

Smt. Taraben Mashruwala

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1982

Coming in close contact with Mahatma Gandhi at a very young age, and profoundly influenced by Gandhiji's Constructive Programme for the regeneration of the nation, Taraben Mashruwala has been ceaselessly striving for the last four decades to serve the cause of upliftment of women and children and basic education, Today, at 73, though frail of physique she is stout of heart. She has remained single in order to work with total dedication to the cause.

Born in 1909 Taraben was educated at the Gujarat Vidyapith (Ahmedabad). She actively participated in the freedom struggle and was imprisoned during the Salt Satyagraha (1932) and the Quit India movement (1942).

When she came out of prison in 1943, she started an organization named *Yuwati Sangh* along with a few of her friends to infuse a new spirit of service and revolutionary zeal in young girls. Many branches of the organization were established in Vidarbha and summer camps for girls were held every year.

Gandhiji nominated her as the representative of the Kasturba Gandhi Trust for the Vidarbha region in 1946. Working from her headquarters at Madhan, a small village in Amraoti District (Maharashtra) in an area with a large population of Adivasis and Harijans, she established Kasturba centres in all districts of Vidarbha. Balwadis, basic schools, health centres, craft classes and training centres for Gram Sevikas were set up at these places. In the course of a decade her work had made such an impact that Madhan came to be known as Kasturba Dham.

In 1978, Taraben founded the Kasturba Sarvodaya Mandal at Madhan in order to intensify the work she was carrying on and to provide a nucleus and model centre for training women and social workers. The activities of the organization were extended to the neighbouring towns at Chandur Bazar, Ghatladki and Surali, as well as some places in the adjoining Wani District. Several institutions like the Kanyashram and Maherghar (Maternal Home) have been set up under its aegis with the twin objects of providing education and health services to women and children and helping women to overcome their social handicaps and become self-reliant.

The Mandal conducts three Maternity Homes which also provide pre-natal and post-natal care. The Kasturba Rural Health Service project covers 10 villages in which trained health workers pay frequent door-to-door visits to provide advice on health care and nutrition.

For the benefit of working women and young girls "Two hours Schools" which they can attend during their spare time have been established. Creches are also run for the benefit of women farm labourers. Propaganda for prohibition and removal of untouchability form an integral part of the Mandal's activities.

The sum total of Taraben's efforts can be said to be *Stree Shakti Jagran* creating awareness among women of their own strength.

In 1979, the International Year of the Child, Taraben as President of the Vidarbha Bal Anand Samiti organized programmes all over the region in which about 20,000 children participated.

Inspired by Gandhiji and Vinobaji, Taraben Mashruwala is simple and humble and full of compassion and love. All her life she has worked with single-minded dedication for improving the lot of women and children, the poor, the degraded and the down-trodden. She is always looking for new avenues of service and ceaselessly striving to create a cadre of equally devoted women for serving the cause so dear to her heart.