

SRISTI SAMMAN-2018

## Shrimati Bhanumatiben

She is like a wall that stands in solid support of female teachers and works hard to ensure the safety of the school and the students. She is none other than retired teacher Bhanumati Upadhyay from Malpur village of Aravalli district.

Bhanumatiji says 'I am my family's seventh member and fifth child who was a girl child. At that time the midwife said that a fifth sword has been born in your family. In those days a girl child was considered to be a burden. But my parents were different and hence made me feel special. They were active in the Independence struggle back then.'

At that time studies were only good in Ahmedabad and Malpur. "I used to like science as a subject and easily passed even in the regional languages. In 1957 I joined teachers training programme. I was 19 years old when I started studying and then joined as a teacher in the Malpur village," informs Bhanumatiji.

At that time Bhanumatiji realised the importance of girls' education. "There is a standard counter argument by all parents that if a girl goes to school who will take care of domestic chores? I used to have a standard reply that do you ever talk to your daughter after she gets married?" says Bhanumatiji.

The District Education Board's chairman was a well-known freedom fighter who recognised Bhanumatiji's work and offered her a job in the village school. Bhanumatiji started teaching students under a tree. Most of the families at that time were engaged in agriculture whereby the adults would go to the field and elder children would stay back at home to take care of the younger siblings. Bhanumatiji personally visited various fields to convince the parents to send their children to school. She tied a rakhi on the male head member of the family and made him take an

oath that he will send children to school. "I would tell them I am a Brahmin's daughter. I will tie rakhi. What will you give me as a gift? I would ask them to send their daughter to school as a gift to reciprocate my rakhi."

Later, Bhanumatiji was selected by district Panchayat Committee to start a school where it was required the most. She started using folk songs and bhajans to generate interest in languages in Rajwadu village. At that time, it was a princely state so the king being very influential Bhanumatiji took his support for school. She had also taken up the task of creating environment awareness too through children. She made one girl responsible for one plant and this way spread greenery in the school campus.

There were areas of the village where lower caste children would reside and would not be allowed to attend school. Bhanumatiji went to such Harijan localities and persuaded them to send their daughters to school. She took the responsibility of dropping and picking up these girls from school too. This act of hers was widely discussed in the whole taluka

and people even appreciated her efforts. She was honoured by several social institutions for getting together children from different castes to study under the same roof.

Bhanumatiji was one of the first persons to be awarded as 'Best Teacher' by the President when this kind of award was initiated. She was the first ever woman from Gujarat to be selected for this award for uplifting the standard of education.

Bhanumatiji has also taken up role of government official with several public institutions for educational purposes. She has spent her entire life in bringing about a revolution in the field of education in her native Malpur. She was elected as the first Gram Sarpanch with the support of the villagers. Due to her wide range of experience she has been called as consultant on several occasions at Central and Gujarat State government offices.

Even today Bhanumatiji's efforts are evident to eradicate traditional beliefs and make progress through education. We are proud to be honouring her with the Sristi Sanman Award for her sincere work in the field of education.