

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Name:** Annapoorna MAHRANA (né Choudhury) **Date of Birth:** November 3, 1917

**Nationality:** Indian

**Father:** Late Gopabandhu Choudhury

**Mother:** Late Rama Devi Choudhury

**Husband:** Late Sarat Chandra Maharana

### **Awards and Recognitions :**

1. D. Litt (HC), Utkal University.
2. Sarala Puraskar (Prize), Literary Award in Oriya Literature, for Autobiography, *Amruta Anubhabha*.
3. Felicitation by the President of India for her participation in Independence Movement (60 years of Quit India Movement).
4. Utkala Ratna (Jewel of Orissa), Utkal Sahitya Samaj.
5. International Rotary Award, For her Life time social services.
6. Diwali Ben Charitable Trust, Mumbai, for Life time social service.
7. Radhanath Rath Foundation Award, For Life time achievement.
8. Dinabandhu Sahu Foundation Award, For social service.
9. Ravenshaw College Felicitation and Award.

**Permanent Address:**

Utkal Gandhi Smarak Nidhi  
Bakharabad  
CUTTACK - 2, INDIA

**PROFILE OF Smt ANNAPOORNA MAHARANA**

Annapoorna Maharana (né Choudhury) was born on November 3, 1917 as the *second* child of Smt. Rama Devi Choudhury and Sri Gopabandhu Choudhury in Cuttack. She was *not* sent to any school as the parents *strictly* followed Mahatma Gandhi's advice of not giving education to children in Government Institutions. She had her education at home and in **Ashrams**. She was for a year in *Alaka Ashram* near Jagatsinghpur with her elder brother Manmohan Choudhury and her parents and other distinguished patriots of Orissa. She memorized the entire Bhagvat Geeta at the age of twelve. She took active part in *picketing* at the liquor shops and stores sailing foreign clothes and collected donations for nonviolent resistance movements carried out by Indian National Congress. All members of her family, except the old grandmother Padmavati Devi, were imprisoned in 1930-32.

She accompanied Mahatma Gandhi in his historic Harijan Pada Yatra (Foot March) from Puri to Bhadrak, in 1934 with her mother, father and brother.

She spent approximately five years (from August 13, 1934) with her mother, father, brother, young girls and women volunteers at **Sevagarh Ashram** in the perennial flood affected area of Bari in the undivided district of Cuttack.

She received teachers training in Basic National Education for about 4 and half months in Wardha in 1938 under the (All India) Hindustani Talimi Sangh. She lived in Veera Narasinghapur in Puri district for about 18 months to carry out con-

structive works as formulated by Gandhiji.

She married Shri Sarat Chandra Maharana, an eminent educationalist, in 1942.

She organized the 'Shanti Sena' and 'Marana Sena' in the Bari area soon after the arrest and imprisonment of all well known Congress leaders in the wake of the **Quit India** movement of 1942. She was in face to face with the armed police force along with a large number of villagers on 26.9.1942 at Kalamatia in Cuttack district where *four* persons were killed by the police firing and several others were injured. She protested against the imposition of punitive taxes at Bari and three other villages in the aftermath of Kalamatia firing.

She was detained as a security prisoner (kept jailed without proper trial) in the Cuttack jail for two years, from 29.9.1942 and was arrested and jailed again as a political convict for 4 months for violating an externment order in 1944.

She participated whole heartedly in Vinobaji's Bhoodan-Gramdan movements from its inception in Orissa. She took a leading role in the Sarvodaya movement.

She has translated many original writings of Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba, Naraharibhai Parikh from Hindi to Oriya. She is a prolific writer and her writings have been published in Oriya periodicals and magazines of repute.

She has rendered valuable services as a volunteer relief worker at the time of distress and natural calamities such as famine in Kalahandi (on several occasions) flood and cyclones whenever it has hit Orissa and in border of East Pakistan ( now Bangladesh) in 1971 during the exodus of refugees to India. She worked as a nonviolent peace keeper during the communal riots in Rourkela, 1964 and undertook extensive Pa-dayatra in the Chambal Valley to persuade dacoits to surrender arms and to change their hearts. She was a member of the teaching staff at the Shanti Sena Vidyalaya at Varanasi to train volunteers for Sarvodaya works. She is a trustee of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust since 1986 and has been associated with the trust since it undertook various programmes in Orissa.

