



Shri Popatlal Ramchand Shah

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Constructive Work-1984

Born on 30th March 1898 in a village 10 miles away from Poona City, Shri Popatlal Ramchand Shah came to Poona for education. But, drawing inspiration from Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi at the early age of 16, he decided to devote his life to the service of the nation, and consequently left education. For the last 70 years he has been ceaselessly, devotedly and selflessly working in all fields of Constructive Work on the pattern of the Constructive Programme initiated by Gandhi. He had also actively participated in the freedom struggle and courted imprisonment in 1932, 1940 and 1942.

Shri Popatlal Shah is a pioneer in Maharashtra in the field of Khadi and Village Industries. He founded the first Khadi Bhandar in Poona City in 1924 and propagated Khadi even by carrying it on his shoulders from door-to-door. At a time when there was considerable opposition to Khadi, he spread its message with a sense of dedication. It was due to his untiring efforts that Khadi was eventually established in Poona and other districts of Maharashtra. His work in the field of Khadi Movement was personally appreciated by Gandhiji on several occasions. He is a founder-member of Poona District Khadi and Village Industries Co-operative Sangh Ltd. and has been its President for more than 22 years. Recently, he has been re-elected its President for another term of three years. This organization is doing excellent work in promoting production and sale of Khadi and also supporting cottage industries in the villages, giving employment to a number of people.

Since 1914, Shri Popatlal Shah has also been whole-heartedly working for the cause of Prohibition by carrying on intensive propaganda against the evil of drinking. He regards his work as his life's mission. At an early age, he participated in picketing liquor shops. He is Vice-President of Maharashtra State Nashabandi Mandal and the All-India Prohibition Council (Maharashtra State). He is also President of Poona City District Prohibition Committee.

Another field in which Shri Popatlal Shah has been carrying on dedicated work is the upliftment of Harijans. He was Vice-President of Harijan Sevak Sangh. He worked for "Bhangi-Mukti", a programme undertaken by Gandhi Smarak Nidhi for relieving the Bhangi Community from the drudgery of cleaning the latrines. As a step towards removing the evil of untouchability, he often organized community dinners in which Harijans and Caste Hindus participated. He actively worked for spreading health and education among Harijans.

The range of his public activities is wide and varied tribal welfare, health and sanitation, education, uplift and welfare of women and children, welfare of physically handicapped and mentally retarded, Go-Seva, welfare of leprosy patients, village uplift, removal of evil social customs, various movements of desirable and useful social reforms, trade union work and promotion of communal harmony.

Besides Khadi and Village Industries organization and Prohibition organizations, he is actively associated with several educational, social and other allied welfare organizations and institutions in the capacity of President, Chairman, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Trustee and Executive Member. To mention only a few, Gujarati Kelavani Mandal, Poona Society for Mentally Retarded, Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, Anath Hindu Mahila Ashram, Poona District Probation and Aftercare Association (Remand Home), Poona Blind Men's Association, Go-Seva Sangh, Arogya Mandal, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Poona District Shikshan Mandal, King Edward Memorial Hospital Society, Poona District Freedom Fighters Association, Maharashtra Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, Prof. J.P. Trivedi Memorial Trust, Deaf and Dumb Society, and David Sassoon Infirm Asylum. He has been doing excellent work as a visitor of Central Mental Hospital, Yeravada, Poona, since 1939.

Shri Popatlal Shah was elected member of Poona City Municipality for four terms from 1928 and became the President of the Municipality in 1939. He worked as Chairman of various Committees of the Municipality. He was elected member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly twice first in 1946 and again in 1952.

He has always helped the people affected by calamities like flood, famine, earthquake, fire or communal disturbances.

The Government of Maharashtra honoured him as “Dalit-Mitra” in 1975 for his work of social service. The Government of India presented him a “Tamra-Patra” in 1972 and the Government of Maharashtra presented him a “Sanman-Patra” in 1976, both these honours being for his participation in freedom struggle.

Shri Popatlal Shah did not undertake any profession or occupation for his livelihood. As a consequence of this great sacrifice, he has suffered extreme poverty. But he has accepted poverty voluntarily. He is one of the senior-most constructive workers in Maharashtra and is actively working for this cause even at his present age of 86 years.

