

**Smt. Shobhana Ranade**

**Recipient of the Award for Development and  
Welfare of Women and Children - 2011**

Born: 26th October, 1924

Smt. Shobhana Ranade - a calm and composed lady, has dedicated over half a century of her life for the betterment of the downtrodden, particularly women and children. She has spearheaded and helped in starting the Gandhi National Memorial Society and a national training institute for women at the Aga Khan Palace in Pune in 1979. Smt. Ranade was an active volunteer at a time when the Mahatma's Quit India Movement was gaining ground. She embodies the Gandhian principles and is the quintessential Gandhian. Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave influenced her to work for the poor destitute women and underprivileged children.

In 1955, she moved to Assam and started a school 'Shishu Niketan' and the first child welfare centre in the oil town of Digboi. She also worked in tribal villages in Nagaland and NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) for women empowerment. Through the Adim Jaati Seva Sangh, Naga tribal women were given special training in weaving and spinning. She also started a Khadi Bhandar in Kohima. She works and lives fearlessly and that is what she preaches to the children and women of the projects.

As a Trustee of the Kasturba Gandhi National Trust, Smt. Ranade has dedicated her life and energies to ensure women's empowerment, development, equality and education. She also worked for the overall development of the children, specially the orphans, under-privileged and also the street children.

The Trust's State office located at Saswad, in Purandar Taluka in Pune is set up over a sprawling area of 11 acres; of which 6 acres is used for farming and 5 acres to conduct various activities of the Ashram. The Balgriha currently takes care of over 40 young, deprived girls by providing them shelter, food and education so as to enable them to live a happy and meaningful life; emphasizing on the development of one's individuality. Some of them have done courses in Nursing, B.Ed and Social Work. There is a Balgram consisting of three Balsadan homes viz. Jai, Jui and Bakul. Currently there are around 27 girls. The Ashram takes care of these girls till they are well settled and happily rehabilitated in life.

Towards the welfare of the Karyakartas/gram sevikas, who have selflessly worked under the leadership of Smt. Ranade, the Ashram also provides homes for the retired sevikas who have no other place or family to go back to. A special home with modern facilities is being constructed now and will be made available to these selfless sevikas very soon.

Smt. Ranade has emphasized on empowerment and emancipation of women. Women are empowered through the Ashram's bakery unit, farming, and vegetation. Besides, they are also trained in over 20 village industrial trades and vocational skills viz. tailoring, flour making, preparing food items, jewellery, and many more. Kasturi is an outlet started for selling products made by the women entrepreneurs trained at the National Institute at the Aga Khan Palace, Pune.

Towards children's upliftment and development, Smt. Ranade directs her Organisation on various programs and initiatives for the welfare and upliftment of the street children. The Hermann Gmeiner Social Centre situated at Shivajinagar, Pune, provides education, nutritional food, healthcare, counseling and rehabilitation to the street kids. These children were traced from the railway station and have mothers who are detected HIV positive. Around 60 children

who were unclean, undisciplined, prone to malnutrition and various addictions are taught basic personal hygiene and are each provided with a set of toiletries and a locker to keep their belongings. Medical check up and immunization of the children is regularly conducted. Majority of the children are studying in semi English medium schools and a few are enrolled in the corporation schools. The fundamentals are taught at this Centre to enable the children to grasp and understand the subjects

once they are admitted in a formal school. The children are also taught candle making, art and craft, stitching, bag making and are also enlightened through excursions and picnics.

The SOS Children's Villages Balgram is yet another noble endeavor set up to provide the orphans and the destitute children their right to a family. Smt. Ranade has been one of the Founder Members instrumental in establishing the SOS Children's Villages in Maharashtra. It runs on the principle of rights-based rather than need-based providing a sense of protection and security, emotional support and love through family care, warmth and affection. At the SOS Village Balgram, a mother is given the responsibility to take care of the overall development of a group of 10 children. Built on 9 acres of land, this was the first village set up in Maharashtra in 1974. The village has 20 houses accommodating around 112 boys and 138 girls. The foster mothers mainly belong to the lower strata of the society who undergo mother's training for a year and during the services they also attend the refresher's course. It is worth noting that some of these women leave and sacrifice their family responsibilities to take care of the abandoned and destitute. In Maharashtra there are 3 SOS villages viz. Pune, Latur and Alibaug. The beginning of the first Balsadan was made at Vinobaji's ancestral village Gagode in Raigad, Maharashtra. It is commendable to see the unstinting welfare and developmental work done by Smt. Shobhana Ranade. A transformational leader and a fire-brand social worker indeed, Smt. Ranade personally mentors every sevika right from the time of selection. She visits them in remote villages, stays with them and with emotional support and frequent discussions guides them to solve the various issues in line with Gandhian philosophy. Smt. Ranade's abilities and convictions invite co-operation and commitment from all her workers. Nothing hinders Smt. Ranade's vision and process of work to achieve her mission. This is also reflected amongst her karyakartas/women who work in close association with her.

She has worked with Vinobaji as a Convenor of Stree Jagaran at Pavnar and also as the Chairman of the 'Bhoodan' Gram Dan' board of Maharashtra. Smt. Ranade joined Vinobaji in his Padyatra from Toophanganj (West Bengal) to Dibrugarh/Digboi, Assam and was made a Founder Member of his 6th Ashram called "Maitri Ashram" in North Lakhimpur, Assam.

Shobhana Tai, as she is popularly known, is well versed in Marathi, English, Hindi and Assamese and is a good orator and writer too. She was the elected President of the All India Women's Conference, New Delhi and is now working as a Patron and Trustee.

### **Awards and Honours**

Smt. Ranade has numerous awards and accolades to her credit, the most recent and notable being the Padma Bhushan for Social Work in 2011. Others include National Award for Child Welfare Services (1983); the Ahilyabai Holkar Award for Women and Child Development by the Government of Maharashtra (2001); the Gandhi Sanmaan Award by the Government of Madhya Pradesh; Rajiv Gandhi Manav Seva Award by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India (2007) . She has also received the Savitribai Phule Award for working for removal of illiteracy among women.

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