



## **MS. SHAKUNTALADEVI CHOUDHARY**

**Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare of Women and Children - 2010**

Born: June 25, 1920

At the age of 89, Shakuntala Choudhary respectfully known as 'Didi', is one of the senior most personalities in the Gandhian fraternity of Assam. Even as a student, she was popular taking part in social activities during the Freedom Movement.

Responding to invitation of Amalprava Das, she joined her in 1947 to run the office of the Assam branch of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT) and to assist in setting up the Kasturba Gram Sevika Vidyalaya at Sarania, known as Sarnia Ashram in Guwahati.

She also served the Vidyalaya as one of the senior instructors. The Vidyalaya has been instrumental in training large number of Gram Sevikas. In 1953, Amalprava Das passed on to her the responsibility of the office of the Prainidhi of the Assam Branch of KGNMT. After putting in unstinted efforts for twenty long years Shakuntaladevi passed on the responsibility to another colleague though she continues to remain associated with the institution.

Sarania Ashram had the privilege of hosting Mahatma Gandhi whose cottage is maintained as a place of pilgrimage for locals and visitors.

This ashram has been training Gram Sevikas. At present there are 22 Gram Seva Centres spread over the whole of North East, including Arunachal Pradesh. Every centre has two to four Gram Sevikas serving the villagers. Nai Talim, Literacy, Balbadis, yarn Spinning and Weaving (Cotton and Silk Khadi) and Prakritik Chikitsa are the main activities.

Under the leadership of Shakuntala Baideo, the Centres have been busy, for over 20 years now, diffusing tension in the whole of insurgency-prone area of the North East.

She accompanied Vinobaji throughout his tour of Assam. The workers of the Trust and Sarvodaya Mandal, working under her guidance, obtained more than 1600 Gramdans of which 312 have been legally recognized by the Government.

Vinobaji founded Maitri Ashram on the Assam Arunachal border. In addition to extending friendship within and outside Assam, Maitri Ashram, under her leadership have been holding camps and seminars for propagation of Non-violence and peace.

At the time of Chinese aggression in 1962, Shakuntala Baideo organized Shanti Sena activities on the international borders of the North-East. More than 40 Peace Centre were established.

In 1973, Shakuntala Baideo took up Mahila Padayatra in Assam. She took part in "Go Hatya Nivaran Movement" in Bengal in 1978 and was arrested. She is a Trustee of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, Sarvodaya Trust, Convenor of Stri Shakti Jagran Samiti and Yuwak Maitri Samaj, Treasurer of People Forum against Drug, Violence and Social injustice.

Shakuntala Baideo made significant contribution during the communal conflagration in 2008 in Udalguri district of Assam. It was a very serious development where 30 persons were killed and thousands fled from their homes and took refuge in relief camps. She led a group of gram sevikas of KGNMT, Assam to build a climate of peace and harmony in the area. Two peace camps were

established at her instance where two sevikas each camped for nearly five months and went from village to village and home to home in providing solace and relief and promoting goodwill.

Shakuntala Baideos' 62 yearlong self-effacing and silent works in the field of development of women and children has made and continues to make an exemplary difference.

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