

Smt. Pushpvati Janardanrai Mehta

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1983

Smt. Pushpavati Mehta was born in 1905. She started her social career in 1934 as Secretary of the Jyoti Sangh, an institution started by Smt. Mrudula Sarabhai. Since then, she has devoted all her life to the task of rescuing, rehabilitating and educating victimized women and orphans and destitute children.

She drew inspiration from the progressive forces in the freedom struggle and decided to concentrate on social reform. Her efforts were blessed by Mahatma Gandhi.

During the past four decades and a half, Pushpaben has built up a number of institutions for women and children, mainly in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Notable among them are Vikas Griha at Ahmedabad, Vikas Vidyalaya at Wadhawan, Kanta-Stree Vikas Griha at Rajkot, Pragati Gruha at Halvad, Kasturba Stree Vikas Gruha at Jamnagar, Tapibai Vikas Griha at Bhavnagar and Shishu Mangal at Junagadh. She also started Ashram Shalas at three places in the tribal areas of Saurashtra.

As a result of the activities of these various institutions, over 2500 children have been provided shelter and education and an equal number of neglected and deserted women have been rescued and rehabilitated. Similarly, the adult literacy classes and vocational training classes have benefited over 4000 women.

To co-ordinate the activities of all the institutions working in the field of social welfare in Gujarat, Pushpaben founded a federating body called the Gujarat Samajik Sanstha Madhyastha Mandal. About 130 institutions are affiliated to this body. It looks after the work of curriculum standardization, holding of examinations and award of certificates in respect of various vocational courses, specially meant for women.

Pushpaben launched a crusade against the atrocities committed against women and attacked evil social customs like dowry. She studied the growing incidence of suicides among women, which, she proved, were the result of social oppression. She prevailed upon the Government of Gujarat to appoint a Committee to look into the matter. It was called the Apaghat Nivaran Samiti. Pushpaben was its first Chairman.

Pushpaben was the first speaker of the Saurashtra State Assembly and M.L.A. in the former Bombay and Gujarat States. However, she did not allow her political and legislative work to adversely affect the constructive work she has been doing in the field of welfare of women and children.

Pushpaben was the Chairman of the Social Welfare Boards of Saurashtra, bilingual Bombay and Gujarat States. She was also a Member of the Rajya Sabha from 1966 to 1972. The Central Government has honoured her with the Padma Bhushan Award.

