

Smt. Shanti Devi

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1994

Born on 18th April, 1934, Smt. Shanti Devi was educated up to Intermediate level. Imbibing the ideas of Gandhiji and Vinobaji she gave up her College education and along with her husband, Shri Ratan Das, came to Koraput, one of the most backward tribal areas of Orissa State in 1951 and started a small Ashram at Sankalpadar village in 1953. The village had only 13 houses. There were two lepers and the rest were all sufferers of "Yaws," a virulent infectious skin disease.

She started treating them and got them cured within a year. She also carried on the treatment with leprosy patients. Regular administration of drugs and injections made the entire village free of contagious diseases. The children relieved from the pangs of "Yaws" were drawn towards Smt. Shanti Devi and became regular residents of the Ashram. They learnt songs, prayers, reading, writing, cleanliness and awareness. Later on these children got themselves enrolled in schools and became primary school teachers, factory workers and good cultivators.

The response of the Adivasi children of Sankhalpadar gave her impetus to start one voluntary organisation for the welfare of children. Accordingly, she established Seva Samaj at Rayagada in 1964 with the help and co-operation of her committed friends. The Seva Samaj was registered on 29th April, 1965. The Seva Samaj was started with only 8 Adivasi girls. She being in-charge of the Ashram, devoted all her mite for the all-round development of the girls. Though they were given general education in the schools, they were taught cleanliness, music and dance, gardening, in the Ashram. In 11 years the strength of the children grew from 8 to 50.

In 1975 another Ashram was started at Gunupur (Koraput Dist.) with a strength of 25 children which grew upto 31. In 1980 after the devastating flood of Gunupur, she started another children's home at Jabarguda, 16 kms North of Gunupur with a strength of 50 children. Thus, at present, she is looking after the education and welfare of 131 orphan, destitute and poor children.

She was able to rehabilitate 27 children of her Ashram. 14 of them have become Primary teachers. 7 girls, who could not go for High School education were got married and settled in their happy married life. 15 orphan' girls are employed in Seva Samaj as full-time workers. The vocational-cum-rehabilitation programme for destitute women was taken up by her in 1982. Since then more than 200 destitute women belonging to Adivasi and weaker sections have been imparted vocational training through tailoring, knitting, garment making, spices making etc.

She is looking after 8 creche centres where 200 poor children are provided with health care and nutritious breakfast daily. Under the direct supervision of Smt. Shanti Devi, a Medical Centre was attached to the Jabarguda Orphanage. The Medical Centre gave special medical attention to the children of both Jabarguda and Gunupur orphanages. It is at present closed but will be revived shortly after receipt of funds.

From February 1993, she has started a Tribal Girls Hostel at Limamedda village near Gunupur with a strength of 50 girls with the help of the Central Govt. She has started an educational complex with the help of Govt. of India. The strength of the children is 40.

Smt. Shanti Devi continues to serve the orphan and destitute children, aspiring to transform them into accomplished and dignified citizens of our country.

Smt. Shanti Devi was honoured with the National Award for Child Welfare in February 1991.

