

SALUTATION TO SMT.DURGABAI DESHMUK : A GREAT SOCIAL REFORMER IN INDIA – AN OVERVIEW

Dr.T.P.Kishorenath,
Assistant Professor of History,
Arignar Anna Government Arts College,
Cheyyar

Abstract

Time to time, many great personalities were born in our country to fight for social equality, empowerment or any oppression against the weaker section of society. Among the great personalities, Durgabai Deshmuk captured a special place in the heart of millions of people in India. Her contribution as social reformer by founding Central Social Welfare Board. Smt. Durgabai's chairmanship in the Central Social Welfare Board was inspirational to many voluntary service organizations and lent a new life to women in India. Apart from these, her speeches in the Constituent Assembly and as the chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board and elsewhere in different capacities constitute her documents, personal in nature. Her inner life, a Chings and longings for children women and the nation, her struggles, failures and success and views' on contemporary problems are found revealed in her documents. Hence, the methodology for this dissertation fingers on a deep perusal of her personal documents. Besides, this dissertation also draws in her views on the diverse aspects of national life. Here this research paper highlights the social reforms and empowered as a great women personality who done welfare for her subject.

Key Words: Welfare Board, Organizations, Empowerment, Social Worker, Programmes.

Introduction

This article discusses a brief history of social work and social reforms in India and the rise of group of women social workers in Gandhian age, their activities and achievements. We are going to evaluate critically autobiographies in English written by Indian women social workers. Among these women social – workers Durgabai Deshmukh, it seems, is more prominent. Her

autobiography written in English by women social workers for an in-depth study in the framework of the accepted parameters of the form and function of autobiography as a genre¹. Durgabai Deshmukh thinks that the present social work in India originated from the work of social reformers in the past especially the 19th Century reformers, and the early twentieth Century. However, social work in the form of mutual assistance, charity and philanthropy is an old activity in India². This article highlights about Durgabai Deshmukh and her welfare activities.

Member or the Planning Commission

As a member of the Planning Commission Durgabai was given the Charge of social services, a comprehensive subject, her responsibilities covered subjects related to several ministries such as Education, Health, Rehabilitation, Housing, Labor Public Cooperation and Social Welfare proper including crime and criminal administration.³ As a member of the planning commission Smt.Durgabai was appalled by the Indian government's allowance to about 100 American families to work in Indian villages.

The efforts of Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy to start a cancer Institute in Madras confronted financial difficulties as the organization of charity programs for this was not possible for her. When this was conveyed to Ms. Durgabai, she along with Dr.Reddy convinced the then Health Minister Ms.Rajkumari Amrit kaur who concerned with the arguments advanced and the then finance Minister who was informed of this came forward to help in the Project. He was Mr.Chinthaman. The cancer Institute thus started stands today monumental in curing and preventing cancer. What is to be noticed here is the efforts of Smt.Durgabai with her visionary zeal and humanitarianism coupled with benevolence⁴.

Member of Central Social Welfare Board

Durgabai became a Member of Planning Commission in 1952. She represented to the honourable Prime Minister Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru and the honourable Finance Minister Deshmukh, that without making necessary financial provision there was no use of talking about the need for bringing up the weaker sections of society, giving better status to women and revitalising the institutions working for their welfare. Her plea was accepted by the Planning

Commission. In passing, it may be noted, that Durgabai had been a trustee of the Kasturba Memorial Trust, established in 1944, and was in charge of collecting funds and organising the Trust's work among rural women in Andhra.⁵

Independents Status for C.S.W.B.

As a Member of Planning Commission, Smt.Durgabai made out a case that the Central Social Welfare Board should be an autonomous body and that the usual governmental procedures, derived as they were from the East India Company days, would not answer the needs of the situation. Also, as assistance to the Social Welfare organisations had to be given expeditiously, in view of the fact that many good institutions were in danger of closing down for want of financial aid and that only an autonomous body could do it. The commission accepted her proposal⁶. She also stated that she would rather surrender the forty million rupees than allotting it to any particular ministry. She requested the Prime Minister to place the matter before the Cabinet. Later she came to know that the Finance Minister asked his secretary to draw up a note to the Cabinet to the effect that, if necessary, the Finance Ministry would itself administer the funds allotted for the benefit of voluntary organisations⁷.

