

SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS IN ANDHRA  
(1920-1947)

A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad  
for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

BY

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1998

### DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in this thesis entitled "Social Reform Movements in Andhra (1920-1947)" carried out by me under the supervision of Prof.V.Ramakrishna (Rtd.), Department of History, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, is original and this has not been submitted for any other degree either in part or in full to any other University or this University.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Social Reform Movements in Andhra (1920-1947)", submitted by S.Inna Reddy, in total fulfillment for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY, is original and the work has been carried out under my supervision. The thesis or parts thereof has not been submitted for any other degree in this University or any other University.

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## PREFACE

Phenomenal changes were effected in India during the course of nineteenth century which laid the foundation for social reform. The century was a crucial period of transition and an important historical phase for the colonial state as well as the indigenous people. The colonial rule was consolidated during this period and such consolidation was accompanied by the introduction of new social and cultural policies. The colonial interventionist phase during early 19th century had to depend upon indigenous cultural practices in the fields like realm of knowledge (Sanskrit-Varna mode), social practices (juridical mores) and cultural traditions. The intervention had an ultimate aim of appropriation and cooperation. Invoking indigenous modes of practice, the colonial state successfully moulded the administration into a western orbit. The early interventionist efforts wanted to institute a make-belief system in the minds of new intelligentsia about this civilising mission. The early educated sections in Indian society, though did not exclusively constitute a class of collaborators, became the involuntary rudders in the travel of ideas. These ideas, rooted in traditional minds and oriented in western habits of learning travelled far and wide in the society of contemporary India. It was this cultural transformation that witnessed the rise of internal criticism of existing social traditions and sowed the seeds for social reform. It was apolitical, rather non-political, effort by new educated middle classes. As colonial intervention during this phase did not provide any scope for the genesis of political ideas (by adopting a seemingly non-interventionist religious behaviour) the early educated sections were forced to believe in the externalities of

civilising mission of the colonial state. And hence, their expression of loyalty to the British Raj. Barring this, the new English educated sections, as represented by Rammohan Roy, A.K.Dutt of Bengal, the early Maharashtrian reformers like Phule, Bhavalkar and Ranede, and Samineni Muthoonarasimha Naidoo, Kandukuri Veeresalingam and Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu in Andhra made pioneering efforts in the field of social reform.

These new educated sections were responsible for the dissemination of ideas in society. They were associated both with reform endeavours as well as other pursuits of knowledge like teaching, law and journalism. They played a leading role in founding debating clubs, public libraries and public associations which moulded public opinion in the contemporary society. The break-up of old social and political order under the colonial rule affected both social and traditional relations in society. The new revenue, social and cultural policies dislocated people from the confines of already defined social roles. Amidst these changes, various social groups in the indigenous society began an intense quest for new identities and new alternatives. In the process, their reactions to the colonial rule were multi-dimensional. The rise of social reform trends during early 19th century, and the growth of public consciousness with its ultimate manifestation as political awakening by late 19th century clearly emerged out of these reactions in a society that underwent unprecedented structural imbalances. During the early decades of 19th century the consciousness often found expression in the reform activities of early educated intellectuals.

The social reformers of 19th century waged a zealous and relentless battle against the decadent and obnoxious traditions

in the contemporary society. The reformers did not leave any social evil untouched. Religion, culture, traditions and customs were made subjects of serious criticism. The latter half of 19th century was the heyday of social reform activity by which time social reform measures assumed the proportions of a movement. Veeresalingam was instrumental in giving the present orientation. However, the slow growth of political consciousness by late 19th century and the rise of nationalist movement by early 20th century proved to be positive obstructions to social reform movement. They are positive because, social reform went hand in glove with freedom struggle and all the early social reformers were active political agitators in 20th century. It was obstructionist because, social reform movements ceased to be a large scale movement in the face of surging national movement. Yet, social reform spirit was alive and reform activities never exhibited signs of absolute stagnation. From the second decade of 20th century, social reform activities were carried along with political agitations. The present study makes an attempt to understand and analyse the progress of social reform during this period dating after the death of Veeresalingam in 1919.

The geographical area covered in this study includes the Northern Circars of erstwhile Madras Presidency comprising the districts of Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Nellore, and the ceded districts of Bellary, Cuddapah, Kurnool, Anantapur and Chittoor. The area corresponds almost to the present day coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. The Telangana districts, then under the rule of the Nizams of Hyderabad state, are not included in the present study. The first two chapters provide us a brief introduction to the study and a survey of

early reform trends. The third **chapter** **throws** much light on the growth and progress of women's movement in Andhra. The fourth and fifth chapters are devoted to a detailed discussion on the origins of non-Brahman consciousness and the growth of non-Brahman movement. The sixth chapter traces the growth of Atheism and Atheist movement, the radical departures within the gamut of social reform activity. Needless to say, these chapters are followed by a conclusion where the foregoing trends in social reform are encapsulated and briefly analysed.

I am highly indebted to scores of people whose help has been a great boon and boost for me in completing the present work. The first among them is Prof.V.Ramakrishna, the research supervisor. His friendly attitude, academic wisdom and timely help laid solid base for my own formulations in the thesis. Claiming, however, the responsibility for ideas expressed in the thesis as my own, I immensely thank him for advising me on all occasions through the research programme. I thank the faculty members in the Department of History, University of Hyderabad who helped me mould my ideas during the days of my post-graduation. I particularly thank Prof.T.R.Sharma, Head, Department of History and Dean, School of Social Sciences who is always student-friendly and sympathetic with the research scholars. I fondly recall the immense help of Dr.R.L.Hangloo, which provided me, what I call, a true catalyst in enhancing the rate of my research enthusiasm. I place on record my deepest sense of gratitude to my parents whose unwavering support alone made me what I am today. I grow highly nostalgic when I recall and remember the moral support of my wife, Mrs.Prakasamma and my elder brother, Mr.S.Joji Reddy who provided a rock strength to my research activities which, otherwise, would have been completely

lost in non-academic pursuit of earning. I do acknowledge my brothers Marreddy, Thomas Reddy and my sisters Chinnamma and Nirmala for their solid support through thick and thin of my life. My cousin brothers, Bro.Thomas Reddy, Provincial of Montfort Brothers, Central India, Fr.S.Bala and friend Fr.B.Chinnappa Reddy have been the main props of psychological support in my life. Their support has been a true guide in the conduct of the present research programme. I specially thank Mrs. I.Sailaja and I.S.S.Naresh for their immense help during my research programme. I thank both of them for all that they have been to me. I express my sincere thanks to Dr.K.H.S.S. Sundar for all his valuable help during the course of my thesis. I also recall my intimate association with my colleague, Mr.B.Thomas Reddy from whom I benefitted a lot during the formative years in my school, college and university life. I thank Dr.V.Lalitha and V.Rajagopal for their constant source of inspiration and help in the present academic programme. I am deeply indebted to my friends Dr.K.Raju, Dr.Ch.Anthony, Dr.M.Gandhi and Dr.J.Anuradha most of whom formed members of the community of researchers and, we all worked together in various archives and libraries. I benefitted much from their association working through patient, encouraging and highly beneficial academic hours in the above institutions of knowledge. I fondly remember the encouragement given by Sr.Rani which provided the necessary boost during the last stages in my research programme.

I am personally indebted to every individual in all those archives and libraries who provided valuable records, and, thus, an access to what formed the bedrocks of my present thesis. The image of those countless employees of archives and libraries ungrudgingly supplying me books and records of my choice never

blurs from my memory. My ideas of thankfulness beggar words in this regard. I wish to thank the authorities and staff of the A.P.State Archives, Tamilnadu Archives, National Archives of India, Sundarayya Vignana Kendram (Hyderabad), Telugu University Library (Hyderabad), the Madras University Library, the Madras Literary Society Library, the Madras Mahajana Sabha Library, the Connemara Public Library (Madras), the Andhra University Library (Visakhapatnam), the Saraswata Niketanam (Vetapalem), Jawaharlal Nehru University Library (New Delhi), the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi) and Gautami Grandhalayam (Rajahmundry). I particularly thank Mr.M.Chandrasekhar, Assistant Librarian (II), Gautami Grandhalayam for patiently copying down some of the source materials for my use.

I am grateful to the University of Hyderabad for giving me an opportunity to join the research programme. Special thanks are due to the Library Staff who were always helpful and friendly in meeting my academic demands in the library. I thank the University Grants Commission, New Delhi for awarding me a Junior Research Fellowship to conduct my research programme.

S. Inna Reddy

## ABBREVIATIONS

APA	ANDHRA PRADESH STATE ARCHIVES, HYDERABAD
DPI	REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, GOVERNMENT OF FORT ST. GEORGE
GDR	GODAVARI DISTRICT RECORDS
NAI	NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI
NMML	NEHRU MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND LIBRARY, NEW DELHI
NNPR	NATIVE NEWSPAPER REPORTS
PET.REG.	PETITION REGISTERS
TNA	TAMILNADU ARCHIVES, CHENNAI (OLD MADRAS)

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## CHAPTER - 1

### INTRODUCTION

Various trends in social reform endeavours in the post-Veerasingam era remain unexplored by researchers. The attention of historians was increasingly drawn towards national movement after the death of Veerasingam in 1919. Nevertheless, it is true that social reform efforts in early 20th century joined the mainstream of freedom struggle. Many of the social reformers actively participated in the movement during the period of our study. Yet, social reform trends retained a separate identity even when they constituted an integral part of the struggle for independence. In this overlapping, the political activities often surfaced themselves with an imposing vigor and vitality, and the social reform efforts always remained a strong undercurrent of the same without losing their importance. Under these circumstances, it was but natural that the freedom struggle attracted the attention of the researchers to focus upon political developments. The present study seeks to analyse the social reform trends in the post-Veerasingam era. In the absence of a comprehensive work on this important aspect, a serious attempt is made in the study to throw light on the 19th century developments under the British rule and the early reform trends of Veerasingam era. The major thrust is to critically estimate the progress and impact of social reform efforts in the post-Veerasingam period.

The 19th century in India was a period of transition. The changes in the field of education, economy and polity, introduced by the British, resulted in structural imbalances in the indigenous society. The outcome of these changes is significant as the reaction from the indigenous society started building up along with them. A study of this transition becomes a significant area for the historian. The changes at all India level had their severe bearing on Andhra too. The region of Andhra, excluding the Nizam's territories in Telangana region, formed part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency during the entire period of our study.

At the outset, the consolidation of political power by the British was not smooth. The ruling authority in the indigenous society was characterised by multiple centres of dominance. This plurality of political power was represented by local ruling chiefs or the big Zamindars or the local military potentates like poligars or the village level officers of traditional power Structure. The acquisition of political control by the British invariably meant a total disruption of these multiple centres of power. In other words, it was a change of power from indigenous feudal classes to colonial state. During this crucial period of transition, the British did neither lose sight of the earlier

For details see Barun De, "Indigenous Governance in Early Modern India : Continuity and Change", Mamidipudi Venkatarangayya Memorial Lecture, A.P.History Congress, XVIII Session, Tenali, January 1994.

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Ibid. The British encroached upon the set of loose and Inter-locked structures of dominance in society and established their supremacy by breaking them.

administrative practices nor ignore their importance. Also they were cautious in introducing new processes of their power. Rather they adopted some of the earlier administrative practices from 18th century administration . For example, during the consolidation of colonial power in Madras Presidency, Thomas Munro could not ignore the influence of village officers like Patels and Karnums in the Ceded districts of Andhra and he personally tried to settle their claims to land rights in an amicable manner<sup>4</sup> .

Despite sincere attempts at adjustment by the British, the dispossessed ruling classes were agitated over the loss of power. The deprivation of power led most of them to resort to revolts against the immediate British authority . The British conquest and consolidation of India experienced severe protest and, for nearly a century till 1857, the discontentment took the shape of armed struggles. The Andhra region of Madras Presidency

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For more details see Rosalind O' Hanlon and David Washbrook, "Histories in Transition : Approaches to the Study of Colonialism and Culture in India" in *History Workshop*, No.32, Autumn 1991, pp.124-25.

J.C.Dua, "Position of Patels and Karnums in the Ceded districts during the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century" in the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 34th Session, 1973, pp.104-118. The influence of local village officers and their relations with colonial authorities are analysed in R.E.Frykenberg, *Guntur District 1788-1848 - A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India*, Oxford, 1965.

The early resistance to the British rule has been discussed in detail in S.B.Chaudhuri, *Civil Disturbances During the British Rule In India*, 1765-1857, Calcutta, 1955.

Andhra region under Madras Presidency during the period of our study comprised the districts of Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari, Krishna, Nellore, Bellary, Kurnool, Cuddapah, Anantapur and Chittoor. The present day Telangana region was under the rule of

witnessed revolts in the territories of Ganjam, Parlakimidi, Goomsur, Vizagapatnam, Palkonda, Godavari and the most far reaching revolt among these was that of Uyyalavada Naarasimha Reddy in 1846 in the Rayalaseema region . All these rebellions may be described as feudal in nature, scattered and localised and motivated by specific interests of the ruling elites. Nevertheless, they reflect two significant facts. First, most of these rebellions received popular support and hence can be termed

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'mass-based' outbursts . Secondly, these outrages unmistakably symbolise the quest of the people for a new identity under the changed political circumstances of the colonial rule. It is to be seen that the colonial rulers could not afford to lose the support of landed magnates after 1857 Revolt and infact the earliest

the Nizam of Hyderabad.

For details see M.Venkataramangaiya (ed.), *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh, Vol.1, (1800-1905 A.D.)*, Hyderabad, 1965, pp.23-38. For a detailed discussion of Narasimha Reddy Revolt See N.Raghavendra, "Narasimha Reddy Rebellion of 1846 - A study of a Peasant Revolt in Rayalaseema", M.Phil Dissertation, University of Hyderabad, 1986; T.Venkata Subba Rao, "Uyyalavada Marasimha Reddy Radha" in *Bharati* (Telugu monthly), June 1969, pp.50-66; J.C.Dua, "Poligars - Their Rise in the Ceded Districts" in *PIHC*, 33rd Session, 1972, pp.467-75 and "Nature of the Poligar Revolts in the Ceded Districts during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century: A case study" in *Ibid.*, 35th session, 1974, pp.235-44; B.Sobhanan, "Narasimha Reddy of Nossam - A Forgotten Hero of Andhradesa" in *Ithlhas*, Vol.XIV, No.2, July 1988, pp.76-81; M.Pattabhirami Reddy, "Peasants Revolt in Rayalaseema, 1846" in *Ibid.*, Vol.XIII, Nos., 1-2, pp.89-100 and D.Subrahmanyam Reddy, "The Ryotwari Land Revenue Settlements and Peasant Resistance in the Northern Division of Arcot of the Madras Presidency during Early British Rule" in *Social Scientist*, Vol.16, Nos., 6-7, June-July 1988, pp.35-50.

<sup>8</sup> S.B. Chaudhuri, op.cit., p.205. The mass character of these rebellions is clearly brought out in the case of Narasimha Reddy's revolt in N.Raghavendra, Op.cit., pp.97-103 and 107-18.

nominations to the Legislative Councils in the three Presidencies of British India were mostly made from this section<sup>9</sup>.

The consolidation of political power was accompanied by new revenue policies. Though, in the initial stages, the new revenue arrangements like Permanent settlement and village Lease settlements were tried, the Ryotwari settlement became the predominant mode of assessment and 17 districts out of 21 in the Madras Presidency were settled under Ryotwari tenures. The system, which appeared to be democratic, proved in practice more oppressive in its actual working. The heavy incidence of taxation<sup>12</sup>, the torture employed in the collection of rents.

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For example the Zamindar of Venkatagiri (Nellore district) was among those who was appointed a member of Madras Legislative Council. However, his apathy towards public cause came under attack. See for details *Hindujanaskarini* (Telugu monthly), January 1889, p.64. In course of time the landed aristocrats who were on good terms with the British government were subject to a paradoxical dilemma whether to support the colonial state or nationalists. This confusion resulted from a fear of insecurity as they were not certain who among the colonial rulers and the nationalists would protect their interests. For a discussion on this see William Roy Smith, *Nationalism and Reform in India*, Yale (USA), 1938, pp.40-41.

This is mentioned by the 1852 Memorandum submitted by the Madras Native Association to the British Parliament. Vide Paragraph no.5 in the memorial.

John F.Thomas, "Notes on Ryotwar, or Permanent Annual Money Rents in South India and on the Duty of Government in Periods of Famine" in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, Vol.Xi, January - June, 1839, p.58.

<sup>12</sup>Vide Paragraph no.29 in the 1852 Memorial of MNA, Op. Cit. A contemporary autobiography vividly brings out the melancholic state of ryots in society even by late 19th century. See Chilakamarti Lakshminarasimham, *Sweeyacharithram*, (autobiography in Telugu), Bezawada, 1944, p.11.

vagaries of nature and incidence of famines<sup>13</sup> left the peasants in a chronic state of poverty and suffering. Added to this, the superimposition of more exploitative capitalist economy, particularly in the post-1857 period, further precipitated the misery of ryots<sup>14</sup>. These discouraging economic conditions and the most fluctuating variables of taxation did not encourage the accumulation of agrarian surplus. The creation of national market along with the exploitative capitalist economy extinguished the fire of indigenous economic enterprise. All these changes led the people towards agitational modes of protest. The activities of Madras Native Association and its historic memorandum of 1852, submitted to the British Parliament, visibly brought out the bleeding realities of peasant economy in the Madras Presidency. The countless number of petitions addressed to the Government of Madras from the inhabitants of various parts of Andhra region

The occurrence of famines was witnessed throughout the century. Apart from natural factors, the new revenue policies and destruction of indigenous industry contributed to the outbreak of famines. B.M.Bhatia, *Famines In India : A study in some aspects of the Economic History of India (1860-1965)*, Bombay, 2nd Edition, 1967, p.14 ff. Also see N.Neelakanteswar Rao, "A Critical Assessment of the Administration of Famine Relief during the Famine of 1876-78 with special reference to Andhra Region" in *PIHC*, 40th session, 1979, pp.908-10. The vernacular press came down heavily on the unsatisfactory relief operations of the Madras Government and its famine policies. It was stated that the colonial authorities instituted famine on a permanent basis. See *Jarlda-l-Rozgar*, dt. 3.5.1879 In the *Native Newspaper Reports*, TNA.

<sup>14</sup>Barun De, op.cit.

In case of Andhra this is discussed in G.Niranjana Rao, "Changing Conditions and Growth of Agricultural Economy in the Krishna and Godavari Districts 1840-1890", Ph.D Dissertation, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, 1973, pp.286-94.

protesting the economic hardships bear further testimony to this . The economic discontent drove the people towards struggle against the colonial authorities and the first political movement was initiated by the Madras Native Association. The Association had its branches spread throughout the Presidency including Andhra. The social base of the activities of the Association was wide and represented both middle and lower classes of people in society. This is attested by the fact that the Association received support from the rural poor including the ryots when it tried to establish its branches at various places in the Presidency and sought support of people .

Along with changes in economic life, the Company administration introduced new education. However, the interest of the Government in its promotion was highly discouraging. The public apathy in this field gave upper hand to Christian missionaries and private individuals like a few enlightened Zamindars and civil servants in establishing and managing educational institutions. The lion's share in this activity had gone to Christian missions whose primary objective was proselytisation and preaching Biblical morals. Another important aim of the new education seemed to be the creation of educated people to fill up lower rungs in the administration. Attempts at

For example see. Petition Registers, Vol.18, No.930; Vol.33, No.956; Vol.39, No.1130, Tamilnadu Archives (TNA), Madras.

For example see, Godavari District Records, Vol.6753, pp.323-325, Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Hyderabad (Hereafter APA).

proselytisation were made through religious instruction in educational institutions always with an eye on new converts. The government also supported the activities of missionaries, sometimes covertly and at times overtly. The aim of such instruction was intended to inculcate ideas of faithfulness and obedience among the learners. On the other hand, the employment opportunities created by new education displaced many people from traditional avocations. The growing demand for English education and jobs under the Company government lend support to this fact<sup>18</sup>.

The growth of towns and education in Andhra from the mid 19th century witnessed the rise of new professional classes mainly drawn from the middle classes of society<sup>19</sup>. The new educated middle classes comprised mainly of people belonging to different professions like teaching, law, medicine and civil service<sup>20</sup>. They symbolised a new spirit of social mobility and intellectual freedom and shouldered the responsibility of disseminating new

<sup>18</sup>For an account on the changing popular perception in this regard see Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, *Anubhavaloo - Jnapakalunu* (Autobiographical Reminiscences in Telugu), Vol.1, Rajamahendravaram, 1955, pp.37-41. He describes how the traditional Brahmin sections were increasingly changing over to new education and employment under the Company during the nineteenth century.

<sup>19</sup>V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform in Andhra*, New Delhi, 1983, pp.34-35.

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For details see B.M.Bhatia, "Growth and Composition of Middle Class in South India in Nineteenth Century" in the Indian *Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.11, No.4, October 1965, pp.345 ff. Also see P.Subramanian, "Tamil Society in Nineteenth Century" in the *Journal of Madras University*, Vol.VII, No.1, January, 1980, pp.73-89.

ideas in the society . They formed the social basis for reform movements in Andhra<sup>22</sup>. Kandukuri Veeresalingam became a pioneering leader of social reform in Andhra and was responsible for far reaching changes in the contemporary society.

Growth of education and new middle classes in Andhra became one of the most important factors in the growth of journalism. In the initial stages the vernacular press remained confined to specific middle class concerns. However, it soon emerged into an effective instrument of public opinion. It assumed the historical role of enlightening people on issues of public concern including reform issues and acted as an instrument of public protest of repressive colonial rule<sup>23</sup>. Apart from being one of the potent factors in the growth of press, the educated sections were actively involved in establishing public societies, debating clubs and public libraries where public issues were discussed<sup>24</sup>. These two developments provided a platform for people to demand their

<sup>21</sup>B.B.Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes*, OUP, 1961, pp.5-7.

<sup>22</sup>

V.Ramakrishna, *Op.cit.*, pp.35-36.

From mid 19th century there was a vigorous growth of Telugu press. Some of the journals like *Vivekavardhani* of Veeresalingam were devoted to reform issues. For example see *Vivekavardhani*, February 1878, pp.28-34. The vernacular journals served as effective tools for people to discuss their problems in their columns and generated a public awakening in society.

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In Andhra there were a number of these public bodies by late 19th century. For details on one such society see V.Ramakrishna, "Kakinada Literary Association - A study in the Stirrings of Early Political Consciousness in Modern Andhra" in the *Proceedings of Andhra Pradesh History Congress*, 8th Session, Kakinada, 1984. More details about various public societies are discussed in Chapter.IV.

rights from the colonial state.

Another fact of the spread of new education was the popular resistance to the teaching methods in the system. The religious instruction in schools by Christian missionaries invited severe opposition from all classes in the society. The religious propaganda in schools and the support of the government to these activities were criticised by people and protested by public bodies<sup>25</sup>. When the Madras Government paid scanty attention to the public protest, people began searching for alternatives. As a part of this programme they established separate Hindu schools and withdrew children from missionary schools. Though by no means these efforts did equal the educational activities of the missionaries, they timely warned the government about the undesirable religious interference. The resistance to the proselytising educational activities formed one of the important aspects of modern education. Apart from these, the establishment of Rate Schools which were supported by voluntary popular contributions in the form of additional land or water tax was one of the significant aspects of modern Andhra and this experiment was first initiated in the Godavari region<sup>27</sup>. Most of the people

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For example see Paragraph No.17 in G.O.(Public), No.1044, 9.7.1859, TNA and G.O.(Education), No.142, dt. 26.5.1871, APA.

<sup>26</sup>G.O.(Public) No.1044, Op.cit.

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See *Papers relating to the State of Education in the Provinces subject to the Government of Madras*, Madras, 1854. Also see for more details on this system J.Mangamma, *The Rate Schools of Godavari*, A Monograph of A.P.State Archives, Hyderabad, 1973.

who voluntarily contributed to these Rate Schools were drawn from agricultural non-Brahmin castes. This voluntary effort symbolised the growing urge among these sections of society towards self-enlightenment and social improvement.

The growth of non-Brahmin consciousness under the changed socio-economic conditions in the 19th century was a significant development. It assumes importance in the light of the growth of new education free from the ideological influence of Brahmins and creation of employment opportunities under the Company government, irrespective of religion and caste. The completion of Godavari and Krishna anicuts by the middle of 19th century witnessed the rise of economically dominant non-Brahmin castes in coastal Andhra<sup>28</sup>. All these factors created a social awareness among non-Brahmin castes in demanding equal opportunities with Brahmins in education, employment and local bodies like Local Fund Boards and Municipalities. This social awareness had different characteristics under the new colonial set-up, when compared to earlier forms of non-Brahmin protest, which most often criticised external aspects of Hindu religiosity<sup>29</sup>. It is argued by some scholars that under the Company administration the prepondering

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See G.N.Rao, "Canal Irrigation and Agrarian Change in Colonial Andhra : A study of Godavari District" in *IESHR*, Vol.XXV, No.1, January-March 1988, pp.25-60. Also see V.Ramakrishna, "A background study to the Emergence of Caste Consciousness in Coastal Andhra Pradesh" in Suranjan Das and Sekhar Bandopadhyay (ed.) *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia*, Calcutta, 1993, pp.99-118.

<sup>29</sup>V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op.cit., pp.42-47.

influence of Brahmins on Hindu Law and the Imperial System of dispute management viz., the Anglo-Indian Legal System which initially associated Brahmins in its formation, were responsible for supremacy of this caste in 19th century<sup>30</sup>. For them, hence, nineteenth century was a 'Brahmin Century' which represented the 'Brahman Raj'<sup>32</sup> and the twentieth century which witnessed the emergence of non-Brahmin movement against the dominance of Brahmins was an 'Anti-Brahmin Century'

It cannot be denied that Brahmins were associated with Company administration not only in the field of dispensing law but also in various other capacities such as dubashees and other small job holders. It is unhistorical to label periods of history on the basis of caste as it is equally erroneous to compartmentalise it on the basis of religion. The non-Brahmin protest was not a unique phenomenon under the East India Company administration and this form of social protest was witnessed both during the ancient<sup>34</sup>

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D.A.Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.15, No.3, 1981, pp.652-53. The argument is further reiterated in Rosalind O' Hanlon and David Washbrook, *Op.cit.*, pp.115-116.

<sup>31</sup>Washbrook, *Law, State, Op.cit.*, p.653.

This expression is used in Pamela G.Price, "Ideology and Ethnicity under British Imperial Rule : 'Brahmins', Lawyers and Kin-Caste Rules in Madras Presidency" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.23, Part.I, 1989, p.162. It is argued that utilisation of Brahminical codes in the legal system under the Company administration resulted in the supremacy of Brahmins and often times they alone benefitted from the system.

<sup>33</sup>David Washbrook, *Law, State, Op.cit.*, p.653.

34

See for example R.S.Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1980 p.200 ff; Romila Thapar, "Social Mobility in Ancient India with

and medieval periods<sup>35</sup>. Under the British rule there was a perceptible change in the socio-economic conditions. The new education, social and moral values introduced by the colonial state created an altogether different atmosphere where one has to look for and carefully analyse the new social interactions and relationships. Increasing dependence on a single set of factors in our analysis of social set-up may often lead us towards developing historical inattitudes in our conclusions. On the other hand, the growth of non-Brahmin consciousness was fairly witnessed during nineteenth century in Andhra. There are a few significant aspects of this. The demand for equal rights in education, jobs and local bodies was a major factor in the emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness and this was witnessed more among the upper non-Brahmin castes like Reddy, Vaisya, Balija, Kapu, Kamma and Velama. The non-Brahmin consciousness during nineteenth century was not influenced by narrow casteist tendencies despite the fact

Special Reference to Elite Groups" in R.S.Sharma and V.N.Jha (ed.), *Indian Society : Historical Problngs*, New Delhi, 1977; B.N.S. Yadava, "The Accounts of Kali Age and the Social Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages" in *Indian Historical Review*, Vol.V., 1978-79, pp.31-63 and R.N.Nandi, "Client, Ritual and Conflict in Early Brahmanical Order" in *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, 1979-80, pp.64-118.

35

See V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op.cit., pp.37-48. Taking the example of Andhra the author tried to show how social protest movements of Medieval Andhra which, drawing their sustenance from non-Brahmin lower castes, were increasingly attacking the traditional and caste-ridden Hindu society. But, under changed economic conditions during the colonial era, the upper caste non-Brahmins emerged as dominant economic groups and their demands disputing equal status with Brahmins were different from earlier period. Apart from questioning the superiority of Brahmins, they started adopting Brahminical rituals and began to demand equal opportunities in education and employment.

that the non-Brahmin sections of the society stood opposed to Brahminical influence . Such consciousness was positive in the sense that its attack was not aimed at a particular caste and remained mainly as a social protest measure. Moreover, there was no interference of the colonial authorities during nineteenth century, unlike in the early twentieth century, when they extended their indirect support to the non-Brahmin movement. The non-Brahmin consciousness during the entire nineteenth century did not fructify into a caste movement. It is attested by the fact that non-Brahmin sections worked together with Brahmins when both of them were demanding a relative autonomy to local bodies on the eve of local Self-Government campaign<sup>37</sup>. This multi-class approach to a public issue rules out any assumption that non-Brahmin consciousness was narrow in its nature and scope. Even during the 20th century the non-Brahmin social reform endeavours primarily remained serious social protest measures. Many of the leading personalities of non-Brahmin movement proclaimed that the movement was aimed at cutting the Brahminical domination to size and that it was not against Brahmins. Even the activities of Justice Party and its government concentrated primarily on those aspects which

<sup>36</sup>Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, Op. Cit., Vol.III, 1966, pp.99-100. The author took part in the Godavary District Social Conferences during late 19th century. Being a participant analyst he threw much light on contemporary political life in Andhra. He says that, "the political life was not yet poisoned by partiality of social approach and did not still assume the narrow casteist nature".

See K.H.S.S.Sundar, "Origins and Growth of Political Consciousness in Andhra during the Nineteenth Century", Ph.D thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1994, Chapter.VI, pp.253-282.

the early non-Brahmin social reform endeavours wanted to achieve. The details of these strands in non-Brahmin movement are discussed in the succeeding chapters.

## II

A brief account of socio-economic conditions during nineteenth century would further enrich our understanding of the broad changes that have been discussed in the foregoing pages. The supremacy of the British over South Indian region culminated In 1763 with the decline of French authority. However, this did not immediately lead to the annexation of the territory of Andhra. From early decades of the 18th century, most of the parts in Andhra were under the direct rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad . In 1765, Robert Clive, the Governor of Bengal, could secure a firman from the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam which gave away the Circar districts to the British. In the following year the Nizam reluctantly confirmed the cession of these areas through a treaty with the British. Under this treaty the British acquired important areas such as Chicacole, Rajahmundry, Eluru, Mustafanagar (Kondapalli) and Murtazanagar (Guntur)<sup>39</sup>. These areas later formed into the districts of Vizagapatnam, Ganjam, Godavari and Krishna. At the end of Anglo-Mysore wars, the Nizam entered into the subsidiary alliance with Lord Wellesley and ceded those areas

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M.Venkatarangaiya (ed.), Op. Cit., p.11.

<sup>39</sup>B.H.Baden - Powell, *The Land Systems of British India*, Vol.111, London, n..d., p.67.

which were acquired during the earlier Mysore wars in 1792 and 1799. The areas thus ceded to the British were Bellary, Anantapur, Cuddapah and Kurnool which came to be called Ceded Districts<sup>40</sup>. In 1801 the Nawab of Carnatic was relieved of his Subah and Nellore and Chittoor districts were added to the British territory<sup>41</sup>. With the inclusion of these areas Andhra came under the British rule.

At the time of the British conquest, the Andhra region was under the management of squabbling crowd of local chieftains like Rajas, Zamindars and Poligars. They regarded themselves as petty kings and exercised the most arbitrary authority. In order to enforce their power they maintained armed men and the Munro Report put their number at 30000 in Ceded districts alone<sup>42</sup>. In the absence of any powerful controlling authority these local chieftains became free-booters. Munro imposed an armed peace upon these unruly group of local rulers.

Society in Andhra during nineteenth century was based on the hierarchical order of various castes and sub-castes<sup>43</sup>. Each caste group followed its hereditary calling and enjoyed a fixed social

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p.8.

<sup>41</sup>A.Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency, 1800-1858*, Madras, 1948, p.9.

<sup>42</sup>

Cited in Ibid., p.6.

For details see V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op.cit., pp.2-9.

status. Within the society the lines of orthodoxy were rigidly drawn and caste distinctions persisted. The differences that existed between the 'Right hand' and 'Left hand' castes among non-Brahmins are an example<sup>44</sup>. Each village was a corporate unit comprising within itself the entire machinery of local administration. Each village was headed by a village headman belonging to castes such as Reddy and Naidu and other important village officials were *Karnum* and the moneylender<sup>45</sup>. The village justice was dispensed by the headman and assisted by other officials. The introduction of new judiciary by the Colonial state resulted in far reaching changes in village administration. Except the office of *karnums*, all other earlier offices connected with village administration were abolished. Provincial and Circuit Courts were established, the Governor of the Presidency being the final court with a proviso that an ultimate appeal could be made to the Crown . The new judicial system proved to be very

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For a detailed description see Petition Registers, Vol.59, No.2787 and No.537, dated 3.3.1857, TNA; H.D.Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800*, London, 1913, pp.141-42; Arjun Appadorai, "Right and Left hand Castes in South India" in IESHR, Vol.11, Nos.2-3, June - September 1974 and V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op.clt., pp.8-9.

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Various administrative aspects of villages are discussed in Bundla Ramaswamy Naidoo, *Selections from the Records of the South Arcot District, No.II : Memoir on the Internal Revenue System of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1908, p.50 ff.

During this period there were altogether two different courts at Madras which used to hear appeals from lower courts. One was the Supreme Court which functioned according to the English law and was under the direct control of the Crown. The second was called Sadr Adalat which followed Hindu and Mohamadan laws and used to possess superior authority over the district and other lower courts in the Presidency. Each Court was presided over by a chief justice and two other judges. Digavalli Venkata Sivarao (ed.),

costly, time-consuming and multi-layered when compared to the earlier system<sup>47</sup>. It had baneful effects particularly on the cultivating classes. For example, under the new administration the number of officers with whom the cultivators had to communicate in respect of the revenue, civil and criminal affairs increased to twenty five as against the earlier five<sup>48</sup>. As a result the poor peasants were often placed at the mercy of courts where moneylenders could get favourable decisions by engaging lawyers.

The break-up of village as a unit was further enhanced by the introduction of new revenue policies, the dominant one being the Ryotwari system in the South. The initial history of revenue settlements in Madras Presidency was characterised by glaring inconsistencies as evidenced by constant shifts in policy formulations<sup>49</sup>. Apart from Ryotwari, there were other revenue settlements like Zaminadri (Permanent) and village Lease

Enugula Veeraswamaiah - *Kasiyatra Charitra* (Telugu), New Delhi, 2nd Edition, 1991, Introductory Essay on the life of Veeraswamaiah by K.S.Pillai, p.2 (First Edition 1941).

47

One of the popular Madras civil servants, Thomas Munro was in favour of a status quo in the earlier system. When he was made a special Commissioner in 1814 to revise the Madras Judicial System he favoured the idea of the revival of village judiciary under the overall supervision of the district collector. T.H.Beaglehole, *Thomas Munro and the Development of Administrative Policy in Madras, 1792-1818*, Cambridge, 1966, pp.83-104.

48

B.Ramaswamy Naidoo, Op.Cit.,pp.52-53.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.. pp.31-32.

Settlements . In course of time, the Ryotwari system became the predominant mode of assessment and, under the Governorship of Thomas Munro, the chief architect of Ryotwari, rapidly spread to most parts of the Presidency. Even some parts of the estates, under the control of local Zamindars who became defaulters in paying peshcush to the Company like in Northern Circars, were settled on Ryotwari system. This is because of the fact that there was no hard and fast rule, as in Bengal, that the landlord estates sold for arrears must again be permanently settled with the purchaser. As a result, in the districts that were mostly made up of Zamindari estates, there were considerable tracts of Ryotwari lands . Moreover, many of the Zamindari estates began to collapse in districts like Godavari, Krishna and Ganjam where lavish expenditure of Zamindars coupled with excessive demands from the Government enhanced their rate of decline . The Zamindars could not always cope with the liability to pay *peshcush* as their expensive life style and discouraging revenue collections from the ryots had a severe impact on the treasury. Furthermore, the cultivators of land were subjected to unmitigated exploitation as their rights on lands under Zamindari estates were not clearly

Right from the beginning Munro and his colleagues argued in favour of Ryotwari system. On the other, people like Hodgson strongly favoured the Permanent Settlement. When Munro left Madras in 1807 the Board of Revenue tried its hand in Zamindari and Village Settlements under the influence of Hodgson. For details See Nilmani Mukherji, *The Ryotwari System in Madras, 1792-1827*, Calcutta, 1962, pp.65-99.

B.H.Baden-Powell, *Administration of Land Revenue and Tenure in British India*. New Delhi, 1978, pp.111-12.

Cited in V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op. Cit., p.29.

defined. The Zamindars sometimes forcibly collected land rents from ryots for two or three years in advance when they fell short of revenue collections in order to meet the demand of the government . All these combined to keep the state of affairs in the Zamindaries in a highly discouraging economic set-up.

The spirit behind the Ryotwari system was to benefit the individual cultivator by recognition of his right to land and the elimination of all intermediary levels of revenue exploitation. However, the actual operation of the system proved to be more repressive in nature. The recognition of peasant's right to land at a fixed assessment proved illusory. Land rent was very high per each acre. The report by the Collector of Masulipatnam, Russel, stated that a ryot on dry land could raise crops worth Rs.99<sup>54</sup>. After meeting the government's demand and cultivating expenses, the ryot was finally left with a paltry sum of Rs.9 and 12 annas . Likewise, a ryot who could produce a crop worth Rs.160 on wet land would be left iwth Rs.10 and 5 annas . The revenue demand under Ryotwari was such that the Madras Presidency became

A few reliable accounts on this aspect are available from the histories of local zamindaries compiled by some of their ruling members. For example a few details in this regard can be obtained from Vastavaya Raya Jagapati Varma, *Peddapura Samsthana Charitramu* (Telugu), Rajahmundry, 1934, p.131.

54

The Report is cited in the 1852 memorandum of Madras Native Association. Op. Cit., Paragraph No.29.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

the highly taxed of all the three Presidencies and the tax collected in Madras for every one lakh of people was more than the double that collected in Bengal . The following table of revenue collections further attests this fact<sup>58</sup>

Year	ALL VALUES IN RUPEES			
	Total Income India General	Collection from Madras	Proportionate share of Madras According to Population	Difference in excess
1860-61	305404720	56616050	45335365	0.296
1869-70	351491160	69004310	45336174	0.726
1874-75	353095050	73870182	45335730	1.6S7
1879-80	413767870	82513675	45336715	1.536
1885-86	417241400	83537703	45336290	2.063

The high rates of land revenue became one of the potential factors in the spread of poverty among the peasants. Most often the ryot had been in a state of chronic incapability to meet the demand of the government. The ryot was even prohibited from conversion of land from wet to dry under the Ryotwari. Hence, the peasant was tied to the plough till a time when he had to dispose the land in lieu of land rents. Under these discouraging economic conditions the agricultural sector came to throw up a few

A.Sarada Raju, Op.Cit., p.50.

58

The table is based on the statistics provided by B.N.Sharma in his Presidential Address to the 21st Madras Provincial Conference, *Annie Besant Papers*, Reel No.3, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi(NMML).

characteristic developments. There was an increase in the number of agricultural labourers. Most of the peasants either sold or mortgaged their lands to moneylenders. They have been reduced to landless agricultural labour from land-owning tillers. Their percentage rose from 12.67. in 1871<sup>59</sup> to 19.617. in 1891<sup>60</sup>. It shows the upward move in their number. The growth of agricultural indebtedness was noticed. In such a state of affairs the peasant was incapable of reaping any benefits even during the few intermitent favourable periods. The low percentage of purchasing population under the exacting conditions of Ryotwari and absence of any outlet for the peasant to sell his grain in market were two important factors of this . The discouraging agriculture and constant growth of poverty often resulted in the outbreak of famines. Heavy taxation and growth of rural indebtedness ruled out any capital formation in the agricultural sector. This inturn effected the introduction of capitalist agriculture. All these factors had a cumulative effect on society. The seemingly democratic Ryotwari system ultimately proved to be a major colonial experiment in exploitation. The gradual growth of economic discontent in the society was beginning to found expression in popular memorials. The Madras Native Association finally put the economic sufferings of people on its agenda of political struggle by the middle of nineteenth century.

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W.R.Cornish, *Census of the Madras Presidency - 1871*, Madras, 1874 p. 12.

60 *Census of Madras Presidency - 1891*, Vol.XIII, p.330.

61 John F.Thomas, *Op. Cit.*, pp.53-56.

The introduction of new education also resulted in far reaching changes like in the case of new revenue policies. Education at the beginning of 19th century still remained confined to indigenous methods of teaching and the system was known by the name, **Pial** School system . It was calculated that out of 12,500 schools in the Presidency 750 were Vedic schools and the rest were village schools . Being unaltered in methods of teaching and subjects these schools became outdated. On the other hand, the Company administration did not shoulder the responsibility of popular education. As a result, the earliest efforts in the field of new English education were confined only to Christian missionaries and their activities were motivated by religious considerations.

Till the end of the 18th century all the educational activities were in the hands of Christian missionaries and their influence was to continue in 19th century also . Various mission schools were established in Andhra from the beginning of 19th century. By 1806, the London Missionary Society established a school at Visakhapatnam and, within a few years, it opened two more schools in Bellary district . In course of time missionary

For a description of the system see Charles E.Grover, *Results of Educational Census*, 1871, Madras, 1872, pp.2-4.

D.V.Siva Rao, *1857 Poorvarangamulu* (Telugu), **Bezawada**, 1957, pp.105-107.

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<sup>Y</sup> Vittal Rao, *Op.Cit.*, p.29.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.35-36.

educational institutions were established in many districts of Andhra like Cuddapah, Kurnool and Bellary by the London Missionary Society . The first female school also was opened by the Society at Visakhapatnam .

The Church Missionary Society began its work in Machilipatnam in 1841 and later on spread its activities to other coastal towns like Vijayawada and Eluru . The Pennsylvania Synod Society under the leadership of C.F.Heyer organised, by 1841, various schools in Guntur, Prattipadu and Nallapadu . Around the same time the American Baptist Missionaries began their work in Guntur District establishing their centres at Guntur, Gurajala, Palanadu and Ongole town soon became one of the most prominent centres of their activities . The American Baptist Mission and the Free Church Mission initiated their work in the neighbouring Nellore district also . In the Godavari region the North German Missionary Society was active in its work by 1840 and Rajahmundry became

S.Sathianathan, Op. Cit., p.52.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>

V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, Op. Cit., p.52.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

For details on the activities of Baptist Mission see Anima Bose, *Higher Education in India in the 19th Century : The American Involvement*, 1883-1893, Calcutta, 1978, p.223 ff.

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793-1833 : An Account of the Work of Christian Missionaries on behalf of Social Reform*, London, 1956, p.48.

their centre<sup>72</sup>. The work of North German Mission was later continued by the American Lutheran Mission with its branches spreading over rural places like Palcode and Nurasapore<sup>73</sup>. Almost all these missionary societies clubbed their religious propaganda with their educational activities.

Though the work of the Christian missionary societies cannot be underestimated, their educational activities invariably concentrated on religious teaching and conversion of people under instruction. The educational institutions readily helped them as the ideal centres of social intercourse. The Madras Government extended its support to the missionary activities in the field of education as the inculcation of Christian morals among the beneficiaries of English education would ultimately serve their imperial political interests. It is argued that the educational institutions of the missionaries did spread enlightenment among certain sections of society by dispelling their superstitions and making them self-respectful in society<sup>74</sup>. Nevertheless most of the time their activities, both social and educational, have been exaggerated, ill informed and hostile towards indigenous traditions. Consequently there were objections and organised protests against the missionary activities. The introduction of

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For details see Henry Morris, *Descriptive and Historical Account of the Godavari District in the Presidency of Madras*, London, 1878, pp.24-38.

73 *Ibid.*

74

V.Ramakrishna, *Op. Cit.*, pp.54-55.

new English education with its attendant missionary aspect provided ample scope for germination of counter reaction from society.

The foregoing account of changes effected in the contemporary society by the colonial rulers indicate that there was a break-up in the earlier political and social order. Different social groups were agitated over economic, social and political issues. All these groups were struggling for a new identity under the over powerful alien colonialism and looking for new alternatives to situate themselves against the colonial government.

The nineteenth century society in Andhra underwent a near total metamorphosis during colonial rule. The period witnessed a turbulent transition. The gloomy state of economy was coupled with the slow but significant growth of new education. The impact of Western ideas together with the far reaching economic changes stimulated a new outlook towards social change. The market economy led to the growth of urban centres in Andhra which also served as centres of English education. As a result of these changes, a new urban-based educated middle class emerged on the social setting and shouldered the responsibility of disseminating their newly acquired knowledge in the society. The growth of vernacular press came handy in this process. The economic discontent and the new enlightenment created a stir in contemporary Andhra. At the upper level, these stirrings were

truly reflected in an intense social reform activity. At the bottom level, they were manifested in the growth of early public and political associations which, with the help of commoners, were endeavouring plans to sow the seeds for a political agitation. Till late 19th century, these two strands of public activity could be easily distinguishable. It appears that social reform efforts of Veeresalingam and his followers shadowed other public activities. By the dawn of 20th century, Andhra, like other regions in the country, was drawn into political struggle. Vandemataram, Non-cooperation, Salt Satyagraha and Quit India Movements attracted the attention of millions of people. Extremist activities formed strong interludes now and then. During this period, the political activity submerged reform activity. Most of the social reformers, including radical activists like Gora, were active participants in freedom struggle. The present work proposes to critically analyse social reform activity of these people in the post-Veeresalingam period till the dawn of independence. In doing so, it takes into account the major movements of reform viz., women's movement, non-Brahmin movement and atheist movement. An analysis of these movements reveal the spread of rationalist and humanist ideas in contemporary society. The present study proceeds with an assumption that the social reform spirit was kept alive and reform activities were conducted on an equally enthusiastic scale as during Veeresalingam period.

## CHAPTER - 2

### EARLY REFORM TRENDS : A BRIEF SURVEY

The tradition of dissent and protest against social evils in society was not new to Andhra society. Attempts to reform some of the existing and rigid social notions were not foreign to the region and they were witnessed even during the late medieval period in this part of the Madras Presidency. This long standing tradition of internal criticism of Hindu religiosity disapproves of the notion that reform trends in 19th century were a colonial construct and influenced purely by innovations like English education and the influence of Christian missionaries. Nevertheless, these two variables were sure catalysts in enhancing the rate of reaction of reform endeavours in the 19th century. On the other hand, introduction of English education and the influence of Christian missionaries came under severe attack even during the early 19th century . The opposition to these

The protest against the contents of English education and the influence of Christian missionaries thereon date back to early 19th century in Madras Presidency. The Madras Native Community submitted a memorandum to the Court of Directors in 1846 under the title "The Wrongs and Oppressions of the Hindus". It took strong objection to the lack of interest on the part of Madras Government in promoting vernaculars, its enthusiasm in readily extending help to English schools under the guidance of missionaries and the undue interference of Christian preachers in educational learning. It stated that "the missionaries, having discovered the helplessness of gaining converts from adult population, have lately diverted their efforts to the establishment of schools for teaching the English language" and, warned the Government that "the British empire in India was chiefly maintained by the fidelity and allegiance of the Hindu community without which the foundations of the colonial state would be shaken". The memorial sparked off a great debate among official circles. For details see the Memorial of Native Community, 1846 and Public Department, Consultation Nos., 14 of 31.10.1846; 15 of 6.11.1846; 54 of 22.1.1847 and 31 of 22.5.1847, TNA. Even the low caste converts began to question the paternalist depotic role of missionaries in

extraneous developments itself formed a long saga of protest from the indigenous social segments. The ulterior motives behind these two colonial agencies lie somewhere else and were introduced as a part of cultural transaction with the important objective of circumscribing the budding social consciousness. The efforts of Orientalists probing deep into aspects of Hindu society, introduction of new mode of Western learning and the upsurge of Christian missionaries were related to the colonial interests of ideological superimposition of western ethics on Indian society which, in turn, were directly proportional to the speedy acquisition and safe retention of power by the colonial regime . Barring all these analytical considerations, Western education truly created a socially interactive place for emerging educated sections to see their society in a new light and question some of the socio-religious misconceptions, blind beliefs and social evils in their society. In doing so, they were successful in breaking the ideological influence of long standing Hindu traditions.

the light of their new education. it was vehemently protested that the endeavours of missionaries instituted a dictatorship of Christian orthodoxy in the place of Hindu orthodoxy. For details see H.Kaveri Bai, Meenakshi's *Memoirs*, Madras, 1937, p.124. The opposition to Christian missionaries and their influence on English education was to continue for long till late 19th century. By this time, all these theological controversies increasingly found expression in the columns of vernacular journals.

The role of these colonial agencies was partially realised by vernacular press by late 19th century. It was argued that the translation of (Hindu) books into English (by western scholars) provided ample scope for the Britishers to have a deeper understanding of religion and society in India. With this knowledge, they could identify all the shortcomings in the indigenous socio-religious practices. Taking advantage of this "they were successful in proselytising large sections of Indian society and consequently instituting their (political) power:.. For details see, Sri *Prabandha Kalpavalli* (Telugu Quarterly), September - November, 1881, n.p.

through themselves being subject to a 'false consciousness' under powerful colonial influence .

