

Ms. Marie Thoeger

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India-2004

Born: 25th July, 1923

Born into a family of farmers in a rural set up, Ms. Marie Thoeger grew up as a typical farmer's daughter serving on the village farm. Her father trained her from girlhood to work in agriculture and animal husbandry, especially dairying. A rustic atmosphere at home in her native village moulded her for service in the rural areas, and this formed her interest in rural life wherever she went. Thus, she could easily work on the path of Gandhian rural upliftment work. After finishing her education and training when she was 20, she became interested in social work, teaching and writing and this has been her mission for the last 55 years.

Marie Thoeger is an ardent admirer and a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave whose writings she has studied deeply. Between 1952-53, she visited India as a participant in a UNESCO programme where she was introduced to Basic Education as a preparation for work in UNESCO projects. She visited Sewagram and paid a visit to the Himalayan regions. She has become an ardent advocate of the Gandhian ideals of constructive programmes. She studied the working of Khadi and Village Industries and became a habitual Khadi wearer. She propagated Khadi and used all products of Khadi and Village industries at her home.

After returning to Denmark in 1954, she started writing about her experience of India and Gandhiji, his thoughts and his work. She wrote several books for her students and for the youth of her country. These became very popular.

Marie Thoeger's love for India brought her back again to India repeatedly. She visited Tagore's Santiniketan where she witnessed a practical demonstration of Gandhiji's ideals of self-sufficiency. She stayed at the "Marjorie Sykes" Ashram at Kotagiri for a month and, along with Marjorie Sykes, went on a campaign of Bhoodan at the inspiration of Vinobaji.

In 1965, at the behest of UNESCO, she went to East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) as an advisor on village work and she implemented the rural development programmes of Gandhiji and Vinobaji.

Since 1960, Marie Thoeger, along with some other people, sponsored a group for helping Laxmi Ashram at Kausani particularly to educate and maintain poor neglected girls in the Kumaon hills, to expand the activities of the Ashram and to take their students to Denmark. She is a believer in the philosophy of simple living and high thinking. She is a versatile writer and many of her books in Danish have been translated into several languages.

As a lover of the environment, Marie Thoeger got deeply involved in the Chipko movement, along with Smt. Radha Bhatt and others. She also took keen interest in the protection of Silent Valley in Kerala State.

Above all, she is deeply committed to the peace movement in Denmark and other countries. She has spent a great deal of time in peace missions in different countries. She is a total believer in a non-violent, welfare society and in the use of nonviolent means for resolving conflicts between men and for ensuring harmony among nations. The record of her work and writings has grown in importance all over this country and abroad and her writings on peace and human society are avidly read.