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## Preface

In today's world of chaos and violence, if there is any hope of deliverance it is from the Peace Pilgrim. Unmindful of the personal hardships, innumerable obstacles and discouragement from the vested interests, these people have continued following their mission with determination and energy.

All the peace pilgrims were or are men and women of great vision, be it saving the humanity from environmental disasters of laying down the guidelines for enduring peace for the coming generations. The 'Peace Pilgrim' walked more than 25,000 miles spreading her message of peace. Few of us remember that the Chipko movement was started by the Bishonis in the year 1731 in a sleepy village of Jalandi, 25 km from Jodhpur. In that 363 (294 men and women) people lost their lives while trying to protect the trees. Amrita Devi and her three daughter were the first to hug the trees to be cut down to piece along with the trees by the axemen of the Maharaja.

Bhagat Puran Singh was a peace pilgrim who has brought peace to thousands of old, sick, handicapped, insane and suffering men, women and children. Pingalwara continues to take giant strides in

alleviating the suffering of the mankind.

A woman with rocklike determination, Vimla Bahuguna never cared for limelight or recognition of her monumental work. She has devoted her entire life for the noble cause of environment protection. She remains the main driving force behind Sunderlal Bahuguna.

These great men and women have devoted their entire lives for ‘peace for the mankind’ which is the need of the hour. We hope that this pamphlet will in turn motivate many readers to spread the message of peace.

**—Dr. Inderjit Kaur**  
**(President)**

All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.)  
Amritsar.

## **THE PEACE PILGRIM**

**She never talked about her real name or her age. She always said “I shall remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the ways of peace.....”**



She walked more than 25,000 miles, carrying in her tunic her only possessions. She crossed America for nearly three decades bearing the simplest of the messages: This is the way of peace—overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth and hatred with love.

Peace Pilgrim talked about peace among nations, between people and the most important Inner Peace, Penniless, walking with no organizational backing. Peace Pilgrim touched the lives and hearts of countless thousands of Americans. Some were charmed by her simple but cheerful presence; many others were profoundly inspired by her message and her remarkable life style.

The book covering her life and work is published by friends of Peace Pilgrim and can be

bought from the following address:

An Ocean Tree Book  
Post Office Box 1295  
Santa Fe,  
New Mexico 87504

The extract of the book is covered in the next few pages.

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*The seeds of great discoveries are constantly floating around us but they take roots only in mind well prepared to receive them.*

—Joseph Henry

*A Nation is a living take; her life is not her own, but a forec and function in the universal scheme of providence.*

—Joseph Mazzini

*A hero gives up a certainty for an uncertainty.*

—Emerson

**In** the middle ages the pilgrims went out as the disciples were sent out—without money, without food, without adequate clothing—and I know that tradition. I have no money. I do not accept any money on my pilgrimage. I belong to no organization. There is no organization backing me. I own only what I wear and carry. There is nothing to tie me down. I am as free as a bird soaring in the sky.

I walk until given shelter, fast until given food. I don't ask—it is given without asking. My pilgrimage is an opportunity to talk with my fellow human beings about the way of peace. It is also a penance for whatever I may have contributed by commission or omission to the tragic situation in the world today. It is a prayer that this war-weary world of ours will somehow find the way to peace before a holocaust descends.

My mission is to help promote peace by helping others to find **inner peace**. If I can find it, you can too. When I first started out I thought the pilgrimage might entail some hardships. But I was determined to live at need level, that is, *I did not want more than I need when so many have less than they need*. Penance is the willingness to undergo hardships for the achievement of a good purpose, I was willing. But when hardships

came I found myself lifted above them. Instead of hardship, I found a wonderful sense of peace and joy and conviction that I was following God's will. Blessings instead of hardships are showered upon me.

If you have a long face and a chip on your shoulder, if you are not radiant with joy and friendliness, if you are not filled to overflowing with love and goodwill for all beings and all creatures and all creations, one thing is certain: you do not know God!

I usually average 25 miles a day walking, depending upon how many people stop to talk to me along the way. I have gone up to 50 miles in one day to keep an appointment or because there was no shelter available. On very cold nights I walk through the night to keep warm.

I sleep equally well in a soft bed or on the grass beside the road. If I am given food and shelter, fine. If not, I am just as happy. Many times, I am given shelter by total strangers. When hospitality is not available, there are always bus depots, railroad stations and all night truck stops.

I remember a dear lady, who was up in years. She was working so hard and always complaining. I finally said to her, "Why in the world do you need to

work so hard when you have only yourself to support?" And she said, "Oh! I have to pay rent on a five room house." "A five room house!" I replied. "But you are alone in the world. Couldn't you live happily in one room?" Oh yes!" she said sadly, "But I have furniture for a five room house." She was actually working her fingers to the bone to provide a proper home for that furniture! And that happens all the time. All I can say is, don't let this happen to you.

The purpose of problems is to push you towards obedience to God's laws, which are exact and cannot be changed. We have the free will to obey them or disobey them. Obedience will bring harmony, disobedience will bring you more problems.

Some people wish for a life of no problems but I would never wish such a life for any one of you. What I wish for you is the great inner strength to solve your problems meaningfully and grow. Problems are learning and growing experiences. A life without problems would be a barren existence, without the opportunity for spiritual growth.

When I help others, it is by instilling within them the inspiration to work-out problems by themselves. If you feed a man a meal, you only feed him for a day but if you teach a man to grow food; you feed him for

a lifetime.

Live this day! Yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision but today well-lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Never agonize over the past or worry over the future. Live this day and live it well.

Tremendous energy comes with anger. It is sometimes called the anger energy. Do not suppress it that would hurt you inside. Do not express it this would not hurt you inside, it would cause ripples in your surroundings. What you do is transform it. You somehow use that tremendous energy constructively on a task that needs to be done, or in a beneficial form of exercise.

The most important part of prayer is what we *feel*, not what we say. We spend a great deal of time telling God what we think should be done and not enough time waiting in the stillness for God to tell what to do.

I always think of the bud of a flower. If you give it proper conditions, it will open into a beautiful flower but if you are impatient and try to tear the petals open you permanently injure the flower for the earth life. The flower can be equated with the earthly

human life. Give the spiritual growing up the proper growing conditions and it will open into a thing of beauty.

For those seeking the spiritual life, I recommend these for daily practices:

—Spend time alone each day in receptive silence.

—When angry, or afflicted with any negative emotion, take time to be alone with God.

—Visualize God's light each day and send it to someone who needs help.

—Exercise the body; it is the temple of the soul.

#### THE POWER OF THOUGHT

If you realized how powerful your thoughts are, you would never think a defeatist or negative thought. Since we create through thought, we need to concentrate very strongly on positive thoughts. It is important that our thoughts be constantly for the best that could happen in a situation—for the good things we would like to see happen.

Every good thing you do, every good thing you say, every good thought you think, vibrates on and on and never ceases. The evil remains only until it is overcome by the good, but the good remains forever.

#### DEATH

Death is a beautiful liberation into a free life.

The self-centered nature goes with you to learn and grow on the disembodied side of life and then returns here into a suitable clay garment and suitable circumstances to learn the lessons we need to learn. Could we but see a bit deeper into life, we would grieve at birth and rejoice at death. If we but knew how short is the earth life in comparison with the whole, we would be less troubled with the difficulties of the earth life than we are troubled now with the difficulties of one of our days.

#### ON RELIGION

I am a deeply religious person but I belong to no denomination. I follow the spirit of God's law, not the letter of the law. One can become so attached to the outward symbols and structure of religion that one forgets its original intent—to bring one closer to God. We can only gain access to the Kingdom of God by realizing it dwells within us as well as in all humanity. Know that we are all cells in the ocean of infinity, each contributing to the others' welfare.

#### THE WAY OF LOVE

Pure love is a willingness to give, without a thought of receiving anything in return. **Love** can save the world from nuclear destruction. **Love God:** turn to God with receptiveness and responsiveness.

**Love your fellow human beings:** turn to them with friendliness and givingness. Make yourself fit to be called a child of God by living the way of love.

Judging others will avail you nothing and injure you spiritually. Only if you can inspire others to judge themselves will anything worthwhile have been accomplished.

I perceived the entirely self-centered as not worth living. If what you are doing will not benefit others besides yourself, it is not worth doing.

To attain inner peace you must actually give your life, not just your possessions. When you at last give your life—bringing into alignment your beliefs and the way you live—then and only then, can you begin to find inner peace.

Ultimate peace begins within: when we find peace within there will be no more conflict, no more occasion for war. If this is the peace you seek, purify your body by sensible living habits, purify your mind by expelling all negative thoughts, purify your motives by casting out any ideas of greed or self-striving and by seeking to serve your fellow human beings. Purify your desires by eliminating all wishes for material possession or self-glorification and by desiring to know and do God's will for you. Inspire others to do

likewise.

Everything is given to me and I pass it on. You must give if you want to receive. Let the centre of your being be one of giving, giving, giving. You can't give too much and you will discover you cannot give without receiving. This kind of living is not reserved for the saints, but is available for little people like you and me—if we reach out to give to everybody.

Think about all the good things of your life. Never think about your difficulties. Forget yourself and concentrate on being of service as much as you can in this world and then, having lost your lower-self in a cause greater than yourself, you will find your higher self: your real life.

The path of the seeker is full of pitfalls and temptations and the seeker must walk it alone with God. I would recommend that you keep your feet on the ground and your thoughts at lofty heights, so that you may attract only good. Concentrate on giving so that you may open yourself to receiving; concentrate on living according to the light you have so that you may open yourself to more light; get as much light as possible through the inner way. If such receiving seems difficult, look for some inspiration from a beautiful flower or a beautiful landscape, from some beautiful

music or some beautiful words. However, that which is contacted from without must be confirmed within before it is yours.

When you find peace within yourself, you become the kind of person who can live at peace with others. Inner peace is not found by staying on the surface of life, or by attempting to escape from life through any means. Inner peace is found by facing life squarely, solving its problems and delving as far beneath its surface as possible to discover its varieties and realities.

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*\* The impressions that come into the ear from a lecture and into the eye from a book, until they modify the active life of a student, they are impressions which are largely lost.*

— J.D. Fleming.

## **A Woman with Rocklike Determination**

*Interview with Vimla Bahuguna*



**Vimla Bahuguna is not known to the world outside as is her husband Sunderlal Bahuguna. This she told me, is the first ever interview she has given at length. This frail and diminutive woman has been a full partner with her husband in the Chipko movement and she asserts it with the calm confidence of someone who has selflessly given her life to the cause of her people. Every line on her face speaks of her compassion and the mammoth struggle that her life has been**

*Madhu Kishwar*

*How did you and Bahugunaji come together in this field?*

Bahugunaji and I come from nearby villages. I was born in Malideval in Tehri. He was born in a nearby village called Sirai—the villages are two kilometers apart. He was born in 1927 and I was born in 1932.

My father worked in the Forest Department. We spent a lot of time amidst nature in dense forests. I got my love of nature from these early experiences in the forests. Tehri was then a princely state. We had no proper provision for educating girls. Even for the boys there was just one Inter College in the district. For the girls there was just one school that went up to eighth standard.

During our youth there was a rebellion against the monarchy in Tehri. At the same time the entire country was swept up in the rebellion against the British. Both my brothers, Budhisagar and Vidyasagar Nautiyal, one elder and one younger than me, joined in the rebellion. My elder brother had given up his education to join the movement. Both of them had to serve prison terms. I used to think about how I could become a meaningful partner in this struggle. Being a young girl at that time I could not do very much. I participated in the movement by collecting



rations from house to house for men involved in the movement when they came to village, as well as organizing meetings for them.

*What form did the rebellion against the local ruler take? What were the difficulties that you had to face?*

First of all, as I have said, the doors of education were completely closed for most people. The ruler feared that if the people got educated they would ask for their rights. But the martyrdom of Gurudev Sumanji did not go in vain and Bahugunaji, my brothers and many other youth like Harpuranandaji, Ramchandra Unniyal and Anand Ratanji raised the banner of revolt.

*Were you with the Congress or were you working separately?*

We were with the Congress, Narendra Shah was our king. His rule ended in 1949. Unlike my brothers I did not get an opportunity to go to jail. Therefore, I turned my attention towards my education. Meanwhile Sarla behn, a European woman, had started an institution in Kosani. Being inspired by Gandhiji, she had come to India. She had stayed with Gandhiji at Wardha for five years. There she frequently suffered from malaria and could not adjust to the heat. So she chose to live in the mountains. Here she came into

contact with the people involved in the anti-Maharaja freedom movement and she started working with them. She would visit the families of those men who had been arrested for participating in the freedom struggle and find out how she could help them. Even though she was born in Europe, she went to jail twice for the independence of the people of India.

She found the women in the mountains to be very courageous and hard working, women who ran their households with determination when their men folk were in jail. But she was distressed when she found that the same women had to shoulder the entire responsibility of the household, looking after the children, attending to the fields but would not come to attend a meeting if Sarla behn called one. They would say, "Behnji, we are like animals. All we know is work. Meetings and other such social activities are meant only for men." This low self esteem of women made her decide that along with the struggle for independence she would also work for educating women to instill self confidence in them. So she started an institution for educating women. My brothers sent me to her institution in 1950, after I passed the eighth class exam. Till now had been in touch with the views of Gandhiji through reading.

But after going there we saw how Sarla behn's life was an embodiment of Gandhiji's ideas. She led a very simple life, she only wore clothes made from hand spun yarn.

*What age group of females did this institution cater to?*

From six years onwards. She established her ashram on the basis of Gandhiji's concept of basic education. We were taught to read and write. Besides this, we were taught all the skills that we need in our daily lives—like cooking, gardening, spinning, healthcare. In addition, we were given training for social work so that when we went back to our villages, we could start a health centre and work there.

*Where did the money come from to run the ashram?*

Those children whose families could afford to pay for their children's education and upkeep did so. My two sisters came there after me. We three sisters got money from our family. For those children whose parents who could not afford to pay, behnji got a grant from the education department. The name of the institution was *Kasturba Mahila Utthan Mandal, Lakshmi Ashram*, Kosani. Radha behn, who also studied under Sarla behn, is running it now. Sarla behn was alive till 1982.

Looking at Sarla behn's life, I felt that if this woman who has come from a far away country can so dedicate herself to the service of Indians, I too should dedicate my life to serving my country's people. She had told Gandhiji that she had started the institution keeping in view his ideals and that she would give proof of her work in 20 years when the girls from her ashram would go back to their villages and spread awareness amongst the women there.

In the meanwhile in 1953, when Vinoba Bhave started the Bhoodan (voluntary gift of land to the poor) movement, he needed some volunteers. At a discussion in our institution, we decided that one of us should join in the effort. I said—I would be most happy if I was given the chance. So in 1953, I was sent to work with Vinoba Bhave.

For one year I travelled with Vinobaji in Bihar for the Bhoodan movement. There was a lot of work to be done with Vinobaji but we had to run our institution also and the area in which we were living also had to be improved. So I returned to our ashram and with Sarla behnji and other women we formed a group and started going from village to village for the village uplift programme.