The rise and spread of Veerasaivism and Sri Vaishnavism within Hindu religious structure represented cataclysmic changes in the orthodox society of Medieval Andhra. Whereas Vemana and Potuluri Veerabrahman were agents of a radical departure from existing social traditions in so far as they questioned fundamentals of Hindu religiosity. Of these two, Vemana was more radical in thinking and, perhaps, the first iconoclast of the tradition of dissent and protest<sup>4</sup>. His deep forays into *varna* structure and the attendant criticism of the evils embedded in the same are of great significance. He criticised almost every aspect

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The cultural synthesis that was attempted under the British was more dominated by Western ethics under the guise of civilising mission. The educated sections did not realise the historical role of western ideological invasion and, instead were full of praise for the colonial state. This 'false consciousness' resulted in many ambiguities in the mental make-up of the educated. Raja Rammohan Roy, the pioneer of Indian social awakening, too was not an exception. See Barun De, "A Biographical Perspective on the Political and Economic Ideas of Rammohan Roy" in V.C.Joshi (ed.) *Rammohan Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India*, New Delhi, 1975, pp.46-89. In case of Andhra, Veeresalingam believed in the "Divine Dispensation" of British Rule and G.V.Appa Rao was given to the impression that the British authority in India was an embodiment of "Dharmarajya". For details see, V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., pp.79-86; K.V.Ramana Reddy (KVR), *Veeresalingam - Gurajada*, an unpublished manuscript obtained from the author. The general theoretical framework on the concept of 'false consciousness' is discussed by K.N.Panikkar in his Presidential Address (Modern Section), Indian History Congress, 36th Session, Aligarh, 1979.

Vemana was a poet-philosopher of Medieval Andhra. He hailed from the present day Rayalaseema. He renounced material pleasures and took to ascetic life during which time he composed his famous verses. For details see, V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., pp.42-45. Also see, M.Pattabhirama Reddy, *Vemana and His Times*, Kavali, 1988.

of Hindu religiosity and disapproved of iconic worship . The existing notions of salvation , caste rigidities , the pseudo-

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religious mystics , pilgrimages and Brahminical world view were subjected to critical scrutiny in his caustic writings. For him, religion was a created entity by those who are ignorant of absolute truth . Advocating monotheism, he disregarded the practice of idol worship . He lambasts even Veerasaivism and Sri **Vaishnavism** for their mutual recrimination over religious practices. He propounds the concept of one god or "Eka Brahma" and condemns the traditional Brahmin priests for their assumption of superiority . His views on caste are very significant as he does not pay any heed to varna hierarchy and, instead proposes that the attainment of real Brahmanhood is accessible to all castes. He takes strong objection to the nomenclature of certain castes as 'Mala' (Panchama)<sup>13</sup> . He remains a traditionalist as far as his notions on the status of women and does not entertain any reformist ideas on the subject. Vemana and his writings have been alive till date and any reform effort in Andhra is not complete without a reference to him.

See Bangorey (ed.), *Vemana Padyalu* (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1980, Part.I, Verse No.102; Part.III, Verse No.182, 202.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Part.I, Verse No.87.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Part.II, Verse No. 96, 142; Part.III, Verse No. 167, 168.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Part.III, Verse No. 174, 175, 193, 194, 196.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Verse No.253, 271.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Part.II, Verse No.371.

., Part.I, Verse no.189, 221.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Verse No.221.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Part.II, Verse No.135; Part.III, Verse No.455.

The dawn of modern age under the British rule resulted in many changes including the spread of reform ideas by new intelligensia. The dissemination of reformist tendencies was effected at two major levels : (a) the spread of reform ideas through writing. The early debates and lectures arranged by early public societies reflect this. This apart, the writings of contemporary intellectuals, educated members of higher learning institutes and contemporary journals performed this historical role. Perhaps, this period may be identified with the immediate pre-Veeresalingam era. All these activities formed the real backdrop to the succeeding period. (b) the Veeresalingam era. The period represents the material aspects of reformist period. The execution and realisation of reform ideas began with Veeresalingam, the pioneer of social reform in Andhra. Our estimate of early reform trends should necessarily consider these variables of spread of reform ideas at ideological level and, the consequent spread of reform activities at the material level. Coupled together, they set the stage for the speedy spread of reform ideas among other non-Brahmin groups in early 20th century and the consequent emergence of political consciousness.

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In the modern era, the installation of the British on the firm footing in India and consequent changes in the socio-economic structure had a direct bearing on the indigenous society. Along with them, the introduction of English education had far reaching

effects on the mental make-up of Indians. In the light of new learning, the educated sections were drawn towards issues of social importance. The founding of early literary societies and debating clubs symbolises such a surging spirit among the educated Indians. When the Britishers established The Madras Literary Society at Madras in 1812, there were seven members from Machilipatnam on the rolls of the same<sup>14</sup>. Though the Society represented the intellectual curiosity of the British people, it became recognised as something like a repository of knowledge in contemporary times.

The first major public body established by educated Indians at the Presidential Capital was the Hindu Literary Society. It sprang into existence in early 1830s wielding a greater influence on contemporary society. The Society was, in fact, stirred into action against the Christian missionary activities. Over a period of time, the Society focussed on various other issues and problems confronting people. Contemporary intellectuals like Vembaccam Raghava Charlu, Komaleswarapuram Srinivasa Pillai, Enugula Veeraswamaiah and Vennelacunti Subba Rao formed the backbone of this body. Of them, Komaleswarapuram Srinivasa Pillai and Enugula Veeraswamaiah evinced a keen interest in social problems like spread of English education, women's education and generation of social consciousness in society | The Society was a secular

<sup>14</sup>For details see, N.S.Ramaswami; *Madras Literary Society, A History : 1812 - 1984*, Madras, 1985, p.35 ff.

V.Ramakrishna, "Traveller's Tales and Social Histories : A study of Enugula Veeraswamy's Kasiyatra Charitra" in the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 50th Session, Gorakhpur, pp.574-78.

organisation and admitted members from different social segments. The programmes of Hindu Literary Society included activities like the promotion of female education, uplift of depressed classes and encouraging widow marriages . Enugula Veeraswamaiah was a 'Dubashee' in the Sadr Supreme Court at Madras. He was highly rational in his ideas and his "Kasiyatra Charitra" reflects this. He left traces of social evils in the book and condemned the contemporary evils like Sati. Around the same period, Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras Presidency, encouraged the formation of Madras School Book Society in 1820 and, Vennelacunti Subba Rao was made a member of it . The Society was a voluntary body and used to publish books for use in English and vernacular schools throughout the Presidency<sup>18</sup>. Soon, Subba Rao was asked to report on the state of education and he prepared a report on the existing educational system<sup>19</sup>. It revealed that knowledge of English was regarded as an important requisite for public employment.

*Ibid.* Also see, R.Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India, 1852-1891.*, Delhi, 1980, p.37.

For details see, Vennelacuty Soob Row, *The Life of Vennelacuty Soob Row (Native of Ongole)*, Madras, 1873, p.64.

<sup>18</sup>The list of the books prepared by the Society was printed and circulated to various towns in the Presidency. The books were supplied on order from schools. See *Vizagapatnam District Records*, Vol.4751, pp.229-33 and *Cuddapah District Records*, Vol.4604, pp.9-10, APA.

<sup>19</sup>V.Soob Row, op.cit., p.64. The report throws light on the deficient mode of education in society and the learners were alleged to learn lessons by rote without a knowledge of the meanings. There was no sound instruction in grammar and moral lessons to the students. The knowledge of English was highly unsatisfactory and its teaching "is inconsistent with just principles of affording education". The report recommended immediate publication of grammar books, vocabularies and moral lesson text books, both in English and Vernaculars. It emphasised that English grammar books should contain necessary explanations in regional tongues which, the author believed, would definitely improve the knowledge of learners.

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and caste to make a great push in favour of liberal opinions" . The trend of liberal disposition was to continue uninterrupted into middle of the century and later. When the Government of Madras conducted an open competition to award Elphinstone Prize on the subject viz., "The Probable Effect of the Introduction of Railways on the habits and Manners of the Hindoos", the prize winning essay by V.Sanjiva Rao (a student of Madras University) contained advanced views on caste and inter-caste relations<sup>23</sup>. The essay said that, "Experience has shown that (existing) social structure is quite incompatible with national prosperity, and advancement. Caste structure proved a drawback upon nation's progress. If India is to be ever independent and rank herself among the civilised nations of the world, an effacement of all her caste distinctions must be a grand step towards this object. Railways would effect this system....Railways will bring all classes of people together (into contact) and thus assuage or prevent ill feeling among the people. Inter-marriages and contacts may take place between inhabitants of the remotest provinces...Such a revolution must undoubtedly go far in extinguishing all national and provincial apathies amongst the Hindus and producing a national unity amongst them"<sup>24</sup>. Around the same time in the mofussil towns of the Presidency, Samineni Muthunarasimha Naidu published *Hltasoochane*, the pioneering book with highly critical insights into the existing social practices

*The Fifth Annual Report from the Governors of the Madras University, 1845-46, Madras, 1847, p.42.*

<sup>23</sup>

Vide *Report on Public Instruction, 1859-60, Appendix.C, pp.cxx-cxxiii.*

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

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Vide *Report on Public Instruction, 1859-60, Appendix.C, pp.cxx-cxxiii.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

The first journal in Telugu to have paid attention to existing social evils in society was *Vrittantni*. It was published in 1838 and edited by Mandigala Venkataraya Sastry . It was reported that the journal used to publish letters, highly critical of social maladies like nautch problem<sup>27</sup>. Though the journal had a little lease of life, it was popular during the days of its publication. The Government of Madras instructed its Telugu translator to prepare and send reports on the journal and its contents<sup>28</sup>. It became defunct by 1841. The next journal of repute in Telugu was *Vartamanatarangini* and was published in 1842 from Madras<sup>29</sup>. In the early days of existence, it was a weekly and printed by K.Sitayya Naidu at Vartamanatarangini Press<sup>30</sup>. It was edited by Puvvada Venkata Rao and used to contain articles by Telugu pandits like Ravipati Gurumurthy and Chinnaya Suri<sup>31</sup>. The journal was a landmark in the history of Telugu Press and a few copies along with extracts have been preserved to posterity by C.P.Brown<sup>32</sup>. They throw light on the nature and critical tone of

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K.R.Seshagiri Rao (ed.), *Studies in the history of Telugu Journalism*, New Delhi, 1968, pp.10-11.

27

Bangorey, *Brown Jabulu : Telugu Journalism Charitra* (Telugu), Nellore, 1973, pp.22-27.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

J.Mangamma, *Book Printing in India with special reference to the contribution of European scholars to Telugu, 1746-1857*, Nellore, 1975, p. 180.

V.Lakshmana Reddy, *Telugulo Patrika Rachana* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1988., pp.62-67.

32

C.P.Brown was officiating as the Postmaster General at Madras between 1848 and 1853. In the present capacity, he had a direct access to various journals despatched through the Post Office. Being a literary genius in Telugu, he collected and preserved a few extracts from the journal. On the break down of his health in 1853, he was replaced in the post by R.H.Williamson. For details see, **Pub.Dept.**, Consl.No.11, 15.2.1853 and No.43, 14.3.1854, TNA.

the articles, letters and, other correspondence published in its columns. The journal was in active circulation in various parts of the Madras Presidency. The figures of circulation were, perhaps, highest in the entire century in comparison with other Telugu journals published from Madras as well as mofussil regions of Andhra. The figures are available today and this was possible due to a contemporary directive from Imperial Government to all the provincial governments in the three principal Presidencies<sup>33</sup>.

These figures provide us direct hints to the popularity of *Vartamanatarangini*<sup>34</sup>

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Pursuant to the order in 1843, the Madras Postmaster General used to send the circulation figures of various journals despatched through the Post Office. For two years till 1844, the Postmaster General despatched the circulation figures in bulk for English and vernacular journals without a mention to individual circulation figures. From 1845 onwards, the figures for each journal were submitted to the Government. For example, A.J. Bruce, the then Postmaster General in 1844, mentions in his despatch that following the "directions contained in a letter (30th September 1843) from the Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, I have the honour to transmit, herewith, for submission to the Government of India, a statement exhibiting the number of Newspapers, of all descriptions, which were, daily despatched from this office, distinguishing the Native from English language, and to observe that pamphlets and periodicals, though forwarded at the Newspaper rate of postage, are not included in the statement". See *Ibid.*, No.33, dt. 23.1.1844.

34

The table excludes the number of copies distributed in Madras town and, counter sales, if any. The table is compiled on the basis of Pub.Dept., Consultation Nos. 58, 17.4.1846; 35, 27.4.1847; 23, 28.3.1848; 10, 8.5.1849; 30 and 31, 8.4.1850; 21, 14.10.1851; 11, 15.2.1853; 43, 14.3.1854. During this period one Persian journal (*Auckbar*) and three Tamil journals (*Desabhimani*, *Rajathany* and *Dravida Deepika*) were in circulation. While *Auckbar* continued till 1853, the Tamil journals ceased their publication at different points of time - *Desabhimani* in 1850, *Rajathany* in 1848 and *Dravida Deepika* in 1852. Of these three, *Desabhimani* was highly popular in the early days and its circulation figure crossed even 3000.

Year	No. of Copies despatched
1845	1279
1846	1331
1847	1554
1848	1563
1849	1197
1850	1007
1852	1026
1853	1661

*Vartamanatarangini* touched upon a number of aspects of contemporary society, customs, traditions and political affairs of the country. It used to regularly publish letters from readers and, one such letter in February 1841 critically viewed the unnecessary and extravagant expenditure during the time of Hindu marriages . In course of time, the journal grew highly critical of the activities of Christian missionaries and accused them of subverting Hindu religion unscrupulously . It called upon journalists to express their views in a candid manner and enlighten people on the attitudes of British rulers` . It asked people to abstain themselves from the Christian missionary activities and their educational institutions<sup>38</sup> . In the history of

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Cited in Bangorey, *op.cit.*, pp.22-27.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

Telugu Journalism, for the first time, it initiated a full length discussion on social evils, reform ideas and, political affairs. The Madras Government grew highly cautious of these tendencies and used to obtain information about the activities of the journal<sup>39</sup> Another credit of the journal was the introduction of spoken dialect in its columns. The dissemination of all these reform ideas was much vigorous in the post-1850 period. The later part of 19th century symbolised a break with the past. The spread of ideas was substituted by the material manifestation of the same in the form of reform activities. Kandukuri Veeresalingam emerged on the scene as the unquestioned champion of social reform activities.

The reform campaign in later part of 19th century has been best represented by Veeresalingam. The role of Veeresalingam was attested by a number of contemporary intellectuals of Andhra<sup>40</sup>. He was influenced by the prevailing social conditions, the reform efforts of people like Raja Rammohan Roy and, the Brahma Samaj movement of Bengal. He evinced a keen interest in the spread of scientific knowledge and the growth of rational thinking. He pleaded for mass education, uplift of women and spread of vernacular education. Before Veeresalingam took up the cause of women's education, missionaries and private individuals were operating in the field. The efforts of neither of these agencies were conducted, as a part of reform drive. On the part of the

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>

For example see, Chilakamarti Lakshminarasimham, *Sweeya Charitramu* (Autobiography in Telugu), Vijayawada, 1944. Also see, *Andhra Patrika* (Telugu daily), 18.6.1919; 26.6.1919.

Madras Government, it did not show much enthusiasm in the field of education and, the early history of educational developments in the Presidency have been marked by constant shifts, experiments and official apathy. Even by 1850's, the sanction of Madras Government for the cause of mass education was depressingly low at Rs.43,588. while it was Rs.3,87,110 in Bengal, Rs.1,33,251 in North Western Provinces and Rs.1,50,408 in Bombay<sup>41</sup>. The number of female scholars under instruction was highly dissatisfactory by 1850's and the following table is an indication.<sup>42</sup>

District	No. of Institutions	Male	Female
Ganjam	255	2965	12
Vizagapatnam	914	9412	303
Rajahmundry	570	4075	37
Masulipatnam	538	5249	33
Guntur	574	7622	102
Nellore	804	7563	58
Bellary	533	6581	60
Cuddapah	494	5892	108

<sup>41</sup>For more details see, Y.Vitta Rao, *Education and Learning in Andhra under the East India Company*. Secunderabad, 1979, Appendix.IV.

<sup>42</sup>Most of the institutions were traditional vernacular schools and, the learning methods were not in tune with the changing demands. However, some of them have been organised on scientific lines with facilities of instruction in English as well as vernaculars. For details see, Edward Balfour, "Remarks on the amount of education in Madras" in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, Vol. XVI, 1850, pp.394-395.

The Company government did not attach much significance to education even afterwards. By 1870, there were more non-governmental schools run by missionaries and private individuals<sup>43</sup>. More students were instructed in the Christian missionary educational institutions. Most of them had an ulterior motive of introducing Biblical morals into classroom teaching and this drive was consciously supported by the Government<sup>44</sup>. While not belittling the missionary efforts in the field of education, it becomes necessary to state that they were neither completely altruistic nor reformative. Spread of Christianity was an unwritten wish of missionaries in all their educational endeavours. This motive has been regarded by scholars as an attempt at cultural appropriation by the colonial masters<sup>45</sup>. It is true that the educational endeavours of missionaries, though religiously motivated, helped the spread of enlightenment among some sections of contemporary society by dispelling the age old superstitions.

43

For details on the efforts of individuals in places like Kakinada, Rajahmundry, Visakhapatnam and Vijayanagaram, see, **Y.Vaikuntham**, *Education and Social Change in South India : Andhra, 1880-1920*, Madras, 1872, p.14 ff. For details on the number of educational institutions see, S.Sathianathan, *History of Education in Madras Presidency*, Madras, Reprint, 1984, Appendix, p. CXXIV.

44

A few contemporary Minutes on Education by Colonial officials attest this. For example, Tweedale, the Governor of Madras Presidency (1842-1848), openly supported the activities of Christian missionaries and the plans to introduce Bible into school syllabus. For details see his Minute on Education, Pub. Dept., **Consl. No.29**, dated 15.9.1846. However, Controversial Minutes like the present were carefully excluded from the books on education published by Colonial government. One such book is by **J.F.Richey**, *Selections from Educational Records, Part.II*, 1840-59, Calcutta, 1922.

45

This is discussed in great detail in Aparna Basu, "Colonial Education : A Comparative Approach", Presidential Address, Section. IV, Indian History Congress, 50th Session, Gorakhpur.

Veeresalingam's earliest concentration, hence, was on mass education and, in particular, women's education. In fact, the central concern of Veeresalingam's reform campaign was emancipation of women from the clutches of rigid traditions, diehard customs and religious impositions. It was generally felt that unless the status of women, who constituted half of the population, was reformed, the society wouldn't register any progress. Veeresalingam, being himself a great literary figure in Telugu, began writing a number of satires to draw public attention to social evils and expose the steady fall in social and individual values. The areas of major concentration for him were female education, bride price, infant marriages and widow marriages. Emancipation of women occupied a pivotal role in the activities of social reform movement initiated by Veeresalingam. This was understandable in the light of women being subject to age old bondage and ignorance.

In the field of women's education, the contemporary society held the notion that female education was meant for devadasis only. Such a deep rooted prejudice could not be uprooted in a dramatic manner. Added to this, the efforts of colonial government in this direction were almost non-existent till atleast middle of nineteenth century. It was only Christian missionaries who pioneered initial efforts in the field of women's education in Madras Presidency. London Missionary Society, the American Missionaries and, the Church Missionary Society established

various boarding homes and day schools . A separate girls' school was opened in 1867 at Visakhapatnam and, this was soon followed by the establishment of a few other girls' schools at **Vijayanagaram** in 1868, Kakinada in 1868 and Dhavaleswaram in 1874<sup>47</sup>.

Of all efforts in the field of women's education, the efforts by Veeresalingam opened a new leaf in the chapter of female education in Andhra. Veeresalingam established a journal, Vivekavardhani in 1874 and it was meant to be an exclusive instrument for the propagation reform ideas. In its columns, Veeresalingam unleashed a campaign advocating the cause of women's education. The movement soon picked up necessary momentum. The echoes of Veeresalingam's efforts at Rajahmundry were soon heard at farther places of Andhra region. The campaign promoting the cause of female education spread to areas like Masulipatnam, Visakhapatnam and Bellary where separate societies were carved to cater to the needs of women's education. Local leaders and liberal-minded educated people readily joined the movement and were instrumental in spreading the message of Veeresalingam. For instance, Dasu Sriramulu of Machilipatnam was an enthusiastic supporter of the present drive

For details see, *Results of Educational Census : Madras, 1871 : A report.*

<sup>47</sup>

V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., pp.90-91. The Vijayanagaram school was meant for Brahmin and Kshatriya girls of the Zamindari town. The Dhavaleswaram school was founded by Veeresalingam and there were no such restrictions on admission as in the case of Vijayanagaram school.

<sup>48</sup>

*Ibid*, pp.94-95.

By 1905, Veeresalingam started a lower secondary school for girls and it was an appendage to the widows home at Rajahmundry. The school at **Bhimavaram** (Estd. 1889) became highly popular around this time and was giving instruction to girls in various subjects. Under the speedy spread of reform **activities**, various local organisations were motivated to take up the cause of women's education. The local women's organisation at Guntur established a girls' school by 1908. The Women's Conferences too were active in propagating the cause of women's education. The proceedings and resolutions of different women's associations, both in the pre and post Veeresalingam period, attest this<sup>49</sup>. An association with the exclusive objective of the spread of education among women was established in 1907 and, it served the needs of aspirants **in** Godavari and Krishna districts in the Coastal Andhra region. Sarada Mandiram of Anantapur (Estd. 1909) was another such body endeavouring for the speedy spread of education among women. Along with all these efforts, local level social conferences, the budding caste associations and journals paid greater attention and discussed in detail the need for the growth of female education. For example, the Godavari District Social Conference, the Kurnool District Social Conference and, the Bellary District Social Conference<sup>53</sup> had female education on their agenda. All these intense reform endeavours were responsible for the growth of

49

Details are discussed in the next chapter.

V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., pp.98-99.

<sup>51</sup>Pub. Dept., Consl. No.517, dt. 28.4.1914, TNA.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, Consl. No. 1298, dt. 8.10.1914.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, Consl. No. 130 dated 27.1.1915.

proper awareness among women and instilled a greater confidence in them. The proliferation of women's journals run by women and the growth of women's associations in the early 20th century owe a lot to the earlier efforts initiated by Veeresalingam in this direction. Apart, the rate of literacy among women slowly began to register a satisfactory progress.

The other major reform activity that engaged the attention of contemporary reformers was marriage reform. This sphere of activity included three major components viz., infant marriages, **Kanyasulkam** (bride price) and widow marriages. Opposition to infant marriages and bride price was on constant rise. According to 1921 census, Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts reported maximum number of child marriages in Andhra region of Madras Presidency. For example, there were **11,904** married girls below the age of four years in these districts when the total number of such girls in the entire Presidency was 24,257<sup>54</sup>. Likewise, 72,102 married girls in the age group of 5-9 years were reported from the above districts while the corresponding figure was 1,44,482 for the entire Madras Presidency . Under these conditions, a fight against the evil of child marriages was imperative for the social reformers. It was observed that infant marriages were rampant among traditional Brahmin families. It was but natural that the problem assumed dangerous dimensions as traditional and orthodox Brahmin families

<sup>54</sup>Census of India, 1921, Vol. XIV, Madras.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

had a blind devotion to some of the outdated practices like infant marriages. They always defended the practice on some religious grounds without any respect to human emotions and wishes. The protest against this was observed even before 1850. There were a few solitary voices which condemned the system of child marriages. The earliest public protestation against this practice was given due expression in a contemporary journal viz., *People's Friend*. The journal was established by a Madras-based Telugu teacher, **Dampuru Narasaiah**, and he extensively quoted scriptural evidence in his arguments against child marriages. His efforts were soon followed by Veeresalingam who conducted the campaign against infant marriage in an organised manner. The Rajahmundry Social Reform Association soon championed the cause and conducted a vigorous movement against infant marriages. The Association fixed the marriageable ages for girls as well as boys, 14 years and 18 years respectively. Various contemporary social reform conferences that met in Andhra gave priority status to the issue of child marriages and waged a relentless struggle against this evil.

The problem of child marriages was closely related to **Kanyasulkam** or bride price. This inhuman practice could be traced to medieval times in the history of Andhra. Poverty and exacting domestic economy were the major causes for the sale and purchase of young girls. Under this practice, infant girls were given away

Cited in V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., p.104.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 107.

to elderly men in the form of marriage. The natural concomitant of this practice was early widowhood for infant girls. Veeresalingam and other contemporary reformers condemned the practice in every possible way and voiced their protest in society as well as contemporary press. The Rajahmundry Social Reform Association took up the issue and made strenuous efforts to drive the evil from the society. At the another level, liberal minded intellectuals like Maharaja Ananda Gajapati of Vijayanagaram initiated serious efforts to stem down the tendency with the help of legislative measures. He moved a resolution on the floor of Madras Legislature with a passionate appeal to the Government to contemplate serious measures to curtail the practice. But, the Government acted otherwise and declined to legislate on the sensitive issue fearing that any initiative in this direction would boomerang in the face of severe opposition from the orthodox elements in the contemporary society. The reaction of the colonial government was normal and was on expected lines. The initial enthusiasm of colonial state in promoting indigenous social reform drives was gradually lost in more compelling political realities and exigencies of contemporary era which became their sole concern and, hence they were no more prepared to extend their helping hand to any effort on the part of Indians. Though devoid of support, the efforts in fighting the issue of bride price continued without any interruption. The evil was attacked from all directions and the magnum opus of Gurajada Appa Rao, *Kanyasulkam* (Telugu play), was published by late 19th century

which was a direct attack on the practice<sup>58</sup>. The play and its continuous stage performances created a historical awareness among people against the inhuman practice.

The problem of young widows was another social evil that attracted the attention of reformers. It was more confined to upper castes of Hindu society and, in particular, Brahmins. The problem was, with less intensity, visible in other non-Brahmin castes like Kshatriyas, Velamas, Vaisyas and Viswabrahmins. As stated earlier, infant marriages served as a potent reason for the growth of young widows in society. Steeped in poverty, the sale of young girls (*Kanyasulkam*) was rampant and most often infant girls were married to elderly people. These unequal marriages soon resulted in the growth of infant widows whose plight was miserable. Subject to domestic impositions, these young widows were given to household drudgery and were not allowed to take part in any worldly affairs. Gurajada Appa Rao described their plight in his *Kanyasulkam*<sup>59</sup>

"She leaves her bed at A.M. four,  
And sweeps the dust from off the floor,  
And heaps it all behind the door,            The Widow !

58

It has been reviewed by one of the outstanding literary figures in Telugu, Sri Sri that *Kanyasulkam* is, perhaps the first of its kind in the history of Indian literature which reflected contemporary social realities and devoted to the cause of reform. For details see G.V.Appa Rao, *Kanyasulkam* (Telugu), Jayanti Publications, Vijayawada, Eleventh Edition, 1995. See the Review article by Sri Sri, p.13.

59

G.V.Appa Rao, op.cit., p.69.

Of wondrous **size** she makes the cake,  
And takes much pains to boil and bake,  
And eats it all without mistake,           The Widow !

Through fasts and feasts she keeps her health,  
And pie on pie she stores by **stealth**,  
Till the town talk of her wealth,           The Widow ! "

According to census figures, widows accounted for 217. of female population in the Madras Presidency and, 127. of these widows were reported to be under the age of thirty years . The problem of these young widows attracted the attention of all rational and liberal elements from different caste groups. They initiated an intense campaign against the problem of widows. Kandukuri Veeresalingam gives a vivid description of young widows in his novel *Rajasekhara Charitramu*. Prior to Veeresalingam, a few others made sincere attempts in attacking the problem. People like Raghunatha Rao and Chentsal Rao put in their humble efforts at Madras and worked hard to generate necessary awareness in society. Soon the Widow Remarriage Association was established and published a few pamphlets including a tract on the desirability of widow re-marriages .

Cited in V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., p. 109.

For details see, Kandukuri Veeresalingam, *Sweeya Charitramu* (Autobiography in Telugu), Part.I, Rajahmundry, 1911, pp. 143-50.

The significant contribution to widow marriage campaign was made by Veeresalingam in the Madras Presidency. He delivered a critical and comprehensive lecture on the issue of widow marriages at Rajahmundry in 1879. The lecture was symbolic of the actual beginning of reform activities. During the same year, Veeresalingam organised Widow Marriage Association and embarked upon an intensive tour of different places in Andhra . One of the most significant aspects of the present drive of Veeresalingam was the participation of students on a large scale throughout his campaign. Following all these initial endeavours, he performed the first widow marriage in 1881 and the second marriage also was performed during the same year. The performance of these widow marriages resulted in a great stir and created commotion among the orthodox sections of society. On the eve of widow marriages at Rajahmundry, 500 students of Veeresalingam were on constant vigil throughout the night fearing physical assault on him . These instances indicate the strong and pervasive influence of contemporary social reform activities of Veeresalingam. On the other hand, the orthodox sections in society began a social boycott of all those connected with the widow marriage movement. The strength of their opposition paled into insignificance very soon before the rapidly spreading influence of Veeresalingam's campaign. By 1903, there were 63 widow marriages reported from

62

*Ibid.*, pp. 156-160.

63

For details vide, Valluri Suryanarayana Rao, Suryanarayaneeyamu (Autobiography in Telugu), Kovvur, 1936, pp.165-167. Suryanarayana Rao was a student of Veeresalingam at Rajahmundry. Though the present number of students may be an exaggerated figure, it is a proof to the slow spread of reform activities among students.

Andhra. Of these marriages, 57 were among Brahmins, 3 each among Vaisyas and other castes

Social Purity Movement formed an important stream of social reform activity during 19th century. Raghupati Venkata Ratnam was instrumental in the growth of the movement. The central concern of social purity campaign was Devadasi or Nautch problem. Devadasi system had been long associated with temples in south India. The loss of feudal or royal patronage in course of time resulted in some undesirable developments among Devadasis. The system has been gradually reduced into prostitution under the new socio-economic conditions created by the colonial rule. Nautch parties became an order of the day at the time of festive occasions, social gatherings and marriages. The upper echelons of society patronised this practice. Gurajada Appa Rao vividly portrays how upper castes in society were passionately drawn towards a nautch girl in his *Kanyasulkam* and ends the play with a positive note showing the impact of reform campaign of contemporary social reformers on the system of nautch. The problem of nautch girls has two internal dimensions. On one hand, all the upper castes were attracted towards nautch girls without any major differences of opinion among them like in the case of child and widow marriages. This had a necessary implication for contemporary reformers that they had to effect a radical change in the perception of those people and drive them away from the present social evil. On the other hand, reformation and

Cited in V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., p.123.

rehabilitation of nautch girls. While Raghupathi was successful in effecting a change in the mental attitudes of the people, **Muthulakshmi** Reddy and Yaminipurna **Tilakam** championed the cause of their reform and rehabilitation in the early 20th century. The campaign against Devadasi system was given a firm shape by Raghupathi during his student days at Madras. Like Veeresalingam, he too undertook a rigorous tour of various parts of the then Andhra region and exhorted people on the necessity to curtail the evil. He gave a clarion call to uproot the system to lead a decent life. On his part, Veeresalingam provided the support of this pen to the social purity drives of Venkataratnam Naidu. He published a chain of articles in his journal, *Vivekavardhani*. Other contemporary journals too extended their moral support to the reform campaign and propagated, in their columns, the necessity to address the problem.

### III

The reform efforts during the period of Veeresalingam were operating under many constraints. At the outset, most of the reform efforts were confined to orthodox Brahmin families as the Brahminical households served, over a period of time, as ideal breeding grounds for various blind beliefs and social evils. Once adopted in their households, they gradually spread to other social segments in Hindu society. Hence, the concentration of people like Veeresalingam on Brahminical households. Even literary works like *Kanyasulkam* projects the same state of affairs. The reform

activity was largely confined to urban areas covering small percentage of urban population, mostly drawn from upper castes and, in particular, Brahmins. The rise of revivalist backlashes against social reform endeavours and the blind opposition from orthodox sections of society checked the pace of reform activity. Orthodox and traditional elements always created hurdles in the path of reform endeavours. These interruptions and interferences necessitated a strong line in defence as well as offence from the side of reformist leaders. Though Veeresalingam provided a dynamic leadership to the entire campaign, his absence from the field badly effected the same and there was no second line of leadership to shoulder the responsibility. For instance, the reform movement slackened when Veeresalingam was away at Madras between 1897 and 1904. Again, the movement displayed signs of relaxation when he diverted his attention to the organisational aspects of Hitakarini Samaj after 1910. All these contemporary developments hint us at one important aspect that the movement always centred round dynamic leadership. In the absence of alternative line of leadership, the vigour of the social reform activity was gradually lost. Until the early decades of 20th century, when many of Veeresalingam's students and others influenced by his reform endeavours, took up the cause of reform among different caste groups, the reform activity of Veeresalingam era was lying low.

The presence of colonial regime and its efforts in legitimising their power in India served as a major hurdle to the activities of educated intellectuals. In the initial phase, the

colonial state extended its helping hand to reform activities and tried to impress on Indians that social reform was their cup of tea too. The colonial initiative had a different motive. It was to circumscribe the newly emerging social awareness into an orbit of colonial cultural ethics. The state readily assumed a historical role of a good Samaritan. Under this influence the early reformers, though represented a break with the traditional values of indigenous society, were invariably subject to a 'false consciousness'. The implication of colonial role in the entire process was to be realised only during the course of developments in 20th century.

Acting under all these constraints, the reform efforts of early social reformers might appear insignificant and halting in their nature. These efforts had to contend with changing attitudes of colonial regime and its cultural hegemony as well as the indigenous orthodox sections. The partial success of early reform campaign was due to these constraints. Yet, the reform efforts left behind them a great legacy. It was a legacy of the spread of social awareness throughout the society. IT was a legacy that instituted ideas of self-respect and self-confidence on a firm footing in the minds of people. It was a legacy that provided motivating zeal and driving force to later day developments in early 20th century. That the first generation of leaders in Andhra, both reform and political, were either direct students of Veeresalingam or influenced by his reform campaign, is a fitting tribute and a token of success to the developments in 19th century.

The course of events during early 20th century presented a different social set up to the progress of reform activities of early period. They were overshadowed by the surging national movement. It can be seen that reform drives remained strong undercurrents throughout the period of our present study. The indomitable presence of freedom struggle did not leave an exclusive social space for reformers. In fact, people with social reform background were in the forefront of freedom struggle. The two activities were so complementary in their roles that any water-tight compartmentation between the two is not possible. Yet it was a positive interaction. Unlike the colonial intervention, it was reform-friendly. Despite the sweeping influence and emotional appeal of freedom movement, the reform endeavours in the early 20th century were more organised. The following developments are noteworthy :

- a) The spread of reform ideas was equally evident in all sections of society unlike the 19th century efforts which, most often were confined to upper castes.
  
- b) The reform endeavours were given a solid organisational shape and firm social footing. The growth of caste associations and their intense intra-caste reform activity is a clinching evidence.
  
- c) The growth of alternate leadership in the reform campaign. The democratic decentralisation of leadership was a major development. Leaders from different caste groups emerged on the social scene and shouldered the responsibility of effecting a change in the mental make up of people in general and particularly

those belonging to respective castes. For instance, the activities of **Atmuri Lakshminarasimham** and Darisi Chenchiah (Vaisyas), Kumara **Yachama Naidu (Velama)**, Suryadevara **Raghavaiah Choudari** and Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari (**Kammas**), Chinta Raghunatha Reddy and C.R.Reddy (Reddy), **Dommeti Venkata Reddy (Setti Baliya)** and Kondiparthi Veerabhadracharyulu (Viswabrahmin) symbolised the multi-dimensional aspect of reform leadership. The monolithic nature of leadership of reform campaign during the 19th century paved the way for a smooth emergence of plural leadership in early 20th century. This decentralisation helped in the consolidation of reform endeavours during the period of our study.

d) the growth of women's movement, separate women's associations and the intense struggle against all social evils confronting women in society is a significant historical development. Leaders from among women emerged on the scene and concerned themselves with issues like education, infant and widow marriages, bride price, nautch problem and dowry. The central concern of **Veerasingam's** reform campaign has been consolidated in the present period.

The foregoing developments in the 20th century provided solid strength to reform activities conveying an unmistakable impression that the zeal for reform was not lost. The national movement overshadowed it, but did not devour the same. The reform activities and the awareness generated from it were, in fact, instrumental in creating the necessary political consciousness in contemporary society.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN'S ISSUES : THE REFORM AND THE LEGACY

For centuries women in India had been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The age old traditions and orthodox religious principles riveted women to an insignificant corner of indigenous social spectrum. Time and again elements and influences of patriarchy were forcefully imposed on the social structure which ultimately clipped the wings of women. Most often the status of woman in Indian society was that of glorified slavery. In a nut shell, women have been seen as mere subjects of male members and looked upon as mere adjuncts to men.

The traditional status-quo in so far as the position of women remained intact even during the process of cultural synthesis that was affected during the rule of Muslim monarchs. Despite the process of reciprocation between Hinduism and Islam, in imbibing elements of cultural practices into one another, the status of woman did not show any considerable change. Even in Islamic tradition the role of woman in society was no better than that in Hindu society. The major consolation during this process was the indigenous tradition of dissent and protest against the established cultural practices. In South India, Veerasaivism, Verses of Vemana and Sri Vaishnavism defied the brahminical order in society. The 19th century reform movements have been

For details on these aspects, see K.Satyanarayana, A study of the History and Culture of the Andhra. New Delhi; 1975; S.M.Hunashall, The Lingayat Movement - A Social Revolution in Karnataka. Dharwar, 1947; V.R.Narla, Vemana, New Delhi; 1970; V.R.Narla (ed.), Vemana Through Western Eyes, New Delhi, 1969.

**influenced** by these developments. Though there was a healthy tradition of protest in society, the problems of women became central to reform activity only during the 19th century.

The reform movement in Andhra during the 19th century should be seen as a part of all India efforts initiated in this direction. The reform efforts of earlier reformers in Bengal and Maharashtra had a bearing on Telugu people. Like other regions in the country, Andhra society during the 19th century, was dotted by caste restrictions, blind beliefs and various social evils. The consolidation of colonial rule and the destructive as well as regenerative roles played by the British during this century paved the way for social change. The destruction of rural economy, creation of a national market, introduction of English education along with western notions of liberal ideas and new modes of transport and communication provided a launching pad for social reform. The English educated middle class that took its origin during this period, shouldered the responsibility of taking the new message to others in contemporary society.

The existence of indigenous tradition of dissent provided the needed social setting to reform activity. Kandukuri Veeresalingam became a pioneer of social reform activity in Andhra. The central concern of his efforts was women's issues. His intense reform activity in these fields spread the necessary

For more details on early reform activities in Bengal and Maharashtra, see N.S.Bose, Indian Awakening and Bengal, Bombay, 1965; Sivanath Sastry, History of Brahma Samaj, Calcutta 1974 (first edn. 1911); D.S.Sharma, Hinduism Through Ages, Bombay, 1956.

consciousness among women numbers of the society. The efforts of reformers eased out various social restrictions imposed on women. The latter began educating themselves and took to various professions like teaching and journalism. G.V.Appa Rao, a literary prodigy in Telugu during late 19th century, became very optimistic of the immense impact of social reform activities on the conditions of women and declared with a prophetic inclination that modern woman would rewrite history.

The father-figure of social reform movements in Andhra, Veeresalingam died in 1919 leaving behind him a rich legacy of social awakening and the much need to continue further the attack on social evils which witnessed signs of clear decline. It is true that most of the social evils have been given shattering blows during the life time of Veeresalingam. Though the intensity of the problem was diluted, its total annihilation was still due at the time of his death. While evils like bride price yielded to heavy pressure of social reform, the problem of child marriages and widow marriages still remained major social obstacles to contend with. Further, new social evils were added to the already existing ones. The most important among them was the problem of dowry at the time of marriages. The problem of dowry was equated with the growth of English education and creation of white-collar jobs under colonial administration.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note

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For details, see K.V.Ramana Reddy, Veeresalingam - Curajada (Telugu) an unpublished article obtained from the author. Also by the same author Mahodayam (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1969. This book is an authentic biography on G.V.Appa Rao and provides interesting insights into social history of Andhra during the 19th century.

4

A few contemporary autobiographies reveal that the dowry problem

that the problem of dowry was slowly raising **its** ugly head even during the second **half** of 19th century. We come across a few scattered instances of harassment of brides for dowry and the first dowry death was reported from Nellore district in the second half of 19th century itself. Though such instances were rare, still they served as a strong pointer to the magnitude of problem in future. Infact, the problem of dowry became acute by early 20th century. The post Veeresalingam period too left a achieved during the earlier period. An attempt is made in the present chapter to review and assess the activities in the field of social reform after Veeresalingam.

## II

The death of Veeresalingam left many a reformer perplexed and it was considered a severe blow to the ongoing reform

was gradually assuming alarming proportions for middle class people. It is reasoned out that the new employment opportunities created by the English education displaced many people from traditional occupations. When the educated people could secure a job with some surety of tenure and a fixed amount of salary, they began to feel that they were relatively secure in an era of declining economic conditions under the colonial rule. Precisely these were the people who demanded dowry at the time of marriages and this problem initially became very acute in case of middle class Brahmin families in Andhra which had more number of educated and employed people. With the growth of English education, the problem of dowry became serious in other non-Brahman castes also. For details, see Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, Anubhavalu - Jnapakaloonu (Autobiographical Reminiscences in Telugu), Vol.1, Rajamahendravaram, 1955, pp.37-41.

For more details, see K.H.S.S.Sundar, Origins and Growth of Political Consciousness in Andhra During the Nineteenth Century. Ph.D. Theses, University of Hyderabad, 1994, p.144. Also see Apendix No.2 on p.315 in the same thesis, wherein the author gives an anonymous protest petition addressed to the Governor of Madras Presidency and which, requests for a thorough enquiry into the happening.

activity in Andhra. Describing Veeresalingam an 'angel', a well-known contemporary playwright bemoaned that the path-finder left the people leaving them without a captain to steer the ship of reform to a safe shore. He however, ends by saying that the sapling of reform which Veeresalingam planted would definitely grow and spread its branches throughout the contemporary society. Precisely it was this optimism generated by Veeresalingam and the social awakening of his reform efforts led the second generation of reformers in a right direction after his death. A few important aspects may become significant here for our analysis. Whereas the influence of Veeresalingam was explicit during his lifetime, the same was implicit after his death. Though the onslaught of revivalist movements like Arya Samaj and Theosophy succeeded in halting the pace of reform activity, they failed in arresting its spirit. The intellectual make-up of Modern Andhra and the first generation of political leaders in this region have been immensely influenced by the social reform endeavours. The legacy of Veeresalingam was kept alive after his death by the next generation. It is attested by the reform efforts of various people in society after 1920. Despite the presence of a strong hegemonic influence of national movement throughout the second phase of social reform in the pre-independence era, people never lost their insights into this important aspect of social development.

See Kallakuri Narayana Rao, Veeresalinga Vimsati (Telugu), Kakinada, 1919, pp.4-6. This is a small book of poems written by the author mourning the death of Veeresalingam.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

An important aspect of **post-Veerasingam** period was that women members in the society began to organise themselves in order to fight for the rights of their own. Though the social base of such women activists was narrow and their number was less, they came to the forefront of reform activity after 1920. In the pre-1920 period enlightened men, under the influence of rationalistic and humanistic sentiments, worked for the upliftment of women. By early 20th century they were replaced by self-conscious and self-confident women members who shouldered the task for the betterment of their social and economic status. They founded many organisations, institutions and initiated efforts to alleviate the miseries to which women members had been subjected to. It can be seen that during the period of present study, there was hectic activity in society for the emancipation of women from the confines of traditional roles and in removing several practices that were deterrent to their development. The wish among the women members to initiate such constructive activity was possible due to rapid changes in the social, economic and political spheres during 19th century and early 20th century.

The existing tradition of protest in Indian society coupled with the inflow of Western ideas facilitated the social change and women began to participate in social movements. Soon after the first decade of 20th century a national conference on women's education was organised which consequently led to setting up of the first ever All India Women's Conference in 1927.<sup>o</sup> The

Shahida Lateef, "The Indian Women's Movement and National Development : An Over View" in Gail Minault (ed.), The Extended

organisation was expected to consolidate the efforts of all women groups and formulate policies on women's issues. However, the organisation was narrow in its scope and ignored the problems pertaining to rural women. Added to this the social base of the movement was also very narrow as most of the members of the organisation were drawn from the urban-based well-to-do families.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the organisation remained confined to a small group of women from urban areas.

Broadly, the women's movement in India had three distinct phases. During the 19th century, the reform efforts were directed at improving the status of women beyond purely domestic concerns. These initial efforts were directed at improving the social position of women vis-a-vis age old traditional practices. The efforts were directed by men. In the second phase of reform activity, starting from the second decade of 20th century witnessed the emergence of women organisers and activists. The movement during the period was elite in nature and became defunct after achieving specific goals. In the later stages, there was a gradual realisation that involvement of women from different strata of society and an exposition of their problems became the primary concerns. It was further realised that the movement should be horizontal involving all women on equal footing rather than a vertical movement.

Organisational activity among Indian Women was generally

Family. Delhi, 1981, p.201.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 198-99.

higher in South India than in North India. This had been particularly marked in the Andhra region of former Madras Presidency. Scholars put forward three major reasons for this. Madras Presidency was ahead of all other parts in India in terms of female literacy. The female literate number was slightly higher in Tamil areas than the Telugu areas of the Presidency. **However**, education in parts of Andhra was relatively free from Christian missionary influence which was not so in Madras and other Tamil areas. As a result the girl students of Telugu region did not face the onslaught of missionary influence like in other parts.<sup>14</sup> The slow but significant growth of education,

Karen I. Leonard and John C. Leonard, "Social Reform and Women's Participation in Political Culture: Andhra and Madras" in Gail Minault (ed.), *Op.Cit.*, p.39.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.27-40.

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It is not to say that Andhra region was totally free from missionary influence. Christian missions were active in this part of the Presidency too. For details see V.Ramakrishna, Social Reform. *Op.Cit.*, pp.50-55. Contemporary Press reports reveal that missionary activities were carried out regularly. Even reform journals like Vivekavardhini came heavily upon missionary activities and, in particular the Zenana missions which were converting Hindu females. See Vivekavardhini. January 1884 in Native Newspaper Reports (NNPR), Tamilnadu Archives (TNA). Some journals published a series of articles condemning Christian morals. See Purusharthapradayini, March 1876, p.36. Some times a few violent attacks on Christian missionaries were also reported by colonial authorities. For example see the Minute by Chamier, a member in the Governor's council of Madras in Secret Department Consultations, No.1, dt.13.7.1847, TNA. However, large scale protest was reported from Madras and surrounding regions. For details see K.H.S.S.Sundar, *Op. Cit.*, p.73 and p.172. Violent acts on Christian missionaries assumed serious proportions in Tamil regions of the Presidency. For more details, see R.E.Frykenberg, "The Inner Logic of Imperium in India" in Indo-British Review (IBR), Vol.VI, No.2, and "Crises of Conscience: Conversion under the company Raj in South India" in *Ibid.*, Vol.IX, No.1.

<sup>14</sup>Protests against missionary interference in girls' schools in Andhra were a few in number. For example, it was reported around 1871 that most of the girls at Bezawada Church Mission Girls' School left the institution because of a religious panic. See

coupled with social endeavours during the 19th century, provided much needed scope for women to freely express themselves. It can be seen that the struggle for the cause of women, culminated in the establishment of women's journals in Andhra. The lead was taken by Veeresalingam and he published first ever women's journal in Andhra in 1883 viz., Satihitabodhini. This was followed by the publication of a few other women journals during the late 19th century and early 20th century. The unique contribution of these journals lies in the fact that they took reform ideas to women and were responsible for the spread of enlightenment among them. Coupled with the growth of education and journalism, the **Brahmo Samaj** and its off-shoot, **Prarthana Samaj** had a major impact on the Telugu speaking areas in the fields of social reform and political awakening. For example, the **Brahmo Samaj Centres** which were exclusively meant for women at Eluru and Rajahmundry may be cited here. In such a favourable social setting women members in the society were imbued with a new enthusiasm and took up the cause of women's issues themselves. Trained in a society that was bubbling with reform spirit, they soon emerged as activists and leaders of the

for details Report on Public Instruction, 1871-72, Appendix A, No.V, P.xlii, TNA.

<sup>15</sup> See K.H.S.S.Sundar, Op.cit., p.143.

For a detailed account on women's journals, see D.Padmavathi, Aspasta Pratibimbalu: Telugulo Streela Patrikalu - Oka pariseelana. 1883-1947 (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1989; Vavilala Gopalakrishnaiah, "Andhra mahilalu - Patrikalu" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila, dt.5.1.1945 and V.Ramakrishna, "Women's Journals in Andhra During the Late 19th Century: A Study of the Reflection of Reform Issues" in the Proceedings of Indian History Congress. Goa, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Andhra Mahila, dt.1.11.1953, p.45.

movement.

Against this background the issues and problems relating to women, the early reform efforts, various women's organisations in the early 20th century and their fight for the cause of women may be discussed. The major areas of reform during the period under present study were more or less the same issues which have been left unfinished. During the present period a few more problems were added like the problem of dowry and there was an increased emphasis on other problems like nautch. Since the same social evils were still persistent in the society among large sections of people, the issues taken up during early 20th century were almost same like in the preceding century.

What was significantly achieved in the early period was dissemination of progressive ideas, generation of social consciousness and modest beginning of actual reform process in abrogating social evils through the consistent efforts of early reform leaders and their followers. As the goals of reform were not totally fulfilled in the first phase of social reform during the life time of Veeresalingam, the second generation still felt the urgency to alleviate the ignominable practices persisting in the society. During the period of our study, reform activity and, in particular, women's issues was conducted alongside political activities and national movement. The question of social reforms was now taken up by political leaders and hence, both social and political reforms were considered together as the former was the beginning and the latter was the culmination of reform activity.

