

Chipko Movement and Gouri Devi

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Abstract: Chipko movement is an important movement in the field of environmental movement in India. The first chipko movement in India began in Rajasthan in 1730 AD. Then another chipko movement took place in Uttarakhand in 1973 AD. Sundarlal bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt was thought to be the leader of this movement. Gouri Devi was also another prominent leader of the movement. In this article I will discuss the role of Gouri Devi of the chipko movement in the year 1973 AD. How did she manage the movement? How she managed to save the jungle despite all the obstacles from government and contractors. Gouri Devi made movement popular worldwide because of her talent.

Keywords: Chipko, Environment Gouri, Devi, Government, Movement, Women.

INTRODUCTION

India's first chipko movement occurs in 1730 AD in Rajasthan¹. After that another movement happens in 1973 AD in Uttarakhand. The 1730's Bishnoi movement led by Amrita Devi. In 1973 chipko movement leaders are Sundarlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Gouri Devi and many others. In this article I want to discuss about Gouri Devi. How she fights and how she led? Why she till now not honored from us? Why we ignored Gouri Devi? Why we forgot Gouri Devi? chipko movement will not succeed in any discussion about the movement unless we talk about Gouri Devi. Through her hard work not only India but all over the world she became famous.

Gouri Devi was born in 1925 AD to an indigenous family in the village of Lata in Niti valley in the Chameli District. Their village is 24 K.M away from Joshi Math. Nanda Devi is the childhood name of Gouri Devi. Where she lives there was no school, so she is illiterate. She has huge knowledge about her family woolen business. From the age of 12, her parents were worried about her marriage. In this hill region child marriage is not a big issue. It happens every day everywhere. Gouri Devi married with Meherban Singh in the age of 13 at the village Reni and her father-in-law was Nai Singh and mother-in-law was Hema Devi. In this new family Gouri Devi has some pets and family woolen business. When her son is only two and a half years old, she lost her husband.

In Indian society and literature widow's position are very poor. They have to fight to exist. They have to fight to live. We Indians do not take it easy to widows. We think widows had hard life and they have followed the rituals until death. Gouri Devi is not exceptional in this case. She also led a widow's life. Yet she did not give up hope. Gouri Devi runs their family woolen business. Shortly afterwards, both of Gouri Devi's mother-in-law and father-in-law died. Gouri Devi along with her son Chandra Singh gets alone on this earth. Shortly thereafter Gouri Devi took over all her work and worked as a helper to her son. At this time huge demand of woolen products at Tibetan market. The one who exploited Chandra Singh increased his business even more. From this time, Gouri Devi began to think of social service as more pleasant than the work of the mundane and continued to serve the old-fashioned community.

In the year 1972 AD women of Reni village decided to found 'Mahila Mangal Dal' and they request to Gouri Devi to join them. Gouri Devi joins this social group and she took president of this group. She promised that she would perform her duty, even with everything in life. At first this group cleansed the village, forest protection, campaigning against alcohol trafficking, etc. In the year 1973, when chipko movement started, it spread many regions, its wave touched the Reni village. Become inspired by the chipko movement Gouri Devi explain the importance of the movement to the members of

¹ It's also called Bishnoi Movement.

Mahila Mangal Dal. She says forest is our God, where there forest will be disappearing; the land is bound to collapse. That's Why they want to save forest, even their life. They may not know about Amrita Devi². The women of Reni village unanimously decided that they were save their forest. For this Gouri Devi preaches, in the surrounding villages importance's of forest. This illiterate woman was able to convince the surrounding villages, if we shall not able to protect our forest, then we shall face many dangers. If need our life to protect forest we will scarifies our life.

On march 25, 1974, Uttar Pradesh's forest department again allocated trees to multinational companies. But the residents of the village know of this incident is nothing. That morning they all went to bring their compensation money to chamli district³. On March 24, 1974, a group of workers and some of their government employees left for the destination. At that time a girl was pasturing there. The girl saw the workers and employees of the residence realized that they had come to cut down the trees. The girl then returned of the village and told Gouri Devi about incident. Women of the village on the day of examination, so we have to do something to save the jungle. All women realize that they are about undergo a difficult test. They had no choice but to be in front of the axe. We know of Amrita Devi, who scarifies her life by saving tree with the axe. Gouri Devi did the same. They had good fortune that all these employees were not brutal like 1730.

It appears that some women came here to provide food for all those workers, these women also joined them. Gouri Devi joins hands and urges the workers to leave. We have to save our jungle. Gouri Devi said,

Brothers this forest is our Maika
(mother's house). We get medical
Plants and vegetables from it, Do
Not cut this the forest? If you cut the
Forest this hill will plunge on
Our village, the flood will come and
Winter fields will be washed away⁴.