She has provided valuable facts to several research scholars (especially ladies) who

have been carrying out extensive studies on the Independence movements in Orissa. Several of them have used these sources for their M. Phil and Ph.D. degrees.

She has devoted a lot of her energy for education and social transformation of Adivasis in Orissa, especially in Raygada. One of the major achievements of her works in Raygada is the establishment of a school for Adivasi children where they study and learn to do productive work so that they grow up with self-confidence to become exemplary citizens of the country.

She has received numerous recognitions and awards. Notable among them are D. Litt. (HC) from Utkal University, the coveted Sarala Puraskar (Prize) for her autobiography, Diwali Ben Charitable Trust Award and the award of the International Rotarians. She has two sons both of whom are professors of physics.

## SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ANNAPOORNA MAHARANA

Annapoorna Maharana (né Choudhury), born on 3rd November 1917 was the second child of Shri Gopabandhu Choudhury and Smt Rama Devi. The Choudhury family was famous for their aristocracy, wealth and her grand father, Gokulananda Choudhury, was a famous lawyer and politically powerful person. Annapoorna's mother came from the most renowned family of Orissa. Rama Devi was second daughter of Gopalballav Das and niece of the legendary Utkal Gaurab Madhusudhan Das, the architect of modern Orissa. Gopabandhu was an outstanding student. Barely within a few months of Gopabandhu's marriage Rama lost her father and very soon he lost his father too. Subsequently, he joined the civil service of the 'Empire' looking forward to a very successful and prosperous career ahead as used to be the ambitions of the elite families of the society in that era. However, Gopabandhu could not go against his own conscience and decided to resign from the Government service; already his younger brother Nabakrushna had given up his college career following the calls of Mahatma Gandhi to join the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921. Nabakrushna went on to become a leader of Congress, founding member of Congress socialist Party, Chief Minister of Orissa and eventually dedicating his life to Sarvodaya movement.

Annapoorna, who was to be brought as a girl of aristocratic affluent family of Orissa, had to be molded differently as per the decisions of Gopabandhu to quit his job abruptly. He decided to change the attitude and life style of his own family before plunging into freedom movement.

The first step was to adopt the Gandhian way of life and practice what you preach. The son, Manmohan and daughter, Annapoorna were **not** sent to any school for education and their education for future was charted out by Gopabandhu. The two children learnt at home what every child learns at school. However, the real education was to prepare them mentally and physically to face the hard struggle that was awaiting them.

The Choudhury family underwent a cultural and social transformation when Nabakrushna

married Malati (Sen) whom she met at Santi Niketan. Malati came from a very elite Bramho aristocratic family and had grown up at Santiniketan and was a favourite pupil of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. She was an excellent player of Beena, was exponent of Rabindra Sangeet and trained as a dancer by Gurudev.

Manmohan and Annapoorna could explore new horizons in culture, art and music. Annapoorna already had a good training of Sitar and vocal music under Ustad Khanu Mian and now she adapted to Rabindra Sangeet. Thus the children of Choudhury's were brought up in the confluence of Tagore's cultural heritage and Ganghiji's spiritual and moral values. The brother and sister have amply demonstrated their commitments to Gandhian way of life through their deeds and their aesthetic senses and contributions to creative writings.

When they moved to Alaka Ashram near Jagatsinghpur she disciplined herself to Ashram way of life, spinning with Charkha, participating in social work and assisting freedom fighter in their revolutionary works. She memorized the entire Bhagvat Geeta at the age of twelve and she had very enchanting voice.

She participated in picketing when the movement, persuading customers to boycott liquors and foreign goods. Scores of young boys deserted schools to participate in the movement and they were called 'Banara Sena'. It is during the salt Satyagraha that Annapoorna tasted the prison life of the British India when she was detained for illegally selling salt made from the Bay of Bengal, although this hospitality was very short lived.