Further, significance of the study of reform endeavours during post-Veerasingam period lay in that the serious efforts were made in the direction of dowry and nautch problems, Child marriages and other related issues were also taken up in a concerted manner. It is precisely here that the reform efforts after 1919 differ from the earlier period. In the early 20th century a number of women's associations were established in Andhra region of Madras Presidency. Such associations have been founded at places like Berhampore, Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Narasapuram, Eluru, Vijayawada, Machilipatnam, Guntur,

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Ongole and Kurnool. Prominent women members from all social sections actively participated in the movement. Among the caste associations, the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha had a woman wing of its own viz., Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha and this was active in taking the message of reform to the members of their own caste in the entire region of Andhra.<sup>19</sup> A significant aspect of the work of these women's associations is that they inculcated a right spirit in women to work for their progress in an independent manner. Another significant aspect is that they mobilised and facilitated the movement of women. This in turn led to the much needed exposure of women members in the society which ultimately

<sup>18</sup>Vernacular newspapers and journals are full of reports on these activities. For details, see Krishna Patrika (Telugu weekly), dt. 10.5.1922; Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Kavitam Mahila Samstha (West Godavari District, 1985); Manoranjani (Telugu Monthly), June 1911 and August 1911; Anasuya (Telugu Monthly), February - March, 1920; Vasavi (Telugu Monthly), April, 1932; Andhra Mahila (Telugu Fortnightly), 15.5.1944, 1.6.1944 and 1.11.1944; Hindu Sundari (Telugu Monthly), December 1946, January 1947, April 1947 and October - November 1947.

<sup>19</sup>See for example proceedings of Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha (Telugu), Madras, 1940.

resulted in their development.

### III

A major reform activity that engaged the attention of reform leaders in Andhra was the child marriages. The evil of child marriages attracted the attention of student community too. In one of the articles published in a college magazine, the author lashed out at the evil of child marriages. He opines that social progress would be adversely affected unless there was no check on growth of child marriages.<sup>22</sup> Explaining this further, the article says that the children born out of early marriages would be unhealthy and become a liability to nation since the productive value of the labour of such people was of no use to the nation.<sup>23</sup> The author advocates that the evil of child marriages should be dealt with in a stern manner. Such vehement protest was voiced by young students under instruction since the problem was still a serious concern in the society. At the Presidency level in Madras, the number of child marriages for the girls under the age of 15 showed an increase between 1901 and 1931. Such number increased from 92 to 108 in Hindu community, from 44 to 55 in Muslims and from 25 to 35 in Christians per every 1000 girls married.<sup>24</sup> The percentage wise break-up is shown

<sup>20</sup> Krishna Patriaka, dt.29.3.1924.

For more details, see N.A., "Baalya Vivahamulu" (Telugu) in the Hindu College Magazine. Masulipatam, Vol.1, No.1, January 1929, PP81-82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>

This estimate is based on the contemporary articles and

in the following table <sup>25</sup>

Age Group	% of girls married
Below 1 Year	0.8
1 to 2 Years	1.2
2 to 3 Years	2.0
3 to 4 Years	4.2
4 to 5 Years	6.6
5 to 10 Years	19.3
10 to 13 Years	38.1

The problem of Child marriages was acute in the coastal region of Andhra. The following tables reveal the contemporary situation. Which gives the number of girls married per every 1000 marriages in the age group of 0-10.

calculations which heavily depended on census figures. For details, see Garimella Salyanarayana, "Andhrulu - Ati Baalya Vivahamulu" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi (Telugu Monthly), October, 1933, p. 194.

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For more details see the Census Report of 1931. We have some references to caste-wise break-up of child marriages. Per every 1000 marriages performed the number of child marriages showed an upward trend in Brahmins (6 to 20), Telagas (35 to 55), Mala (5 to 26), Kalingas (180 to 353) and a downward trend in Tamil Brahmins (15 to 2) and Tamil Viswabrahmins (2 to 1). For details, see the Presidential speech of Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy, 7th Andhra Mahila Sabha conference in Grihalakshmi, December 1933, p. 196.

Garimella Satyanarayana, Op.Cit., Also see Grihalakshmi, December, 1933, Op.Cit.

DISTRICT	Number of Child marriages per every 1000 marriages	
	0-5 years	5to6 years
Ganjam (Plains)	98	416
Ganjam (Agency)	08	416
Visakhapatnam (Plains)	111	442
Visakhapatnam (Agency)	13	77
East Godavari (Plains)	104	193
East Godavari (Agency)	04	96
West Godavari	87	177
Krishna	57	145
Guntur	103	167
Nellore	24	86
Chittoor	187	
Cuddapah	3.35	
Kurnool	4.80	
Anantapur	2.00	
Bellary	6.60	

The table shows that the problem assumed serious proportions in the Plains of coastal Andhra. Interestingly, the incidence of child marriages was very low in Rayalaseema region.<sup>27</sup> The contemporary press came heavily upon the educated sections of the society in ignoring the magnitude of this problem and appealed to all the reading public to come forward to annihilate this evil.<sup>28</sup>

Alarmed by the dangerous dimensions of the problem, leaders, of reform movement as well as caste associations focussed their

<sup>27</sup>The influence of social reform campaign was vigorous in Rayalaseema region too. This was affected even during the life time of Veeresalingam. The pervasive influence of his reform activity in Rayalaseema is attested by the fact that a few public associations were founded in this region with the exclusive motive of propagation of social reform. For example, Pattikonda Literary Society (1882), Chittoor Native Association (1883) and Palamaner Literary Association (1884) have been founded with such aim. For more details, see K.H.S.S. Sundar, Op.Cit., pp.205-09. Perhaps, the later day reform activity must have been influenced by these trends in late 19th century.

<sup>28</sup>

Anasuva (Telugu Monthly), February - March, 1920, pp.4-5.

attention towards this peril and concentrated their efforts and energies to root out the evil. Addressing the Andhra Kshatriya Mahasabha as early as 1908, G. Hari Sarvotama Rao stated that the degradation of the society lay in the fact that girl children were married at an age when they were ignorant of its meaning.<sup>29</sup> He advised the members of the Sabha to abstain from performing child marriages. The second Arya Vaisya Mahasabha held at Machilipatnam passed a resolution urging its members to stay away from the evil.<sup>30</sup> The conference further decided to cut off all help to those people of Vaisya community in case of violation of the resolution. On the same lines, the Gouda conference held in 1913 adopted a resolution urging its members to do away with the evil and perform post-puberty marriages.

The Kammas, among others were highly progressive with regard to their perception of child marriages. The seventh Kamma Conference held in 1919, under the chairmanship of R.V.S.Naidu, passed resolutions against child marriages and set the minimum marriable age limit at 16 for girls.<sup>32</sup> The Reddy Conference held at Kurnool took a pledge to stop performing child marriages. The women's associations were equally forthright in their criticism of child marriages. Speaking from the Presidential Chair on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of Berhampore

29

G. Sudarsan Reddy, Caste Associations and Social Change Andhra. 1900 - 1925, M.Phil., Thesis, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1986, p. 140.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>32</sup> Andhra patrika (Telugu Daily), dt.24.6.1919.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., dt.3.1.1920.

Women's Conference, **G.C.Kudutamma** gave a call to perform post-puberty marriages.<sup>34</sup> In order to equip the required knowledge to affect change, she urged the audience to read thoroughly the writings of Veeresalingam.<sup>35</sup> The need for eradication of the evil of child marriages was further emphasised by contemporary writers and educated intellectuals. Quoting references from the early texts, where women were married after attaining certain age, the writers advocated the need to stem the tendency of child marriages. They advised the orthodox sections and legislative bodies to follow the foot steps of princely states of Mysore and **Baroda** where child marriages were officially banned even before the Sarada Act of 1929 was enacted.<sup>37</sup> Above all, the Andhra Mahila Sabha (Andhra Women's Conference) took an official stand as early as 1923 and gave a clarion call to the entire society to put an end to the practice of child marriages.

All the efforts directed against the evil of child marriages, both at the regional as well as national levels bore

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Anasuya, Feb-mar., 1920, pp.4-5.

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Furthering the argument Kanaparti Varalakshamma, a writer and activist advised women readers to acquire an inkling of knowledge into contemporary social and political affairs by taking resort to the reading of good books such as the ones published by Vignana Chandrika Grandhamandali of Komarraju Laxamana Rao. For details, see *Ibid.*, May-June 1920, pp.42-51.

For details, see Rayasam Venkata Sivudu, Vvasavali (Telugu), 37<sup>th</sup> II, Nellore, 1926, pp.152-53.

*Ibid.*

38

Speaking at the 4th Andhra mahila Sabha Conference, the President of the session, Mrs.Kasinathuni Ramabayamma declared that she would keep aside the doubt whether post-puberty marriages were in tune with the Sastras or not and, instead she would staunchly support them. Adding further she stated that the benefits emanating from post-puberty marriages were innumerable and child marriages would definitely bring in more troubles than normal. For details, see Krishna Patrika, dt.29.6.1923.

fruit in the enactment of Sarada Act in 1929 which fixed the minimum **marriable** age at 14 for girls and 18 for boys. This was welcomed by many people throughout the country. Lashing out at the orthodox elements in society, Cuttamachi Ramalinga Reddy, a reputed intellectual and writer of the early 20th century in Andhra immensely thanked the government for the same. Speaking at the 15th conference of Andhra Mahasabha, he openly declared his uncompromising attitude with orthodox sections in case of child marriages.<sup>39</sup> The enactment of Sarada Act, on the other hand caused an uproar among the traditional sections of the society which still preferred a no-changer's stand. This is reflected by the activities of these sections on the eve of Sarada Act. All sections in society including Brahmins, Vaisyas, Kammas and even **Malas (Untouchbles)** openly defied the contents of Sarada Act. Muslims too joined their hands with their Hindu brethern since they considered this as threat to indigenou religious practices, and feared that they also would meet the same fate at the hands of colonial government.

The Vaisyas were highly vocal in condemning the provisions of Sarada Act. The opinion of Vaisyas was reflected by contemporary press. Arguing that post-puberty marriages were not sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures, it was criticised that the British Government committed a blunder in enacting the present legislation.<sup>40</sup> To protest against the declaration of the Act the Orthodox sections among Vaisyas convened a meeting at Guntur on

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For more contents, vide the Speech By. the President. Reception Committee, 15th Andhra Mahasabha. Bezawada, 1929.

40

Vaisya (Telugu Monthly), September, 1929, pp.2-3.

behest of Veluri Venkata Sivavadhanulu. The regional and state conferences further culminated in conducting "All India Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha" and "All India Stree Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha" between 30th November and 2nd December, 1929 at Madras.<sup>47</sup>

The nature, tone and contents of the resolutions adopted at the foregoing conferences of orthodox sections of the society reflected similar concerns. The following resolutions that have been adopted at these conventions bear out this fact.<sup>48</sup>

- i) Post-puberty marriages are not in tune with the Hindu Dharmasastras. Hence, Sarada Act should be rejected by one and all.
- ii) People should continue their agitation so long as the Act is not repealed
- iii) People should be prepared to leave British India if the government fails to withdraw the Act and,
- iv) Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru betrayed Hindus by giving their consent to Sarada Act.

The antagonism to Sarada Act did not either end with protest meetings and resolutions. To openly defy the announcement of the Act, some people openly performed child marriages. It has been reported that members of various castes were panic stricken on the eve of the enactment of Act and were performing child marriages in an indiscriminate manner.<sup>49</sup> Such haste among them was often leading to unsuitable alliances. Citing these examples, some of the progressive Viswabrahmin leaders requested

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Ibid., December, 1929, p.10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.9 and p.31.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., November, 1929, pp.25-35 and December, 1929, pp.43-48.

49

For details see Rachakulla Chenchaiyah, "Prastuta Vivahamulu (Telugu) in Prabodhini, January, 1930, p.186.

the members of their caste to strictly observe the resolutions at the earlier Viswabrahmin conventions which stipulated the minimum marriable age 12 for girls and 18 for boys. However, a few child marriages were performed even after the Sarada Act came into force. Such marriages were reported from Vijayawada taluq in Krishna district. Kshatriyas of Mutyalampadu village performed four child marriages in May, 1930 and during the same month Vaisyas of Pedavadlapudi village, Kammas of Poronki village and Malas of Vijayawada town performed one child marriage each. It was further reported that people were enthusiastic to perform more such marriages in future.

On the other hand, reform leaders were bent upon countering the influence of orthodox sections in the present controversy. Despite some resistance from traditional elements, Sarada Act of 1929 received a favourable response throughout the country. In Andhra the Provincial Women's Conference welcomed the enactment of the Act and recommended imposition of heavy penalties on all those who were found guilty of violating the provisions of the Act.<sup>53</sup> It criticised the manoeuvres of certain educated sections

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 186-87.

<sup>51</sup> Vaisya, May, 1930, p. 15.

Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>

See B. Kesava narayana, Political and Social Factors in Andhra. (1900 = 1956), Vijayawada, 1976, p.202. Some of the caste association also favourably reacted to the Sarada Bill. For example, the All India Padmasali Mahajana Sabha (Weavers' Conference held at Hyderabad in September, 1929 took an official stand in this regard. It passed resolutions which, severely condemned child marriages and welcomed the immediate enactment of Sarada Bill into an Act. For more details, see the proceedings of the Ali India padmasali Maha jana Sabha - 6th Conference, Hyderabad. September 13-15, 1929, Hyderabad, 1930.

of the society who were trying to perform child marriages. It was felt that the enactment of the legislation was hastily done without proper base of favourable public opinion. It was further opined that the success of the Act in preventing child marriages became doubtful in the face of mounting opposition from powerful orthodox sections of society.

The pro-reform activists and associations enhanced the pace of their activities in drawing the attention of public opinion towards the evils of child marriages. Though orthodox elements among Vaisyas took the lead in attacking the Sarada Act, the reformist **members'** of the same caste were more vigorous in condemning the acts of no-changers among them. The 12th conference of Arya Vaisya Manila Sabha held during 1940 at Madras asked its members to put up a brave front against the orthodox sections and work towards a successful implementation of the Act.<sup>54</sup> Another wing of Vaisya Mahasabha viz., Arya Vaisya Vyayama Sabha severely condemned the practice of child marriages at the time of 4th conference of the Sabha under the chairmanship of **Dr.G.R.Somanna**. Advocating the need for a sound body, the President despised the idea of child marriages, which would result in unhealthy and weak progeny who were of no use to society. The 14th Conference of Andhra Mahila Sabha held at Cuddapah during 16-17 December, 1939 passed various resolutions

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For details see the proceedings of the Aryavaisya Mahila Sabha - 12th Conference (Telugu), Madras, 1940, pp.87-93.

Proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Vyayama Sabha - 4th Conference (Telugu), Madras, 1940, p.129.

56  
**Ibid.**

on the Sarada Act and its implementation. One of the resolutions threw light on the continuance of the evil practice in society and asked the members to fight against this.<sup>58</sup> Another resolution drew the attention of the colonial government to some of the shortcomings in the Act and requested it to take stringent measures against all those people who did not follow the provision of the Act.<sup>59</sup> Yet another resolution favoured the age of sixteen years as the marriable age for girls vis-a-vis fourteen years as stipulated by Sarada Act. It was finally resolved that members of the Mahila Sabha should embark upon extensive tours in rural areas to enlighten rural women on this issue and stop child marriages. Such call was necessitated by some of the contemporary reports which published the agonising experiences of a few young women emanating from their child marriages.<sup>62</sup>

The reform leaders organised themselves into well-knit units in some places to propagate the need for reform in case of child marriages. For example, in the agency tracts of Polavaram such

For more details, see Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, pp.748-59.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp.750-51.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.759.

Ibid.

**Suramamba**, a young woman married at an age of six years and later deserted by husband, recapitulates her trauma in an article entitled "Naa **Baalya Vivaham**". She declares that child marriage is solely responsible for the sorry state of affairs in her life. She describes child marriages as "instruments of destruction" and strongly advocates the idea of mutual consent in marriages. For more details, see Kagada (Telugu), dt.1.5.1940, p.11.

committees were formed under the guidance of leaders like **K.Viyyanna** Pantulu and Perraaja Rao. These committees were also constituted at the district level like in the case of Visakhapatnam and West Godavari. In course of time such efforts yielded rich dividends. On the part of the government, it rectified a few shortcomings in the Act. Initially the Sarada Act did not specifically prohibit early marriages outside British India. Taking this as an excuse some people migrated to French settlement area within the British India and performed child marriages. However, the government passed another Act in 1938 which provided that child marriages performed in or outside British India were liable to be treated as unlawful. This Act further strengthened the hands of reform activists. Leaders and Associations took every opportunity to condemn this practice and issued warnings whenever they found such instances in society. Under the influence of intense reform efforts in fighting out this evil, the Hyderabad State Women's Conference began to exert greater pressure on the Nizam's Government to ban the practice of child marriages. As a result of these efforts of various

**B.Kesavanarayana**, Op.Cit., p.202.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

For example, the All India Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha vehemently protested the few semblances of child marriages in the society. For details on its proceedings, see Andhramahila, dt.1.8.1944.

During its 11th conference in June 1944 strong appeal was made to the Nizam of Hyderabad to ban the practice. The proceedings of the conference further reveal the fact that the members of the Sabha were thoroughly influenced by the early reformers and the convention paid rich tributes to leaders like Rammohan Roy, Veeresalingam, Vidya Sagar and Annie Basant for their contributions to the spread of awakening among women. The increasing popularity of the Sabha was attested by the fact that the present convention was attended by 2000 delegates from different parts of Nizam's territory. For details, see Andhra

sections of the society, reformers, and organisations, the incidence of child marriages became less common and finally lost support in society. A contemporary report sums up the net effect of reform activity in this regard. Commenting upon the proceedings of the state level convention of Andhra provincial Women's Conference at Guntur in 1944, a report stated that "the conference does not seem to pass any resolutions on women's education and child marriages since these two are certainly things of the past".

Another problem that continued to plague the Andhra society, like many other parts of the country during this period, was enforced widowhood and orthodox sentiments against widow marriage. The root cause of enforced widowhood was child marriages. Despite strenuous efforts made by early reformers in Andhra, opinion against widow marriages was still strong and did not disappear from the society.

When reform activity was initiated with an increased enthusiasm in the post-1920 period, the number of child widows in the age group of 0-20 years was alarming. This necessitated persistent efforts by reformers inspite of immense opposition from the orthodox sections of the society. The following table gives the details about the great magnitude of child widows pertaining to two different time periods.

mahila, dt. 1.7.1944, pp.11-13.

67 For details, see Ibid, dt.15.11.1944, p.8.

68 For details, vide B.Kesavanarayana, "Widow marriage Movement in Andhra" in Itihas. Vol.11, No.1, pp.147-164.

DISTRICT	Widows in the age group, 0-20 years	
	1921	1931
Ganjam	9,130	7,979
Visakhapatnam	10,794	12,985
Godavari	5,428	11,050
Krishna	6,270	3,623
Guntur	4,445	6,040
Nellore	2,908	3,791
Cuddapah	2,485	2,420
Kurnool	2,284	2,749
Anantapur	2,759	2,614
Chittoor	2,334	3,196

The table reveals a few important aspects of the problem. Problem of child widows was more acute in the coastal districts than the Rayalaseema region. Among the coastal districts, Ganjam and Krishna revealed a slight decline in the number of child widows between 1921 and 1931. Whereas, Visakhapatnam, Godavari and Guntur regions showed an upward trend in this regard. In the Rayalaseema region the problem was generally of less intensity as revealed by the figures. Cuddapah and Anantapur reported a marginal decline in the number and the rest revealed a minimal increase in the number of child widows.

Efforts have been made to collate the number of widows within a particular caste group. For example, a survey conducted among Vaisyas in the three coastal districts of Nellore, Guntur and Krishna revealed that there were around eight thousand widows in the age group of 1-40 years. The following table shows this.

Age Group	No. of Widows
Below 5 Years	02
5 - 12 Years	73
12 - 15 Years	217
15 - 20 Years	699
20 - 40 Years	6772

<sup>69</sup>Vasavi (Telugu Monthly), August, 1926, p.15.

Though the above table reveals that the problem of child widows was not very acute in the age group of 1-20 years, it still points out that the total number of widows in the three districts was of serious concern. The total female population in these districts was 91174 and this shows that there was a widow per every 12 members.

The serious dimensions of the problem attracted the attention of both general public and reformers in the society. On the part of general public, members of various social sections began to support widow marriages. For example, the first widow marriage in Guntur around 1902 drew enthusiastic support from local people. Kandukuri Veeresalingam was invited to attend the function and when he arrived at Guntur he was given a rousing reception by thousands of people at the railway station. Commenting upon this, a contemporary press report said that the marriage was an indicator to public opinion against no-changes.<sup>72</sup>

In the Krishna district also people were highly alert to the problem of widow marriage and encouraged it through various resolutions during the time of social gatherings. When the

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1</sup> Dharmavadini (Telugu Fortnightly), dt.24.10.1902, pp.2-9.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>73</sup>

Ibid. This marriage was a smooth affair and a reputed reformist leader from Guntur, Unnava Lakshminarayana, was instrumental in arranging the marriage. The district munisif, Viswanatha Iyer extended his full support to Unnava and even allowed people to freely use his house during the time of the marriage. Though the orthodox sections from Guntur as well as Tenali raised a hue over the marriage and though the heads of Pushpagiri and Sringeri Ashrams detested the same, the marriage was performed with great enthusiasm. For more details, see Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Krishna District Social Conference met at **Vuyyuru** it was resolved to encourage remarriage of women.<sup>74</sup> This was followed by various village social conferences in the district. At Vellatur convention it was proposed to discuss this issue and consequently two such meetings were convened. C.Chidambara Rao of **Mannava** established a branch of Prarthana Samaj at the village and initiated a serious discussion on the issue of widow marriage. Commoners from the village of Ponnur convened a meeting to discuss at length the problem of widow marriage. All these efforts attest the fact that the spread of social awareness in this regard was rapid in affecting a change in the thinking of people at grass-roots level.

On the part of reform leaders and contemporary intellectuals they shouldered the responsibility of widely canvassing the need for widow marriages. They argued that there was no scriptural opposition to these marriages and instead Vedic pronouncements favoured widow marriages.<sup>75</sup> Some of them favoured that the child widows were to be given sound education, economic self-sufficiency and then married.<sup>76</sup> It was also advocated that Widow Homes should be generously established on the lines of those founded at Bombay by Sasipada Benerjee.<sup>77</sup> Equating the

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ibid., n.d., August, 1902, p.7.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

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For details, see Kolachalam Srinivasa Rao, Madyapanamu, Judamu, Streela Gunamulu (Telugu), Bellary, 1926, p.25.

79

Rayasam Venkatasivudu, Vvasavali, Op.Cit., p. 144.

80

Ibid., p. 145.

problem of child widows with the worst possible social evil, it was even felt that the freedom given to male members in marriage also should be curtailed.<sup>81</sup> Enforced widowhood devoid of all pleasures was more sinning than sin and some people went to the extent of saying that given a choice between 'Sati' and enforced widowhood, the former was better than the latter.<sup>82</sup> It was advised to revive and revoke the ancient system where every person had to undergo celibacy before getting married after certain age.<sup>83</sup> Suggesting an innovative and practiceable solution to the problem it was said that a law should be enacted binding upon all the widowers to go in for second marriage only with widowed women and not virgins.<sup>84</sup> A few others opined that according to Hindu scriptures all those widowed women whose marriage was not consummated or whose husbands died before their wives matured should be declared virgins and that these women should be considered as unmarried.<sup>85</sup> Some of the caste

<sup>81</sup> N.A., Sammar janamu, Bellary, n.d., p.5. This source is located in Saraswata Niketanam, Vetapalem.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.7.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp.14-15.

<sup>85</sup>

For details, see Darisi Chenchaiiah, "Vaisya Samskarana Sangham" (Telugu) in Vasavi. August, 1926, p.30. Chenchaiiah was a pioneer in social reform activity in Vaisya Community. Though he was in total agreement with widow marriage movement he too was given to some of the views on widow marriage which have been self-contradictory. For example, he dilates upon three eligibility requirements for widow marriage. They are

- a) the girl should not attain the age of 16
- b) her earlier marriage should not be a consummated one and,
- c) the girl should be chaste in character.

Any child widow who is found lacking any one of these qualities is not fit for remarriage. For details, see Ibid. These ideas of Darisi Chenchaiiah immediately invited counter attacks from other people. Criticising the stand taken by Chenchaiiah, others viewed this to have baneful effects on child widows and as an anti-thesis to the very idea of widow remarriage. For details,

associations supported this and the Arya Vaisya Sabha conference held at Visakhapatnam in 1921 favoured this. Some of the contemporary writers and social activists of the Vaisya community further demanded the organisers of Vaisya Mahasabha that they should pass resolutions to the effect that the remarriage of men also should be prohibited.<sup>87</sup> This was in response to the no-changers in society who were opposed to widow marriages tooth and nail. Even among the no-changers two sections were identified by the contemporary society.<sup>88</sup> One section was totally given to age old traditions and customs and such people were very few in number. The other section could be described as pseudo-traditionalists since they were acting against the reform leaders to settle their own personal scores.<sup>89</sup> Condemning this attitude the male members of the society were urged to shed down these narrow feelings and join hands in extending their support to the genuine reform activity in the case of child widows.<sup>90</sup>

Though public opinion was in favour of widow marriage, women's organisations were late comers into the field of remarriage movement. Since many of the women were still under the strong influence of domestic orthodoxy, it took a long time

see the readers' mail in Vasavi. September, 1928, pp.35-37.

*Ibid.*, August, 1926, p.30.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, September, 1927, p.228.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>

*Ibid.* This was not the case only with Vaisyas. For example, the orthodox elements who stood in opposition to widow marriages in Viswabrahmin community have been severely condemned by editorials in their caste journal. For details, see Prabodhini, January, 1930, p.185.

for them to come out openly to proclaim their support for the movement. For the first time, the Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha passed various resolutions on this issue during its 6th convention in 1928 at Salem which was presided over by **Karnapati Chandramma**.<sup>91</sup> These resolutions are as follows.

- a) all those child widows whose early marriage is not consummated would be treated as virgins and hence, they are eligible for remarriage.
- b) always post-puberty marriage is highly recommended. If the marriage is performed before 16 years, the girl should not be allowed to derive carnal pleasures till she attains an age of 16 years and,
- c) in any case the age difference between the boy and girl should not exceed 10 to 15 years.

The above sentiments expressed by the Mahilasabha have been discussed by the 13th Arya Vaisya Mahasabha with a few reservations.<sup>92</sup>

91

For details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha, 6th conference, Salem, 1928, p.197.

The 13th Arya Vaisya Mahasabha was held under the chairmanship of **Tumpudi Bhagavantam** Gupta in August 1928. A few of the orthodox elements in the Sabha objected to the inclusion of the issues viz., post-puberty marriages and widow remarriage on the agenda of deliberations. In order to conduct the sabha in a smooth manner, these two issues have been excluded from the agenda. However, **Nalam Ramalingaiah** in his introductory speech raised these issues and said that most of the Vaisya families accepted post-puberty marriages in principle and asked the members to further consolidate their position on this and also to give their consent to widow marriage in near future. His speech drew enthusiastic response from the audience as his points of contention were not opposed during his address to the Sabha. For details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha, 13th convention, Salem, August 1928, pp.170-173. The differences among pro-reformist and orthodox groups within the Vaisya Mahasabha were not new. Even during the early conference at Guntur in 1924. There was a bitter fight between these two groups. For details, see **G.Sudarsan Reddy**, *Op.Cit.*, p.148. In some cases people took report to extreme measures against reformers. For example, **kandukuri Veeresalingam** was ex-communicated by Orthodox Brahmins and he was not even allowed to fetch water from the houses of others. See **karen I.Leonard**

Widow marriages were opposed on other counts too. Apart from cultural taboos attached to it, there were economic dimensions to the problem. When a young widow inherited her husband's property, the parents of the widow would not like their daughter to marry again since any such act would deprive them of enjoying their daughter's property. Rather, they would encourage her to go on pilgrimages and read scriptures so as to divert her attention from material pleasures.<sup>93</sup> In case the parents were wholly dependants on the earnings of their daughter, they wouldn't even try to marry her again since it would immediately result in the loss of earning as well as working member of their family.<sup>94</sup> Most of the middle class families faced this problem in the society.

In spite of various hurdles and difficulties, the reform leaders were successful in their campaign for widow marriage. Social reformers, progressive individuals and various caste associations supported the cause of widow marriage. In 1925, young and enthusiastic members belonging to Vaisya Community organised "Vaisya Youth Association" under the leadership of Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta. The Association was later given a great fillip under the dynamic guidance of Darisi Chenchiah.<sup>95</sup> The first widow marriage was arranged under the auspices of this Association. The orthodox sections among the community tried

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For details, see Darisi Chenchiah, Nenu-Naa Desam (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1967, pp.358-59.

94

G.Sudarsan Reddy, Op.Cit., p. 148.

95

For a list of Presidents and tone of the resolutions passed by Arya Vaisya Yuvajana Sabha (Youth Association), see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Yuva jana Sabha, 8th Convention, Madras, 1940.

their best to foil the present attempt but could not succeed in doing so.

Darisi Chenchaiiah, Mote Narayana Rao, Rao Bahadur Tumpudi Dhagavantam Gupta and Kollurl Suryanarayana Gupta became leaders of widow marriage movement among Vaisyas. Among these people Darisi Chenchaiiah took the lead in performing these marriages and providing the necessary information to all the people who were willing to marry young widows. In one of the articles he published during the heyday of widow marriage activity among Vaisyas, he accounts for five important reasons for the success of his efforts. They are:

- i. There are no financial constraints on the movement. Just like Pyda Ramakrishnaiah came to the rescue of Veeresalingam, Narasepalli Chennappa extended monetary help to Chenchaiiah.
- ii. Mote Narayana Rao was hell bent upon the activities of widow marriage movement. Narayana Rao's entry, a wealthy and highly respected nationalist leader among Vaisya community, served as a boon to the entire movement.
- iii. Even the orthodox sections and traditional elements in the community timely recognised the winds of change in society and they were not as rigid in their attitude as in the past.
- iv. The rapid changes in the socio-economic conditions where caste divisions were slowly disappearing from public life were responsible for a change in the attitude of general public and finally.
- v. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi was sweeping the youth day by day. Gandhiji openly declared that the earlier marriage of a young widow is totally null and void if the girl was married before the age of 15 years and she should, at once, be considered as unmarried. Gandhiji's propaganda had a direct bearing on the minds of Vaisya youth.

<sup>96</sup>Vasavi. June, 1928, pp.61-62.

Under the dynamic leadership Darisi Chenchaiiah and other such persons a number of widow marriages have been performed. In the month of December, 1929 the marriage of the young widow, Mahalakshamma was performed with Ramiah and the marriage was attended by a number of prominent personalities of Vijayawada town.<sup>97</sup> The marriage of another young widow, Narayanamma of Cuddapah district was celebrated and the bridegroom was Viswanatham Sresti.<sup>98</sup> In order to effectively supervise the widow marriage movement, the Arya Vaisya Social Reform Association was founded at Machilipatnam and it performed ten widow marriages before the year 1931.<sup>99</sup> The frequency of these widow marriages left a very positive impression on the minds of other people throughout the state. Under the influence of the movement in Krishna, Guntur and Godavari districts, parents of young widows from other parts of Andhra began openly proclaiming their readiness to accept young widows as their daughters-in-law. In an advertisement released in one of the contemporary journals, K.V.L. Narayana Setty of Madakasira taluq in Anantapur district invited proposals from the parents of young widows in the age group of 14-16 years for his son's marriage. This example is self-explanatory in giving us an idea about the extent and

97

Vasavi, January, 1930, p.368.

Ibid.

99

For details see Ibid., December, 1931, pp.306-07. Out of these ten marriages three marriages were arranged by Darisi Chenchaiiah, two each by Mote narayana Rao and Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta, one marriage by Kolluri Suryanarayana Gupta and the rest by others.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., January, 1930, p.369.

influence of widow marriage movement.

Widow marriages were performed in other castes also such as **Kammas** and **Reddies**. The first widow marriage in **Kamma** caste was that of Dr.Mulpuri Rangaiah and **Chukkamma** and the marriage was secretly performed. The openly celebrated widow marriage in the community was that of Darisi **Bapaiah** and **Lakshminarasamma**. The marriage was performed at Vijayawada in 1927 by Darisi **Chenchaiah**. He faced stiff resistance from other numbers of **Kamma** caste for doing so. However, this marriage was much publicised despite various odds and nearly 5000 members belonging to **Kamma** community attended the marriage. On the same lines a few widow marriages were performed in **Reddy** community too.<sup>104</sup>

During the vigorous campaign for widow marriage movement, some of the women's associations, other than those affiliated to caste associations, took an active part in spreading the message of reform in rural areas. For example, the Godavari District Women's Association and its regional branches fought against the 'Purdah' system which was prevailing among **Kshatriya** families in the district. Responding to the prevailing reform tendencies in the contemporary society, members owing allegiance to the

<sup>101</sup> Darisi Chenchaiah, Nenu. Op.Cit., p.271.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp.336-340.

<sup>104</sup>

For more details, see Reddi Rani (Telugu monthly), February 1930, p.25; November, 1930, pp.34-35 and September, 1931, pp.30-31.

Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Kavitam Mahila Samstha, Op.Cit., p.27.

Association toured the entire district and spread the message of the need for reform in matters of child marriages and widow marriages. The Andhra Mahila Sabha asked its members to enhance the rate of their reform activity. It felt that the state of poor and young widows in particular was distressing and hence called upon the members to help them in education which would ultimately enable them to eke out livelihood on their own.

Along with the widow marriage movement, the orthodox tendencies in marriage rituals and the lavish expenditure at the **time** of celebration of marriages have been severely criticised and questioned. During the entire period of reform activity contemporary journals came very handy to strengthen the movement further. Journals like Andhra Patrika, Krishna Patrika, Hindu Sundari, Grihalakshmi and Andhra Mahila threw their might behind the reform movement. Apart from these journals, a few other caste journals like Vaisya, Vasavi, Prabhodhini and Devanga Prabha also contributed to the spread of reformist ideas in society. They were the mainstay of the reform movement and immensely helped the reformers to disseminate reform ideas in society. Among these journals, women's journals devoted most of their time to the problems of women. These were moderate in their tone in the initial stages and gradually became aggressive in championing the cause of women. They fought for the cause of women in particular and carried a crusade against social evils. <sup>108</sup>

<sup>106</sup>  
**ibid.**

For details on the proceedings of the 14th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha, see Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, pp.759-60.

<sup>108</sup>

V.Ramakrishna, Women's Journals, Op.Cit., pp.530-31. These journals generally propagated progressive, reformist and at times

The efforts of reform leaders, caste associations, women's associations, journals and progressive people in society brought about a visible change in the general attitude towards widow marriage. The impact of widow marriage movement was so impressive that one of the speakers at the 19th convention of Arya Vaisya mahasabha held at Madras in 1940 categorically stated, "there is absolutely no need to specially dilate upon problems like post-puberty and widow marriages since these are accepted by all others in society. The people who oppose reform movement are negligible now".<sup>109</sup> This reflects the general public opinion and the strong influence of widow marriage movement.

Another major problem that invited the immediate attention of reformers was women's education and the problem of illiteracy among them. Though there was a perceptible change in the activities of some women in education, journalism and social reform, the overall position of literacy of women was far from satisfactory. The returns of education did not indicate any discernable growth in the field of women's education. The

revolutionary ideas through their columns. For details, see S.Harikrishna, Contribution of Telugu Journalism to the Social Reform in Andhra, 1874-1920, M.Phil., Thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1991, pp.13-33. Women's journals at times questioned the domination of men and advocated the cause of economic freedom for women. Though they were highly progressive and active in spreading the message of reform, they were handicapped by fiscal constraints and low circulation. Further, these journals were run by middle class members and often reflected the concerns of a particular class like in the early period. Infact, their nature became a stumbling block in understanding and helping the cause of other classes of the society. For details, see *ibid.*, pp.143-45.

109

For details, vide the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha, 19th convention, Madras, 1940, pp.20-21.

**following table** reveals this.<sup>110</sup>

YEAR	Percentage of Literates	
	MEN	WOMEN
1901	<b>7.68</b>	0.48
1911	<b>8.14</b>	0.81
1921	10.43	1.43
1931	10.54	1.58

The above table shows the highly discouraging picture of women's literacy. Education of women did not show any favourable results because of the expenses involved, the tradition of early marriage of girls and the indifference of the parents before marriage and of in-laws after the marriage. Before the impact of social reform movement in the society, women were never considered as individual entities. It was only during the period of social reform endeavours that the problem of women's education became one of the main priorities on the agenda of reform movement. Education of women was considered as an instrument of change by contemporary reformers which, they believed would relieve women from the present state of ignorance and illiteracy.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in B.kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op.Cit., p.239.

Initially, differences existed among the votaries of women's education on the nature of curriculum. Some suggested mere elementary education while, some others favoured vocational education to make women confident, self-reliant and self-assertive.

From the beginning of 20th century onwards education of women was a topic of discussion at various public fora. The Andhra Mahila Sabha took an active part in propagating the need for women's education. As early as 1910 it encouraged its members to work for this cause. A few of contemporary activists and writers asked people to open their eyes to reality in society and counter the influence of Missionary schools where a number of Hindu girls were admitted due to internal constraints imposed by narrow Hindu traditions.<sup>112</sup> These divisions in the society had their effect on women's education too. A society deprived of women's learning would be disunited and adversely affect social progress.<sup>113</sup> A few of the contemporary women's associations, on the other hand were very active in the field of women's education. The "Women's Educational Development Society" at Narasapuram in Godavari region used to conduct periodic examinations to women students in the surrounding regions and issue certificates to the successful candidates.<sup>114</sup> So also, the "Dharati Samajam" at Visakhapatnam was actively working in this

For details, see Manoran jani (Telugu monthly), November, 1910, p. 153.

<sup>112</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 159-160.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, January, 1911, p.79.

<sup>114</sup>

*Ibid.*, June, 1911, p.232.

field under the leadership of Bulusu **Suramma**. In collaboration with the Kakinada **Women Students'** Association she conducted a few special conferences for women wherein they were instructed in essential elements of different branches of education. Crowning the achievements of these efforts was the contribution made by Kakinada **Women Students'** Association. The Association was established in 1904 and was not very active in the initial stages. It became defunct within a few years of its establishment. However, the Association was revived in 1910 by **M.Rajabayamma**.<sup>118</sup> The revived association was registered on 27th September 1927 with the following objectives.<sup>119</sup>

- a) to initiate efforts in developing women's education
- b) to train some of the members of the Association as women teachers and
- c) to establish girls schools, women's colleges and widow homes and to impart vocational skills among women so as to make them self-reliant.

These sentiments on women's education were further reiterated by contemporary nationalist leaders. Konda Venkatappaiah Pantulu, a renowned leader during national movement, strongly advocated the need for women's education on par with male members.<sup>120</sup> Extensively quoting from the census

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., August, 1911, p.313.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp.317-18.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>

Ibid., October, 1911, pp.379-80.

See for details, Andhra Patrika (Telugu weekly), Golden Jubilee Special Number, 1965, p.59. The present article by Venkatappaiah

figures he added that there was an increased need for more number of girls' and vocational schools to train girl students.<sup>121</sup> He favoured the idea that women teachers along should be appointed in girls' schools and requested the government to open institutions for those women who were willing to continue their studies after marriage.

Consistent efforts were made by other enlightened members of society in the direction of improving the state of women's education. The Maharaja of Vijayanagaram was instrumental in opening four schools at Madras and one at Vijayanagaram during the period 1919 to 1921. An exclusive institution for girls came into existence at Machilipatnam. The 10th Andhra Maha Sabha held in 1918 under the presidentship of Gadicherla Ramabayamma passed a few significant resolutions urging its members to establish primary schools for girl children and appoint female teachers to teach the students.<sup>123</sup> It is interesting to note that exclusive women educational institutions have been promoted throughout Andhra by various agencies. The following table shows this.<sup>124</sup>

Name of the Institution	Year of Establishment	Place	Founding Agency
Vaisya Seva Sadanam	1920	Rajahmundry	†Nalam Ramalingaiah
Sarada Niketanam	1922	Guntur	Unnava Lakshmi-

is a reprint from the 1913 Annual Number of the journal.

121

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., pp.60-61.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

123

For details, see Krishna Patrika (Telugu Weekly), dt.2.7.1919 and 9.10.1920.

124

Grihalakshmi, August, 1929, pp.661-664.

Kasturi Devi Vidyalayam	1923	Nellore	bayamma Women's wing of Indian National Congress
Mahila Jateeya Vidyalayam	1924	Kakinada	Kakinada Women's Association
Vaisya Yuvati Vidyalayam	1927	Guntur	Kalangi Seshumamb

The Vaisya Seva Sadanam was modelled after Pune Widow's Home.<sup>125</sup> It used to provide training to girl students in elementary education, subjects like History, Geography, English, Mathematics and Vocational subjects like tailoring, embroidery, drawing, music and weaving. Under the influence of national movement the Seva Sadanam used to admit students belonging to all castes including 'lower' castes and provide them free lodging, boarding and education.

The "Sarada Niketanam" at Guntur was promoted by the wife of well known social reformer of 20th century, Unnava Lakshminarayana. The institution devised a curriculam of its own spanning into eight years and impart academic and vocational

<sup>125</sup> Andhra Mahila, n.d., pp.25-27.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

Ibid. It was around the same time and under the influence of Harijan upliftment movement of Gandhi, the first harijan **Girls'** Hostel was established in Andhra. The Home, known as Anjana Devi Adi Andhra Girls' Hostel, was founded at Vijayawada in 1929 by Eda Venkaiah and Vemula Kurmaiah. The well known reform leader and a staunch nationalist, Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu was highly instrumental in founding the hostel along with the aforesaid two members. The Chatapalli Zamindar, the local rice millers. Harijan sympathisers and the collectors of Krishna and Anantapur districts helped the smooth functioning of the Hostel. It used to provide free lodging facilities to harijan girls who were prosecuting their school as well as collegiate studies in the town. For more details on the Hostel, see Grihalakshmi. October, 1941, p.489.

skills to the students under instruction.<sup>128</sup> During the first five years students were generally given basic training in Sanskrit, Telugu, painting, handicrafts, domestic medicine and history.<sup>129</sup> During the second phase students were instructed in their optional subjects. The institution was generously helped by local municipality, taluq boards and district board.

**Kasturi** Devi Vidyalayam at Nellore was promoted by the women's wing of Indian National Congress. This is an explicit example showing reformers and nationalist leaders together in an activity of women's development. The founder of the institution was Ponaka **Kanakamma**. Students had been imparted knowledge in languages and other non-academic subjects like cane work, music, theology etc. Education was given free of cost and within five years of the establishment of the institution 400 students received training.

The Mahila Jateeya Vidyalayam at Kakinada was sponsored by the Kakinada Women's Association. The institution was highly dependent upon the donations received from general public. Like Sarada Niketanam, this institution also imparted training to students in a fixed time period of three years. During this period learners were provided with some basic skills in tailoring, music and weaving.<sup>133</sup> The institution used to prepare

<sup>128</sup>

Grihalakshmi. August, 1929, p.661.

Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.662.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Ibid., p.663.

students for the Hindi examinations conducted by "Hindi Prachara Sabha".

The Vaisya Yuvati Vidyalayam at Guntur was conceived by **Kalangi Seshumamba**, daughter of Majeti Sriramulu, a reputed member of Vaisya community of the town. It instructed students in handicrafts, tailoring, painting, music, embroidery, aspects of elementary medical knowledge in ophthalmology and other subjects like Hindi, Telugu, History, Geography and Mathematics.<sup>134</sup> Within two years of its inception the institution had 140 students on its rolls.<sup>135</sup>

A brief look at the contents of curriculum in all these institutions brings out a significant aspect. All of them were bent upon imparting vocational skills to women students so as to make them economically self-reliant. Infact, most of the contemporary reformers, associations, writers, journals and intellectuals of the period advocated this. The establishment of the above institutions was exactly in tune with the demand of reformers and women activists. Some of the writers propagated the idea that education of women alone would bring momentum to social reform activity and hence schools should be established in all rural areas of Andhra so as to bring women into the fold of main social stream. In tune with this some women activists demanded that all girl children should be invariably given

134

Ibid., p.664.

135  
Ibid.

For details, see **Rayasam Venkata Sivudu**, Vyasavali, Op.Cit., p.141.

education for atleast twelve years.<sup>137</sup> A few others recommended compulsory education for girls for atleast thirteen years.<sup>138</sup> Being impressed by the division of **curriculum** in contemporary educational institutions like Sarada **Niketanam**, they suggested a break-up of 5-10 years and 10-13 years in school curriculum where the students would be instructed in essentials of 3 R's and other vocational subjects like tailoring, cooking, domestic medicine **etc.**,<sup>139</sup> A few other contemporary writers proceeded further in demanding adult education for rural women.<sup>140</sup> Recognising the intense need of rural reconstruction in India, it was observed that without the constructive help of women the former would be totally incomplete.<sup>141</sup> It was then imperative, the argument said that adult women in rural areas should be given elementary knowledge in education so as to make them active participants in the process of rural development. Further, they should be trained in cottage industries in order to achieve self-reliance in economic activity.<sup>142</sup> Citing all these causes, government as well as private agencies were advised to educate adult women in rural areas. The Women's organisations of the day criticised the government that adult education centres were established only for

Vide Darisi Annapurnamma, "The rights and Duties of Hindu Women" (Telugu) in Vaisya, n.d., pp.390-91.

<sup>138</sup>

For more details, see Sriram Venkataratnam, "Female Education" (Telugu) in Prabodhini, January, 1930, pp.181-83.

<sup>139</sup>

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup>

For details, vide Kamaraaju Maitreyi, "Rural Reconstruction and the Duties of Women" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi, June, 1931, pp.298-301.

<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

men and women were totally ignored.<sup>143</sup> They felt that the need for adult education was more important in case women and that all the local bodies should come forward in promoting this.<sup>144</sup>

Caste associations also played an active role in serving the cause of women's education during the period under study. The third Reddy Annual Conference held at Nellore in 1920 felt that the root cause of development and progress in society was a healthy growth of education.<sup>145</sup> The Conference stressed that Women's education was of pivotal importance in the harmonious growth of family institution. The Conference went even to the extent of calling upon its members to open libraries in as many places as possible to enable women to get acquainted with the knowledge about contemporary society. The conference urged the members to raise funds for propagation of education among women. The 7th convention of Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha recommended compulsory education for all girl children for a period of not less than ten years.<sup>147</sup> Some members of the Viswabrahmana Maha Sabha urged the orthodox elements in the Sabha to shed down traditional notions on female education and realise that the progress of women's education also would result in the well-being of the entire Viswabrahmin Community. However, the Niyogi Mahajana Sabha (an association of Niyogi Brahmins) was reserved

143

For details, see the proceedings of 14th Convention of "Andhra Mahila Sabha" in Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, pp.750-51.

144 Ibid.

145

Krishna patrika. dt.29.5.1920.

Ibid.

147

Vasavi, n.d., pp.202-03.

148

Prabodhini. January, 1930, p. 183.

in its views on female education. Though the Sabha agreed in principle to imparting education to Brahmin girls, it maintained that the girls should be instructed in those subjects only which would suit the Traditional practices and religious observances followed in the Brahminical households.<sup>149</sup> Despite such aberrations, generally in all the conferences of caste associations it became customary that speakers emphasised the importance of women's education and resolutions were passed regularly to this effect. The positive sentiments on women's education have been reiterated in a constant manner.

The Andhra Women's Conference that met in 1932 emphasised the importance of the need for introducing compulsory education for women, establishment of arts colleges, Ayurvedic colleges and industrial schools. In the following year the conference appealed to authorities to encourage medical education among

<sup>149</sup>

For details, see the proceedings of the 13th convention of Niyogi Mahasabha held at Pamarru in Krishna district in Niyogi (Telugu Monthly), December, 1919, p.15. There are a few others who advocated that women need not be educated for longer duration of time. However, these people never based their arguments on notions of traditionality. Instead they were given to a strong belief that the present education would only fit for obtaining service positions under the colonial bureaucracy and hence there was no need for such education for females. For example, see Grihalakshmi, December, 1941, pp.506-07. A few youth associations also were not in favour of colonial education. It was felt that the process of learning would be justified only when it promotes national feelings. That education which fails in driving out blind beliefs and social evils is of no use. A system of education that would promote social and national awakening alone is needed to suit the present times. For details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Yuvajana Maha Sabha, 8th Conference, Madras, 1940, pp.114-115. Such sentiments among youth reveals the sweeping influence of social reform activity and national movement.

G.Sudarsan Reddy, Op. Cit., p.151.

B.Kesavanarayana, political and Social. Op. Cit., p.247.

women by establishing more medical colleges and providing more seats for women in the Visakhapatnam medical College. Some of the organisations opined that women's education was long over due and its promotion was the immediate need of the times since progress of women's education would have positive effects in the domestic circles as well as social progress.<sup>152</sup> The 16th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha further reiterated its stand on **women's** education and demanded the establishment of more number of primary, secondary and higher educational institutes for girls.<sup>153</sup> Along with higher education, women should be imparted that kind of education which would help them sorting out the economic problems in the society. In other words, they should be given instruction in the necessary art of achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Barring a few scattered antagonistic tendencies, the reform campaign for women's education may be said to be a smooth affair. The intensity of opposition from the orthodox sections of the society was very mild when compared to the magnitude of the same in case of child and widow marriages. The reform endeavours in promoting the cause of women's education yielded rich dividends even during the period of our study. The number of girls studying in various educational institutions showed impressive results. By the end of 1943 there were 11,84,979 girl students enrolled in various schools and colleges in Andhra.<sup>154</sup> The success

For more details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Maha Sabha, 19th Convention, Madras, 1940, pp.16-17.

