

GANDHIAN, SEWA FOUNDER, AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACTIVIST ELABEN BHATT DIES

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Elaben Bhatt

Elaben Bhatt, 89, Gandhian, leading women's empowerment activist and founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), passed away on Wednesday in a hospital in Ahmedabad after a brief illness.

The recipient of several national and international awards, including the Padma Bhushan, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, and the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize, she was globally recognised as a woman leader who carried out pioneering work in organising the informal sector for self-employment and empowerment of women not only in India but across South Asia.

Elaben was the Chairperson of the Sabarmati Ashram and recently resigned as the Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi-founded Gujarat Vidhyapith. In 2007, she became part of a group of world leaders called the Elders, founded by Nelson Mandela to promote human rights and peace across the world.

Working women

She was also a member of the Rajya Sabha and the Planning Commission in the 1980s. She served in many international organisations, including Women's World Banking, a global network of microfinance organisations, which she co-founded. She also served as an Adviser to the World Bank. Founded by her in 1972, SEWA is one of the largest cooperatives working for women, with a base of over two million members from as many as 18 States in the country and in neighbouring nations.

"Sad to know about the death of Elaben Bhatt. She will be remembered long for her work for the promotion of women's empowerment, social service and education among the youth. Condolences to her family members and admirers," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and many other political leaders also expressed their condolences over her demise.

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