Uma Devi says we will give our life but we will not cut down a tree. Then the workers say our food is being cooked and we will leave. The state department's employees and contractors are a short distance away resting a cave. This is where Gouri Devi also appears. Government employees are wondering that else they can do nothing. Then Gouri Devi's arguments with the employees of the forest department began. Many of these employees were alcoholics and behaved indecently with women. Nevertheless, Gouri Devi's was persistently stable in the their goals. There were about 60 employees and plenty of workers. The officers ordered the workers to do, these women can do nothing. Then Gouri Devi shouted that no one would touch the tree. No one will be able to cut down while we are here. Then they followed the method of Chandi Prasad Bhatt and embraced the tree, Gouri Devi said let's see how you can cut a tree. You need our heads from the body before cutting the three.

The workers then looked at the contactor and said what they would do now? Women are request to the workers don't fell the trees. Harki Devi said that you have children is your house and leave this forest for our child. If you clear this jungle we won't be able live any longer. Another woman said that we collect mushroom, Chandra, mango, almond, walnuts every years from here. This forest is our homeland, our god lives here. Still if you cut the trees, we will be forced to stop.

The contactor and employees of forest department continue to threaten to women in varies ways that they will be arrested for obstructing government work. One had brought a gun front of them, but the women were not too scared. Then Gouri Devi said

"Come on shoot us and
Before you touch our trees
You will have to kill us.
If you have courage then kills us⁵.

² Amrita Devi was the India's Environmentalist.

³ After the Indo-China war of 1962, the Indian government took the villagers land to give them a barbed wire fence. Every year, the government is compensated for this.

⁴ The Emancipated Women-Folk of Uttarakhanda, A Joint presentation of Himalayan Action Research Centre (HARC).

Then every woman appears as a demon destroyer, workers run to see women this look. Even the workers who took the food left the place. Then all employees and people of the company left the place. The women chased about 2 km of the road, chasing down all such workers and employees and the demolished the bridge over the main street of the connection and woke up all night guarding the forest.

However, all the men who went to chamli district, when they heard the news a group of workers in the village. They thought there would be no more jungle. No man could think that forest could be saved. This memorable triumph led by Gouri Devi inspired women from her village to conserve forest. The next day the leaders of chipko movement Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Gobind Singh visit Reni village. She told Chandi Prasad Bhatt all the events and also said that the workers and government employees how misbehaved them. The forest department employees were treated badly by the compulsion because they later admitted that their job would have been lost if they had not done so. The most importance is the forest is protected. Gouri Devi swore that they would not let anyone cut a tree. Many of those who abused the Gouri Devi but later apologize to them.

Gouri Devi's this invaluable decision (without having men in the village, she came forward to protect the forest and lead 27 women) not only saved the forest but she made Reni village world famous. Gouri Devi herself became the symbol of the chipko movement and she became the epicenter of all environmental movements. From this incident Gouri Devi learned that the women are not alone and not weak. They can quench all obstacles though self sacrifices. Women can play an important role not only in protecting the environment but also in securing girls in society.

This world of Gouri Devi was confined to the village of Reni only, spreads all corner to state. She has part many environmental movements. In the year 1974 the traditional Badrinath Temple was in a great crisis. She brought to get them the women of the area and said that the Temple is a heritage of Garwal and it is the source of culture. We will not accept any outside pressure. She formed a strong party with about 40 women and organized a historic meeting in Badrinath.

CONCLUSION

Gouri Devi not just a name, she made her a symbol of environmental movement. She lives in every woman in the Garwal area. She took his last breath of life 4th July 1991 A.D. One thing I will try to bring to your attention, is that Gouri Devi even a small amount of 'respect of the Gouri Devi'. The honor and money that Sundarlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt received. Sundarlal Bahuguna got 'Padma Shri' Award from government India in 1987, Jannalal Award in 1986 A.D; 'Padhma Bhusan' in 2009 A.D, etc are awarded in prizes. Chandi Prasad Bhatt on the other hand, was awarded the 'Ramon Magsaysay Award' in 1982 A.D, 'Padhma Bhusan' in 2005 A.D, 'Ghandhi Shanti Puraskar' in 2013 A.D. On the other hand Gouri Devi was not honored with any award or honor, she just got neglected. Gouri Devi's causes of this neglect is it the male-dominated social system or the mentality of honoring us? There will come a day when perhaps Gouri Devi will receive her worthy honor. But she was no less than Sundarlal Bahuguna or Chandi Prasad Bhatt in protecting environment. Yet she was neglected.

Name and address of the organization from which I collected the information

1. AME (Academy for mountain envionics from the laboratory to the field)

51/5 Rajpur Road, Dehradun-248001, Telephone-0135-747304

2. NAVDANYA TRUST

Globalizing Traditional Knowledge

105, 51/5 Rajpur Road, Dehradun-248001, contact Vandana Shiva, 91-2668077

3. HARC (Hamilayan Action Research Centre)

744, Indira Nagar, P.O-New Forest, Dehradun, 248006

4. HESCO (Himalayan Environmental Studies and Conservation Organization)

Vill-Ghisarpali, P.O-Mehuwala, Derhadun, 248001

⁵ Hugging the Trees for Life: Implicating Bitzer in the Chipko's Non-violent Rhetorical Situation-Shareen Mat Nayan.

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