

# LOK SABHA DEBATES

## LOK SABHA

Monday, March 6, 2000/Phalguna 16, 1921 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock.*

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

[English]

### OBITUARY REFERENCE

MR. SPEAKER : Hon. Members, it is my sad duty to inform the House of the sudden demise of one of our esteemed colleagues Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee popularly known as "Geeta Didi".

Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee was a sitting member of Lok Sabha representing Panskura Parliamentary Constituency of West Bengal from Seventh to Thirteenth Lok Sabha continuously from 1980 till her death.

Shrimati Mukherjee had been a member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly from 1967 to 1977.

A devoted social and political worker, Shrimati Mukherjee started her political career as General Secretary, West Bengal Students Federation. During her membership of Lok Sabha she served as member of Panel of Chairmen in Lok Sabha and also as member of various parliamentary committees namely Committee on Public Undertakings, Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Joint Committee on Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 1990, House Committee, General Purposes Committee, Consultative Committee on Ministry of Information and Broadcasting etc. She also served as Chairperson of Joint Committee on Constitution (81st Amendment) Bill, 1996 providing for reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies and Joint Committee on Offices of Profit.

As an active member of Lok Sabha, she always stood for the cause of welfare of the poor, the downtrodden and the weaker sections of the society. She was always in the forefront for the empowerment of women. Her crusading endeavours have culminated in a broad consensus for giving reservation to womenfolk in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

An experienced parliamentarian, she always actively participated in the proceedings related to national and international issues.

She took keen interest in literature and authored a few books namely 'Bharat Upakatha', 'Chotader Rabindranath', 'He Atit Katha Kao' in Bengali. She contributed regularly to various newspapers and weeklies. She also served as member of 'Press Council' and 'Court of Vishwa Bharati', National Commission on Rural Labour, National Commission on Women and National Children's Board.

A widely travelled person, she was a Secretariat member of Women's International Democratic Federation, Berlin, 1958.

Shrimati Mukherjee passed away on 4 March, 2000 at New Delhi at the age of 76.

We deeply mourn the loss of this friend and I am sure the House will join me in conveying our condolences to the bereaved family.

[Translation]

**THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE)** : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seems hard to believe that now we will not be able to meet Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee. Death is a hard and naked truth of life but we never expected that the cruel death would suddenly come, deceive us and snatch Geetaji away from us.

Her whole life passed in struggle. Her's was a fighting personality but alongwith fighting spirit she embedded in herself, a feelings of innocent live, and affection and also a firm resolve to stick to her beliefs. We continuously witnessed her presence in the House since 1980. Her sustained struggle for the cause of a common man outside the House always gave her a dignified place in the House. She always raised the fundamental issues which are very essential in our national life. What should be the form of post independence India, this idea always remained central to her and her party also and throughout the crests and turfs of her career she always remained committed and devoted to this aim and kept working tirelessly to achieve this objective. The sphere of her activities included certain ideal works such as the end of exploitation, discrimination and wish for the welfare of all etc. She played a significant role especially in empowering the women. She played a leading role over women reservation issue ever since it came to the fore, she was the chairperson of the parliamentary committee and raison'd'etre behind the presentation of unanimous report.

When, I after reverently bowing before her and paying floral tributes to her, I was coming out of her small room which was also a symbol of her personality. Living in small room and doing big deeds were the characteristics of her personality. The small room of Vithalbai Patel House had become a centre of attraction for the people. At that time a women asked me to give consent to the Women Reservation Bill. That bill is the property of the House. Her memory

is with us. Her vacant place in the House would be filled up but the hearts of the people which have become empty in her absence, would be hard to fill. I, on behalf of myself and my alliance and the entire House offer my humble tributes to her.

[English]

SHRIMATI SONIA GANDHI (AMETHI) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, I join the hon. Prime Minister in paying homage to our esteemed colleague Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee.

With the passing away of Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee, the country has lost a most respected figure in national politics and Parliament one of its most active, loved and admired Members.

Her dedication, her commitment, her personal integrity, her simplicity have been an inspiration to this House for the past 20 years. Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee, a petite figure, housed an indomitable spirit, a spirit of remarkable courage and determination evident even at an early age, when she participated in the struggle for the freedom, and she was even arrested and imprisoned several times. Her passionate belief in secularism, her crusade for social justice, for the alleviation of poverty, for women causes were the hallmark of her work, both in West Bengal where she served in the Legislative Assembly for ten years, and in Parliament later. The fact that she never lost an election is an eloquent tribute to the exemplary manner in which she served her party and her constituency.

But Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee's achievement as a Parliamentarian went much beyond her party and constituency for she made a lasting contribution to politics and society through the causes that she so ardently espoused. In the Eighties she was a nodal figure in getting the anti-dowry and anti-rape legislations passed by Parliament and more recently it was because of her drive and commitment that under her Chairpersonship, the Women Reservation Bill was prepared, I believe, in record time. Indeed, over the past two decades, Geetaji played a very crucial role in sensitising Parliament to issues concerning women. We bemoan Geeta Mukherjee passing. We shall miss her greatly. For 20 years, her presence here, in this Chamber was a constant reminder of the noble ideals and selfless service that politics should be driven by. This august House will never be the same without her.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you, I would like, on my behalf and on behalf of the Congress Party, to convey my condolences to her family and to the large number of her friends and admirers throughout the country, and the world.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (MIDNAPORE) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is difficult for me to speak. Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee was my sister, and all these many, many years that we have worked together I find it difficult to think of her only as a politician or a political leader or a political worker. She was

my sister. Her contributions and her achievements in public life, I leave to other Members to narrate, if they want to. I can only remember her as a person. She was a heart patient. She had a major heart operation a few years ago and only the other day we found out that the doctors were pressing her to go back into hospital for a proper check up and all that because she was not keeping well.

But, of course, she never listened to them. She never listened to them and we could not persuade her. So, this fatal disease overtook her when the time came.

Sir, I am grateful to you and to the House for the tributes that they are paying today to Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee. Everybody knows that she was an outstanding person. My party, of course, has suffered a grievous blow. The House also has suffered a grievous blow. But death is inevitable: none of us can escape it and, I think, we should all try our best to live up to the standards, which she set in this House. Most of the Members do not know about her activities outside. But, we, who are fellow workers in our party, know how the common people, and especially in the villages, in the rural areas, deeply loved her and how close she was to them. Whenever they were in need, whenever they were suffering, whenever they required, Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee was always there to help them.

Sir, we should try our best to follow the standards which she had set and, I am sure, the Members in this House will always respect and love her memories.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (BOLPUR) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is almost impossible to believe that Geetadi is no longer with us and that she would not be sitting here.

Sir, I believe she was Geetadi to everyone of us; cutting across party lines, she had endeared herself because of the affection with which she held everybody. Everybody knew her to be a crusader for the common people, for the active interest she took inside the outside the House for the emancipation of the common people of this country, the vulnerable section of our Society.

Sir, as we all know, she was an active participant in the proceedings of this House. Even on the last Friday, we were here together till 3.40 p.m. and she wanted to make submissions on what was happening in one of the States of our country. We have had the great privilege of working closely with her both within and outside the Parliament. She always had a special place in the hearts of the common people. The greatness of hers was that it was not only the people of her constituency or the people connected with the Left Movement that had access to her but everybody from all walks of life – people from different States and districts – used to go to her because she never refused anybody. Whenever she felt that some cause should be taken up, she fearlessly did so. That is why she won the hearts of the people.

We have lost a colleague who was passionately devoted to the cause of the working class. She exemplified the