healthy, balanced and harmonious growth and development the child needs a multiplicity of inputs, which it is hard to grade in a scale of priority. Providing adequate and suitable food at regular intervals and keeping the child out of danger and mischief are by no means enough. Yet the custodial regime which seems to be characteristic of day-care programmes does merely this: indeed, in some instances, even the mere physical components seem to be distressingly absent. On the other hand, the child is missing all the elements that he would get in his natural environment, both in terms of sensory experience, interaction with others, and opportunities for motor activity, as well as the opportunity to develop survival skills through exposure and learning to cope with the challenges and hazards of the environment. In this context, the ICDS kind of approach which provides some basic health care, nutrition and supportive services while leaving the child in his own environment may be far healthier.

An ideal day-care environment should combine the elements of a good home with those of a good school (understood in the sense of an educational setting). But the evidence indicates that the kind of custodial care offered does not even attempt to emulate a home and fails in its endeavor to be a school, since the programme content is inappropriate for the age-group.

Yet it is clear that the children of the poor are in need of intervention in the form of solid inputs from the health, nutrition and psycho-social angles, as the foundation for their optimal future development. At the same time, those of them who have working mothers also require a sustained input of “mothering”, from other adults, which would include both physical and physico-social elements.

The experience of Mobile Creches shows that it is perfectly possible, given certain conditions already documented, to provide such a combination at low cost. Mobile Creches has demonstrated that one can be clean, sanitary and contamination-free in a mud hut; one can have an educationally stimulating, rich and interesting environment conducive to child development using little more than what is normally available in the child's environment. The essence of the programmes is an imaginative adaption of theory to practical realities.

A second important point which emerges from the comparison is the difference in approach to the care of infants. Most agencies, workers and institutions concerned with day-care justify the absence or low presence of infants below three in the programme by referring to the mother's preferences. These are described either condescendingly as superstitious, ignorance, apathy, lack of education, illiteracy etc. or more politely as cultural norms, preferences, traditions, conveniences. Few have gone on to question the basis of this unwillingness of mothers to deliver their infants to the rigours of institutional care. Mothers may or may not know what is good for their children, but it seems that they rarely find what they are looking for in an institutionalized setting. Again the experience of Mobile Creches is significant. It has been one of the few institutions which has always had a large proportion of infants, and is skilled in caring for them, often from birth or a few weeks old. This is the outcome of the process of demonstrating in practice, to mothers, that infants can and are properly and lovingly cared for, their physical needs, safety and needs for warmth and emotional security met by keeping the ratio of worker to child low, by accepting all the unpleasant, dirty and menial tasks concomitant with infant care and so on. Such an approach requires patience, constant and close interaction with mothers, individualized attention and willingness to do dirty work. The approach is deliberately designed to combine home with institution, or create a home-like environment.

A third aspect is the ability to meet the needs of both women and children, Here too Mobile Creches demonstrates the possibility of combining the two; this in itself releases the older girls for education.

### **Alternative Proposals**

The question now arises, is it possible to apply the lessons of the more positive examples? How can the elements of success be replicated? Can the scheme of assistance become an instrument of reform? Can it help voluntary agencies to move in the right direction?

First, it must be said that monolithic designs are inappropriate in a country of the size and diversity of India. *No single design can be appropriate for all situations. And hence the scheme has first to be reconceptualized as a series of designs, rather than as one.*

In this event, it would be possible to adapt it for the needs of different population groups (rural, urban, tribal), women in different occupations, to seasonal, migratory labour, etc. At the same time, it could be adapted to the needs of agencies of different sizes with different demands and standards for each group. Larger agencies would be expected to provide certain basics like supervision, and operational costs which may have to be subsidized in the case of smaller agencies.

The size of the unit itself could be adaptable. There is no sacredness about 25 children and two workers in a room. A minimum and maximum range could be suggested, and the number of workers related to the numbers in each age-group, with a higher ratio for the younger children. Again, it is possible to conceive of extending assistance even to family units in which one to five children could be taken care of by a woman in her own home, with appropriate support in the form of supervision, monitoring, guidance and some kind of training. The ratio of supervision and the qualifications of in-charges could also be variable, depending on the distances to be covered, the size of the units, the availability of educated women and other

factors. Similarly, provision could be made for health care of different types to suit different needs and circumstances, and for a variety of training situations ranging from supervised placement of the untrained to professional courses. Similar variety could be suggested in equipment, buildings and settings. Exciting new possibilities emerge. A series of alternative designs along with appropriate expenditures for different situations could be worked out. This would enable agencies to select the design appropriate for each.

In terms of future growth, a major consideration is cost. Salaries form the major component in expenditure, and have been kept at a ridiculously low figure so far, thus creating an artificial low-cost pattern. This is neither desirable nor feasible in the future. It is not only because of inflation, discontent and pressure from the workers that salaries must rise; a recognition of the skilled nature of day-care and the fact that it implies a full day's work is equally important. Low costs should no longer be bought at the expense of the workers. *Not only must workers be paid at levels commensurate with their effort and skills, but it must be recognized that daycare is "high-cost" in human resources, since the quality of care is inevitably linked up with the nature of the worker-child ratio.*

A rise in costs need not be frightening if a variety of funding sources and expenditure patterns is accepted. Programmes need not be financed wholly or mainly through government grants, nor need the scheme described in this chapter be the only one for channeling resources. *But a change in rules and procedures is required to enable voluntary agencies to tap parents, employers, the local community and the public at large for resources in cash and kind.*

From the financial standpoint, again, variety is conceivable only if the basis of funding is altered radically. Perhaps it would be possible to think in terms of *per child* costs, and allot funds accordingly, leaving it to agencies to distribute the money under different heads. Of course, the possibilities for misuse in such a scheme are endless, and it would entail a stricter and more professional kind of monitoring. Can misuse be guarded against? Possibly, if criteria are not seen in terms of numbers or physical targets (counting the number of plates or toys present). A challenging task for child development specialists would be to frame criteria appropriate for this purpose.

Can they evolve criteria derived from the basics of child development to evaluate a programme in terms of its impact on children and women? Research into parental aspiration would also be needed. All of this requires a radically different approach. Ten years from the beginning may be a good time for a change of direction.

