

Sulabha Bramhe

Eminent Economist, Marxist intellectual, Political and Social Activist

February 2, 1932 – December 1, 2016

Sulabha Bramhe was a remarkable scholar-activist. Daughter of an eminent economist and trained in top notch universities, she could have launched into a focused career in economics in any global institution. But she chose to ground herself in the Indian reality and in socially relevant areas of research.

Eminent economist, Marxist intellectual, political and social activist Dr. Sulabha Brahme passed away after a brief illness at her residence in the morning on 1st December 2016. She was 84 years old. She was active till the last moments of her life. Only a week before she died, she attended meetings at Purandar with local residents to oppose the proposed airport. Her last article was about the devastating impact of the demonetisation on ordinary people.

Born at Satara, as daughter of eminent economist and Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission D. R. Gadgil and eminent social worker Pramila Gadgil (Kale) she finished her schooling at Huzurpaga in Pune. She completed her masters in Economics from University of Pune and did her Ph. D. from the Gokhale Institute of Economics and Politics (GIPE), Pune where she was later Reader and also Registrar. She did her post-doctoral research from London School of Economics, UK in 1958. In 1966 she was in USSR to study Regional & Urban Planning and went to Harvard University, USA to undertake Special Studies in Planning.

During her tenure as Research Faculty at GIPE, spanning 33 years from 1959 to 1992, she conducted a number of socially relevant studies including two important reports on the Regional Development Plan for Marathwada and Land Use in Western Maharashtra. She was engaged in field investigations and planning and policy studies on Urbanization and Urban Planning, Changing Village Economy, Rural development & Regional Planning, Land-Use Planning, Problems of Drought & Irrigation Planning, Economic development of SC and ST, Energy Planning, Alternatives in Agricultural, Energy & Industrial Development.

She was a member of the Board of Directors of the Bank of Maharashtra (1972-77) and Trustee and member of Executive Committee of National Book Trust, Delhi (1987-93). She was founding member and editorial board Member of bimonthly journal 'BAIJA' (in Marathi language) devoted to Women's Issues, Pune (1977-84) and was also founding and active member, Lok Vidnyan Sanghatana, working for popularisation of science and people-centred sustainable development approach (since 1980). In addition she was Member, Board of Management, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune. (1992) and she was a Trustee of Academy of Political & Social Studies, Pune, the Bhai Vishnupant Chitale Trust and the R. G. Ranade Memorial Trust, Pune.

She founded the Shankar Brahme Samaj Vidnyan Granthalaya in 1969 that engaged in study of contemporary economic problems and dissemination of research findings through lectures, seminars, booklets and monographs in Marathi. Brahme Granthalaya emerged as a centre for left, progressive and secular tendencies in Pune and Maharashtra conducting research, publishing important pamphlets on topical issues and organising activities to create awareness. The range of her passionate involvement in people's movements and issues was staggering - from economic development, environment, organic farming, peace, anti-nuclear movements, people's science, women's equal rights, casteism, communalism, education, secularism, culture, etc.

In 2004, Brahme Granthalaya launched 'Lokayat Vyaspeeth' for experimentation in ecologically friendly and people-centric development model in agriculture, education, health, culture (2004). Subsequently, Lokayat Samajik Sanstha (Nandanpada, Tal. Khalapur, Dist. Raigad, Maharashtra) undertook an

experimental project of rural development in Khalapur and Pen talukas in Raigad district of Maharashtra. The distinctive facets of this project are – Initiative and leadership of local activists, scientific planning, and most importantly peoples’ participation. The basic idea is to build an organization of rural toilers on the principle of cooperation to work in the areas of watershed development, afforestation, organic farming, to conserve, regenerate and develop the resources – soil, water, agriculture, forests, fodder and livestock - to enhance the overall productivity, to make agriculture sustainable and to improve quality of life. The project also intends to strengthen the toilers’ will not to surrender to the designs of the real estate sharks intent on depriving them of their only source of livelihood.

Apart from these she authored more than 50 high quality booklets in Marathi and monographs and also published some written by other eminent activists on the contemporary topics.

She maintained close links with all the different shades and strands of progressive people's movements.

Since 1992 she was deeply engaged in field investigations and policy studies on the impact of the New Economy Policy on the Indian economy and society, with special emphasis on the problems faced by rural peasants, adivasis and women. She was actively involved in the grass-root level people's movements against the Dunkel Draft, privatisation of Public Sector Enterprises, banks, utilities, the Enron Power Project, Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project etc. She focussed her energies in theoretical exploration and praxis in relation to alternative development policies in contrast to the current world development paradigm

She lived an extremely simple and frugal life, devoting all her time and personal material resources to support progressive movements and activists from the trade union, peasants, students, youth and other social and political organisations. Fiercely independent, she lived alone for several years, but her house was open to all at any time. She leaves behind a huge family of activist friends and comrades across the country, for whom her loss will leave behind a huge void. They will now have to take on the responsibility of continuing her valuable work.

Sulabha Bramhe’s Selected writings and publications:

1. Distribution and Consumption of Cloth in India (1961)
2. Deluge in Pune: Aftermath and Rehabilitation (1967)
3. Regional Planning: A Case Study of the Marathwada Region (1975)
4. The Writing & Speeches of Professor D.R. Gadgil (Edited): On Co-operation (1975); On Economic & Political Problems (1981)
5. Drought in Maharashtra: A case for Irrigation Planning (1983)
6. Planning for the Millions: Problems and Prospects (1991) jointly with AnandSarup, Wiley Eastern, 1990
7. The Indian Economy: Problems and Prospects: Selected Writings of D. R. Gadgil (Ed.) Oxford University Press, 2011.

Prepared by Kiran More and other comrades.