

Couple who spur social change

It was also difficult for Dipti, in her salwar-kameez attire. As she does not wear bangles, people in this traditional and conservative village first thought that she was a widow. They were taken aback that she was not wearing these though she was a married girl. "Even now, women and that too Muslim women, are after me, coaxing me to wear bangles and other ornaments that a married Hindu girl wears Dipti adds with twinkling eyes."

By UMESH AMBEGAOKER

GOVERNMENT and voluntary agencies undertaking rural uplift work! That is nothing new, particularly in Gujarat, where innumerable agencies are engaged in diversified activities for bringing about socio-economic changes in the ru. areas.

But do these activities really help to achieve the goals is a moot ques-

para-medical centre to provide basic treatment (no primary centre) exists. Hygiene and cleanliness training and productive activities like encouraging the farmers to go in for vegetable cultivation, water management and also youth activities to channelise the youth power.

Both Raju and Dipti want these activities to be extended to 25-30 villages around Lotia and to adopt and induct students of six secondary



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tion. Target-wise, these might be true, but Raju and Dipti Purohit voice their strong reservations to the methods employed to achieve this.

Rather as the young social activist couple, who had been working in a remote village in this drought-prone border district of Banaskantha often stress, "It is counter-productive and often defeats the very objectives".

Well qualified (he is a M.E. and she is B.Com. LL.B.) they gave up their good jobs and have settled down in a small hot-dusty village of Lotia in Radhanpur taluka of Banaskantha district, where there is no electricity, no piped water and no post-office. The state transport bus visits the village of around 1,000 population twice a day.

'SLAVISH' OUTLOOK: Raju, who speaks on behalf of the two, says that the loans and subsidy given by government agencies and the voluntary agencies have made the backward people rather "davidish" in mentality. "They have forgotten the tenets of self-reliance and have come to depend on it as a matter of right. What is required is rural-based centres for real awakening of the people".

And to prove their point, they gave up their lucrative jobs, their initial affiliation with the reputed Bhanjali Trust and started working purely on their own in the remote village.

"Only condition, I put before coming to this village was that I will not go and draw and carry water. That has to be arranged" quips in Dipti, who was born and brought up in Ahmedabad. Otherwise, the decision to devote their life for this work was a joint one. "We get mental and marital peace in this village, unparalleled and practically non-available in cities like Ahmedabad, they attest."

During their 10-month stay, they set up a Balwadi (there is only a primary school) with 30-40 kids, a

school in the nearby areas to continue these activities.

FURTHER EXPERIMENTS : But they are not happy with just these things. Both of them are active in uniting "fragmented" population. One such successful experiment that they worked out was of the gram-nanchayat's tube-well. Only influential and goonda elements were able to use its water through their muscle power. Raju and Dipti worked, united the weak and got the well water for the entire population. Another instance securing donation from an Ahmedabad-based company for drilling another tube-well, which provided the much-needed water.

But in this case, they put in practice their principles and techniques. They provided water for cultivation of fodder in two acres of land to 10 farmers, one-third share of the production they took for maintenance and other purposes and also to provide one-acre plots to landless labourers to carry on their experiments in fodder development, community plantation and protective irrigation.

"It is a difficult task and we had decided to undertake this for one year initially on experimental basis. But now we are convinced that there was tremendous potentiality, which should be exploited."

HURDLES, TOO: But all this seems to be too easy. It is not so. The couple had to cross their hurdles. One such incident, Dipti recollects, was when they employed a Harijan girl to bring water for home use. The conservative villagers were aghast and imposed a social boycott.

But both Raju and Dipti, steeped in the Gandhian ideals remained steadfast and even threatened to leave village or to go and stay in Harijans. The villagers were cowed down and instead brought pressure on the Harijan girl to give up the job.