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From India to Iowa

Scholars in Saris

by Mary Ellen Muckenhirn, H. Ed. 3

This fall the first phase of an international Home Economics exchange program began at Iowa State.

Baroda University, India, Home Science and Iowa State Home Economics faculty members have begun a unique graduate exchange program.

Currently 18 colleges in India grant diplomas in Home Science, but the three-year diploma programs are rapidly being converted to four-year degrees. With this change the colleges have found a need for faculty members with advanced degrees. Only three institutions in India give masters degrees, and they are only in the areas of food and nutrition and child development.

Five students from each area of Home Science have started work at Iowa State on advanced degrees that will help Baroda University strengthen its graduate and research programs in Home Science. These five students are studying food and nutrition, textiles and clothing, home management, child development, and education and extension.

Along with graduate study goes a research program that is suitable for India. Currently Indian schools are using American research material, but their subject matter, resources and culture are so different from ours that they need research that is adapted to India.

The program to establish research and strengthen graduate study is divided into three phases, covering an eight-year span. The first phase began this fall. Kalindi Patel, F. & N.; Dhruti Chhaya, H. Ed.; Jyoti Desai, H. Mgt.; Freny Debu, C. D.; and Mrs. Shashikala Shinde, T. C. have come to the United States from Baroda to study on the regular masters degree program. Only five Baroda students are in the United States at one time. Presently all five are at Iowa State, but they may study at other schools. In the next eight years there will always be five Baroda students in the United States.

The faculty at Baroda, Helen LeBaron, dean of Home Economics, and the Ford Foundation, which sponsors the program, select the five students, and Dean LeBaron selects the institution at which they study. She is in charge of the Baroda graduate program, and last winter was in India for two months to lay the groundwork for the program.

The second phase of the study will begin next June, the beginning of the Baroda school year. Five faculty members from Iowa State will teach graduate courses and work with the University in Baroda. Dr. Mary Lyle, Education and Extension, is project chairman of the group. The faculty members will be in India for a minimum of two years to help set up their research programs. Currently the only research that is done is in government nutrition.

The third aspect of the program will take place in India, where the Ford Foundation will grant fellowships for students in other Indian universities to study at Baroda. This will start when they have competent graduate instruction, possibly in the next year, after the Iowa State faculty members are there and the five who are now studying here return to Baroda to teach.

While at Baroda the students study Home Science courses, similar to our Home Economics
courses, but with details relating to their own culture and living. In preparation for study in Iowa they also studied English and American customs.

From the border of India to the Iowa state line, the change is not only geographical, agree the girls. Menus in India are not like ours. Depending on what section of India you call home, a typical meal might include vegetables, cereals, milk and milk products and fat.

Costumes vary with geography, too. In northern India the women wear long gowns which appear to be similar to American dresses. The sari, six yards of material draped around the body, is found in other parts of the country. The manner of draping indicates their place of residence. A final touch may be a dark red spot in the middle of their foreheads, slightly above the line of the eyebrow. This is typically a Hindu practice and is required for all married women whose husbands are living. It is an optional mark for the single girl.

The wife in India is to be a “perfect homemaker.” It is seldom that a woman attempts to combine marriage and a career, particularly if she has children.

Climate, too, changes from India to Iowa. The girls brought what clothes they felt would be suitable for winter, but they have been advised to acquire warmer outer garments. The sari is worn, however, regardless of drop in temperature or rise in drifts.

Adjustment has been great, but not too difficult, the girls agree. There still is one big problem. “You cover in a quarter what they gave us in a year in India,” one says.

Getting into the study routine is hard for any student, but the girls are eager to gain all they can from the year or two that they will spend at Iowa State.