She participated in the Historic Harijan Pada Yatra of Gandhiji when Bapu marched from Puri to Bhadrak. Gopabandhu, Rama Devi, Manmohan, Annapoorna and a number of freedom fighters accompanied Gandhiji during this march. It not just a foot march; it was a message to be spread among the masses for social reform, for hygiene and to prepare themselves for the forthcoming freedom movement. Gandhiji advised that all his followers should spread out in the country to serve the villages and undertake constructive works such as Khadi, village sanitation, social reforms like

removing untouchability and so on. An amusing anecdote about meeting of Mahatma Gandhi with mother of Gopabandhu Choudhury, Padmavati, is Worth mentioning: Gandhiji used to collect cash and jeweleries as domination for his movement and in 1934 he asked for some donations from Padmavati. The witty grand old lady replied in Oriya ” I have donated my two sons, daughter-in-laws and grand children to you already, what more is left to be donated to you ?”. Needless to say that during 1932-34 movements entire Choudhury family had been imprisoned one time or another.

Gopabandhu, Rama Devi and Annapoorna, in 1934 together with several freedom fighters, lady volunteers and young girls decided to set up the Seva Ghar Ashram at Bari in the undivided Cuttack district. Manmohan came to Bari subsequently. Bari is tormented by devastating flood every year by the three rivers, Kharashrota, Bramhani and Birupa. Gopabandhu visited Bari when he was a second officer (posted at Jajpur) during one of those menacing floods and then refused to write a toned down report of the calamity when his superior pressurized him. Subsequently, he resigned from his service.

Now they started a new phase of their life, living under very trying conditions and their life style was at the same level as the lowest economic strata of people in Bari. Their dedicated work was not accepted in every sphere of the society since untouchability and other social evils were pervading. The villagers of Bari and surrounding areas began to understand the ideology behind all the constructive works and the essence of the Gandhian philosophy. Subsequently, Seva Ghar became a hub for the freedom movement and Gandhiji’s constructive programmes.

Annapoorna was very active in many fronts. She took part in visiting Harijan localities and educating them, worked among the women and took part in Basic Education. She came in personal contact with Gandhiji and subsequently, she accompanied her father on many occasions to Sevagram, Wardha, to meet Gandhiji. She spent four and half months at Wardha as a teacher trainee in the programme for Basic National Education in 1938 under the All India Hindustani Talimi Sangh. She was in charge of

a school near Bari after she returned from Wardha. The five years she spent at Bari, from 1934, had its effect since a large number of freedom fighters, men and women joined the Independence struggle in subsequent years. She went and lived in Veera Narasinghapur, in Puri district, under the influence of Acharya Harihar Dash for 18 months from 1939 where her focus was on constructive work and social reform.

Annapoorna Choudhury and Sarat Chandra Maharana were married in March 1942 at Bari. The marriage was solemnized by Acharya Harihar Dash. It was an unique event by the social standard of that era. Annapoorna came from the background mentioned earlier. Sarat Chandra was the youngest son of famous literary giant Chandra Mohan Maharana. They belonged to different castes. Sarat Chandra was a brilliant educationist who started his career in the Education Department and had come to Ramachandrapur, near Bari, when Basic Education was initiated there. He also went to Wardha for the training in Basic Education. He resigned his Government job when the Government decided to close down the education system. The wedding was very solemn and simple. The bride and groom walked from Bari to Ramachandrapur after the ceremony was over.

They started their new life together at Ramachandrapur. However, Gandhiji had already started thinking of the next and final step of the freedom movement. The Congress workers had already sensed that the future was holding some exciting actions out there. All the important leaders were arrested after Gandhiji gave the clarion call **Do or Die** in August 1942. Every Congress worker took his own decision since the apex leadership was behind the prison.

Annapoorna organised 'Shanti Sena' and 'Maran Sena' in that region. So was the spirit and mood of the mass that they declared themselves independent which was the case in many part of the country. In the village Kaipada, about 6km from Ramachandrapur, the freedom fighters took siege of the post office, burnt some papers, hoisted the tricolour and declared the independence. A platoon of armed police was sent from Jajpur under the command of an officer to 'regain' the lost territory. On

arrival, they searched some houses and arrested a few people and decided to return to Jajpur with the captured prisoners. Next day, August 26, 1942, was the 'Rakhi Purnima' which turned out to be the day for playing Holi with blood.