INSERT PICTURE

## The Lessons

### PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD CARE

What is the picture that emerges now about the status of child care in the country as a whole, and what can be said about the quantity and quality of the facilities available?

In terms of quantity, only a rough estimate can be made, indicating the order of magnitude. To take the statutory sector first, the Labour Bureau reports that about 23,000 children are in creches operating under the Factories Act for 1980-81. As far as coal mines are concerned, there were 210 creches in 1984. An average attendance of 10 children seems generous, so about 2,000 children may be involved. In other mines, 310 creches were reported in 1980-81, and this may account for another 3,000. All mines taken together therefore seem to have only 5,000-6,000 children in creches. In plantations, there were about 800 creches reported in 1980-81 (excluding those that seemed to exist only on paper) and the attendance at these was much higher, perhaps 25-30 children each. So there may be 20,000-25,000 children in creches on plantations. The total for the entire statutory sector may thus be between 50,000 and 55,000 children. It must, however, be mentioned that these figures relate to different periods, and there are some errors in the reporting, so this is only an estimate.

In the voluntary sector, 7,600 creches are reported for 1984-85 catering to 1.75 lakh children. However, all of these may not be the children of working mothers, nor of the poor, nor those receiving day-care. It is difficult with the available data to estimate accurately how many of these children have working mothers. Allowing a reasonable margin of error of 10-15%, it may be said that about 1½ lakh such children may be receiving some sort of day-care in the voluntary sector.

Taking both sectors together, the number of children receiving day-care can be estimated at or about 2 lakhs. Even this may be an over-estimate, but this is the best approximation. In absolute numbers, that is a respectable figure, particularly in the context of the voluntary sector, which accounts for 75% of it, having grown up in the last decade. But if taken as a percentage of the number of children who might be in need of day-care, that is, 31-34 million, it appears negligible, accounting for less than 1%. From one standpoint, a great deal has been achieved; from another, there is a long way to go.

In terms of quality, again, it is equally difficult to be categorical or to generalize. Data does not permit firm conclusions about the numbers of children above and below three years of age who are being looked after, the number who are in full-day or half-day programmes, and the extent to which mothers' needs are being met. All of these are areas in which detailed information is yet to come. As far as location is concerned, only those in the statutory sector are located at the place of work of women, which is about a quarter of the total. The bulk (75%) are found in residential locations.

From the standpoint of child development, the most important question is the quality of care. On this, the overall picture is discouraging judging by the extent to which it contributes to step healthy all-round development of the child, and by adherence to minimum standards of space, hygiene and nutrition. This is all the more discouraging since a good case can be made out for supposing that children from the neediest backgrounds, in fact, require a higher than average standard of developmental care as a compensatory measure for the deficiencies of their

homes. Unfortunately, the low financial provision, reflecting the low priority given to this need, does not permit any such compensatory activities. But the picture is not altogether dark. There are signs of a growing awareness of the need to improve quality. Further, only when the infrastructure has been laid down, is it possible to think of upgrading quality.

However, before drawing any final conclusions about the state of child care, it would be worthwhile to consider the practices of working women belonging to the middle and upper classes in India as a point of comparison.

## **The Middle Class**

Till recently, middle and upper class working women were protected from the need to think in terms of institutionalized care for their young children. The large joint or extended family and the availability of inexpensive and reliable domestic servants, were the two main planks on which they could rely. In the last two or three decades, however, this situation has been changing rapidly. With growing urbanization, migration, and an increasing number of middle class women taking to white-collar jobs, the size of the household has been reduced. The joint family is more of a social and psychological entity than a unit of residence. Smaller houses in urban areas make it difficult to have a multi-generational family in residence. At the same time, domestic help is becoming scarce, expensive and undependable. Even today the bulk of middle class working women manage to have their children cared for within the family, but this is becoming more and more unsatisfactory and leading to more and more pressure, anxiety and difficulty. More women are beginning to look for institutionalized child care, and cries of distress from the middle class working women are beginning to be heard.

The commercial response has not been lacking, but little information of a reliable type is available about it. In many of the large cities, privately run creches are operating, without any licensing or regulation and hence there is no control whatever over standards. Even the modicum of control that could exist in the statutory sector is lacking. In Chandigarh, for example, it is reported that a large number of creches and day-care homes are being privately run. A question in Parliament some years ago, which led to an informal enquiry, unearthed some frightening facts about overcrowding, lack of hygiene, untrained staff, high fees and allied horrors. A few studies by academics have reached similar conclusions.

In Bombay and Calcutta, on the other hand, there are reputed to be a number of very exclusive and expensive day-care homes catering to well-paid women professionals and maintaining excellent standards. How numerous these are, in relation to the other more commercial profit-oriented ones which are also reported to exist, cannot be stated now. In Delhi, the Department of Social Welfare has for several years been running a chain of day-care centres for working women. Most of these are patronized by the office-going middle class worker, but in theory they are open to all categories of workers, with a sliding-scale for fees related to income. Some hospitals have creches for nurses/female doctors. Reports about the quality of care in all these range from indifferent to poor. In Madras it is reported that a few enterprising retired couples have undertaken family day-care, taking in the children of friends, relatives or neighbours. Day-care solutions appear to have been found in other cities, but little is known about them. This seems to be one more area where survey and documentation are sadly lacking.

It would seem logical to suggest that middle class educated women would be capable of organizing themselves to provide for the care of their children, and to insist on the kind of standards they require through the market operation of fees. Yet this is not happening. Possibly, day-care homes are used only by those working mothers who are forced to do so because they cannot resort to any traditional arrangement and are in no position to be critical. This leads to

commercial exploitation at its worst, but the mother is powerless to protest. Further, the “longevity” of parents in institutions like day-care or nursery school is notoriously low. In a year or two, with the immediate problem solved, the children have outgrown the institution, and the parents lose interest in it. For these reasons, a middle class day-care movement has not yet arisen in urban centres. But it is not unlikely that some enterprising women’s organizations will take this up in the coming decade. From the state, there has been a firm and consistent emphasis on the poorest sections who need such services the most. There has been so far no diversion into provision for the urban middle class though this would have been logistically the easiest to tackle.

