

Proceeding of Ashok Babu Paribesh Mitra Award Ceremony,

Dated: 10th January 2008

Meeting Venue: Red-Cross Bhawan, Bhubaneswar.

In the esteemed memory of Late Sri Ashok Babu, our former Director of Vasundhara, an award ceremony i.e Ashok Babu Paribesh Mitra Puraskar was organized on the occasion of his birth at Red Cross Bhawan, Bhubaneswar. On the occasion three different awards were honoured.

1. **Ashok Babu Paribesh Mitra Puraskar** aims at honouring the **collective initiatives of the communities in the field of environmental protection and conservation**, instituted since 2004. It carries a cash prize of Rs. 10,000/- (Ten Thousands) and a citation. **This year the Joint Forest Protection Committee of Budhikhamari, Mayurbhanj** is selected for the award out of many groups doing their successful and exemplary contributions in the field of forest protection and environment conservation initiatives. JFPC is a federation of 95 village forest protecting groups in Mayurbhanj district started in the year 1983. They have been successfully protecting around 10, 000 hectares of forest areas.



Members of JFPC Budhikhamari, Mayurbhanja are receiving the award for community contribution to environment protection and conservation.

2. **Ashok Babu Smruti Sanman Puraskar** was instituted since 2005 to honour an individual for exemplary contribution in promoting environmental protection and conservation, which also carries a cash prize of Rs. 10,000/- and a citation. This year considering the types of nominations, it was decided to give this Award jointly to **Sri Arjuna Pradhan of Chanchunia, Badamba and Sri Ramachandra Parida of Ranpur**. Arjun is an active member of Chanchunia village forest protection committee. **He was severely attacked by a wild bear on 10th September 2007 while he was guarding and patrolling (*thengapali*) the forests, in which he got serious injury in his hand. In spite of his hard pressed poverty, as a poorest person with 3 small children and wife, Arjun could manage to do surgery in his injured left hand but no improvement was seen to it, which is practically paralyzed. His dedication and contribution is exemplary and inspiring.** Popularly called as Rambhai, **Ramachandra has been a dedicated captain in environment and forest conservation in various ways, has been actively involved in the initiatives beginning from his own village in Ranpur areas. Despite his very impoverished family background he has been successful in widening and leading the movement of community forest protection initiative in Ranpur area.** Meeting an ill-fated accident while voluntarily watering the newly constructed school building, he was critically bedridden with his lower half of the body completely paralyzed after he slipped from the ladder. **His struggle and contribution to the environment protection has been exemplary.** Arjun has personally received the award while

Mrs. Malamani Parida, wife of Ramachandra has received the award on his behalf due to his physical disability to come.



Arjuna whose left hand is paralysed with wild bear during guarding of forests receiving Ashok Babu Smruti Sanman Award jointly.



Mrs. Malamani Parida, wife of Ramachandra Parida receiving the award on his behalf.

- 3. Ashok Babu Smruti Ajiban Paribesh Sadhak Puraskara, newly instituted this year, for the individual with outstanding lifetime contribution in the field of environment protection and conservation through community mobilization. The award carry Rs. 5000/- with a memento. This was honoured to an undoubted personality Sri Udyanath Khatei, aged 85, popularly known as Bapa (father) who has made a significant contribution for the community forestry initiative and environment protection in his village and spearheaded it to the entire district. He alongwith a group of like minded people also formed the “Bruksha O Jeevar Bandhu Parishad” (BOJBP) in 1982 informally and remained as honorary president for three decades through which he has spearheaded and widespread the movement. His vision was not only limited to forest protection but also how to address the development and livelihood concern of the community, in which he has shown the significant success.**



Sri Udayanath Khatei receiving the honour for his lifetime contribution in environment protection and conservation initiative.

Bapa became father less at the age of 12 and shouldered all the family responsibility since then and started earning his livelihood through daily wages and working as a servant with one of the village landlord. Till today he is also earning his livelihood as wage labour. From childhood he has been quite interested in protection of natural resources. Although he is a just formal literate with his effort he was established a school in his village. Bapa preferred to identify himself as the *Mulia Uday*. He has spread the message of community forestry from village to village through public meetings and padyatra. While narrating his experience of the early days of his organization he reminded of the baton and lantern that he used to carry while organizing the meetings in different villages in night. He used to around 20kms to organize such meetings. It is his contribution that has given the organization a unique identity and able to spread the message of community forestry with in Orissa as well as around the globe. The practice of *Thengapali* is widely recognized and is taught as a subject in geography syllabi of schools of England. He is never crazy of praise but for his vision. In spite of his ill health his moral health makes him active who proved that time is defeated with his strong will power and commitment. He is a person of a gigantic stature for his self less service and working as a torchbearer to the future generation in formulating the principles of community forestry and sustainable agricultural practice.

