

SMT.DURGABAI DESHMUKH: THE REAL FOUNDER MEMBER OF ANDHRA MAHILA SABHA – AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Smt.Durgabai Deshmukh lives through the Institutions where she founded. They are many standing monuments which speaks about her multifaceted dynamic personality, organizational skills, persistence in efforts for optimum utilization of talents and resources. This is true of the institutions that she built up and nurtured for women's welfare. This research paper to highlights the establishment and functions of Andhra Mahila Sabha at Madras (AMS). Moreover, this AMS established many institutions like Vnitha Bala Vihar School, Sister Organizations, Built of Ladies hostel, Nursing homes for women for the empowerment and development of the women community.

Key Words: Andhra Mahila Sabha, Institution, Ladies Hostel, Social Work

Introduction

Smt.Durgabai, on the basis of her own work observes: "The path of service is long and unending and it is impossible for a social worker to draw a boundary line around every field of activity, and say thus far and no further. The *Little Ladies of Brindavan* of 1937 expanded itself to the dimensions of a huge complex of institutions as the AMS of today. A children's club flowered into *Sishu Vihar*, through school and colleges; a center originally set up for distribution of milk to pregnant women developed into Nursing homes, and mini hospitals on wheels and the same modest venture extended to the rehabilitation service to adults, who were orthopedically handicapped.

Building of Ladies Hostel

One more important activity started between 1940 A.D.-1942 A.D. was a hostel for women²³. Those who did pursue their studies through AMS staying in the hostels, later on became volunteer workers engaging themselves in *Sarvodaya* and welfare work.²⁴ The years 1940 A.D. 1942 A.D. were a bad period for the whole country. The clouds of the Second World War spread over the Indian sky and there were rumors that the enemy bombers might strike Madras city any day. This was a crucial period for the *Sabha* also. Majority of its members, in search of shelter, left Madras and scattered all over Andhra.¹

During the war time, *Andhra Mahila*, a monthly magazine was started in 1942 to bring all the scattered members in touch with one another and all of them with AMS. It was the brain child of Mr. Narayana Rao (Smt.Durgabai's brother). It was open to all members to know the voluntary work done

by AMS for the uplift of women and children. Shri Mallavarapu Visveswara Rao contributed to its growth. Women writers like Kanuparthi Varalakshamma, Sthanapathi Rukmanamma and Nayani KrishnaKumari enriched the pages of *Andhra Mahila* with their valuable contributions. It was a journal pertaining to women's problems run by women in the South. The journal also gave the news about the struggle for Independence. The success of the AMS resulted in increase of demand from adult and deserving of women for admission to the condensed courses women increased. Smt.Durgabai felt seriously the need for spacious accommodation.²

Construction Activities of AMS

In the post Second World War period, and with the advent of Independence and a large role Smt.Durgabai was in different involvements as Member of the Planning Commission, as first Chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board, etc. It was possible for Smt.Durgabai to enlarge the scope of work of AMS and to provide for its physical expansion. The basis for the institution is the praiseworthy philanthropy of affluent individuals, Maharajas and Maharanis, and the Government was attracted by the admirable qualities of Smt.Durgabai. She observed: "For capturing land after land, Ministers belonging to different parties and groups were responsible, to enlarge the first eight or nine grounds of land to campuses of more than 15 acres. Ministers Shri Kala Venkata Rao Seetharama Reddy, Sri Kamaraj and Sri Bhaktavatsalam of the Congress, Sri Annadurai, Sri Karunanidhi of the DMK, and Sri M.G. Ramachandran of the A.I.A.D.M.K.

They all joined hands to give land after land to the *Andhra Mahila Sabha*, Raja of Bobbili of the Justice party and the Maharaja of Pitwapuram of the People's Party enabled the AMS to construct the first buildings of its own, and the donors for construction of all other buildings were from different parties, castes, and communities along with the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Government of Andhra Pradesh. It is not known how many such examples are there in our country when all of different policies and programmes formed themselves into a united front to help the AMS grow from strength to ' strength. Charity had not dried up in our country.³

Growth of Andhra Mahila Sabha

Smt.Durgabai's presence in Delhi as a member of the Constituent Assembly and the Provisional Parliament facilitated the growth of the AMS in Madras in numerous ways. Sri Hare Krishna Mahatab, then the Minister In-Charge of Industries and Commerce in the Government of India gave a grant of Rs.75,000/- for the construction of a building for the industrial institute in Santhome and also Rs.40,000/- for buying equipment. Shri Abdul Quadir, then a top official of the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation in the Government of India helped in establishing the Industrial Institute on a firm basis in Madras. As the *Sabha's* activities increased Smt.Durgabai's expectations, and the organization were in dilemma as to which side, they should concentrate upon and develop. The Government of India instructed the State Government to give AMS more equipment that were needed for training the

women. The equipment consisted not only of tailoring, embroidery and sewing machines but also implements for starting carpentry and smithy, some parts of printing press, composing and book binding sections.