What are the plus and minus points? The achievement is admirable, but difficulties of implementation have prevented a focus on the needs of rural women in the agricultural sector, though they form both the largest and the neediest component. The organized sector, being the easiest to deal with, has been tackled first; but the limitations of that approach have already become evident, and attention is now gradually shifting to the unorganized sector. The voluntary sector, characteristically a strong element in an open society, has been drawn upon as a resource. But in its anxiety to promote day-care and meet a need, Government has stuck to an unnecessarily monolithic and single track approach. *Greater diversity, freedom and support for experimentation by voluntary agencies combined with stricter application of the conditions of assistance would now be a great incentive to moves in the right direction.*

## ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

It is now time to probe the picture for reasons and linkages to analyze issues and frame theories. How has the dominant ideology, the inheritance of the past, and the course of development in the last three decades affected it? What covert and overt factors are operating? Where do the prevailing winds originate and what strategies have been used to deal with them? What light does comparison with other countries throw on the subject?

In the context of the need, the availability of day-care today may be a very tiny achievement. Yet it may be considered admirable precisely because it has taken place in the context of attitudes largely antithetical to it, and represents a triumph of progressive forces in the ongoing conflict between modernizing and conserving forces.

### Myth and Reality

The fundamental reasons for the limited growth of organized day-care for the poor working woman is the lack of exposure that women’s issues have had till recently. Among women’s issues, in turn, the issue of child care has received low priority. The reasons for this may be located in major clusters of attitudes which have come down from the past through the large numbers of traditionalists who have yet to come to terms with the rapid and far-reaching social and economic changes of the present. Three ideas in particular emerge in this content as social “myths”. The facts on which such myths are based may have been true at different times in the past, but have now been eroded. Yet they continue as conceptual frameworks long after their factual validity has become questionable.

The three important “myths” are:

- (a) The belief that Indian women are not working, the “invisible” working woman.
- (b) The belief that the extended Indian family unassisted is capable of caring for children adequately (the “invisible” nuclear family).



- (c) The myth that anyone, or any woman, can take care of children properly (“invisible” skills).

The first is one of the pervasive concepts in Indian thought closely linked to traditional romantic images of the Indian woman as the ideal wife, mother, homemaker and even goddess. This image of the Sita-Savitri type extolled in Indian history, classical literature, Hindu law and metaphysics reflects not so much male domination as an upper class and upper caste view. Intellectual activity, especially theorizing, has always been the privilege of the educated elites, who have been drawn from the upper classes and castes, and it is not necessary to refer to Veblen to affirm that the capacity to keep women at home in relative leisure has always been a prestigious distinguishing mark of the leisured class. The lower castes and classes have rarely been accorded the opportunity to record their images and concepts for posterity. However, the factual realities of today point out that one out of every three adult women is working, that one adult woman is in the work force for every three males, that one out of five females (of all ages) is working.

When Mahatma Gandhi exhorted Indian women to come out of their homes and join the freedom movement, he was addressing himself to this sector, the middle class women, and not to the labouring masses. These women indeed brought about a sea change in Indian society, for they have never gone back since, and are now to be found in many walks of life formerly closed to them. Yet even this is ignored, so great is the power of the myth. Morarji Desai, when he was Prime Minister had described day-care as a Westernized concept not applicable to Indian women whom he saw as wedded to their homes and hearths and never to be parted from their young children. Since 1975 and the publication of the Report to the Committee on the Status of Women, the signs of a slow reawakening can be seen. But there is still a long educative process ahead before the “invisible” working woman is fully recognized in India.

The second myth is closely related to the first, and reflects a sentimental attachment to the joint family ideal, which is seen as the sacred repository of the most cherished Hindu values. It should be clear by now even to non-Marxists that this too is the dominant ideology of the upper class and upper caste groups. The joint family as described in classical textbooks is a theoretical construct, or a model, in the academic sense, rather than a description of facts. Approximations to this ideal do exist even now but sociological evidence shows that its prevalence is correlated with caste and income, being more among the upper and less among the lower-income groups. Families among most tribal and some other minority groups are also more likely to be nuclear. Studies indicate that 60% of households are nuclear, though even in a nuclear family there may be older dependent adults present to take care of children. Besides, the joint or extended family continues as a psychological and social reality even when units of residence are nuclear. More detailed evidence is needed before the “invisible” nuclear family can become visible. An educative process has to begin here too to help society to come to terms with change.

The third myth, that anyone is capable of child care, is the only one which truly reflects a gender bias, rather than a class bias. In a patriarchal society, and a male-dominated world-view, all female tasks are assigned secondary value, the prestigious and skilled jobs being perceived as male. Thus if women’s work is to take care of home and family, this is perceived as an unskilled job, or one requiring only a low level of skills that any woman can “pick up” in the course of growing up. That major skills are learnt through those informal role-imitating and practice methods of learning is missed.

The ramifications of this myth are extensive. Women are usually pushed into the lowliest, lowest paid, lowest skilled jobs and this contributes to their “invisibility” as members of the work force. But more important in this context is the outcome for education, for if no special skills are required for child care then no training is required either. This attitude is responsible for the “blind spot” about training.

The lack of appreciation of the need for training has profoundly affected the development not only of day-care but of the whole range of child welfare services in our country. The authors of

ICDS, for instance, are victims of this business; ten years ago, when ICDS training was hesitantly started as a “crash” programme, four-month brush with theory in a classroom was considered adequate to prepare uneducated girls for the delicate and complex functions they had to perform. Today it has become somewhat more organized but only slightly better – there is still a divorce between theory and practice, trainer and supervisor. It is still too hasty, bookish and superficial to serve its purpose well, and still not diversified or flexible enough to respond to local variations. The “competency” based approach of Mobile Creches, which draws both from modern pedagogic concepts of learning-by-doing and of traditional role-modelling strategies, is little appreciated even in academic circles and is brushed aside as an interesting but far-fetched notion, incapable of replication. Anutai Wagh’s repeated suggestion that a regular course in child care should be introduced to form the recruiting ground for ICDS workers has been ignored so far. Proposals by several agencies, the above two included, to introduce child care as a two-year course at +2 level in the vocational stream have fallen on deaf ears. Schemes of training for day-care workers/creche workers/ayahs are yet to get off the ground. At college level, Home Science and its branches – home management, child development, nutrition, etc. may have entered the academic world as “disciplines”. But child care is not even accepted as a vocational exercise.