During this time my father began pressing

me to get married and settle down. I said that I would get married only if I found someone whose ideas were in harmony with mine. I did not think that marriage was a must as I was a disciple of Sarla behn and she had dedicated her entire life to social work.

My father knew Bahugunaji as we were both from the same place. He was a rebel from his student days. When Sumanji was in Jail and was being tortured, Bahugunaji managed to smuggle this news out to the newspapers. He was arrested for this and jailed. As Sumanji was in the Tehri jail, he was not kept in that jail but in a lock up at Narendranagar. The police was constantly after him. He was studying for his inter exam at that time. He would be sent under police escort to the examination centre. It was at Narendranagar police lock up that he got the news of the martyrdom of Sumanji.

While in jail, Bahugunaji had developed boils all over his body as there was no provision for bathing. As the doctor refused to treat him in prison, he was released. He was quite weak when he was released. He tried to improve his health and went to Lahore for studies. Even in Lahore the police trailed him. He went under-ground for a year disguised as a Sikh. He returned to Tehri after completing his B.A.

By then the king had been overthrown and Bahugunaji became the secretary of the Congress committee and took up social work. He started a school for the *Harijans* in the sweepers' colony. He was involved in a lot of activities such as taking out *prabhat pheris* (early morning processions), organizing camps and conferences. I also used to take part in these programmes. We knew each other as we were both from nearby villages. My father put the proposal of my marriage to him and he agreed. He had a lot of proposals before him but he had so far not agreed because he did not want to get tied down with marriage. In this case, he thought that I would be more of a partner and together we would be able to do much more. After he had agreed, my father wrote to me that he was very happy to inform me that I was getting married on such and such date so I should come home immediately. I found this very strange as I had not been given the chance to be mentally prepared for marriage. I told him that I needed one year to think over the matter of whether I wanted to get married or not, whether I should marry Bahugunaji or not. My father was very angry at this and he said if I declined to marry, the doors of his house would be permanently closed to me.

*How old were you then?*

I was 23 then. He was very angry and said that Bahugunaji was such a good man, qualified in all respects, shared the same values as us, then what more did I want? I said that I wanted to be ready from within myself. My doubt was whether after entering into marriage I would be able to keep up with my social work.

I was a little afraid of marriage. I felt that we had to take the work of Sarla behn ahead, work for our institution. When I asked for a year to think about marriage, Bhagunaji agreed. But my father was very upset. I told my father that since he had said the doors of his house would be shut for me if I refused to get married, I would come to his house only if I was ready to marry. After one year, in 1955, I agreed to the marriage. It was decided that we would get married in 1956. We got married on June 19. I told Bahugunaji that I had no interest in his politics. Nor did I want to live in big cities. At that time he was living in Tehri town. He was the president of the Congress in Tehri and had built a students' hostel for *Harijans*. It was called *Thakkarbaba Chhatravas*. This was part of his work against untouchability. He himself lived in the same hostel.

*How did he meet with the expenses of the hostel?*

In some cases parents of the students paid for the expenses. Some students got scholarships from the Social Welfare Board or the Harijan Welfare Union.

I told Bahugunaji that Sarla behn had promised Gandhiji that all the girls from her ashram would work in the villages. If I left the Kosani Ashram, I would do so only to live in villages. He agreed and he resigned from the Congress Party.

*On this issue alone?*

Yes, for this very reason, he gave up party political work. Then we looked around to see which area would be best for our services. We looked around in many places and we finally found this place 36 km from Tehri which was among the most backward. You had to walk miles to reach there as there was no bus link. Educationally, it was very deprived. On June 19, we organized a camp there and built two huts. That is how we got married and made it our home and workplace.

*Who had chosen this particular village?*

Bahugunaji had chosen it. Through correspondence with Sarla behn and me he used to tell us about different places he was seeing. He wrote to us why he

liked this place. Sarla behn and I gave our consent. He had two huts built where the camp was held. In fact, there was just one hut, the other was still being built. Sarla behn, my family and his family, all came there and we had a simple marriage there on June 19 and founded the institution—*Parvatiya Navjeevan Mandal*. We decided that we would not take any grants. He worked as a newspaper correspondent from his student days and that provided us with some income. He said that if we got used to filling our stomachs with grants, then we would have to do what the people giving grants wanted us to do. We would not be able to do the work we wanted to do. Therefore, we began to live with and depend on the people of the village and did not accept any external grants. We would go with the local people to their villages, work with them in their fields and show them new methods of farming. Through collective and voluntary labour, we would construct canals for irrigation and would teach their children at night.

People gave little or no thought to girls' education in those days. Sons' education was acceptable as they were expected to get jobs and help their parents. They saw no point in educating their daughters. Life in the mountains is totally dependent on the labour of

women. The men folk often go out to the cities to earn a livelihood. All the work in the village has to be done by the woman. She gets up at four in the morning, tends to the animals, cooks for her children, works in the fields, collects firewood from the jungles—all this and more she has to attend to all by herself. A daughter gets channelized towards all these chores right from her childhood.

It starts with looking after her brothers, tending to the cows and sharing her mother's chores like fetching fodder and water. Knowing this, I wanted a way out for the girls. Therefore, I told the villagers, let the girls work during the day but let them come to me and stay with me in the evenings. In this way, I started educating them at night.

*Weren't the girls too tired by the time they reached you?*

No, the girls in the mountains are very energetic and brave. Bahugunaji and I used to visit different villages. We would hold evening prayers in the village amidst the village folk. Then Bahugunaji would teach the boys at night while I took the girls to my ashram for teaching. Slowly, we started teaching both boys and girls during the daytime.

*How many girls came to you?*

Initially, there were five girls but gradually their numbers increased. Later on, the both boys and girls started coming in the afternoons. Today we have 120 pupils.

*Are you still in the same village where you started?*

Yes, we are still there. But now most children come from different villages and return to their homes. When we started, we thought that we too would make a big educational institution like Sarla behn. While we were constructing the building, Sarla behn came and asked us what we were building. We said that we were making a mess and a place for 50 students to stay. She replied that in that case we would get buried in merely running this one institution, arranging money and looking for teachers. We would have no time for working on spreading awareness among the villagers. Therefore, she suggested, it would be better if we had a small place which housed no more than 10-15 people—the average size of a village family. She advised that in this way, we would be able to spend as much time as possible working with people.

We agreed to her suggestion and made the place for just 10-15 people. Some girls come and stay with us. Other children come from the village and return home. As I told you, we do not accept grants from any

source. The villagers know that and so in the early years, they used to support our work by giving us a part of their harvest. This way, we would manage for ourselves and also for those who were staying with us. The parents of the girls who were staying with us in the hostel gave some money with which we met their expenses.

At that time, there were three of us, Bahugunaji, me and our *greha mata* (house mother), who looked after the children. For 20 years the villagers supported us by giving us their grain from their harvest. Then slowly Bahugunaji's writings started earning more and our own farm started yielding more.

I believed that to instill self confidence in the women of the hills, it was necessary that I should live like one of them and show them by my experiments how to get a balanced diet from ordinary farming. We have a small farm, animals and even arrangements for training. This was to demonstrate to them that progress did not have to involve giving up the lifestyle of the hill people.

We do not hire any farm hands because of the teachings of Gandhiji, who believed that if we want to succeed in developing the intelligence of everyone in this country, then we have to combine education with

labour. The reason why we have so many educated unemployed in this country is that we have separated labour from learning. Today's farmers or workmen do not want their children to follow them in their vocation because they are not socially respected. They see that those who do not labour with their hands and only use their brains, using just a pen are respected. A farmer or labourer does not command the same respect. Moreover, a person who has not laboured for 16 years, from his childhood does not remain fit for labour, so that the educated children of farmers cannot return and work with their parents in the fields.

Gandhiji wanted everyone to spin some yarn on the *charkha* so that every person would know how to do some manual labour. Keeping this in mind, we do not hire any help for farming. We and all the children together work in the fields. When there is a heavier load of work, the women from the village come collectively to help us.

*How much land do you have?*

We have three acres of land but the land that we have was originally useless as it was full of rocks. We didn't have money to buy good land. Moreover, we were aware that since everyone from the mountains cannot settle in the plains, we had to demonstrate to

the villagers how the hilly land could be made more fertile, how to get a better yield from it, how to grow things on their own farms for a balanced diet. We taught them that it was necessary to have vegetables and fruits side by side with grains. We would go and give the villagers the seeds at the right time and exhorted them to grow vegetables and fruits. Slowly, people have been encouraged to do this. Similarly, we tell the villagers how they can get more milk from their animals by giving them nutritive fodder from their fields, thereby raising their grain and milk output. The people of our region used to grow enough grain for their own needs. At times, they would even have enough for selling. But they were not aware of the fact that fruits and vegetables are also a necessary part of a healthy person's diet.

Even though our land is not very good, we have planted oranges, sweet lime and guavas. This way the faith of the people in us grew. Our main mission is to solve their problems. A major problem of women in our area is liquor. The men folk go out to cities to earn a livelihood and when they come back to the village for a short visit, they just get drunk. The women were very unhappy because they had to toil so much and the men would waste all the money on liquor. The women

got together on this issue and started a prohibition campaign in the area.

I do not remember the exact year. Before 1971, women had gone to jail twice. In Saharanpur, Dehradun and Tehri, the women went to jail in large groups pressing for prohibition to be declared in the area. Seeing the agitation, the government had to declare prohibition.

*So is there now total prohibition in the area?*

The government has opened a few permit shops recently. There has been a little reduction in the consumption of liquor. When liquor is freely available, everybody will drink openly. Then there can be no control on liquor consumption. But if there are curbs on liquor drinking and it is only available to permit holders, a non-permit holder will be afraid to drink it. You won't find a person drunk at ordinary *melas*, festivals or on the road. We have to deal with mountain roads which are full of risk. If the driver is drunk, many lives will be endangered.

After this prohibition, accidents due to drunken driving are rare. But women have to be constantly involved in the struggle for mass awakening. Women's groups have to remain active in the closure of illegal

liquor shops. People have recognized the strength of women in the movement for prohibition. The awful feeling of hill women that they were considered to be like animals (something that had distressed Sarla behn so much) has begun to change. The women have realized that they can change the government's policies if they are organized. They now feel that they are as strong as men, in fact even stronger because their strength lies in *ahimsa*.

*Has your social work affected your married life?*

After I got married I realized I wasn't able to do as much of the outside work as Bahugunaji was doing. I decided that one person has to stay in the house and also manage the institution which we had started and that I would take charge of that. I felt that Bahugunaji should handle the work in the outside world.

Even within the house, it wasn't that I was only taking care of my own children. I was also taking care of the school as well as the work of the neighbouring villages. I didn't confine myself to my own family because I had committed myself to what Sarla behn had taught me—that you must stay amidst these women and help them become self-confident.

*It seems to me from your description that Sarla behn*



*has had a much greater influence over your life than your own husband.*

Yes, absolutely. She played a very big role in shaping my life. All the creative activists in Uttarakhand who are involved in social work organizations accept Sarla behn as a mother figure and drew inspiration from her. She had taken this whole idea of *gram swaraj* very seriously and had gone from village to village propagating that idea. When the movement for prohibition started, she took her rucksack and went from village to village and collected women for *satyagraha*.

*Tell me a little more about Bahugunaji's life. Did you ever get time to spend together as husband and wife?*

Most of our life has been spent in this running around. He is hardly ever at home. Every second and minute of his life is so busy in writing, making public contact, travelling, in moving from village to village and a hundred other things such as addressing meetings and others programmes. He goes all over the country and also abroad. But in Uttarakhand itself and in the entire Himalayan region, he has covered every inch of the region on foot. First he went from Kashmir to Kohima on foot. He has been up and down this region

so many times that there is no path that is unknown to him. He has carried a rucksack on his back even in the hardest terrain.

He has even taken his sons on these travels. He has also taken many other young people on these trips, to encourage a new generation to become active in the Himalayan environment protection movement.

He is very self sufficient. I don't have to take care of him at all. The rucksack he carries on his back is his home. It's always ready. He keeps his basic requirements in it and can get up any minute and leave at a minute's notice. He doesn't expect much nurturing or caring from me and doesn't expect me to tend to his few requirements.

I do consider myself very lucky even though our life has been very difficult. We didn't have all the conveniences that most families have. I am sure that my children did feel the pinch of it. But in order to keep my children from respecting their father any the less, I never communicated any of my difficulties to the children. At no point did I give them a reason to become resentful against their father, to think that he wasn't taking on his full share of the responsibility for the family.

He is very firm in his ideas and has a great deal

of respect for me in his heart. It is primarily because of me that he has been able to go ahead in his social work without worrying. If he had been married to someone else, he would have had to face hundreds of problems from the point of view of money, child care and taking care of the house. He never, for instance, even paid any attention to the education of our children, nor did he pay heed to what was happening in the family, how we were fending for ourselves.

We pulled through days of extreme poverty. I doubt whether any woman except me could have coped with the kind of poverty we had to live through. I had a very important role to play in all of this and I could only do it because I had the determination that I had to do something for society. But I have the satisfaction of knowing that he has a great deal of respect for me and that our *grihasthi* has its own sanctity.

It began against certain contractors who were cutting down certain valuable trees for sale in the cities to make badminton rackets and other luxury goods. The hill people use these trees for making ploughs and for other basic requirements. So we said that we will cling to the trees and not let the contractor take them away.

The idea came from all of us. We decided that

we would protect the trees by clinging to them. So when the contractor came, all the women immediately collected. On seeing this, the contractor ran away and we didn't have to resort to hugging the trees. The main person in this movement was Gaura Devi.

At that time, the Chipko movement was based on economic considerations. Later, the women realized that the cutting down of trees for commercial purposes had led to diminishing water resources and soil erosion. Landslides had occurred in several places and several lives had been lost on account of such landslides. That is how, under the leadership of Ghoom Singh Negi, the women of that region tied *rakhis* on the trees and said that they would protect them by clinging to them, even if it meant giving up their lives. The contractors had brought the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the police along with them. The women would go to the jungles. As soon as a tree was ready to be cut, they would cling to it. That's how our slogan arose, "*Kya hai jungle ki pukar? Mitti, pani aur bayar. Mitti, pani aur bayar zinda rahne ke adhar.*" (What is the call of the jungle? Earth, water and trees. They are the basis of our existence).

*Have the jungles been saved?*

Yes, the jungles have been saved. After this, a big struggle was carried out and the women stayed for one month in the jungles located at a great height. At that time also, Bahugunaji fasted for 24 days. We had pitched our tents in the forest. During his fast, Bahugunaji was arrested and taken to Dehradun jail.

The whole area had been made into a police encampment. Sometimes, things would come to such a pass that labourers would be sent to cut the trees at night. In those days, we would cook and eat *khichri* only once a day because we would have to be prepared to run at short notice. As soon as we heard the sound of axes, we would run in the direction of the sound and stand in front of the trees that were ready to cut down.