When news reached Ramachandrapur that the police has arrested some of these people at Kaipada, some of the members of 'Sena' went in the direction of Kaipada. Annapoorna went towards Kaipada accompanied by one person and a young lad. However, she was told on the way that Police was already going back to Jajpur with the prisoners and will board the boat which was moored near Kalamatia. Annapoorna briskly walked towards the water logged paddy field and saw a crowd and later heard gun shots. On approaching the scene of violence she found one person was lying on a pool of blood oozing from his chest. She tore apart her Sari and tried to bandage the wound but Mayadhar Bhuyan passed away very soon. This was display of supreme courage, as a woman alone faced armed forces who had already killed four unarmed persons without any provocations and has boycotted many.

What followed the aftermath of Kalamatia firing was tyranny. Government sent armed forces, imposed punitive taxes and arrested people arbitrarily. Both Annapoorna and Sarat Chandra protested against these action. They were both arrested. Annapoorna was detained as a security prisoner (without trial) at Cuttack jail for two years from September 2, 1942 and he was sent to Berhampur jail. Annapoorna was detained for **two years**. When she was released in 1944, she was again convicted and sentenced for **4 months** prison term for violating the externment order. Finally the 'couple' were united after being separated for almost two and half years. Annapoorna went to spend a few months in Seva Gram with Gandhiji.

Gandhiji had foreseen that India will win independence when the Second World War comes to an end. He was asking whether India was ready for the forthcoming freedom. He sent a message to all his followers to go back to villages. He advised that each one should choose a village and adopt a way of life according to Gandhian principles and earn his living with his own labour. The life style should set an example to the

common man to follow Gandhian ways. Thus, a large number of his followers, who decided not participate in elections and hold elected office, spread out to these villages. Gopabandhu, Rama Devi, Manmohan and his wife Sumitra chose to return to Bari; whereas Annapoorna and Sarat Chandra decided to live in Ramachandrapur. He put all his efforts to reorganize the Basic Education and she was involved in the training programmes of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. The KGNM Trust was set up after Kasturba passed away in the Aga Khan Palace when she was imprisoned along with Gandhiji and Mahadev Desai at the onset of 'Quit India' movement. The principal goal of the Trust was to serve Women and Children. In order to achieve this objective a large number of women volunteers were required and they needed suitable training. In those days it was not easy for a woman to take part in social work. Moreover, widows were harassed and tormented in the society. The Trust undertook the monumental task of social service and reforms especially focused on women and children. Every year scores of women, some very young widows, joined the training programme. A large number of the worker of the Trust dedicated rest of their lives following the ideals of Gandhiji and Kasturba and went to serve in Adivasi areas of Orissa. Annapoorna has played a very important role in organizing activities of the Trust ever since the activities started in Orissa. She has been a Trustee of the KGNM Trust since 1986.

Both Sarat Chandra and Annapoorna adhered to the principles of Gandhiji. When Vinobaji launched Bhoodan Movement, Sarat Chandra took the responsibility of organizing the activities in Orissa as the Secretary. Annapoorna was left behind at Ramachandrapur with two sons. She also became bread earning member to raise the family since her husband had joined the movement which paid only adequate amount for his maintenance. She undertook translations of Vinobaji's writing, speeches from Hindi to Oriya which were published in periodicals. She led a very austier life during these years. Moreover, the couple had decided to educate their children according to the tenets of Basic Education and they were sent to the school at Ramachandrapur.

However, she would undertake Bhoodan Pada Yatra from time to time leaving the two children under the care of her sister-in-law, Sumitra Choudhury.

Generally, this phase of her life has not been highlighted by biographers. It was a period when she raised two children leading a modest life style by choice and yet contributing a lot to nonviolent peaceful revolution which was aimed at fundamental changes in social structure and inculcate spiritual values.