Even the members of the “new” women’s movement, who have been vociferously demanding that child care facilities be compulsorily attached to all institutions which employ women, are victims of the same attitude. While some have insisted in their dialogue with planners that child care be included among the Minimum Needs, which now include maternal and child health and nutrition, they have not yet gone into the implications of this demand from the point of view of training, or analyzed its consequences for vocational education. The vast employment potential for a cadre of women professionals and paraprofessionals seems to have escaped them. Already there are about 80,000 anganwadi workers and soon the number will be 1 lakh. But little thought has been given to long-term issues of training, advancement or mobilization of this huge group.

This attitude also underlies the prevailing indifference to the low levels of girls’ enrolment in schools and to female illiteracy. Confining girls to their homes as child caretakers is seen as preparing them for their future role as home-makers, presumably the time is used to “pick-up” those skills as child caretakers and home-makers.

The three myths, interlinked, form a vicious circle that traps girls forever in a self-perpetuating situation. If women are working, the family is becoming nuclearized, household units are getting smaller and child care is task requiring attention and skill, a conclusion that follows is that more and more men need to get more and more involved in child care. But this is the kind of awareness that can spread and grow only as the prevailing myths are demolished. All of this implies that long-term attitudinal change is an issue that must be addressed. More well meaning plans and proposals cannot take us very far unless the underlying issues are clearly faced and strategies to deal with them devised.

## **Motivating Forces**

The prevailing ideology then reflects a perspective which is upper caste, middle class and male-dominated, not a climate suited to the development of day-care. In this context, it may be interesting to study how day-care emerged at all. What forces then propelled its origin? Where did the pressures come from? A closer look, sector by sector, will reveal some surprising contradictions and insights.

To begin with the organized labour movement, trade unions as a whole have played a very small part in the growth of day-care. There is not a single instance of a trade union anywhere in India having fought a militant battle on this issue, and indeed very few actions on behalf of women’s welfare. The record of trade unions, even the more Left-wing ones, on workers’ education

and welfare concerns has not been a particularly bright one. In the coal industry, as mentioned earlier, women now form only 10% of the work force (declining from an earlier 24%) but their representation in unions is even less (8%) and they have hardly any role in leadership or decision-making. In textiles, the unions have not resisted the gradual reduction in the employment of female labour. The unions have almost everywhere seen themselves as instruments of collective bargaining on wage issues first, and then on issues such as grievances, victimization cases or retrenchment. Pressure here has come from the statutory obligations introduced by enlightened legislation, and the bureaucratic machinery for its enforcement, rather than from the unions.

In the unorganized sector, the equivalent of trade unions are the grassroots organizations of self-employed workers, artisans and producers' cooperatives, piece and contract workers' unions, in small-scale enterprises. Most of these have been too preoccupied with survival and struggle on basic issues affecting income and work conditions to have become involved with day-care. The rise of an organization like SEWA, which is the mouthpiece of self-employed women, is a recent phenomenon. Significantly, SEWA has from the beginning been concerned with child care issues and has experimented with its own home-grown efforts in day-care, including both group day-care and care by neighbouring families. The centres are basically custodial in nature, and due to lack of funds are able to provide only the most elementary health care and some nutrition. They may be judged primitive by those going solely by standards of child development. But significantly, they depend for finances mostly on mothers' contributions, which naturally sets serious limits to the programme. This is a pointer to other such movements. But on the whole there has been little or no pressure from the bottom in the unorganized sector.

Turning now to legislators, what has their record been? The early generation of legislators both in the Constituent Assembly and in the first two Parliaments, were deeply concerned with women's rights, a legacy of the freedom movement. Their efforts culminated in the Hindu Code Bill and other social legislation of the fifties. They were more preoccupied with social problems and had little energy left over for economic issues, or to consider woman as worker. The primacy of women's economic role did not come to the forefront till much later. The early legislation to protect labour drew its inspiration from Fabianism and was an expression of Socialist concern for the welfare of workers as a whole rather than of women as such. Its perspective was almost wholly industrial, hence the unorganized sector, in which women play so major a role, escaped its attention.

From the sixties onwards, women's issues as such were relegated to the background in the legislative debates. Women members of Parliament continued to take interest in women's concerns but concentrated on other aspects relating to social reform, and the same line was followed by the major women's organizations like the All India Women's Congress (AIWC). Women when drafted to ministerial positions in the State or Centre, generally took charge of portfolios like health, education, social welfare, family planning, etc. and the issue of day-care was very rarely or never taken up as a priority. The perspective continued to be of women's welfare, allied to child welfare.

The stand of political parties may be considered next. The Congress Party, which has held the centre of the stage in the last half-century, has a long and honorable record, right from pre-Independence days, of support for women. At the same time, the Congress has consistently supported all minority groups. Women have tended to get lumped along with other minorities – Muslims, Scheduled Castes, tribals, handicapped, aged, children, etc. – and to get the same sort of support, a generalized commitment which is translated from time to time into special actions, as and when particular circumstances merit, and a welfare approach rather than a sustained analysis of needs of different levels.

The political parties of the Left have also not addressed this issue. It has been the accepted policy to subsume gender issues under the more general rubric of class issues. The Marxist parties maintain that women's difficulties are only a part of the larger exploitation of the toiling masses under capitalism, and that attention must be concentrated on the larger strategy. With the coming of true Socialism, women's problems will automatically be resolved.

This quick survey seems to indicate that the demand for day-care was not sponsored by trade unions, women's organizations, grassroots workers' organizations, legislators, political parties and other formal institutions. From where then did the motivating force come? Who spoke for the woman worker and for the child?