The poor Nepali labourer brought in by the contractor was compelled to use his axe. The contractor would say to him, "You do not want to work. You only want to get your wages." When we would go and stand in front of the trees, he has an excuse, "Babuji, I cannot cut down human beings." So this is how the struggle carried on for one month in some of the jungles of the Tehri Garhwal region. The men did not call off their struggle till the government banned the cutting of trees and declared that the cutting of trees in the hills would

not be permitted for 10 years.

*Is this ban still in force?*

Yes, cutting trees for commercial purposes is still not permitted. The everyday requirements of hill people are to be met by cutting dry trees. And if they cannot be met by cutting dry trees, they can be given green trees. But green trees cannot be cut for commercial purposes.

*Has it made any difference?*

Yes, some difference. Had that ban not come into force, you wouldn't have seen even a single tree in the jungle. All the trees would have been taken away for commercial purposes. And the women would not have got even a single piece of wood. The contractor would have taken away every little scrap. Slowly, as the movement spread to other areas, the government ordered a ban on the felling of trees located above 1,000 metres.

Yet, much of the reforestation is not genuine, it's just completing paperwork. None of its benefits reach us. That is why the sisters of the hill region are saying, "Hand over this task to us. We will show you how to dig proper pits. The Forest Department will dig a one foot deep pit but show it to be several feet deep

so that they can make money out of it. Our lives are intimately connected to the forest. We will do all the tasks. We will make our own manure for these trees and put the right kind of manure in those pits. And we will take care of these trees in the jungles and show you how they can prosper.” The women have had to struggle a lot to get these points accepted. But in a few places, this work has been handed over to the *mahila mandals*.

*Please describe the last dharna leading to Bahugunaji's fast.*

On December 14, a lot of people came from far off places. Some of the women who had come stayed at night at the site of the last *dharna*. We saw that the blasting machines were working there. This was going on despite such a big earthquake and such a laborious struggle against the dam. The women went forward and stood in front of the machines. It was 10 p.m. I went along with them and we stopped the work. We stayed at night at the site where the machines were standing. From December 14 to February 27, 1992, we managed to keep the work from reopening.

On the night of February 27 at 1 a.m., the police came and without any notice said that they had

imposed Section 144 and began to take us away from there. When Bahugunaji asked to see a warrant of arrest, they paid no attention and forcibly took away about 40 of us in buses and trucks. They put us all into one room where there were no proper toilet facilities. The next morning, when we requested that they present us before the District Magistrate, Bahugunaji was lifted up and dragged to a jeep. They put him in the men's jail and I was sent to the women's jail. If the police can meet out this kind of treatment to us, how can the ordinary citizen demand his rights? We were very distressed and decided that we would keep a protest fast.

The jail where we had been lodged did not have any facility. We were very badly treated in Tehri jail. For example, during our fast, we needed boiled water. For this we had to make a great deal of effort. They tried to harass us in this and so many other ways.

We were shifted to Roorkee jail on March 2. There for the first time we were given an opportunity to give a statement to the Magistrate. We were well treated at Roorkee jail. We got hot water and Deeksha Palji and I began to take lemon and salt in the jail. Our health began to suffer because of our fast. The

jail authorities realized that it was not good for our health to stay in Roorkee. So they sent us to the Meerut Medical College on March 5, where we continued our fast. Bahugunaji was drinking only water. On March 8, we learnt from the District Magistrate that we were being released. Bahugunaji said that he would only go if he was sent back to the same place where he had been taken from. The District Magistrate from Roorkee contacted his counterpart in Tehri and then told us that we would be sent back. With that assurance, on March 9, we set off from there. The fast was continuing and we decided we would break it only when we reached Tehri.

It was during this period that we went to meet Swami Chidanandaji. He made some *rasahar* for us and tried to persuade us to break our fast. I gave up my fast in his presence but Bahugunaji said that he would first go back to the same spot from where the police took us away when we were on *dharna*. So he didn't drink the fruit juice prepared by Swami Chidananda. Even so, Swami Chidananda insisted on giving him some lemon and honey and said, "This at least you will have to take." And since Bahugunaji never refuses anything to his guru, he took a spoon of honey and lime from Swami Chidananda on the twelfth day of

his fast. From then on he continued to take the same amount of lime and honey everyday during the fast.

When we reached Tehri we were confronted with an unexpected situation. The PAC had surrounded the entire bazaar and they were obstructing all possible ways to enter. But the local population of Tehri had been waiting to welcome us for a long time and we managed to have the meeting despite them. After the public meeting, when we tried to proceed towards the *dharna* spot in our jeep, we were told that Section 144 has been imposed. So Bahugunaji sat there by the roadside, right where the trucks were going up and down and said he wouldn't move from there. His fast kept going at that very spot until it reached 45 days.

This was my first fast. I had never fasted before this. But I don't feel any stress. Eleven days passed very easily. Neither did I feel any great weakness, nor did Deeksha, who was with me in jail and who also fasted for 11 days. This despite the fact that throughout this fast we were put through many inconveniences because the administration and the contractors used to harass us a lot.

One needs *shanti* during a fast and you need your environs to be clean and peaceful. But the administration would go out of their way to ensure

that trucks kept plying on the road where we were sitting for our fast. In fact at night they would make more trucks go up and down so that Bahugunaji couldn't sleep all night. There was a lot of dust and pollution. The government would sprinkle water in other places but they would never allow water to be sprinkled where we were sitting and Bahugunaji was fasting. There was a lot of dust and we would be bothered. The administration would come back again and again and tell us how we must break the fast, otherwise we would be arrested. They also threatened Bahugunaji with force feeding.

Towards the end they were so determined to subject him to force feeding that Bahugunaji had to say, "Look, I know my body. I know the rules of fasting." He used to, for instance, keep *maun vrat* (silence fast) through the day and would speak only during the morning and evening prayer time. Otherwise he kept busy in reading and writing and corresponding with various people. We were quite confident that if they left him in peace, he would be able to carry on his fast with determination.

*But weren't you afraid that he might not survive the fast?*

I was a little afraid but I had this great faith

that he would be able to pull through this because he hadn't done any unnatural things. It was very *prakritic* that is, nature's methods were being followed. But towards the end when the administration began to harass him a lot and the PAC began to bother him with a view to somehow get him to give up his fast, it became extremely difficult.

They got a doctor's certificate saying that force feeding was necessary. Bahugunaji, in response to that, gave a written statement to the District Magistrate that if he were made to go through force feeding, the government would be responsible for his death. For his own safety he asked for another team of doctors to be near him and made these doctors give a written statement that he shouldn't be subjected to force feeding. But those last three or four days when they were all set to break his fast by force feeding were very tortuous days for us. They had even gone to the extent of emptying out a whole hospital ward where they planned to admit Bahugunaji after his arrest, where he would be force fed.

*Does your movement draw more support from men or women?*

It's about equal. But women are more sensitive because they know that once a hill woman is uprooted

from her environs and pushed off to the plains, even if she is not starving there will be no end to her troubles. The woman of the hill regions is brave and fearless. Even when her husband is out working in the city, she takes care of the entire household's needs, the fields, the farming, all by herself. She is used to roaming around the jungles by herself and is unaccustomed to leading a confined life. She is very innocent and the moment she comes to the plains she has to deal with all these crooks, robbers and all kinds of unsafe people. The atmosphere in the cities on the plains is very unsafe. She is not able to adjust to it. That is why women prefer to stay back in the villages even when the men go away.

We need to keep in mind that there is no guarantee from the government that the people who are uprooted from their villages are indeed going to be provided employment. When the family shifts to the plain, what is the husband going to do? Is he going to do *chowkidari* of his wife or is he going to go and look for a job?

This woman who right now leads a life of freedom in the hills—she is like the queen of the forests and the hills—will be reduced to a very pitiable status when she is thrown out of this environment and sent

to the cities and the plains. How is she going to make a living in that situation? And then they will have no land. Whatever money they get will be so pitifully little that they will not even be able to construct a little hutment with that.

*How much money does the government pay as compensation?*

There are different criteria for determining the levels of compensation. But the main thing is that those who are willing to bribe government officials are able to get lakhs. Those who don't bribe don't even get the basic minimum compensation for the property that is being taken away from them; there is a lot of corruption in this.

*Is there a new generation of activists that is ready to take on the tasks you are facing?*

The new generation is not gravitating towards social work. They don't have that sentiment in them anymore. The question that is a bit worrying is how will this incomplete work be carried forward, if new people don't come and carry it on. Our only sense of satisfaction is that a few young people have come up, among them our own son. Many more are needed.

*What are the hurdles in the way of these people coming up?*

I know more about women. Our government is not making plans in a way that will reduce the drudgery and misery of women, that will take into account their needs and free their energy for their own intellectual and mental development and involve them in the social planning process.

*Are you able to do so much because you were trained as a child to hard physical labour?*

In my childhood I never had a tough life because my father was an officer in the Forest Department and we weren't used to hard labour. I learned how to work hard only after I went to Sarla behn. Watching her work, I learned to do simple labour. I am mentally very strong. Like any hill woman, I am very fast in doing the household and the *ashram* work. At present I can't do hard physical labour in the fields because I have not been well. But I still take care of the *ashram* work.

*It's been the experience of activists the country over, that whenever they try to organize women, they get demoralized after the first flush of success. Women have so many domestic responsibilities that it is very hard to keep them involved in sustained socio-political movements; they are only involved sporadically. What has your experience been?*

I've already mentioned that one of the sources of great anguish for me is the harsh life rural women lead and the very hard work they are constantly doing. That's why I feel very strongly that the planning and development that we do has to be geared towards reducing the drudgery of these women, it has to make their lives a little easier so that they can take an active role in social affairs. It's true that at harvest time we can't have any movements; most of the mobilizations of the movement have to occur in the lean agricultural season.

*Movement or ganisers feel that it is very hard for them to find women activists who can take on the job of going from village to village. Not those who can just come to attend a few meeting or movement gatherings, those who can do sustained work.*

That is true. They are able to come only occasionally. However, it also depends on how much they feel the issue affects them. For example, take the *sharab bandi*. The affects them very directly because they do the earning and the men blow it up. It has a very bad effect on the upbringing of the children. That's why they participated in full force in the anti-liquor movement. At the time of the June harvest, the women who were arrested couldn't do their own



harvesting and it's the neighbouring women who did the harvesting for them.

Likewise, women are more active in the anti-dam movement because they recognize that if their villages are uprooted they will have to leave their homes. Then the freedom to roam around the jungles will no longer be available to them. They will have to lead very constricted lives when they are sent off to other places as resettlers.

But it is a fact that it is very hard to get full time activists. Even so there have been a few women. Like the 84 year old Managsari Devi who has continually been involved in the agitation. She has even been to jail. Even during the time of the *sharab bandi andolan* she went to villages, overtaken by the spirit of do or die.

*Did the men oppose the anti-liquor campaign?*

Not too much, really. Earlier there was some kind of opposition from the men who said to the women, "Why did you go for it? Also, the cash is in the hands of the men. How do these women travel or have bus fares? They only have grain under their control. So they would take some rice, tie it up in their bundles. They wouldn't even have money for their bus fare. But later on they became so bold that when the men

said to them, "Get out of the house," they would say, "We need to decide whose house it is. Is it only yours or is it equally mine? If you were to take a vote in the house, the children are going to vote with their mothers. They are not going to vote with you. And so the work that we are doing is a good influence on children, not like drinking which ruins their lives. It is not enough that you give food to children. The kind of upbringing that you give to the children is also important. Take a vote and you will find that the majority is on our side in this house. So who is going to get out?"

*How is it that this is the first interview you've ever given?*

Because I live in a very remote corner of the country. I am not like Bahugunaji *a duniya bhagat*, going from one place to another. The reason I left my village and came and sat in Tehri with him is because of his 45 day fast. Otherwise, except for some movement activities, I stay in my ashram, in my *grihasthi* and take care of them. Who is going to come to my remote village and interview me?

(Translated from Hindi)

## SUNDERLAL BAHUGUNA



How do you describe the life of a man who was a freedom fighter at the age of 14, the leading political leader of his District at the age of 23 and who gave up a most promising political career to serve a remote village at the age of 28? Who has born in a remote hill village of one of India's poorest Districts, went on to win the alternative noble prize (right livelihood award) and then instead of resting on past laurels came close to sacrificing his life in a 45 day fast observed in the most hostile conditions to focus public attention on socially and ecologically disruptive project?

This is Sunderlal Bahuguna, the internationally acclaimed social and environmental activist and thinker on new development concepts. It is typical of his determination to live his life according to certain principles that after receiving so much fame and adulation, at the time of writing this he prefers to spend his days in as isolated camp on the bank of the Ganga river, accepting loneliness and even ridicule but not giving up his resolve to oppose the giant Tehri dam project which he is convinced (and in this he is supported by a number of experts including officially appointed ones) will cause large scale destruction to his beloved Ganga-Himalayan region and the people living here. It is to the service of this land and its people that his life has been devoted and he is now willing to sacrifice his all for a cause which he knows is crucial to the welfare of the people whether they realize it today or not.

Sunderlal was born in Marora village of the princely state of Tehri Garwal. The extended family had a base in two neighbouring villages Sirain and Marora. His father Ambadatt Bahuguna was a courageous man who came up the hard way. Having lost his father at an early age he rose to become a forest official. He had a deep affection for Ganga River and

constructed his house in such a way that the Ganga was clearly visible from the sitting room.

Sunderlal Bahuguna had obviously inherited his father's love for Ganga. He also made very good use of some books and old journals that his father had collected a long time back. Sunderlal Bahuguna also had to face the misfortune of losing his father at an early age. The deepest influence on his early childhood was that of his mother Purna Devi. The extremely hard life that his mother like most hill women has to lead, working from dawn to the late hours of night obviously made a lasting impact on the sensitive mind of the child. Years later, reducing the rigours of women would become a central plank of his thinking for a new pattern of hill area development. He would recall time and again the hardships of hill women as observed in his own childhood and a sketch of his mother written from this perspective would become his most widely read and appreciated writing in Hindi.

His sensitivity to the distress he saw around him was enhanced by the reading material he was able to obtain which included books on the freedom movement in the country. As he was sent outside the village for education at an early age, this also helped in the widening of his horizons. At the age of 13 when

he met Sri Dev Suman, the most famous freedom fighter of Garhwal, he already had a certain inclination towards social work although this had certainly not yet become the main aim of his life.

What will you do when grow up? Suman Ji asked the young, eager boy. I'll service the mankind as an official, Sunderlal replied in a matter of fact tone, reflecting the viewpoint of most young boys who were sent out for education by their village based families. Then who'll serve the poor people? Sumanji asked. I'll do that too, the eager but inexperienced boy replied without batting an eyelid. How can you serve two quite different masters at the same time? Suman Ji said and left the boy to think over the implications of his remark. The more the young Sunderlal thought about this, more he realized the significance of what Suman Ji had told him. His mind started working in the direction of making people's service (and not the court's service) the main and perhaps the only aim of his life.

But how could a mere 13 years old boy contribute to the great task of the freedom movement. Young Sunderlal found out one way that suited his talents. He had a flair for writing and he started contributing short-write ups to the newspapers. As his

commitment grew, he gladly gave up the money he obtained for buying 'doodh jalebi (milk and sweets) to buy instead Gandhian literature and other inspiring books from Suman Ji and others. One book that made a lasting impact on his mind at this stage was the message of Prince Kropotkin to youths.

