

## AROTI DUTT (1924-2003)

The late Aroti Dutt said, “We, the Soroptimists, should try with our combined efforts to create some work or project which will live after us”. Her words continue to be the guiding spirit of SI Calcutta even today.

Born on 23 September 1924 to Satyendra Chandra Mitra, freedom fighter and politician, and Uma Mitra, Aroti was their only child. Married into an eminent family of social workers and reformers, Aroti entered the realm of social work at the age of 18. Soon, she took up the reins of Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association, started by her father-in-law Gurusaday Dutt ICS in memory of his wife Saroj Nalini Dutt, a pioneer in the movement for uplifting women.



A graduate from Calcutta University, Aroti majored in Philosophy. She won a scholarship for a Diploma course in International Social Welfare at the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague, The Netherlands. She received her Diploma in 1959 for her paper "Social Welfare Planning for Low-income Countries".

During a visit to London, Aroti fell ill, and was assisted by her kind hostess, who asked her to start a Soroptimist Club in Calcutta. Thus, SI Calcutta, the second Soroptimist club in India, was born. The club was chartered in October 1979 with Aroti as the Founder President.

The first endeavour of the club was Project 50 (now Society 50), conceived by 5 international organisations at the World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. A pilot project was initiated in 1981 with Aroti as the dedicated Committee Chair. The integrated programme of health, education and training in income-generating skills catering to women of 20 surrounding villages is still running successfully today.

In 1986, under her leadership, SI Calcutta became the first social service organization in West Bengal to gain entry to Alipore Presidency Jail, Kolkata. The Prison Project imparted vocational training to the non-criminal women inmates, preparing them for post-release rehabilitation. Counselling and legal assistance were also provided.

In 1989, Aroti Dutt was the initiator and first President of the National Association of Soroptimists of India. She also played a lead role in other eminent women's organisations in India and overseas:

- Founder President, Inner Wheel Club of India; Countrywomen's Association of India;
- World President, Associated Countrywomen of the World, and elected "Member of Honour" in 1983. She served on several Central and State Government Committees in India:
- Member, Central Social Welfare Board 1978–1980; West Bengal State Social Welfare Board 1988
- Chairman, Family Planning Association West Bengal;
- Patron, National Indian Association of Women;
- Vice-Chairman, Gurusaday Du. Folk Art Society, Gurusaday Museum;
- President, Sylhet Union; Bengal Bratachari Society - and several others.

Aroti wrote several books and articles. Her books include 'Bichitra Prithibi', 'Ajaanaa Manoosh' and 'Jibaner Nana Diganta' in Bengali and 'Over the Rainbow', a travelogue in English.

Aroti Dutt passed away in 2003. She continues to inspire and motivate all working for the social welfare and empowerment of women.