Interestingly enough, the answer came from the Government, and ironically, from the same middle class intelligentsia which has been at vanguard of so many progressive movements. There have indeed been and are lobbies for women, for children, for girls' education, and spokesmen for them. These are small, active and vocal groups, led by visionary and dynamic individuals and drawing support from the idealistic educated middle class. Because of their social position and articulateness, these groups could command official attention and insist on allocation of some funds for such purposes. The charisma of the leaders involved exerted a pressure out of all proportion to their numbers.

The top echelons of the bureaucracy, drawn from the same class, have been sympathetic, aware and supportive, launching with zeal and efficiency a series of anti-poverty programmes. However, inter-departmental rivalry, has been responsible for lower efficiency than otherwise could have been achieved. Thus, Departments of Education, instead of concerning themselves with the quality of educational inputs into day-care and with training of workers, have remained aloof, categorizing day-care efforts as mere glorified baby-sitting. The Departments which themselves employed female workers in large numbers have tried to look the other way and evade the law while Labour Departments have taken a logistic stance. Social Welfare Departments for an embarrassingly long period tended to look upon child welfare centres as avenues for the rehabilitation of destitute, abandoned or unemployable women! The Law and Finance Ministries have done little to help voluntary agencies. Lack of rapport, poor communication, internecine rivalry, bickering, sheer ignorance and lack of cooperation have stood in the way of the emergence of a more coherent, compact and dynamic movement.

At this point, it may be useful to compare the Indian experience with that of other Asian countries.

On the issue of day-care, the Asian world can be sharply divided into two approaches – Socialist and non-Socialist in orientation. For the Socialist countries, day-care for the children of working women is an integral part of their social and political philosophy, with a strong claim on State attention and resources. The two major Asian Socialist societies, China and Vietnam, however, differ in their approach.

### **The Socialist Countries of Asia**

In China, a vast network of both creches (0-3) and kindergartens (3-7) for the children of women workers are known to exist. The two are intimately related and seen to be performing dual functions for both women and children. This system was introduced in the early fifties, but little quantitative detail about it is available even now. In the seventies, several foreign observers described the two institutions, stressing the availability of creches in factories especially, where the mothers could be conveniently feed and attend to children during their working hours. Factory creches also worked three shifts, round the clock, like the women. Less was said about creches in rural communes. But more recent reports speak more about kindergartens. It seems that China faces problems similar to those in India with regard to infant care, and creches, while still in existence, are now seen as more informal arrangements for child care. The few creches recently observed are reported to be custodial centres with a clean and healthy environment, plenty of space, adequate nutrition and affectionate caretakers. But not much is known about developmental activity or programmes.

Kindergartens are more visible and more widespread, but here too there are sharp rural-urban differences. While almost all creche staff seems to be untrained, many kindergarten workers

also are untrained. The exact numbers in each are not known. The range is from well-equipped, sophisticated educational programmes in some of the best institutions staffed by well-trained teachers to very crude and simple child-minding centres in rural areas with untrained staff and a minimal but formal programme. All observers are agreed, however, that three elements are present in all situations from the most to the least disadvantaged, namely, adequate nutrition, a clean and healthy environment, and a warm and loving attendant or teacher. This indicates that China has laid down infrastructures for children with a provision of minimum basic care, though other things vary enormously. Immense diversity must be expected in a country even vaster than ours, but the infrastructure and growing awareness makes possible gradual upgrading.

Vietnam, on the other hand, has opted for the Soviet model from the start. A network of creches was developed in North Vietnam during the war years, when women were most needed to support the war effort by releasing men for combat. This system has now been extended to the southern part of the country, formerly South Vietnam. As in China, a distinction is made between creches and kindergartens, which are in the administrative charge of different ministries. Urban/rural disparity is significant. At present, 43,000 creches staffed by 1½ lakh workers, cater to 1.148 million children aged 0-3, or 24% of the age-group. However, 90% of all creches are found in the northern part of the country. Here too there is a differential in favour of the organized sector. One-third of the children are those of women in State employment (government functionaries and industrial workers) and 70% of all women in State employment are catered for by these facilities. Only 2/3 of the creches catered to children in rural areas, whose mothers are in more scattered residences and in agricultural occupations.

As far as kindergartens are concerned, 1.5 million children, or 35% of the age-group 3-6, are found in them. 27% of these provide day-boarding, including lunch, and are intended to cater to the children of working mothers. Some keep children for the whole day, but being unable to provide lunch, are obliged to send them home, while the rest are half-day schools. Only about 50% of the staff are trained. In the creches, less than half the workers are trained, and of these, most have attended only a short one-month training programme.

In spite of emphasis on health and safety and enormous efforts to meet standards, there is a wide variation in actual practice. Vietnam, like India, has accepted a monolithic concept and will not tolerate in principle, the idea of differential provision. Yet, in practice, it exists. The attempts to emulate the Soviet model could not be carried far in a resource-poor nation. So on the one hand palatial buildings, well-equipped, airy and spacious, with well-trained staff in a ratio of one to five or six children, excellent food and health care, stimulating play activity and superb care are available in a handful of institutions, mostly urban, and probably catering to high-level government cadres. On the other hand, rural creches are found housed in small cramped damp rooms, in insanitary conditions, with no provision for basic hygiene, short on all sorts of equipment and materials from food to play materials, and untrained and inexperienced staff with little supervision. These examples of elitism within the Socialist pattern are distressing in relation to their avowed egalitarianism. Nevertheless, Vietnam, like China, has laid down a basic infrastructure on which it will be possible to upgrade facilities for the masses. The most encouraging fact is the uniformly high worker/child ratio – 1: 7 is the national average, ranging from 1: 5 to 1: 8. This makes individualized care possible and lays the foundation for better quality.

Other Socialist countries in Asia like Burma, Kampuchea and Laos have only made a start in this direction. The level of services is still very low, and in pattern they appear to be following their political mentors. Hopefully, they may learn from both China and Vietnam and chalk out more realistic paths for themselves. No information is available at the moment about North Korea.

## Other Asian Countries

It is in contrast to the non-socialist group of countries that India's achievement becomes most striking. These countries may be considered in three groups – the poor, the middle-income and the rich. In the first group, one may consider the other countries of South Asia, in the second, the ASEAN countries, and in the third, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Hongkong.