Sunderlal Ji and like minded youth formed a small group which participated in activities relating to the freedom movement. When news of this reached his home, his mother was quite upset. According to traditional social norms working against the king was considered very wrong. Some relatives started speaking against him and for some time he was kept under close family scrutiny in his village. But he got away on one pretext or the other and stayed with Suman Ji for some time. He also went to Mussoorie and participated in the working class movement for some time, taking educational classes and helping in other ways.

On returning to Tehri Sunderlal learnt that Suman Ji had been arrested and sent to Tehri Jail. He was being tortured there. Sunderlal managed to sneak out the news of his arrest, torture and the statements given by him. These were published in newspapers and helped to build up public opinion against the

repression in Tehri Garhwal. Sunderlal managed to make friends with a guard in the jail who gave him the latest news. The local police was getting very upset about the kind of bad publicity they were getting at the national level. Search for the source of this news finally brought them to Sunderlal and he was arrested.

He was taken to Narendra Nagar and kept in the lock-up for nearly five months. Here he was treated very badly and sometimes kerosene oil was put in his food. He could not even have a bath for nearly two months. It was also here that he received the news of the martyrdom of his Guru Suman Ji. He had fasted for 84 days before he achieved martyrdom. All this while he was tortured, heavy weights were tied to his body and he was even flogged. The great martyrdom of Suman Ji had a profound impact on the sensitivity of the young man and prepared him for big sacrifices in his own life.

Bad treatment in jail finally made him so ill that he had to be taken to a doctor. As good fortune would have it, this doctor turned out to be a very sympathetic person who went out of his way to convince the police that Sunderlal's life would be seriously endangered by any further imprisonment. This led to his sudden release but the police continued to keep a close watch

on him Due to this and his poor health, any immediate action on the political front was not possible.

In the midst of all this hectic work, Sunderlal had striven to continue his education to the extent possible. Once he had to appear in the examination under police custody now he decided to continue his education. For this purpose 18 year old Sunderlal decided to go to Lahore where his elder brother Govindram was already studying.

When Sunderlal reached Lahore he had a total capital of Rs. 25 and two pairs of clothes. While squeezing into the room of his brother was not a problem for Sunderlal, arranging Rs. 97 needed for college fees was certainly a big headache. Hectic attempts to get a fee concession backed by his success in getting a tuition enabled him to get admission in the college but still he had to strive to save each paisa. Fond of tea, he used to buy milk worth 2 paise every day for making tea as this was all the milk he could afford. Then one day the milk-seller refused to sell milk in such a small quantity (do you take milk for putting it in your eyes? He asked) and Sunderlal was forced to start taking milkless tea. The hectic hard life supported by inadequate nutrition took its toll and he fell seriously ill. The illness also left behind a debt.

But this gloomy life had its bright patches too. For example the time when the examination results came and it became known that despite all the adversities, Sunderlal had managed to top in subject like Political Science. Prof. Roshan Lal Verma was very pleased with his performance and insisted that he should work in a more organized manner for academic achievements. With the Professor's help Sunderlal also managed to get better facilities and it appeared that his day of adversity in Lahore were over.

But adversity again intervened in the form of a force which had been sent to arrest (or at least interrogate) him. He was again a wanted man in the context of his earlier political work in Garhwal. His friends managed to act just by the nick of time to hide him in the college hostel. Subsequently, he was sent to Lyallpur, dressed up as a worker in the company of a friend named Tofail Muhammed.

Life as a runaway from the repressive machinery of the colonial government was very difficult and for survival he even had to clean plates in a canteen. Finally an offer emerged of teaching children of a landlord's family in a village. This would also keep him at a safe distance from the police; Sunderlal thought and accepted the offer.

In the village, Sunderlal was able to find the time of a serious study of some books such as those relating to the thoughts of Gandhiji. He accordingly also made certain changes in his life making it more austere and disciplined. This was not liked by the landlord who was proud of his family's ability to spend a lot on luxuries of life and thought that Sunderlal would be a bad influence on his children. Sunderlal knew that his search for a home and job will have to start again soon.

Fortunately would come from Lahore that the police did not appear to be after him any more and Prof. Verma would be very happy to have Sunderlal back as his student. Sunderlal returned to Lahore. Helped by the kind professor he was even able to get better accommodation and stayed on to finish his B.A. course. Meanwhile the political events were moving rapidly towards independence but also the partition of the country.

Sunderlal was 'welcomed' to his native land by the policemen of the king who prevented him from entering Tehri town. The Lahore police may have forgotten him but the local police obviously remembered well the rebel who had vanished for some time. Sunderlal insisted that he should be allowed to

enter Tehri town and when all pleas fell on deaf ears, he started a fast—the first of the several fasts which would follow later in his life. As he sat on the fast for nearly seven days near the bridge on the Bhagirathi river which is the main entry point for Tehri town, several men and women from Tehri town and nearby villages came to meet him. This gave him an idea of the developments which had been taking place in his native place while he was away.

The resistance to the arbitrary and repressive rule of the king had been building up. A strong movement had emerged in Saklana area. Within Tehri town youths like Virendra Dutt Saklani were coming forward to organize people against the king. Sunderlal met Virendra Dutt and the basis of a life long friendship was established. This friendship would prove crucial in later days of the struggle against Tehri dam.

Soon Sunderlal was made the Secretary of the Prajamandal, the nearest local equivalent of the Congress Party, a post which he occupied for nearly eight years. Before this he was also sent to Delhi for some time by other freedom fighters to help in building opinion in favour of the struggle in Garhwal. This also helped him to renew his contacts with the media which he put to very productive use in subsequent years to

focus attention several relevant issues and also to earn his living.

Back in Tehri Garhwal Mira Behn (a European disciple of Mahatma Gandhiji) was trying to do important experimental work in Bhilangana Valley area for giving a true Gandhian orientation to rural development work. Sunderlal used to walk for as much as 40 kms. To meet Mira Behn and help with her work. It is another matter that bureaucratic procedures came in the way of the implementation of Mira Behn's ideas. He also established very good relations with another European disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Sarla Behn (who also had made Himalayan region her area of work and became a mother figure for Gandhian activists in U. P. Himalayan region).

Sunderlal gave a lot of his time during this phase to the welfare of Harijans (scheduled castes) and for fighting against the shameful practice of untouchability. He played a leading role in the movement for securing the entry of harijans in important temples. He was pained by the fact that Harijan students were forced to eat separately in College and School hostels. So he made a lot of efforts to establish a hostel called Thakhar Bapa Hostel for Students (so named after a leading social reformer) for harijan students. He

himself also stayed there with the harijan students.

He helped to organize a number of meetings and processions to spread the message of constructive work and social reform and to attract more and more youth to this work. It was in the course of this work that he met Vimal, a 23 year old girl who worked with Sarla Behn in hill villages. Senior Gandhian activists like Dada Dharmadhikari were convinced that the marriage of Vimla and Sunderlal will be an ideal meeting ground of common aims and commitments but Vimla insisted they should work in villages after marriage. Despite leading an austere life very different from the normal run of politicians, Sunderlal was also not happy with the ways of the politicians with whom he had to inter-act. So the two decided finally to serve in a remote village after their marriage.

Sunderlal Ji had not hesitated from doing physical labour to earn his living but now along with his wife Vimla he will have to do much more than his share of it. The village they had selected—Silyara—was miles away from the nearest motor road. Not only did he have to carry heavy loads to the village and also help in the construction of the living place and a school, in addition to earn his living in village he worked in the fields, at the gulls (small canals) and at a watermill.

Further he held classes for village boys, even if this meant working late in the night.

While the villagers obviously had respect for the former Secretary of the local Congress Party who had willingly given up his political career to serve in their village, some of them also had problems in accepting the high caste couple who mixed freely with the harijans. So even when they gave grain to Sunderlal Ji and Vimla Ji for their work in the village, some of them would not allow them to enter their home. These problems increased even more when Sunderlal Ji and Vimla Ji participated in the movement for the entry of harijans in the Bura Kedar temple. They were beaten up by shoes at the time of this movement. Sunderlal Ji especially due to his efforts to protect the others.

Gradually the limitations of working within the framework of a single village also began to manifest themselves and so it was decided that while Vimla Ji would continue to devote most of her time to their chosen village and the Navjivan Ashram which they had established here, Sunderlal Ji would go on extensive foot marches to take the message of social reform, environment protection and other Gandhian ideals to as many hill villages as possible.

One of the main facts that emerged from these

foot marches and the extensive contacts made with villagers was that liquor was playing havoc with the social, economic and moral life of the hills. In addition, the increased consumption of liquor also leads to a lot of road accidents. Even a small mistake on the hill roads can send a bus tumbling down the steep hill slopes and several such accidents had recently taken a heavy toll of human lives. It was therefore decided by several Gandhian social activists that anti-liquor movement would be given the maximum emphasis in their activities in the near future, to prevent people from consuming the devil's brew.

Sunderlal Ji played an important role in mobilizing people against the liquor contract. The opening of new liquor shops at Ghanshali and Lambgoan had to be cancelled. The scene of action later shifted to Tehri town. Here Sunderlal Ji went on a 16 day fast to express solidarity with the people's desire for the removal of the liquor vend.

The anti-liquor movement achieved several successes and even though the vigilance could not be maintained at the same level leading to later day spurt in liquor consumption, still public opinion was considerably aroused against the evils of the spread of the drinking habit and several persons were encouraged



to give up this habit once and for all.

The next important step on the agenda of the Gandhian (Sarvodaya) movement in the hills related to the protection of forests. Initially Sunderlal had shared the concern of those who wanted that the main emphasis should be on forest based small scale industries in villages (instead of allowing the raw material to be taken away from hills so that the economy of the hills could be enriched. But the long travels in the hill villages and forests convinced him that the most basic need was for the protection of the fast dwindling forests. "It is in the course of these distant travels that my attitude changed and I was led from emphasizing the demand for setting up local industry to protective considerations managing forests primarily for the soil and water conservation provided by them rather than for their timber and resin" says Sunderlal Bahuguna who himself travelled about 4200 kms. In the years 1973-75 in the courses of such padyatras (foot marches) in the hills. In addition he encouraged youth to take up similar marches (such as the Askot-Arakot March) in which he also accompanied them for some marches. He also spent sometime with forest labourers (who had to toil in very difficult conditions), with the hope of improving their living and working conditions.

Meanwhile axemen had already been chased away by the villagers, especially village women, from places like Rampur Phata and Reni and there was much discussion of this incipient 'Chipko' (hug the trees) movement. Now efforts were made to mobilize people to oppose the auction of trees at the auction sites. Sunderlal Bahuguna observed a fast in Uttarkashi to protest against the auction of trees. At a protest demonstration in Narendranagar the precisionists while remaining entirely peaceful entered the auction hall while the contractor's feld. This was the beginning of the series of 'Chipko' actions in Himalayan region of Tehri Garhwal with which Sunderlal was most closely involved. Hemvalghati region is home to a number of Gandhian social activists like Dharm Singh Negi, Kunwar Prasun and Vijay Jardhari who have been with Sunderlal Ji through several adverse situations in various social and ecological movements. Their joint efforts led to a glorious phase of the movement in which several activists and villagers, including women and children actually hugged trees for the first time to prevent them from being axed and they did not go away even when policemen were taken in a large number to the forest. This happened in Advani village.

Earlier there was a successful effort to draw

attention to the excess 'bleeding' of pine trees for extracting resin from them. This excess extraction made the tree extremely weak. As a result of the campaign in which Sunderlal Ji secured the participation of some leading public figures the government agreed to revise the procedures for extracting resin and a ban on this was imposed some of the worst affected forests.

From Hemvalghati the movement went to other villages as Ghonti (Lahasi), Khuret and Kaangar. Almost at all these places in Tehri Garhwal District the movement registered one success after another in its ability to stop the felling of trees. The confrontation finally reached a flashpoint in the forest of Badiyargad. Here the authorities made a very determined bid (pursuing a carrot and stick policy) to keep away the villagers from supporting the movement. Many times activists had to remain hungry and unsheltered in the cold Himalayan weather in the effort to stop the felling of trees. The movement picked up after the arrival of Sunderlal Ji and the start of his indefinite fast to demand a moratorium on the felling of green trees. People from far off villages came to see him and do listen to the message of Chipko movement. Subsequently he was arrested and taken first to Tehri jail and then to Dehradun jail. He broke his fast after

24 days on certain assurance. Although the talks with officials were not immediately successful, the process initiated led first to the cancelling of the auction at Badiyargad (and another movement site Amarsar) and finally to the moratorium in the felling of green trees on heights of over 1000 metres all over the Uttar Pradesh Himalayan region.

What is more, this successful movement inspired some efforts of a similar nature in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarkannada district of Karnataka and elsewhere. Activists from these areas like Pandurang Hegde and Kulbhushan Upmanyu came here to live with Sunderlal Ji and his colleagues and the later in turn travelled to their areas to tell them about their experiences. So this led to 'chipko' type actions with similar success in stopping commercial tree felling in areas like Himachal, Uttarakannada and elsewhere. There was also a long and bitter struggle against indiscriminate, highly destructive quarrying of limestone in Nahin Kalan village of Doon Valley.

The decade of the sixties had ended with notable successes for the anti-liquor movement and the decade of the seventies ended with the even more remarkable successes of the movement against deforestation. But Sunderlal Ji was not the man to sit

content with past achievements. His life mission of saving the Himalayan ecology could not be achieved by achieving sure success in just one or two parts of the great Himalayas ranges. He decided to embark on a very difficult and hazardous journey which would take him across the entire length of the Himalayas on foot (the famous Kashmir Kohima March-see the next chapter).

After the completion of the march Sunderlal Ji was drawn more and more into the question of the large dam projects in Tehri Garhwal and other neighbouring areas. Work has already started on the giant 260 metre high Tehri dam on Bhagirathi—Bhilangana Rivers in his native place. This was to be followed by a number of other large dam projects in the region. Sunderlal Ji's old friend and well-wisher Virendra Dutt Saklani had played a leading role in organizing an Anti Tehri Dam Struggle Committee and collecting the opinion of various experts on this dam project. The more they studied this project, the more they became convinced that it would be disastrous for this region and other affected areas. Experts of even some officially constituted committees later supported their view. The movement also suggested specific and practical alternatives to Tehri dam so that hydel power could

be topped by smaller run-of-the-river projects.

However Saklani Ji's health deteriorated with his involvement in all the work that was required to be done. So he made a request to Sunderlal Ji to give up his other engagements and devote most of his time to leading a movement against the disastrous Tehri Dam Project (TDP).

Himself fully convinced of the importance of this issue he started devoting himself more and more to this work. By now he had been invited to several national and international gatherings on environmental questions and he made use of these opportunities to broaden his horizons about the various national and international debates and also contributed his own views on the basis of his own grass-roots experiences and learning. Generally these were very appreciated at most gatherings. Several awards and recognitions were constantly coming his way and he sometimes had to struggle to keep a balance between these increasing meetings and what he considered his real work at the grass-roots.

