

A DETERMINED FIGHTER FOR THE COMMUNITY



TUPESHWARI DEVI
TB CHAMPION
GIRIDIH DISTRICT, JHARKHAND



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Tupeshwari prefers to keep to herself, but she is hard to miss. She has strong convictions and stands by them. Tupeshwari is the president of a local political party in Dumri block and is active in community work. She is the mother of two children who are 20 and 18 years old. Her husband runs a furniture business in Goa.



In 2012, Tupeshwari was diagnosed with TB. Initially, she had a cough and cold, and she consulted a private physician. He prescribed cough syrup, which she took for 15 days. As she continued to cough, she consulted another private doctor in Giridih. He asked her to get a chest X-ray but did not give her a clear diagnosis. But her health didn't improve. A few days later, Tupeshwari had a fever. "I was losing weight and felt weak. I did not know what to do. There was no one to help," Tupeshwari says. "My children supported me until my husband returned from Goa," she recollects.

Tupeshwari's condition worsened. She continued to go from one doctor to another, one of whom prescribed 23 injections and medicines for 15 days, which cost her Rs 5000, more than she could afford. Tupeshwari eventually went to the local PHC, where she was diagnosed with TB. "I usually prefer to go to private doctors, but this time I went to the PHC and took treatment for TB without a break," she says. She was declared cured after six months.

"The first time a doctor said I had TB, I felt terrible and started crying. The doctor said there was no need to worry and that I would be cured if I completed the course properly," Tupeshwari recollects. Tupeshwari's family was very reassuring. Her husband wanted to ensure that she was cured at any cost, even if it meant selling land to meet the treatment expenses. For over four months, he stayed with the family and gave her all the support and help she needed. "My husband tried to convince me that I would be cured, but I was sceptical as others in the family had died of TB. I was worried about what would happen to my children if I died," she says.

Today, Tupeshwari works as a TB Champion, having participated in a capacity-building workshop for TB survivors in 2018. She tries to help people in her area with early diagnoses. “I use the information I have to create awareness in the community. People will not die because of TB if they are diagnosed in time and take the medicines regularly,” she says. Tupeshwari is also determined to reduce stigma in the community. “People should not stop interacting with those affected by TB. The disease will not spread if the right precautions are taken,” she says emphatically.

As a member of both the state and district TB forums, she raises key issues affecting people with TB. In a social media campaign for Women’s Day, Tupeshwari said, “When I support one woman with TB, and she supports 20 others, especially women, this movement will grow, and more people who earlier felt stigmatised would then feel cared for.”