In South Asia, with the notable exception of Sri Lanka, the Indian experience is outstanding by its uniqueness. The other countries seem as yet barely aware of such issues. Bangladesh and Nepal are now making a start with small experimental programmes in the voluntary sector, still confined to urban areas. The tiny country of Maldives is making a bold experiment in trying to adapt its traditional child-minding institutions to meet the needs of the present. Sri Lanka is the only other country in the region with some achievement in this area. Here too the programme of plantation creches is obviously modeled on the Indian one, and has run up against similar difficulties. Soon after the estates were nationalized in 1976 the creche scheme was introduced and a chain of creches set up. However, they are poorly equipped and maintained, inappropriately staffed and heavily underutilized. To make matters worse, the situation is complicated by ethnic and language issues, since the plantation labour is mostly Tamil speaking, of Indian origin, and part of the complex question of stateless people. In spite of the well-meaning efforts of the Government to give the Tamil labour a fair deal, lack of imagination in planning and apathy in execution have led to the current situation. Almost all the problems referred to in the chapter on voluntary agencies are reflected in Sri Lanka. An attempt is now being made to improve matters and upgrade both quality and utilization by involving workers of the Sarvodaya movement in training and supervision. The situation has very close parallels with that in India and mutual sharing of experience could help a good deal.

In the middle-income countries of the ASEAN region, institutionalized child care is conspicuous by its absence, except for a small fringe serving the urban middle class. In Thailand, most day-care is concentrated in Bangkok, but the number is large enough for the Government of Thailand to have introduced certain regulations, laying down minimum standards for space, equipment and staffing. No special training for day-care workers, however, seems to have been developed. In Malaysia, a similar situation prevails. Recently there has been a move to introduce day-care as a special support programme for the plantation labour, an underprivileged group of immigrant Tamils. With the delicate racial balance in Malaysia, this may be seen as a populist political measure, but could nevertheless be a worthwhile programme. In the Philippines, the situation is confused by semantics, the word "day-care" being used to describe the Government-supported child development services. The so-called "day-care" centres usually function for a few hours only, are unrelated to the mothers' work status, and mostly cater to children of age-group 4+. The programme is community-based, staffed by local volunteers with little or no training and offers a very diluted and formal kind of preschool education, with some mid-morning snack whenever available. The major objective appears to be to socialize children for school, but since it can hardly be termed kindergarten education as understood in the Philippines this name has been chosen as a compromise.

These countries on the whole have yet to acknowledge the problems of working women, generally sticking to the belief that the extended family can cope with child care. It is to be noted that young girls do not seem to be under particular pressure as child caretakers in these countries, all of which have a much higher rate of female school enrolment than India. The Philippines is particularly outstanding, since school enrolment at elementary levels is in fact slightly higher for girls than for boys. Cultural variability thus plays a very important part.

In the high-income countries, large numbers of women are now employed in the professional, technical and commercial sectors and there is a growing demand for day-care. The problem here is of a different nature, closer in many respects to that found in the affluent West. The

information available indicates a spurt in the growth of private day-care centres, with attempts at control and regulation failing far behind. Singapore and Hongkong have proceeded furthest with the attempt to ensure quality through licensing and control while in Japan it appears that rampant commercialism has led to low standards and agonized protests from working mothers.

The problems, needs and responses to the situations vary tremendously from country to country. But what all the non-socialist countries have in common is the virtual abandonment of day-care to the play of market forces, thus tilting the balance in favour of the more affluent. The Indian experience assumes critical significance in this context because of its nature, and its attempt to steer a course midway between the Socialist and non-Socialist approaches. There has been significant State intervention on behalf of the poor, combined with an unwillingness or inability to carry things to their logical conclusion.

The development of day-care in India can thus be seen as a typical product of a Welfare State. Whether called welfare capitalism, or Nehruvian Socialism, or by any other name, it is a system half-way between two extremes, with the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Day-care has been fuelled by the Welfare State approach thus far, and in view of the background, the achievement is creditable. But the demand has neither the thrust of a revolutionary mass movement legitimized by the attainment of State power and determined to use it to better the lot of masses, nor does it have the spontaneous self-propelling vigour of a genuine participatory grassroots movement that could only arise in a democracy where the poor and the under-organized have the capability to articulate and direct their own development. This is a characteristically Indian situation, applicable not only to day-care but to many other departments of life.

The question is: Where does one go from here? What is suggested is a switch in approach from “top-down” to one that is bottom-up”.

## **PRESCRIPTIONS AND POLICIES**

First, it must be reiterated that only strong pressure from below can give both direction and force to the movement for day-care. Grassroots organizations, women’s groups and women’s movements must articulate and express their needs themselves. Only then can day-care emerge not only as a strong movement but take a shape which responds to their needs. It is essential that this demand come not from the more educated, enlightened women’s group of the middle class, whether they be militant or protective, speaking “on behalf of”, but from the women concerned, poor and unorganized through they may be. In fact, it seems that organization of the unorganized poor women is an essential first step. If child care is one of their priorities, then the demand for it will be made and strategies can then be worked out with the help of professionals and all the forces “at the top”. But a “mai-baap” attitude to Government as the Great Dispenser can only mean more of the same soulless, watered-down programme, ultimately weak in cost-benefit terms.

At the same time, the extreme vulnerability of the poor should not be forgotten, placing a ceiling on wild hopes of “instant” organization. In a situation of surplus labour and unemployment, poverty, lack of education and organization, the poor are not in a strong position to make demands. And among the poor, the women are in an even weaker position. Further, it should be remembered that people cannot demand something which is outside their current experience. The concept of day-care is still a new one. It has not yet generated sufficient awareness of its possibilities. So creation of awareness must precede demand, and here many elements, from women’s groups to trade unions, have a role to play.

### **Strength in Diversity**

The welfare package kind of approach has to be countered with a more dynamic, critical and demanding one by a force which must come from below. But meanwhile, there can still be considerable input into patterning from above. Here the most important point which cannot be reiterated strongly enough, is the need for utmost diversity of design to suit varying needs, aspirations, circumstances and conditions. The principles of flexibility and diversity have to be applied across all areas, in relation to legislation, programming, training and funding.