The anti dam movement received a new strength in 1989 when Sunderlal Bahuguna undertook a protest fast and sat on a bulldozer's wheel as an act symbolizing the determination to stop this dam project

in its present form.

In 1991 a disastrous earthquake struck Garhwal. In Jamakh and neighbouring villages of Garhwal where the maximum damage had been done, the people recalled that the entire area had been badly shaken up by the indiscriminate work done for Maneri Bhali Hydel Project and this was stated to be a main reason why the earthquake proved particularly destructive in this area. The question which the movement had been raising about the threat posed to the dam structure by earthquake and about the threat of reservoir induced seismicity now evoked a greater response among the people. Simultaneously with participating in relief work, some social activists started a protest dharna (sit-in) near the dam site.

On the night of February 27, 1992 some local officials and police raided the dharna site and rounded up the people sitting here to take them to New Tehri Jail. They insulted the persons, driving away some ladies in their night dress and not even allowing several persons to collect their belongings. At New Tehri they were not given access to essential facilities. Sunderlal Bahuguna, his wife Vimla Bahuguna and another lady Diksha Behn started a protest fast. Sunderlal Bahuguna's fast lasted for 45 days. Several social

activists were kept in jail for over a month. Even later the cases against them were not withdrawn. Those jailed included at 84 year old lady Mingsiri Devi and 12 year old girls Guddi and Pushpa. The arrests were widely condemned. Prominent political leaders and social activists like George Fernandes and Amarnath Bhai visited the dharna site. The Parliament expressed concern at Sunderlal Bahuguna's health and appealed to him to give up his fast.

On March 20, 1992 the movement took out a very successful protest demonstration in Tehri which defied the prohibitory orders imposed by the administration. People from several distant villages came to participate in this protest action. But their enthusiasm turned to great sadness when on the return journey back to their homes, one of the buses met with a serious accident. The bus rolled down a hillside killing about 16 persons and injuring many more. Several aspects of this accident were mysterious. The driver was not the regular one and managed to escape and run away even as the bus started tumbling. Many people suspect that this was an act of sabotage aimed at discouraging the people from participating in any further demonstration against TDP.

This had been a big setback for the movement

but slowly and steadily its work in continuing.

An important aspect of the life of Sunderlal Bahuguna has been that of a writer-scholar. Whatever understanding he gathers from his grassroots experiences, he tries his best to put down in the form of papers, articles, or at least diary notes. All this has to be done hurriedly, waiting at bus stops or travelling in trains but still he has succeeded to an amazing extent in communicating his field-visits, thoughts and suggestions through the media and also through lectures delivered at various meetings.

Several of these writings are concerned with developing an alternative development framework for the Himalayan region. He is deeply concerned about the relentless pace of deforestation, soil erosion and impoverishment in the hilly areas, he sees clearly the relationships between ecological and economic ruin and he is anxious to develop a development strategy that will be able to effectively challenge this trend. He is greatly concerned about the displacement and other havoc that will be caused by ill-conceived giant dam projects and here again he is very eager to establish the alternative of the smaller run-of-the river hydel schemes.

In his vision of alternative hill development he

gives a lot of importance to tree farming. Trees are to be valued not for timber but for their sustainable yield of food, fodder, fertilizer, fiber and fuel, apart from their contribution to air and water. He sees the contribution of the Himalayan region in terms of its soil and water conservation, an abode of spiritual learning and natural beauty. The existing path (of looking at the hills as a source of obtaining timber and other raw materials for industry, of displacing thousands of people to create giant dam projects, promoting vulgar tourism etc.), he rejects with strong words.

This alternative vision of development for the hills is developed within a wider understanding for the alternative concepts of development. Development he perceives as a state of peace, happiness and fulfillment. Some extracts from his writings are given to briefly explain his concepts of development environment protection and social change. These concepts have been influenced to a significant extent by the message of Gautam Buddha and Bhagwad Gita.

Here it will be sufficient to say that the alternative development about which he speaks with passion cannot be possible unless it is based on the spiritual advancement of people. By his own life he has tried to establish how far spiritual advancement

can enable a man to obtain peace, happiness and fulfillment even while following the most difficult path and setting out to meet most formidable challenges. More than anything else the life of Vimla and Sunderlal Bahuguna shows how spiritual advancement makes it possible for even hardships to be turned into happiness.

## **HUGGING THE TREE**

### **An Example of Chipko Action**

1st February, 1977. Nearly 500 people gathered in the Advani forest of Hemvalghati region, Tehri Garhwal district (Uttar Pradesh), heard the distant din of approaching vehicles. For a short while the slogan-shouting stopped as people strained their ears to make out from this dim sound what the approaching vehicles could be. Then on the last visible portion of the serpentine hilly road appeared a jeep, then another and then one more. Last came two trucks, exuding thick clouds of smoke.

Now there could be no mistaking the identity of the approaching caravan. "The police has come" said one of the young men with an air of finality, his eyes moving from the approaching vehicles to the colourful gathering of men, women and children before him.

Then, louder than ever before, these Himalayan hills reverberated with the six words which had shattered the calm and quiet of this secluded forest since morning.

Aaj Himalaya Jagega  
Krrur Kulhara Bhagega

The Himalayas will awake today.

The cruel axe will be chased away.

The source of all these high voltage emotions—nearly two dozen axes and saws—lay unconcerned about 50 meters away from the crowd and near them stood nearly an equal number of gurkha labourers. These labourers had been summoned by a contractor, in turn hired by a bigger contractor or ‘maaldaar’ to whom 640 chir pine and sal trees of this forest had been sold by the forestry department.

The forestry department officials had earlier marked the trees to be felled and subsequently the contractor had on several occasions gone to the forest with his labourers, but they had been unable to fell any tree as whenever people from surrounding villages saw the labourers approaching the forests with their axes they rushed out of their homes and fields to hug the trees. Since the labourers could not axe trees without injuring the people claspings them, again and again they were forced to withdraw from the forest.

Then the contractor sent an urgent message to the District officials to help him as he was legally entitled to fell these trees after they had been sold to him in an auction and properly marked by the

forestry department officials. After some hesitation the administration agreed to send armed police force to assist him in felling trees. This force of about 100 men of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), some of them armed with rifles, had arrived a day before at a roadside village called Jajal about 10 kms away from Advani and had paraded on the road in an apparent show of strength for the benefit of local villagers. Word of the arrival of the police force soon spread in the villages of this region and since early morning people started gathering in the forest to face the new situation.

Now the labour-contractor, after hurried consultation with the forestry and police officials, asked his men to pick up their axes and saws. But as soon as the labourers moved towards the forest, the assembled villagers formed themselves into groups of three and four and each group surrounded the nearest marked tree. Whenever some labourers advanced towards one of these trees, they immediately hugged the tree, claspings their arms firmly around its thick trunk. For more than an hour the frustrated contractor went around the forest with his labourers, seeking to fell at last a few trees, but whenever he approached

a marked tree, which had been left uncovered by the tree-hugger, the women and children standing on the road below rushed to the tree to protect it.

The police-force had no answer to the unique form of tree-protection. The only way of felling trees was to drag each one of the tree-huggers away from the forest and then arrest him.

There was no possibility of a violent retaliation as these protesters had throughout remained non-violent, again and again shouting two slogans:

Hamla chahe jaise hoga,  
Hath hamara nahi uthega.  
No Matter what the attack on us  
Our hands will not rise in violence  
And  
Police Hamari Bhai Hai  
Usse Nahi Larai Hai

The Policemen are our brothers,  
Our fight is not with them.

Thus the police had no fear of violence on the part of the assembled people if it decided to arrest them. But it could not possibly take the drastic action of dragging away each of the demonstrators from the forest and then sending them to the nearest prison

against a people who were exuding all the warmth and brotherhood towards the assembled officialdom and reassuring them time and again that their only intention was to protect the trees and not to create any disturbance.

After waiting for over an hour, the officials consulted each other and decided to move away. While leaving, some of the PAC men exchanged pleasantries with the assembled men and even congratulated them on their success.

As the jeeps and trucks off, the joyous people gathered to shout in unison their last message, "If the axe falls on the trees we will offer our bodies first".

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## He Was A Man Of The Trees

By Sunderlal Bahuguna



“In my childhood, I had no toys to play. I played with the little plants in my father’s nursery. I observed the seeds sprouting and then growing into plants. I enjoyed watering those young friends and when these grew up and stood in a line, in my child’s fancy I thought as if these were the soldiers who had lined up to salute me.” This was what Richard St. Barbe Baker, internationally known as ‘Man of the Trees’— the man responsible for planting 26 billion trees during his life time spoke about his childhood.

St. Barbe was born in Hampshire, England on October 9,1889. He developed a strong affinity for nature in early childhood. Later the family settled in Canada. He studied in the University of Saskatoon, Canada. He served a soldier in France during World War I, where he was seriously wounded; taken to be dead and kept in the heap of dead soldiers to be buried. Somebody noticed a body’s slow movements and put him into another van with the wounded to be taken to the hospital. After his recovery, he studied forestry at Cambridge University and Oxford in England. Upon graduation, he joined the British Colonial Service and was appointed Assistant Conservator of Forests in Kenya in 1920.

In Kenya, he could closely study nature, while working in the hilly and coastal forests. He realized that his importance of trees was not merely based on their apparent economic value but their effect was equally beneficial for climate, agriculture; for the very existence of human life.

The annihilation of forests had resulted in lands turning barren in Africa. The Sahara had turned into a desert on account of destruction of forests and indiscriminate grazing. Densely populated areas turned into graveyards.

His designation—conservator of forests—“believing his duties, St. Barbe soon decided he could not

preside over the massive exploitation of forests without regeneration.” He involved the local tribals in tree planting ‘through the dance for the trees’ and in this way founded an institution—‘Man of the Trees’. —in 1922, which now its branches in 108 countries with headquarters in U.K.

He organized Sahara Expeditions twice, joined the campaign to save the Red Woods in 1932—went around the world several times teaching, preaching and convincing the ‘unwilling governments of the importance of forests for the survival of human kind; till his end. He died on June 9, 1982 in the University of Saskatoon, while he was away from his home— Mt. Cook station in New Zealand working for his mission.

Baker met Gandhi in England as early as 1914, and Rabindranath Tagore in 1918 when he was injured for a second time in the battlefield and rendered extremely weak both in physique and spirit. The post guessing the mental state of the young soldier, kept his hand on his forehead, recited a poem to him, jotted it down on a piece of paper and left it there. In that hour of despondency, the youth with broken heart and body, derived spiritual strength from it. Baker related this incident saying, “He was a real Guru (teacher), who knew what I needed at that moment.” He kept this poem by his bedside throughout his life.

He first visited India in 1931, met Jawaharlal Nehru. Later he visited India in 1957 to attend the 15th World Vegetarian Congress. Mrs. Rukmini Arundale had arranged his meeting with Prime Minister Nehru; presented him his book, “The Sahara Challenge”, Next day when he saw Nehru, the latter said, “Baker, thrice I have gone through your book, do you have anything to say about deserts in India.” Prompt came a reply from Baker, “Trees around your fields.”

“Numbered though are my days. I care little for my health for the sake of your work. I shall accompany you to the Himalayas”—this is what 88-year old Baker told me during the first meeting with him on November 20, 1977 in Delhi. I was then regarded as an undesirable person, who had challenged the traditional scientific management of forests for timber. So the big wigs in Delhi did not like him to accompany me.

After his visit in Garhwal, Himalayas, seeing the dried rivers and spreading deserts in the foothills, he urged the Government of India to ban felling of trees in the hills. This was the first scientific support to the Chipko movement.

He had heard of Acharya Vinoba Bhave and his Gram Swaraj Movement from an American economist, Mr. Hoffman’s book, “India’s Social Miracle,” in which

he had advised the Americans to go back to the villages if they wished to lead a calm and peaceful life. So he visited the Paunar Ashram to pay his respects to Vinoba. The historical meeting was extremely touching. Baker prostrated at Vinoba's feet and the latter was moved.

He again visited India in August 1980. The nature lovers in the country were worried about the Silent Valley. Mentioning the importance of the Silent Valley as the last remaining oxygen bank of India, he burst into tears at functions in Bombay and New Delhi organized to honour him. He said, "I want to go on fast unto death to save the Silent Valley." He repeated the same to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who assured him that the Silent Valley would be saved.

He visited Advani village of Tehri Garhwal in Himalayas, where in 1971 he had blessed trees marked for felling. The women tied sacred threads (rakhi) round these trees as a symbol of their firm determination to save them even at the cost of their lives. The slogan of these women was: What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air are the basis of life," he was welcomed with the local band and folk songs. At this the messiah of trees, the 90 year old man danced with joy.

Wherever he went, the veteran forester, who was one of the few living founder members of the World

Forestry Congress, addressed the foresters. In Delhi he addressed all the chief conservator of forests and in Dehra Dun, the scientists and trainees of the Forest Research Institute. He said, 'Look here ! You have been given the dignified name 'the Conservator of Forests, you are not timber merchants. Forestry has been prostituted for short time economic gains.'" He authored 30 books on forestry; including his autobiography 'My life, My trees', which is an excellent reading.

His last wish was to see the earth green again and for this he had a practical programme. Regreening of the Sahara by an international army of soldiers was one of his dreams. This could produce food for 320 million people in the world. He advocated planting trees for survival; priority to species giving food and fodder to all living beings. These, of course, will release oxygen without which we cannot survive more than five minutes. Forests, according to him, were the mothers of the rivers."

With this message he moved all over the world trying to involve to children in tree planting. He suggested establishment of the "International Tree Crop Institute", to carry on research in tree species for different regions and climates providing edible seeds to replace cereals; nuts, oil-seeds, honey and seasonal fruits. He was a perfect vegetarian and preferred to live on nuts and fruits.

This year the centenary of this saint scientist is

being celebrated all over the world. In India this was marked by raising a memorial forest at Tara in Bombay. This can be done in every village by planting food, fodder and other useful trees in his memory. Raising 'freedom forty groves' all over the country is one of the programmes during the Nehru centenary year.

Baker had the head of a scientist and the heart of a saint.

"Of the thirty billion acres of land on the earth more than nine million are already desert. We cannot afford to lose more of this green mantle or the water table will sink beyond recall. Trees are like the skin of the earth. If the being loses more than one third of its skin it dies. One third of every country should be kept under the tree cover. A country is very poor that does not have trees."

"I have a vision of the Earth made green again through the efforts of children. I can see the children of all nations planting trees and holding hands around the globe in celebration of the Earth as their home and all children, all people as their family."

—Richard St. Barbe Baker.

*(The Hindu, January 22, 1989)*

## **HENRY DUNANT AND BHAGAT PURAN SINGH**

The founder of Red Cross, Henry Dunant was born in Geneva, the capital of Switzerland. He obtained the highest educational qualification that was available in that city and at the age of 31, borrowed heavily from his friends to set up flour mills. He wanted to establish these mills in Algeria because of a large number of waterfalls in that country. These waterfalls would be able to provide the power required for running the mills. At this time Algeria was being ruled by France, therefore, he required permission from the King of France to carry out his task.