On the occasion the special dignitaries invited were Prof Parthasarathi Mandal of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Among other dignitaries Professor Kameswar Choudhury of KIIT University and Sri Bhagaban Prakash, eminent Social Scientist enlightened as special guests of the occasion. Sri Prasant Mohanty, coordinated the meeting. Sri Udayanath Khatei has shared his experience and days of struggle in early days to take ahead the process.

Two members of JFPC, Mayurbhanj, have shared their experience, struggle and success in the community forest protection initiative. Many people including the people from Similipal National Park have visited in exposure to see their areas and work. They have highlighted the holistic importance of forests and trees and the essence of it for protection for human survival. One member said “Tree is life, livelihood. Tree release the oxygen for our life.” They have realized the constraints of the new rules and regulations, which they said does not serve the public. Now, without the knowledge of the Committee all the trees fell are taken away by govt although people have been protecting them with rigor and commitment. They are planning to do some measure for that. One of the member of JFPC said that “this award will inspire people even unite the people who have some difference and discontent within. People will bridge the gaps within the people and make our movement strong.”

Among the dignitaries Sri Bhagaban Prakash said that the contribution of Ashok Babu to the process is incomparable in leading the movement of community forest protection initiative by the with the active participation the villagers. Ashok Babu was a rare personality who has combined the thoughts with action. Trees are important but living beings are also equally important. He has very scientifically narrated the Upanishad concept of environment in the context of Akash, Vayu, Agni, Jala, Jangal and Brukshya.



Sri Bhagaban Prakash sharing his lecture on the occasion

Disagreement with the philosophy of “Forest is to be prevented from the people” he has argued that Forest has to be protected by the people for which the Brundtland Commission also recommended for enabling people to protect their environment. In his remarks Bhagaban Prakash has said that “Our environment policies are not framed by the people but by the government. Environment is a behaviors issue. For any development the health of the mother earth is more important. If the mother earth is healthy the development will be healthy.

Another dignitary Prof Kameswar Choudhury had given a very insightful lecture on environment and development. He has explained how the change of worldview has affected the activities of human behaviour and the larger environment friendly development, which ultimately became the threat to human being. Besides, he also emphasized that like human being other living beings have also equal rights in the realm of nature. It is a “deep ecology” thinking saying equality in the society at large includes plants and animals.

On development he has argued that “Economic centric development should be rejected. Complete domination of generic science should be rejected. Traditional wisdom should be given priority. On the other hand the environmental centric world view is opposite to development. The present development is a balanced type of some kind.”

In the management of environment and forests he has mentioned three types of worldview: First, expert centric world view, which is based on pure scientific approach. Second, environmental centric world view refer to peoples knowledge wisdom should be the core value. Third category of worldview is drawn from both science and traditional knowledge or wisdom. The former two are not exclusively tenable. The mutual participatory understanding will help in conserving the natural resources.

Commenting upon globalisation Prof. Choudhury said that the present trend of globalization is economic growth centric development. **One need not be opposed to the globalization but the patterns of globalization and the kind of ongoing development. “Our approach of**

development should be socially harmonious, economically inclusive and politically participatory and ecologically sustainable in which the voice of the disadvantaged should have the space.” Interactions with the people and their wisdom are essential in policy making. One needs to change the worldview and the kind of science we have distorted. There is need of reorientation in the approach of development.



Prof K. Choudhury delivering his lecture on Environment & Development on the occasion.

Sri Sudhir Patnaik one of the very close associate of Late Ashok Babu thanks all the participants and requested to send the message of Ashokdada to the ground regularly. We should not limit this in seminar and conferences.



Sri Arakhita Sahoo praised the contribution of Ashok Babu saying that “we are not reaching all the person the way Ashok Babu has done. Many sacrificed their life and many are still struggling but the movements are ongoing. Some years back we were searching for forest in nearby Cuttack. Now due to the initiative of the people the forests are increasing. However, the destructive forces now have come to take and cut all these forests for revenue

generation. We should take the thinking of Ashok Babu to the village level and to take his initiatives to all corners of the villages in Orissa.

Jugal Kishore Pradhan, Ranpur said *Brukshya ru Arna Srusti* (our origin is from the tree) so the message given by sri Prakash should be spread to the students in school and colleges. The initiative of such kind is very essential. We do not allow the forest to be cut down. The principle of “Live and let live” is the need of the hour.



At the end vote of thanks was given by Sankar Prasad Pani to all the audience and dignitaries.

Sd/-

Convener,

Ashok Babu Paribesh Mitra Award 2007-08

VASUNDHARA, 15, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar