



## **MS. VIDYA DEVI**

**Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare of Women and Children - 2000**

Born: October 15, 1916

Educational Qualification: Visharad

In the field of the upliftment and empowerment of women and making them conscious of their role in family, society and nation Vidya Devi has continuously since 1930 has done phenomenal work. Having been married at the tender age of 14 years and thereby coming in contact with the freedom struggle, she joined the national movement at that very age of 14, and participated in the movement in Bihar including the Salt Satyagraha in 1932 for which she was imprisoned for a period of six months. In the meantime, her husband Vrajanandan was picked up, along with a band of very young workers, by Gandhiji and taken to South India for spreading Hindi in South India visualising the need of a language to be spoken and understood throughout India after India would gain its independence. After coming out of jail, Vidya Devi joined her husband Vrajanandan who was working for the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras. During this period she worked in the villages of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu for making women conscious of their social and national responsibilities by persuading them to join the national movement through learning Hindi.

She was acclaimed as one of the best workers in the field of women's movement. In fact, she set an example by herself breaking the bondage of purdah and educating herself. Vidya Devi lived in Wardha for two years in 1942-43 and there she came in contact with and worked under the guidance of Jamnalal Bajaj, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Jankidevi Bajaj. This helped her to imbibe the values, the work ethos and austere life-styles of the Ashram.

The couple were inspired and encouraged by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, subsequently the first President of India, to return to Bihar and do some work for women's education in the Province. With this purpose in mind and blessings of Mahatma Gandhi the couple came back to Bihar in 1946 and there she served as the Sanchalika of Kasturba Memorial Trust, Ranchi for one year. During that period with the consent of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Lakhisarai being one of the most backward places of Bihar in matters of women's education, was chosen as the place for establishing an institution for the purpose, now the famous Balika Vidyapith. The couple started the institution from scratch, built it brick by brick and never allowed the basic ideals of simplicity, honesty and respect of labour, to be diluted.

Even after the death of her husband in 1979, Vidya Devi has devoted herself through the medium of this Trust for making women conscious of their duties and rights and bringing them out of the confines of their homes to the forefront. Totally self-effacing, dedicated to the work without any lust for publicity, honour and political power, she has concentrated on fulfilling her mission to educate, empower and sensitise women and make them active participants in the reformation and transformation of society. The Trust not only imparts academic education but also education in classical music, dance, physical, culture, dramatics and allied activities, internal running of the hostels, hygiene and sanitation, social values, eradication of superstitions, gender equality and communal harmony.

Persons like Mahatma Gandhi, Maharshi Karve, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Jayprakash Narayan, and a host of other distinguished personalities had associated themselves with the conception and activities of this Trust from time to time. The Education Trust was taken over by the

Bihar Government in 1980 but with indomitable spirit and total commitment Vidya Devi fought a long and agonizing legal battle with the State Government to save the integrity of the institution and succeeded in 1987 in the withdrawal of the takeover.

Vidya Devi nurtures the hope of developing this institution into a Rural University for Women. She has done the ground work and prepared the massive infrastructure for this, and now a conducive atmosphere exists for this. Vidya Devi is now an octogenarian but retains the spirit and exuberance of a dynamic young worker. She still serves the Trust as Sanchalika inspite of her failing health and oversees the affairs of the Vidyapith.