At the same very time a battle was in progress between Italy and Austria. This battle was being fought at Salfarino with the King of France also involved from one of the countries. Dunant waited in the battlefield for King of France. But even after 15 hours of wait he was unable to meet him. During this period about 45,000 soldiers from both sides were injured and required medical attention. Unfortunately of the sides was equipped with medical supplies or had the doctors available to attend the injured. This resulted in widespread of Tetanus and gangrene. Majority of the

injured soldiers kept lying unattended. A few of the fortunate's were evacuated in wooden wheeled carts. On the bumpy roads, these carts caused more injuries to the already half dead soldiers.

When Dunant saw the pitiable state of the injured, he forgot all about his own work. He desperately wanted to do something for them, so he went to a nearby village and gathered a few men. With the help of these men he started carrying the injured to a nearby Church. In the end, he had about 200 injured soldiers in the Church. They were all packed like sardines in the small space. However, this effort was extremely small considering total number of injured soldiers. These 200 injured soldiers also consisted of two soldiers from the enemy side. Noticing this, the villagers started to throw them out. Dunant stopped them saying that an injured enemy soldier who is not capable of waging war should be considered as your own kin and must be treated well. The villagers were taken aback at his words and thought that Dunant must be mad to think like that. Slowly the word spread around in the village Salfarino soon these words were destined to spread around the whole world.

Dunant had to continue his work for about a month before medical personnel and the medicine started arriving from France.

Dunant was deeply moved by the grievous state of the injured soldiers in the battlefield and was determined not to start any other work. He wanted to remove this big blot from the face of mankind. To achieve this he thought about opening an organization which should have branches in all parts of the world. Main task of these organizations would be to provide first aid to the injured in the battlefield. The help was to be rendered in the name of humanity without any prejudice to the nationality or political views—of the injured.

With this plan in mind, he started meeting heads of all states and countries to seek their help. At the age of 31, Henry Dunant devoted his entire life in the service of the injured. The idea of setting up the flour mills never entered his mind again and he continued travelling all over the world drawing people's attention to the poor pathetic of the injured in the battlefield.

He returned to Geneva at the age of 80 having spent 49 years on his mission. For the first few years, his rich father kept sending him some money. But seeing his total involvement in the social work he stopped sending him any money. At the end of his entourage he reached Geneva, he was wearing very

old worn-out clothes and was supporting a big growth of beard. By this time most of the Heads of states had agreed to his proposal and the organization was known as Red Cross.

To honour this great man, Switzerland decided to change their national flag by including the Red Cross symbol. The flag of Switzerland had two colours. Red background and white cross. The colours were changed to a Red Cross over white background.

Bhagat puran Singh appeared in the matriculation exam in 1924. Immediately after that he decided to devote his entire life in the service of the poor, destitute, sick and cripple people. In 1934 he started looking after an abandoned, four years old spastic child. This child was to become the foundation of Pingalwara. For the next 68 years, Bhagat Ji was to raise the institution which today houses 1712 inmates. Pingalwara is the result of a continuous, dedicated, tortuous struggle of one soul for the benefit of the suffering mankind. The ideas run parallel to that of Red Cross. There are injured people during the peace time also. There are the rich, poor, destitute, mentally insane, disabled people who have no place to go. Task for Pingalwara is in ending, the battle must continue.

## **The Story of Amrita Devi's Sacrifice**

In order to give people courage to fight for their trees, Chipko leaders fasted and recounted the story of previous actions where hardship and overwhelming odds were overcome in the battle for trees. One of the grandest of these stories, designed to put steel into the soul of the most timid villager, is the story of the Bishnoi woman, Amrita Devi. This story has featured in many Chipko pamphlets, was recounted to villagers and retold in press interviews. Bahuguna related the story to Richard St. Barbe Baker, who in turn, through his *Man of the Trees* newsletters, told it to world. The story is a wonderful propaganda piece; it is about simple, religious-minded villagers laying down their lives for trees. It is almost guaranteed to instill pride in a forest heritage and make the listener determined to face the tree-felling adversary with redoubled courage.

After witnessing hardships caused by an extended drought and the resultant deforestation, Jambhoji, the son of a village headman, had a vision of men quarrelling with nature as the cause of the hard times. In 1487, the founder of the Bishnoi sect

(now known as Swami Jambeshwar Maharaj) laid down the twenty-nine tenets of the faith which are still followed by the Bishnois of Rajasthan. The rules include a prohibition on the cutting of green trees (and especially the protection of the all important shade and fodder trees, the drought-resisting *Khejari*), the wood conserving practice of burial (as opposed to the normal Hindu practice of cremation) and a ban on the killing of animals. Along with the growth of trees and life of harmonious balance with the now protected wildlife, grass for cattle grew and the soil became increasingly fertile. The prosperity of the Bishnois increased as the desert spread in non-Bishnoi areas of Rajasthan.

There were early examples of Bishnois laying down their lives for trees. In 1604, in Ramsadi village, two Bishnoi women died to protect trees and in 1643, a saint called Buchoji lost his life at Peelawas in a similar act of sacrifice. Such acts occasionally still continue but the most inspiring example was the sacrifice of Amrita Devi and the massacre of Bishnois over 250 years ago.

The Bishnois had been taught from childhood to love trees; children had their own special trees that they would regularly talk to and hug—and Amrita

Devi was no different. One day in 1731, the peace in Jalnadi village, some twenty-five kilometres from the Rajasthani town of Jodhpur, was broken when the Maharaja's axemen arrived.

The Maharaja of Jodhpur, Abhay Singh had decided to build a new palace for himself and so dispatched Giridhar Das Bhandari and a detachment of men to fetch wood for his lime kiln. The Bishnoi village was surrounded by hundreds of trees. Bhandari ordered his men to cut the trees. When she saw the axe men approach, Amrita Devi rushed to the scene and begged them to stop. She explained the faith of the Bishnois. The King's men were unmoved, so Amrita Devi hugged the first tree marked for felling. She allegedly uttered the now well known couplet of the sect; 'a chopped head is cheaper than a felled tree', as she was cut through by the angered axemen. As her dismembered body fell to the ground she was replaced, in turn, by her three daughters, who were also brutally killed. Bhandari withdrew to gather reinforcements. The Jalnadi villagers also sent out a call for assistance to the eighty-four surrounding Bishnoi villages—only one (to its eternal shame) did not respond.

When Bhandari's axemen returned there was a major confrontation. He warned the villagers that

if they continued to resist, the axe would fall upon them also. But the Bishnois held firm. By the end of the day a further 363 people (294 men and sixty-nine women) from forty-nine different villages had been butchered. Whole families had been wiped out.

The axemen had managed to secure only one-third of the required timber and the enraged Maharaja demanded an explanation. When he heard the ghastly story of the 363 villagers who had sacrificed their lives in order to prevent the work of the axemen from continuing, he immediately ordered a stop to the work on the palace and set out to visit the scene of destruction. As the full realization of what had happened impressed itself upon him, the fiery-tempered Maharaja underwent a change of heart. He apologized to the villagers and pledged that in the future the Bishnois would never again be called upon to provide timber, that no *Khejari* tree would be cut and that there would be no hunting permitted around Bishnoi villages.

Bahuguna has fruitfully retold this story many times. Since 1978 the Bishnois themselves have started commemorating the martyrdom with a major fair in Amrita Devi's village. Now known as Khejarli (in honour of the trees) the village boasts a concrete tower raised on the supposed spot of Amrita Devi's death,

a marble water-pool, 363 young *Khejari* trees and a Government nursery supplying tree seedlings. Work still continues on the tower—eventually the names of the 363 butchered Bishnois will be inscribed upon it and as the volume of tourists and pilgrim conservationists, increases, the legend that no blade of grass can grow on the exact spot of the first sacrifice is sure to remain fulfilled.

The annual fair, unlike other Rajasthani fairs, is an occasion of solemnity and reverence. Thousands of white clad Bishnoi men and brightly clad Bishnoi women now gather annually to hear speeches from their elders, holymen and politicians. The Bishnoi villagers come to pay homage and to remember; to reaffirm their faith in militant conservationism. Bahuguna ji, a regular visitor to the fairs, calls it 'my one important place of pilgrimage'. With the visitors, increasingly, newsreporters and film crews also arrive. As the Chipko activists use the story of Amrita Devi to foster a spirit of determination in the fighting of Chipko actions, so the press are beginning to use the example of the Bishnois' conservationist ethic to spread the environmental message to the Indian masses.

—From the book. HUGGING THE TREES

—By Thomas Weber.



## “HUMILITY IS MY MACE”

*V.N. Narayanan*

**The Tribune, March 30, 1991**

He looks like the Rishis of old and the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh—a veritable combination of courage and compassion, a total embodiment of unselfishness and service. Bhagat Puran Singh is what India’s distilled wisdom and rich heritage are all about.

There he sits, at the entrance of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, with to loads and loads of paper around him. In front of him is a brass vessel as non-descript as the man’s physical appearance. Visiting devotees to the shrine stop, pay silent obeisance, put some cash into the tray and move on. Bhagat Puran Singh neither seeks nor acknowledges their greetings.

The money piles up but the sage notes it not and along comes a seeker and the sage welcomes with open arms.

There is spontaneous rapport and the generation gap is closed. You wonder what this wizened old Man has—anything at all—to say and minutes latter there is another kind of wonder: how is it that this frail man of near-ninety is so well versed in ecology,

environment problems, the Tehri dam, Narmada and deficit financing. The words of Guru Nanak in Var Asa flash through the mind:

*“He who attains humility through  
Love and devotion to God,  
Such a one may attain emancipation”.*

“You are from the Tribune? I have reprinted your article on...(he turns to one of the sewadars to open a bundle). The Times of India had a series of articles on this subject...”

Amazing that he should tell a journalist what the journalist had written. Perhaps the transience of journalism acquires the trappings of immortality through not a mass medium but a spiritual one. Bhagatji subscribes to two dozen regional, national and international dailies and magazines—and reads them all!

What obsesses us most—the daily obscenities of politicians and editorial homilies of journalists—does not occupy his attention for more than a fleeting moment. Bhagatji, over the decades, has developed a free for real news, that which concerns that people, society at large and the values that (ought to) govern it.

As he talks one could see the zeal of a child

eager to learn. He is gentle, soft and sublimely uncritical of anything around him. To him, all of God's creations are sacred, be they animal, vegetable or mineral or whatever. He collects, as he walks along the streets of Amritsar, pebbles, horseshoes, peculiarly shaped stones and a lot else...

An important looking SGPC functionary, surrounded by kirpan-wielding assistants and armed guards, passes by. Somehow, the presence of Bhagat Puran Singh with no guards, no security, no paraphernalia, seems irksome and out of place. What is the secret of this man's impregnable security?

Guru Arjan Dev has the answer:

“Humility is may mace;

Touching

The dust on the feet of the people, my spear

These weapons no-evildoer can withstand,

The Master, all-endowed, has armed me with these”.

(Sorath 80)

The picking of pebbles on the street is very symbolic. After all, for close to seven decades Bhagatji had been picking up human pebbles cast away on the street by a cruel destiny or an uncaring society. God helps those who help themselves; Bhagat Puran Singh has vowed to help those who can't help themselves.

He is the saint of our times. Contemporary history has few names (I have Mother Teresa in my mind when I write this) which can boast of such relentless service to humanity as that of Bhagat Puran Singh.

*“Binu sewa phal kabhu na pawasi  
Seva karni sari.”*

Pingalwara is no posh hospital with modern clinical facilities. It contains children of “lesser gods” than those who bless the rest of us. A visit to it can be depressing. But Bhagatji has no inhibitions; he is the spiritual father to the mentally retarded and the society-abandoned creatures in human form.

Talking to him is enlightening. He has very simple remedies for almost all the nation's ills. All perfectly practical and easily enforceable—but in a nation of Bhagat Puran Singh.

A few public spirited Indians in the USA have started a movement to recommend the Nobel Peace Prize for Bhagatji. He would be the last person to be enthusiastic about it. He knows the difference between the emancipated soul and the Good Samaritan, the difference that would explain why Martin Luther King's non-violence struggle was worthy of Nobel Award and why the Nobel Prize is unworthy of

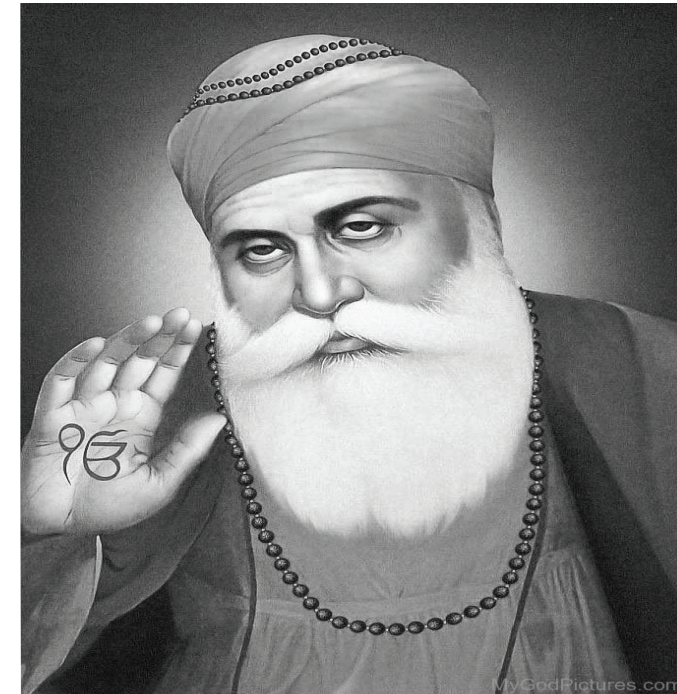
Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha and Ahimsa. But the prize money—around Rs. 40 Lakh—is welcome if only to house Pingalwara in a better building and with improved hygiene and amenities. Also, the Nobel Prize needs to redeem its honour by going to the right persons. The cause must be taken up by the country at large.

Meanwhile, the saint goes on unworried by the mess caused by our leaders to the country. Bhagat Puran Singh would echo Guru Nanak Dev...

“I have learnt by the light shed by the Master perfectly endowed;  
Recluse, hero, celibate or sanyaasi—  
No one may expect to earn merit  
Without dedicated service—  
Service which is the essence of purity.”

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## Peace for Punjab? NANAK'S VIBRANT LEGACY



Guru Nanak's birthday falls on Nov. 10, RADHA-KRISHNA RAO recounts the life and teachings of this revolutionary social reformer whose, vibrant message is so relevant today, not just in Punjab but throughout the nation.

THE continuing human tragedy in Punjab and repeated incidents of violence should not extinguish hopes for peace. It must be recalled that the founder seer and master mystic of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, appeared on the Indian scene at a most critical juncture of its history. For the hordes of suffering humanity he revealed that the path of joy and salvation lay not in precepts but in personal sacrifices.

As a humanist par excellence he spelt out that there should not be any racial and religious discrimination because all men, regardless of race and creed, are equal and should live a life of absolute brotherhood.

As a luminous messenger of love and brotherhood, he strove to demolish that which was divisive between man and man—differences of caste, creed and convention. He taught the oneness of God and brotherhood of man to a society crippled by incessant internecine quarrels. Though Nanak's primary mission was to extricate the ignorant masses from the morass of spiritual stagnation, for which he prescribed Nama Marg—path of contemplation—he never overlooked the social and economic aspects of life.

The social philosophy preached by Nanak, which has become a part and parcel of Sikh ethos,

has withstood the test of time and has engendered in the votaries of Sikhism a healthy and virile attitude of hard work and service to society.

Nanak severely lashed out at the exploitation and suppression of the weaker and downtrodden sections of the society by the people of upper class. He identified himself with the under-privileged strata of society. The following utterance of Nanak is an eloquent testimony to his solicitude for the uplift of suppressed masses:

*“I am with lowest of the low, what have I to do with the great?”*

*God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly”.*

Dr. Wazir Singh says: “His role as a revolutionary social reformer was notable not only for the widest republican spirit he desired to inculcate in his disciples, but also for his advocacy of the downtrodden, the workers, and toilers and womenfolk.”

The friction produced by Hinduism and Islam worked marvellously in Nanak. Endowed with a heart broad enough to embrace both Hindus and Muslims, Nanak zealously strove to reconcile these two warring communities in a common worship of the one Supreme Being. He laid emphasis on the supremacy

of truth.

The practical spiritualist that he was, he fervently realized that our people could not be resurrected until they were freed from the tentacles of religious dogma and artificial ritualism.

Nanak outlined the necessity of acquiring divine knowledge. According to him: “He who is true, is contented, who is kind to everyone and is devoid of greed and hatred, is not bigoted, has no evil desires, has controlled his self, knows right from wrong and has placed himself physically as well as spiritually at the disposal of good and who has cultivated the habit of truthfulness. Such a balanced man has become Guru’s disciple.”

GOD can be obtained, he said, through the path of intense devotion, self-restraint and self enquiry. He said that only a society inspired by a spirit of fearlessness can contain the wicked ambitions of the exploiting forces. Hence, he asked men to cultivate the virtue of fearlessness in their character and placed before them the invigorating concept of *Nirbhya*—fearlessness, which is also the source of righteousness.

It was this bold concept of *Nirbhya* that inspired the Khalsa to withstand all sorts of privations and persecutions in their crusade against some tyrannical

Moghul rulers. Dr. M. P. Kohli says: “In Guru Gobind, Nanak’s spirituality reached its pinnacle of glory and in him also appears the result of the great transformation of the society, so eagerly sought by Guru Nanak.”

Guru Nanak was perhaps the first saint-reformer of medieval India who embarked upon the idea of inculcating in his people a spirit of fraternity and brotherhood, which form the bedrock of the truly socialistic society.

*Langar* or community kitchen instituted by Nanak, where irrespective of caste or creed one can partake food with equal right, heralded a new era of social equality in Punjab. This revolutionary concept of community living, which Nanak thought can contribute to understanding and goodwill among people, is all the more relevant today, faced as we are with the stupendous task of disentangling the nation from the bonds of parochial passions, narrow fanaticism and disastrous communal thinking.

The Guru urged his followers not only to work hard and honestly but also to *share* the earnings of their labour with others so that weaker sections of the society would be able to tide over its hardships.

Decrying selfish greed, he warned men against unbridled indulgence in material comforts and

luxury. By using Punjabi for the dissemination of his teachings, Nanak not only enriched the spiritual lives of the masses but also the much neglected Punjabi, which would have died of sheer disuse.

The teachings of Nanak are simple and pithy. He made use of such common idioms and expressions that even an illiterate can grasp the full significance of them. The devotional hymns of Nanak, pulsating as they are with aesthetic sublimity, came as a whiff of spiritual solace to society, suffering under the yokes of hypocritical mercenary priests.

Nanak lashed out at the prevailing social corruption, moral degradation and religious hypocrisy. As a ruthless crusader against social degeneration, he sought to reform society through personal examples rather than through precepts. Thus Nanak stands out as a social reformer par excellence, a greater synthesizer, a spiritual visionary and a moral crusader.

Though more than five centuries have lapsed since Nanak attained final beatitude, the vibrant message of Nanak has all the potential to bring peace and tranquility to Punjab—the holyland of five rivers.

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## Social Vision of Guru Nanak

*Sunita Puri*

THE ADVENT of Sikh religion represents a decisive development in the evolution of Indian religious consciousness. Guru Nanak, the founder of this religion and the chief exponent of the *Bhakti* movement in Punjab appeared in the midst of several powerful religious currents related to the *Bhakti* cult. While he was quite naturally, influenced by them and in certain respects, his ideology has strong affinity with that of *Nirguna Bhakti* cult of medieval India, he made a number of departures and formulated a specific and well defined religious ethos that extended far beyond his own times into the future.

In fact, Guru Nanak's genius lay in integrating the contemporary *Bhakti-Sufi* tradition of spiritual quest with the socio-political milieu in medieval India. He sought to build a new order on principles of justice and equality as alternative norms to caste or creed. While most of the other contemporaneous expressions of the medieval *Bhakti* movement in various parts of India were to be absorbed by the orthodox stream of Hinduism, it was only the Sikh movement of Guru Nanak that developed as an autonomous faith and

which still retains a great deal of its original dynamism.

Guru Nanak's social vision, like his metaphysical vision, was comprehensive in nature, taking within its range the totality of society. His verses bear eloquent testimony to his concern over social discrimination, miscarriage of justice, cowardice of people and many other evils of the contemporary society. By far, the most fundamental departure which Guru Nanak made from the established social order was rejection of caste. He was convinced that no spiritual and social progress could take place in a system of privileges which confirmed the monopoly of the higher castes and exploitation of the so-called lower castes.

There are numerous pronouncements by Guru Nanak, repudiating the ethical validity of caste, affirming the equality of human beings before God and projecting deeds rather than caste as the determining factor for one's true status. Further, it is not the metaphysical utterances alone but the practical steps taken by Guru Nanak for the abolition of caste that helped to translate his message into a concrete reality. He provided a framework for a vigorous egalitarian society through the creation of institution like *Sangat*

and *Langar* which constitute the original nucleus of the Sikh Panth and both of which have been operating in the panth ever since their inception.

Guru Nanak thus set up a social order in which low castes fraternized without discrimination with other members drawn from higher classes and he conceived the community of his followers as constituting a classless and casteless society.

Guru Nanak's rejection of social differences was further complimented by his affirmation of equality for women and his concept of an ideal society was free from taboos and prejudices born out of gender discrimination. In fact, Nanak stood out, in his own time, as a staunch advocate of women's proper place in society and their equal status with men. Another important aspect, from the socio-economic point of view, was Guru Nanak's precept of *Kirat Karo, Wand Chhako, Nam Japo*. It means (a) earning livelihood by honest labour, (b) sharing the fruits of labour with others; and (c) practicing the discipline of *Nam*.

The first of the commandments forbids parasitism in any form since stress is laid on *Kirat*, i. e. honest productive labour. In the second, emphasis is laid on sharing the fruits of labour while in the third part of the formula, contemplation of God's name

was prescribed both for spiritual upliftment and as a safeguard against lack of *dharma* during pursuit of economic power. Thus, over and above being a mystic, Guru Nanak was founder of a new social order. As a result of his teaching and the organizational steps initiated by him, a new brotherhood came into existence which exhibited a progressive social outlook.

Significantly enough, Guru Nanak was equally vocal on the political ills of his time. He keenly observed the functioning of the governments and felt deeply concerned over the disabilities of people groaning under the heels of tyranny and injustice of both the rulers and invaders. Through his fearless denunciation of all forms of oppression and tyranny, he symbolized the right of man to freedom of expression. One of the most important acts of Guru Nanak in grooming the society lay in promoting the capacity to think freely, fearlessly, rationally and independently. Nanak also infused moral strength among people by upholding the divine law of justice and its ultimate victory in the form of retribution of unjust rulers.

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## Precious Thoughts

\* *God wants of you no big showy things. Offer Him your little gifts of love and He will accept them as His Holy Food, His Sacrament.*

—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

\* *What is silence?*

*Silence is of three types.*

\* *The first is the silence of activity. Let all activity cease when you repair to your corner. Let no thoughts of work disturb you in your moments of silence. Be serene that you may enter the Interior Castle.*

\* *The second is the silence of memory. Free yourself of the fret and fever of life, of all worry and vexation. You must be quiet as the tranquil sky, quiet as the silver moonbeam.*

\* *The third is the silence of desires. We are all slaves to desires. We move about with chains on our hands and feet, the chains of desires. Rise above the storm of desires and practice silence. Lay your senses to sleep, purify your mind of desires and practise silence. In order to practice such silence you require the grace of the Guru. Once you receive divine grace, the recollection comes to you that this world is not your real home. God is the Homeland of your soul.*

—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**



- \* *Life is meant to radiate light. The piteous need of the humanity is light, more light. Let the light of love fill your heart-love for all races, all nations, all men, all creatures, all forms of cosmic light, and filled with light, your heart will be a love-hymn of thanks-giving to the All-love. Your life will be a singing altar.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *What you think upon constantly passes into you, becomes a part of you, colours your thought and emotion. Therefore, I would ask of you to be careful of your thoughts.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *If you will grow, be humble as grass and patient as the tree and prayerful as the daisy that turns its face to the sun.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *God asks not whether you have studied Sanskrit or Latin, Greek or Hebrew.  
God asks: Have you studied the little word of letters your, L-O-V-E?  
Have you grown in the spirit of meditation, beauty and love ?* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Infinite, infinitely open, is the Universe.  
What room is there for free in an open universe ?  
He looks at you ! He speaks ! Listen! Nor be afraid !* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *In this universe of wonder and grandeur, Death itself is but a face of life.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Experience is the Great Guru.  
Experience is the Saviour of man,—his Liberator.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Without a sense of humour, it would be difficult to live in this world of friction and contradiction.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *To multiply desires is to dissipate life's energies. what is needed is concentration. And the secret of concentration is simplicity.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *God wants of you no big, showy things. Offer him your little gifts of love, and He will accept them as His Holy food, His Sacrament.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *To be natural is to be spiritual.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Life's most blessed moments are those in which we feel that we are, in howsoever small a measure, the conductors of His electricity, the carries of His message and presence.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *God-Consciousness begins in God, but never ends; for God is infinite.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *What is Yoga ? Yoga is love of Love.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Karma is a boomerang. What you think, desire, do,  
comes back to you !* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Walking, not talking,—life, not lips are the best  
preaching.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Art thou disappointed, depressed ? The Atman is  
seeking utterance through thee. He wants thee to  
express His. Therefore take courage ! Re-enforce  
thy faith.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *If I were asked, “What is the note universal in all  
religions ?” I would say: “God is Love.”*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *“Teach me how to love God!” said a bright young  
man to me. And I said to him: “Love is not  
taught: Love is caught !”* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *When the ATMAN looks at you, you are ravished  
by its beauty, and love springs spontaneous in your  
heart.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *God-consciousness, when heightened, rejoices alone  
in Him. Its language is a lyric cry:— “Lord by Thy  
flute I swear, I know none but Thee !”*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *Life’s consummation is sacrifice. As an ancient  
scripture saith: “In all the world there is not a spot  
so large as a mustard-seed where the Buddha hath  
not renounced himself for the good of the creatures.”  
Renounce, renounce—if you will attain !*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Do not imitate. Be creative. Therefore, understand  
at once the goal of India and the new world forces.  
Be simple and strong and believe in yourself.  
Believe and achieve.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *“Why is the ocean the King of all rivers and  
streams?” a disciple of Lao Tze, the Chinese sage,  
asked the master, “Because it is lower than all of  
them”, The master replied.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Service and sacrifice must be the inspiration of the  
new education; otherwise education would have  
little meaning.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *O my heart Listen to his flute in the gleaming waters,  
in the rustling leaves, in the language of the flowers,  
in the words of the holy men—the saints of God!*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Kindly the light and the light is within you.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *The centre point of knowledge is not the mind but the heart. The mind moves in delusions. The heart has the vision of the one.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Guard the ideals of India. Keep away from conflicts and controversies, mingle with the poor and those of low caste and give love to them. He is a true Hindu who moves forward and clings not to old customs and conventions.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Follow these simple rules. Live a life of purity and prayer. Enemy none and harm no creature. Keep away from lust. Worship truth and be content with what God has chosen to give. Also continue to repeat the name Divine.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *The mind separates, the mind divides. For the mind proceeds by the method of comparison and contrast. Walk the way of unity, seeing all things in the one.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Reverence*
  1. Reverence for one's self, reverence for the Atman.
  2. Reverence for what is around us.
  3. Reverence for what is beneath us, below us, for the humblest and poorest of all living things, for the birds and beasts; for they are in no way inferior to us.
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *Make me Thy singer, O Lord! That in some temple house I may, everyday sing Thy songs of Silence.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Love thou everyone in God and love thou God in everyone!* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *To Thee I bring my prayers and tears. I offer myself to Thee.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Many are the Temples they have built in many lands! When will one, with love and humility in the heart. Build the Temple of man?* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *He came: He smiled: He summoned me to the inner shrine: He said "All things are his who knows all things are Mine."* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *The wings of the soul are two,—wisdom and sympathy.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *What most of us call love, is not love, it is passion. True love springs from calmness. The centre if life is calmness. From this centre have sprung up all that you behold, these tree and gardens, this whole universe. Our love is expression of passion of appetites and desires. But true love springs from the centre of calmness.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Simran and Seva are the two angles of the mystical triangle. The third is Silence.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *Seva is the service of the neglected, the needy and the distressed; but service becomes seva when it is performed in the spirit of sacrifice, without any motive of worldly reward* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *What are the ideals which constitute our great tradition? I can put it in three words: Abhaya or fearless, Ahimsa, love of all; Asanga, non-attachment.* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *And bless me that I may hear in my heart, each day, a new song of Thy mercy and Thy love.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Lao Tsze speaks of a law according to which what goes forward must come back; what goes backwards must come forward. Softness springs from silence. Have we not observed how when a man of silence speaks, though his words be few, they penetrate our hearts?* —**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *The primal movement which proceeds out of calmness moves towards God. The second movement of true love is activity. Love should be expressed through service. We need activity. Pure act is internal; activity is external. He in whom both these activities are in harmony, the primal movement and the outer movement, is the Silent One.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**

- \* *The reward of love ? Poverty and persecution.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *Seva helps us in realizing the truth that we all are one, that through us all flow the same life-stream, the same life-current and that there is no separation between one entity and another. By doing Seva, our whole outlook on human relationships undergoes a change. In serving others, I become a part of others and others become a part of me. For all of us are a part of the Greater Life we call God.*  
—**Sadhu TL Vaswani**
- \* *The primal movement within us is towards God. This movement towards God is the first essential note of true love. It is called pure act,—act, berefit of all change, berefit of all restlessness, berefit of all rajasic and tamasic qualities.*
- \* *There is no greater sin than to laugh at someone's forth.* —**V. N. Narayanan.**
- \* *Whatever thou doest, Whatever thou eatest, Whatever thou givest as gifts away, Whatever tapsaya thou doest practice O Arjuna, son of Kunti. Do it all as an offering unto me!*
- \* *Reward of one service could only be the greater service.* —**Mahatma Gandhi**

