

MS. MALATI DEVI CHOUDHURI

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Development & Welfare of Women and Children-1988

To refuse to step on to the threshold of a promising political career with prospects of acquiring eminence and power and to opt for a life of sacrifice and selfless service requires a rare courage of conviction. Malati Devi showed this quality when she resigned her membership of the Constituent Assembly and other political organisations and went to a distant corner of Orissa to work for the uplift and welfare of women and children in that backward area.

Her nationalist spirit became evident when she refused to join the Government College and completed her higher education in Shanti Niketan under the guidance of Rabindranath Tagore and Rev. C. F. Andrews. Unlike a young wife, Malati Devi did not go to the big mansion of her in-laws and preferred to stay in a hut and work among the poor.

For the last 40 years she has been applying the Gandhian ideas of basic education and emancipation of women. She built the necessary institutional structure for the purpose, which includes a primary school with emphasis on learning of simple crafts, a post basic school with advanced craft training attached thereto. Similar facilities were created for the education, vocational training and employment of women. Through the Utkal Navajeevan Mandal, Malati Devi has built a large team of dedicated social workers, who have spread their work by establishing social service centres in various parts of the State. These Centres perform a number of extension functions for women and children, particularly, maternal and child care, running creches, a hospital, a dispensary, in which medical services are rendered free of charge.

Realising the potential of adult education for social reform, Malati Devi awakened the people to fight against the evils of ignorance and superstition. Her work in the field of adult education has been acknowledged by the State and Central Governments.

In addition to social service, Malati Devi laid emphasis on two other programmes: prohibition, and land reforms. She encouraged the formation of Co-operative Society of Palm Growers and exhorted them to use palm juice for making gur instead of liquor. It was because of her efforts that the oppressive Muthadari system was abolished.

By conferring on Malati Devi Choudhuri the Jamnalal Bajaj Award for outstanding contribution in the field of development & welfare of women and children, the Trustees of the Foundation feel privileged to recognise her selfless service, sacrifice and self-denial for the benefit of the women and children of Orissa.

