

This is a report on an investigation set by the Agriculture Department of I.C.T.A., and is submitted as part requirement for the D.T.A. (Diploma in Tropical Agriculture).

Aim The aim of the survey, results of which are contained in this report, was to study the life of the agricultural population in the St. Augustine-Streatham Lodge area, in order to provide a sound basis for a local agricultural extension policy. This thought has been at the back of the writer's mind throughout the survey and the idea that it was only an exercise on which one would be judged, soon disappeared owing to the absorbing nature of the work.

Lack of Reconnaissance The carrying out of a survey of this sort pre-supposes that a preliminary reconnaissance to see what there is to be surveyed has been accomplished. This of course, was not so - and though there is no record of it contained in the body of the report, the first four or five months (during which little time was available) were spent in an attempt to gain the confidence of selected families and in imbibing the general atmosphere of the daily life. (This sometimes meant the imbibing of many other things, some desirable and some which could only be regarded with suspicion).

Approach to Survey The first striking observation was the extreme lack of uniformity in the economy of the population. Some were canefarmers, some were rice-growers, some were provisions gardeners and others engaged in everything. A few people worked continuously for employers such as the neighbouring sugar estates and I.C.T.A., but most of the people either worked part time for an employer or were quite independent of wage-earning for their livelihoods. Some cultivators had over five acres of land while less fortunate individuals had no more than a house lot; moreover the degree of sub-division of the land varied considerably. With livestock the same variation is present: Some people had five or six head of cattle and some had none - carts and bicycles were owned irregularly. This heterogeneity went further than the economic aspects of their life. Several religions were concerned though Hinduism was by far the most important. Among Hindus, the four castes, viz. Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vais and Shudras were all represented. The number of children per family varied from 0 to about 10.

In the light of these observations it soon became clear that the original intention of selecting representative families and studying such things as their income and expenditure would be quite impossible without sufficient staff to study at least 50 families intensively. Singlehanded, and with only short irregular periods available for the work, one could handle no more than eight families closely and these could by no stretch of the imagination be considered to be representative of the area. Besides - there were too many other things to be surveyed to spend too much time on income and expenditure, important as these things are. e.g., The impression imparted by many people was that nothing could be said in favour of the agricultural practices of the people being surveyed - they were presumed to carry on without any basic system and in a thoroughly haphazard manner. This view was soon discarded and it has been considered worthwhile to spend some little time in emphasising the fact that their cultivation of the land and management of livestock takes place according to definite interwoven systems. This interweaving of systems, plus the fact that the systems rarely involve definite crop rotations present a confusing picture to the casual observer. The systems might perhaps be bad ones, but considering the difficulties with which they are faced, and the complete lack of instruction and guidance, the Indian gardeners of the area show considerable ingenuity and resource. From the extension point of view, these systems are of great importance because rather than attempting to start from scratch, the line of approach can be to modify and improve the existing systems. One has completed the survey with a profound respect for the people concerned and it is felt that even I.C.T.A. has something to learn from them.

The People In trying to fix the limits of the survey in one's mind, other difficulties arose. With the basic idea that the people themselves represent the target of extension work, a sound knowledge of the people as they are - their society, religions, community life, customs, state of enlightenment, state of health etc. - is fundamentally necessary. It would have been satisfactory to refer the reader to the writings of an anthropologist or sociologist on the subject, but for the fact that such writings do not exist.