For details on this, see Hindu Sundari, June, 1940, pp. 1-2.  
<sup>154</sup> This is cited in Andhra Manila, dt.15.11.1944, p.7. The reform campaign for women's education was slowly picking up momentum in

of the reform campaign was visibly reflected in some of the contemporary writings. Reflecting over the progress of women's education, a contemporary writer expressed satisfaction over the state of women's learning in society and attested to the fact that "every village in Andhra has a few educated females" and a number of women's organisations were founded in various places. This statement may be considered as a conclusive verification to the influence of reform campaign emphasising the need for women's education.

A heinous social practice that has been perpetuated by blind traditional observances and age old cultural norms was the problem of Devadasis. This problem, also known as the Nautch problem or kalavantula problem, was one of the most important issues which the contemporary reform leaders took up and fought for its abolition. The efforts of Muthulakshmi Reddy, a prominent and reputed woman social reformer of early 20th century in fighting against this evil assumed greater significance. She

the Nizam's territory also. Invited to preside over the 8th Conference of Nizam State's Andhra Maha Sabha, Ravi Narayana Reddy, a central figure in the Telangana Communist Movement, emphasised on the need for women's education. Brushing aside all existing traditions as imposed by male members, he said that women also should receive sound instruction in all branches of knowledge and attain independent outlook and economic self-sufficiency. He openly declared that all those hurdles in the path of women's development should be removed at once. For details, see Grihalakshmi, May, 1941, p.319.

Vide M.Kameswaramma, "The Present Status of Hindu Women" (Telugu) in Andhra Patrika, Golden Jubilee Number, 1965, p.47.

Before Muthulakshmi Reddy initiated her efforts in this direction, we have a few and scattered references to the opposition expressed by some of the Devadasi women against the profession even during late 19th century. For example, a devadasi woman from Bellary petitioned the governor of Madras Presidency to strike off her daughter's name from the police registers as a prostitute. She informed the governor that her

strongly pleaded in favour of passing a law to ban this practice in the Madras Legislative Assembly.

Devadasis were originally dancing girls in temples supported by land grants and patronised by kings or local ruling chiefs. They were intended for service in temple. Devadasis found scattered all over Andhra and according to census figures of 1901, there were 50, 891 Devadasis in Telugu-speaking areas. Social reformers addressed themselves to effect a change in the socio-economic conditions of these people. As the reform efforts were carried on, there was a gradual awakening among the members of the community. The reformers genuinely felt that it was their duty to reform this evil practice and improve the conditions of Devadasis.

Reformers felt the urgency of immediate social action in this regard as the dancing girls began to be hired as prostitutes when they lost the earlier royal patronage and were thrown out of temple lands. Even otherwise, they were hired by private parties to provide entertainment during the time of marriages, festivities and other such auspicious gatherings. Generally Devadasi girls were patronised by local potentates and this was looked upon as a status symbol.<sup>158</sup> In course of time, the youth

daughter should not be treated a prostitute for the sheer fact that she was the daughter of a prostitute. She also brought to the notice of the governor that the police authorities were harassing them since they refused to bribe them. She finally requested the governor to arrange for striking off her daughter's name from the register of prostitutes. For more details, see petition Nos.1109, dt.20.4.1874; 1197, dt.27.4.1874 and 1531, dt.18.6.1874 in Petition Registers, TNA.

Cited in B.Kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op.Cit., p.217.

158

V. Ramakrishna, Social Reform, Op. Cit., pp.269-70.

from affluent sections of society have been adversely affected by keeping nautch girls both in terms of wealth as well as health. Various caste associations of the period paid their attention towards this problem and began to discuss this question in a number of conferences.

The attack on the evil of nautch issue was multi-faceted. It was not only the reformers and caste associations that played a role, but a few progressive women from Devadasi community itself had a major role in the reform efforts. The efforts of Yaminipurna Tilakam, a Kalvanthula woman by birth, went so far into the make-up of reform initiatives. She was strongly committed to abrogate the evil from the community and tried to bring changes in their status. Her immediate task was to enlighten the community and arrange for marriages of nautch girls. She was amply supported in her activities by Darisi Chenchaiyah. As Tilakam was a gifted orator, Chenchaiyah arranged a number of meetings at various places in Andhra where she used to deliver lectures on the nautch problem. On the advice of Chenchaiyah she founded a new journal, Hindu Yuvati. It was a Telugu fortnightly and began its publication in 1923 from Madras. The journal used to publish critical essays on various social issues and political happenings in the contemporary period. After an active period of publication for seven years it became defunct in 1930 during the Salt Satyagraha movement.

159

G.Sudarsan Reddy, Op.Cit., p.137.

D.Chenchaiyah, Nenu, Op. Cit., pp.260-68.

Vavilala Copalakraishnaiah, Op. Cit., p.9.

162  
Ibid.

Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu joined the band of these reformers and performed a commendable work in supporting these reform efforts. In defense of the reform activity he used to publish various articles in his Andhra Patrika. The ideas and expressions abhorring the nautch practice as articulated by reformers found place in the columns of his journal.

Mahatma Gandhi's tour of Andhra in 1921 electrified the reform efforts in this direction and immensely enhanced their pace. Gandhi was visibly moved by the accounts of members from Kalavanthula community and later he lashed out at the male dominated values of the society in the columns of Young India.<sup>1 63</sup> A perceptible change was witnessed in all those areas where Gandhi and Yaminipurna Tilakam toured. Funds were collected to keep the movement alive and the same have been used to further the reform efforts. Tilakam's association with Theosophical Society during her stay at Madras and her extensive tour of Andhra paved the way for founding a society in 1925 known as Kalavantula Social Reform Society. The intense campaign of Tilakam soon yielded desirable results. Marriages of nautch girls were performed on a competitive scale in various areas of the state. Under the impact of Tilakam's painstaking efforts and influences of current reform movements independent Kalavantula

B.Kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op. Cit., pp.220-21. During the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Kakinada members of the Kalavantula community brought to his notice that theirs was not a social problem, but an economic problem. It was only their economic dependence that made them stick to the profession. For more details, see Andhra Mahila, dt.15.3.1945,p.20.

Darisi Chenchaiiah, Nenu, Op. Cit., pp.271-75.

institutions sprang up in places like Guntur and Narsapur.

The first Kalavanthula social reform conference was held at Guntur in 1924 under the Chairmanship of S.Anjaneyulu and adopted various resolutions against the social evil. It urged the people to financially support young girls of the community and work for the general progress of the same. It further emphasised that young girls should not be, at any cost and under any circumstances, forced to take up the profession and instead they should be married. It called upon the government to tighten the provisions of the Indian Penal Code so as to punish those who would support prostitution. By 1926 the Kalavantula Social Reform Propaganda Committee commenced its activities and started visiting the houses of dancing girls in towns and villages to dissuade them from pursuing the disreputable vocation. Under the impact of the present propaganda, twenty five families in Rajahmundry , forty families in Machilipatnam , and a few other families in Eluru abandoned the profession.

But the economic dimensions of the problem of the members belonging to Kalavantula community became a hurdle in the way of reform. The women of the Devadasi community had been accustomed to a luxurious life earlier since they were provided Inam lands

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-77.

<sup>166</sup> For details, see Krishna Patriaka, dt.25.4.1924.

Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., dt.5.6.1926.

<sup>169</sup>

Ibid., dt.19.7.1926 and 26.7.1926.

<sup>170</sup>

Ibid., dt.4.9.1926.

and Temple grants. They, therefore, were not enthusiastic in the **initial** phase to give up the profession. It was at this juncture **Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy** sought the intervention of the colonial government. As a member of the Madras Legislative Council, she argued in favour of immediate reform of the community and introduced a **bill** to this effect in 1927. She urged the government that any delay in curbing the practice would become a bane on womanhood of the society. Consequently an Act was passed in 1930 and yet it remained a partial attempt on the part of government.

Along with the agitation spearheaded by members belonging to the Kalavantula community, various other agencies and the general public opinion also were gradually turning against any furtherance of the practice. The Andhra Maha Sabha held at Vijayawada in 1929 passed serious strictures on the problem. The President of the Reception committee described the practice as a worst sin of humanity and urged the members to take corrective steps.<sup>173</sup> Some contemporary writers even published books and articles condemning the practice. One of the books on Devadasis

B.Kesavanarayna, Political and Social, Op. Cit., p.226.

The Act came into existence under the title of The Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1930. For details, see K.Narayana Rao Naidu (Transl.), Vyabhichara Nirmulana Sasanamu (Telugu), Nellore, n.d. Though the Act was passed in 1930 it took a long time to apply the provisions of the Act to various places in the Madras Presidency. For example, the Madras Government announced in 1938 that the Act would come into force in various villages of Nellore and Kovuru Taluqus with effect from 1.4.1938. See Ibid. The long gap between the enactment of Act and its application shows the apathetic attitude of the government in dealing with a social evil that already assumed alarming proportions.

For details, see the Speech of the President of Reception Committee - 15th Andhra Maha Sabha, Op. Cit., p.16.

brought out the transition in the community under the influence of social reform activities.<sup>174</sup> The book presents two characters in the form of mother and daughter, the former symbolising no-changer's position and the latter reflecting the reformist stand. While defending her stand, the mother informs her daughter that their position is far better than those Brahmin widows who have been steeped deep in blind Brahminical traditions. The daughter instead argues that they also should toe the line of reform under the changing socio-economic conditions and not cling to the fast dying Devadasi practice. The book depicts that the daughter finally won the argument and her marriage was celebrated with the help of progressive elements and prominent members of the town where she is living. The book ends with a call of the young girl to other girls in the community to shun the practice and get married soon.<sup>178</sup>

The 14th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha urged the government to bring in a uniform legislation in the entire country to ban the practice.<sup>179</sup> In tune with the sentiments expressed by women's organisations like Andhra Mahila Sabha a few others demanded that the members of Devadasi community should be immediately extended all help in the field of vocational education so that they could come out of the profession and

<sup>174</sup>

For details, Vide S.Ramanatha Sarma, Vesvaratnamu (Telugu), Tirupati, 1935. the book is written in a dialogue form.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.23-24.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>179</sup> Grihalakshmi. January, 1940, pp.750-51.

attain economic independence.<sup>180</sup> On their part, members of **Brahmo Samaj** convened meetings of Kalavantula community to fight against the evil. One such meeting was arranged at Kakinada in the month of November, 1944 and it was presided over by the local Zamindar, Pyda Venkata Narayana.<sup>181</sup> The meeting was attended by a large section of town's public and considerable members belonging to Devadasi community from places like Tuni and Pithapuram.<sup>182</sup> Pyda Venkata Narayana came down heavily on the evil practice of Devadasi and appealed to all members in the gathering to speed up the reform activity in bringing about the much desired change in their community. Various other speakers on the occasion reiterated the same sentiments. On one occasion members of local reform bodies at Kakinada staged a Satyagraha at the venue of a nautch party and convinced its members to recede from its performance.<sup>184</sup> The movement against nautch parties in Godavari region became intense in Narsapuram and infact it became a centre of reform efforts. During the time of Dasara festival in 1945 there was a lot of commotion in the town when the Trustees of local temple were planning to go ahead with the arrangements for nautch party on the occasion.<sup>185</sup> Sensing this local people, under the leadership of Bhaskarla Hemachandra Rao, published pamphlets against the attitude of temple trustees. Though the trustees

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Ibid., July, 1940, pp.277-78.

181

For details, see Andhra Mahila dt.1.12.1944. p.8.

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid., dt.1.11.1944, p.17.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

did not bow to the pressure of reformists, members of the proposed nautch party realised the gravity of the inhuman practice and expressed their unwillingness to the trustees to perform the party. Instances like this reveal the strong determination of reformers in attacking the problem. Under the influence of intense reform efforts the practice of nautch parties showed signs of clear decline and almost ceased their existence in a few regions.<sup>187</sup>

The urgency to affect immediate change in the evil practice was even recognised by the Congress government. In 1946 it appointed an assistant provincial women's welfare worker who extensively toured districts like East Godavari and urged the people to support the reform measures. In the following year the Government of Madras passed a bill with regard to nautch practice in the entire Presidency.<sup>188</sup> The reform bodies and various associations immediately undertook the task of propagating the contents of the Act. All of them unanimously asked the people to strictly observe the provisions of the Act failing which they would be liable to be prosecuted. By 1947, the practice of nautch parties and the profession of dancing girls have been officially banned by the law of the land.

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For example the practice of nautch parties and Devadasi system was intense in Godavari region of Andhra. It assumed dangerous dimensions and hence the movement against it mainly concentrated in this area. The intense and aggressive reform campaign was successful in breaking the evil tradition and it was reported that the practice of nautch parties was almost driven out from places like East Godavari district. For details, see *Ibid.*

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**B.Kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op. Cit., p.226.**

An important social evil against which reformers unsuccessfully fought has been the problem of dowry. Ironically the intensity of the problem was increasing day by day and even today it is a problem of serious dimension and dangerous magnitude. Most unfortunately the victim is the bride whether it is bride price ("Kanyasulkam") or dowry ("Varasulkam"). Though the former almost ceased its existence by the end of our study period, the problem of dowry has become virulent and widespread in Andhra society among all castes. The gravity of the problem attracted the attention of reformers, writers and journals like in the case of other social evils.

Varasulkam, popularly known as dowry was initially offered by the parents of bride. In the subsequent period dowry began to be demanded for two major reasons. First, growth of education among boys and secondly, growth of opportunities for jobs for the educated people under the colonial administration. These two factors led to the further precipitation of the problem. The middle and lower classes of the society were the worst sufferers of this evil due to their poor economic conditions.

As the problem of dowry was becoming a common feature of each and every caste in society, the caste associations of the day began to discuss and pass resolutions against the problem.<sup>189</sup> Some of the caste journals too focussed their attention on this and outrightly condemned the practice.<sup>190</sup> The most traditional

<sup>189</sup> G. Sudarsan Reddy, Op. Cit., p. 151.

<sup>190</sup> For details, vide Prabhodhini, April, 1915, p.1. This is a caste journal promoted by Viswabrahmins in Andhra.

section in society, Brahmins who almost were tight lipped over the reform activity in child and widow marriages, was now much agitated. In the case of dowry they also began to feel the pinch of the problem since it would affect them in hard monetary terms. As a result the Brahmana Maha Sabha conventions also began adopting resolutions against the problem of dowry. The 13th convention held at Pamarru, Krishna district and the 15th Convention held at Amalapuram, East Godavari district of Niyogi Brahmins, categorically stated that dowry had been a major impediment to the general progress of the community and hence it should be immediately abandoned.<sup>191</sup> These sentiments against dowry have been seconded by the writings of a few contemporary writers.<sup>192</sup> The youth wing of Vaisya Association condemned the practice and it may be noted that the Vaisya Yuvajana Maha Sabha did so under the guidance of young and energetic reform leaders like Darisi Chenchaiyah and Mote Narayana Rao.<sup>193</sup> It can be further seen that the first few conferences of this association passed very critical resolutions on the problem of dowry.<sup>194</sup> Under the

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For more details, see Niyogi, December, 1919, p.15 and June-July, 1920, p.26.

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For example, see Rayasam Venkata Sivudu, Vyasavali, Op. Cit., p. 155.

193

Vasavi, September, 1927, p.229. Darisi Chenchaiyah, Mote Narayana Rao, Kolluri Suryanarayana Gupta and Kolla Viswanatham Gupta became highly influential reform leaders among the Vaisya youth in Andhra. Infact, they served as presidents of Vaisya Yuvajana Maha Sabha conventions in 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1940. The 8th convention of Vaisya Youth held at Madras under the Chairmanship of Kolla Viswanatham Gupta in 1940 went to the extent of warning the youngsters against the practice of dowry. One of the resolutions stated that marriage should not be equated with a money spinning affair and asked the members to open their eyes to reality before young women would take to agitational methods against dowry mongers. For details, see proceedings of the Eighth Arva Vaisya Yuva jana Sabha, Madras, 1940, pp.116-17.

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For example see Vasavi, n.d., pp.218-19 and September, 1927,

influence of Vaisya Youth Association, the regional conferences of Vaisya Community also followed the line. For example, the very first convention of Arya Vaisya Sabha of Nandigama taluq in Krishna district urged its members to stay away from the social evil of dowry.<sup>195</sup> So also, the regional Women's Association of East Godavari and West Godavari districts held in 1933 under the presidentship of Sarangu Seetha Devi severely condemned the practice of dowry.

Even during the early decades of 20th century the rates of dowry were enormously increasing. Bringing this into light, a contemporary report says that the problem of dowry has been a universal problem with every caste in society.<sup>197</sup> The author brings out the fact that parents of boys who passed F.A.(Faculty of Arts) and B.A.(Bachelor of Arts) examinations were demanding dowry to a tune of Rs.5,000 and Rs.10,000 respectively. Acquiring educational degrees was immediately identified with more and more dowry and some times young girls committed suicides in order to bail out their parents from economic difficulties arising out of their marriages.<sup>199</sup> Various women's associations began addressing themselves in suggesting a few solutions to the problem of dowry. The first All India Women's Conference, held at Madras in 1927, under the presidentship of Muthulakshmi Reddy

p. 229.

<sup>195</sup>

Vaisya, June, 1929, p.25.

<sup>196</sup>

Grihalakshmi. October, 1933, p.754.

<sup>197</sup>

For details, see Kongara Annapurna, "Varasulkamu" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi. December, 1929, pp.805-807.

<sup>198</sup>

<sup>199</sup> ibid.

ibid.

condemned the practice of dowry. At the same time she urged the parents to transfer any amount of money given (in the form of dowry) in the name of their daughters. It felt that this money should be allowed to be freely used by the bride at will. Choice of life partners was another solution suggested by the conference. These ideas have been further supported by Andhra Mahila Sabha. In its fourteenth conference held at Cuddapah, the Maha Sabha asked its members to extend economic freedom to all female members of the society so as to enable them to lead a life according to their own will and never come under the pressure of any sort. Dilating upon the need for economic freedom for women, regional women's associations felt that women should be given an equal share in parents' property before the marriage in case the parents are sound in their assets. Otherwise, the only solution to the dowry would be giving right to women to half of the property of the husband after the marriage.<sup>204</sup> A few others suggested that women should become economically independent before marriage. Only after receiving a sound education to achieve economic self-reliance and after attaining certain age girls should get married. A few contemporary left activists opined that the present social set up was characterised by

<sup>200</sup> See for details, Vasavi, May, 1928, pp.490-91.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Grihalakshmi, Janaury, 1940, p.759.

<sup>203</sup> This idea was expressed by Vaddadi Kamala Devi during her Presidential speech to the 7th Ganjam Mandal Women's Conference at Barampuram held in October, 1941. For details, see Ibid., December, 1941, p. 549.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.  
For details, see Dulla Venkata Ramanamma, "Economic Independence to Women" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila. dt.23.9.1944, p.13.

excessive exploitation and hence people should fight for economic equality which alone would provide relief from social evils like dowry problem. In a society built on the basis of equal opportunities for all, men and women would freely decide on marriage where the principle of mutual consent and love would be the driving force behind such alliance.

It can be seen that the problem of dowry had been aggravated due to the absence of freedom for girls in the choice of their partners. As a result parents of the brides always would have their own say over the alliance. It was felt that intimate and friendly relationship between husband and wife in an arranged marriage would be a distant dream. The consequence of such a marriage was that there was a kind of mechanical relationship between the partners. The parents were requested to realise this and provide higher education to their daughters so as to face any evil consequences in the post-married life.<sup>209</sup> Such a step would ultimately help the family and the parents of prospective brides not to go in for early and hasty marriages of the girls. It was suggested that liberal and free education at higher levels should be provided to the young girls irrespective of any considerations.<sup>210</sup> The content of such education should be vocational and this would enable young women to stand on their own legs and escape unwanted early marriages. Along with sound

For more details on this, see the article by Chandra Savitri Devi in *Ibid.*, dt.15.2.1945, pp.19-20.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>208</sup>

Andhra Patrika, dt.16.6.1924.

<sup>209</sup>

*Ibid.*, dt.11.7.1927.

*Ibid.*, dt.31.7.1927.

education some people suggested three other measures to avoid the problem of dowry. They are, a) property rights to women b) free choice of husbands in marital alliances and c) choice of divorce in case of any serious problems after marriage.<sup>211</sup> Above all, contemporary writers asked young women to initiate a serious movement against dowry without which there would not be any real solution to the problem.

The reform activity in the problem of dowry has been incomplete. This is the only problem where the reformers as well as women's associations failed to succeed in bringing about a change. The positive aspect of the entire campaign was to generate a serious discussion and a general awakening in the society. The discussion on dowry problem is still on. The reform efforts did not succeed due to some inherent weaknesses and also lack of strong determination on the part of those who advocated reform. On the other hand, factors that have been working in favour of dowry are getting stronger day by day. Even legislative enactments against dowry did not deter the people to be away from the practice. The lack of strong will to fight the evil is reflected in the contemporary journals. One of the reports stated in 1922 that the problem of dowry was really bad and it deplored double standards of the reformers in pleading against dowry system, while at the same time indulging themselves

For details see Chandra Savitri Devi, Op. Cit.

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See Harikrishna, "Varavikrayam" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi, July, 1947, n.p. It may be noted that a reputed dramatist (K.Narayana Rao) in early 20th century Andhra wrote a play entitled "Vara Vikrayam" wherein he criticised the problem of dowry in society.

in the practice.<sup>213</sup> The reform efforts were not substantial as in the case of other problems and they never aimed at changing the material conditions which perpetuated the evil. As a result the practice of demanding and accepting dowry is still seen today. Even after the period under study there was absolutely no change in the perceptions of people on the problem. Reviewing the genesis and growth of women's movement in Andhra one contemporary writer was deeply pained to note that the problem of dowry was still posing serious threat to society.<sup>214</sup> Unfortunately the communist party members who openly pleaded for a system of marriage based on mutual love and consent were accused of adopting the practice in their households. This was, perhaps a death blow to the entire reform activity against dowry problem. One of the pioneering left historians of modern Andhra, **Kambhampati Satyanarayana** brought this to light in one of his articles almost four decades ago. He severely attacked the communist party cadres because the spirit of **Kandukuri Veeresalingam's** social reform campaign which served as a major fountain of inspiration to the entire party between 1927 and 1947 was totally lost after 1950. He further targetted the party cadres that they abruptly stopped propagating reform ideas of **Veeresalingam** in society which they were doing earlier. Quoting

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Andhra Patrika, dt.22.11.1922 and 11.6.1923.

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For details, see Kanaparti Varalakshamma, "Women's Movement" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila n.d., November, 1953, p.49.

Kambhampati Satyanarayana, "Dowry and Duties Before the Communist Party" (Telugu) in Sandesam (Telugu Monthly), July 1957.

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<sup>216</sup>ibid., pp.38-39.

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<sup>217</sup>ibid.

particular examples from the families of reputed communist leaders where dowry was freely exchanged in marriages, the author took them to task in describing them as followers of feudal traditions under the garb of Communist party.<sup>218</sup> He advised the party members to abandon the practice immediately and follow the line of Veeresalingam.<sup>219</sup> These advices and other efforts were in vain. Dowry is still posing threats to the institution of marriage.

#### IV

The foregoing aspects of reform activity in the post-Veeresalingam period bring out certain new dimensions of the same during our period of study. Though the nature of social issues and number of social evils did not show any major change (except for addition of a few new problems like dowry), the orientation given to reform activity in the post-Veeresalingam period exhibited clear signs of ideological manifestations.

The Gandhian method of struggle was a major ideological force that attracted a major chunk of social reformers. Most of them were acting under the guidelines set by Gandhian programme of action, both political and social. Reform issues were undertaken under the social reconstruction programme of Gandhi. For example, mass literacy, women's education and untouchability were considered under this programme. Women activists too took

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp.41-42.

active part in national struggle and were responding to major social issues within Gandhian framework. Many prominent women leaders of the period were Gandhians and active participants in the national freedom struggle. These activists were often drawn from middle and upper castes of urban and semi-urban areas in Andhra.

The slow but significant growth of left movement and communist ideology had a greater influence on rural women specially in the post-1930 period. Organisation of rural communities on class basis with economic aspects on the top of its agenda attracted working class members towards communist ideology. The left ideological force had its converts from urban areas too. A few middle class and upper caste women were drawn towards communist action programmes. Reputed women activists of the period like Dr.Komaraju Achamamba openly favoured leftist modes of struggle as a remedy to some of the existing social evils. Though the social base of the communist movement was narrow, the same was consolidated by the end of our period of study. We have increasing number of evidences by 1940s when women members of Communist Party took an active part in social conferences of various women's organisations. Their participation, according to contemporary reports, electrified the discussions during these conferences.

Ideological orientation to social reform issues was a major development in the post-Veeresalingam era. Along with this, reform activity was given an institutional orientation. Various

caste associations and women's organisations took up the cause of social reform and placed reform issues on the agenda of the respective bodies. Ideological orientation and institutionalisation of reform issues consolidated the earlier strands of reform activity of Veeresalingam period. While social reform programmes were given a solid institutional support and ideological backing, there was the growth of second line of leadership of reform activity. Social reform campaign during the earlier period drew its major sustenance from the personal influence of towering leaders like Veeresalingam. Growth of multiple leadership strengthened as well as consolidated reform activity.

All these dimensions of reform activity in our period of study were not explicitly visible due to the influence of national freedom movement. Most of the social reform activists, irrespective of their ideological affiliations, were active participants in the freedom struggle. In quantum terms, reform efforts pale into insignificance before the influence of freedom movement. Social reform activity, though overshadowed by liberation struggle, never lost its separate identity as exemplified by exclusive reform efforts of various organisations. That the social reform activists were highly contributory and complementary to India's freedom movement is evidenced by their active participation in the same. Women members as well as male activists like Saraswathi and Gora took a brief respite from their revolutionary social reform campaign and participated in freedom struggle. All these aspects of reform programmes in

post-Veerasingam period made them more resonant and different in orientation.

V

Social reform campaign suffered from a few shortcomings during the present period of study. Though the social base of the movement was widened, it was still confined to certain urban-based upper castes in society. An analysis of the lists of memberships of a few contemporary women's associations throw light on this aspect. The Andhra Mahila Sabha and various other district as well as local women's organisations had their members mostly drawn from upper castes<sup>220</sup>. The limited social base of the movement invariably resulted in the promotion of sectarian interests of a few sections in society while ignoring others. Further, this became a hindrance in championing new problems. Another impediment was the absence of rural base for exclusive reform activity. A few contemporary writers were pained to observe that women's organisations cut a sorry figure in taking the message of reform to rural women<sup>221</sup>. An editorial in a contemporary Telugu writes "Women activists should be aware that the country does not mean a few 'civilised' people living in urban areas, but it only refers to large masses living in rural villages"<sup>222</sup>.

For example, see Hindu Sundri, October-November, 1947 and Kavitam Mahila Samstha, *Op.Cit.*

<sup>221</sup>

Vide Editorial in Grihalakshmi, December, 1941, pp.557-58.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*

The caste associations during this period and their reform activities had certain adverse effects. Doubtless, they provided greater scope for intra-caste reform activity and succeeded in generating awareness among their caste members. The caste associations never tried to project common reform issues from a single platform. We have no references to such efforts on the part of caste associations. This was a glaring flaw that could be seen during the reform movements. Moreover, caste associations rather remained narrow social groups propagating reform issues within the orbit of a particular caste. The influence of non-Brahmin movement can't be brushed aside. Most of the prominent members of caste associations were active members of non-Brahmin movement. As a result they failed to identify caste as an issue for social reform. Instead, the vigorous activities of caste associations sowed the seeds of narrow casteist tendencies among its members. This can be seen in the activities of Vaisya Mahasabha which repeatedly asked its members to blindly follow Mahatma Gandhi since the latter, though accidentally, belonged to the same caste. Unfortunately, these narrow social sentiments were slowly influencing various women's organisations. A contemporary writer felt ashamed to note the fact that "the venom of casteism was slowly getting accelerated among women members of society too"<sup>223</sup>. The tendency of blind devotion to caste reached its obnoxious proportions when contemporary women's associations barred 'lower caste' women from

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For details, see Kanaparti Varalakshamma, Op. Cit., p.49.

being admitted as members. For example, one of the by-laws of Kakinada Women Students' Association say that the membership in the Association is open to all women from respectable families except those women hailing from the despised castes like Malas and Madigas.<sup>224</sup> When the institution of caste had been a major social impediment from the ancient past, the reiteration of same rigid sentiments even during active reform period was a major factor responsible for undoing the reform efforts. Infact, the role of caste associations was less complementary to reform campaign and more contributory to the rise of casteist tendencies.

Some times it has been criticised that a kind of apathetic attitude of a few women was responsible for the sluggish activity of both the women's organisations. It was felt that this apathy would often result in the decline of women's organisations and their activities.<sup>225</sup> A contemporary writer expressed her anguish that most of the women's organisations have been marred by lack of cooperation and coordination among members and there was a clash of ego and status. It was advised that the spirit of reform should guide the founding of societies and people should not establish them for the sake of name and instant fame.<sup>227</sup> Even some of the caste associations did not escape such criticism from contemporary public opinion. For example, the activities of

<sup>224</sup>Vide Manoranjani. October, 1911, p.380.

<sup>225</sup>For more details, see Anasuya, February-March, 1920, pp.5-7.

<sup>226</sup> See Alladi Annapurnainma, "Women Organisations" (Telugu) in Grihahalakshmi. February, 1942, pp.652-53.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

Vaisya Mahasabha have been subject to scrutiny. It was opined that the period between two consecutive Vaisya conferences did not witness any reform activity when compared to high sounding resolutions adopted at the conventions.<sup>228</sup>

The rise and consolidation of Communist Party attracted many women members from working class. The Party began to organise various sections of society on economic issues. Though it followed the spirit of Veeresalingam's reform campaign, social reform was not the only issue on its agenda. Even the 'affiliated' cultural and women's wings of the party have been moulded in accordance with the ideology of the party. Many of these party workers used to participate in social reform conferences of other women organisations<sup>229</sup>. In course of time, the Party itself took up a few reform issues.

The few shortcomings in the reform movement in the post-Veeresalingam period did not, however, adversely affect the pervasive influence of reform efforts. A contemporary estimate says that the spirit of Veeresalingam's reform campaign was responsible for the awakening and development of women in early 20th century<sup>230</sup>. Though national movement circumscribed reform

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See Vasavi, December, 1933, p.100.

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Whenever participated in general women's conferences, they would surcharge the atmosphere with their remarks on various social issues. It was reported that the attendance of women member from Communist Party during the State Conference of Andhra Mahila Sabha at Guntur electrified the entire proceedings of the convention. For details see Andhra Mahila, dated 15.11.1944, p.8.

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Quoted in Andhra Mahila, n.d., November, 1953, pp.45-46.

**movement;** it can be observed that the association of political reform with social reform was a new dimension given to the reform movements in 20th century. This is attested by the fact that most of the prominent women leaders of national movement were active participants of reform endeavours earlier. For example **Kanaparti Varalakshamma, Pulugurta Lakshminarasamamba, Kotikalapudi Seethamma, Chunduri Ratnamma, Unnava lakshmiyamamma, Achanta Rukminamma, Ponaka Kanakamma, Choladam Ammanna Raja, K. Ramasubamma, V. Padmasenamma, Gummididala Durgabayamma** and a host of others have been very active members of reform movements in 20th century.<sup>231</sup>

Despite the fact that women's organisations during the period under study suffered from the lack of a strong social base, the reform efforts yielded the cherished results. Child marriages almost disappeared by the time our period of study comes to an end. Most of the members in various social groups could give up their narrow sentiments in case of widow marriages. Various caste associations performed widow marriages on their own. This was a significant departure from earlier period because reform campaign for widow marriages was undertaken by individuals in 19th century and the same was conducted by institutions like caste associations during early 20th century. Institutional orientation to social reform was another new dimension during the period of our study. The problem of Devadasis was effectively tackled by reformers and the practice

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More details on this can be had from Alladi Vaidehi, Andhra Desamu-Streelu (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1975, pp.59-66.

of nautch parties was officially banned. Most of the members from Devadasi families joined the main stream by the end of first half of the present century. Above all, women's education registered a highly satisfactory growth during the present period. Separate women's educational institutions have been promoted by various agencies and in course of time women's education made rapid strides. By 1950s most of these problems confronting women have been solved much to the satisfaction of general public opinion.

The Gandhian method of mass mobilisation brought women into lime light and women reformers as well as activists began to take active part in social reform as well as political movements on par with the members of the opposite sex. Women who have been traditionally confined to homes came out of their narrow shells and took an enthusiastic part in contemporary social and political movements. This can be said to be a far greater achievement. The left ideology also attracted a few prominent educated women workers during early 20th century. For example, **Dr.Komaraju Achamamba** used to believe that communist pattern of society was the true remedy to many of the evils which the country was facing.<sup>232</sup> The receptivity and open-mindedness to

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For details, see Kanaparti Varalakshamma, Op.Cit., p.47. Even during the non-cooperation movement many prominent social workers like Unnava Lakshmiyamma, Duvvuri Subbamma, Digumarti Janakibayamma, Sattiraju Syamalamba, Kalagara Pitchamma, Ponaka Kanakamma, Dronamraju Lakshmiyamma, Gummididala Durgabayamma, Kolla Kanakavalli Tayamma, Achanta Rukminamma and Gogineni Bharati Ranga joined the national movement following the call of Mahatma Gandhi.

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For details, see Mallampalli Somasekhara Sarma, Doctor Komarraju Achchamamba Jeevitam (Telugu), Bezawada, 1946, pp.6-14.

different ideas was certainly a direct consequence of prevailing social reform campaign and the kind of awareness it generated in contemporary society. It may be conclusively asserted that the rapid strides made in areas like women's education, child and widow marriages and the problem of Devadasis resulted in bringing about the much needed social consciousness among women in the society.

CHANGE AND CONFLICT : EMERGENCE OF NON-BRAHMIN CONSCIOUSNESS IN  
ANDHRA DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY

The growth of non-Brahmin movement and its emergence as a political force in the early 20th century were the spin-off of the developments that took place during the course of 19th century. In the light of this, it becomes necessary to delve into different aspects of non-Brahmin consciousness in the 19th century. An analysis of the course of events in the development of non-Brahmin consciousness suggest that it was more a social upheaval than a political challenge to Brahmins. Hence the focus here is not from a political perspective.

An attempt is made to consider the growth of non-Brahmin consciousness during the 19th century from the view point of a socio-economic and socio-cultural perspective. In doing so, the non-Brahmin awareness during this period is seen as a 'reformist drive' from within non-Brahmin castes.

In the absence of any strong corroborative contemporary documentary evidence to show that non-Brahmin castes were pitted against Brahmins in absolute political terms, an analysis is made to view and project non-Brahmin consciousness as a social reform measure in 19th century.

We have to reason out why the non-Brahmin consciousness cannot be considered from a political angle during 19th century. This is followed by another chapter dealing with the developments in early 20th century wherein an attempt is made to shed more light on the fusion of non-Brahmin consciousness into a movement.

The impact of colonial policies was seen among different social groups in the society. The break-up of old political and social order under the colonial rule affected both social and traditional relations in society. The new revenue, social and cultural policies dislocated people from their occupations and social positions. Amidst these changes various social groups in the indigenous society began an intense quest for new identities and alternatives. During this process their reactions to the colonial rule were multi-dimensional. The growth of public consciousness and the consequent political awakening emerged out of these reactions. Since public life in general was less organised during this period, it can be seen that the emerging consciousness was found scattered among various social groups. The term 'consciousness' can be understood in a broader sense which reflects the sprouting seeds of resistance and protest among different social groups. In the absence of a strong ideological force to channel this germinating consciousness, the latter remained isolated at different levels. The origin of social consciousness among the non-Brahmin sections in Andhra during the nineteenth century is to be seen as a part of the general spread of public consciousness in society since such

consciousness among these sections took a definite shape of a caste movement only during the early decades of 20th century.

The emergence of consciousness among non-Brahmin castes was one of the most important developments during 19th century in Andhra. The attack on Brahmin community was spearheaded by **Kamsali** (Viswabrahmins), Reddy, Vaisya, Balija and **Velama** communities. Before a discussion is initiated on this, three important points deserve our attention:

a) The emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness was slow but significant. It gained momentum only by the late 19th century. The attack on Brahmins was carried forward by different castes within their own limitations.

b) The attack on Brahmin community was three-pronged viz., economic, social and cultural and

c) The emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness was not given concrete organizational shape and hence it did not form into a movement. Moreover, the non-Brahmin sections joined hands with Brahmins during the time when they were demanding the

One of the dominant peasant castes, Kamma which was actively associated with non-Brahmin movement in 20th century did not figure in the list of castes that opposed Brahmins in 19th century. However, there is a stray reference to a village by name **Kammavari Brahmanapally** in Rayalaseema region which suggests that the Sanskritisation process was, perhaps, initiated among **Kammas** too. But any conclusive assertion in this regard is not further corroborated by contemporary evidence. See Education Department, Consultation No.51, dt. 15.6.1868, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (APA).

introduction of local self-government in Andhra. This was seen in the public meetings organised in 1882 and the participants were drawn from all caste groups. This shows the resilience and flexibility of the non-Brahmin awareness . Such awareness was given definite institutional shape only during the 20th century with the formation of Justice Party.

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With the consolidation of the colonial authority there was a change in land relations. This was effected by various land revenue settlements in Andhra of which the dominant and most influential was the Ryotwari settlement. The change in property relations of land badly affected Brahmins for two important reasons. First, they lost the traditional patronage from the rulers which they were enjoying earlier. This was the first development that had its serious bearing on land. Secondly, political control over land was grabbed by the colonial authority which displaced the local rulers. For the British who were

It has been observed by a contemporary writer who participated in the Godavari District Social Conference meetings in late 19th and early 20th century that the narrow casteist tendencies did not yet creep into the contemporary political life. He further asserted that there was no partiality in approach to any public concern and people were united in fighting for their demands. For more details see Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, *Anubhavaloo-Jnapakalunu* (Telugu), Vol.111, Rajamahendravaramu, 1966, pp.99-100. It may be noted here that such unbiased and casteless approach in public life was witnessed in Andhra even during the heyday of non-Brahmin movement. Gutti Kesava Pillai, a prominent lawyer in Rayalaseema region disclaimed the non-Brahmin manifesto. See the letter of G.Harisarvottama Rao, dt. 23.2.1917 in *R.K.Pillai Papers*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

primarily interested in land revenue they were not inclined towards extending patronage to any social group. As a result it was Brahmins who were adversely affected.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, under Ryotwari settlement the holder of the land was recognized as its proprietor provided that the fixed amount of land revenue was paid to government. This amount was generally heavy and in practice the Madras Presidency was the highly taxed of the three Presidencies and the amount of tax collected for every one lakh of people was more than the double that collected in Bengal . It means that the ryots, in order to meet the revenue demand, had to till the land themselves or leave it. These changes had wider implications specially for Brahmin land holders. Most of the time the Brahmins remained absentee landlords renting their lands to other peasant groups. They were hardly involved in any agricultural operations. This was possible in earlier period as they received political protection from the local ruling dynasties . Under the colonial rule the land relations of Brahmins were threatened. They began to lose control over their **Manyam, Srotrium** and **Agrahara** lands due to the excessive revenue

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This was brought out clearly in the petitions from Brahmin land holders to the Governor of Madras. One such petitioner represented that the references from old documents would reveal that the rulers generously donated lands to Brahmins where as the British government did nothing in this direction. The welfare of Brahmins was completely ignored by the colonial rulers. See for details petitions No.22 and 23 in G.J.Somayaji (ed.), *Jateeya Likhita Bhandagaramandali Telugu Lekhalu* (Telugu), Waltair, 1957. The neglect of the colonial government in extending favours to Brahmin landlords was a conscious attempt since such favour would ultimately affect the revenue interests of the British.

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A.Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency, 1800-1858*, Madras, 1941, p.50.

demand from the government . The loss of political patronage further aggravated the problems for Brahmins. As a result, the relative isolation of these people from land in the earlier period was gradually giving way to their total alienation from the same. When the hold of Brahmins over land relations was weakened under the British rule, some of the non-Brahmin Zamindars in Andhra began using force in grabbing the lands held by Brahmins. Such a forceful usurpation was evidenced by the late 18th century and the beginning of 19th century . The non-Brahmin castes began, thus, asserting their supremacy over land. By the middle of 19th century the emergence of non-Brahmin castes as landed magnates picked up momentum.

The construction of Godavari and Krishna anicuts was a major development which largely contributed to the rise of non-Brahmin castes such as Reddies and Kammas. The areas which benefitted from these two anicuts were earlier reeling under poverty. The conditions in society were characterised by stagnation, heavy taxation on cultivators, depression in agricultural prices and the like . The construction of Godavari and Krishna anicuts

*Manyam*, *Srotrium* and *Agrahara* denote the land donations to Brahmins.

In an exhaustive report on the economic conditions in Northern Circars, the Commissioner refers to grabbing of Brahmin lands. The Zamindar of Ramachandrapuram, Kochherlamudi Ramachandra Raju, dispossessed many Brahmins and usurped their Inam lands by force. The Zamindar was much despised by the people for such an act. See for details the communication addressed to the B.O.R. by the Commissioner for Northern Circars (February, 1796) in Godavari District Records, Vol.842, pp.313-317, APA.

For a detailed description of these conditions see G.Niranjana Rao, "Changing conditions and Growth of Agricultural Economy in the Krishna and Godavari Districts, 1840-1890", Ph.D Thesis,

resulted in unprecedented changes in the agrarian economy of  
Andhra . The net results of the anicut construction were the  
growth of surplus grain production, increase in the value of  
land, growth of commercial agriculture, development of market  
towns etc. It was estimated that the shift from dry to wet crops  
in the post-anicut period would raise the productivity of paddy  
and in fact rice acted as a catalyst of commercialisation in  
agriculture . In course of time agricultural lands were passing  
from non-cultivating castes to the cultivating peasant castes  
like **Kamma, Kapu, Reddi** and others .

The concomitant results of new canal irrigation schemes  
virtually obliterated subsistence agriculture and created a near  
mono crop economy in delta regions, thus transforming them from  
areas of frequent famine to one of intense wet rice cultivation.  
Paddy quickly became a commercial crop, being cultivated largely

Andhra University, Waltair, 1973, pp.13-78.

The construction of the anicuts was accomplished by the  
brilliant engineering skill of Arthur Cotton. He was already  
famous by then with the construction of irrigation projects  
across Coleroon in 1835. Cotton, with his able assistant  
C.A.Orr, could complete the Godavari anicut construction and the  
Krishna anicut work was looked after by his other associates  
including C.A.Orr. For more details see Lady Hope, *General Str  
Arthur Cotton : His Life and Work*, Calcutta, Reprint, 1964 (first  
edition, 1900), pp.80-90 and 117-130. Also see A.Prasanna Kumar  
and I.Dosagiri Rao, "Sir Arthur Cotton and the Growth of Godavari  
District" in *Indo-British Review*,. Vol.VIII, Nos.1-2, pp.116-120.

For details see G.N.Rao, *Changing conditions and Growth,  
Op.Clt.*, pp.286-294. Also see by the same author, "Transition in  
the Agrarian Economy of Andhra", Presidential Address to Modern  
Andhra Session, A.P. History Congress, 1988, Passim.

G.N.Rao, *Transition*, *ibid.* However, middle and rich peasant  
communities could not emerge in other areas like Rayalaseema due  
to various factors like heavy land assessment, non-completion of  
irrigational projects like Kurnool-Cuddapah Canal, old  
agricultural technology etc. For details see, *Ibid.*

for the market and the region became an important supplier of rice for other parts of Madras Presidency.

The growth of rice production and trade stimulated the development of local agro-processing particularly rice mills in towns and larger villages. The expansion of trade and communication resulted in the 'money economy' of delta region .

Changes in land revenue policy contributed to the commercialisation of agriculture. The gradual removal of intermediary class of Zamindars, who controlled much of the land in the region, gave an impetus to agricultural growth by allowing greater part of profit to the cultivator<sup>12</sup>. The introduction of Ryotwari system promoted production for the market and by confirming ownership rights in land, it also paved the way for the development of a market in land. The enhanced productivity of the delta lands after irrigation and increase in population meant that there was a growing demand for land and consequently land prices also rose .

For details see, A.V.Ramana Rao, *Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh, 1766-1959*, Secunderabad, 1972, pp.64-67.

Nata Duvvuri, "Tobacco Trading and forms of Market organisation : A case study of Guntur District" in the *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, Vol.27, p.1329.

<sup>13</sup>A.V.Ramana Rao, *Op.Cit.*, p.72.

Continuous rise in grain prices during most of this period contributed to the growth of economy and a general increase in prosperity. The commercialisation of agriculture picked up momentum and this is proved by the fact that 427. of rice produced in Guntur District during 1920s was exclusively meant for marketing purpose .

The most important outcome of these economic changes was the emergence of a relatively large class of prosperous peasants or owner cultivators . **Kammas, Reddys, Kapus and Velamas** constituted the neo rich peasant class . These rich cultivators began to participate directly in the market both as sellers and buyers. Consequent upon this, they came into contact with towns while transacting their business. With the shooting up of higher productivity rate, big farmers could accumulate substantial surplus from their agricultural operations during the early decades of 20th century . These cultivators began investing

<sup>14</sup>Nata Duvvuri, *Op.Cit.*, pp.46-47.

It is observed that the social structure that developed in this region contrasts sharply with that found in most of the dry land of Madras Presidency in which rural society was dominated by a small land owning elite. For more details see Baker.C.J. and Wash Brook, D.D., "South India : Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940", Delhi, 1975, p.164.

There were several land owning cultivating castes in Coastal Andhra, the dominant among them being **Kamma** cultivators. Kapus were probably more numerous than Kammas, but they had in their possession less amount of land. Given any village in the delta region one caste was dominant in so far as land ownership is concerned. For more details see, Upadya Card Boyock, "The Farmer Capitalist of Coastal Andhra Pradesh" in EPW, Vol.XXIII, No.27, 1988, p. 1378.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

money in agro-industries and it was this capital that resulted in the rapid growth of rice mills in the delta region.

In addition to new urban and rural interaction the spread of literacy and higher education among the cultivating peasant castes was another important development. The importance of education, in particular, English education was realised by them as it provided the real key to public employment under the colonial administration, political power and social status<sup>18</sup>.

The chain of developments in the post anicut construction period clipped the wings of Brahmin landlords and they became unsuccessful as agriculturists<sup>19</sup>. On the other, newly emerging non-Brahmin peasants employed workers from their respective castes and successfully conducted all agricultural operations. This phenomenon explains the steady decline of Brahmins in agricultural sector and the consequent rise of non-Brahmins. This, in turn, provided the required momentum to social and political developments in the first half of 20th century<sup>20</sup>. With a spurt in economic status of non-Brahmin peasants, they began to seek to improve their social status in contemporary society.

<sup>18</sup>The Madras Banking Enquiry Committee (1933) reported that in the delta region, substantial sums of money were made available to educate the children of local inhabitants.

<sup>19</sup>For a detailed discussion on this aspect see, G.Haragopal, "Evolution of Modern Andhra : A socio-economic perspective", Presidential Address : Section HI in the Proceedings of Andhra Pradesh History Congress, Kurnool, 1985.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

Once the economic position of non-Brahmin castes was strengthened and secure, they started demanding equal rights with Brahmins in education, employment and executive bodies like Municipalities and Local Fund Boards. It may be noted here that the new English education under the British admitted people of all sections in society to reap its benefits irrespective of caste, creed and religion. The introduction of English education had two major implications. On one hand it introduced new syllabus and subjects of learning vis-a-vis the contents of traditional indigenous learning where Brahmin teachers had a monopoly. The new education sought to create an educated class of Indians who would fill up the lower rungs of colonial bureaucracy. This was one of the cherished objectives of colonial rulers apart from using the centres of education for proselytising purposes. Under the new educational system all sections of society began to train themselves in the new subjects. Though people of all castes in society joined these institutions, the lion's share was appropriated by Brahmins. Even the members of traditional Brahmin families took to new education who earlier were engaged in professional activities like performing traditional rituals and rites<sup>21</sup>. Such a tendency

A few contemporary autobiographies of nineteenth century intellectuals from Andhra reveal this. It is stated that the new employment opportunities created by English education displaced many Brahmin families from traditional occupations. Under the discouraging economic conditions of the colonial rule these people increasingly took to English education which fetch them an easy earning in the form of employment. For details see, Sripada S.Sastry, *Anubhavaloo - Jnapakalunu*, Vol.1, Rajamahendravaram, 1955, pp.37-41.

loosened the grip of Brahmins over the indigenous system of education.

