



AMAL PRAVA DAS

A Voice for the Vulnerables

“Like Gandhiji she fought a crusade against all social evils....A great humanitarian, a true Gandhian, a rare gem of Indian womanhood, she passed away on 30th December 1994.”

During its transitional stage from colonial underdevelopment to a modern society with a vision for the future, the history of Assam witnessed the undaunting efforts of a few intrepid women who led the masses from the front, but remained with them all along, not just with a utopian ideology but with a concrete programme to translate this dream into reality. A life-long celibate, Amalprava Das is such a true leader of the masses, with a rare personality imbued with the teachings of great men and women of ancient India, also shining bright with her uncommon talent and the nobility of her character. Srimati Das was born on 12th November, 1911 at Tekelagaon (now Mohanghat) in Dibrugarh, Assam. Her father late Harekrishna Das, was a well known surgeon and her mother late Hemaprava Das, an eminent social worker, was a pioneer in women's education in Assam. Amalprava was their second child, the elder being Dr. Tilottama Rai Chowdhury. After passing the Entrance Examination she decided to study Intermediate Course in Science in Cotton College, Guwahati. Mr Thomson,

the then Principal of Cotton College denied admission to her, as he was not in favour of co-education. With much disappointment she proceeded to Calcutta, passed Inter Science Examination securing First Division, in 1929. Thereafter, she enrolled herself in B.Sc. course, in Benaras Hindu University. But, due to the 'Salt Law Violation Movement' in 1930 and political unrest in the country the University was closed sine die and she had to return to Guwahati. At this juncture, she took active part in the freedom movement as a volunteer. It was sometime during this year that she along with her mother left for Warddha to learn about constructive programmes and acquire practical knowledge on crafts like extraction of edible oil, making of 'Magan Chulla', making of soap paper, sugar, etc. After undergoing basic training in village industries she returned to Assam and alongwith her parents started a production centre at Sarania Hill, the place where Kasurba Ashram is now located.

In 1933, Amalprava Das passed B.Sc examination with Distinction and joined the M.Sc classes in Applied Chemistry in the Calcutta University Science College. She earned the distinction of being the first lady from Assam to secure the M.Sc degree from the prestigious Calcutta University.

Gentle and polite by nature this noble lady completely followed the ideals of Gandhiji and Vinobaji. Because of her selfless service and sacrifice, she was adored as a leader of the common people. Always clad in self woven khadi mekhla chadar, she had been an inspiring force in the field of social activities, not only in Assam but in the entire country. She joined the Satyagraha Movement in 1940-41, Quit India Movement in 1942 and was arrested on 27th January 1943. She was imprisoned with prominent workers like late Chandra Prabha Saikiani and others. On 15th January 1945 her mother Hemaprava Das passed away suddenly and the production-cum-training centre and the entire property at Sarania Hill top was donated to Kasturba Memorial Trust by her father, late Harekrishna Das. Amalprava Das was entrusted with the responsibility of managing the activities of the trust. She rendered great service during the earthquake in 1950. Acharya Vinobaji, the great social reformer was on a padayatra to Assam in 1961 for one and a half years and all through the tour Srimati Das translated his lectures into Assamese in every meeting.

In 1955, the Govt. of India offered her the prestigious 'Padma Bibhushan' award in recognition of her service to the society. With all humility she declined to accept the honour and wrote to the then Prime Minister Pandit J. Nehru, "Thank you for the honour conferred on me but I am unable to accept it because I fear, it may make me feel proud. I hope you will excuse me". In 1982 she was again offered the 'Jamnalal Bajaj Award', a national award for outstanding work in the sphere of social service. It is worth mentioning that the prize money of rupees one lakh was distributed among seven Sarvodaya organizations of Assam by her.

A postgraduate in science, this distinguished woman has successfully combined science with spirituality in her life and thus proved true to the wise saying of Vinobaji "Brahma

Satyam, Jagat Sphurty, Jibanam Satya Sadhanam". Like Gandhiji she fought a crusade against all social evils. With blessings from Bapu and Baba (Vinobaji) she devoted her life to social activities serving in different capacities such as Director, Advisor and Principal of different social organizations and institutions.

A great humanitarian, a true Gandhian, a rare gem of Indian womanhood, she passed away on 30th December 1994. By virtue of her able guidance, efficient administration, enthusiasm and charming behavior she won the hearts of the masses. We strongly believe and hope that this illustrious woman would inspire the new generation to work for the creation of a regenerated India as dreamt by Gandhiji. □□