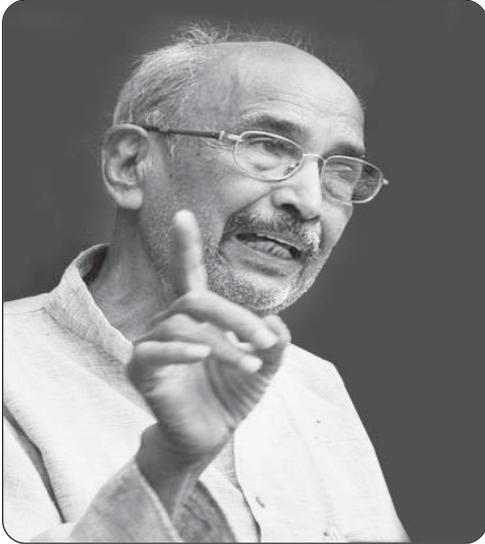


Dedicated to the Tribal Cause - Dr. B.D. Sharma



Former IAS officer, former chairman of National Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Commission and former vice- chancellor of North Eastern Hill University DrBrahmDev Sharma, popularly known **Dr BD Sharma**, breathed his last at his residence in Gwalior on 6th December 2015. He was 86. He was ailing since last one year.

RytuCooliSangham (AP) and All India KhetMazdoor and KisanSabha (AIKMKS) pay homage to the departed friend of adivasi people. The fond remembrances of his two decade long association with our organization and with the adivasi people of Andhra Pradesh will always inspire us in our endeavour to bring a better and respectable life to the adivasis.

Dr B.D. Sharma joined the Indian Administrative Services in the year 1956. He is basically a student of Mathematics with doctorate in the same subject. He was posted as Collector and District Magistrate to Bastar district, the largest tribal tract of the country. While serving in the central government and also state government, he was responsible for the formulation of adivasi policies particularly what is known as ST Sub-plan strategy. He was also instrumental in bringing back the Fifth Schedule, as the vital instrument of policy for the very survival of adivasi people, on the national agenda.

Dr Sharma resigned from government service in 1981 when differences arose on vital issues of policy. He became the Vice Chancellor of North Eastern Hill University and worked in that position from 1981 to 1986. He occupied the highest constitutional position concerning adivasi people, as the last commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes during 1986-91. Thereafter separate National Commissions were constituted for SCs and STs,

Since 1991, Dr Sharma has been with the tribal people and is actively participating in tribal movements. He is leading the Bharat Jan Andolan (Indian People's Movement) as its National Coordinator which was formed in October 1992. Its presence is very strong in Ranchi region of Bihar, Nagari-Sihawa region in Raipur District and Sarguja district of Madhya Pradesh. The Andolan works on the issues of peasants and adivasis.

In 1992 Bharat Jan Andolan released its first manifesto. In 1993 when the Panchayats became the institutions of decentralization through the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, the Andolan focused its energies on tribal self-rule. The Andolan is not a registered society because Sharma believes that if they seek legitimacy from the state then their endeavor and mass movement to delegitimize the state will weaken.. All the workers volunteer their services and their daily needs are taken care of by the village in which they live. Dr. Sharma contributes his pension to the movement and mobilizes some financial support from sympathetic and supportive individuals. Out of principle, the movement does not accept any organizational grants or aid.

Most of the social movements believe in first creating an organization and then starting to spread the ideas. According to Sharma, the ideas, not the organization, should reach the people first. In line with this thought, the books written by Dr. Sharma play a vital role. Very often the villagers read the books and then invite the Andolan to their areas. The idea of 'gaonganaraaj' (village Republic) and 'hamaragaon, hamararaaj' (Our Village, Our rule) is very appealing to the masses and captures their imagination. It encourages the people to want ownership of the resources and not merely a share. The movement coined the slogan 'jal, jungleaurjamin' (Water, Forest and Land). Once the village accepts the Andolan, a 'shilalekh' (rock inscription) is made at the entrance of the village, which proclaims 'hamaragaon, hamararaaj'.

Dr Sharma has been pursuing the Panchayat Acts since 1972. He suggested to the Ashok Mehta Committee that the gram sabha should be given the real powers, but this was not accepted. Later due to the pressure built by the movement the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Act was amended. After the amendment the decisions of the Gram Sabha have become binding on the Gram Panchayat. Dr Sharma played a very significant role in the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, which is the most revolutionary act in his opinion. The Act provides space to the community in the legal framework and the most significant clause is 4(d), which gives legitimacy to the culture and tradition of local communities.

Dr.B.D.Sharma wrote extensively on the debt burden being forced upon the peasants even by the institutional credit channels by imposing compound interests, penal interests and confiscating productive assets of peasants, all of which are illegal. The peasants needs no mercy from the rulers as in the case of loan waiving provided they were given loans not on usurious terms but reasonable terms.

Dr. B.D. Sharma writes extensively and on a wide spectrum of issues. His writing is simple and focuses on the real issues of the adivasis and rural communities. Bureaucracy often functions antagonistic to people rights and entitlements. But Dr B.D. Sharma is a rare bureaucrat who gave up government position dedicated to the tribal and rural cause fully and joined hands with them to fight for their rights and entitlements.

Dr.B.D.Sharma attended the Adivasi conference protesting the amendments to 1/70 regulation held in Rajahmundry in 1996 and again in 2000 expressing his solidarity with the adivasis protesting the attempts at bauxite mining. Since then, he visited adivasi areas from Salur in Vizianagaram district to Kondamodalu in east Godavari district, Vararamachandrapuram in west Godavari district and Adilabadadivasi areas several times and stood on the side of adivasis in their fight for their rights. The adivasi people and rural masses have lost a steadfast friend in passing away of Dr.B.D.Sharma and they will always remember him.

**RytuCooliSangham
(Andhra Pradesh)**

All India KhetMazdoor and KisanSabha

7 December 2015
