Nripen Chakraborty — A highly adored leader

By Fulan Bhattacharji

The grand old man of Tripura political scene is no more. But he is fondly remembered for the service he rendered to the people as the chief minister of Tripura. He drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi to plunge into freedom struggle. The author outlines his eventful political life spanning over seven decades.

Most colourful, active and debated personality of the political arena of Tripura is no more. His dauntless approach enriched the political environment of the state. At the same time it also aroused many a controversy.

Having been blessed to be a witness of hundred summers, he had the rare distinction of witnessing all the ups and downs of the 20th century. The devastating effects of two world wars and the sufferings through British subordination had prevailed during his days of adolescence and youth. The great Irish revolutionary Develera's life and work motivated him to dream. But the inspiration and strength to dedicate himself for freedom movement came from Mahatma Gandhi. The great Dandi Aviyan (campaign) prompted him to leave the college and take part in satyagrah. Prior to that, he joined “Abhoy Ashram” at Comilla - the common address of the Gandhian revolutionaries during their preparatory stage.

A towering personality in Tripura politics, Chakraborty was the leader who shaped the political history of the state, which joined the Indian Union in October 1949.

Chakraborty, who was the Chief Minister of Tripura from 1978 to 1988, was expelled by the CPI (M) on April 13, 1995 for open criticism of the party and its government in West Bengal and the then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu.

A man with a Spartan lifestyle and unblemished political career, he was held in high respect by all irrespective of their political ideologies. After he relinquished the office of Chief Minister in 1988, a small room in MLA hostel was his abode.

Resolute, sensitive and sometimes defiant, Chakraborty was often dubbed as a conservative Communist who was never afraid of paying the price for calling a spade a spade. But he was also a man of sparkling wit and humor.

Nripendralal alias Nasha was the ninth son of Rajkumar Chakraborty and Uttamsundari Devi. Born into a well-educated family of Bikrampur under Dhaka district (now Bangladesh) on April 4, 1905, he passed entrance examination from Outsahi High School in first division in 1925.

But his quest for a ‘better world order’ brought him in touch with extremist leftist leader Smritis Banerjee in 1932 and he joined the Communist party in 1935 before joining trade union movement.

Mr. Chakraborty’s chequered and eventful political career spanning seven decades saw him as a jute mill worker, a revolutionary in hiding, a sub-editor in Ananda Bazar Patrika, a Marxist teacher among tribals in remote hills, and Chief Minister who commanded highest esteem.

Fluent in tribal language ‘Kokborok’ Nripen Chakraborty, known among the hill people as ‘Jagat-da’, was the most popular leader both among tribals and non-tribals.

Mr Chakraborty also evinced great interest in literature, philosophy, economics and history. He was even interested in gardening, child psychology and cooking.

He was a regular columnist in the state party organ ‘Daily Deser Katha’ before his expulsion from the party where he often used a pen name ‘Arup Roy’.
The respect he enjoyed can be gauged from a bizarre incident when a south Indian youth sent a letter to Mr Chakraborty written in his blood to pay tributes to the leader.

VILLAGE SWARAJ

My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Thus, every village's first concern will be to grow its own crops, and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, thus excluding ganja, tobacco, opium and the like. The villages will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final Basic course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of Satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. There will be a compulsory service of village guards who will be selected by rotation from the register maintained by the village.

(Extracts from "The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, pg 374-75)