On the other hand, non-Brahmin sections of the society also began to avail the new opportunities. Though the growth of education was very slow in the first part of 19th century, they were not ignorant of the benefits of new education. Members from upper castes from among the non-Brahmin sections began to educate themselves in English schools. The mid peasant castes of non-Brahmin sections also realised the importance of new education by the middle of 19th century. This is best exemplified by their efforts in establishing Rate Schools in Andhra. Rate School is a school which was maintained by local contributions from society. This experiment was first initiated in Godavari delta region and later on spread to other parts of Andhra . The completion of Godavari anicut provided ample

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For details see *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government No. XXVI - Papers Relating to the Establishment of Village Vernacular Schools in the Sub-Division of Rajahmundry*, Madras, 1856. This is an exclusive report on the Rate School experiment and other related aspects in the Godavari region. G.N.Taylor, sub-collector of Rajahmundry played an important part in this experiment. He adopted the idea of Subscription or Rate Schools from North Western Provinces where the village schools under the system of *Hulkbandee* were successfully run by local contributions. A recent monograph gives us various details about these schools in the Godavari delta. See J.Mangamma, *The Rate Schools of Godavari*, Hyderabad, 1973. The desire for Rate Schools was simultaneously expressed from the Cuddapah region in Rayalaseema. Edward Porter of London Mission Society informed the Government that the people of this region belonging to cultivating and weaving castes were anxious in extending elements of plain and secular education to their children. He added further that he had already received a contribution of RS.1200 from people towards this object. For details see, Public Department, Vol.932, Consultation No.46, dt. 3.10.1854, Tamilnadu Archives (TNA).

opportunities for the emergence of mid peasant castes from the non-Brahmin sections. Their enthusiasm in coming forward in establishing Rate Schools was active till the end of 19th century. The motivation for the system was purely indigenous reflecting the inherent urge of these people towards self-improvement and social development. The experiment picked up momentum in the second half of the 19th century with Rate Schools being established in almost all districts of Andhra region. Most of these schools were dominated by people belonging to non-Brahmin castes. For example, out of 980 boys under instruction in 55 Rate Schools spread over three taluqs of Godavari during the first year of operation of the schools, only 23 284 were Brahmins and the rest (696) were non-Brahmin students . So also out of 37 Committee Members of Rate Schools in Nellore district, only 8 members belonged to Brahmin caste and the remaining 29 members were drawn from different non-Brahmin castes<sup>24</sup>. The preponderance of non-Brahmins on the school committees as well as the rolls of attendance in these schools unmistakably refer to the existence of strong sentiments of self-reliance and an urge towards social improvement among non-Brahmins. It also reveals the slow but significant spread of

For more details see *Papers Relating to...Op.Ctt.*, pp.54-55. Even in those Rate Schools some of which have been transferred to the control of the Government, non-Brahmin boys were more in number. When calculated, in eight of such schools during the same period (1854), 290 boys out of 442 under instruction belonged to non-Brahmin castes (excluding Muslim students). For details see *Ibid.*

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The information is based on Edu.Dept., No.10, dated 2.3.1867; No.73 dt. 2.3.1868; No.72 dt. 24.4.1868; No.7 dt. 4.7.1868 and CO. (Education) No.142, dt. 29.4.1869, APA.

public spirit among these sections. It is with this new enthusiasm that the people from the non-Brahmin castes began to demand equal opportunities with Brahmins and challenge their supremacy over traditional observances and spiritual pursuits. However, it is to be remembered that these people never attacked Brahmins on the basis of their caste but only questioned their supremacy in the contemporary society. This is attested by the fact that educated members of non-Brahmin sections increasingly associated themselves with social reform movements and took active part in establishing public libraries and public associations during the course of 19th century.

### III

From the mid 19th century till the late 19th century, non-Brahmin castes from different regions of Andhra sent a number of memorials to the Madras Government demanding equal rights and share with Brahmins. It is observed that between 1850 and 1880 there were specific petitions addressed to the Governor of the Presidency against Brahmins. The major demands of these petitioners related to employment, share in Local Boards and economic grievances. The following table gives the details of these petitions<sup>25</sup>.

The table is based on the Petition Registers, TNA for the years 1854-1879.

Place of Origin (DISTRICT)	Year	Petition Number	Caste Groups Involved	Nature of Compl- aint or Demand
Nellore Town	1854	2771	Anonymous from Sudras	For fair share in employment
Nellore Town	1854	2983	Anonymous from Sudras	For fair share in employment
Cuddapah	1859	1545	Reddy	Against Brahmin Curanam and for enquiry by non- Brahmin officers
Bellary Town	1861	2965	From Vaisyas and other traders	For equal share in Local Boards
Nellore (Ongole Tq)	1863	2242	Vaisyas and others	For equal share in employment
Bellary (Rayadurgam Tq)	1863	2848	Sudras	Against decisions of Brahmins in Local Board - Request for discontinuance of Brahmins
Bellary Town	1863	3235	Non-Brahman peasant castes	Against revenue payments to Brahmins - Refusal to do so
Cuddapah (Madanapalli)	1879	1928	Not available	Against Brahmin employees
Vizagapatnam (Sarvasidhi Tq)	1879	2113	Not available	Against Brahmin judge and his partiality in recruitment

The contents of the above table are significant to our analysis since all these memorials have been categorically opposed to Brahmins and every petition specifically mentions the name of Brahmin caste vis-a-vis the non-Brahmin castes. This

awareness was a novel development in the 19th century . The vertical division and a broad-based caste opposition between Brahmins and non-Brahmins were recent happenings in the society.

The major demand of the petitioners from Nellore was a fair share in employment and requested the government "to cause enquiry to be made and a fair distinction of appointments among all castes impartially"<sup>27</sup>. For the people of Cuddapah the Brahmin curanam who was supporting other Brahmins out of fear were causing much trouble. They requested for an enquiry by Europeans or any other officer of non-Brahmin caste .<sup>28</sup> These people complained of the excesses committed by Brahmin subordinates working under a few corrupt European Officers<sup>29</sup>. The non-Brahmins from Bellary were opposed to the Brahmin monopoly in

It is also true that there were a number of conflicts between upper castes (both Brahmins and non-Brahmins) and 'low castes'. Even among the 'low castes' (Malas and Madigas) tensions existed. For example see the protest petition by high castes against paraiahs in Masulipatnam in Pet. Reg., No.3339 of the year 1861, TNA. For conflicts between Malas and Madigas see **Pet.Reg., No.2227** of the year 1863, TNA. These conflicts were seen more between Right Hand and Left Hand Castes. For details see V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform, Op.Cit.*, pp.8-9. Also see the protest letter of Right Hand Caste people who took objection to the use of a palanquin by a Left Hand Caste man and to the interference by the acting Magistrate, G.N.Taylor in Pet. Reg., Vol.59, No.2787, TNA.

27

See Anonymous petition as well as the one by inhabitants of Nellore town in Pet., Reg., Vol.58, No.2983 and Vol.59, No.2771, TNA.

28

A ryot from Kattakindapalli (Doopad taluq) in Cuddapah district complained of the excesses. He, in fact requested for an enquiry by the sub-collector of Nellore, Minchin. See Pet., Reg., Vol.68, No.1545, TNA.

29

For details see the petition by Venkata Narasu, Madanapalli in Cuddapah district, Pet., Reg., No. 1928 dt. 17.10.1879, TNA.

the Local Board<sup>30</sup> and the adverse decisions taken by the Brahmin members<sup>31</sup>. Hence, they demanded for an equal share in the management of Local Boards and the discontinuance of the biased decisions by Brahmins. The ryots in Bellary district also opposed the decisions of the Deputy Collector of Inam Commission who granted *patta* lands to Brahmins superseding the claims of non-Brahmin ryots<sup>32</sup>. The Vaisyas, along with the inhabitants of all the villages in Ongole taluq of Nellore district, were much worried that every taluq and village office was filled with Brahmins and a combination of all Brahmins was playing havoc with their lives . They demanded that "Europeans may be appointed to the above offices or in case of appointing natives, persons may be selected in all classes proportionately"<sup>34</sup>. In Vizagapatnam too the grievance was related to the question of biased attitude of a Brahmin Munisif in appointing his relatives in public offices in the district .

The mercantile community launched this protest under the guidance of Narayanaswamy, Kuppaswamy and others. See Pet. Reg., No.2965, dt. 29.9.1861, TNA.

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.* Also see Pet. Reg. No.2848, dt. 20.10.1863, TNA.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, No.3235, dt. 26.11.1863.

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The Vaisyas and other inhabitants representing every village in Ongole taluq under the leadership of E.Subbaiah and Kistum Chetty sent their petition to the Government. For details see Pet. Reg. No. 2742, dt. 28.3.1863, TNA.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

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The petitioner complained against the present District Munisif, Maddirala Sundararao Pantulu, that he was indulging in unfair practices like bias in appointments, amassing huge amounts of wealth etc. See for details Pet. Reg., No.2113, dt. 99.11.1879, TNA.

The study of these petitions and the nature of the grievances show that most of these are related to a fair share in employment and decision making bodies like Local Fund Boards. It is to be observed that the growth of education gained momentum after mid 19th century. Hence, these demands reflect the concerns of the gradually growing members of the educated middle classes among non-Brahmin castes. Their demand for employment and a share in Local Bodies on par with Brahmins point out the direction in which they would agitate in future. The growing consciousness among these caste groups formed the backdrop to the emergence of non-Brahmin movement during the 20th century. Another important aspect is that these people were ready to shed down, at least in 19th century, the narrow caste aspirations in the face of a public issue facing all. It was revealed by their association with Brahmins in the public meetings to discuss the issue of local self-government and arriving at unanimous resolutions. Pursuant to Ripon's resolution on Local Self-Government, the Madras Government tried to garner public opinion in this regard. It asked various district collectors and Municipal Board Members to contact people and know their mind on the present proposal. When the local board members and colonial officials did so accordingly, people from different parts of Andhra assembled in meetings and intimated their opinions to the government in the form of resolutions. These resolutions favoured the immediate introduction of Local Self-Government. These public meetings had a wide social base representing all sections in society. For example, the meetings at Vizianagaram

and Ongole were attended both by Brahmin and non-Brahmin members of those towns . An analysis of the social base of signatories to the resolutions adopted in these meetings testifies this.

## I V

By the late 19th century the educated members from among the non-Brahmin castes began their attack on the Brahminical world view. The monopoly of Brahmins over spiritual and ritual spheres was opposed by various non-Brahmin castes. Viswabrahmins (earlier known as Kamsalis), Gowda, Reddy, Balija, Velama and Vaisya were the major castes which opposed Brahmins in these fields. The attack was two dimensional. First, most of these non-Brahmin castes began undergoing the process of Sanskritisation by adopting Brahminical titles and performing their rituals. It was a process of Brahmanisation of intra-caste rituals of various non-Brahmin castes. Secondly, these people questioned the superiority of Brahmins, claimed equal status with them and at times even claimed superiority over them. These two strands went hand in hand in opposing Brahminical traditions.

The opposition of Viswabrahmin (Kamsali) caste people was not new to 19th century. It can be traced back to the Vijayanagar period<sup>37</sup>. They claimed equal status with Brahmins by performing

For more details see the proceedings of the public meetings at Vizianagaram and Ongole in Pub.Dept., Sundries, Vols. 130 and 131, TNA.

<sup>37</sup>

See V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform, Op.Cit.*, Chap.I, Foot Note.30.

rituals like *Upanayana* and the tendency continued<sup>38</sup>. A new entrant in this field during the 19th century was Gowda caste and it also claimed an equal status with Brahmins by adopting their titles<sup>39</sup>. The Reddy caste people under the influence of Arya Samaj began wearing 'sacred threads' according to Vedic rituals<sup>40</sup>. A person from this caste, Chinta Raghunatha Reddy of Vayalpadu village in

<sup>on</sup> Upanayana means thread marriage ceremony, the performance of which alone entitles a person to chant *Gayatri Manta* in accordance with the Brahmanical tradition. That they were still following Vedic rituals is attested by an anonymous petition from Viswabrahmins at Masulipatnam who demanded that "in conformity to the proclamation of Her Majesty an order may be issued to the collector to allow the goldsmith and carpenters to go through all the public streets in procession mounting an palanquin on condition of their paying Rs.8.00 per each marriage ceremony and Rs.4.00 per each Upanayanam ceremony". Pet. Reg. 1787, dt. 4.7.1863, TNA. As per the available evidence it is known that the earliest caste journal was published by Viswabrahmins entitled *Viswakarmakula Sampradaya Prabodhini*. The First issue of the journal was issued in July 1876. However, the journal did not live long and became defunct within six months. Its last issue was released in December, 1876. See *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency during the year 1876-77*, Appendix, pp.ccxlvii - ccxlix.

39

This is revealed by a petition by Sunderlala who claimed to be a priest to Gouda Brahmins of Bellary. See Pet. Reg., No.2295, 30.6.1859, TNA. Goudas are a toddy-drawing caste of Andhra. They are called Gamallas in South Coastal Andhra. In Cuddapah district they are known as Asilivandlu. 1901 census entered Idigas as a sub-sect of Gamallas. Sometimes they claimed to be Balijas or Telagas who adopted toddy-drawing as a profession. The above Census Report returned some of the Gamallas also as Settigadu or Chetty. They are known as Yatas in Visakhapatnam and Ganjam districts. For more details see Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.11, Delhi. Reprint, 1975 (first edition, 1909), pp.253-57 and Vol.111, pp.435-37. The Setti Baliljas in Godavari region also claimed themselves to belong to toddy-drawing caste. As noted above some of the toddy-drawers were shown in census reports as Balija and Chetty. Perhaps, Setti Balija is a corrupt form of Chettu (Tree) Balija or Chetty Balija. Thus, Goudas or Gamallas, Idigas, Yatas and Setti Balijas belong to toddy-drawing caste. The Srisayana (Segidi) caste in Srikakulam area of Andhra also is a toddy-drawing community and belongs to the group of foregoing castes.

40

V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform, Op.Cit.*, p.8, F.N.30.

Chittoor district put on 'sacred thread' and came to be called Raghunatha Varma<sup>41</sup>. He further induced people from Balijas, Boyas and other 'lower castes' to wear 'sacred thread'<sup>42</sup>

The efforts of Balija caste people were reflected in the activities of Kokku Hanumantha Rao<sup>43</sup>. His family migrated from Nellore to Cuntur district during the mid 19th century<sup>44</sup>. He used to chant 'mantras' even during his boyhood and claimed that he had a 'darshan' of Lord Hanuman in his dream when he was fourteen years of age<sup>45</sup>. Then onwards he began learning traditional folk arts and concentrated on Brahmanical literature. Though it is not known whether he adopted Brahmanical rituals, he strongly disputed the superiority of Brahmins and on one occasion he even entered into a philosophical discussion with an 'old beggarly Brahmin' at Vijayawada on the issue of Sanatanadharma<sup>47</sup>. He constantly referred to the existence of non-Brahmin opposition to Brahmin monopoly in the contemporary society<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>

These are revealed by his *Autobiography*. In fact it is a pseudonym as the author, Hanumantha Rao, claims that this autobiography narrates the life history of the descendants of his father's second wife to which line he also belongs. This book is entitled "Autobiography by Kokku Hanumantha Rao" and categorised under call number Q22W M71 N37 in Tamilnadu Archives. For other details see K.Hanumantha Rao, *Autobiography* (pseudo).

<sup>44</sup>

*Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>45</sup>

*Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.4-5. By the time he attained thirty five years of age he was initiated into Adwaita Philosophy.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup>

Hanumantha Rao narrates his difficulties in facing the Brahmin

The reaction of **Velama** caste members was more vigorous when compared to other castes. **Velamas** even claimed superiority over Brahmins and such awareness was percolating down to younger generations too. Such an attitude was reflected by Velama students at Bobbili when they refused to attend the town school because they had to sit on the same benches along with Brahmin boys<sup>49</sup>. Only with the intervention of the **BobbiliRaja**, Velama boys reconciled and agreed to attend the school

The adoption of Brahminical rituals and questioning their traditional authority could be seen in the efforts of **Chilambu Adinarayanappa Naidu**. He was well read in traditional

domination at Masulipatnam. He was appointed as a clerk in the District Munsiff Court in 1896 at Masulipatnam and for many years his promotion was withheld owing to the "machanisations of Brahmin influence rampant in the district court". He remarks that the Brahmin sect became a stumbling block in the way of non-Brahmin uplift and screened the divine knowledge and philosophic studies from them". Later he got transferred to Munisif Court at Peddapuram where he could get easily promoted with the help of the District Munisif, T.Varadarajulu Naidu of his own caste. See *Ibid.*, pp.10-11. it is to be noted that caste-based patronage was widely prevalent in the society and this tendency was severely protested by the vernacular press. See *Vivekavardhani*, August 1885 in NNPR, TNA. It took strong objection to caste-oriented favouritism and said that it would create disunion among people.

**49**

This was reported to the Madras Government by the Director of Public Instruction in his communication dated 14.1.1873. It is cited in G.Ranganaikulu Patrudu, A Brief Account of the Bobbili Zamindari : Chiefly Compiled from the Samsthanam Records. Madras, 1889, pp.66-68. The author of the book was a manager of Bobbili Samsthanam at the time of compilation. The D.P.I. further reported that there was a proposal to establish a school for Velamas only. Raja's interference finally resolved the issue.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p.66.

He was born into **Adivelama** caste in 1837. After his education he worked as revenue inspector and police inspector at **Pithapuram**

literature and even contributed a few articles to the contemporary Telugu journals. He often entered into scholarly disputes with Brahmins. On one such occasion differences of opinion over a poem in *Mahabharata* led to heated exchanges between himself and Somanchi Bheemasankaram Pantulu at Rajahmundry . As against the traditional practice of consulting Brahmins, Chilambu began helping his caste people in fixing auspicious timings (*muhurtam*) for rituals connected with birth, naming ceremonies, travel and marriage .

The efforts of Venkatagiri Raja, Kumara Yachama Naidu are more noteworthy in opposing the Brahmanical superiority<sup>54</sup>. In his book entitled *Manassakshi* he criticised Brahmanical notions of morality, multiplicity of Hindu Gods and divine origin of Vedas . He condemned traditional fastings, cumbersome rituals, charity to Brahmins and strongly objected to the prohibition of non-Brahmins

and Bellary. For more biographical details see Chilambu Chandrasekhara Rao, *Chilambu Adinarayanappa Naidu Garl Pavitramagu Charitramu* (Telugu), Rajahmundry, 1923, pp.1-4.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

*Ibid.*, pp.54-55. This process came to be popularly called Swasanga *Paurohityamu* and was more visible among Kammas in early 20th century.

<sup>54</sup>

He is also known as Kumara Yachendra Bahadur. For more details on his activities see Alladi Jagannadha Sastri, *Op.Cit.*, pp.108-110.

*Ibid.* He also authored *Gitasara Sangraham* and *Hindumatha Virodhabhanjani*. His books including *Manassakshi* are in Telugu. The latter was translated into English by two scholars (a) C.Aravamudu Aiyangar, *Manassakshyam [The Mind's Testimony] of Sri Velugoti Kumara Yachendra Bhupala*, Madras, 1888 and (b) Sripati Suryanaryana, *The Manassakshimatam of Sri Velugoti Sarvajna Kumara Yachendra Bahadur*, Madras, 1894.

from learning Vedas . In order to propagate his views he began delivering lectures on his book at Venkatagiri. For the same purpose a separate society, Manassakshi *Kutam*, was established at Bobbili by its Raja, Venkata Swetha Chalapati Ranga Rao *Bahadur* .

The Vaisyas too did not lag behind in opposing the superiority of Brahmins and such an opposition could be seen in the efforts initiated by Atmuri Lakshminarasimham<sup>58</sup> . He was moderate in his views and a staunch supporter of social reform issues like women's education and widow marriage<sup>59</sup>. At the same time he rebelled against Brahmanical superiority in denying his community access to Vedas. He started studying Vedas and even established a school to teach Vaisya students and the teaching started after the celebration of 'Sacred Thread Marriage' . He went on extensive tours lecturing on Vedas at different places like Gutti, Vizianagaram in Andhra and Satyamangalam,

Sripati Suryanarayana, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

*Ibid.* Ranga Rao Bahadur was the third son of Venkatagiri Raja and was given in adoption to the ruling family at Bobbili in 1872. He was ten years of age at the time of adoption.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>

He was all praise for the British rule and his view, like in the case of other educated middle class intellectuals, reflects his misguided notion of colonialism. He believed that Britishers were first cousins of Indians as both belonged to the same Aryan stock and hence there was no reason in opposing the colonial rule. However, this 'false consciousness' did not influence his activities in supporting social reform endeavours initiated by Veeresalingam. For more details see *Ibid.*, pp.39-41, 131-33 and 168-69.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

Chidambaram, Coimbatore and **Kumbhakonam** in Tamilnadu . In these lectures he emphasised that Vaisyas should be given free access to Vedas and that the meaning of Vedas should be informed to the entire society . To propagate his ideas he established a Telugu Journal, *Vedardha Prakasika* in 1901 and various topics relating to **Bhagavadgita**, Vedas and Upanishads were discussed in its columns . Symbolising his efforts in opposing the upper hand of Brahmins over traditional rituals he performed **Agnistoma Yagna** at Masulipatnam and claimed the title of Somayaji

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.70-72 and p. 140 ff.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-66.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.112-13.

*Ibid.*, pp.70-74 and p.87 ff. **Agnistoma Yagna** is the most important as well as the most intricate Soma (Ritual Liquor) sacrifice in Vedic rituals. These sacrifices would normally incorporate animal sacrifices along with a number of other rites. **Agnistoma** is an annual ritual in praise of fire God (Agni) and spans over four days "culminating in morning, afternoon and evening soma pressings on the final day and including two goat sacrifices". However, cow is the main animal of sacrifice. Its performance generally includes seventeen Brahmin Priests. The other important and ambitious Soma sacrifices are **Aswamedha** (Horse Sacrifice), **Rajasuya** (Royal Consecration) and **Vajapeya** (booty or Victory Draft). For details see *Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York. 1987, Vol.6, pp.339-340 and Vol.15, pp.280-30. **Atmuri** was condemned by the Sankaracharya of **Sringeri** Peetham since Vaisyas were debarred from Yagnic rituals. The Peetham sent a court notice to Vaisya community at Satyamangalam whom the notice claimed, were violating the Hindu traditions under the influence of Lakshminarasimha Setty. It may be noted here that the notice used the suffix, Setty, to his name which is generally used for Vaisyas only. During the performance of **Agnistoma Yagna**, **Atmuri** Lakshminarasimham deviated from the traditional Brahmanical practice of cow sacrifice for it symbolised an act of violence and instead used a replica of cow made of flour called 'pista pasuvu'. Condemning the practice of cow sacrifice he published a tract entitled 'Pasuvadha Khandanam'. For details see *Ibid.*, pp.70-74, 98-100 and p.259 ff. He delivered a few lectures on caste condemning the hold of Brahmins over Hindu caste structure. For example see his

## V

The foregoing efforts of non-Brahmin caste people in asserting themselves during the course of the 19th century signify the fact that awareness was gradually spreading among these sections regarding the issues of social importance. A few aspects assume significance in the growth of non-Brahmin consciousness. Though the beginnings were noticed in their consciousness, it was consolidated into a definite non-Brahmin movement only during the 20th century. The spread of non-Brahmin consciousness was more complementary in its role in society during the entire course of 19th century and did not assume the shape of exclusive caste identity. The pervasive influence of social reform campaign in the second half of nineteenth century played an important role and under its impact narrow caste divisions were submerged. Even the caste associations in the early 20th century concentrated on internal reforms under the impact of vigorous social reform campaign by people like Veeresalingam. A few contemporary autobiographies of nineteenth century Andhra intellectuals bring out the fact that social life in Andhra during this period did not attain narrow caste identities.

On the other, non-Brahmin sections could readily give up narrow caste aspirations in the face of a popular demand. They

"Lecture on Caste Delivered in the Museum Hall, Rajahmundry in September 1882", TNA (Under the call number Y 592.2 M84). Also see C.J.Baker and D.A.Washbrook, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 152-155.

did not hesitate joining hands with Brahmins in demanding a free hand in the management of local bodies when this question became a bone of contention between Indians and the Colonial government. These evidences provide enough proof to the non-sectarian nature of non-Brahmin consciousness. Above all, there was no interference of Colonial state in this field unlike in the early 20th century when it extended an implicit support to the Justice Party, organised on the social basis of non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency including the Andhra region. In the light of these facts it can be safely assumed that the emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness served as yet another instrument of public opinion, and, at least during the nineteenth century, it did not cocoon itself into a narrow shell of caste consciousness.

While the available evidence points to non-sectarian nature of non-Brahmin consciousness, a few writings on 19th century present us a distorted notion of caste consciousness during this period. It is argued by some scholars that under the Company administration the preponderating influence of Brahmins over Hindu Law and the Imperial system of dispute management viz., the Anglo-Indian Legal System, which initially associated Brahmins with them were responsible for the Brahmin supremacy in the nineteenth century . Precisely for this reason they described nineteenth century as a "Brahmin Century" which represented the

For details, see **D.A.Washbrook**, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.15, No.3, 19981, pp.652-653.

<sup>66</sup>**Ibid.**

"Brahman Raj" . According to them the 20th century which witnessed the emergence of non-Brahmin movement against the dominance of Brahmins was an "Anti-Brahmin Century"

It cannot be denied that Brahmins were associated with Company administration not only in the field of dispensing law but also in various other capacities such as dubashees and small job holders. However, it is not historical to label periods of history on the basis of caste as **It is** equally erroneous to compartmentalise it on the basis of religion. Under the British rule there was a perceptible change in the socio-economic conditions. The new policies introduced by the British created an altogether different atmosphere where one has to look for and carefully analyse new social interactions and relationships. Increasing dependence on a single set of factors in our analysis of social set-up may often lead us in developing historical inattitudes in our conclusions. The available evidence strongly suggests that the nomenclature of "Brahmin Century" to describe the social change in 19th century is a historical misnomer. It also proves at the same time that the emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness was fairly witnessed during this period. It further suggests that such consciousness was highly complementary in public life and at least during the nineteenth century it was non-sectarian in its nature, role and scope.

This expression is employed in Pamela G.Price, "Ideology and Ethnicity under British Imperial Rule : 'Brahmins', Lawyers and Kin-Caste Rules in Madras Presidency" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.23, Part.1, 1989, p.162. It is argued that utilisation of Brahminical codes in the legal system under the Company administration resulted in the supremacy of Brahmins.

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D.A.Washbrook, *Op.Ctt.*, p.653.

GROWTH AND CONSOLIDATION : ENDEAVOURS OF REFORM AMONG NON-BRAHMINS  
IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY

The legacy of 19th century non-Brahmin consciousness continued in the next century and became more vigorous among different castes. The nature of activities of various social groups and caste associations is not always political. Equating the non-Brahmin consciousness with political manifestation alone, in the pre-independent era, is not a historically viable proposition. For, the process of politicisation of non-Brahmin awareness was not total during the period under study. The over emphasis on Justice Party and its activities by various scholars and, in particular European and American, resulted in looking at the non-Brahmin consciousness from a political perspective. Knowingly or unknowingly the scholars shed more light on those aspects which were readily available in print in English and these sources definitely lead us to a political analysis of the developments. Efforts to draw on vernacular literature help us to estimate the activities of non-Brahmin groups from different angles and, they do not necessarily drive us towards a political characterisation of non-Brahmin consciousness. The general political atmosphere under the influence of Indian National Congress was, no doubt, highly surcharged with notions of freedom from the yoke of colonial rule. But, the non-Brahmin political wing (Justice Party) stood in opposition to the Congress and such an opposition was confined to a few economically dominant upper castes of non-Brahmins. When analysed from a non-Brahmin

political point of view, barring the influence of national freedom struggle, the non-Brahmin consciousness did not assume political character, atleast in Andhra Province. The nature of activities of various caste groups helps us in understanding the growth of consciousness.

The subtle difference between the prevailing political atmosphere and the political activities of non-Brahmin groups in early 20th century is to be considered in our estimate. The fructification of non-Brahmin consciousness into a separate political movement necessarily implies that the process of **politicisation** was not in juxtaposition with that attempted by Indian National Congress. Rather it was in opposition to Congress politics. This dichotomy raises question on the social base, activities and methods of operation of non-Brahmin caste groups. It further raises other important question whether all the caste groups among non-Brahmins were involved or not. These questions are crucial for our study as they unearth more reform activity and less political activity in response to the call given by a few influential non-Brahmin leaders towards a political front vis-a-vis Congress party. This is historically attested by the collapse of Justice Party after a brief period of active

Emphasis is on coastal districts and a few districts in Rayalaseema. The activities of non-Brahmin castes were very active in the coastal districts like Godavari, Krishna and Guntur. These areas (riparian and fertile regions) formed the nucleus of **activities**, both social and political. These were followed by other coastal districts like Visakhapatnam, Nellore and a few Rayalaseema districts like Chittoor, Kurnool and Cuddapah.

existence. The other aspect of non-Brahmin activities is the reform drive that was explicit in various caste associations in early 20th century. In quantum terms, there had been more emphasis on intra-caste reform activities within all non-Brahmin castes with varying degrees of difference. Compared with this, the political activities outside the pale of existing political currents of the Congress, were at a low ebb in these castes. Even highly articulate caste groups such as Kammas, Reddis, Vaisyas, etc. did not leave reform activity aside. Rather, they gave equal importance to reform issues including the ritual reform as against the Brahminical world view, and their dominance over various traditional observances. In fact, the second aspect of the reform activity viz., diametric opposition to Brahminical rituals and their supremacy over the same came to occupy a place of pivotal importance for different castes, especially Kammas, Reddis and Vysyas.

Apart from reform issues like Child marriages, widow marriages, *Kanyasulkam* (bride price), *Varasulkam* (dowry), female education, attempts were made to claim ritually superior status on par with Brahmins. The concerns of caste associations unmistakably reveal the legacy of Veeresalingam's reform campaign. At another level, they suggest attempts at upward social mobility of these caste groups. Social mobility was considered on a priority basis and, at the operational level, there was a vertical disjuncture between economically dominant upper non-Brahmin castes and other lower non-Brahmin castes. Kammas were virulent in their attack on the Brahminical world view. The attack was

multi-pronged :

- a) disputing the ritual status of Brahmins with authoritative arguments based on traditional Brahminical literature.
- b) rewriting some of the traditional treatises with a non-Brahmin orientation and
- c) compilation of detailed caste history to give a Kshatriya status to Kammas.

Vaiśyas too disputed the claims of Brahmins and their monopoly over rituals. But, their attack was not as vociferous as in the case of Kammas. It was rather mild and confined to situational specificities. They were given to a staunch belief that attainment of spiritual wisdom, which had been hitherto banned by Brahmins, was not difficult under changing conditions. Through noble character and spiritual learning, Gandhi (incidentally a Vaiśya by birth) could attain the status of a Brahman and his precept could be followed by all Vaiśyas<sup>2</sup>. The overriding influence of Gandhi on Vaiśya associations in Andhra was responsible for mild reactions from the community both to the attacks on Brahmins (in social terms) and to the Justice Party (in political terms)<sup>3</sup>. Reddis, Velamas and Balijas also were bitter

<sup>2</sup>

These notions were explicit in the speeches delivered by prominent Vaiśya leaders during their caste association conferences. For example see the introductory speech of Raja Peddasubbarayudu Setti in the proceedings of *Arya Vaiśya Mahasabha, 19th Annual Conference, Madras, 1940*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup>

However, there are exceptions. A liberal-minded Vaisya intellectual and a follower of Veersalingam's reform campaign, Darisi Chenchiah was severe in his attacks on Brahminical deeds which resulted in the ritual subordination and subjugation of non-Brahmin castes and, in particular Vaisyas. He was given to a belief that craving for "political freedom before breaking the

in their attacks on Brahminical notions.

Incidentally, all these castes reaped immense benefits after the construction of Krishna and Godavari anicuts by the middle of 19th century. As already discussed these caste groups became neo-rich agricultural castes. Once their economic predominance was firmly established, they began clamouring for ritually superior status. And this brought them into a direct conflict with Brahmins. Though most of the prominent non-Brahmin leaders disclaimed any personal animosity towards Brahmans, their activities were uncompromising in so far as they claimed a ritual status on par with Brahmins. They even could win over the sympathy of liberal minded Brahmin leaders like Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao who described the present non-Brahmin aspirations as symbolising a "moral indignation" on the part of fellow Hindu gentlemen<sup>4</sup>. But there was an equal and more concentrated

shackles of religious anarchy in India would further strengthen the hands of Brahmins in their exploitative capabilities". Though, he did not give a call to Vaisya youth to join hands with a political front other than Indian National Congress, he was more concerned about the ritual hurdles and impediments in the free growth of Vaisya Youth. Along with Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, who again was a supporter of Veeresalingam's reform campaign, Darisi Chenchiah represents more radical and rational elements among Vaisyas. The present views of Chenchiah are expressed in his presidential speech at the *Pradhama Arya Vaisya Yuvajana* Maha Sabha (Telugu), Madras, 1930, pp.29-31.

<sup>4</sup> Vide D.Raghavachandrayya Sath Sastri, *Non-Cooperate with the Brahmin, the Eighteen Great Sinner*, Bezawada, 1933. Writing Foreword to the book, Nageswara Rao, the founder of nationalist journal *Andhra Patrika* (discoverer of Amrutanjan balm), says that the present book is "helpful for the Sanatanists....and proves the necessity of re-examining the whole of Hindu Dharma, by all true lovers of Hinduism, whether Sanatanists or reformers". For more details see his Foreword to the book, pp. 1-12.

opposition from traditional Brahmin sections. While the economically dominant upper castes among non-Brahmins could effectively make a dent into the society with all the substantial material sources at their command, other lower non-Brahmin castes were still struggling to come to grips with their own internal problems. Instead of attacking Brahmins with all the diatribes and invectives as in the case of upper non-Brahmin castes, they were more concerned about self-development, internal reform and, no doubt, upward social mobility. The poor economic base was, however, their Archiless heel in any aggressive campaign for the same. The present mood of "moral indignation" was visible in the activities of caste associations like Telaga, Agnikula Kshatriya, Setti Baliya, Nayee Brahmana (Barbers), Devanga or Padmasali and, Viswabrahmin.

There were, thus, internal differences among the non-Brahmin castes and vocal expressions regarding the superior status. There was the group of economically dominant and rich upper castes. Puffed up by the new agrarian economy, they were highly comfortable in their new found roles as social agitators. Their activities too were bifurcated. At the material level, they aspired to penetrate deep into executive structure of the state, both civil and political. This would definitely relocate the administrative structure and push the Brahmins who till, then by virtue of their early English education, held positions of prominence, down the scale. The vociferous demands for proportionate representation in public employment reflects the same. At the another level, their demands for reservations in

legislative bodies from top to bottom including local and village **boards**. This would dislocate Brahmins from policy-making and revenue functions. Coupled together, these two demands would push the Brahmins to a lower position as wished and hoped by non-Brahmin sections. These new aspirations of non-Brahmin castes were fructified in the political party viz., Justice Party and it proved a successful effort for a couple of decades. It realised the dream of non-Brahmin castes regarding superior social **status** over Brahmins. The colonial state too extended its support to non-Brahmin agitators and employed the divide and rule technique in supporting numerically strong and socially volatile groups. The activities of the Governor of Madras Presidency, Lord Pentland, is a case in point .

The contemporary public opinion speaks about the attitude of colonial state. Going a bit further, a contemporary journal *Sadvi*, dated 1.6.1916) accuses the Madras Government of starting non-Brahmin movement on its own. Citing the examples of Collectors of Madras and Bellary, it says that the gentlemen in question invited applications from non-Brahmin graduates to fill in public posts. It further says that this was unbecoming on the part of Christian gentlemen (Collectors). For details see the Files on *History of Freedom Movement*, TNA, P.1. Referring to the activities of Madras Governor, Lord Pentland, another journal accuses him of his provocative actions in instigating non-Brahmins. The Governor was alleged to have said that "non-Brahmins formed 987. of the population, that swaraj could not be granted in their own interests until they too acquired appointments, titles and fashions like the Brahmins, for, if Swaraj should be conceded, the Brahmins who were already in the enjoyment of such fortune, would usurp the whole Government and make the condition of the non-Brahmins much worse than what it had been...". For details vide *Ibid.*, p.37. The attitudes of colonial government irritated many young aspirants and, in particular, Brahmins. Much peeved over the government's attitude in this regard, a young Brahmin aspirant declared that he was "prepared to relinquish his Brahmin status and become a non-Brahmin to make himself eligible for public employment". For more details see, Baba (Pseudo), "Brahmanuni Sthanamu" in *Navvulathota* (Telugu monthly), June 1925, p.8. The criticism of

At the ritual level, these non-Brahmin castes were **more enthusiastic** and vigorous in attacking the superior status of **Brahmins**. As already noted earlier, the activities of **Kammas** are symbolic of all that could be done under the present sphere of **activity**. The only difference being that there was a material goal and there was no such concrete thing in their fight **in** traditional sphere. Vocal sections of non-Brahmin castes disputed the ritual status of Brahmins with all the power of eloquence and all inherent talents in giving written expression to the same. Here, the efforts were partial and the success that was registered was again notional. At the material level, non-Brahmins were **themselves** the alternatives to Brahmins. But, at the spiritual or notional levels of traditional framework, they themselves were not the alternatives. Neither they could evolve an alternative thought process outside Brahminical or Hindu world view. And **hence**, agitation and conflict had been long drawn. While this is one aspect, the non-Brahmin caste associations devoted their attention to other reform issues too. Education was central to their concerns, followed by other reform issues like child **marriage**, untouchability, dowry etc. Even by the eve of India's independence, caste associations were still focussing their attention on reform issues within their respective castes. This **definitely** allows us to an unmistakable impression that social

colonial government's diabolical behaviour was to continue for the next two decades too. The government was accused of dividing Brahmins and non-Brahmins through their explicit support to the demand for division in public employment. For details see, *Telugu Swathantra* (Telugu Monthly), April 1949, pp.31-33.

reform issues were major concerns of non-Brahmin awareness in the 20th century too.

In contrast, the lower non-Brahmin castes were politically inactive and subordinated to upper non-Brahmin castes. But **they** were enthusiastic in ritual terms with intense activity focussing on internal reform. An analysis of the proceedings and activities of various caste associations during the early decades of 20th century indicates their concerns. Again, education of caste members was at the top of the agenda followed by other reform issues like child and widow marriages, bride price and dowry. Each caste association claimed superiority in ritual hierarchy and always tried to project themselves on par with Brahmins. The deadly obsession with claims over a superior status was never extinguished even by the middle of 20th century. Hand in hand, extreme identification with reform issues never ceased from their agenda. Unlike in the case of other non-Brahmin castes like **Kammas**, the claims of lower non-Brahmin castes were mild and always restricted to a mere theoretical discussion and argumentative abilities, the exception being Viswabrahmins who had a conflicting legacy of opposing Brahmins in severe terms and at times boycotting their services to them . Political ideas and resolutions were rarely found in the deliberations of these caste

On the eruption of conflicts over some temple issue in Narasarao Peta village (Guntur District) between Viswabrahmins and Brahmins, the former decided on the stoppage of traditional services to Brahmins like making gold ornaments. For details see, *Abhinava Saraswati* (Telugu Monthly), Vol.2, No.12, pp.1-5. Such instances are numerous where Viswabrahmins came into conflict with Brahmins.

various non-Brahmin castes was fairly visible by late 19th century. Such awareness was a prelude to founding caste associations in the early decades of 20th century. Spread of literacy and the slow growth of English literacy among different members of non-Brahmin castes provided an opportunity to expose themselves to the world of knowledge. The urge for knowledge and self-improvement was already given expression in the form of Rate Schools in the middle of 19th century where there were more non-Brahmin students under instruction . In the spread of primary and secondary education, prominent non-Brahmins like the Zamindars of Vizianagaram, Venkatagiri and Pithapuram, and non-Brahmin liberal intellectuals like Samineni Muthunarasimha Naidu played a pivotal role<sup>o</sup> . Added to these, the Christian missionaries loomed large over the field of education. As a result, there was a clear spurt of progress and development in the field of education. The following table is an indication<sup>9</sup> .

This aspect is discussed in the foregoing pages.

There were even two second grade colleges patronised by Zamindars. For more details see K.H.S.S.Sundar, "Origins and Growth of Political Consciousness in Andhra during the Nineteenth Century", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1994, p.49.

<sup>o</sup>The table is inclusive of different schools, both vernacular and English. Figures are compiled on the basis of *Report on Public Instruction* (Madras Presidency) for the corresponding years.

District	Number of Institutions		Number of Scholars	
	1860-61	1884-85	1860-61	1884-85
Ganjam	29	1117	973	26407
<b>Vizagapatnam</b>	06	720	347	18506
Godavari	117	966	2718	26532
Krishna	06	1184	473	25612
Bellary	07	624	533	12694
Cuddapah	01	535	70	8843
Kurnool	01	372	120	6652
Nellore	13	467	323	10229
Anantapur		311		5488

The figures of learning are impressive and provide us insights into the kind of urge for education among people. Institutions of higher secondary level too were giving instruction and by late 19th century there were 23 such institutions to train students at matriculation level . The impact of intense activity in the field of education was seen in the increasing number of students under instruction to total population. The table below

They were the high schools promoted by Christian missionaries, private individuals and local Zamindars. These high schools were of matriculation standard and located at Berhampore, Vizianagaram, Vizagapatnam, Chicacole, Rajahmundry, Nursapore, Ellore, Kakinada, Masulipatnam, Guntur, Bezawada, Nellore, Kurnool, Cuddapah, Chittoor and Bellary. For details see *Report on Public Instruction*, 1879-80.

throws light on this aspect .

District	Proportion of population to one pupil		
	1875	1880	1885
Ganjam	218	119	66
Vizagapatnam	328	166	134
Godavari	152	82	67
Krishna	130	94	60
Nellore	173	120	119
Kurnool	166	131	106
Cuddapah	<b>171</b>	167	126
Bellary	<b>155</b>	111	58
Anantapur	—	--	109

The coastal districts viz., Krishna, Godavari and Ganjam, and Bellary in Rayalaseema exhibited impressive growth in the spread of education. The other districts too showed signs of progress as indicated by the proportion of population to each student under instruction.

At the collegiate level, there was a first grade college at Rajahmundry with facilities of instruction in F.A. and B.A., and six second grade colleges at Berhampore, Vizianagaram,

<sup>11</sup>Vide *Report on Public Instruction* for the corresponding years.

**Vizagapatnam**, Kakinada, Masulipatnam and **Bellary** . Of these six colleges, the Vizianagaram and Kakinada institutions were patronised by the non-Brahmin Zamindars of Vizianagaram and **Pithapuram**. By the end of 1885, there were 31 students drawn from different non-Brahmin castes pursuing F.A. and B.A. in these institutions<sup>13</sup>.

The newly found urge among non-Brahmin sections towards self-enlightenment had its positive consequences manifested in a rational outlook. The work of Samineni Muthunarasimha Naidu best exemplifies this. His work, *Hltasoochane* is, perhaps, the earliest work promoting rational and scientific ideas in society much before Veeresalingam. The book was a monograph written in spoken dialect of Telugu and put to print in 1862<sup>14</sup>. The work represents how the newly educated intelligentsia was drawn towards social problems under the influence of emerging social and intellectual movements across the country . The monograph

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, 1883-84, Subsidiary Table, p.2.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*. This statistical compilation excludes all those students at the graduate and under-graduate levels at the Presidential Capital, Madras. The corresponding strength of Brahmin students in these seven colleges was 199.

<sup>14</sup>For details see, V.Ramakrishna, "Literature and Social Consciousness : Examination of a Lesser Known Telugu Monograph of the Early 19th Century" in the *Proceedings of Andhra Pradesh History Congress*, 18th Annual Session, Tenali, 1994.

Such a process was common to many regions of the subcontinent. Apart from educated intelligentsia, some of the enlightened rulers of princely states undertook reform campaign. For example, the rulers of Rajasthan were in the forefront in effecting reformist campaign among traditional sections and Raja Sajjan Singh of Mewar was instrumental in founding the first ever reform society, "Shri Desh Hitaishini Sabha" in 1877. The Sabha was concerned about

contains altogether eight *Prameyas* (subjects or issues) and, in the discussion of these subjects the author displayed high rationality of mind and scientific outlook on all matters relating to society like women's education, superstitions, attack on the notions of supernatural powers, modern approach towards medicine, advanced ideas regarding the need for mutual consent of bride and groom in marital alliances and the like<sup>1</sup>. It is stated that the pioneer of social reform in Andhra, Kandukuri Veeresalingam, owed much to this monograph and a critical scrutiny of his writings would bear out this relation. The attack on blind beliefs and traditions by Muthunarasimha Naidu represent the budding spirit among non-Brahmin intellectuals in questioning the established norms of traditions. The modest and sober approach of Naidu's period was to assume more aggressive stand taken by other non-Brahmin intellectuals in the later period. The latter tried to probe deep into traditional world of Brahmins and direct an attack on their superiority, a historically assumed status in the eyes of non-Brahmins.

During the last few decades of 19th century and early decades of 20th century many educated non-Brahmins were enthusiastic in

various social evils prevailing among the Rajput and Charan communities of Rajasthan. For more details see, V.K.Vashishta, "Role of Caste Reform Associations (Sabhas) in Social Reform Among the Rajput and Charan Communities in Rajputana (1877-1949)" in *The Indian Archives*, Vol.XXXVIII, No.2, Jul-Dec, 1989, pp.21-31.

V.Ramakrishna, *Literature and Social Consciousness*, op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

founding public libraries in some urban and mofussil areas of Andhra. The growth of library movement is significant on a few counts. It was an off-shoot of the growth of educated sections and associated both Brahmin and non-Brahmins in the pursuit. Its growth was rather an indication of a new spirit among newly emerging educated classes which shouldered the responsibility of spreading enlightenment in contemporary society. This process was more witnessed in rural and semi-urban areas of the then Andhra province with much focus on coastal belt. Apart, these libraries served as platforms for discussing issues of public importance. Some of them like the one established at Rajahmundry undertook the twin tasks of the spread of knowledge and the message of reform and, interestingly, the latter was confined to women's education. Various intellectuals of contemporary Andhra including reformist leaders like Veeresalingam associated themselves with the movement.

The Zamindar of Venkatagiri was the first person to organise a library in 1850 under the name, *Saraswathi Nilayam* at Venkatagiri<sup>18</sup>. Incidentally it was again at Venkatagiri that Raja Kumara Yachama Naidu or Kumara Yachendra Bahadur published his works like *Gitasara Sangraham*, *Hindumatha Virodhabhanjani* and *Manassakhi* (all in Telugu) which disputed the Brahminical world

For details see, Velaga Venkatappayya, Prasiddha *Grandhalayalu* (Telugu), Guntur, 1976, pp.96-97. The author is one of the pioneers of the library movement in Andhra.

view and their ritual superiority in unequivocal terms<sup>19</sup>. The coincidence was not mere historical. Rather it reflects the direction of newly emerging non-Brahmin consciousness. By 1886, Manthina Audinarayana Murthy organised *Saraswathi Nilayam* Library at Visakhapatnam<sup>20</sup>. It was the first library to be organised on modern scientific lines. Under the influence of Theosophy, the local Krishna Theosophical Lodge at Guntur opened a public library in 1882 and it was the first among public libraries in the district<sup>21</sup>. By 1890, C.V.N. Reading Room and Library was established at Ongole<sup>22</sup>.

The efforts of Kallakuri Narasimham were noteworthy in opening *Su. Janananda Grandhalayam* in 1894 at Rayakuduru in Godavari District. In the following year, he established A.O.Hume Reading Room at **Kopalle**, again in Godavari District<sup>24</sup>. The *Nauroji Club* was opened in 1895 at **Undi**<sup>25</sup>. Around the same time,

<sup>19</sup>This aspect is discussed in detail in the preceding pages.

Paturi Nagabhushanam, *Andhra Pradesh Grandhalayodyamamu* (Telugu), n.p., 1957, pp.1-2.

Adusumilli Sreenivasa Rao, "Gunturu Zilla Grandhalayodyama Sangraha Charitra" in Gunturu Zilla Paura *Grandhalayamula Sadassu* (a souvenir in Telugu), Tenali, 1964, p.25.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

Velaga Venkatappayya, *Jeevitha Charitra Kosam : Grandhalaya Karyakartalu* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1986, pp.48-49.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Velaga Venkatappayya (ed.), *Grandhalaya Jyothi* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1967, p.279.

Simhachalapatil *Rao Library* was established at the Zamindari town of Vizianagaram . One of the earliest and most famous public libraries, *Veesalinga Kavi SamaJam* was founded at *Kumudavalli*, near *Bhimavaram* in Godavari District . The library had the twin objectives of the spread of knowledge and social reform. The efforts of Vadrangi Chinna Raju, Bhupatiraju Rama Raju and Bhupatiraju Tirupathi Raju were instrumental in strengthening the Library<sup>28</sup>. One significant aspect of the library was that the founders were true followers of *Veesalingam's* reform campaign and hence wanted to shape the present library as a repository of knowledge on reform issues<sup>29</sup>. The *Vignana Chandrika Mandali*, a famous library which served as the seat of publication of books on different aspects of Andhra, was given a shape by Komarraju Venkata *Lakshma Rao*<sup>30</sup>. The inception of the library was in 1898 at Munagala, the Zamindari seat of Nayani Venkata Ranga Rao Bahudur<sup>31</sup>. Reputed Vaisya philanthropist, Nalam Krishna Rao, was instrumental in the formation of a small reading room in 1898 at

26

A.A.N.Raju, *History of Library Movement in Andhra Pradesh, 1890-1956*, Delhi. 1988, p.233. Interestingly the nomenclature of these libraries (A.O. Hume, Nauroji) reflects the influence of early moderate leaders of Indian National Congress.

27

Yatagiri Lakshmi Venkata Ramana, *Crandhalayodyamamu* (Telugu), Bezawada, 1923, pp.20-21.

Velaga Venkatappayya, *Jeevitha Charitra Kosam*, op.cit., pp.48-49.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.* p.56.

31 *Ibid.*

Rajahmundry and it later shaped into the famous *Gautami Grandhalayam*<sup>32</sup>. The members of the library were involved in the spread of women's education in the areas around the town with a missionary zeal. Supply of the necessary books for essential reading followed by an annual examination were on the agenda of these members. Various mofussil areas in the riparian belt of Godavari witnessed the spread of public libraries and a contemporary estimate was that "Kakinada had a public library in almost every sub-division of the town"<sup>33</sup>.

