



SUNITI BARUA

Empowered Womanhood

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A woman of substance does not have to be empowered by some body else, because she knows that the essence of empowerment lies in herself. This is the motto of life for Suniti Barua.

A versatile and spunky old lady is Suniti Barua who is all of 82 years of age. Indeed it will not be wrong to say that she is 82 years young! Her sparkling eyes and enthusiasm are enough to inspire any young woman who wishes to be an entrepreneur. Born in 1928 at Sivasagar on 28th of February, she had three sisters and one brother. Her father was into contracts while her mother was a school teacher in Phuleswari School. Her parents' names were Mithiram Gohain and Xorumoni Gohain.

Suniti Barua recalls the stories she used to hear of her mother, who had studied in Mission School in Nagaon. Her mother had to use all forms of transport sometimes even walking part of the way, riding on bullock carts to reach Nagaon. The village people did not eat at her mother's childhood home as the school was a Christian school. Suniti Barua's schooling was done at Phuleswari School where her mother was a

teacher. Her main inspiration was her mother who, she recalls, never allowed her to sit idly or sleep in the afternoons. They were given pieces to embroider, sew or knit. In short, the skill and dexterity which she displays even now were fine-tuned in that stage itself. From her father who was a stylish man himself, she learnt to attend meetings to which he took her. He was heavily involved in the freedom movement and was even a recipient of *tamrapatra* and imprisoned in Jorhat Jail at one time.

In 1944, she got married to Rabindranath Barua, who was a teacher by profession. She was just 15-16 years old at that time. However, in 1968, she was left totally bereaved at the sad demise of her husband who was Principal of a govt school at that time. A young mother of four children, two girls and two boys, Ms Barua shifted to Guwahati in 1970, primarily for her children's education. When her son became an engineer, the family shifted to the quarters of the Assam Engineering College. Her leadership qualities came to the fore when she started a Mahila organization and a school with teachers among the women themselves. However after a few years she shifted to a rented house in Kahilipara and the Madhuban Mahila Samiti was born under her initiative. She joined exhibitions and became the President of Rodali Sangha. However, it was in her flat at Zoo Road, her present address, that she finally found her moorings. She started the Triveni Sangha, was its President and now its advisor.

In 1994, she was selected as the Vice President of NEWEA (North East Women Entrepreneurs Association) and after six months became its president. She continued to be its President till 2002. In the intervening years, she joined many exhibitions, where her products were in high demand. In 1999, in the International Trade Fair, her group won the TECHMART award (2nd prize). A social organization called Abhijatri was started in 1998 in which she was Treasurer for 5 years while she was primarily instrumental in opening of the Guwahati branch of NEWEA in 2005.

At 82, this sprightly lady still embroiders and takes orders. She stays alone but is never lonely. May her tribe increase.□□