However, for reasons of answerability to Parliament the Board was placed under the Minister of Education. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru enquired from her whether this would meet her point. Smt.Durgabai thanked him for the decision, as for all practical purposes, the Board would be an autonomous one.⁸ Smt.Durgabai's service mindedness is evident from her abandonment of Membership in the planning commission, after 1952 in order to devote her time to the implementation of the several schemes which she was responsible for sponsoring. But Nehru, in order to enable her to achieve that objective, asked Smt.Durgabai to work full time as the chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board. As a member of Planning Commission⁹, Durgabai was also a member of the National Development Council which included the Cabinet Ministers, the members of the Planning Commission and the Chief Ministers. Even after Durgabai ceased to be member of the Planning Commission, the Prime Minister asked her to continue on the National Development Council as a Chairman of the C.S.W.B.

Smt.Durgabai accepted his suggestion.¹⁰ Smt.Durgabai who had already been working as an honorary Chairman of CSWB since its inception on 14th August 1953, was appointed full time

Chairman in 1954, which position she held for about a decade with unique distinction and remarkable achievement. Social welfare was till then nowhere recognized as an important component of national life. The country had the good fortune of having Smt.Durgabai as the first chairman, of the CSWB for nearly a decade. Starting with women, children and the handicapped as the immediate objects of help, and voluntary effort as the main instrument, what she achieved was little short of a miracle. Smt.Durgabai had organised, thousands of voluntary workers and institutions into a well-knit, reasonably well-coordinated set-up for the whole country as chief participants in a systematic programme of rehabilitation and welfare. To Smt.Durgabai one of the most important tasks was to build up leadership among local women in the thousands of Indian' villages, -and when this was achieved so quickly, and with such success, one imagines that even Smt.Durgabai was little surprised.¹¹ The primary task before the Board was to bring numerous voluntary workers and organisations into partnership and co-ordinate their activities with those of the Government and also to establish closer relationship among themselves.¹²

Voluntary Organisations Grants

When she took over as the first chairman of the Board, she found that there were already more than 400 voluntary organisations engaged in Social Welfare work; but no information was available then of the pattern of services already in existence and the nature and volume of work being done by those voluntary organisations. So the Board, setup, in 1953, three ad hoc panels- one on child welfare with Mrs.Krishna Huthee Singh as Chairman, the second on women's welfare with Mr.Prabha Benerjee as Chairman, and the third on the welfare of Juvenile Delinquents and the physically handicapped under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Mary Clubwalla Jadhav, to survey the main problems in the field, to assess the work of the voluntary organisations, to study their needs and make recommendations to the Board to help it formulate and immediate programme of grants-in-aid. The earlier grants were based on the recommendations of these panels. Based on a survey and a study initiated by her, the Board immediately evolved suitable methods and procedures for giving grants to the deserving institutions which had done good work in different - fields, but which were unable to carry on further work for lack of /adequate funds.¹³ During her tenure, as the Chairman of the Board, more than 10,000 organisations were brought on the official map of the Central Social welfare

Board and 30,000 welfare centers were set up covering about 1,50,000 villages, each serving a group of 5 villages.

The Board realized as early as in-1954 that a trained social worker willing to serve the village was the best input for the success of the plans. It trained more than 30,000 such workers which included grama sevikas, craft teachers, auxiliary nurses, midwives, village dais and the Bala Sevikas.¹⁴

Introduction of New Services

This is one area in which the Board displayed appreciable imagination and drive. Once again it is historically true that most of the new programs originated in the mind of the founder chairman Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh. The welfare Extension Project, the Socio Economic Programme , the Condensed Courses of Education for Adult Women and hostels for working women are some of the leading programmes which have achieved remarkable results.