The spread and growth of library movement brings into focus many educated and philanthropic non-Brahmin members including the Zamindars of Venkatagiri, Pithapuam, Munagala and Vizianagaram. This was one of the areas where there was a harmonious working relationship between Brahman and non-Brahmin members of the contemporary society. The movement, however, provided a historical opportunity to members of non-Brahmin castes to train themselves in matters of social and public importance. This new spirit emanating from their newly found social roles was further consolidated in the public associations established throughout Andhra during the same period<sup>34</sup>. There were a few scores of such bodies throughout Andhra province and some of these associations had specific objective of social reform. The **Bimlilpatnam**

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>

V.V.L.Narasimha Rao, *The History of Coconada*, Coconada, 1923, p.29.

For a detailed discussion on this see the Chapter on "The Genesis and Growth of Political Consciousness" in K.H.S.S.Sundar, op.cit.

Association emphasised on social, religious and political **instruction** to members<sup>35</sup>. For **Penukonda** Club, literary and social betterment remained chief objectives. In case of Chittoor and Palamaner Associations, social advancement along with moral and cultural development occupied their agenda<sup>37</sup>. The **Pathikonda** Literary Society was specific in its objective that diffusion of knowledge and enlightenment on social reforms through periodical lectures should be its priority. The spread of these public bodies espousing the cause of social and moral advancement was uniform throughout Andhra and, Rayalaseema region, however, had an edge over coastal areas in this respect. The end of 19th century and the early decades of 20th century witnessed the activities of non-Brahmin leaders who played a pivotal role in establishing public associations on their own. The Raja of Bobbili promoted the *Budhanandnl Sabha* at Bobbili<sup>39</sup>. Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta, a well known Vaisya intellectual, was behind the formation of two public associations at Atmakur in Nellore District<sup>40</sup>. They were Atmakur Progressive Association and *Deena Poshaka Samajam*. The

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.212-221.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Vide G.Ranganaikulu Patrudu, *A brief account of the Bobbili Zamindari chiefly compiled from the Samsthanam Records*, Madras, 1889, pp.50-51.

<sup>40</sup> For more details see Amabatu Subbaraya Gupta, *Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta Gari Jeevitamu* (Telugu), n.p., 1954, pp.3-13 and 20-25.

growth of these bodies wherein the non-Brahmin members were seen as both promoters and active participants helped them in consolidating their new roles as social agitators.

The district level social conferences established during late 19th century provided a broad-based social platform for many to freely discuss and dilate upon different issues and problems in the contemporary society<sup>41</sup>. Though rid of any explicit caste-based approach, the educated sections of non-Brahmins were members of these bodies and they could imbibe a spirit of social dynamism<sup>42</sup>. Coupled with all these, the contemporary society witnessed an intense social reform campaign, Veeresalingam being the fountain of inspiration and Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu was one of the corner stones of the same. Social reform in Andhra went hand in hand with religious reform. For, it was believed that all social evils had religious sanction. The educated sections drawn from both Brahmin and non-Brahmin sections were the solid strength behind the campaign. They were active participants

41

For details on the activities of district social conferences, see V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, op.cit., pp.190-95.

42

A contemporary liberal-minded Brahmin literary figure in Telugu, Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry was an active participant in these conferences. He mentioned that these social conferences were still left untouched by narrow caste tendencies. For details see his autobiography in Telugu, *Anubhavalu - Gnapakalunu*, op.cit. During these district social conferences non-Brahmin agriculturists took an active part. Sometimes they were in the forefront of conducting these conferences. For example, the local non-Brahmin ryots shouldered the total responsibility of managing the Krishna District Social Conference in 1902 at Vellatur. For details see *Dharmavadini* (Fortnightly in Telugu), 16.3.1902, pp. 1-3.

in both social and religious reform. While Veeresalingam concentrated much of his energy on social reform issues, Venkataratnam Naidu took interest in religious reform. Mannava Butchaiah Pantulu and his activities further strengthened the hands of people like Venkataratnam Naidu. Both of them helped the growth of Prarathana - Brhmo Samaj movement in Andhra. Veeresalingam and Venkatratnam Naidu condemned idolatry, polytheism and *Varnasramadharm*a. Under the influence of these reform trends, both Brahmins and non-Brahmins began attacking the ritual notions. During his own life time, Veeresalingam was responsible for the growth of radical and rational elements among Brahmins, he himself being excommunicated from the caste by traditional Brahmins. Under his influence some of his students, in particular Brahmin students, at times displayed over enthusiasm to give expression to their idea of radical social reform. They used to hang their "sacred threads to a tree outside the college premises in order to provoke the passers by"<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup>This has a parallel to the activities of Derogians (Young Bengal Movement) of the early 19th Century. For details see Valluri Suryanarayana Rao, *Suryanarayaneeyamu* (Autobiography in Telugu), Kovvur, 1936, pp.165-67. He was a student of Veeresalingam at Rajahmundry. He used to write and publish articles in a contemporary journal, *Trilinga* with highly critical remarks on the misconceptions and illusions propagated by Hindu Puranic Literature.

Under the influence of the foregoing developments, the non-Brahmin sections began looking for alternatives and they were in a quest for new social and political roles which could establish them in society. At the social level, they began to question the ritual superiority of Brahmins thereby claiming an equal status with them. Various castes among non-Brahmins, both upper and lower castes, initiated a rigorous discussion on ritual matters. **Kammas** were in the forefront of the entire process, followed by others. A brief look into their activities makes it clear that they were demanding a place of equal importance in traditional affairs of the society, which for them was historically due.

As stated earlier, the attack on Brahminical rituals and their notions of superiority by **Kammas** was caustic and multi-pronged. The works of D.Raghavachandrayya "Sath Sastri"<sup>44</sup> best represent the ideas of **Kammas**.

44

It is a title assumed by the author and he says that "Sath Brahmins" are real Brahmins. He was a Congress volunteer earlier and tried to raise the issue of non-Brahmins during the Andhra Provincial Conference in 1931, presided over by Tanguturi **Prakasam**. But his request was denied. However, he was granted permission during another session at Nellore with Raja of Gampalagudem in the Chair. Vide *Non-Cooper ate*, op.cit., pp.352-53. In addition, his request to get nominations into Central Legislative Assembly was rejected by Congress leadership. Peeved over the treatment, the author published various books attacking Brahmins and Congress. Vide *Destroy this Brahman Raj*, Bezawada, 1945. P.xiii.

He published three books which disputed Brahminical superiority. They are a) *Non-coo per ate with the Brahmin The Eighteen Great Sinner* , b) *Destroy this Brahman Raj* and c) *An Appeal of The Real Indian National Congress Party Office* <sup>47</sup>. All these three books indulge in highly critical remarks on Brahmins, their notions of ritual dominance and **pro-Brahminical** attitude of Indian National Congress. Equating Brahminism with a kind of "hidden religious imperialism"<sup>48</sup>, he feels that the real Brahminical state of affairs i.e., the Sath Brahminical state existed in the pre-Ramayana or pre-Sambuka murder days<sup>49</sup>. And hence, the central objective of his narrative is how to exactly restore that Sath Brahminical state of " i) spiritual ii) religious iii) divine iv) social v) political and vi) economical life of Hindus" . According to him Brahminism which solely rests on the misrepresentations of Bhashyakartas (the commentators on Vedas, Upanishads, Gita and Puranas) "encroaches upon 18 fundamental birth rights of non-Brahmin Hindus" and thus

45

Published at Bezawada. op.cit.

Published at Bezawada. Op.cit.

47

Published at Bezawada, n.d.

*An Appeal*, op.cit., p.8.

49

*Non-Cooperate*, op.cit., pp.ii-iii. For him, the idea of 'Rama Rajya' (as emphasised by Gandhi) represents an "inconceivable hell" to Sudras because of Sambuka's murder by Rama.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

commits 18 great sins . These sins are :

- 1) The eternal reservation of the right of adopting **Brahmana** Dhanna by the so-called Brahmins and the denial of the same to all other peoples.
- 2) The eternal reservation of the right of receiving first **namaskar** for the Brahmin from all people and denial of the same to all others.
- 3) The eternal denial of Brahmana Dharma and first namaskar to **Kshatriyas**.
- 4) The eternal denial of Brahmana Dharma and first namaskar to **Vysyas**.
- 5) The eternal denial of Brahmana Dharma and first namaskar to so-called **Sudras**.
- 6) The eternal denial of Brahmana Dharma and first namaskar to so-called **Panchamas**.
- 7) Eternal reservation of titles like **Brahmasree**, Acharya.Achari, Sastri and **Sarma** for the Brahmins.
- 8) Styling other non-Brahmins as Dasa, **Varma**, Gupta etc.
- 9) Reservation of the right of being pollutionless and first Holiness in sight for the Brahmin and denying the same to all others.
- 10) Reservation of the right of being pollutionless and first Holiness in touch for the Brahmin and denying the same to all others.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p.vii.

- 11) Eternal reservation of God by Brahmin and declaring Him to be pollutionless "only after a Brahmin performs traditional rituals" (emphasis added).
- 12) Denial of the right of personal worship to so-called Sudras in inner Temples.
- 13) Denial of the right of Temple entry for the so-called **Panchamas**.
- 14) Denial of the right of studying Vedas to all non-dwija Hindus.
- 15) Denial of the right of performing "Tapah" to all non-Brahmin Hindus.
- 16) Denial of the right of marrying the Brahmin's daughter to all non-Brahmin Hindus.
- 17) Imposing greater punishment than the Brahmin to all non-Brahmin Hindus for one and the same crime and
- 18) Denial of all males' rights to females.

The author blames Varnasramadharm for all these faults and identifies it with "concentrated immorality" on the part of Brahmins . All the Dharmasutras and Gita which strengthen the concept of Varna Dharma are nothing but "Dustha Sutras" or "Unholy Texts" and "Sanatic Doctrine" respectively<sup>53</sup>. The presence of Brahmin among non-Brahmin social gatherers or non-Brahmin politicians is a bad omen and the author advises all Brahmins to

<sup>52</sup>

Vide *Destroy this Brahman Raj*, op.cit., Introduction, P.iv.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, P.v.

retire from politics and seek to content themselves "to live in the highest and holiest walks of life of Vedic Brahmins"<sup>54</sup>.

To overcome the hurdles imposed by Brahminical traditions, the Real Indian National Congress Party was established in 1932 with **D.Raghavachandrayya** Sath Sastri as the Honorary Secretary . The party had its own constitution and its preamble states that "whereas the Brahmin has been committing the following 18 great sins of ungodly reservations and sanatic condemnations. . . . And also believing that to close eyes to the realities - namely the loss of the 18 most elementary birth-rights of the non-Brahmins which found expression in the above said 18-fold boycott doing incalculable harm to the country is a great danger and so having determined to fight it out openly by striking at the very root of Brahminism which destroyed the nation - this real Indian National Congress Party, the realistic political school of the Indian National Congress was established" . The Party had three declared objectives, one being the resolve to "achieve Swaraj" and, "another object of the Party is to remove the bad effects of the 18 fold boycott of the Brahminism..." The third object is to "convert all Congressmen to this realistic point of view i.e., to

54

*Destroy*, op.cit., p.xviii.

*Non-Cooper ate*, op.cit., Appendix 1, p.38.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.31-38.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

view things as they are and try to remove the bad effects of Brahminism and create a healthy nationality among the various subjects of Hindus on the one hand and non-Hindus such as **Mohmedans**, Europeans, Sikhs, etc., on the other"<sup>58</sup>. The Party had separate rules for elections and envisaged the removal of all the 18 fold boycott of Brahmins before elections and, all the candidates of the party "must be informed of the **Sath-Brahmin** policy which is removal of the 18 fold boycott"<sup>59</sup>. The membership of the Party was thrown open to all aspirants including Brahmins. But an "obligation was imposed upon the Brahmin - just to reform his Brahmin relations and friends of a Taluk or Tahsil i.e., making atleast 50% of all the Brahmins of that Taluq or Tahsil in which the applicant seeks admission, dine along with one so called Panchama untouchable and so called Sudra in his own dining room, hosts and guests side by side - before he gets admission" . Apart from all these, the author states that there are certain "minimum necessary qualifications for adopting Sath Brahminism" like performing Brahminical ritual of Sandhya offerings every day, observing a minimum spinning of atleast 12 minutes a day for atleast 3 months or 90 days in a year, accepting that "sacrificing animals such as goats, etc. ought not to be performed in Yagnas" and taking a vow not to "dine i) eggs ii)

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

fish iii) nor mutton nor any other kind of flesh and observing it strictly (sic)"<sup>61</sup>.

The writings of Raghavachandrayya are an attempt to provide a theoretical notion, atleast, of a state of affairs where non-Brahmins have the ritual freedom. The timing of these publications (around 1930s) after the decline of Justice Party refers to the turmoil among non-Brahmin intellectuals even by the middle of the present century. These works also reveal the contradictions within the mental make up of these intellectuals who were in a dilemma whether to a) identify themselves with anti-Congress feelings and b) anti-Brahmin spirit. The vociferous attack on Brahminical rituals and attitudes of Congress and, yet an attempt to amalgamate some of the characteristics of these two shed light on this. Emphasis on spinning, observance of Brahminical rituals and, vegetarianism are mute witnesses to this historical dilemma among the non-Brahmin intellectuals on the eve of the decline of Justice Party. Beyond doubt, these activities bring into focus the continued efforts of non-Brahmin sections in designing a comfortable role and status in the world of Brahminical traditional structure. Implied is the irony of fight against a ritual framework of society and, yet an unwrit wish to find a superior position in the same.

*Ibid.*, Appendix V, pp.ii - 1.

The other stream of activity in questioning Brahminical notions is reflected in the writings of Suryadevara Raghavaiah Chowdary, the founder of non-Brahmin movement in Andhra. He authored five books in Telugu to dispute the dominance of Brahmins and expose the evil deeds of Brahmins and Brahmin poets in the construction of an exclusive Brahminical world view in the society . His writings are less emotional unlike the writings of Raghavachandrayya and display a conceptual clarity in so far as they spell out the notions about a non-Brahmin society where the role of Brahmins could be reduced to the lowest possible limits. Raghavaiah Chowdary is more functional in his approach to the problem. At the outset, he denies the Brahminical modes of traditionality and tries to create an alternative in appointing some members of his own caste as 'purohiths' who are to replace traditional Brahmins in the performance of religious rituals. For him, the Hindu religion "today is disfigured by the mechanisations of Brahmins who claim that it is their exclusive concern. In the process, the non-Brahmins have lost access to scriptural writings and, are seen today lacking any interest in religion. The monopolising tendencies of Brahmins are responsible for the

These five books are printed in the second and third decades of 20th century. They are *Varna Vibhaga Darpanamu*, *Vipra Charitramu*, *Swasanga Paurohityamu*, *Arya Kavi Kutantram* and *Brahmarutara Sanghadarsamu*. These books formulate the main postulates of his theory and throw light on different aspects of friction between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. For details vide, Suryadevara Raghavaiah Chowdary, *Brahmanetarodyama Tatvam* (Telugu), Kollur, 1936, p.viii.

development of negative attitude towards religion" . The real remedy for this is the revival of ancient Hindu religion and this is to be "affected from two different planes. First, the present Brahminical religious priests should be rendered powerless. This, in turn, can be achieved through *Swasangha Paurohityamu* which automatically gets rid of Brahmins. As liberal minded Brahmins are not available today, it is advisable to have own caste purohiths in every non-Brahmin caste. Secondly, the prevailing notion that caste is based on birth should be abolished"

To counter the dominance of Brahmins, and their acts in humiliating non-Brahmins Raghavayya Chowdary propagated the concept of *Swasangha Paurohityamu* among different non-Brahmin castes. Thus originated Non-Brahman Movement in Andhra Province in 1915 where Raghavayya Chowdari played an important role and the movement took its origin with the main objective of religious reform . The founders of the movement were given to a belief that "Hindu religion is played by selfish attitudes and cruel designs

*Ibid.*, p.i. He states further that Brahmins concocted various myths and rendered non-Brahmins powerless in religious affairs. Since they manipulated Varna Dharma in their own favour, their privileged status is historically assumed than natural (pp.65-66). For him a liberal Brahmin is one who is prepared to baptise an untouchable (*Panchama*) into Brahminism by way of teaching him *Gayatri Mantra*, the most sacred chant in Hindu rituals (pp. 173-76).

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p.ii.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.284-88.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

of **Brahmins...with** the existing privileges in religious affairs, Brahmins always create problems in the way of **socio-religious** reforms" . They were peeved over the indifference of the British government towards religious reform without whose help it was difficult to conduct the same on their own . In the absence of such help, Raghavayya Chowdari and his friends initiated their humble efforts at **Kollur** in Guntur district and propagated the idea of *Swasangha Paurohityamu* . The Non-Brahman Association put in hard work in driving out the Brahminical prejudices. It envisaged a role for itself and "the Non-Brahman Association ought to replace Brahmin priests by non-Brahmin priests and observe" some of the rules . These rules are :

- a) without depending on others (Brahmins), they should perform rituals on their own.
- b) To avoid any association with evil-minded Brahmins and to regain the self-respect of non-Brahmins.

Vide Suryadevara Raghavaiah Chowdari, *Swasangha Paurohityamu* (Telugu), Rajahmundry, 1927, pp.i-ii.

*Ibid.*, p.iii.

Raghavaiah Chowdari, *Brahmanetarodyama*, op.cit., p.17. The author refers to the visit by G.S.B.Saraswathi, a non-Brahmin ascetic to Kollur in the first decade of 20th century. Saraswathi delivered a few lectures on the eligibility of Sudras and women to learn Vedas and performed a few "sacred thread marriages" to non-Brahmin youth. However, the author prevailed upon G.S.B.Saraswathi and discussed with him the need for "Swasangha Paurohityamu". Being convinced, he joined hands with Raghavaiah Chowdari in founding a Vedic school at Kollur and in the propagation of the idea of "Swasangha Paurohityamu". For more details, see Raghavaiah Chowdari, *Swasangha*, op.cit., pp.v-vi.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

It follows strictly the foregoing two rules which would restore the "non-Brahmin pride and this would immediately lead to country's independence" .

Another aspect of Raghavaiah Chowdari's contention that needs attention was his thorough understanding of the nature of knowledge available, to generate public opinion in the form of books. He believed that Brahmins manipulated various religious texts by way of innumerable interpolations and consciously destroyed the past history of non-Brahmin castes<sup>72</sup>. He cites the glaring absence of ancient Pali texts and Buddhist and Jain manuscripts. On the other hand, there was no dearth of "Hindu Brahminical writings on a large scale" and the texts which "degrade the status of non-Brahmins are seen in abundance throughout the country" . Even under the new dispensation of the British rule, Brahmins occupied all top slots in the administrative structure and these people "do not allow non-Brahmins to have any access to epigraphic (historical) research and suppress all historical evidences relating to non-Brahmins" . The urge to reconstruct the history of

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.65-66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.186-191.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

non-Brahmins was a new dimension. Vaisyas too expressed a desire in this regard and called upon young students to undertake research to reconstruct caste history on scientific lines. These aspirations found material expressions very soon. By the middle of 20th century the history of Kammās was compiled.

While traditional elements among non-Brahmins like Raghavaiah Chowdari drew their attention to the reconstruction of their history, the rational minds among them concentrated on the deconstruction of certain Brahminical texts. For them, this aspect was equally important as these texts were primarily responsible for reiterating and reemphasising the superiority of Brahmins over a period of time. The most reputed and rational minded Tripuraneni Ramaswami Chowdari and his works represent the present stream of thought among Kammās in 20th century. He has been thoroughly influenced by reform ideas of Veeresalingam and others. Like Veeresalingam, Ramaswami Chowdari is a great

The history is compiled by Kotha Bhavaiah Chowdary. The history is in three volumes tracing the origin of Kammās and projecting them as Kshatriyas. The third volume throws more light on modern day developments. For details see Kotha Bhavaiah Chowdari, *Kammavari Charitramu* (Telugu), Vol.11, Part.2 and Vol.111, Tenali, 1942. In addition, he published a few other books focussing on the biographical details of other non-Brahmin leaders. For example see, Kotha Bhavaiah Chowdari, *Mahajana Charitra* (Telugu), Vol.1, Pamaruru, 1967. The books deal with the biographies of B.Muniswami Naidu, R.Venkatratnam Naidu, Raja Panuganti Ramarayanam (all non-Brahmin leaders of Justice Party) and Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty (the earliest political agitator in Madras Presidency). The present book was published as one among the series of "Vighneswara Grandhamala" of *Bharati Samiti*, established at Pamaruru (Krishna District) by Koganti Mallikarjuna Kavi. The biographical sketches were earlier published in the form of articles in *Andhra Prabha* (Telugu daily) and later they were compiled into books.

literary figure in Telugu.

Born into a middle class **Kamma** family, he had the bitter taste of Brahminical notions of superiority during his childhood. He was educated in India and Ireland and began taking active part in public life from 1917, the year of establishment of Justice Party. After the death of Raghavaiah **Chowdari**, he became the towering personality of non-Brahmin sections in Andhra. **Imbued** with the spirit of reform and influenced by rationalist ideas, he used his pen in the propagation of the ideas of rationalism and humanism in the contemporary society. Through his writings, he tried to provide an alternative mode of thinking and his books represent a radical departure in so far as they tried to deconstruct the existing notions of orthodox sections. He shouldered the responsibility of releasing people from the shackles of brute traditionalism of dominant social groups. For him, long standing and unchanging traditions were great hurdles in the natural growth of social groups and serve as potent factors for social stagnation . His works were an attempt at demystification of mystified traditions and, in a true sense of the term he is a Nihilist of Andhra . Through his constant tours, he propagated ideas of rationalism and paved the way for the rise of socialist movement. He was unequivocal in declaring that the ancient sacred texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata and

Gopichand, "Varga Chaitanyam" (Telugu) in *Kaviraju Sanmana Sanchitka*, Gudiwada, 1942, p.72.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

Gita and Dharmasastras are only instruments of dominant orthodox sections in society to legitimise their power and keep others under constant subjugation. It was precisely these ancient texts which Ramaswamy Chowdarl chose for his work of **deconstructing** the religious literature.

For Tripuraneni, "God" is a created historical entity who manifested Himself in different forms in response to the existing socio-economic conditions. In contrast, human being has been made supreme in his writings and his depiction of **Bhagavadgita** is an epitome of his views in this regard.<sup>78</sup>

"Sutapuranam" is his magnum opus. The entire work is devoted to the condemnation of the ideological hegemony of Brahmans and propagation of rational thinking in society. "Kuppuswamy Satakam" (in memory of Jagarlamudi Kuppuswami Chowdary) condemns the notion of salvation and declares that salvation cannot be attained through shaving heads, donning ochre robes and growing beards. Dilating upon *Dasavataramulu* (Ten incarnations of Cod) he conceives another incarnation i.e.,eleventh incarnation of God which would "campaign against the existence of God".<sup>79</sup> He projects

78

For more details see, Tripuraneni Subba Rao, *Kaviraju Tripuraneni Ramaswami Chowdari : Jeevitham - Sahityam* (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1989, p.31. Also see, Avula Sambasiva Rao, *Tripuraneni Ramaswami : A herald of Philosophical Renaissance*, Hyderabad, 1988. p.201.

79

P.V.Subba Rao, "Praja Nayakulu" (Telugu) in *Sanmana Sanchika*, op.cit., pp.134-36.

Pandavas as immoral rulers in his *Kurukshetra Sangramamu*.<sup>80</sup> **Kauravas** are clearly depicted as morally superior individuals than their first cousins and Pandavas are shown as having no right to crown<sup>81</sup>. In case of Ramayana, Ravana was assigned a superior place and Rama was degraded to a lower status<sup>82</sup>. On the same lines, he describes Prahlada as patricide and Sugreeva and Vibheeshana as fratricide<sup>83</sup>. In *Sambuka Vadha*, he takes Rama to task for his act of killing Sambuka under the pretext that Sambuka was undergoing penance. For Ramaswami Chowdari, this act is reflective of the conspiracy hatched by Aryans to keep the Dravidian people under perpetual subordination. Despite the rising social storms over

80

*Ibid.*, p.143. There was a hue and cry from society over these books. But the mood of protest slowly vanished and the book was made a part of Intermediate curriculum in the later period.

81 *Ibid.*

82

Gopichand, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

83 *Ibid.*

*Sanmana Sanchika*, *op.cit.*, p.143. Other non-Brahmin educated members were on their toes in criticising all published works which projected non-Brahmins as Sudras. The best example is *The History of Andhras* by Chilukuri Veerabhadra Rao. The work is credited to be first of its kind in early 20th century which is based on a scientific analysis of the history of Telugu people. The **Kakatiya** rulers were identified with Kammas who in turn were classified under Sudra category of Varna hierarchy in the book. This raised a hue and cry from them. A rejoinder was immediately published which was highly caustic in its remarks both on the book as well as Veerabhadra Rao. For details see, N.A., Chilukuri *Veerabhadra Rao* Cari *Dundagamu* (Telugu), Rajahmundry, n.d., pp.1-3. The book is described as "mischievous" and "spiteful" in the nature of its contents. The author of the book even requested the Andhra University to abstain from its proposed felicitation programme of Veerabhadra Rao for his conscious bias in the book exposing his "mean manners". *Ibid.*, P.56. But, some other non-Brahmin journals of the contemporary period were full of praise for the book by Veerabhadra Rao. A Viswabrahmin journal of the time said in its review article that "for such an excellent

the publication of these works, Ramaswami never relented in his activities which, for him, were socially justified.

Tripuraneni Ramaswami Chowdari diverted his attention to another aspect of traditional literature whereby he tried to give a new orientation to some of the existing works. His *Vivaha Vidhi* best represents this. Considering marriage as the most important ritual for a Hindu, Ramaswami simplified the procedural formalities involved in the celebration of marriage and translated the Sanskrit chants into Telugu. The effort was to enable the bride and groom to understand the meaning of chants of the priests during the time of marriage. His book was immediately adopted by a number of non-Brahmin families, and in particular **Kammas**. Ramaswami himself performed a number of marriages with the help of this book. Its publication and immediate adoption by people resulted in three benefits.

- a) it could successfully arrest the exploitation of Brahmin priests at the time of marriages.
- b) the bride and groom could understand the meaning of different *slokas* and the duties emanating from married life and
- c) marriage could be performed with lowest possible expenditure without deviating from existing traditional norms.<sup>85</sup>

historical account, all the Telugu people should be thankful to Mr.Veerabhadra Rao. Throughout his book there has been a quest for truth and the contents are not pedantic and misleading in their arguments". See *Prabodhini* (Telugu Monthly), July 1912, pp. 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Tripuraneni Subba Rao, *Kavi Raju Lekhalu - Daireelu* (Telugu, Hyderabad, 1972, pp. 16-17.

The aspirations of Kammas in regard to self-development, claims over a superior social status and intra caste reform were to continue for a long time to come. Even during the peak of the activities of Justice Party, the non-Brahmin castes did not lose their insights into other social issues. The first **Kamma** Conference was organised in 1910 under the chairmanship of **Kanthamaneni** Rangaiah Chowdari . Following this, various conferences of Kammas were organised throughout Andhra with vigorous activity confined to Godavari, Krishna and Guntur districts<sup>87</sup>. In Rayalaseema, these conferences were organised at places like Gutti and Kurnool<sup>88</sup>. Most of these conferences gave an increased emphasis to eradication of social evils and the importance of education. Almost every caste association had a separate educational fund for its members and the *Kamma Mahajana Sangham* was established in 1911 with the sole aim of educational development of Kammas . By 1935 the Sabha helped 345 Kamma boys with necessary educational scholarships. In addition three caste journals were founded to propagate ideas of reform and

86

Kotha Bhavaiah Chowdari, *Kamma Vari Charitramu*, op.cit, p.302.

87

Kammas are concentrated more in Krishna and Guntur districts. Their number is thin in other districts of Andhra even today.

88

*Ibid.*, p.303. These conferences were conducted in 1936 under the leadership of Kandibeda Ramappa and Jampala Hanumaiah respectively.

89

*Ibid.*

**self-improvement** among **Kammas**<sup>90</sup>. All these efforts at reform, education and development have been reiterated from time to time in conferences of caste associations. Even after two decades of establishment the **Kamma** conferences were still focussing on these issues. The speech of **Bollini Munuswami Naidu**, one of the most prominent leaders of Justice Party and the Chief Minister of Madras Presidency for one term, at the 10th Kamma Conference in 1929 at Angaluru reflects the continuous emphasis on these aspects<sup>91</sup>. In a pointed speech, he emphasised the need for the following<sup>92</sup>:

- a) fight against social evils like nautch problem, enforced widowhood, opposition to inter-caste marriage and commensality rituals.
- b) opposition to the undesirable influence of Brahminical priesthood between God and devotee.
- c) need for educating Kamma children and a separate fund for the same.

#### 90

They are -. *Chowdarl, Kammakula Pradeepika* and *Kamma Maharaju*. But these journals did not last long and, for want of enthusiastic support from readers became defunct soon. For details see, *Ibid.*, p.302.

<sup>91</sup> **B.Ramanujulu Reddy** and **P.Sreeramulu Reddy**, *Dewan Bahadur Bollini Munuswami Naidu Gari Jeevita Sangrahamu* (Biography in Telugu), Chittor, 1935, p.3. In the same year, he presided over the non-Brahmin Conference at Nellore.

#### 92

For details see, *Andhra Patrika* (Telugu Daily), 19.6.1929 in *Andhra Patrika (Weekly)*, *Diamond Jubilee Number*, 1983, pp.62-66.

**The** emphasis on these issues was to continue still further. Irrespective of ups and downs for Justice Party and its consequent **decline, the** non-Brahmin associations never relaxed **in their efforts** to spread the ideas of reform among their own **caste members**. Politics was one of the priorities for them. Nevertheless it was not the sole aim on the agenda of **these** associations.

Vaisya associations were equally enthusiastic in their activities during the period under study. These associations were more strong than all other caste associations of the period. The nature of vaisya associations display three distinct characteristics :

- a) they developed a well knit organisational structure throughout Andhra province of Madras Presidency. Separate associations for women and youth were established in addition to the general Vaisya associations. They had thus a flexible and wider scope to discuss in detail all the problems confronting the society as well as the community.
  
- b) all the associations devoted their attention to social evils, need for internal reform, importance of education etc. The women's associations attached greater significance to women's education and the social evils like child marriage, bride price, nautch problem, dowry and the question of widow

marriage<sup>93</sup>. They did not involve themselves in the controversy surrounding the debates on Brahminical world view. On the other hand, general Vysya conferences and youth associations concerned themselves with this problem. Unlike in the case of **Kammas**, the attack of Vaisyas on Brahminical dominance was oscillating between milder and mildly severe forms of protest and never took violent expressions in disputing the Brahminical superiority.

- c) the Vysya conferences were equally vehement in detesting the traditional sections within Vysya community and this was more specific in case of marital issues<sup>94</sup>.
- d) politically they were not totally sided with Justice Party which increasingly became a political front for influential Kammas, Velamas, Balijas and Reddis. Rather, the Vaisya

**93**

This aspect is already discussed in detail in Chapter.III.

**94**

For details see, Vaisya Kulabhimani (pseudo), *Kakinada Teerubadi Komatta Candaragolamu*, Kakinada, 1926. The entire book is devoted to a discussion on issues concerning marriage. It is a bitter attack on traditionalists among Vaisyas of Kakinada. A doctor from the town, Dr.Ramamurthy, had been abroad and married an English woman. He was forced to do so because of his wife's blind devotion to custom who does not even allow him to touch her unless he does so in traditional wet robes. There was a hue and cry over the act of **Ramamurthy**. Vaisya public opinion was vertically split between pro-changers and traditionalists. The present book takes the side of pro-changers and lambasts the orthodox elements among Vaisyas. The work represents the cleavage between these two sections and also the vehemence with which the pro-changers pounce upon the blind notions of orthodox Vaisyas.

associations were sympathetic and loyal to Congress under the leadership of Gandhi<sup>95</sup>

The Vaisya conferences began in 1904 and continued their active existence throughout our period of study in the pre-independent era. The following table has more details

<i>Place of Conference</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>President</i>
Guntur	1906	S.Narayanaswami Sresti
Bandar	1907	P.M.Chakrapani Sresti
Kakinada	1908	V.Krishnaswami Sresti
Vizianagaram	1909	V.Tiruvengadattan Sresti
Madras	1911	M.Chengaiiah Sresti
Kumbhakonam	1912	Nalam Padmanabham
Visakhapatnam	1921	P.V.Gupta
Guntur	1924	G.V.Copala Gupta
Salem	1927	T.Bhagavantam Gupta
Peddapuram	1929	K.B.Krishna Sresti
Mahanandi	1934	Mote Narayana Rao Zamindar
Nellore	1941	K.Subbaiah Sresti
Bellary	1946	Upputuri Punnaiah
Anakapalli	1947	Harshagiri Sresti

The places where these conferences were held are scattered throughout the Presidency. The Youth Associations, however, began

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To cite an example, the Vaisya Conference in 1930 at Bezawada had on its agenda issues like : Constructive programme of Gandhi; need for Vaisyas to take active part in Satyagraha, need for propagation of Khaddar movement in particular among women. Most of the resolutions revolved round these aspects. Incidentally Bezawada was the nerve centre of activity for Kammas who, in the initial stages of Justice Party, were thoroughly anti-Congress. For more details see, *Vaisya* (Telugu Monthly), June 1930, pp.14-17.

96

See S.Sundaram (ed.), *Andhra Pradesh Rashtra Arya Vaisya Mahasabhalu*, Vijayawada, January 29-30, 1977. But a contemporary journal gives the year 1907 to the first conference. See *Vasavi*, October, 1926, p.14.

their activities with the first conference in 1926 at Madras<sup>97</sup>. Between 1926 and 1940, altogether eight conferences of Vaisya youth were held at Madras (1926-Darisi Chenchaiiah), Salem (1927-Mote Narayana Rao Zamindar), Vayalpadu (1928-Kolluri Suryanarayana Gupta), Peddapuram (1929-P.Anjaiiah Gupta), Bezawada (1933-Grandhi Krishna Surya), Mahanandi (1934-M.Venkata Papanna Gupta), Bandar (1939-Uppala Gourisankar Gupta) and Madras (1940-Kolla Viswanatham Gupta) . Most of these youth conferences coincided with the conduct of general Vaisya conferences. Various resolutions passed during these sessions reflected the same concerns. The following throw light on the concerns reflected in these resolutions.

- a) members of Vaisya community should devote their energies to the self-improvement of their caste.
- b) every member of Vaisya community should educate their children and it is only education that makes individuals self-confident and self-dependent. Instead of spending money on unnecessary rituals, the members are advised to divert their material

97

*Vide Proceedings of Arya Vaisya Yuvajana Sabha* (Telugu), 8th Conference, Madras, 1940.

98

*Ibid.* Apart from these, there were many regional Vaisya Conferences that have been in operation during this period. For details see *Vasavi* (Telugu monthly), October 1926, January 1930 and April 1933; *Vaisya* (Telugu Monthly), June 1929, pp.22-26. In addition, Vaisyas established a separate literary forum for themselves under the name of *Arya Vaisya Kavi Pandita Parishat* around 1935. Vaisya intellectuals like Nalam Krishna Rao were behind its establishment. Among others, it was a measure to prove to the world that Vaisya community too had literary figures and the criticism of Brahmins in this regard was a mere sham. For more details see the *Proceedings of Arya Vaisya Kavi Panditha Parishat* (Telugu), Madras, 1940.

resources towards development of education among Vaisyas<sup>99</sup>.

- c) the present education is promoting only Western social values and ideas of slavery. It should be substituted by technical education. The Vaisya youth should get acquainted themselves with knowledge of commerce.
- d) Bride price and dowry are great social evils and they should be banned among Vaisyas.
- e) Vaisyas should encourage post-puberty marriages and widow marriages.
- f) child marriages are a sin and Vaisyas are advised to abstain from the same.
- g) census operations should focus on caste-wise census figures in the Presidency.
- h) Vaisyas should discourage the practice of untouchability.
- i) Vaisya youth should take up public employment as and when they get the opportunity. Brahmins and Sudras are to be blamed because they occupy most of the posts in government service

99

One of the resolutions passed during the 19th Annual Conference of Arya Vaisya Mahasabha, April 12-14, 1940, Madras. The 13th Conference already resolved that Vaisya children and, in particular girls, should be under instruction for a minimum period of eight years. To promote education among Vaisyas, they even founded *Arya Vaisya Vidya Sabha* with its first conference held at Guntur in January, 1930. For details see, *Vasavi* (Telugu Monthly), January 1930, pp.409-411. These educational conferences encouraged travel abroad for academic purposes. Ibid.

19th Annual Conference, op.cit., pp.39-44.

For details see the *Proceedings of Pradhama Arya Vaisya Yuvajana Sabha*, Madras, 1930, p.34. The Conference was presided by the reputed Vaisya intellectual, Darisi Chenchaiiah. The present idea found expression during his speech at the Conference. The interesting aspect is that he too employed the term "Sudras" to denote non-Brahmin castes, for the removal of which Kammas were waging a relentless battle during the same time.

- j) Establishment of **Vaisya Seva Sanghams** (Service organisations) and public libraries in every town and village.
- k) suppression of activities of ego-centric Brahmins.<sup>102</sup>
- l) Establishment of night schools to train low caste people.
- m) Vaisyas should try to know the meaning of various Vedic chants and take equal part in the performance of rituals in temples on par with **Brahmins**.
- n) engaging Vaisya Purohits, instead of Brahmin Purohits, to conduct all household rituals.
- o) the research scholars among Vaisyas should undertake the task of
  - i) compiling books which would enhance the prestige of Vaisya community and
  - ii) publishing books on prominent Vaisyas.
- p) The minimum marriable age for girls should be 12 and 18 for boys. The marriages should not be consummated before the girls and boys attain the age of 14 and 20 respectively<sup>104</sup>

These resolutions are self-explanatory and serve us to assess their nature in the contemporary period. Their traditional ways of behaviour and political loyalties do not have radical elements like in the case of **Kammas**. Their dvija status, the relatively

<sup>102</sup>

*Ibid.* The third conference of Arya Vaisya Yuvajana Sabha was more specific that Vaisyas should revive the ideas of **Atmuri Lakshminarasimham** (another Vaisya intellectual who established Vedic schools and performed Yagna) in society and get rid of ideas of slavery implanted by Brahmins.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*

comfortable position in societal hierarchy in comparison with so called **Sudras** and the sweeping influence of Gandhi were, perhaps, major reasons for these behavioural attitudes in contrast with **Kammas**. Barring these issues, the urge for educational improvement, women's upliftment, internal reform and opposition to blind social beliefs were still kept alive in the caste associations. In fact, awareness generated from these social indulgences provided a space for political action of various social segments. While economically dominant castes were more politicised, the others were relatively mild in their actions for reasons depending on social and economic conditions.

The Reddis, one of the dominant castes which reaped immense benefit in the post-amicut construction period, were also in the forefront effecting reform among their own members of the caste. Like other caste associations, Reddy Mahajana Sabhas were very active throughout Andhra province of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Their concerns too reflected the contemporary needs of the society and various resolutions were passed in the Conferences calling upon people to pay them greater attention. As early as **1917**, the Reddy Mahajana Sabha, during its annual session at Nellore dilated on the need for education and, in particular scientific education . It was opined that "we should educate every person in our caste. The present educational system is fit for only servile positions in the administrative set up. We

<sup>105</sup>Vide *Andhra Patrika*, 4.7.1917 in *Andhra Patrika : Diamond Jubilee*, op.cit., pp.46-50.

should deviate from this tendency when we start educating our children and train them in professional skills so that they would lead an independent life" . Urge for knowledge and education **was** very intense that almost every caste association was primarily concerned with this aspect. Like Vaisyas and **Kammas**, the Reddy Mahajana Sabha too established an educational fund for the students of their caste and it was supposed to extend its helping hand to all the deserving and poor boys from the caste

Various Reddy associations were seen functioning in Chittoor , Nellore , Anantapur , Guntur , Godavari and Visakhapatnam . The Reddy Youth Mahasabhas also were active during this period<sup>114</sup>. The resolutions adopted at these conferences invariably related to internal reform, need for education,

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Andhra Patrika*, 19.6.1929, op.cit., p.66.

<sup>108</sup> *Grthalakshmi*(Telugu Monthly), May 1929, p.383.

109

*Andhra Patrika*, 4.7.1917, op.cit.

<sup>110</sup> *ReddiRant* (Telugu Monthly), March 1931, p.24.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1931, p.65.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1930, pp.25-39; February 1930, p.7.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1931, pp.6-10.

<sup>114</sup>

*Ibid.*, February 1930, pp.25-26; May 1930, p.41.

opposition to child marriage, and emphasis on widow marriage . On the important question of Brahmin and non-Brahmin controversy, some of the contemporary intellectuals were mild in their reactions and advocated unity among them. Since the tone was mild in comparison with that of Kammas, the issue was even openly discussed on general political platforms. The ideas of **Cuttamanchi Ramalinga Reddy**, highly reputed Reddy intellectual, a well-known literary critic in Telugu and the first Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University, reflect the stand. Speaking from the Presidential Chair of 15th Annual Conference of Andhra Mahasabha, the political forum demanding separate statehood for Andhra, he condemned the differences between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Describing Brahmins as "cooperationists", he felt sad that they were ultimately biased towards their own caste people despite they had an internal liking for their non-Brahmin brethren . As a result, the non-Brahmins were provoked into conflict in the light of their newly generated awareness<sup>118</sup>. He called upon the members to shed down the pro-Brahmin attitude failing which the nation . . .<sup>119</sup> would regress

<sup>115</sup> *Grithalakshmi*, May 1929, op.cit.

<sup>116</sup> *15th Andhra Maha Sabha, Bezawada, 1929 : Presidential Speech* (Telugu), pp.24-26.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

The Viswabrahmin Associations were active in Krishna and Guntur districts alone as revealed by their caste journal, *Prabodhini*. Spanning over a period of two decades, the *Viswabrahmana Mahasabha* conducted eleven annual conferences<sup>120</sup>. The mantle of spreading reform ideas among Viswabrahmins fell on the shoulders of a few educated intellectuals like Kondiparthi Veerabhadracharyulu, Boloju Veerabhadra Charyulu, Kakinada Gannayacharyulu and Sanagapati Kotaiah. These people presided over various conferences and some of them like K.Veerabhadracharyulu published satires on existing social evils in order to propagate the need for internal reform<sup>121</sup>. The main preoccupation of various conferences was education of members and, in particular, women's education. This concern was followed by others like child marriages, bride price, dowry, widow marriage and post-puberty marriages. Most of these conferences were silent in their attitude towards Brahmans and, instead stated that the

Vide *Prabodhini* (Telugu Monthly), September 1929, p.78. In fact, the period witnessed proliferation of caste journals on a large scale. Every caste association was particular about establishing a journal of its own. According to one contemporary estimate there were 18 caste journals published by different caste groups. They are : *Brahmana Patrika* (Brahmins), *Swadharna Prakasin* (*Neogi Brahmins*), *Kshatriya Patrika* (Kshatriyas), *Vaikhanasa* (Vaikhanasa Sect), *Reddi Rani* (Reddis), *Chowdari* (Kammas), *Telaga Sanghabhivardhani* (Telagas), *Panchanan* (Viswabrahmins), *Vaishnava Patrika* (Vaishnavas), *Devanga Seva* (Devangas), *Padmasali* (Padmasalis), *Padma Nayaka* (Velamas), *Yadava* (Gollas), *Agrikula Kshatriya* (Agnikula Kshatriyas), *Adi Saiva* (Adi Saivas), *Adi Kshatriya* (Adi Kshatriyas), *Deenabandhu* (Adimandhras or Panchamas). For details see, *Vasavi*, September 1931, pp.245-46. Apart from the journals listed above, there were a few other caste journals which ceased their publication very soon after their establishment.

association was founded "with an eye on self-development and without any malice towards any group in the society" . Following are some of the views expressed and resolutions passed during the annual conferences :

- i) education o Viswabrahmin boys and girls should be the top priority of all members of caste. Almost all the conferences extended their support to G.K.Gokhale's bill on compulsory education in the Imperial Legislative Council. All the prominent members of the association emphasised on the need

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for English education for Viswabrahmin Children . Almost all the members of the association agreed upon the urgent historical need for women's education, without which, they warned, the Hindu family would collapse<sup>124</sup>

- ii) every conference condemned the evils of child marriage, bride

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Quoted from the President's speech, during the third Viswabrahmin Conference. For details see *Prabodhini*, January 1911, pp.9-11. The same sentiments were reiterated time and again. In his speech before *Viswabrahmana Bala Samajam* at Kollur, Kondiparti Veerabhadracharyulu expressed a wish that "all Hindus should strive for the development of their respective castes and do not hate each other on any account". Vide *Ibid.*, June 1913, pp.28-29.

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*Ibid.*, January 1912, pp.5-8. However, the Viswabrahmin Public opinion criticised the educated members of the caste who form a "separate class claiming high self-respect" and yet do nothing for the betterment of others in the caste. "They show the pretext that their involvement in the public affairs would result in their loss of employment. But it is not true. Even judges of courts and revenue employees take active part in social reform issues". For more details vide *Ibid.*, November 1912, pp.28-29.

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*Ibid.*, January 1913, pp.11-14. It is suggested not to perform marriage of boys before they are educated and twenty years of age. After completion of education and the age of 20, no boy would prefer a girl under the age of 10. Such an arrangement would increase the rate of women's education and reduce the incidence of child marriages. See for more details, *Ibid.*

- price and dowry
- iii) there was an unanimous agreement over the performance of widow **marriages**.
- iv) some of the conferences expressed their loyalty to the British Crown. But for this, there was no indulgence in political matters during the proceedings of these conferences.

The friction between Brahmins and Viswabrahmins rarely found expression in the caste conferences atleast during the first few decades of 20th century. Like other caste conferences, Viswabrahmins were concerned about other social issues affecting the entire society. In political terms, they did not much bother to discuss and pass resolutions either in support of Justice Party or in support of Congress. Moreover, one of the Presidents who presided over the third conference at Ponnur (Guntur District) in 1909 declared that "Viswabrahmins are not involved in current political agitations" and the stand was to continue later during the time of Justice Party

The Devanga Community (weavers) was organised into an association in 1925 and their first conference was conducted at Peddapuram during the same year. Dr.Sajja Suryanarayana Rao was instrumental in inspiring the Devangas in founding the caste

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*Ibid.*, January 1911, pp.6-7. Also see *Prabodhini*, January 1930, pp. 186-187.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, January 1911, p.23.

association<sup>127</sup>. The Conference was attended by delegates from Godavari and Ganjam districts<sup>128</sup>. Members who attended the conference were much concerned about only two aspects viz., education of Devangas and the immediate need for internal unity<sup>129</sup>. During the same year All India Devanga Conference was convened at Madras under the leadership of P.T.Kumaraswamy Chetti . His welcome address to the members of the conference clearly spelt out the thinking of the association.

- a) the need for English education was emphasised as it became "quite essential in view of the fact that the Government is British and that it is the language that is spoken throughout India" . Members were requested to open night schools for those who could not avail the opportunity of formal education. The parents of Devanga children were requested to impart compulsory elementary education to their sons and daughters. But he was given to the belief that women need only that education which could "make them good housewives"<sup>132</sup>
- b) there was a specific emphasis on the need for establishing weaving units on modern scientific lines.
- c) the need for internal reform was stressed. Inter-dining and

Vide *Andhra Devanga Mahajana Sabha, First Annual Session, Peddapuram, 1925* (Telugu), p.12. Dr.Suryanarayana Rao published the first ever caste journal of Devangas, *Sri Devanga Seva* in 1924.

<sup>128</sup>

Ibid. , pp.15-16.

<sup>129</sup>

Ibid., pp.6-19.

<sup>130</sup>

Vide *All India Devanga Conference, Madras, Madras, 1925*.

<sup>131</sup>

*Ibid.*, p.4.

Ibid., pp.8-9.

- inter** marriages were suggested as two important measures to achieve internal unity.
- d) child marriages were severely condemned and lavish expenditure during marriages was detested.
  - e) the speakers referred to the activities of Non-Brahmin Movement and said that they, under its influence, are "striving our level best to relieve ourselves of that lethargy and indifference which kept us at the background of the political world .
  - f) Devangas should be allowed to perform rituals near the main deity in temples.

All these aspirations again reflect the same social concern of contemporary society. Over a period of time these issues were slowly diluted because of the "indifferent attitude of educated members among the community who are much bothered about fame and leadership" and use caste platforms to achieve the purpose<sup>134</sup>. A Devanga caste journal called upon the educated members to shoulder the responsibility of reform in letter and spirit<sup>135</sup>

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*Ibid.*, p.19. The speaker invariably refers to some of the Tamil districts here and is silent on Andhra. One of the founders of the Non-Brahman Movement, P.Theagraya Chetty, was closely associated with Devanga leaders at the Presidency Capital and hence his influence over them at Madras.

<sup>134</sup> *Vide Sri Devanga Prabha* (Telugu Monthly), May 1943, p.97.

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*Vide Devanga Seva* (Telugu Monthly), March 1924, pp. 1-4.

The Andhra Kshatriya Mahasabha was active in the Godavari delta region of Andhra where they are found in large numbers. The Sabha was established with the chief objective of effecting "social, moral, **intellectual**, economic, industrial, agricultural and physical improvement among the members" . To achieve this objective, the Mahasabha emphasised on five important tools:<sup>137</sup>

- a) extension of educational scholarships.
- b) establishment of schools and hostels
- c) founding agricultural co-operative societies.
- d) arranging periodical lectures to drive away the evil tendencies from among the members and
- e) establishment of a monthly journal.

