

Smt. Annapragada C. Krishna Rao

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Uplift and Welfare of Women and Children-1987

Recipient of the Award for outstanding contribution in the field of uplift and welfare of women and children

Born in 1913, Smt. Krishna Rao was brought up against a family background which was conducive for orienting her towards community service. Her father, late Rao Bahadur Kalli Chitti Abbayi Naidu, was himself a social reformer and was deeply interested in the promotion of education for girls. By conviction, he was a crusader against casteism and untouchability and worked for the uplift of Harijans and backward communities. Smt. Krishna Rao's husband, too, is an accomplished and academically brilliant social worker.

Smt. Krishna Rao had a very distinguished College career having passed post graduation in Physics in first class. She did teacher's training thereafter and became a teacher by profession ; but her main concern was social work which she made as her honorary career and ha dedicated almost 50 years of her life to it.

Smt. Krishna Rao's first major activity in social work was undertaken in association with the late Padma Vibhushan Dr. Durgabhai Deshmukh, with whom she co-founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha in Madras and Hyderabad. She occupied various administrative positions in the Sabha continuously for 24 years and contributed to establish and run educational, vocational training and health programmes for the benefit of poor women and children.

She served for 33 years as Honorary Principal of the Govt. Industrial Centre for Women, the first of its kind in India for women. Starting with one unit and a seating capacity for 16 trainees, Smt. Krishna Rao was instrumental in increasing the activities of the Centre, which today has 16 units and 256 trainees. She introduced vocational, technical and engineering courses for women at the craftsman level.

As the first Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Social Welfare Advisory Board, she toured the districts of Andhra Pradesh for 5 years. She could meet hundreds of women poor, ignorant, sick, suffering and exploited as also children lacking the minimum requirements for normal development, especially from rural areas. For amelioration of these conditions she initiated a number of social, educational, crafts, training, child- welfare and health projects in the villages all over the State.

The pinnacle of Smt. Krishna Rao's achievements in the field of social service was the setting up in 1949 of the now famous Stree Seva Mandir. She was the founder executive Vice-President of the Mandir and continues in that post till today. Started as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the fundamental aim of the institution has been the emancipation, care and total rehabilitation of women and children in need of any type of help. The Mandir is a multi-campus institution with 27 units/activities being conducted in different parts of Madras City and 6 units in the outlying villages of Chinglepet District, about 40 kms away from Madras.

The Mandir functions with special emphasis on 5 types of service : institutional care, education formal and non-formal, vocational training, employment and community welfare. Its activities, therefore, are multifarious and multifaceted hostels, day care centres, crèches, schools, vocational programmes ranging from appalam-making to electronics and computer programming workshops for on-the-job training and employment, health and family welfare, and a variety of cultural, recreational and community welfare programmes.

There are 3 hostels, including one for working women, and the number of inmates is over 300. The hostels are, really speaking, big families where the young and the old, the handicapped and the able-bodied, the brilliant and the retarded, live, pray and eat together, and help each other with the aim of preparing for a life of respect and self-reliance. Besides, there are 3 creches, including a mobile one for children from slums.

The Mandir's educational activities range from the KG to the secondary stage, for which it has established a KG school, a Primary School and 2 Secondary Schools in Madras City and a Primary School in its rural project. Over 3000 students, including the inmates of its hostels, are on the rolls of these Schools. The Mandir also conducts free tutorials for drop-outs and illiterates in a Non-formal School. An outstanding educational project started by the Mandir is the laboratory called Prayoga, in which students (1500 every month) from various Schools in the City conduct experiments handling the equipment themselves.

One of the most exemplary activities of the Mandir is its vocational training programme, which is composed of training through formal courses as well as on-the-job training in workshops and production units. The trades are chosen to suit the age, aptitude, need and educational background of the trainees. They include : making of household products like appalam, juice, condiments, bread and pastries; toy-making, tailoring and embroidery; textile designing and weaving; carpentry; printing press; secretarial practice; electronics; instrumentation and computer programming. Over 10,000 women have been trained in the last 40 years. The Mandir has also provided for 3 showrooms as outlets for the products made by the trainees and employees of production units.

As part of community welfare work, the Mandir has built a well-equipped Medical Centre for child welfare, maternity and diagnosis. It has also set up 2 women's academies which arrange cultural programmes, discourses and exhibitions.

The diversity of the Stree Seva Mandir's activities shows the vision, dynamism, and organizational skills of Smt. Krishna Rao, who is its main guiding force.

Smt. Krishna Rao has held several important positions on statutory bodies at the State and National levels. Apart from being the Chairman of the A.P. State Social Welfare Advisory Board, she was member of, among others, the National and State Committees on education, planning and development, and community welfare, Women's training and employment programmes sub-committee for 7th Plan, and Indian Council of Child Welfare and Social Welfare. She is also actively associated with other social organizations for women and children such as Abhaya Nilayam and Guild of Service.

Smt. Krishna Rao has won several honours like the Rotary Club of Madras Award, felicitations by Lions Club of Guindy, Narmada Women's Academy, and Madras Telugu Academy Award.