Durgabai A Her top priority was the development of human potential and through the medium of the Central Social Welfare Board and its programmes, Smt.Durgabai wanted to reach the most neglected of the neglected. As the chairman of the Board she conducted meetings, seminars and worked in the remotest corners of the country and inspired many workers with similar zeal.¹⁵ Smt. Tara Ali Baig, President, International Union of Child Welfare, Paris, said that Smt.Durgabai took up the reins of Central Social Welfare Board at a time when the country was in a transitional stage, from a colonial feudal stage to a democratic stage. The ways of the government were or inscrutable for the common people.

Smt.Durgabai facilitated better interaction between the Government and the people, familiarizing them with accounts, finance and functioning of the administrative machinery at different levels at different levels. Through the Board, Smt.Durgabai sponsored social welfare programme 'for the women and children, living in the remote, backward and rural areas and thus opened a new chapter in the history of social welfare in the country. As a result, today thousands of social workers are engaged in the welfare of the weaker sections of the community i.e. women, children and the handicapped.¹⁶

Starting of Urban Family Welfare Scheme

At about the same time, under the scheme called Urban Family Welfare Scheme, industrial co-operatives were being formed for starting small scale industries in selected areas. Each of them was to provide employment to about 500 women of the lower middle class families. The Ministry, besides providing trained personnel and marketing facilities made a contribution of Rs.3 lakhs for each Family welfare project, partly as a loan, and partly as a grant.

Voluntary Workers

The Central Social Welfare Board, the state Boards, and the Project implementing Committees in the districts had by 1958 some 4000 honorary women members who had been during the period of four years, giving their full time and attention to this work. By the end of the second Plan, it was expected to rise to 10,000. Smt.Durgabai believed that this was the only way of organizing programmes for the welfare of women and children and the handicapped and that her method had been very much more successful than anything which had been devised by any Governmental organization.¹⁷

Schemes of Women Welfare (rural areas)

As chairman of the CSWB Smt.Durgabai took up special interest in promoting welfare work among rural women. Steps were taken to establish thirty thousand rural welfare centers covering one and a half lakh villages with one center for five villages³¹. As *Mukhya Sevikas*, Midwives, and Craft Teachers were needed for the scheme, women came forward to equip themselves through education and training for this work. The scheme also helped to improve the liaison between voluntary bodies and the government in matters of social welfare. This came about through the institution of committees established to evaluate implementation¹⁸.

Smt.Durgabai Ceases to be the chairman of the CSWB

By March 1961 the Central Social Welfare Board had given grants to voluntary institutions benefiting approximately 7,22,560 women, 5,98,403 children and I lakh handicapped of various categories. Working closely with the Ministry of Community Development,

Smt.Durgabai started 744 welfare extension projects in 40,648 villages. The nine years of unremitting work ended with little note than a curt little more by the government announcing of the termination of her services as chairman of the Board.¹⁹

Social Work in India

The Central Social Welfare Board, in collaboration with the Planning Commission, brought out standard works. Of these "Social Welfare in India" (1958), Social Legislation (1956) and "Plans and Prospects of Social Welfare 1951-61 (1963)", besides being landmarks in Social Welfare literature in India, became forerunners to the Encyclopedia of Social Work in India. Smt.Durgabai was chairman of the Editorial committee of Encyclopedia of Social work. The Encyclopedia, according to Smt.Durgabai, "was an effort to present a synopsis of progress achieved in Social welfare in the broadest sense". Smt. Gandhi observed that Smt.Durgabai, the chairman of the Editorial Committee, was the best known face and name in the realm of Social Work. Paying a glowing tribute Indira Gandhi further added that Smt.Durgabai-was indeed "The mother of all Social work in our generation."²⁰

Celebration of Silver jubilee: C.S.W.B.