- \* *Nature and loving hearts who do not charge anything for their generousities and gifts provide intrinsic happiness.* —Harish Chander
- \* *Wonderful are the treasures one acquires by going into silence. Lao Tszs says: “Silence is returning to the root. Dive deep within. Delve deep within. Meditate until you realize that the one thing needful in the priceless pearl of peace.*
- \* *Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity anywhere.*
- \* *Proportion your charities to your income lest God should proportion your income to your charities.* —Leo Toistory
- \* *True knowledge is the service of eternal values—the service of God—the service of humanity—the service of poor and lowly.* —Mahatma Gandhi Ji
- \* *This hands that help are holier than the lips that pray.* —Robert Ingersol
- \* *The golden age only comes to men when they have forgotten gold.* —G.K. Chesterton.
- \* *One who does the smallest thing with thoroughness is really a great man.* —American Proverb.
- \* *A child’s brain is a fire to be innited, not a pot to be filled.* —John Lock

- \* *Whosoever could make two ears of corn of two blades of grass grow upon a spot where only one grew before would do more essential service to this country than all the politicians put together.* —Jonathan
- \* *Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.* —Hovage Man
- \* *Not education but character is man’s greatest need and man’s greatest safeguard.*
- \* *Our dignity is not in what we have but what we understand.* —Georgesatayana
- \* *A person that takes of pride in the noble achievement of remote ancestors will never achieve anything to be remembered with pride by posterity.* —Macaulay
- \* *A true reformer never leaves things to change, he believes in the wisdom of planning.*
- \* *There is nothing that is impossible if one brings to bear on one’s work a vigilant and resourceful mind.* —Thiruvillur
- \* *I will not allow a child to weep if I could.* —Gautam Buddha

- \* *Air, earth and water including the deep sea are already being polluted to a degree at which we are being poisoned.* —Arrold Toynbee.
- \* *I have two doctors-my left leg and my right leg. A sedantary worker must walk at least 8 miles a day.* —Bhagat Puran Singh
- \* *We Indians are too status conscious. How can we risk venturing out on a cycle? Now when I look back, I laugh at my (false) vanity which prevented me from pedaling.* —Pritim Bhullar
- \* *Despite all the good it does to one's health and pocket, most urban middle class Indian hesitate use the bicycle which they consider beneath their dignity.* —Sanjeev Antony
- \* *Motor cars are a show of vanity rather vulgarity.* —Bhagat Puran Singh
- \* *That the most deadly invention of all is not nuclear power but the car.* —Yale University Professors research
- \* *Be thou a shining Ray of His white light, each day!*
- \* *If you were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, I would not swerve from the truth. God will teach me to stand for truth or give me death.* —Muhammad.

- \* *Know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.* —Jesus Christ.
- \* *Few find inner peace but this is not because they try and fail, it is because they do not try.*
- \* *He is not alone though diffused in many ways; recall, recall Him is your thoughts; He fillet creation.* —Bhagat Ravidas
- \* *Whosoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass grown upon a spot where only one grew before would do more essential service to this country than all the politician put together.* —Jonathan
- \* *There is nothing that happens by chance in our universe. Everything unfolds according to higher law, everything is regulated by divine order.*
- \* *Judging others will avail you nothing and injure you spiritually. Only if you can inspire others to judge themselves will anything worthwhile have been accomplished.*
- \* *I perceived the entirely self centered life as not worth living. If what you redoing will not benefit others besides yourself, if is not worth doing.*
- \* *The Godly was is one of the few simple precepts that even a child can understand. Truth is simple. It's*

*just not so simple to live it. Therefore, immature people tend to bide behind complicated interpretations in order to avoid living simple truth.*

*\* Humanity has only scratched to surface of its real potential. Anyone can plug into the Divine Current by discovering the truth of Jesus and other prophets who taught that the Kingdom of God is Within.*

*\* Perform your actions in the spirit of worship as an offering to God.*

*\* Do little acts of service every day. Seek not to harm others, nor even to hurt the feeling of others.*

*\* We should pay gratitude to God alike in the sunshine and rain.*

*\* One must free oneself from desires. He who succumbs to desires invites pain, one who keeps one's heart pure and is free from desires blooms in the beauty like lotus, sorrow like drops of water disappears.*

*\* He who gave the life conveyeth thee sustenance, And in every heart openeth a shop.*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* Our passions are strong and our discrimination weak; our understanding cannot enter into God's designs. We say one thing and do another, worldly love hindereth us from understanding*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* Let me dedicate and offer my body and soul as my worship, Thus, by the Guru's favour shall I find the Pure One.*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* When there was egoism in me, Thou were not with me; Now that Thou are with me, there is no egoism.*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* Men read, study and hear all god's names, yet God's designs are not known, How shall iron become pure gold unless it be touched by the philosopher's stone.*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* Though the screen of illusion be spread over the whole world yet it troubleth not the saint.*

*—Bhagat Ravidas*

*\* Of all spiritual disciplines (Sadhana) knowledge -of -the-self is verily the real means of liberation just as fire is for cooking. Liberation cannot be attained without knowledge-of-the-self.*

*Sri Shankracharaya.*

*\* And bless me that I may hear in my heart, each day, a new song of Thy mercy and Thy love.*

*\* An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy.*

*—Spanish proverb.*

## PINGALWARA DIARY

(UPTO APRIL 2016)

Services rendered by Pingalwara Institution for the service of the suffering humanity are:-

### 1. Homes for the Homeless

There are 1712 patients in different branches of Pingalwara now a days:—

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| (a) Head Office, Mata Mehtab Kaur Ward,<br>Bhai Piara Singh Ward | 349 Patients |
| (e) Manawala Complex   | 826 Patients |
| (b) Pandori Warraich Branch, Amritsar                            | 83 Patients  |
| (c) Jalandhar Branch   | 39 Patients  |
| (d) Sangrur Branch   | 224 Patients |
| (f) Chandigarh (Palsora ) Branch                                 | 94 Patients  |
| (g) Goindwal Branch  | 97 Patients  |

Total 1712 Patients

### 2. Treatment facilities

(a) **Dispensary & Laboratory:-** Pingalwara has a dispensary and a laboratory for the treatment of patients. It has an annual expenditure of about Rs.90 lakhs. Medicines are also distributed free of cost to the poor and needy people.

(b) **Medical Care Staff:-** Experienced medical staff like Nurses, Pharmacists and Laboratory

Technicians are available for the care of the Pingalwara residents.

(c) **Blood-Donation Camps:-** A Blood Donation Camp is organized on Bhagat Ji's Death Anniversary every year. The blood is used for Pingalwara residents and road accident victims.

(d) **Ambulances:-** Ambulances with basic Medical aid are available for victims of road accidents on G.T. Road, round the clock and provide facilities for taking Pingalwara patients to the hospital.

(e) **Artificial Limb Centre:-** There is an Artificial Limb Centre at Manawala Complex, dedicated to the memory of Bhagat Ji which provides free of cost Artificial Limbs to Polio-ffected and amputee cases. 7654 needy people have benefitted till April 2016.

(f) **Physiotherapy Centre:-** A Physiotherapy Centre equipped with State-of-to-art equipment is functioning in the Manawala Complex since June 2005. On an average 80 patients are treated everyday.

(g) **Operation Theatres:-** There is a well equipped Operation Theatre in Bhai Piara Singh Ward Amritsar for general surgery and A Micro Surgery



Operation Theatre in Manawala Complex where Cochlear Implants and major operations are carried out.

- (h) **Dental, Eye, Ear & Ultrasound Centres:-** These Centres have been set up to provide these services to Pingalwara residents, sewadars and their families.

### 3. Education

Pingalwara Society is running five Educational Institutions for the poor and needy children.

- (a) **Bhagat Puran Singh Adarsh School, Manawala Complex:-** This school provides free education to 750 students from the poor and deprived sections of the society. They are provided with free books and uniforms. Children being brought up by Pingalwara Society are also studying in this school.
- (b) **Bhagat Puran Singh Adarsh School, Buttar Kalan (Qadian):-** This school is dedicated to the sweet memory of Bhagatji. 446 students are getting free education under the able guidance of well qualified teachers. The school also provides financial help to students who have finished their school studies and are aspiring for higher studies.

- (c) **Bhagat Puran Singh School for Special Education, Manawala Complex:-** This school is providing Special Education to 185 Special children.

- (d) **Bhagat Puran Singh School for the Deaf:-** Bhagat Puran Singh School for Deaf Children is functional at the Manawala Complex since May 2005. The school is equipped with state-of-the-art training aid and has 150 children on its rolls.

- (e) **Bhagat Puran Singh School for Special Education, Chandigarh(Palsora):-** his school caters to the needs of Special adults of the branch.

- (f) **Vocational Centre:-** This Centre is providing free training in embroidery, stitching, craft work, making washing powder, candle making, ainting, etc. Young girls from the villages of surroundings areas are the main beneficiaries.

- (g) **Computer Training:-** Computers are available in all the schools for academic and vocational training.

- (h) **Hostel facilities:-** There are separate hostels for boys and girls in Manawala Complex. Many girls are pursuing higher studies in different colleges.

### 4. Rehabilitation

- (a) **Marriages:-** After being educated, boys and girls at Pingalwara are married to suitable partners. 37

girls and 4 boys have been married off till date.

#### 5. **Environment Related Activities**

- (a) **Tree Plantation:-** Bhagat Puran Singh Ji was deeply concerned about the degradation of the environment. A vigorous campaign of tree plantation is started every year on Bhagat Ji's Death Anniversary. Each year 15,000 to 22,000 trees are planted in various schools, colleges, hospitals, cremation grounds and other public places. These include Amaltas, Kachnar, Behra, Champa, Arjun, Sukhchain, Chandni, Zetropa, Kari-patta were distributed to different institutions.
- (b) **Nursery:-** Pingalwara has its own Nursery where saplings of various plants and trees are prepared. Every year, the aim of nursery is to grow more than 54 different kinds of saplings every year.

#### 6. **Social Improvement Related Activities**

- (a) **Awareness:-** Pingalwara has played an important role in spreading awareness about the evils in the society. This has been done by printing literature on religious, social and environmental issues at the uran Printing Press Amritsar and is being distributed free of cost. It has an annual expenditure

of printing and publicity is about 1 crores 50 lakhs rupees.

- (b) **Puran Printing Press:-** The Printing Press has been updated with an Offset Press.
- (c) **Museum and Documentaries:-** A Museum, and a number of documentaries have been prepared on Pingalwara activities as well as on zero budget natural farming. The C.D.s are freely available from Pingalwara.

A feature film produced by Pingalwara Society Amritsar EH JANAM TUMHARE LEKHE (Punjabi) on Rev. Bhagat Puran Singh Ji, founder Pingalwara and his struggle not only for selfless services of wounded humanity but for Environment Crisis also, will prove a beacon for the generations yet to come after us.

7. **Help to the victims of Natural Calamities:** Pingalwara makes an effort to provide succour to the victims of natural calamities like floods, earthquakes and famines. Aid was sent for the earth-quake victims in Iran, Tsunami disaster victims, Leh landslide and flood affected areas.

8. **Cremation of unclaimed dead-bodies:** Pingalwara cremates unclaimed dead bodies with full honour.

#### 9. **Dairy Farm**

180 cows and buffalos at Manawala Complex

provide fresh milk to the Pingalwara residents.

**10. Old Age Homes**

Old age homes at Sangrur and Manawala Complex of Pingalwara caters to the needs of elderly people.

**11. Projects Completed and Under Construction**

Since 1997 ambitious projects of Sangrur, Palsora at Chandigarh and Manawala Complex have been completed. In the year 2009 new buildings— Administrative Block, Puran Printing Press, Deaf School, T.B. Ward at Manawala Complex and at Head Office and a New Administrative Block have also been completed.

In the year 2013, a new modern Bhagat Puran Singh School for Special Education in Manawala Complex of Pingalwara and a new Block for Pingalwara patients in Pandori Warraich Branch is under construction and is fast coming up.

Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa

Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh

Dr. Inderjit Kaur,

President,

All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.),

Tehsilpura, G.T. Road, Amritsar. (Punjab).

<b>DETAILS OF BANKS FOR SENDING DONATION THROUGH ONLINE/CHEQUE/DRAFT</b> Cheques & Bank Drafts may be sent in favour of : <b>All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.</b> PAN CARD NO. AAATA2237R					
S. No.	Name of Account	A/C No.	Name of the Bank	IFS Code For Inland Remittance	Swift Code For Foreign Inward Remittance
<b>FOR FOREIGN DONORS</b>					
1.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	01562010002890	Oriental Bank of Commerce Sharifpura Amritsar.	ORBC0100156	ORBCINBBASR
<b>FOR INLAND DONORS</b>					
2.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	01562010003720	Oriental Bank of Commerce Sharifpura Amritsar.	ORBC0100156	.....
3.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	10978255668	State Bank of India Town Hall, Amritsar	SBIN0000609	SBINHBB274
4.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	630510100026147	Bank of India City Centre Amritsar	BKID0006305	BKIDINBBASR

5.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	685010100009799	Axis Bank Ltd. City Centre, Amritsar	UTIB0000685	AXISINBB179
6.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	0018002100097336	Punjab National Bank Hall Bazar, Amritsar.	PUNB0001800	PUNBINBBAHB
7.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	006601012522	ICICI Bank Ltd. Lawrence Road, Amritsar	ICIC0000066	ICICINBBFEX
8.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	01151000246510	HDFC Bank Ltd. Mall Road, Amritsar	HDFC0000115	HDFCINBB
9.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	13131000082013	HDFC Bank Ltd. Ghanta Ghar Golden Temple Amritsar	HDFC0001313	HDFCINBB
10.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	00011000096048	Punjab & Sind Bank Hall Bazar, Amritsar	PSIB000A001	PSIBINBB017
11.	All India Pingalwara Charitable Society (Regd.) Amritsar.	01010100015572	Bank of Baroda Town Hall, Amritsar	BARBOAMRITS	BARBINBBAMR

- \* Preserve natural resources.
- \* Service of the poor and destitutes is the service of God.
- \* Plant trees to save environment.
- \* Wear Khadi clothes to lessen unemployment.
- \* Simple living and high thinking is a bliss.
- \* Use less of diesel and petrol.
- \* Exercise restraint in your living habits.
- \* Don't forget to plant trees. They are the sign of prosperity of a nation.

—Bhagat Puran Singh

K.M. Munshi writes that Matsya Purana says: "One who sinks a well lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in it. But to dig ten such wells equals in merit the digging of one pond; digging of ten such ponds was equal to making a lake; making of ten lakes was as meritorious as begetting a virtuous son but begetting ten such virtuous son had the same sanctity as that of planting a single tree."