## **Legislation**

New legislation for day-care must be directed to serving the unorganized sector, but it should be enabling rather than prescriptive, and provide support for what can be done rather than tell what to do. The experience of the past, with regard to legislation for the organized sector, has clearly shown that the law remains a dead letter in the absence of a strong enforcement machinery, being either evaded altogether or complied with only in the letter and not the spirit. But can even a strong enforcement machinery be effective in relation to issues of welfare?

Legislation for the organized sector is necessary, but needs to be amended. Earlier chapters have indicated the kind of amendments which need to be made, so the details will not be repeated here. But laws have to be more realistic. If rules have to be laid down, they should be guidelines rather than standards to be rigidly applied. For example, relating the obligation to provide a creche to the number of women employed not only leads to evasion, but penalizes women who work in smaller units. Yet, as the example of the coal industry shows, insisting that a creche be provided if even a single woman is employed, produces no better results. Obviously, the rules must suggest and support devices like community creches or cost-sharing by employers. *The guidelines should be drawn up in consultation with several kinds of people – professionals and field workers who know what is desirable and feasible from the point of view of the children, representatives of the employees and the employers, lawyers who know what is evadeable and what is enforceable, and officials who are concerned with execution.* In this way, the guidelines may make more sense. There should also be a built-in mechanism for review after a fixed period of years, as well as for questioning certain provisions if they become inapplicable because of changed circumstances or even mere passage of time.

## **Programme**

In programming, a diversity of models is needed and encouragement should be given to people to develop designs appropriate for them. The present pattern of voluntary agencies needs support, but with allowances for diverging approaches. Thus small and large agencies with small or large programmes need to be treated differently, as suggested earlier, and provided with different kinds of funding and support services. Within the organized sector itself, it may be better to promote day-care through independent agencies, with financial support from employers, parents and governments. These agencies may run community day-care services for women employed in small units, either in residential areas or near work places, according to local needs. In the unorganized sector, since there are no large employers, public donations or community services would be valuable. The financial and personal commitments of parents are essential, in both sectors.

Another model which could be thought of and which has been little tried in India is of family day-care. In this model, women belonging to the same community as the clients are encouraged to take in a few children (one or two perhaps, certainly not more than four or five) into their homes, acting as part-time foster mothers. Professional support, training and funding is required to enable them to do this job in a way that is satisfactory from the point of view of the child's development. They can provide one basic ingredient – a substitute home. But other inputs



are necessary to ensure that the substitute home is also one which promotes development. This approach has immense scope, but will raise complex problems that need to be thought out in detail.

Other possibilities are a school-based approach, attaching creches to primary schools, along with *balwadis*, and the community-based integrated model or *vikaswadi* type of approach which caters for infants, preschoolers and school-age children under one roof. Special groups like migrants, nomads, home-based workers, shift workers, seasonal workers, will each require a different design. If the need exists and the demand is articulated, and if the groups are homogenous to some extent, it should not be beyond the realm of imagination to devise solutions appropriate to each. The difficulty arises only when the same solution is blindly imposed on all questions.

The issue of whether the custodial part of day-care is necessary or possible in all cases can then be faced squarely. This becomes possible if one differentiates between development, which is the right of all children, and custodial care which is necessary only for those children whose mothers or adult caretakers have to be away for long periods. In a large number of cases, it may be better as well as more feasible to offer only support services of health-care, nutrition, short periods of educative activity, home-based activity, parent education etc. along the ICDS lines and not attempt full day-care. This is suggested not merely on grounds of feasibility. *Day-care is justifiable only if it offers an environment and a programme at least as good as, and hopefully better than, that available to the child otherwise.* To offer less is both unfair and dangerous, because it could be worse for the child than the alternative. Here a holistic view must be taken. Day-care must always compare itself, in all dimensions, and not merely in the physical dimensions of health and nutrition, to the alternatives, and ask what it is putting in the place of that which it takes the child away from. If custodial care is offered, it must be developmental. If this is not possible, then custodial care should not be offered, but developmental programmes can support whatever custodial care is in existence. This would help avoid the pitfalls into which many current day-care programmes have fallen, while at the same time encourage the emergence of viable indigenous alternatives.

Flexibility can be visualized in many situations. Within ICDS itself, it may lead to several solutions, some offering custodial care and others not. In every case, whatever the design chosen, the characteristics of good programme must be clearly defined in terms of objectives, with close attention to the needs and resources of each specific situation. The concept of a single monolithic design for the whole country must be abandoned.

## **Diversity in Training**

All of this implies an infrastructure for training which should include in its scope an apparatus for monitoring, supervision and guidance on professional lines. The training apparatus itself needs to be diversified, flexible, and multi-layered, if it is to be sensitive enough to respond to a diversified situation. At one end, there has to be orientation and education of parents and families, supporting their own efforts in child care and to involve men more; next the training of paraprofessionals who may be for long the only kind of caretakers to staff institutionalized child-care centres; at the other end, there is need for extension workers, trainers, instructors, supervisors and higher-level professionals.

The biggest chunk will undoubtedly be for paraprofessionals, who will be performing in a multiplicity of situations. Though such people may vary in many respects, they are likely to have one thing in common; few of them will be able to spend long periods away from their homes/workplaces to undergo training. A basic principle of training would then be that the trainers have to be mobile, offering advice, guidance, skill upgrading, resources, and support on the spot and on the job. From a pedagogical standpoint, training which is on the job, related to job specifications and rooted in experiential reality is more likely to be meaningful, to be internalized and to endure.

So on-the-job training by mobile trainers makes sense by more than one criterion; it saves effort in the long run, reducing the need for repetition, it saves money, and it is more effective.

At the next level, it is time to consider the introduction of child care as a regular course in the vocational stream. Since, to be effective, such courses would need to be based on practical experience in child care centres in addition to whatever theoretical inputs are considered desirable, this suggests considerable restructuring. University courses are not well adapted for large amounts of practical work in real-life conditions. The recognition of something akin to “apprenticeship” in the industrial sector, or residency in medical education, which is what Mobile Creches has developed through its internship model is desirable. Many of the existing courses and programmes for ICDS training, Balsevika training, pre-primary training etc. could be adapted within the framework of day-care, offering special optional courses in preschool education, child health, adult education and other aspects.

