

'VEERAYATAN TO ESTABLISH 200 SCHOOLS'

Born in 1937 at Chaas-Kaman in Khed tehsil of Pune district, **Shakuntala Manikchand Kataria** has spent her life in the service of the poor and the needy at Mahaveer's land in Bihar. She was the first female Acharyashree of the Jain community. Through Veerayatan, she established schools, colleges and hospitals for the downtrodden. Acharyashree Chandanashree speaks to **Mahendra Shinde**.



Instead of promoting the community, like all other community leaders, you have been working for the poor and the downtrodden. Did you ever face any opposition?

All communities respect tradition, which is rarely changed or challenged. Using sound amplifiers or vehicles for transportation was against the tradition of the Jain community. I did both. All communities consider service to the poor as their prime responsibility. Taking a cue from this, I established Veerayatan, an organisation to help the poor and the needy. While working in this direction, I had to face a lot of opposition, at times they also abused and physically assaulted me.

What are the objectives of Veerayatan?

Established in 1973, Veerayatan is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that strives to uplift and empower humanity through the three jewels of humanitarianism, education and inner development. In its world renowned eye hospital and orthopaedic centre in Bihar, Veerayatan provides most of its services free of charge. It has also established several primary education and vocational training centres throughout the region of Kutch.

What do have to say about Veerayatan's journey so far?

In 41 years, Veerayatan has undertaken several projects. In the next year, Veerayatan will established 200 schools in five states including Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. These schools will be open for students from all communities.

What is your message to the society?

Be useful to the world, avoid being a nuisance. Love people, animals, birds and the environment. Let your behaviour be full of love.