

Ela Bhatt

Why in News?

Recently, Ela Ramesh Bhatt, a Gandhian, eminent feminist and activist, passed away. She was visionary personality who did commendable job for the informal sector and workers.

About Ela Bhatt

She was born on September 7, 1933 in Ahmedabad. Her family was economically sound and involved in social welfare works. She was known as the "Gentle Revolutionary".

She founded 'Self-Employed Women's Association' (SEWA) in 1972. Through this organization, she provided small loans in formal sector and especially to women. Millions of women received financial assistance for five decades to become self-reliant. Their aim was to bring structural reforms for uplift the condition of Indian women.

She also headed the women's wing of Mazur Mahajan Sangh, the Textile Labour Association founded by Anasuya Sarabhai and Mahatma Gandhi.

She joined the group of global leaders called the 'Elders', founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007 to promote human rights and peace around the world.

She served as the President of Women's World Banking and as an advisor to the World Bank. She also addressed the United Nations General Assembly.

Ela Bhatt was honored with several national and international awards including Padma Bhushan, Magsaysay Award and Indira Gandhi Sadbhavna Award for her significant contributions.



Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

SEWA was previously known as Textile Labour Association (TLA) which was formed in 1917. Main objective of SEWA was to organize self-employed women in the informal economy and empower them to ensure their social justice and equality.

It follows Gandhian principles like Satya (truth), Ahimsa (non-violence), Sarvadharmasambhav (Respect for all the religions) and Khadi (employment at local level and self-reliance).

But due to lack of a well-planned "employer" system, it failed to register as a trade union. In 1972, SEWA was founded and one could get annual membership of SEWA with fee of Rs.10.

In 1981, Ela Bhatt advocated quotas for Dalits in the medical educational institutes. But she faced much severe criticism and TLA broke ties with SEWA on this issue.

Although SEWA started working in urban areas, it successfully spread in rural India in late 1980s through new social groups such as producers' groups, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), village resource centres and rural distribution networks etc. SEWA also encourages food processing, package and marketing of agricultural commodities produced by rural members.

66 per cent membership base of SEWA consists of rural India. Establishment of cooperatives and other social-security type organizations are playing an important role in remote areas of India for banking, housing, insurance, education and child service to poor and disabled women.

Various initiatives taken by the government for women empowerment –

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) - To ensure safety, survival and education of the girl child and improve child sex ratio of India

Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY) - To make girls financial empowered by opening their bank accounts.

Scheme for Adolescent Girls: It aims to empower girls in the age group of 11-18 years and improve their social condition through nutrition, life skills, home skills and vocational training.

National Shishu Griha Yojana - To provide meaningful employment to women through providing a safe environment to her and her child

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana- Ensures maternity benefits to pregnant and lactating mothers

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Ensure women to have house with the ownership title

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana - To provide free LPG cylinders to women and protect their health



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Co-operative Institutions

An association of people who voluntarily cooperate for their mutual benefit on social, political, economic, cultural matter

Self Help Group {SHG}

Generally a group of people coming from the same socio-economic background and its members solve their common problems through cooperation and combine efforts. SHGs believe in the concept of "Self-Employment" to encourage economic empowerment and alleviate poverty.



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