Such a comprehensive programme of training would need an army of workers at the next level – extension workers, teachers, trainers, researchers and academics – as well as a corresponding diversity of approaches. Extension and supervisory support may range from mobile teams or roving advisory teachers on the one hand and refresher courses, workshops and training camps at the other. Training methodologies could range from sandwich courses combining distance methods with practical experience to the more conventional graduate, post-graduate and research-oriented courses. All courses could offer optional requirements to meet specialized needs at different levels.

## **Finances**

Funding too has to be many-faceted and flexible. Screening and monitoring devices must exist, and so must financial controls, but the devices must be different. There must be criteria that can support daring, innovative and imaginative proposals while guarding against misuse, waste and duplication. Given the financial ingenuity of the bureaucracy, it should be possible to find ways and means doing so. Working out per child costs for different levels of services and programmes, from the minimal services to full developmental day-care, for units of different sizes and varying designs may be one way to approach this problem. Only the suggestion of principle is offered here; details must be worked out in another setting.

*The source of funding should be autonomously administered financial pools or funds built up by contributions from employers, parents, the state and the public.* As regards the first group, all employers, large or small, within a given area or industry should be required to contribute, perhaps at varying rates, regardless of whether they employ women or in what numbers, as a general charge towards the provision of social amenities, rather than as a specific contribution for women employed by them. In this way, for instance, market traders or forest contractors may be drawn upon to help support services for self-employed women, market vendors or headloaders as the case may be. Parental contribution, again at varying rates, is also a must, with the balance made up by the public at large. Such a fund should finance, not merely day-care, but other support services for working women too. Funding should be of an “enabling” rather than “directive” nature, leaving people to work out schemes and apply for assistance rather than requiring all to conform to a single pattern or framework.

## **Attitudinal Change**

Finally, at another level, there is the vast, vague, undefined and tough issue of long-term attitudinal change. Who is to tackle this and how? There are no simple answers. Awareness has to be created at

two levels. First is awareness of the true situation of women and children today, resulting from the sweeping social changes of the past decades, rendering visible the invisible, as it were. Next comes awareness of alternatives, of possible solutions, of viable models. The first is an endeavour that must involve the entire educational system and curricula at all levels and the fullest possible use of the mass media and of all institutional facilities. The movement for such change must be powered by women's groups and organizations pressing for change at all levels and in the media. The second, a visible demonstration of possibilities, can only come about through the involvement of the vast institutional network, both governmental and voluntary, that already exists. This is specially necessary in rural areas, which have hitherto remained relatively untouched by efforts in day-care. Agricultural universities, extension services, government departments, cooperatives, banks, trade unions, voluntary agencies, and political parties are among those who can take part in propagating the movement. But the initiative must come from the concerned groups.

### **Gaps in Knowledge**

It has become clear in the course of the study that many gaps exist in the information available now, which are essential for policy and programming in the future. Some of these have been identified and presented in the preceding pages at the appropriate points. To sum up briefly, the following are some of the areas where research and documentation appear most to be needed.

1. Demographic data about who, how many, where and what. How many women are working, in what occupations and where, in what circumstances and at what income levels? How many children do they have, and how many of these need day-care, and how many need other developmental programmes? How many girls are full-time child caretakers, where and for how long, and in what circumstances? Who actually cares for young children in the family, at different income levels, places and occupations and in the context of different kinds of household composition?
2. Theoretical studies on the impact of different types of care-taking on the development of children. What effect does multiple mothering or multiple care-taking within the family have on the child? What effects do different types and levels of institutionalized care-taking have on the child? What factors are salient in each case and how do they differ?
3. Survey data about programmes and agencies. How many agencies and of what type are involved in day-care? How many training programmes and of what kind? What information can be gleaned about the distribution of day-care services between rural and urban areas, between different income groups, between working and non-working mothers, between children of different age-groups, between half-day and full-day programmes, between large and small agencies, between work-place and residential locations of day-care centres?
4. Evaluative studies about the nature, quality and effectiveness of different types of programmes in existence, including historical and anecdotal accounts and interviews, case-studies along the lines presented here, micro-studies of experimental programmes, criterion-based research studies, and accounts of day-care for different sections of the population.
5. Comparative studies of the situation in other developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, linking up the development of day-care with economic growth, social and political perspectives and value systems in each culture, as well as comparisons with developments in affluent countries both in Asia and the West.

There is considerable scope for research and information necessary for rational policy-making. But research here is not being suggested as a substitute for action. Day-care programmes must continue to develop even as research fills the gaps in our knowledge.

Finally, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the long-term issues. The future of day-care is dependent on a change in public awareness about the true situation of working women and their children, and in the growth of new attitudes responsive to the social and economic situation of today. Much needs to be done in this area. Attitudinal changes take time and many have to participate – educational institutions, the media, political parties, women's movements, all the formal and informal structures that affect the ways in which people perceive reality. But the size, time-scale and complexity of the problem should not be deterrents in making a start.

In conclusion, it must be stated that the purpose for which this study was undertaken was not merely to cast light on a relatively dark and little-studied area. It was also to engage the passions in a call for action, but action to be taken in a climate of understanding.

Women, both participant and professional, must now enter into a dialogue, if the next step is to be taken; the one provides the driving force, the other the design. The two together can make a dynamic and responsive whole. If this study has served to open such a dialogue, to stimulate interest in new patterns of day-care, it would have served much of its purpose. But there is also another kind of dialogue to be started. And if this study has helped to bridge two converging streams of concern, that for women's development and that for children's development, it would have more than fulfilled its purpose. To keep such a bridge in good repair is an even more formidable task, and must be left to the future.

The title for this study, which emerged in the course of writing, can be read in several ways – literally or ironically, in despair, taunt or challenge, as a simple request for information or as a shrug of indifference. To the present writer, it has all these connotations and more.

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