The caste associations of Agnikula Kshatriyas were seen functioning in Krishna and Godavari regions of Andhra. These associations were established at Korangi (1901), Bandar (1915), and Vijayawada (1927) with the chief objective of education and social improvement of members belonging to Agnikula Kshatriyas<sup>138</sup>

The association founded a night school at Vijayawada to educate young boys<sup>139</sup>. It had a separate educational fund and, between 1918

For more details see, *Andhra Kshatriya Mahasabha -.Regulations, December, 1926*(Telugu), Rajamahendravaramu, 1927, p.1.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>138</sup> N.A., *Agnikula Kshatriya Mahasanghamu : Dasama Varshika Charitra* (Telugu), *Bandaru*, 1928, p.7.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

and 1928, it helped 404 students with scholarships . It had two caste journals viz., "Agnikula Prakasika" and "Agnikula Prabodhini" with the aim of propagating ideas of social improvement.

A few other non-Brahmin caste associations were established during this period in Krishna and Godavari regions whose main botheration was moral and social improvement. Some of the lower non-Brahmin castes like barbers were more concerned about nomenclatural controversies and exhibited greater amount of interest in Brahmanising their intra-caste rituals<sup>142</sup>. The Padmasali (or "Sale") caste association too was much concerned about the same<sup>143</sup>. The caste members, however, were more specific like other upper caste non-Brahmins (Kammas and Vaisyas) about "swasanga paurohityamu" while at the same time devoted their attention to other issues like child marriages. The resolutions adopted at the

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

<sup>142</sup>

For details see, Revati Prasada Sarma *Nayee Brahmana Prakasana, Tanuku*, 1931, p.1. People belonging to barber caste in Andhra call themselves as Nayee Brahmins. The author of the present book was the President of All India Nayee Brahmana Mahasabha at the time of the publication of the present book. It tries to prove that barbers are Brahmins. Alluding to scriptural evidence, the author says that the son born to a Brahmin father and Vaisya mother is called a potter, and if the latter does not take potter's profession, he is called a barber. The author opines that the sperm-centric theory proves that a barber is a Brahmin. Like the present he quotes many examples from traditional literature to substantiate his claim.

<sup>143</sup> The Padmasali Caste association at Tenali (established in 1923) resolved that the word "sale" should be replaced by "Padmasali" in all the records. For details see, Tenali *Padmasaleeya Bahuttama Sanghamu Vari Panchaayitee Teermanamulu* (Telugu), Tenali, 1925, p.14.

conferences of All India Padmasali Mahajana Sabha attest this.

Some of them are as follows:<sup>144</sup>

- a) The word "sale" or "padmasali" should be substituted by words viz., "Padma Brahmin" or "Padma Sadhuvu" or "Paadmeeyulu".
- b) All the rituals within the caste should be performed by own caste purohits.
- c) The caste association should make endeavours to establish Vedic schools in convenient places and impart Vedic learning to young boys.
- d) child marriages should not be entertained and they are to be condemned by one and all.
- e) Padmasali members should be nominated to all legislative bodies.

Among lower non-Brahmin castes, there were a few caste associations which were organised in a systematic manner and conducted themselves without interruptions. They too, however, were more introverts in emphasising much on intra-caste reform and self-improvement measures. The Setti Balija caste association serves as the best example. Being influenced by Aryahihida Mahasabha at Bellary, some of the delegates who attended its conferences began informally organising the meets of Setti Balijas during 1911 and 1912 in Godavari delta region at places like

The 6th Annual Conference passed the present resolutions. For more details see, the proceedings of *Akhila Bharata Padmasali Mahasabha : 6th Conference, South Hyderabad, 1929, September 13-15, Hyderabad, 1930.*

Mumuduru, Narsapuram and Bhimavaram<sup>145</sup>. The culmination of these efforts was the establishment of Setti Balija Caste Association by 1920 at Bodasakurru . Dommeti Venkata Reddy was instrumental in organising the association and he patronised it for the first few years<sup>147</sup>. The association established its own library at Nattla Rameswaram and published a few books on different aspects of Setti Balija Caste<sup>148</sup>. The association convened its regular annual conferences and this is, perhaps, most successful organisation among lower non-Brahmin castes. The following table has the details.<sup>149</sup>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>President of the Meet</i>
1920	Bodasakurru	Dommeti Venkata Reddy
1922	Bodasakurru	Pastula Sagaram
1923	Bodasakurru	Guduri Sreeramulu
1924	Peddipalem	Jakkamsetti Bhimaiah
1925	Bodasakurru	Guttula Narayanaswamy
1926	Bodasakurru	Veeravalli Ramanna
<b>1927</b>	Bheemadolu	Chintakula Suraiah
<b>1928</b>	Jagannadhapuram	Dommeti Veeram Setti

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The Aryahihida Mahasabha was a caste association of people who were counterparts of Setti Balijas of Andhra. For details see T.Venkataramayya and P.Venkanna, *Setti Balija Kulabhyudaya Charitra* (Telugu), Attili, 1943, p.53.

**146** *Ibid.*, pp.56-57.

**147** *Ibid.*, pp.58-62.

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*Ibid.* These books are i) *Setti Balija Sanghaseva* ii) *Setti Balija Nayakaratmakaram* and iii) *Settibalija Satakam*. Perhaps, the library is the first to have published exclusive books on caste. The association published a caste journal, *Setti Balija* and **Pala** Venkanna was behind the present venture.

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*Ibid.*, pp.53-61.

1929	Ramachandrapuram	Gubbala Venkata Reddy
1930	Malikapuram	Pilli Subba Raju
1931	Penugonda	Rayana Satyanarayana

All the annual conferences of Setti Balija Association are seen confined to Godavari region alone. They were more organised and discussed issues relating to the development of Setti Balijas. Like other non-Brahmin castes, Setti Balijas too were concerned about notions of ritual status in society and there are references to Brahmanisation of intra caste traditions . When compared to most other non-Brahmin castes, Setti Balijas were highly resilient and more reformist as far as their notions on inter-caste relations. The fifteenth annual conference of Setti Balijas in 1935 at Amalapuram was inaugurated by a dalit leader from Madras, C. Basudev . The association mainly related itself to a discussion on aspects like education and eradication of social evils<sup>152</sup>

The Telagas, an important non-brahman caste group, were agitated over the same issues confronting others in the contemporary society. To inject spirit of dynamism, they even tried to formulate certain rules to caste members. These "Twelve

There are references to Setti Balija Caste Purohits. See *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, p.61

<sup>152</sup>

The educational fund, for example, was a highly successful venture among Setti Balijas. The fund was established by Dommeti Venkata Reddy with an initial amount of Rs.10,000. It received generous support from other members of the caste. By 1940-41, the amount accumulated was Rs.50,000. See *Ibid.*, pp.56-58.

commandments are:<sup>153</sup>

- i) I shall serve my country and society.
- ii) I shall consider it as my sacred duty to serve my **society.**
- iii) I shall induce other members of my caste towards social service.
- iv) I shall try to bring out unity among members of my caste.
- v) I shall even sacrifice my life in helping the cause of members belonging to Telaga community.
- vi) I shall warn every youngster of my caste to educate himself/herself.
- vi) I shall treat all members of my caste **equally.**
- vii) I shall try my best to uproot internal divisions and evil practices among Telagas.
- vii) I shall not allow the dissensions among the members to influence activities aimed at welfare of Telaga **community.**
- x) I shall be at the disposal of my caste association and I am prepared to serve all the members of the caste.
- xi)** I shall not violate the stipulations of the leaders of my caste association.
- xii) I shall not heed any advice against the interests of my caste association and participate in any activity that goes against it.

For details see, Bharam Venkata Nrusimharama, *Telaga Sanghamu*, Bezawada, 1932.

These rules reflect a few concerns of contemporary caste associations who were confronted with problems of internal unity. Like in the case of all other caste associations, the Telagas also were much bothered about education, internal reform and blind beliefs, social evils like child marriages and dowry<sup>154</sup>. In addition, there were persistent demands for cordial relations between urbanites and rural folk of Telaga community and these requests were reflective of a) the growing need for internal unity and b) an urge towards establishing connecting links between the metropolitan and moffusil. The Telaga society too had its own caste journals which for the lack of support from subscribers ceased their publication soon after their inception.

#### IV

The activities of various non-Brahmin associations reflect more social and spiritual concerns than political concerns. Except a few castes which played key role in Justice Party and captured political power, the other non-Brahmin castes were not involved in the politics of "Justice" and diverted their attention to aspects of social improvement and upward mobility. Even among **Kammas**, the very founder of Non-Brahman movement, Suryadevara **Raghavaiah** Chowdari advocated religious (social) reform and did

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<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 3-15.

155 *Ibid.*, p-16

156 They are *Kapu Patrika* (1924) and *Telaga Patrika* (1925). *Ibid.*, p.6.

not subscribe to the views of other prominent Kamma leaders who argued in favour of Justice Party. A study of the resolutions passed during the conferences of various caste associations becomes self-explanatory in indicating the bias towards reformist drives undertaken by them. Efforts to consider such an awareness in political terms are bound to mislead historical analysis.

The resolutions and aspirations of various caste associations mainly pertain to a) attempts at claiming a superior ritual position b) education on modern lines c) opposition to blind beliefs and social evils like child marriages, bride price and dowry d) support to reform issues like widow marriage and e) attempts at consolidation of intra-caste relationships among members. Various caste associations could register measurable success as reflected by the growth of education, the near total disappearance of social evils like bride price and child marriages, declining opposition and increasing support to widow marriages. All these were responsible for the rapid spread of awareness in society.

For more details see Suryadevara Raghavaiah Chowdari, *Brahmanetarodyama*, op.cit., pp.293-97. He categorically states in his book that "some people are of the opinion that the non-Brahmin movement should assume radical character to achieve complete success. But such a course of action is unwarranted as Indians enjoy freedom of thought under the British administration. Unless aware of evil effects of the activities of religious priests, we cannot stem down various social maladies,....97 members out of every 100 among non-Brahmins are uneducated and fail to understand the nature of non-Brahmin movement. The rest of non-Brahmins are going crazy about political power and do not entertain any interest in religious issues....These members are trying to extinguish the fire of the present non-Brahmin movement" (which is agitating for religious reform). Ibid.

The caste associations are, however, constrained by a few factors which had some undesirable effects. Structurally these associations always remained isolated units even within the parameters of non-Brahmin community. Intra-caste concentration became the norm of the day when different caste associations were more involved in their own affairs. "It was believed that intra-caste social improvement effected through caste associations would ultimately result in the over all development of our nation. But, it was soon realised that various caste associations are exclusively serving their own interests and in the process failed to look beyond the narrow aspirations of the respective caste associations".<sup>158</sup> Though this did not clip the wings of intra-caste activities, it could not curtail the polarisation of caste interests. "Casteism" as a reform issue was not on the agenda of the associations and, perhaps, this was a non-issue for non-Brahmins who always tried to relate themselves with a ritually higher caste Viz., Brahmins.

The reform activity of these associations in ritual sphere yielded only partial dividends for a few reasons. Access to scriptural knowledge became a less important issue as there was no rigid opposition from Brahmins over a period of time.<sup>159</sup> The free

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*Andhra Patrika*, 4-7-1917 *Andhra Patrika: Diamond Jubilee*, op.cit.

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Access to scriptural knowledge gradually turned out to be an issue of less importance. On one hand, non-Brahmin intellectuals like **Atmuri** Lakshmarasimham initiated various steps including the foundation of Sanskrit and Vedic schools to impart scriptural knowledge to young people. On the other, liberal minded Brahmin leaders and reformists shouldered the responsibility of translating traditional religious works into Telugu. The intention was to make available these books for those aspirants

availability of books in print (with meanings and summary) solved the problem. Whereas, the demand for an equal status on par with Brahmins has not been successful. The non-Brahmins were constrained on many accounts. On one hand, they could not think of alternatives. Though people like Ramaswami Chowdary could deconstruct certain religious texts, they failed in providing an alternative thought process vis-a-vis the Hindu Brahminical religion. Fighting against Brahmins, they were psychologically subordinated to Hindu mode of thinking which again was a construction of Brahmins. This riddle in their fight against Brahminical dominance was unresolved throughout the active reform period of caste associations. But for these limited constraints, the reform endeavours of these non-Brahmin caste associations have been successful in the contemporary period. These aspects reiterate our statement that non-Brahmin awareness and its consequent consolidation were more reformist in nature. Only a few upper castes, economically sound and educated members of non-Brahmin castes, took to active politics in the form of Justice Party. Over a period of time the Justice Party lost touch with

who wish to read them. None other than Veeresalingam undertook this task much before the non-Brahmin leaders did so. He began translating Rigveda into Telugu and his act was much publicised in contemporary journals exhorting the readers to use the opportunity and equip themselves with religious knowledge. For details see, *Hindujanamasakarini* (Telugu Monthly), August, 1887, p.20. Veeresalingam himself advertised it in the journals under his own name. The advertisement read: "Rigveda is fundamental to Hindu religion. It helps us in knowing the history of our ancestors. On the request of some of my friends, I have begun to translate it into simple Telugu....The subscribers are advised to send their applications with the necessary amount of money to the office of *Vivekavardhani*, Rajamahendravaramu". See *Ibid.*, January, 1888. p. 154.

people and there were times when its leaders were forced to hire labourers for electoral campaign

This was particularly so by 1930. For details see, Saraswathi Gora, *Gorato Naa Jeevitham* (Autobiography in Telugu), Vijayawada, 1992, pp.113-114.

## CHAPTER - 6

### RADICAL DEPARTURES AND POSITIVE DENOUNCEMENTS : GORA AND THE GROWTH OF ATHEIST MOVEMENT

The rise and growth of atheism and atheist movement in Andhra rather symbolised the revolutionary character of social reform tendencies in post-Veerasingam period. The name of Goparaju Ramachandra Rao, famously called GORA, is inextricably interwoven with atheist movement. Veerasingam and his followers crusaded against social evils perpetuated by religious impositions and, were instrumental in reforming the existing religion of Hindus and the blind practices of the same. Gora, on the other hand, represented, for the first time, the centrifugal tendency in reform and rejected religion. His was a fight for the growth of a post-religious society where human free will substituted the place of imaginary god. His was the first intellectual break in modern Andhra representing areligious programmes of social reform. The early reform trends were given a radical shift and dimension in the hands of Gora.

Though Gora contends that "I recall no special event that turned me an atheist", the influence of intellectual atmosphere

Gora, *We Become Atheists* (Autobiography), Vijayawada, Reprint, 1990 (First edn. 1975), p.1. Gora was born in 1902 into an orthodox Brahmin family as the third son of Goparaju Venkata Subba Rao. He completed his early education at Chatrapuram (in present day Orissa) and Kakinada. He joined as a Lecturer in Botany at Madurai in 1925. His study of science did not allow him to be a mute subject of blind domestic traditions. His mind was increasingly drawn towards rationalism. His first attempt at

created by social reform movements and the consequent rise of rationalism and humanism cannot be altogether ruled out. The growth of radical rationalist tendencies in Gora was organically linked with the general spread of reform consciousness in contemporary society. Any estimate of Gora without reference to earlier efforts in the direction is incomplete and partial. As already stated, 19th century in India represented an era of social reform. Starting with Bengal, the reform efforts spread to Maharashtra, Punjab and South India, in particular, Andhra. These reform efforts paved the way for the growth of a new awareness in contemporary society and truly laid foundations for modern history. They were the harbingers of a new consciousness and political awakening in society. They introduced elements of rational thinking into conventional and blind religious structure of Hindu society. The spread of new awareness and social consciousness was not a resultant of new English education. The latter had only a catalytic effect. The long standing tradition of dissent and protest formed the real background to the 19th century efforts.

openly challenging religious beliefs took place at Madurai where he occupied a house that was popularly believed to be a haunted place. He later worked at Coimbatore and Colombo where he further experimented with his newly generated thoughts. He encouraged his pregnant wife to freely move about during the time of eclipse as against popular Hindu beliefs. He joined P.R.College at Kakinada in 1928 where he undertook programmes on atheism, untouchability and widow marriage. With the publication of his first article on the "Concept of God" in 1933, Gora became a centre of controversy and he never, afterwards, deviated from his proclaimed path of atheist social programmes. For more biographical details see, *Sree Gora Abhinandana Sanchika* (Telugu), Vijaywada, 1963.

Rationalism was the main Instrument in the hands of early social reformers. They subjected every long standing belief to the test of rationalism. They were given to a true belief that rational thinking was fundamental to the growth of knowledge and science. Except a belief in devotion to one god, they questioned all external aspects and blind beliefs of Hindu religion. Despite a few exceptions and shortcomings as imposed by contemporary historical conditions, these early social reformers did not leave anything unquestioned which did not seem consistent with their rational thinking. Raja Rammohan Roy of Bengal was the pioneer of social reform efforts in the modern era under the British government. He published "Gift of Monotheists" which represented the rational outlook of young Rammohan Roy. He made it clear through the book that all religious scriptures were not above human beings and infallible . Every practice or convention should be viewed from a rational angle. He later founded *Atmeeya Sabha* which became the famous Brahmo Samaj of Bengal. His ideas on education and his advocacy of scientific education stood him ahead of all his contemporary social reformers. Another early Bengali reformer who took the concept of rationalism to its logical heights was Akshaya Kumar Dutt. He founded two important Bengal journals viz., "Sulabh Samachar" and "Tatva Bodhini" to propagate his views. He proclaimed that vedic scriptures were

<sup>2</sup>V.Ramakrishna, "Sangha Samskartaalu - Hetuvadam" (Telugu) in *Hetuvadam Enduku?* (Telugu: a compilation of essays on rationalism published by Nellore District Rationalist Association), Nellore, 1981, pp.49-50.

not adoptable to **Brahmo** samajists. He was responsible for clearing some of the ambiguities in the fundamental principles of **Brahmo Samaj**. By extending his support to the Indigo Revolt of contemporary period, he represented a desirable break from other social reformers of his time by adding economic perspective to social reform movements .

The movements in Maharashtra owe their credit to the efforts of Jyotirao **Phule**<sup>4</sup>. He believed that social progress was not to be confined only to the social elite and it should benefit all ignorant and downtrodden sections of society. The later day movements like **Prarthana Samaj** and reformers like **Ranede, Malabari** and **Karvey** based their thought and efforts on the foundations of rationalism. **Prarthana Samaj** movement was more social than religious. For, it believed that the potent impediments to social progress were ignorance, illiteracy and blind religious beliefs. By the very identification of these evils that are generally associated with religious orthodoxy, **Prarthana Samaj** seemed more concerned about social progress of contemporary Hindu society. As a remedy to all these it advocated

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>4</sup> For early developments in Maharashtra see, Richard Tucker, *op.cit.*, pp.139-141. Phule was born in 1827 into Mali caste of gardeners in Maharashtra. He completed his schooling in 1847 and took to the profession of teaching. Unlike most others, he concentrated on low caste children along lines established at the missionary schools. His talks with American missionaries at Ahmadnagar in 1848 reinforced his resolve to open a school for untouchables in Poona as an open challenge to orthodoxy and discrimination. In the initial stages, he was supported by his liberal Brahmin friends like S.B.Govande and K.S.Bhavarkar. *Ibid.*

the speedy progress of education on rational lines. Along with Prarthana Samaj, the Brahma Samaj activities too spread their influence over Maharashtra society after mid 19th century. The activities of Brahmos acted as an unconscious check on the proselytising efforts of other religionists too viz. Christian missionaries. The Christian missionaries as well as indigenous converts had to concentrate more upon putting a brave front against Brahma Samajists than orthodox Hindus. The elements of rationalism in the efforts of social reformers posed dangers to all shades of organised religious faith. Most of these early reformers questioned the injustices which had been in operation under the guise of religious observances.

In South India, social reform endeavours were more confined to Andhra region of erstwhile Madras Presidency and, Andhra became the most important centre of social reform. Its proximity to Bengal and Maharashtra gave it an advantageous position in the history of travel of reform ideas. The seeds of reform were sown in Andhra even during the early decades of 19th century. Enugula Veeraswamaiah, Vennelacunty Soobrow and Samineni Muthunarasimha

For example, the early Brahmin converts to Christianity in Maharashtra had to contend more with Brahma Samajists who, by then, were slowly effecting a change in Hindu society. For, any speedy social change among Hindus would clip the wings of Christian missionary activities. For example, the best known works of Nehemiah Goreh (Nilakantha Gore), a Brahmin convert, were "disputations not against orthodox Hindus but against the Brahma Samaj and its Maharashtra allies, who had long frustrated the missionaries by adopting a curious eclecticism rather than moving the full distance to Christianity". See Ibid., p.151.

Naidoo were some of the pioneering reformists of early modern Andhra . They unanimously despised old beliefs, blind traditions and, welcomed rational ideas in the contemporary society. Implied in their early efforts was a demand for scientific outlook to effect social change. These activities heralded an era of rationalism in modern Andhra. In the period after 1850, the rational endeavours of early reform intellectuals were consolidated and given a firm social footing through the activities of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, R.Venkataratnam Naidoo, Chilakamarthi Laxminarasimham and Unnava Laxminarayana. They were the true agents of winds of social transformation and reflected the slow but significant spread of reform endeavours of Bengal and Maharashtra. To this line of reformers was added Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudari. He was ahead of his early and contemporary social reformers and propagated radical rationalist ideas in society. All these reformers were responsible for the spread of rationalism through their innumerable writings. They exhorted people to shun all the outdated social practices and traditions. They moulded and developed their arguments around the idea that any ideology which was to benefit the entire society, irrespective of any discriminatory social denominations, was good and acceptable. Kandukuri Veerasalingam and his followers did not confine themselves to mere academic and intellectual arguments. Rather, they were responsible for the beginning of practical reform work in contemporary society. Their

Details of their activities are already discussed in the preceding chapters. For example, vide Chapters.II and IV.

social reform movements gave a jolt to the orthodox structure and religious beliefs. They condemned every trivial issue which, for them, was irrational in social terms. Veeresalingam published a number books, articles and pamphlets to propagate the idea of how rationalist outlook would lead to social progress. These early reformers published various scientific books covering such aspects like nature and its laws, human physiology, health and history of animal kingdom.

The early reformers were profusely quoting from traditional literature and religious scriptures. This may, superficially, seem an inconsistency in their efforts. In the light of various limitations imposed on society during the contemporary period, their method of disputation is understandable. In the absence of education and scientific knowledge, they had to take recourse to the language of traditional elements of society in order to oppose their blind beliefs. Commoners would easily follow the ideas of reformers provided they are articulated in religious language with which they had an intimate connection. Yet, the reformers propagated rational ideas through their writings and activities with the use of religious and scriptural language. Another important aspect of early reformers and Brahmo Samajists was that they were not atheist in their beliefs. But, on the other hand, they did not subscribe to all the existing notions of religion. They believed in single god, which for them represented a superior force in nature. The nature of their god was formless. They were basically monotheists. They condemned

idol worship and plurality of gods. They criticised long standing religious beliefs, traditional observances, customary rituals, manoeuvres of Brahmin priesthood and imaginary stories as propagated by religious texts. Veeresalingam best represents all these tendencies in the contemporary period. He was influenced by reform trends of Bengal and his own personal trait of questioning everything before developing a belief in the same.

In the practical life, Veeresalingam discarded different observances connected with traditional beliefs. He joined duty at Dhawaleswaram school on new moon day against the wishes of his mother who firmly believed in Hindu practice that new moon day is a bad omen and an inauspicious occasion to initiate any work . On another occasion, he threatened a sorcerer who came to his house to treat his ailing mother. He attacked notions of good and bad omens, auspicious timings, palmistry, astrology and, published a number of books to propagate his views. Most of these books exposed the blind traditions followed in the Brahminical households. His novel, "Rajasekhara Charitra" is a direct attack on all these perversions observed in religious life of Hindus . In addition, he published a few farces wherein he left nothing untouched regarding social evils propagated under the garb of religion. He dared the influential and the powerful in contemporary society and questioned their inhuman act of

V.Ramakrishna, "Hetuvadigaa Veeresalingam" (Telugu) in *Hetuvada Vyasaalu* (Telugu), Kavali, 1977, p.29.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.30.

patronising another social evil viz., nautches. Even the so-called religious heads did not escape his criticism. His impudence for the strictures passed by these self-proclaimed religious leaders towards those who married widows was a matter of great controversy in his life time. He defied the orders of Sankaracharya who declared widow marriages as null and void. With the support of his students at Rajahmundry, Veeresalingam made Sankaracharya and his lieutenants flee the place in the face of mounting opposition. Veeresalingam used his journal, *Vivekavardhani*, as an effective instrument to propagate his reform ideas. His world view was only social reform. His target was **ignorant** people and women. He chose his pen to present his views in an easily understandable language. His vision was a society rid of all social evils including the concept of plurality of gods. But for his belief in a monotheistic god, Veeresalingam became a non-practising theist of his days. Even **Brahmo Samajists** believed in congregational prayers and rejected polytheism. These early rationalist ideas were taken to new heights by Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari in early 20th century. He denounced as well as deconstructed the existing notions of religion . All these developments in the early period provided a background to the ideas and activities of Gora. It is not a mere historical coincidence that Cora published his first atheist article (*On the concept of God*) in 1933 by which time

The activities of Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari are discussed in **Chapter.IV**.

**Tripuraneni's** influence was still fresh in the contemporary society.

## II

Cora was both a philosopher and practitioner. At theoretical level, he was a visionary and Utopian atheist. He analysed atheism as a positive way of looking at life and, he was given to a belief that the term is not negative. For him it denotes godlessness. Godlessness is not the only implication and it encompasses a larger idea in it wherein a human being asserts himself or herself over the will of imaginary god. With this free will, the individual, Gora believed, is capable of correcting all the evils in society in cooperation with his fellow human beings who are equally free in their will. Human free will is central to Gora's vision of a society, polity, culture, economy, technical developments, nature and aesthetics. His doctrine, Positive Atheism, visualises an Utopian society where there are no inequities of any kind as all the human beings are free individuals. Gora's hope was in a man "who could think for himself, act for himself, understand the world himself mixing freely with his fellow human beings and, at the same time, keeping in his mind the general good and, realising freely that everyone has got a social obligation to fulfil" . Gora conceives

Vide Sunanda Shet, "The Significance of Gora" in *Atheism and social Change (International Conference), A Souvenir*, Vijayawada, 1985, pp.A.58. Sunanda Shet of Coimbatore submitted a thesis on Gora and atheism and was awarded a doctorate from the University of Madras.

a kind of social morality, emanating from the will of free individuals, which serves as an instrument of equality and helps the formation of a society, rid of exploitation and inequality. The citizens or individuals of his society are basically atheists with no regard or respect for imagined divinity and they are self-confident individuals bubbling with free will and socially beneficial behaviour. In such a state of affairs "individual is independent and subordinate to none. Only cooperation among individuals gives the collective notion of a society.... Atheistic citizens refuse to be ruled; atheistic labourers refuse to be exploited. Each operates with fellow human beings and, cooperation yields conscious morality of status and opportunity. The sooner we accept atheism, the sooner we establish the new way of life, where all individuals live free, equal and moral. Atheists achieve Utopia" . His philosophy of atheism stands him apart from the contemporary individuals, for most of them were not philosophers and, rather they remained adherents or representatives of a particular school of thought. Cora's was, thus, a split personality which combines both an idealist and a devout activist. In fact, his personality gave scope for much confusion for his contemporaries whose criticism of Gora was more concerned about the idealist aspect of his personality. Even some of the researchers were misled by his personality and described him as a "practical idealist"<sup>12</sup> which term does not take

Gora, *The need of Atheism*, Vijayawada, 1980, p.77.

<sup>12</sup>Sunanda Shet, *Op.Cit.*, p.A57.

into consideration the two different characteristics in Cora's personality.

As a practician too, Gora stands apart as a distinct social philosopher. For, he tried, during his life time, the principles of positive atheism in contemporary society, but with a nominal success. He was successful with regard to his influence on caste, untouchability and the concept of womanhood. These are the three areas where he left a deep impress on social thinking in the post-Veerasingam era of social reform. In political terms, he remained a true Gandhian and the influence of Gandhi on Gora was of a greater dimension. Though Cora never subscribed to the theistic language used by Gandhi, he was impressed by the practical work of Gandhi and *Satyagraha* programme during the freedom struggle. Gandhi's notion of "Truth is God" and, not vice versa, represented an atheistic way of presenting social realities for Gora. Truth in social life means for him, an assertion of individual free will in sorting out issues. Even Gandhi clarified his position to Gora that their social action programmes represented unity of purpose and, the conflicting methods of theism and atheism were of less importance as long as they did not assume fanatical proportions. In one of the interviews he told Gora that "We are seekers after truth. We change whenever we find ourselves in the wrong. I changed like that many times in my life....There is no harm as long as you are not fanatical. Whether you are in the right or I am in the right, results will prove. Then I may go your way or you may

come my way; or both of us may go a third way"<sup>13</sup>. It was this transparency in social ideas of Gandhi that attracted Gora towards Gandhian ways of social struggle. He became a Congress volunteer and participated in freedom struggle with intermittent **internments** of brief and long spells. In his programmes against caste, untouchability and social impositions on women he, neither invoked god nor mouthed religious language vis-a-vis Gandhi. Yet, he remained a true Satyagrahi. In the post-Gandhian era, he turned to Sarvodaya movement of Vinoba Bhave when he found that the spirit of Gandhism was lost in the political mechanisations of Congress politics. The shift was but natural for a man who believed in eradication of social, political and economic inequalities. In the post independent era, he conducted his activities from the Atheist Centre at Vijayawada with the help of atheist journals (*Sangham* in Telugu and *The Atheist* in English) and other social organisations of the centre like Arthik **Samata** Mandal and Vasavya Mahila Mandal.

## II

The influence of early social reform movements and the rationalist campaign of people like Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari had a direct bearing on the thought process of young Gora. Juxtaposed with this, his study of natural sciences increased his inquisitive instincts. By 1925, he took his

<sup>13</sup>Gora, *An Atheist with Gandhi*, Ahmedabad, Reprint, 1986 (First Edn. 1951), p.44.

Masters degree in Botany and joined the profession of teaching. **Coincidentally**, it was a vigorous period of reform, both social and political. Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari and **Unnava** Laxminarayana were in the forefront of a struggle with the aim of spreading rational outlook in society. On the other, the **Gandhian** programme of political as well as constructive work was slowly spreading like a rapid fire. Gora was beginning to react. After a brief stint in Madurai, Coimbatore and Colombo and his first experiments in atheism<sup>14</sup>, he was back at Kakinada. He joined P.R.College as a Lecturer in Botany in the year 1928 . He discarded his sacred thread much to the annoyance of his parents and undertook a campaign for the spread of atheism and initiated drives at common commensality and night schools in the local Harijan slums. Along with them, he and his wife promoted widow marriages .

<sup>14</sup>He began his experiments at home. After marriage he encouraged his wife, Saraswati, to discard traditional practices like worship of imaginary gods, customary rituals and traditional observances like partaking in meal in silk or wet robes as was the practice in most of the contemporary Brahminical households. He emphasised more on cleanliness rather than godliness of routine domestic habits. Defying Hindu religious sanctions against freedom of movement during the time of eclipse, he encouraged his pregnant wife to do so at Colombo. When both of them visited Tirumala hills ( the abode of god Balaji or Venkateswara), they did not have the darshan of the idol. They enjoyed the green canopy of the hills than their divine importance. For more details see, Saraswathi Gora, *Gorato Naa Jeevitham* (Autobiography in Telugu), Vijayawada, 1992, pp.40-54.

*Sree Cora Abhmandana Sanchika, Op.Cit.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

Gora gave expression to his ideas in no time. When one of his students at P.R.College, Kakinada asked him to contribute an article to his manuscript magazine, viz. *Critic*, Gora wrote his first article entitled *The Concept of God*. He brought out the uselessness of God and argued that "though the concept of god was a useful falsehood, it should be discarded as every other falsehood in order to promote truthful life and real social harmony"<sup>18</sup>. The article put him in the midst of a controversy. The principal of the college was much peeved over the writings of Gora. The last straw on the camel's back which resulted in his dismissal from the college was a conference of Brahma Samajists of Kakinada. Gora was invited to lecture on the nature of God (whether He is *Saguna or Nirguna*) by the convenors of the Conference<sup>19</sup>. During the course of his discourse, Gora questioned the validity of God and proclaimed that it was mere beating around the bush to discuss the nature of God who is non-existent. The management of P. R. College, an institution run by Brahma Samajists, took severe objection to Gora's speech and he was finally dismissed from the College. He later founded Andhra Tutorial College at Kakinada and tested his first socialist

Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.93.

*Ibid.*, p.94. He argued that like every falsehood, it too corrupted mankind by importing superstition and fanaticism into the belief in god. And hence, it should be done away with. See, Gora, *We Become*, *Op. Cit.*, p.23.

19

Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.94.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

experiment there<sup>21</sup>. After an year, he joined the Hindu college at Machilipatnam and worked as a Lecturer for six years before he resigned the job in 1940<sup>22</sup>. Here too, his atheist campaign in the surrounding areas and his unwavering support to the emerging communist party and its leaders brought him into conflict with the principal of the college. Resolved, once for all, over the need to shoulder atheist campaign on a large scale, Gora resigned the job and settled, on invitation, at Mudunur in Krishna district in 1940 . In the following year he published his first book on atheism and stated in unequivocal terms that recognition of individual freedom is the major difference between theism and atheism<sup>24</sup>. He declared that rational outlook was the only method to search for truth in the earlier days when the knowledge of man was primitive and limited. As civilisation grew, the material consciousness of man showed significant strides of progress and, hence, man's knowledge now depended on the factual evidence rather than rationalism . He developed his concept of positive **atheism** and propounded his new philosophical postulate.

21

*Ibid.* The college was established by Gora and his friends. Except teachers, they did not employ any workers to look after manual work. They themselves indulged in both physical and academic labour and shared the income equally among them. Durgabal Deshmukh was a student of this college.

22

Gora, *We Become*, p.34.

23 *Ibid.* p.36.

For details see, Gora, *Naastikatvamu* (Telugu), Mudunuru, 1941, pp.204-206. The book went into six reprints, the last one being in 1989.

25 *Ibid.*

**Gora** deals with different aspects of society under positive atheism. He divides his positive atheism into six major heads as follows<sup>26</sup> :

- a) atheistic philosophy
- b) atheistic ethics
- c) atheistic politics
- d) atheistic economics
- e) atheistic technology and
- f) atheistic aesthetics

In all these spheres, Gora gives a place of pivotal importance to the freedom of individual. He says that free will of the individual is omnipotent and decides for itself everything needed for human happiness and social harmony. He subordinates every other element including natural laws to the free will of the individual. Renouncing the plurality of gods, he feels that "though manifestations of God are varied, common feature is to regard god as superior to man" and this theistic belief reflects total surrender of man to a non-existent will of a imagined divinity . For Gora, even the concept of god is a postulate of man necessitated by the conditions of society in primitive ages. It was a terrible necessity for him to appease his curiosity and

<sup>26</sup>Gora, *Positive Atheism*, Vijayawada, 2nd Reprint, 1978 (First edn. 1972)

Gora, *A Note on Atheism* (a pamphlet), Vijayawada, n.d., p.1.

a self-consolation from the fear of nature's fury<sup>28</sup>. As the knowledge of man registered progress, the need of god became only a vestige of man's earlier actions. The increasing availability of factual evidence which, for Gora is representative of atheistic outlook, there is no need to depend on God. To avoid all the impositions of man's own imagination, atheistic outlook is a sure remedy. Altogether four different stages have been recognised in the gradual transformation of man's mind from a theistic belief to atheistic reality<sup>29</sup>

- a) practising theists - they necessarily believe in god and the related customs and practices.
- b) non-practising theists - though they primarily believe in god, they entertain doubts about the efficacy of the idea of god. They gradually come to conclusion that theistic path of devotion is fraught with some inconsistencies and hence, discard many religious practices. Now, they remain only theistic sympathisers.
- c) non-practising atheists - they may not follow atheism in real life. They develop a slow aversion to organised religion and, slowly come to a conclusion that theistic way of life is

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>29</sup> Lavanam, "Our March Towards Post-Religious Society" in *Atheism and Social Change, Op.Cit.*, pp.A38-A39.

wrong. They develop a rational outlook and are drawn towards atheism. At this stage, they are atheistic sympathisers.

- d) practising atheists - they believe in atheism and propagate atheist ideology. They practise atheism in their own life. It is this stage of complete avowal of atheism that prevents people from slipping again into old faiths and ways of human life . The present stage is the culmination of atheistic  
31  
civilisation which is one of free, equal and moral people . The feeling of freedom of all individuals removes all barriers of religion, race, colour, caste and creed. It paves way for the emergence of the ideal of one humanity and, world citizenship comes nearer of realisation<sup>32</sup>. Such a society stands in direct contrast to theistic social order, replete with inequalities, injustices, greed, ignorance and cowardice. Adoption of positive atheism is a sure remedy to all these evils. Practising atheists are free individuals with complete control over their destinies and, morally superior beings with notions of equality in all spheres of life. Keeping those individuals in mind, Gora popularised the slogan of "Jai Insaan" (Hail Human Being)<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Gora, *A Note on, Op.Cit.*, p.4.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>G.Vijayam, "Social Change and Cora" in *The Atheist* (English Monthly), August 1992, pp. 101-102.

The atheistic philosophy criticises other schools of thought as deterministic in nature which necessarily goes against human free will and, surrenders man to external forces. It believes that the central concern of philosophy is to understand reality. The knowledge of reality is not confined to facts of perception and, a play of human imagination modifies these facts into ideas through synthesis, analysis and sublimation<sup>34</sup>. Though tomorrow is a reality, any knowledge or perception about the same becomes indirect knowledge of today's non-existent reality. Till then, all those perceptions are neither true nor false. They are just opinions which, may, shift themselves into truths or falsehoods when subject to verification. Truths are, hence, imaginations which stand the test of verification and falsehoods too are imaginations which do not stand the test of any verification. Truth becomes a fact upon solid verification. The weather forecast as well as hallucinations and illusions too are perceptions and, upon scientific verification, the former becomes a fact and the latter becomes a falsehood. Religious faiths, however logical, respectable and hoary, can never be either truths or facts without any verification. The greatest shortcoming of theistic postulates is that they mistake and, project faiths as truths. Hence, god is a falsehood who, upon creation without factual evidence, surrenders man's free will to Him. This is the deterministic element of all theistic faiths.

<sup>34</sup>Gora, *Positive Atheism, Op.Cit.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p.24.

They reveal that religious faiths which believe in divine determinism, sans human free will, are utter falsehoods . Atheism, on the other, asserts freedom of man and, understands surrounding realities by discriminating between faiths and facts. "What is capable of verification and necessary for the individual should be tested and known"<sup>37</sup>. The theistic determinism results in the erosion of the base for individual and social morality in society as it necessarily surrenders human beings to god. This surrender leads to the loss of human initiative and breeds passivity. As theism surrenders man to invisible falsehood of god and fate, inequalities naturally crop up in society and leave scope for exploitation . Whereas, atheism has positive content inherent in itself through its emphasis on man's mastery over his ideas, actions and surrounding world. For Gora, atheism like theism, is a way of life, but not a parallel to theism. Positive atheism does not view atheism as mere godlessness and, in contrast, it is based on reality, evidence and scientific outlook<sup>39</sup>.

The philosophical postulates of positive atheism do not subscribe to the theory of causation. For, the theory of

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>38</sup>

Gora, *A Note On, Op.Cit.*, p.3.

G.Vijayam, *Op.Cit.*, p. 106.

causation supposes that the relation between cause and effect is always certain and universal. This causal determination drastically reduces the scope for the action of human will and becomes a basis for fatalism<sup>40</sup>. For positive atheism, it is reflective of man's surrender to a set of causes and, surrender in any form to any external agency is motivated by slavish desires. "If everything had a cause, the first cause also should have a cause; if the first cause could be without a cause, anything else could be without a cause. Hence, assumption of universality and of the first cause was arbitrary than rational"<sup>41</sup>. Positive atheism believes in probability of cause-effect relations. Atheists never claim any amount of certainty for any initiative. For them, the initiative loses originality upon causation. Hence, human initiative is always fresh and original. Therefore, the chain of causes is repeatedly broken at every initiative. The obsession with the idea of human free will and initiative makes Gora reject the causation of natural laws too. For him, the scientific proposition that universe is bound by a set of natural laws where human beings are an integral part is consistent with theistic faith. It means surrender of man to external laws. For atheists, universe is a collective concept and, it exists as several phenomena as

Gora, *Positive, Op.Cit.*, p.31.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

individuals exist<sup>42</sup>. "The sum total of these individualities gives the impression of a natural law. Universe is a collection of individuals and, every individual is a free entity by himself"<sup>43</sup>. For atheists, universe, thus, a concept of human imagination.

The positive atheistic philosophy finds a few semblances of rational elements in Marxian dialectics, Gandhism and existentialism. It appreciates Marxian postulate since, it basically promotes the idea that religion is the opium of people and discards all religious faiths. But, on the other hand, Marxian materialism surrenders human beings to systems like proletariat dictatorship and economic determinism<sup>44</sup>. For Gora, this aspect in Marxism is inconsistent with his human free will. In comparison, he believes that Gandhian Satyagraha is a large scale attempt in recognising the freedom of individual. The programme of *Satyagraha* insists on what one knows to be a truth. It implies free will and, is in accordance with contents of positive atheism<sup>45</sup>. It is activation of truthfulness. It eschews violence and makes people free, open, social and non-violent. These are the qualities for moral excellence. For all these

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>  
*Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p.42.

merits in the system, Cora considers *Satyagraha* programme as truly atheistic in principle . Yet, he entertains doubts about the real nature of *Satyagraha* as Gandhi uses theistic language to present his case. "It could have been starting point for the atheistic movement", writes Gora, in modern age but for the use of religious verbal expressions of its founder. He believes that the existentialist philosophy also liberates human beings from the clutches of custom, governmental despotic authority, economic impositions and cultural inhibitions. However, Gora takes strong objection to the absence of social outlook among existentialists. He states that though Marxian materialism, Gandhism and existentialism have advanced civilisation towards atheism, they failed in bringing about all round equality in the society as they have not avowedly accepted atheism<sup>47</sup>. Within their own hemispheres of influence, they have subordinated the free will of individuals to external factors.

Gora's views on rationalism, natural laws and causation theory came under bitter attack from contemporary intellectuals. For them, Gora's ideas represent perversions of scientific thought process and aberrations in philosophical postulates. They take strong objection to his opinions on causation and natural laws. They are of the considered view that Gora, in a fit of over enthusiasm, rejects scientifically proved natural

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.44.

laws and, believes that there is no rational order and relation between different aspects of nature<sup>48</sup>. The atheists are considered utterly ignorant of the material forces in society and their influence on the conduct and emotions of human beings<sup>49</sup>. The concepts of liberty or free will and slavishness belong more to human society than nature. The blunder in Gora's concept lies in the fact that he tried to correlate theory of evolution and moral laws of human beings in the world . Moreover he does not accept the existence of different classes in society. At best Gora's postulate of atheism may serve the elementary needs in explaining a few trivial issues of nature . Other critics took objections to Gora's views on rationalism and causation. In contrast, they state that the primitive man was neither a theist nor an atheist. Rather he remained neutral in the face of natural forces. He had innumerable questions before him on the nature of elements of nature. For every question, he thought of reasons and this dialectical process led him to discover the cause for all these reasons and, it was all powerful god . In fact, his rational outlook led him to the imagination of god. His rationalism soon made him also question the reason for the existence of god. When

48

For details see, Ranganayakamma, *Naastikatvam - Oka Pariseelana* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1976. For details see, *Ibid.*, pp.4-7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ranganayakamma, *Naastikavadam, Hetuvadam, Navya Manava Vaadam* (Telugu), Hyderabad. 1980, p.33.

<sup>52</sup> Ravipudi Venkatadri, "Hetuvadam Naastikatvaaniki Jeevagarra" in *Hetuvaada Vyasalu* (Telugu), *Op.Cit.*, pp. 1-2.

and wishes . These relations bring in considerations of morality and, the two basic principles of social morality are honesty and tolerance<sup>58</sup>. Gora defines honesty as the consistency between thought and deed which necessarily excludes secrecy in human relations. Whereas secrecy means escapism from social obligations. He feels that there are three methods to keep a man moral and social. They are self-discipline, religious faith and political power. Of these three, self-discipline, like in the case of Gandhian Satyagraha, is the only viable method of keeping oneself moral in behaviour, as it leaves a greater scope for the free will of individual<sup>59</sup>. The other two methods are unnecessary encroachments on the same which call for either a religious discipline or political discipline of the adherents. When there is openness in the deeds of conduct, there is a sufficient guarantee against the use of violence in social relations . Only free individuals under the atheistic social structure work for rightfulness in their acts and lead to the establishment of equality in social relations. In atheistic ethics, the objective is equality and the methods is openness .

Gora, *Positive Atheism*, pp.49-50.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-57.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

*Ibid.*, p.62. Also see Gora, *People and Progress*, Vijayawada, 1981, pp.49-52.

Atheistic politics is the realm where Gora visualises an Utopian system of federated democratic structure . Recognition of freedom of individual is the chief plank in atheistic polity. It is necessarily a partyless democracy wherein the citizens assert **individual** free will and have a direct control over sovereignty. His exclusive emphasis on an Utopian federation is a result of his disbelief in the mischiefs of party spirit in modern democratic governments where people meekly submit to their elected representatives who, in turn, enjoy absolute powers in the name of democracy . Modern democracies are theistic representations where citizens are subordinated to dictates of political parties and their leaders. Through passive submission to government, citizens negate the very fact that they are the real masters of the democratic government. Modern party policies in popular democracies have resulted in democratic determinism and centralisation of authority in the hands of a few. An ideal political system is to make citizens politically equal and, it finally results in the economic equality . Contrary to this, people have become slaves to elected representatives and, in the absence of effective direct control over administration by citizens, these people's representatives are increasingly

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Gora, *Partyless Democracy*, Vijayawada, 2nd Edition, 1985 (first edn. 1961), pp.49-66.

63 *Ibid.*, pp.45-48.

Gora, *Positive Atheism*, *Op.Cit.*, p.67.

becoming indifferent to their duties. 'Equality' has been reduced to a convenient political slogan during the time of elections. As majority in legislative bodies is a key to power, politics in democracy has been reduced to politics of power in the present democratic set up . The deadly competition between political parties, which aspire to form government, always results in secrecy of political deals than open mindedness . Moreover, modern democracies are functioning in large territories with unwidely populations. These modern nation states, writes Cora, are both sectarian and too big to have a direct relation between leaders and individuals . This reduces the possibility of reading the mind of individual citizens and renders administration and bureaucracy more impersonal

To be rid of all the evils attendant on modern democracies, atheistic form of government is the only solution where the free individual citizens have a direct knowledge of government and its public affairs. With this idea strongly entrenched in his mind, **Cora** visualises a decentralised structure of democracy with the central principle of partylessness. It means the existence of small handy units of administration, with each unit having a

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

territorial jurisdiction over 20 square kilometers and a thousand population . Size of population is more important to enable the citizens to have a direct role in administrative functioning. Each unit has an elected committee and, these basal units are federated into larger territorial units which too have an elected body to administer . The apical units look after the general needs of population and the basal units take care of immediate needs of people. Gora believes that the present federated system of partyless democracy" cuts across sectarian considerations of nationalism and minority interests that cause war and strife. Under this system, every individual is socially and economically secure" and, at large, the structure enables human beings to grow into the world federation of one humanity without any need for narrow loyalties to party or nation .

Gora's vision of democracy and popular government remind us of Plato's Utopia sans philosopher kings, militia and slaves. In such an atheistic democratic system people enjoy greater economic equality and satisfy their needs. Atheistic economics recommends organisation of handy economic units in which "members live in close relations : commonly own material resources and equally

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p.7.3

share them" . This will satisfy the two basic aspects of atheistic economics - a) all individual citizens or people get all material comforts with dignity and equal standing with others and b) these comforts are provided for all people which result in perfect social harmony. Respect for human dignity is, **thus, preserved** in atheistic economics. Whereas Marxism leaves the control over means of production to a particular class and induces slavish mind in subordinating people to material forces . Gandhi's 'trusteeship' programme along with other such programmes like 'Bhoodan' movement of Vinoba failed in their objectives primarily because of their non-political character<sup>74</sup>. As a remedy to these problems, Gora conceives atheistic economics in his vision of partyless democracy. The presence of handy economic units necessarily implies, writes Cora, decentralised technology with heavy emphasis on small machines, excepting in fields like mining, metallurgy and related heavy industries . This set-up is useful on two counts - a) it enables people to develop skills of their own choice and removes the monopoly of the few over technology. It will preserve the freedom of individual and b) it removes the attendant evil of the divorce between the

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p.91.

<sup>73</sup>

*Ibid.*, pp.79-83. Also see Gora, *Mudha Nammakaalu - Naastika Drusthi* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1976, p.92.

<sup>74</sup>Gora, *Positive Atheism, Op.Cit.*, pp.79-83.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.97-99.

machinery of production and the machinery of distribution as in a socialist state. This separation between these activities necessarily requires dictatorial authority of the state to supervise proper functioning of equitable distribution. Whereas new atheistic technology removes these problems through its emphasis on decentralised technology.

**Gora's** views on aesthetics represent a radical shift. The significance lies in the fact that the expression of aesthetic taste is not impaired in atheism. The theme changes from self-interest to social good. "Moments of joy should not be divorced from the acts of real life" . For Gora, expression of artistic talents has three different strands<sup>78</sup>. The religious stream has a greater influence on aesthetics. But its impact is more destructive than constructive. The Hindu theistic aesthetic faith in spiritual bliss and prayer renders people dormant, lazy and distracts them from material avocations and productive process. In spiritual terms, the adherents are rendered passive with their eyes fixed on other worldly pleasures. On the other, this passivity, embedded in spirituality, kills the work instinct in human beings. This in turn leaves scope for the growth of inequalities in society. At the pure material level, in such a society with the few rich and the hungry many, aesthetic pursuits are most often monopolised and fine arts would assume

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, PP 101-110.

professional nature in the hands of the rich. The realm of joy is thus separated from the reach of many people. In contrast to these shortcomings, atheistic concept of aesthetics turns its attention to social good and considers the basic instinct of relations of sex as the starting point to evolve a structure of aesthetics on the basis of human equality.