Formation of Sister's Organization

Smt.Durgabai felt that, the AMS should consolidate and stabilize its activities. So, the AMS decided to hand over the entire equipment in the Industrial section to other voluntary sister organizations in Madras viz., *Sree Seva Sadan* under the guidance of Smt. Addanki Sundara Amma. This proved to be a very good step indeed, for, with the dynamic leadership of Mrs. A.C. Krishna Rao (Chennaghant Amma), the *Sree Seva Mandir* developed into a mighty Institution, serving hundreds of women by training them in various crafts and trades for their employment.

Elevated the Kinder Garten in to School

In the Vidyamandir, the AMS began to help the neighbourhood slum dwellers. The *Sabha* made a small beginning for milk distribution in its own premises for children and expectant mothers of the neighbouring slums. The number of beneficiaries of the *Sabha* began to grow posing a problem to the organisers. The working women had problems in looking after their children. The *Sabha* decided to start a *creche* for the children which became known as *Nageswara Sisu Vihar*. It developed from a milk distribution center to a kinder garten, and later into a Tamil Medium School and stands as a worthy memorial to Desoddharaka Nageswara Rao Panthulu. It was founded in 1957 A.D. with the gift of the late Smt Kasinathuni Ramayamma and a grant from the Central Social Welfare Board. Smt.Durgabai entirely agreed with Gandhiji's and kept his ideal and proceeded with the work of fund raising on the guidelines provided by him.⁴

Foundation of Nursing Institution

The growth of the AMS has been spontaneous as seen through its evolution. As the public confidence in the AMS began to grow, some outside women requested the *Sabha* to take activities relating to health and maternity. By 1953 A.D. the Government readily came forward to help the AMS on every occasion. At first, the Government of Madras gave two grounds of land at Adayar and Philanthropic women donated money for the construction of the Nursing Home. The successive Chief Ministers like Sri Ramaswamy Reddiar, "Revenue Minister, Sri Kala Venkata Rao, and Sri H. Sitarama Reddy were greatly responsible for the extensive development of the Nursing Home Campus.

In its earlier stages of development, reliable, efficient, loyal social workers, doctors and nurses rendered their honorary service to Nursing Home. The Maternity and Nursing Home of the AMS in

Adayar, was a blessing to many poor people. In 1950 A.D., Smt.Durgabai was now and then away from Madras. As a member of the Constituent Assembly and provisional Parliament she was required to be in Delhi and her brother Mr. Narayana Rao was posted to Delhi as Superintendent in the Central Silk Board. Dr. Pavanabay, Smt. Channaghant Amma, and Dr. Ambuja Devi constituted the efficient trio for the initial working of the Nursing Home with encouragement of Smt. V. Lakshmi Parvathi.⁵

Introduction of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives courses

In 1949 A.D. 1950 A.D. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur brought forward a Bill in Parliament providing for the constitution of the Auxiliary Nurse Midwives Services. She brought into existence a second line of service in the nursing profession. Due to the support of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the bill was passed in due course. Late Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy of West Bengal not only gave his whole hearted support to the Bill but also started taking steps to implement it quickly. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur constituted a Committee with Miss Adranwala, the then Nursing adviser to the Government of India. Smt.Durgabai was one of the active members of the committee, and the syllabus was ready in 1950 A.D. - 1951 A.D. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur constituted the All India Nursing Council. The Council had the powers to approve the syllabus and the courses of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives and the General Nurses. Smt.Durgabai suggested to Rajkumari that if the Government of India had confidence in voluntary organisations like the *Andhra Mahila Sabha* they should try to entrust the scheme to such of those organisations which had already the necessary facilities. With favourable recommendations, the Government entrusted the scheme to AMS. Today AMS as a single unit is training more than 365 AMS per annum that is, it is contributing to the nation more than one Auxiliary Nurse Midwives a day. No other voluntary organization has so much to contribute in the South as the AMS in this respect.³⁸ The foundation for the first building for the Maternity ward in the Nursing Home Campus was laid by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur on 7th January 1950 A.D. Behind every stone in AMS there is much a bigger story to tell, the hectic activity that preceded it, the problems and anxieties and disappointments faced, and the sleepless nights spent by Smt.Durgabai and her family members.

Smt.Durgabai fell ill in Delhi when she was a member of the steering committee. The illness became serious and the Doctors strongly advised an operation. She decided to go to Madras. This was her strong determination and will power. She recovered soon with the kind attention given by Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar, Dr. A.V. Avadhani and Dr. Pavana Bai. Nursing Home in Madras became a reality soon with the donations of Rs. 5,000/- each from Smt. Lakshmi Parvathi, Smt. Puram Annapurnamma, Smt. Nidamarthi Lakshmi Narasamma and Smt. Vijayalakshmi Rao, Rani of Vuyyur, for the construction of the ward.⁶

