

Smt. Jayashri Raiji

Joint Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1980

Born in Surat on 26th October 1895, daughter of Sir Manubhai Mehta and Smt Harshadagauri, Jayashri ben graduated from Baroda College (Bombay University) in 1918. On her marriage to Shri N.M Raiji, a chartered accountant, the same year, she came to live in Bombay.

During the last over sixty years, Smt Jayashri Raiji has dedicated her life to social work and has a distinguished record of social service to her credit. She has acquired a deep insight into the social problems and needs of the under-privileged, particularly of women.

Smt. Jayashri Raiji entered public life and started her social and political activities at a very young age. In 1920 she became a founder-member of the Bhagini Samaj, Bombay. Her dedicated efforts over the years have considerably contributed to the growth of the institution to its present pre-eminent position. She was its President for 11 years from 1933-1944.

Since 1920 Smt Jayashri Raiji has ceaselessly devoted herself to the cause of the welfare of the Adivasis and the uplift of women, especially those belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes.

A monumental work to her credit has been the development of the Adivasi Welfare Centre, Udvada (Valsad District). The Udvada Centre was started with three girls in 1940 and has now developed into an educational and cultural centre which caters to the needs of more than 600 girls providing them educational facilities right from pre-primary school to post-S.S.C. teacher training. The residential Ashramshala at Udvada is considered as one of the best Ashramshalas in the country and provides basic education with an agricultural bias to the Adivasi boys upto the S.S.C. stage.

She also started the Rashtriya Stree Mandal in the 1920s. She was one of the pioneers of the co-operative movement in 1928. She took an active part in the Swadeshi Movement and in the propagation of Khadi and Village Industries.

Smt Jayashri Raiji has also been deeply involved in the uplift of women and their education and has been in the forefront of the movement to spread educational and health programmes not only in Maharashtra and Gujarat but also at an All-India level. She was the Chairman of the Maharashtra State Women's Council and the United Women's Organisation. She has also been an active member of the Vanita Vishram Executive Committee (Home for Widows) and a patron of the All-India Women's Conference. For many years she has been a member of the Indian Council of Child Welfare, Maharashtra, and the Bombay Vigilance Association. She represented India as a delegate to the International Conference of Social Work in Toronto in 1954. She has also been connected with the Moral and Social Hygiene Association.

An ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and an active Congress worker, Smt Jayashri Raiji participated in the freedom struggle in 1930 during the Salt Satyagraha. She was Secretary of the Rashtriya Stree Sabha which was declared illegal by the British. As an active Desh Sevika she picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops. She was also imprisoned during the Quit India Movement in 1942.

She organized the Congress Mahila Vibhag, Bombay and was its President for many years. The Mahila Vibhag later organized the Co-operative Industrial Society for women in 1956.

She was a member of the Bombay University Senate in 1939 and was nominated as a Councillor of the Bombay Municipal Corporation from 1939 to 1943 by the Fellows of the University, in which capacity she served on several of its Committees. She also served as a member of the Senate and the Syndicate of the S.N.D.T. University for women for some years. From 1927 onwards she has been active in collecting funds and organizing relief for those affected by natural calamities like floods, famines and earthquakes in many parts of the country.

Smt Jayashri Raiji has been a valiant Member of Parliament from 1950 to 1957, taking a leading part in passing important social legislation such as the Hindu Code Bill and the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children. She sponsored the Dowry Restraint Bill and Indian Adoption of Children Bill.

The Adivasi Welfare Centre, Udvada, founded with the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi and nourished by her meets the educational, social and cultural needs of women in the neighbouring rural areas within a radius of 20 miles. Today, at the age of 85, her interest has not flagged and her energies are abundant. Her latest project has been in collaboration with the S.N.D.T. Women's University for the adoption of about twenty villages around Udvada where work is being carried on for an Integrated Rural Development Programme. Her mission is to make Udvada a centre of development for the under-privileged.

Smt. Jayashri Raiji has been a source of inspiration and strength to many institutions and social workers to whom her advice is always available. She is a person with creative ideas and imagination and is a quiet and selfless worker with a self-effacing personality.

