

Shri Man Singh Rawat
Recipient of the Award for Outstanding
Contribution in the field of Constructive Work - 2015

Born: January 24, 1928

A staunch Sarvodaya Sevak, Man Singh Rawat hails from Garhwal District of the Himalayan region. He vowed to lead a life of simplicity and dedicate his being to the welfare of the masses, when he was still in his youth.

Man Singh Rawat is spiritually bonded to the ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Loknayak Jayprakash Narayan. As such, he is committed to the fundamentals of Gandhiji's Gram Swaraj, Vinoba's Sarvodaya, and JP's Jeevandan to the core.

After completing his graduation in social work from the Tata Institute of Social Science in 1952, he participated in the Bhoodan movement and got involved in other activities initiated by Vinobaji. In this, he drew inspiration from Gandhiji's British disciple Saralabehn, the founder of Lakshmi Ashram in Kausani, Almora.

Rawat undertook the Vishwa Maître Padyatra across Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Kotdwara to propagate peace and brotherhood. In course of the padyatra movement, he closely observed the prevailing poor educational system in the region for the women and the tribals. Thus 'Education for women and upliftment of Boksa tribes' became the focus of his future work. Boksa tribes are indigenous people residing at the foothills of the Himalayan region.

Empowering the Boksas: Man Singh Rawat has dedicated his life for the upliftment and development of the Boksa tribes in Haldukhata and its surrounding villages in Uttarakhand. He initiated work in the realms of village cleanliness, life skills development in children, alcohol de-addiction, peace and friendship, village infrastructure development, environment and forest conservation, women empowerment and related activities in the Boksa villages. He helped release bonded land from the landlords. He addressed these issues as part of Swaraj movement by facilitating meetings and forming village development committees. All this necessitated people's proactive involvement which Rawat was able to muster solely because they had faith in him and their belief that he is doing for the welfare of the Boksa community.

Man Singh Rawat has ceaselessly been working for decades primarily focusing on:

- De-addiction
- Empowerment of women by honing their revolutionary and leadership power
- Coordination with people of all castes
- Education of the Boksa children

Rawat first sensitized the village women on liquor prohibition. Gradually he and the people of the region channelized their energy to eradicate and prohibit alcohol. There was picketing against liquor vendors and shops, mass rallies etc. Man Singh also undertook fast during this agitation. Pressure from all corners resulted in prohibiting liquor and declaring the Garhwal region as an alcohol-free region. In this process, Rawat 'fought' the liquor promoters and vendors with love, peace and non-violence thereby earning their respect and affection.

Women empowerment: During 1984-98, significant developmental work was carried out in Nayaar Ghati villages (which is one of the neglected areas of Garhwal region) to bring transformation through people's participation. Under the chairmanship of the Block head, Rawat guided the formation of Nayaar Ghati Gram Swaraj Samiti Baadiyun Garhwal to carry out the

development work. Women were empowered to be the pillars for further upliftment and development of the villages. They emerged as a strong group in Nayaar Ghati. Women were encouraged to form women's council and self help groups. Rawat alongwith these women worked on the holistic development of the village focusing on activities like stopping felling of trees, collectively guarding the cultivated crops, balwadis, sanitation and hygiene, forest conservation, and infrastructure development. Owing to persistent demand of women, the Government started new schools and also upgraded some in several villages. Eighty five villages were empowered following the philosophy of Gram Swarajya. A Mahila Bank was also established. Presently, over forty self help groups are empowering the society, five villages have initiated library set up along with innovative educational programs and eight villages have formed Kishori Sangathans. The women have also represented on the village Panchayat level.

Education: In the field of education, Man Singh Rawat started balwadis in Haldukhata, Sitabpur and Bijnor villages in 1955 which was continued for almost a decade. Later, he started the Boksa Janjati Balika Vidyalaya in 2001 which has gained recognition over the years. Efforts have been afoot to change the mindset of Boksa community and sensitize them about educating the children. Children from Boksa, van gujjar and other communities attend this school. It conducts non formal classes and life skills education to prepare the children for mainstream and formal education. Seven batches have completed and passed 8th standard. Currently there are 181 students and nine teachers. The school is supported by The Hans Cultural Mission.

Other initiatives: Jeevseva was propagated by Man Singh Rawat to prohibit forest hunting and animal killing. He has also worked for saving the rivers and other water resources as issues of Jal (water), Jungle (forest), and Jameen (land) are also major areas of concern in the region.

Rawat is associated with the formulation of Jal Niti (water policy) which was submitted to the Government of India. Recently, Rawat undertook a fast for fifteen days and successfully got a promise from the government and its functionary to undertake any legislative measures only after taking into consideration that they benefit the common people of the society.

Throughout his work, Rawat sensitized, mobilized, involved and encouraged villagers for all developmental activities. He facilitated formation of social groups/organizations to carry out these. Public participation is an important feature of Rawat's work.

Man Singh Rawat found his soul mate in his wife Shashiprabha who has stood by his side and supported throughout this journey of work and life. Shashiprabha has participated in the satyagrahas, padyatras, alcohol prohibition, chipko movement, bhoodan and gramdan work alongside her husband. What characterises this couple is generosity and compassion for mankind. Their life and lifestyle are purely Gandhian. They lead a saintly life amongst the tribals.

Man Singh Rawat is a guiding star and an inspiration to the local community, especially the younger generation. Across gender, caste and creed, Rawat is a facilitator. He has provided motivational, inspiring and participative leadership to the community in a fair and fearless manner.

Rawat's devotion, dedication, the spirit of sacrifice, his allegiance towards Gandhiji and Vinobaji being their silent crusader, his relationship with the common people and above all being fair, fearless and a friend to all, is noteworthy.

Rawat is simplicity personified; who has emerged as a hero of the old time and a worker of the old school in the Sarvodaya fraternity.

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