Various Difficulties faced by the AMS

Smt.Durgabai faced many obstacles in organising the AMS. Once, it seems, a question was raised in the Madras Assembly, about the Government of Madras favouring an Andhra Institution by giving them grants, though, in fact there were no grants except that of the land for construction of the building. Sri Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister, and Sri Subrahmanyam, Finance Minister, answered the question effectively by observing that services rendered by AMS were open not only to *Andhra Mahilas* but Tamilians Women also. The AMS, despite its name, served every one alike and made no discrimination between a Tamilian and Andhra, a Gujarathi or a Maharashtraian. With renewed spirit, the AMS expanded its services. Smt.Durgabai faced criticisms bravely. The operation theatre and the surgical wards were raised through the grants from the Government of Madras. It was the first grant given by it. Sri C. Subrahmanyam laid the foundation for the operation theatre in 1957 A.D. and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the then Vice President of India inaugurated the building in 1959 A.D.⁷

Establishment of Vanitha Bala Vihar School

A certain Amount of land was leased out to the *Sabha* by the Corporation of Madras. There was a reading room and a library. Free craft classes were conducted there for young girls. In the park grounds, a primary school, recognised by the Education Department of the Government of Madras was run. Standards I to V were conducted there in Tamil Medium. The school did not levy fees.⁴² The AMS took six grounds from the Corporation of Madras in 1956 A.D., and this was intended to be a part of Nageswara Rao Panthulu Park. Though they developed it, the lease was not renewed. In 1972 A.D. the Corporation took over the Vanitha Bala Vihar. Only the Elementary School remains there today. The Vanitha Bala Vihar ceased to exist. Smt.Durgabai's dream was to provide a children's train in Vanitha Bala Vihar with assistance from a foreign country. However, it remained unfulfilled.⁴³

Silver Jubilee Celebrations of AMS

The AMS at Madras has completed 25 years of service, in 1962 A.D. Smt.Durgabai and others decided to celebrate its Silver Jubilee Celebrations. Through campaigns for raising funds and annual subscription they collected Rs. 40,000/- for this occasion. The Government of Andhra Pradesh gave a grant of Rs. 1,00,000/- to the *Sabha*. The institution of Andhras was thus established and maintained for 25 years in the capital of Tamil Nadu for the benefit of Tamilians, Andhras, Gujaraties and others. The Yuvaraja of Pithapuram accepted the Chairmanship of the Silver Jubilee. Late Sri Chirala Satyanarayana worked as a Treasurer.

Smt.Durgabai thought that the Silver Jubilee Celebrations should begin with a re-dedication of the *Sabha* to the service of the mother and the child. They installed a mother and child statue which was carved by Sri Lingadhara Rao, a well-known sculptor from Hyderabad. They fixed up a

marble plaque on the face of the pedestal with the inscription "On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of our *Sabha*, we re-dedicate ourselves to the service of Education and Welfare of Women and Children". The statue was unveiled by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India on May 27, 1962 A.D.⁸

Establishment of Tourist Hostel

Smt. Durgabai used to say that tourist hostels meant hospitality plus business, and Hostels became hotels which were business minus hospitality. She felt that there should be a happy blend of hospitality and business.⁵² It started functioning on 1st July, 1964 A.D. Perhaps nowhere in the country has any voluntary organization engaged in the field of Social Service ventured to run a hostel for tourists. The *Sabha* undertook this venture purely to do its utmost to provide to the tourist the hospitality he deserved as an honoured guest. The Tourist Hotel like other units of *Andhra Mahila Sabha* is another social welfare organization and the spirit of service is the main motive behind this unique venture.⁹

Conclusion

The research further reveals that Durgabai nursing, her '*Little Ladies of Brindavan*' in Madras grew into the *Andhra Mahila Sabha*. She devoted herself to the uplift of the helpless and the destitute women by providing them with various ways and means to become economically self-supporting and independent by the *Andhra Mahila Sabha*. Under her dynamic direction and management, it flourished and prospered. It established branches at Hyderabad and recently celebrated its Golden Jubilee. In raising resources for the construction of the necessary buildings at different times, she never felt the dearth of funds. Adequate funds were forthcoming from philanthropists. She was untiring in her attempts to build up the *Andhra Mahila Sabha* with the unstinted co-operation of the band of workers she builds up. The secret of the success of the A.M.S lay in addition to these, in the method of Governance she envisaged for. The activities of the *Andhra Mahila Sabha* were quite varied and comprehensive covering the fields of Adult Literacy in women- hood, Education, Medicine, Nursing and Social Service. Smt. Durgabai used to observe that A.M.S provides all the amenities necessary for the development of women from birth to adulthood. Through the activities of the *Andhra Mahila Sabha* and allied organisations, Durgabai provided jobs to hundreds of women who had fallen on evil days and deserved financial assistance. She picked up widows and destitute and made them self-reliant and socially useful citizens. She never probed their antecedents as that may psychologically hurt them. Some of them helped her in building the numerous institutions of the *Andhra Mahila Sabha* and in implementing her Social Welfare Projects. The *Andhra Mahila Sabha* is a standing monument to her multifaceted dynamic personality.

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