

## **Smt. Vimla Bahuguna**

### **Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1995**

Smt. Vimla Bahuguna was a Sarvodaya worker and participated in the Bhoodan Movement in Bihar in 1953-55 where she came in contact with Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan and Dada Dharmadhikari, who were all impressed by her work.

After her marriage to Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna, Smt Vimla continued to live in the villages as a householder, collecting wood from the forests, attending to the household chores, educating children and inculcating a sense of self-confidence among the women.

She also started a drive for prohibition. In 1971 along with her 6 year old son, Pradeep, she went to jail. She also persuaded and prevailed upon her old mother to join the campaign for prohibition. The common village women were also inspired to join the Chipko movement and the prohibition campaign. Under her inspiration, thousands of women participated in the Tehri dam agitation in 1990 and 1990-91. There is no parallel to her successful effort to bring in thousands of women from such a poor and inhospitable area like Tehri Garhwal into the people's movement.

Austerity is the key note of all her actions. She herself stayed in a very small house in the village and this became the centre of her activities as well as her literary writing. She offered herself completely in the development of the villages. The Parvatiya Paryavaran Saurakshan Samiti (Hilly Area Environment Protection Committee) which had been established by Smt. Bahuguna was entrusted with all these activities. She is the Secretary and the live wire of this institution for the last 23 years.

Smt. Bahuguna has inspired a large number of workers to come out in public. She also engaged in activities to inspire confidence among the orphan and deserted women. Women who had been neglected or deserted by the families were taught by her to become self-reliant. Even today, there is a large number of such women working along with her.

Smt. Bahuguna is a woman of very few wants. She took assistance from her institution only for her livelihood. The Hilly Area Environment Committee was self-reliant from the very beginning and did not believe in obtaining Government grants. In the earthquake of 1992, all buildings were damaged. She herself had a hairbreadth escape. She was a silent and shocked witness to the devastation by nature of all her Herculean endeavours to raise these institutions during the last 35 years. She did not, however, give up courage. Smt. Vimla Bahuguna herself took the lead in this rehabilitation effort.

It is difficult to imagine that a frail 28 kg woman i.e. Smt. Bahuguna works for 19 hours a day in various activities such as agriculture, cow service, basic education, construction of huts, duties in the house. The secret of her success is her dedication and faith. Her determination has triumphed over her bodily infirmities.

Smt. Bahuguna's involvement along with her husband is something remarkable in the annals of constructive work. It started originally as a movement against the contractors who were cutting down valuable trees for sale in the cities to make badminton racquets and other luxurious goods. The Hill people used these trees for making ploughs and other basic requirements. So the idea sprang up that the women will cling to the trees and not let the contractors take them away. When the contractors came, they saw the women and fled away. Though the earlier reason was economic consideration later as realisation dawned that the cutting down of trees led to diminishing water resources and soil erosion. Land slides occurred in several places and many lands were lost. Many women tied rakhis to the trees and said they would protect the trees even if they have to give up their own lives. As soon as the tree was ready to be cut, the women clung to it, they would shout the slogan

“Kya hai jungle ki pukar, Mitti, paani aur bayar. Mitti. Paani aur bayar, zinda rahne ke adhar.” (What is the call of the jungle ? Earth, water and trees. Earth, water and trees. They are the basis of our existence). The campaign lasted for a month and even Shri Bahuguna fasted for 24 days during which he was arrested and taken to jail. The sustenance of movements like Chipko, agitation against construction of dam, etc. require a constant supply of activists who both by their determination and by their adherence to principle will go all out in the campaign. Smt. Bahuguna realizes that it is hard to get full time activists though there have been a few such women.

Awards/prizes, etc received earlier : Kheti Award by Indian Council of Agricultural Research in 1975 during International Women's Year.

