

# **Anurupa Mukherjee : The mother figure of Tripura**

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***Anurupa Mukherjee endeared herself to the people of Tripura by virtue of her progressive outlook and service to the poor and downtrodden. Fondly addressed as Maani (mother) all over the state, she broke the barrier of purdah system at a time when women were supposed to observe it religiously. She has left an indelible imprint of her much valuable efforts to educate tribal women, especially girls, who dropped out of school. The writer unfolds her multifaceted personality.***

She was Maani (mother) to the common people of the state. To outsiders she was familiar for her great contribution in making downtrodden to organise, capacity building and ushering in development. Policy-makers used to seek her help to reach the unreachable, and the underprivileged used to find refuge under her motherly care in search of ray of hope for livelihood. Anurupa Mukherjee (Debbarman), a pioneer of social service in Tripura, will be ever remembered as an unmatched organiser, planner and achiever.

Born on the 10th September, 1927 at Agartala, Tripura, in a respectable conservative Tripura Thakur (Deb Barma) family when a woman could hardly communicate with outside world without covering herself, she proved to be far more progressive than her time. She not only got admitted herself in the only girls' school at Agartala namely, Maharani Tulshibati Balika vidyalaya, but got associated with a number of freedom fighters who were trying to build secret organisation in Tripura. She showed her inherent talent even at this initial stage of her life. Although a frequent visitor to Raj Bari, she did not hesitate to raise her voice in favour of democracy. In fact, she encouraged the other women of Thakur family to come out and join the democratic forces.

First woman in Tripura to contest the Agartala Municipal Council Election in 1948, Anurupa was married to the eldest son of a distinguished Bengali Brahmin family of Nadia (West Bengal ) who was then serving in the Indian Navy. In 1957, her husband retired and was immediately offered the post of resident representative of M/S Kalinga Air-Lines at Delhi. Hence she had to shift to Delhi. The new world only widened the sphere of her activity. In Delhi she joined the women's wing of the undivided Congress under the guidance of Smti Mukul Mukherjee, M.P and simultaneously joined as PRACHARIKA' of the Depressed Class League formed for eradication of untouchability and uplift of the depressed classes under the guidance of Late Babu Jagjivan Ram. In 1958 she joined the All India Women's Conference under the stewardship of Mrs. Lakshmi Menon.

The outbreak of Indo-China war in 1962 brought additional responsibility for her. She rendered invaluable services by opening and supervising relief canteens at Railway Station at Delhi and by arranging various facilities for the Jawans.

And again, with the sudden outbreak of Indo-Pak war in 1965, she was drawn to join the Central Citizen's Council under the stewardship of Smti. Indira Gandhi and worked for the relief measures for war victims and fighting jawans.

Founder member of Tripura Adivashi Mahila Samity, she is the recipient of many national level recognition. She paved the way for the literacy movement among tribal women, especially for the girls who dropped out from school. In 1980 she started a school with five drop-out tribal girls. Initially, state government was less enthusiastic to help in such projects. But by now helping and funding for the education of drop-out tribal students is considered to be one of the major projects of the tribal welfare department of the state.

Recipient of Tagore literacy award in 1998, Anurupa Mukherjee adorned many honorary posts in many organisations — government and non-government — such as vice-president & life member of Tripura State Child Welfare Board, president, Protective Home, run by Govt. of Tripura, convener, Tripura State Level Committee for Eradication of Illiteracy Amongst Women, chairperson, Tripura Handloom & Handicrafts Development Corporation (1988-1993), zonal organiser, All India Women's Conference for N.E. region, executive member, Women Voluntary Service (Tripura branch) since 1992-1996, general body member of 'CAPART', New Delhi, in the year 1992, regional committee member of 'CAPART' in the year 1994, member, Commission for Women in Tripura, member, ICAR, NE region.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2000 she received Mahabir Award in Chennai at a glittering ceremony. Two days later on the 7<sup>th</sup> October she passed away in a nursing home at Bangalore. Her demise made us poorer. She made Tripura and its people proud through her life time achievements.

*\*Highly respected social activist whose main preoccupation has been with journalism for the citizens of Agartala. She is fondly addressed as Foolan Di (elder sister Phoolan).*