She was invited to teach at the Shanti Sena Vidyalaya in Varanasi where Sarva Seva Sangh had set up a training center to educate young people on the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence and to resolve social problems and disturbances through nonviolent means. Therefore, these Shanti Sainiks would risk their lives if communal riots broke out and make every efforts to save lives of innocent women and children. Moreover, they will undertake missions to restore about peace and Harmony. There have been numerous examples where Shanti Sainiks have risked their lives. Annapoorna herself took a leading role in restoration of peace when a communal riot had broken out in Rourkela, Orissa, in 1964. Moreover, she undertook Pada Yatra in the Chambal valley along with other Sarvodaya worker in the dacoit infested areas spreading the words of Gandhiji and Vinobaji. As is well known several of the gangs of Chambal valley surrendered to Vinobaji and to Jayaprakash Narayan and renounced the path of violence.

When the children grew up and were capable of taking care of themselves, Annapoorna indulged in the Gramdan and Sarvodaya movements more vigorously. She undertook Pada Yatra in Adivasi areas of Orissa and went to other states to join Vinobaji.

Kalahandi district of Orissa was very severely affected by drought in 1966 when a number of people died due to starvation. She was involved in relief and rehabilitation works which was undertaken by Sarvodaya Relief Committee and KGNM Trust. Several young girls were orphaned and the Center of KGNM Trust at Satyabhamapur (birth place of Madhusudan Das) took care of them. These girls were educated, given vocational training and later lived a dignified life in the society.

Annapoorna was accompanying her aged mother Rama Devi like a shadow wherever she went on whatever missions. One of the most trying time came when signs of instability became manifest in Pakistan due to the turn of the events. People of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) initiated struggles for their independence. A very large number of refugees fled to India and it became a burden for India on its boarder states. Not only these refugees are to be provided food and shelter but the large number of people suffering from malnutrition and diseases are to be cared for.

Rama Devi and Annapoorna proceeded to West Dinajpur district, West Bangal, accompanied by Sarat Chandra and several volunteers of Sarvodaya Relief Committee and KGNM Trust. Their dedicated service and hard works earned tem the love and affections of not only the refugees but also the local inhabitants. No sooner Bangadesh war was over than a devastating cyclone struck coastal districts of Orissa. It created havoc killing thousands, leaving hundreds of villages marooned with no place for habitations. The same group of people who were in West Dinajpur moved swiftly to undertake responsibilities for cremation of the dead, treatments of the villagers and rehabilitation. Funds poured in from all over India for relief work and for reconstruction of houses for those who had no means to build one. The entire group worked relentlessly.

One of the salient features Annapoorna's character has been to adhere to certain basic principles in life. She is willing to take all risks, even to stake life, to confront injustice, to struggle for freedom and to stand by the side of the oppressed. It is amply demonstrated in her activities, be it in riot infested town or for the poor Adivasis in tribal belts of Orissa. She has devoted a lot of her time for constructive works in Kalahandi, Koraput, Raygada and elsewhere. She was very deeply involved in a Khadi programme in Kalahandi which enables Adivasis to be come self-sufficient and earn their livings.

She was instrumental in setting up a school for Advasi children near Raygada where the boys and girls undergo education as well as some vocational training in order to

become self-sufficient. This school has made a tremendous impact in the sense that, otherwise deprived, girls have received good education contributing a lot to social upliftment and social reforms. This school has been recognized by many as a model institution.

Annapoorna has enriched Oriya literature considerably. She has translated several book of Gandhiji, Vinobaji, Naraharibhai Parikh from Hindi to Oriya thus making Gandhian philosophy and literature accessible to a large section of Oriyas. Moreover, her writing pertaining to nonviolence, freedom movements, Sarvodaya philosophy have appeared in Oriya periodicals and magazines.

The autobiography of Annapoorna **Amruta Anubhava** is written in a lucid style giving a panoramic view of the hierarchies in the society those days. She has presented freedom movement a vivid picture of the movement and narrated of the important events which she witnessed from very close quarters. Furthermore, the books serves as a tribute to a large number of freedom fighters who contributed to the struggle sacrificing their life and careers. This book has been awarded one of the most prestigious prize of Oriya literature: The Sarala Puraskar.

Smt Annapoorna Maharana is ninety. The edifice of her life is built on four fundamental principles *Ahimsa, Satya, Prem and Karuna*. She continues to be active in many ways in spite of her frail health and is widely loved and respected.