



MS. SARASWATHI GORA

Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare of Women and Children - 1999

Born: September 23, 1912

Educational Qualification: Professional Social Change Worker

Saraswathi Gora a freedom fighter and social change worker on Gandhian lines and the co-founder of Atheist Centre (in 1940) is a relentless champion of women and children and Gandhian constructive work. For the last six decades she has been in the forefront for the eradication of untouchability and the caste system, and for the promotion of secular and humanist values. Under her able guidance the Atheist Centre covers a broad spectrum of activities through its three major organisations Vasvaya Mahila Mandal, Arthik Samata Mandal and Samskar for comprehensive rural development in more than three hundred villages in various districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Saraswathi Gora participated in the Quit India Movement and led a batch of women satyagrahi for which she was imprisoned for six months in the Vellore Central Jail. She was a freedom fighter and though the Government offered a pension to her, she did not take it. In the 1930s Saraswathi Gora championed the cause of Devadasi marriages and re-marriages were performed. From 1940 onwards she took the bold step of bringing out inter-caste and inter-religion marriages. She started with such marriages with her own family and set an example to others. She also advocated the registration of marriages under the marriage act, which emphasises the equality of the spouses.

She successfully struggled for the abolition of zamindari system and the inamdari by leading a batch of 60 illiterate women in Karivena in 1954 for which she was imprisoned for five months, but the outcome of the abolition of inamdari was that the peasants were given those lands.

She led many a Satyagrah in post independent India championing the cause of the poor and downtrodden. The Atheist Centre was fully involved in the Sarvodaya and the Bhoodan Movement; Saraswathi Gora actively participated in Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Padayatra in Andhra Pradesh.

She established and inaugurated in August 1985 Gora Abhay Nivas, a short stay home for women. From its inception on August 1985 to March 1999, 1053 women with social problems were admitted into Gora Abhay Nivas. Under her leadership 350 self-help groups of women with a membership of over 6000, are involved in a thrift and credit as well as a loan programme of Rs. 70 lakhs for income generation activities, recovery of the loans has been excellent.

Through the Arthik Samata Mandal, she organized child and family sponsorship programmes. She worked very hard for the rehabilitation of the Jogins. In this task the State Government has also offered help. Samskar which is a unit of Atheist Centre bought and distributed 832 acres of agricultural land for their economic rehabilitation.

Saraswathi Gora also persistently worked for weaning away women ex-criminals by rehabilitating them in several constructive programmes. Saraswathi Gora is the driving force of Arthik Samta Mandal of the Atheist Centre. It has implemented a comprehensive scheme of rural development in 150 villages of Krishnam Guntur, West and East Godavari and Nalgonda districts. Arthik Samata Mandal also helps hundreds of children through child and family sponsorship programme. Through the financial help

given by the Save the Children Fund (UK) and Plan International, and other agencies, hundreds of children in remote rural areas received education.

The Atheist Centre has implemented medical welfare, health services and check up and family planning programmes for the benefit of the slum dwellers and the vulnerable sections. An eye centre which was established in September, 1995 has restored eye sight to 84 blind people within four years.

The Atheist Centre has also established family courts, set up a social guidance centre to provide help to women, to train women in Panchayati Raj and to empower them has also been undertaken.

Saraswathi Gora's life is a saga of struggle to achieve social justice and equality and to translate humanist ideals into practice. Although rooted in Indian soil, she has the global perspective and national and international outreach.

Saraswathi Gora is the recipient of the Challagalla Award & Malladi Subbamma Award for outstanding social work by trusts of Hyderabad. Her autobiography titled "My Life with Gora"; a 250-page book in Telugu was published in 1992 coinciding with her 80 birth anniversary. It is a tribute to her work that the International Humanist and Ethical Union, chose Atheist Centre for International Humanist Award in 1986 presented in Oslo, Norway.

