



With Chipko, Sunderlal Bahuguna shaped green movement

25 May 2021

Sunderlal Bahuguna, a beacon of the Indian environmental movement, will continue to be a source of inspiration from his heavenly abode. His passing is an irreparable loss for the nation. A home-grown environmentalist who steered a spontaneous 'Chipko Movement' of the 1970s into a strong people's movement and saved the forests of the great and the forest-based livelihoods of its indigenous communities was a living image of unfettered dedication. When I met him for the first time at the in Delhi in 1975, it was an awe-inspiring moment. I was a student and greatly moved by his thoughts and ideals. "Harmony with nature is the only way of life," he believed and instilled in many young minds an environmental consciousness at a time when the world was blinded by a mad race of .

A true satyagrahi and an avid Gandhian, he was born on January 9, 1927 at near Tehri, Uttarakhand. With his wife Vimla Behen he dedicated his life to the cause of society and environment. Since his early days as an activist, he believed in the power of women. He believed that women and nature are intrinsically connected and demonstrated that they can lead change. He pioneered many social movements with women crusaders, most noteworthy were the movement against alcoholism and the anti-Tehri dam movement to save Himalayas and Ganga.

I distinctly remember the 10 days Bahuguna ji spent at the Tarun Bharat Sangh Ashram. He walked with us for hours to see the water and environmental conservation work in villages at Bheekampura in Alwar district of Rajasthan. Witnessing the conservation of Sariska forests, he was determined to replicate the model in the Himalayas.

"The mighty Himalayas and the Ganga river are eternal symbols of sacredness and their natural and pure existence is integral to the development of the nation," he truly believed. He motivated me to take up the cause of the Himalayas and Ganga. We spent hours discussing environmental, societal and cultural issues. With passion and vigour, we embarked on a journey with 120 volunteers from Galtaji, Jaipur, to the birthplace of Ganga at Gangotri to spread environmental consciousness and mobilise youth in the cause of environment.

Since then, I have worked closely with Bahugunaji in struggles against deforestation, pollution and encroachment in the Himalayas and along Himalayan rivers. During the anti-Tehri dam struggles, I had the privilege to follow his lead, to see his passion and dedication towards environment closely and to witness his remarkable persona that inspired hundreds and commanded action.

March 28, 2021, will be etched in my memory as the day I met Sunderlal Bahuguna for the last time. At age 94, a lot had changed in his physical appearance. However, his passion and pride in his work and love for environment was as strong as when I met him for the first time. While talking about forests, he excitedly broke into a folk song about trees.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/with-chipko-sunderlal-bahuguna-shaped-green-movement/articleshow/82845657.cms>