The Central Social Welfare Board Celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1978. The place chosen for holding the celebration was Hyderabad. On that occasion CSWB honoured Smt.Durgabai. August 12,1978 was a red letter day not only in the life of Smt.Durgabai Deshmukh but in the annals of the social welfare movement in the country. Deshmukh had sown with much love and care was nurtured, well by her successors, the late Smt. Achamma John Mathai, Smt. Masuma Begum, Smt. Begam Ali Zahir, Smt. Neera Dogra and Smt. Sarojini Varadappan. That Social workers from all over India had come to Hyderabad to compliment Smt. Deshmukh itself showed the stature of this great daughter of India.Smt. Roda Mitry, Minister for Tourism, Women and Child Welfare, Government of Andhra Pradesh, who released the special commemoration numbers of Social Welfare and Samaj Kalyan announced that in recognition of Smt.Durgabai's great services for the country²¹, the Andhra Pradesh Government proposed to re-name the women's Technical Training Institute as Smt.Durgabai Deshmukh Women's Technical Training Institute.²²

Conclusion

The above article reveals that Durgabai's life history marks the different phases and diverse roles in the evolution process of the modern Indian woman hood. She was born in a traditional orthodox Brahmin family. She demonstrated the inner strength and capacities of a woman to reach high positions in public life. She boldly exposed herself in social and cultural reforms of nineteenth century in Andhra, Madras presidency. She stood as a role model to the Indian women hood through her experiences trials and tribulations. 'Durgabai's motto in life was **'Service to man is service to God'** and her life is an example of the proverb **"Work is worship"**. Women who were close to her knew that she was very affectionate, notwithstanding the fact that she was neither effusive nor demonstrative of her affections for the people. She showed her affection more through deeds rather than words.

Reference

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² Jawaharlal Nehru, "Forward "in social welfare in India ed. Durgabai Deshmukh (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Govt. of India, 1955) p. v.

³ Deshmukh, **Chintaman and I**, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd.. New Delhi, 1980 Durgabai, pp.36.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp.436.

⁵ *Ibid*.pp.61-62.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.50.

⁷ Durgabai Deshmukh, "Address to the Eighth Annual Conference of the chairman", **State Social Welfare History Boards**, New Delhi, 14th March 1962, pp.1-2.

⁸ Durgabai Deshmukh, **Chintaman and I, Op.Cit.**, p.51-52.

⁹ **India-A Reference Annual 1956**, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, May, 1956, p.360.

¹⁰ Durgabai Deshmukh. **Chintaman and I, Op.Cit.**, p.52-53.

¹¹ R.S. Krishnan. "Durgabai'Deshmukh- An Administrator Par Excellence", **Social Welfare**, Vol.XXV, No.5-6, August-September, 1978, pp.1516.

¹² Durgabai Deshmukh, "Address to the Eighth Annual Conference of the chairman", **State Social Welfare History Boards, Op.Cit.**, p.2-3

¹³ *Ibid*, p.50.

¹⁴ G.Ravindran Nair, "Homage to Durgabai A Legend Passed into History", **Social Welfare**, Vol-XXXVII No.3, {June, 1981). pp.1-2.

¹⁵ G.Ravindra Nair. **Op.Cit.**, p.2.

¹⁶“A Legend During the Life Time”, **Social Welfare**, Vol.XXXVIII, No.3, (June, 1981). p.3.

¹⁷ Durgabai Deshmukh, **Chintaman and I, Op.Cit.**, pp.3-4.

¹⁸ Durgabai Deshmukh, **Chintaman and I, Op.Cit.**, pp.7-8.

¹⁹ CSWB News, “A Worthy and Able Successor to a Great Predecessor”, **Social Welfare**, Vol.IX., No.5, (August, 1962), pp.2-3.

²⁰ “Prime Minister Releases Encyclopedia of social Work in India”, **Social Welfare**, Vol.XV., No.3, (June, 1968), p.24.

²¹ G.Ravindra Ns.ir, “The Central Social Welfare Board Celebrates Silver Jubilee”, **Social Welfare**, Vol. XXV, No.7, (October, 1978), pp.1-5.

²² This is an institution in Hyderabad devoted to training of women in T.V. Engineering, Electronics and a variety of other trades requiring skill.