Cora contends that relations of sex have evoked, over a period of time, the most artistic expressions among human beings and, the raptures of sex provided variety of themes for song, dance and poetry. At the level of familial structure, Hindu religion has a greater impact on sex relations. The impact can be seen in terms of marriage, sectarian attitude of inbreeding and womanhood. Barring all other strands of influence, the Hindu religious thought has a devastating bearing on women in the realm of marriage, family, sex and motherhood. The influence can be looked at from two different angles<sup>79</sup>. a) It organised family into a rigid institution and b) it imposed secrecy on sex relations. During the process, woman's lot became subject to all inhuman and masculine impositions. The institution of family in the Hindu society proved an impediment to the progress because of two inherent evils. Through endogamy, it resulted in sectarianism and, the existence of castes has been a result of inbreeding. On the other hand, conventions of marriage and family allowed less freedom to women in terms of selection of

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

mate, sex and motherhood. Family loyalty, as imposed from above, resulted in the suppression of womanhood<sup>80</sup>. Cora questions the concept of fatherhood of man, the institution of marriage and, supports promiscuity in sexual relations and unwed motherhood<sup>81</sup>. He believes that in the present period of population explosion in the country, the institution of marriage is invalid as long as woman's motherhood is decided and controlled by man. As divorce is not easy in Hindu society, ties of marriage formalise love, sex and, compel affection.

As a remedy to the evils in the institution of marriage, Cora suggests promiscuity in man and woman relationship. Atheism believes that secrecy is anti-social and, more so, in the realm of sexual relations. Promiscuity alone frees woman from traditional impositions. She can be liberated from unwanted motherhood, forceful sexual relations and the shame of unwed motherhood. It is true, writes Gora, promiscuity looks outrageous as it is feared that it overthrows masculine supremacy and takes a big stride towards the equality of sexes . Again, mixed marriages vis-a-vis the Hindu marriage contract alliances outside the traditional sanctions widen the scope of marital selection. Cora, during his own life time, struck a cordial note

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.110-111.

*Ibid.*, p.108.

between precept and practice by encouraging his own children in matters of marriage and the choice of motherhood<sup>83</sup>. His impact on inter-marriages had a catalytic effect on contemporary society and many liberal minded youngsters followed the suit. Orientation to aesthetics from social and, in particular, woman's angle stood Cora far ahead of his times<sup>84</sup>. The feminist movement in modern Andhra owes a lot to the influence of Cora and, his contributions in this regard are highly noteworthy and received approbation from different circles of society.

The essence of positive atheism is the freedom of individual which is believed to release the immense potentialities of human imagination, initiative and effort that lay suppressed under theistic faith. It is basically non-sectarian in nature with

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Cora encouraged his eldest son and eldest daughter to choose their life partners from untouchable caste. He defied the sanctions of contemporary society and prevailed upon his second daughter to go in for delivery of the child when she became an unwed mother. She was married later. For details see Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, pp.170-71; 179-196.

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Gora's ideas on woman's freedom, institution of marriage and promiscuity in sexual relations were already given literary expression in the writings of G.V.Chalam, a well-known and highly controversial writer in Telugu. Through his novels and stories, Chalam propagated most unorthodox ideas on the concept of women's freedom. His writings gave a jolt to the contemporary society in the post-veeresalingam era. Many writers have been thoroughly influenced by Chalam and he truly sowed the seeds of feminist writings in modern Andhra. Some of his ideas found their echoes in the views of Gora too. While Chalam was confined to literary field, Gora's activities put the atheist beliefs on woman's issues into social practice. For example vide, G.V.Chalam, *Autobiography* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1971; Buchi Babu, *Bucchi Babu Vyasaalu* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1971; G.V.Chalam *Musings* (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1976.

complete indifference to race, religion, colour and caste. In principle, positive atheism visualises a post-religious society and thinks that the achievement of the same is both its vision and challenge .

#### IV

For Gora, the philosopher, his vision of an atheistic society has no physical barriers and no territorial boundaries. For Gora, the practical social reformer, the three coastal districts of West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur formed the nucleus of his activities and atheist movement . His movement had echoes in other places too like Nalgonda and Anantapur districts during his active life period. Resigned from the job at Machilipatnam, he proceeded to Mudunur in Krishna district in 1940 and established the first atheist centre at the place<sup>87</sup>. His activities spread from this centre and, very soon, Mudunur came to be known as the "godless village" . The atheist centre had been very active at Mudunur for seven years and, later it was shifted in 1947 to Vijayawada. The activities of Gora and his followers concentrated on important aspects like the spread of atheist ideas, establishment of schools with no restrictions on

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**Lavanam, *Our March, Op.Cit.*, p.A.42.**

Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.110.

87

**Gora, *We-Become, Op.Cit.*, pp.36-37.**  
*Ibid.*, p.45.

admissions like caste and religion, encouragement of cosmopolitan dinners (common commensal habits), participation in *Satyagraha* during freedom struggle, promotion of mixed or inter-marriages, establishment of journals as instruments to spread their ideas and, foundation of social service organisations like *Arthik Samata Mandali* and *Kasturiba Mahila Kendram* with an eye on imparting economic skills among people and, in particular, women.

Upon the establishment of Atheist Centre at Mudunur, Cora spread his atheist ideology in the surrounding places. This, was, however a usual practice for Cora wherever he worked in the earlier period. He was twice dismissed from his employment for his averred belief in atheist ideas. Cora extensively toured the districts of West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur and gave public lectures on atheism. He encouraged questions from the audience and answered all of them. Sometimes the meetings lasted for long hours<sup>89</sup>. He was invited from people of different places in and outside Andhra. During his campaign for atheism, he both received laurels and reproachments from orthodox sections. At times people resisted his speeches and, at Madras, Tanguturi Prakasam and Bulusu Sambamurthy had to intervene to silence the opponents when Gora was to speak from the platform of Silver Jubilee

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The questions and answers later went to print. For details see, Cora, *Atheism : Questions and Answers*, Vijayawada, 1992. The book covers the answers of Gora to various questions on atheism over a period of time.

Celebrations of Andhra Mahasabha in 1940<sup>90</sup>. Cora was successful in gaining many converts to atheism from the places where he delivered public lectures. With the encouragement received from his friends and followers like Anne Anjayya, Tummala Gopala **Krishnayya**, Movva Sivarao and Ramkumar Varma, Gora convened the first atheist conference in 1941 at Kanumur Village in Krishna district<sup>91</sup>. The conference was a three day affair and there had been a free discussion on atheism during the period. It was attended by about three hundred delegates drawn from different social segments and all the surrounding villages. The success of the Conference enthused a new spirit in him and encouraged Gora to carry his message further into contemporary society. The impact of his campaign was soon visible. The sympathy for atheism "spread so wide and deep into the minds of people that in the Census of 1941, from Mudunur Village 142 persons classified themselves as atheists"<sup>92</sup>. So also, people from the village refused to take oath in the local courts in the name of god and, an alternative was provided for them soon<sup>93</sup>.

90

Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.144.

91

Gora, *We Become, Op.Cit.*, p.42. As a part of his atheist campaign, Gora demonstrated fire walking in order to dispel popular misconceptions about traditional and religious beliefs. The first fire walking was conducted at Machilipatnam with the help of Cora's student, Jaganmohan Rao. For details see, Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, pp.120-121. Also see, Lavanam, "The Atheist Centre : Humanism in Practice" in *The Humanist*, July-August, 1988, pp. 15-16.

92

Gora, *We Become, Op.Cit.*, p.45.

93 *Ibid.*

Along with the campaign for the spread of atheism, the atheist centre at Mudunur undertook two other programmes with emphasis on education and socialisation. Cora opened an informal education centre at the village to instruct the youth in general knowledge. Classes were conducted for four hours a day from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.<sup>94</sup>. Initially, seventy students enrolled themselves in the school. The classes covered almost all subjects like history, geography, civics, social reform, freedom struggle, physics, chemistry, botany, zoology, philosophy, history of religions and various revolutionary movements in the march of human civilisation<sup>95</sup>. Gora explained the need for social equality during his lectures and encouraged "common tea" programmes among the students. They were an early step towards common **commensal** programmes. The second aspect of educational activity was to conduct a night school in the local Harijan slum area. Under the impact of Gora's atheist campaign, the local youth changed the nomenclature of the respective untouchable slums and the new names did not indicate the areas by the name of caste. The influence of Gora's efforts was so thorough on the issues of untouchability that Mudunur was considered as the "Capital of

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Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.130.

Ibid., p.131. Earlier they were known as "Mala Palem" and "Madiga gudem" denoting the names of untouchable castes (Mala, **Madiga**) of Andhra. Now, they were rechristened as "East Palem" and "Dusari Palem".

<sup>96</sup>Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p.130.

Andhra for social revolution" by contemporary public opinion<sup>97</sup>  
Within a decade, the atheist centre compiled, collected and  
published atheist songs for publicity campaign<sup>98</sup>. The central  
concern of these songs was to confirm the existing notion that  
atheism too was another way of life<sup>99</sup>. In addition, Gora wrote a  
few atheist songs and tuned them with the help of a reputed  
contemporary musician, Puvvala Suryam

Gora's campaign for removal of untouchability, common  
commensal programmes and inter-marriages had a greater impact on  
society during his own life time. Gora's crusade against  
untouchability assumed the proportions of a large scale social  
movement. He set a precondition whenever he was invited to give  
a public lecture. He insisted that his "lodge and board to be  
arranged in the local untouchable slum" and used every such  
occasion to the advance of mingling "the two sects among  
untouchables, *Malas* and *Madigas*. Ordinarily, they do not

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>98</sup>

Vide *Naastika Geetaalu* (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1950. A few famous  
poems of people like Gurajada Appa Rao and Narla Venkateswara Rao  
were collected and printed. Other contributors are Chiranjeevi,  
Sarat, Lavanam, Namburi Subbaraju, Narasimha Rao, Vidya,  
Seshagiri Rao, Anasuya, Sambasiva Rao, Hymavathi, Rayalu, Mythri,  
Pallapolu Sambaiah, China Venkata Reddy, Saraswathi, Arjuna Rao,  
Manorama, C.V.Krishna Rao, N.V.Subba Rao, Purrala Suryaprakasa  
Rao and Narla Chiranjeevi. These poems touch upon aspects like  
caste, untouchability, economic equality, humanism, common  
commensal activities, denunciation of idol worship and need for  
inculcation of atheist ideas.

<sup>99</sup>

*Ibid.* See the Introduction.

<sup>100</sup> Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p. 142.

**interdine** nor they draw water from the same well. I consider their mingling as an achievement for the atheist way of life" Encouraged by the response to his initiatives, Gora organised the first cosmopolitan dinner in 1941 in an untouchable slum People were invited to the dinner irrespective of caste differences. Cosmopolitan dinner was more symbolic of diluting caste consciousness. Every participant was expected to contribute a nominal amount of money on voluntary basis. These dinners were generally arranged on full moon days. The first dinner at Mudunur was attended by about 260 guests . This was soon followed by hundreds of such dinners. Along with the cosmopolitan dinners, Gora undertook the programme of inter-marriages and performed the first inter-caste marriage at Mudunur itself. It was presided over by Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari who, by then, was already reputed as, in the words of Gora, "a non-conformist, iconoclast and rationalist"<sup>104</sup>. The marriage was performed in a civilian manner without any reference to Hindu religious rites and it was followed by a cosmopolitan dinner. This was succeeded by innumerable number of inter-marriages under the leadership of Gora where cosmopolitan dinners became a regular feature. Most of Cora's family members married outside their caste. His eldest son and eldest daughter married untouchables and both of these

<sup>101</sup>Gora, *We Become*, *Op.Cit.*, pp.42-43.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, p.44.

marriages were performed in Gandhiji's Sevagram Ashram . His brother married a widow. The inter-marriages and cosmopolitan dinners sent shocking waves through the orthodox sections in contemporary society. The spirit of Gora's legacy in this regard is still alive and atheist centre has been in the forefront of conducting these programmes.

Between 1942 and 1947 Gora and his followers were drawn into freedom struggle under the influence of Gandhi. For, Gora believed that Gandhian programme of action and his views on social reconstruction closely resembled that of the atheist action plan. Gora and his friends formed a well-knit batch of **Satyagrahis** and began functioning with Mudunur as their headquarters. Under the influence of Gora, the village soon became the centre of Quit India Movement and sent the largest number of **Satyagrahis** into freedom struggle in the entire region of the then Andhra . The Satyagrahis of Mudunur, including the 12 year old son of Gora, Lavanam, were involved in all programmes of Indian National Congress from protest marches to clandestine methods in passing the information from place to place . Most of

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>106</sup> Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

them, along with women *Satyagrahis* were arrested and jailed. Another programme of social action programme undertaken by Gora under the influence of social action programme of Gandhi was the establishment of the first 'Kasturiba Memorial Kendram' at Mudunur in 1945<sup>108</sup>. Cora's wife, Saraswathi was in charge of the centre and its activities emphasised on women's issues like women's education. After putting in two more years of social service at Mudunur, the atheist centre shifted its base to Vijayawada in 1947 after the dawn of independence. In the post-independent and post-Gandhian era, Gora was drawn towards a campaign for partyless system of democracy and against the pomp of congress leaders. Repelled by the unGandhian ways of Congress politicians, he gradually identified himself with Bhoodan and Sarvodaya movements which formed a part of Cora's activities after 1947. Along with these political activities, he founded social service organisations like Arthika Samata Mandali (1953) and Vasavya Mahila Mandali (1965) which threw their attention on economic programmes for the poor and downtrodden and, women's issues<sup>109</sup>. After an active public life spanned over five decades, Gora died in 1975 leaving behind him a great legacy of atheist social consciousness and the spirit of reform drives in the field of untouchability, inter-marriages and women's movement. The atheist centre is still active today

<sup>108</sup>

For details vide, *Ibid.*, pp.166-169.

For more details see, *Atheist Centre - An Introduction*, Vijayawada, 1988, pp.16-19.

For details on the activities of Atheist Centre vide, Lavanam,

The realm of Cora's social philosophy had a wider canvas and, the crucible of his social experiments had only a limited social space. He was conditioned by many current contemporary social and political trends in Andhra. At the outset, the social base of Cora's atheist movement was narrow and confined to a few sections of society, in particular youth. With a confined social spectrum and limited territorial boundaries of his activities, Cora's hands were more tied than free. It was this limitation that checked the speedy spread of his activities.

The sweeping influence of national movement, Indian National Congress and Gandhi drew millions of people towards the freedom struggle. Under the pervasive influence of Gandhi, even Cora and his followers took a brief respite from atheist campaign and joined hands with nationalists. Cora admitted the influence of Gandhi and his constructive programme on his own activities here. In the face of surging nationalist ideas, Cora's activities paled into insignificance and failed in making a firm dent into contemporary society.

"The Atheist Centre :Humanism in Practice", *Op.Cit.*, pp.14-19; *Atheist Centre - An Introduction, Op.Cit.*, pp.3-15; "Atheist Centre : A Decade's Work, 1975-88" in *Atheism and Social Change, Op.Cit.*, pp.B1-B18. Presently, the activities of the Centre are diversified into different fields like economic upliftment of the poor, women's problems, reform and rehabilitation and criminal reformation. These activities are carried along with efforts for the spread of atheist ideas.

Cora's obsession with problems like untouchability and post-religious society was met with a limited and temporary success as evidenced by cosmopolitan dinners and inter-marriages. The spirit of his programmes was never imbibed. Rather, the ascent of disruptive forces was more successful and visible even during the life time of Cora. The activities of non-Brahman movement in the contemporary period resulted in water-tight compartmentation between different castes and sowed the seeds for narrow casteist tendencies in society. In the post-independent era, the politicians consciously patronised them and, soon there was an emergence of social voting blocs in democratic polity. Caste began playing a major role in elections and the trend is alive. On the other, the Hindu-Muslim politics led to polarisation of religious interests. Cora's miniscule operations and the activities of atheist centre in post-Cora era failed in breaking the cocoon of caste exclusivism and the strong shell of religious separatism. Gora's efforts against these tendencies, in the hope of a party less democracy and post-religious society, proved to be of insignificant attempts . In a critical **self-appraisal**, it has been confessed by atheist leaders of **post-Gora** period that "even though the number of full-fledged atheists is still limited, the number of atheist sympathisers is

For details on Gora's crusade against evil tendencies in democratic politics in post-independent India vide, *Partyless Democracy*, *Op.cit.*, Part.11. Also see, Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, pp.207-221.

fast growing"<sup>112</sup> and that "we are in a transitory period. Many people lost faith in traditional religious society. Yet they have not developed vision and understanding about post-religious society.... Now, atheism has to make rapid advances into social and psychological spheres also in order to develop a positive alternative to both the religious and counter religious societies. This is a challenge before atheists"

Gora's social reform campaign with its radical departures could not provide enough motivation to people in society. The flexibility and adaptability of Hindu religiosity proved to be a **stumbling** block to Gora both at conceptual level and material level. The social reform spirit of Veeresalingam era was truly assimilated by Hindu society and the religious practices presented themselves in a reformed form to the people. The declining opposition to widow marriages, post puberty marriages and **Kanyasulkam**, and increasing support to issues like women's education and fight against child marriages attest to the present tendency. This spirit of assimilation of Hindu religious structure did not leave any mental space for people, including educated sections, to readily accept Gora's atheist postulates. On the other, there was a strong opposition to atheist ideology from orthodox sections of society.

Lavanam, "Significance of Atheism" in *Second World Atheist Conference*, Vijayawada, December 25-28, 1980, p.7.

<sup>113</sup>

Lavanam, *Our March*, *Op.Cit.*, pp.A37-A42.

In a limited sense, Cora appears to be a bundle of contradictions. In a fit of over enthusiasm, he rejected even natural laws and theories of evolution. He too, was, unconsciously publicising deterministic trends in society through his positive atheism. For him, many other theories like Marxism have implanted deterministic ideas in society. He viewed his atheism as the only way of achieving individual freedom and equality in social, political and economic terms. He could not but think of an atheist way of life as a remedy to all existing evils. It appears that the concept of his positive atheism is overworked which unconsciously propagated atheistic determinism in the contemporary society. He repeatedly hints through his writings that atheism is the only substitute for theistic and materialist determinism. His ideas, as revealed by contemporary developments, failed in fluting their way into society on a large scale. On the other, he expressed far advanced views on issues like woman's motherhood. These some of the inherent inconsistencies made Gora unacceptable. He was neither received by intellectual circles for his misconceptions on issues like nature and its laws, nor he was welcomed by orthodox sections for his radical views on marriage and motherhood. For majority of traditional sections, he remained a hard nut and was, hence, rejected social acceptance by them.

Gora was an Utopian atheist. His social ideas represented both philosophical and reformist streams. Like any other

idealist, Gora too was drawn more towards a visionary state of society and polity. The ground realities did not allow a smooth dissemination of his ideas. Though a staunch believer in atheist ways of life, Gora was, at times, uncertain about the efficacy of his atheist movement and progress of atheist ideology. It was **this** semblance of doubt in Gora that led him to Gandhi whose constructive programme was believed by Gora to have a unity of purpose with his own ideas. Hence, he looked to Gandhi for advices on his movement. After an year's involvement in the programme for removal of untouchability, Gora wrote to Gandhi in 1941 that "The results of one year's work encourage us to proceed along the same lines. Before we do so, we desire to seek your advice. All of us have great regard for your wisdom and experience. We want to be told and warned of the possible pitfalls, if any, that lie in the way of our atheistic approach. In the light of your advice, we are prepared to revise our outlook and programme"

The rise of Communist Party and left ideology in Andhra during the active life period of Gora posed another potent hurdle to the spread of atheist ideology. The Communist Party, in principle, believed in Marxian notion that "religion is the opium of people". The party and its cadres never encouraged religious ideas and, rather condemned any fanatical views on account of this. With its broad-based political and economic agenda, the

<sup>114</sup>Gora, *An Atheist with Gandhi*, *Op.Cit.*, p.27.

Party soon struck deep roots in Andhra. Along with its spread, its areligious notions too travelled far and wide. For common people as well as orthodox sections, the spread of communism represented atheist ideas and it was increasingly believed that communists were more atheists than Cora and his followers. Moreover, the misconception of identifying communists with atheist ideology bothered many people. In the face of the upsurge of Communist Party and its activities, Cora's atheist movement almost remained a low profile undertaking.

## V

The significance of Gora lies in the fact that he never remained a mere social philosopher. For, he was conscious of the equal importance of material work. He emphasised on the need for social sacrifice to affect change in the mental attitudes of people. To put in his own words, "our grandfathers' was an era of religious conventions and, ours is one of sacrifices" . It was this realisation that made Gora a vehement critic of blind beliefs and led him to radical social departures in his ideas and activities. He was a social rebel to the core. His rebellion had positive connotations and was diverted towards social good in a non-violent manner. His practice of what he preached makes

<sup>115</sup>Gora, *Jeevitam Nerpina Pathaalu*, Vijayawada, Third Edition, 1989 (first edn. 1976), p.36.

him a unique personality in the history of social reform endeavours in post-Veerasingam era. He will be known to posterity as the first social philosopher of modern Andhra who, though with a limited success, tried to correlate the precept and practice.

Gora's contribution to society was duly recognised by the contemporary society. Under the influence of Gora, a number of intellectuals began identifying with his activities. A few contemporary writers even believed that "atheism is natural" and this sums up Gora's influence. Contemporary public opinion as reflected in the Telugu Press, readily recognised the reform personality of Gora more than his atheist personality. Estimating his work after his death, an editorial stated that "how far his movements registered success is not the question. They may be limited, but an individual is not measured only by success. Instead it is done so by the individual's concerted effort. Gora has more admirers than followers. He has more opponents than admirers" . Another editorial commented that "Barring his political convictions, Gora is a great social servant. His role in the propagation of atheist ideology in Andhra is significant"<sup>118</sup>. Gora's practice of atheist ideology

K.Kutumba Rao, "Naastikata" (Telugu) in *Veena* (Telugu Monthly), April 1938, p. 29.

<sup>117</sup>*Andhra Jyoti* (Telugu Daily), 29.7.1975, Editorial.

<sup>118</sup>*Enadu* (Telugu Daily), 28.7.1975, Editorial.

attracted many youngsters towards his movement and, he laid foundations for another social revolution. He was a pioneering leader in the programme of Harijan upliftment<sup>119</sup>. Gora never believed in fate and, through his reform activities he was always after society and never allowed the other way round to happen<sup>120</sup>. These contemporary opinions duly recognised the social revolutionary in Gora, though they were not ready to subscribe to his atheist ideology. One of his friends stated that "Gora is aware of my views vis-a-vis his own atheist ideas....He never exhibited any disregard for those who do not subscribe to his atheist notions" . The society where Gora lived in, had reservations about his atheism and, never failed in recognising his reformist drives. As a social revolutionary, Gora's role was readily accepted.

Gora's contribution to Harijan uplift movement and inter-marriage programme opened a new chapter in the field of social reform movements after Veeresalingam. Though the Brahmo Samaj movement concerned itself with the issue of untouchability, the subject assumed the dimensions of a social revolution in the hands of Gora. He was first among the pioneers in this field. Inter-marriages was one of the most significant contributions of

Andhra *Bhumi* (Telugu Daily), 29.7.1975, Editorial.

<sup>120</sup> *Andhra Prabha* (Telugu Daily), 28.7.1975, Editorial.

<sup>121</sup> *Viswam*, "Manikya Veena" (Telugu) in *Andhra Prabha* (Telugu Weekly) 13.8.1975.

Cora. They too were conducted on the scale of a social movement despite stringent opposition from orthodox society. The semblances of marital reform in the form of mixed marriages in Andhra are a true legacy of Cora's movement.

Cora's influence on the first generation of communist leaders was immense. Reputed leaders of Communist Party in 1940s and 1950s from the districts of Krishna and Guntur were students of Gora. They were trained and taught in Gora's school of atheist thought. In fact, they provided both moral and material support Gora's movement in spreading atheist ideology. The earliest communist leaders like Tammareddy Satyanarayana, Sanaka Butchi Kotaiah, Katragadda Rajagopala Rao, Gunturu Bapanaiah and **Ganji** Ramarao were direct students of Gora at Machilipatnam and they formed the real strength of Gora's atheist campaign during their days in the Hindu college . They soon joined the ranks of Communist Party and rose to positions of prominence in contemporary Andhra politics. More than Veeresalingam, Gora's social reform campaign added strength to left ideology in Andhra.

Gora's greatest contribution is seen in the growth of feminist ideas. While Chalam was responsible for the spread of ideas on women's liberation, Gora laid the foundations for radical feminism. His views on marriage reform, promiscuity, womanhood and unwed motherhood had far reaching effects on

<sup>122</sup> Saraswathi Gora, *Op.Cit.*, p. 125.

contemporary society. He set an example through practice by openly supporting mixed marriages and unwed motherhood of his own daughter. Following his footsteps, the atheist centre grounded many activities concerning the welfare of women. Vasavya Manila **Mandali** and Gora Abhay Nivas are examples.<sup>123</sup> Gora was the first practising radical feminist of modern Andhra. His legacy formed the real material background to the rise of feminist movement indicating the direction of another reform drive concerning the lot of women. Founding a material basis for another large scale social reform endeavour is a direct legacy of Gora.

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For details see, *Atheist Centre : An Introduction, Op.Cit.*, pp.3-20.

## CHAPTER - 7

### CONCLUSION

The inherent zeal for reform has been reiterated over a period of time in Andhra region of Madras Presidency. Though, the tradition of dissent within Hindu religious traditions dates back to medieval Andhra, the dimensions of reformist efforts displayed many variables during colonial period. The colonial regime symbolising the dawn of modern era in Indian history posed new problems to the Indian identity. It was a powerful historical intervention into indigenous cultural practices which, always had an eye on coopting the same into an orbit of colonial and western ethics. The mutual and equitable influence of Hindu and Islamic traditions of medieval era represented a cultural synthesis in indigenous society which was more harmonious than frictional. The colonial intervention reversed the role and it attempted at a cultural appropriation than a cultural amalgamation. The imperial work culture and the colonial rule consciously assumed the role of civilising mission which necessarily implies an unequal cultural relationship with indigenous people.

An analysis of the events during the 19th century shows how the changes effected in Indian society were always in favour of the state. For the colonial rulers, the Century was very crucial as it was a period of consolidation of their rule. In an attempt to extend its influence on every sphere of indigenous society, it almost tampered with all existing social institutions, old economic usages and cultural practices. Extension of colonial

influence became a historical imperative for the British without which their foundations in India would be questioned. The period was equally important for Indians as they began undergoing cataclysmic changes under the new policy measures of the colonial state. During this process various social groups were considerably affected and, consequent upon this, reaction started building up along with the changes. This indigenous reaction showed many variables. Internal criticism of existing social practices in light of new awareness and learning and opposition to oppressive policies of colonial regime were two major trends in the contemporary society. The reaction was neither uniform nor common to all social segments. Rather, it was found scattered at different levels. One of the strong streams of the multi-dimensional popular reaction was an intense criticism of blind social traditions, forcibly expressed through social reform efforts. These efforts symbolised the increased historical need for reiteration of reform sentiments of earlier period to mend the rigid social traditions. Truly, the colonial regime provided a historical opportunity through its new devices like scientific methods of learning with emphasis on human interaction and liberal thinking. The new dimensions given to social and cultural interventions under the colonial regime enhanced the rate of reaction from indigenous sections. The extension of moral and material help to initial reform endeavours, as exemplified by support to Rammohan Roy's endeavours from the colonial state had altogether a different historical connotation and social configuration. The attempt to impress upon Indians on the unavoidable role of the colonial rulers as champions of civilising

mission and harbingers of a viable and liberal social set-up in India was the overt implication in the process. This belief was soon to be undone. The growth of social consciousness and its contributory role in preparing people for political acts of later period checked the colonial enthusiasm and hence, it was again a compelling historical necessity for the state to abandon the assumed role of a good samaritan. Concomitantly, the process of reform endeavours stopped mid way for sometime. In the entire process, the new intelligentsia was subject to a false consciousness and believed in the magnanimity of their masters. Rammohan Roy, Veeresalingam, Curajada Appa Rao, Atmuri Lakshminarasimham and a host of others represented this school of thought during the transitional phase of 19th century.

The reaction of people throughout this period was characterised by an intense quest for a new identity under the colonial regime. The centripetal attitude of colonial regime in trying to appropriate all that is indigenous in nature and, the centrifugal tendency of new middle classes and other social segments in trying to carve out an exclusive social and political space for themselves vis-a-vis colonial oppression could be seen throughout the period. At one level, the oppressed classes like peasants were clamouring for their own rights. Like other regions in the country, Andhra too was subject to various changes effected by colonial government in socio-economic and cultural fields. New revenue policies, creation of a unified market, destruction of indigenous industry, super imposition of a more exploitative capitalist economy in post-1857 period, adverse effects on

agriculture and outbreak of 'man-made' famines with an unflinching periodicity witnessed structural imbalances in society. Consequent upon all these, resentment started building up among peasant and agrarian communities. The woes of these people were given expression by public associations like Madras Native Association.

At another level, reaction to colonial cultural intervention assumed a reformatory role which has been characterised by a sober and passive approach under the strong influence of colonial learning system. The introduction of new education was conceived as a major tool of western ideological influence. Acquisition of control over vast tracts of the sub-continent greatly enhanced economic exploitation and the consequent drain. The immediate problem before the colonial state was the need to give the force and exploitation of their policies the appearance of legality. The historical means used was the introduction of English education with heavy emphasis on western ethics, liberalism, individualism and scientific modes of thinking. Among these, the colonial state was much concerned about moral and intellectual improvement of Indians who were supposed to imbibe western spirit thereby identifying themselves with colonial power structure and social values. The preaching of western values and religious morals in the educational institutes run by Christian Missionaries symbolised the colonial mood. It was categorically stated by the Imperial Government that "with a view to the moral and intellectual improvement of the people the great primary object is the extension among those who have leisure for advanced study, of

the most complete education in our power" The extension of "most complete education" in the hands of colonial rulers was aimed at circumscribing the emerging social consciousness which, if allowed to have a free and unhindered growth, would strike at colonial foundations. And hence efforts to coopt the same into an orbit of colonial ideology. It is argued that attempts were made to relate education to colonial dominance both as a means of persuasion and

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as an arm of coercive apparatus . The colonial attempts yielded partial dividends. The early educated Indians and social reformers were loyal supporters of the British Raj. However, the nature of English learning with its western ethics was exposed soon and criticised by people even by late 19th century <sup>3</sup> .

For details see, Minute on Education by Lord Auckland in Pub. Dept., Consl. No.7, dt. 2.3.1841,TNA.

2

Ranjit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India : A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications*, Calcutta, 1988. p.16.

3

Though the English education opened up job opportunities for English educated Indians, the colonial administration could not absorb all the people. Most of these young graduates, educated in arts and humanities, were unfit for scientific undertakings and hence, forced to take up other professions. The repeat occurrence of famines in late 19th century and, the British War Policy in Burma and Afghanistan considerably drained resources from Imperial vaults. To tide over the problem, the Government retrenched in every direction and, as a first step, reduced the number of subordinate appointments. These measures left adverse reverses on the educated. In the Madras Presidency they warned the Government that "we have long apprehended that the high pressure of educational policy of the Madras Government, must in the end, defeat their objective, and weaken rather strengthen the loyalty of those who have been chiefly benefitted". See *Madras Mail*, 19.3.1875 in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. Reformers had second thoughts about the nature of English education. In his lecture delivered at Madras during 1881, Pandit Sivanath Shastri of Sadharana Brahma Samaj, was highly critical of the destructive aspects of English education. For him, it was creating demoralisation in India and urged the people to be highly vigilant. Vide *The Madras Times*, 16.3.1881, NMML. R.Venkataraman Naidu too emphasised on liberal theological teachings in all the colleges under the Brahma Samaj in Andhra

However, creation of new employment opportunities under the colonial administration for English educated people disturbed many traditional callings and motivated people to take to English education. There was a sudden spurt in the demand for English knowing persons to man the subordinate administrative posts. People with fundamentals of knowledge in English developed a passion for employment under the company. After acquisition of a smattering of English, young people would generally try for a placement and their obvious choice was a place where already their relations were in service of the Company government . The growth of English education was nevertheless slow, but significant after mid 19th century and, various higher secondary schools and colleges were established in Andhra by early 20th century. The growth of primary and secondary education also registered a satisfactory progress by this time. Apart, the new agrarian economy in Codavari delta region influenced mid peasant non-Brahmin castes in founding Rate schools to impart education to their children. The growth of education witnessed the emergence

and, in doing so, he was unconsciously playing against the destructive and demoralising aspects of liberal English education. For details see, Venkataratnam Naidu to N.Jaganna dha Rao, dt. 8.4.1933 in *Venkataratnam Naidoo Papers*, NMML. Attack on devastating aspects of English education was equally evident elsewhere in the sub-continent. A contemporary journal from North Western provinces believed that the educational system "has done more to lower you in our opinion\_\_we have lost faith in a nation that thus neglects its own countrymen and we naturally conclude that you British who grudge a small expenditure for the support, education and care have some deep and sinister political object in spending on English education". See *The Indian Public Opinion and Pubjab Times*, 11.3.1875, NMML.

V.Soob Row, *op.cit.*, p.64.

of an urban-based middle class which formed the main base of social reform movements and early public associations. The growth of vernacular press also was a spin-off of these developments and most of the journals were edited by educated middle classes. By late 19th century and early 20th century many Telugu journals shouldered the responsibility of disseminating reform ideas and strengthened the hands of first generation of social reform leaders.

The progress of reform efforts had three distinct stages. The pre-Veeresalingam era witnessed the spread of reform ideas in society. This was facilitated by the first generation of English educated persons. Enugula Veeraswamy, Vennelacunti Soob Row, Samineni Muthunarasimha Naidu, Sadasiva Pillai, Madhava Rao and a host of others propagated ideas of reform and the need for internal criticism of existing social evils and blind religious practices. The formation of Hindu Literary Society in 1830s at Madras symbolised the new spirit of rationalism in the mental make up of new educated middle classes. Being highly secular in its objectives, the society admitted members from different castes. It openly extended its support to the promotion of women's education, uplift of depressed classes and widow remarriages. Enugula Veeraswamy's *Kaslyatra Charitra* and Muthunarasimha Naidu's *Hitasoochane* are path breaking works which unequivocally condemned blind social beliefs and religious practices. Veeresalingam relied on *Hitasoochane* to formulate his ideas on social reform. The hands of these early young turks were further strengthened by students of Madras University and early Telugu

journals. The students of Madras University, bubbling with new found enthusiasm and spirit of liberal thinking, advocated the spread of education and recognised the urgent need to educate female population. Complementary to the efforts of educated middle classes, the early Telugu journals like *Vrittantini* and *Vartamanatarangini* initiated a critical debate on social manners and customs in their columns. They touched upon a number of aspects of contemporary society, customs, traditions and blind beliefs. Even by 1840s, *Vartamanatarangini* initiated a full length discussion on social maladies and reform ideas. To embrace more number of people, it introduced spoken dialect in its columns. It is, perhaps, a difficult exercise to measure, in qualitative terms, the success of the efforts of educated persons and the early Telugu journals. Both of them had organic links. They were highly complementary to each other in their pursuits. Yet, there was a difference. Publication of reform ideas in regional tongues like Telugu heralded a new epoch which witnessed the spread of reform ideas to the grassroots level. The success was best exemplified by the circulation figures of *Vartamanatarangini* and, even by late 19th century and some of the early 20th century Telugu journals could not surpass its circulation figures. These early activities of educated middle classes, a few non-Brahman intellectuals like Muthunarasimham and, early Telugu journals paved the way for a smooth transition - a transition that was less painful for later day reform leaders like Veeresalingam. There was a continuity in the progress of reform ideas from earlier period to Veeresalingam period, now and then interrupted by bouts of orthodox opposition.

The reform efforts after mid 19th century have been best represented by Veeresalingam. He was a father figure of social reform in Andhra and championed the cause during his life time. He was truly influenced by contemporary reformers of Bengal like Rammohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj movement. He evinced a keen interest in the spread of scientific knowledge and growth of rational thinking. The central concern of his reform efforts was emancipation of women from bondage and blind religious impositions. Being a towering personality in Telugu literature, he began writing a number of satires on various social evils and, expose the steady fall in social and individual values. The areas of his major concentration were female education, bride price, child marriages and widow marriages. He founded a separate girls' school at Dhawaleswaaram and, established a journal, *Vivekavardhani* to advocate the cause of his reform efforts. Soon, his efforts picked up the necessary acceleration and influenced people at different places in the then Andhra. He pioneered efforts in founding an exclusive women's journal, *Satihitabodhini* and, it devoted itself to the cause of women's upliftment. **Veeresalingam's** social reform drives reached their peak in widow marriage movement. He organised a widow marriage association in 1879 and, visited all important places in Andhra spreading the message. He personally performed the first few widow marriages and exhorted all liberal-minded educated people to follow his line. With the emergence of Veeresalingam, all the loose strands of reform in the earlier period were closely knit. It was a major achievement for him. Emphasis on women's issues attracted a

greater attention of contemporary society after he initiated serious efforts in the direction. In the entire movement, his hands were strengthened by other intellectuals like Gurajada Appa Rao, students, journals and, philanthropists like Zamindar of Pithapuram and Pyda Ramakrishnaiah. The awareness emanating from his reform efforts goaded many others in the succeeding period to take up reform issues. At another level, the spread of **Brahmo Samaj** Movement and the efforts of R.Venkataratnam Naidu affected a rapid dissemination of rational and scientific ideas in society. Coupled with other social reform efforts the influence of Brahmo ideology left a deep impress on people like Cora who, were instrumental in the growth of radical rationalist stream of thought as exemplified by the slow spread of atheist tendencies in society by the eve of Independence. R.Venkataratnam Naidu, Dr.Muthu Laxmi Reddy and Yaminipurna Tilakam waged a relentless battle against the evil system of nautch. Veeresalingam provided the support of his pen by publishing articles in *Vivekavardhani*.

The reform efforts of Veeresalingam era were, however, operating under constraints. Most of these initiatives were seen confined to Brahminical households. The reform efforts had a limited influence in urban and semi-urban regions of Andhra. The virulent orthodox opposition, influence of Theosophy and, indifferent attitude of the state by late 19th century halted the speedy progress of reform endeavours. Lack of an alternative line of leadership in the absence of Veeresalingam had an adverse effect on the pace of reform efforts. Despite these potential constraints, the reform campaign of 19th century was highly

successful in the spread of social consciousness in society which, in turn, was responsible for the growth of social reform endeavours among different social segments. The first generation of social and political agitators in early 20th century were either students or followers of Veeresalingam's reform campaign. It was this legacy of preparing a generation of young turks to carry on earlier work that was responsible in keeping the torch of reform alive.

The period of our present study (1919-1947) in the **post-Veeresalingam** era had two significant characteristics. The legacy of Veeresalingam's reform campaign was kept alive as witnessed by an intense intra-caste reform efforts of different castes and their open support to women's issues like post-puberty and widow marriages. In fact, the growth of women's organisations, a few of which were affiliated to respective caste associations consolidated the efforts of Veeresalingam. The other important development was the rise of national movement clamouring for independence to the country. Truly, it, with its immediate strong emotional and patriotic appeals, overshadowed the reform efforts. It could be seen that national movement and social reform went hand in hand and, this combination was a major historical development during our period of study. In Andhra, like elsewhere in many parts of the sub-continent, persons with social reform background were seen in the forefront of freedom struggle. National movement was, no doubt, an interference. Yet, it was a positive interaction which, unlike the colonial intervention, was reform friendly and, a truly cooperative indulgent element in the

process of social reform. Despite the sweeping influence of national movement, the organised strength of social reform efforts could be gleaned through some of the developments in the post-Veerasingam era.

- i) Spread of reform ideas was equally evident in all non-Brahmin castes unlike in 19th century. This was a crucial development during our period of study. The emergence of social awareness among non-Brahmin caste groups was facilitated by three important developments viz., the break-up early Brahminical order under the colonial regime and the growth of agrarian economy in the post-anicut era in Godavari and Krishna delta regions; the spread of English education which, for non-Brahmin peasant castes, meant the end of Brahminical domination over the realm of knowledge and learning; the intense urge for social change in light of new socio-economic and cultural values under the colonial regime and, the emergence of social reform campaign. Non-Brahmins viewed reform from two angles : a) to affect a change of mind in the Brahminical society whose members assumed socially and ritually dominant roles and became self-proclaimed champions of all religious observances. For non-Brahmins, this was seen as an equally important reform drive since, they have been subject to unreasonable socially operative mechanisms which were not sanctioned by any plausible material explanation except by a historically precipitated irrational religious and traditional dogma. The consequent reaction to this was highly virulent and, at times, it even appeared as proceeding along

the lines of exclusive anti-Brahmin sentiments. The extreme social reaction of non-Brahmin groups seemingly conveyed this idea. But, it was not anti-Brahmin. The moral and material **indignation** of non-Brahmins was necessitated by historical conditions. The reiteration of non-Brahmin leaders throughout the active existence of non-Brahmin social and political drives that they were not against the interests of Brahmins in general is a clinching evidence. Their reactions and reform drives could be seen at three different but, mutually complementary levels. The denouncement of Brahminical superiority and the deconstruction of Brahminical religious texts. The former was best represented by 19th century and early 20th century non-Brahmin intellectuals like Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, Darisi Chenchaiyah, Kokku Hanumantha Rao, Gopalakrishna Yachendra, Chilambu Adinarayanappa Naidu, D.Raghavachandraiah and Suryadevara Raghavaiah Choudari. In fact, Raghavaiah Choudari, the founder non-Brahmin movement, wanted it to be an exclusive socio-religious concern. The other stream was represented by the rationalist writings of Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari. At the social level, their demand for equal share in education and employment was again construed as a reform drive which was supposed to rectify the social errings of Brahminical manoeuvres over a period of time. This demand ultimately led them to more reactionary drives. Political power was considered as a remedy to achieve those ends and, it was believed by non-Brahmins that it would reform the social inequalities perpetuated by Brahminical undoings. The broad spectrum of activities of Justice Party

truly reflects this politics of reform in early 20th century before independence. b) The other angle to non-Brahmin awareness was an intense drive at intra-caste reform. It is here the influence of Veeresalingam era was explicitly visible and, reveals how the non-Brahmin caste groups were increasingly concerned about those social maladies taken up by Veeresalingam in 19th century. The efforts at intra-caste reform were highly organised and serious in nature. They were successful in spreading the message of reform among caste members, both at urban and mofussil levels.

ii) the social reform endeavours were given a solid organisational shape and firm social footing. The vigorous growth of caste associations and their obsession with intra-caste reform are an evidence. All caste associations had women's education at the top of their agenda. The spread of education and establishment of separate educational funds enhanced the rate of activities in this regard. They condemned infant marriages, bride price, nautch system and dowry in unequivocal terms and, extended a cordial support to post-puberty and widow marriages.

iii) the growth of second line of alternate leadership in the reform campaign was a significant development in the present period. This democratic decentralisation of leadership vis-a-vis the earlier period when Veeresalingam was the main pivot, helped in further consolidation of reform drives. Leaders from different caste groups emerged on the social

scene and shouldered the responsibility of effecting a change in the mental make-up of people belonging to their respective castes. For instance, the activities of people like **Atmuri Lakshminarasimham** and **Darisi Chenchaiiah** (Vaisyas), **Gopalakrishna Yachendra** alias **Kumara Yachama Naidu (Velama)**, **Suryadevara Raghavaiah Choudari** and **Triupurneni Ramaswami Choudari (Kamma)**, **Chinta Raghunatha Reddy** and **C.R.Reddy (Reddy)**, **Dommeti Venkata Reddy (Setti Baija)** and **Kondiparthi Veerabhadracharyulu (Viswabrahmins)** symbolised the multi-dimensional aspect of reform leadership. The monolithic nature of reform leadership of Veeresalingam era had a smooth transition into the emergence of plural leadership in early 20th century. This was highly complementary in its role in consolidating the loose strings of reform in society.

- iv) the growth of women's movement, exclusive women's organisations and the intense struggle against all social evils confronting women folk is a significant development in our study period. The aspiration of Veeresalingam era viz., emancipation of women from bondage was more than justified in early 20th century. Some of these associations like **Vaisya Mahila Sabha** were affiliated to respective caste organisations. There were other women's associations like **Kakinada Women Student's Association**, **Kavitam Mahila Association** and, **Andhra Women's Association** which did not have any such affiliations. Rather they were organically linked to **All India Women's Association**. These bodies, supported by Women's journals, took up the cause of women and laid emphasis

on all issues like child and widow marriages, bride price, **nautch**, dowry and women's education. Some of the resolutions of these associations even demanded an equal status to women on par with male members. The prophetic reflection of Gurajada Appa Rao that modern woman would rewrite history has been truly symbolised by these activities of early women conferences . These bodies sowed the seeds for the emergence of feminism in modern Andhra.

An off-shoot of the awakening emanated from the social reform endeavours was the emergence of atheism in modern Andhra. The early social reform movements accorded a prime place to human element and questioned all the perverted religious observances. A few of social reformers like Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari introduced elements of rationalism into society. The Brahmo Samaj movement disapproved of idol worship and believed in congregational prayers. The critique of reason was not always limited to matters of religion. It embraced the secular domain as well. Social issues too were evaluated in light of reason and, not by religious sanctions. Though the twin principles of rationalism and humanism were products of reform awareness, social reform movements (either in 19th century or 20th century) did not question the validity of the existence of organised religion. This task was completed by atheism in Andhra. The founder of atheism, Cora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao), was instrumental in the spread of atheist ideas. The progress of atheist tendencies in Andhra was

<sup>5</sup>Gurajada is described as the first feminist of modern Andhra. Vide **K.V.Ramana Reddy**, *Veesalingam - Gurajaada.*, *op.cit.*

more noteworthy for its positive probings into society and religion without being blind opponents of religion. The progress of the atheist endeavours was more implicit in society and represented a silent revolution. The efforts of Cora in trying to introduce secular thinking in society were a landmark in the history of social reform endeavours in modern Andhra. He believed that organised religion does not always provide answers to all social problems and hence, one should look to secular alternatives in finding solutions for the same. For instance, untouchability and **casteism** are two such social maladies for which religion does not provide any remedy since they have been its own historical constructs. Gora's increased emphasis on these aspects and his endeavours in performing inter-caste and inter-religious marriages bring out this element. He was given to a belief that the status of women too would not undergo radical changes unless a secular social temper is equally imbibed by men as well as women. Material truths, social and secular outlook and, freedom of individual formed the main postulates of Gora's positive atheism. Though his movement was initiated just before the end of our study period, it was indeed an integral part of social reform drives of its immediate past and left a thorough-going influence on many liberal minds. Plagued by a thin social base and popular misconceptions about its supposed iconoclastic tendencies and anti-religious nature, the movement registered a very slow progress in the contemporary society. Confined to periodic seminars, indoor intellectual discourses and a low paced public activity, atheism is still alive in society and, more so, among its adherents.

No doubt, the reform endeavours in post-Veerasingam period in early 20th century suffered from a few shortcomings. The social base of reform movement, though exhibited a relative enlargement vis-a-vis earlier period, was still confined to educated members within the respective castes. The opposition of ignorant masses in juxtaposition with traditional elements hampered its speedy progress. This limited base invariably resulted in promotion of sectarian interests of a few sections while ignoring genuine social problems of other sections. For example, untouchability issue was rarely found on the agenda of social reform conferences during this period. Excepting in a few cases like Setti Balija social gatherings which freely allowed dalits to preside over them, the resilience and flexibility were generally absent on the agenda of others. The continuation of the present trend was to mar the vision of Justice Party too. The problem was aggravated by a weak rural base. Contemporary critics regretted that reform efforts of various organisations failed in reaching out to innumerable rural people and, in particular, women. The problem remained unattended during the active reform campaign in post-Veerasingam era. Political parties like Communist Party and Indian National Congress had to shoulder this responsibility, but with a different aim.

The activities of caste associations had certain adverse effects. Nevertheless, they provided a much larger scope for intra-caste reform activity and succeeded in generating a lot of awareness among their members. But, they never tried to build a

common platform to project issues of general social concern. Instead, they remained narrow social outfits propagating reform ideas within an exclusive orbit. The watertight compartmentation between these caste associations marred their vision in identifying caste as an issue for reform. Instead, the activities of different caste associations sowed the seeds of narrow casteist tendencies in the contemporary society, the remnants of which are seen even today. Unfortunately, these narrow tendencies influenced women's organisations too, some of which shut the doors of admission to female members belonging to Mala and Madiga castes (Panchamas). When the institution of caste had been a major social impediment from the ancient past, the reiteration of the same during active reform period and, deadly obsession with claims over equal status with Brahmins, again in caste terms, were responsible for undoing the enlightenment resulted from social reform efforts.

Even the more radical, rational and secular atheist movement failed in arresting the growth of casteist tendencies. Atheism, as such, represented the fructification of rationalist thought. Yet, it failed in making a dent into society on various accounts. At the material level, it had a very thin social base. Elements of rationalism were already entrenched in the minds of people consequent upon the efforts of people like Tripuraneni Ramaswami Choudari. As a result, the historical space available for atheism was narrow and limited. There was a psychological constraint too. The awareness generated from intense social reform endeavours was assimilated by Hindu religious structure. Time and

again, Hindu society repeated it and every time it did not lose its control over the minds of people. In the present instance, post-puberty and widow marriages were accepted. Opposition to child marriages, bride price and nautch problems was ratified. Women were allowed a greater access to education and social life. All these things had the support of all sections of society by the end of our study period. Having assimilated the reform awareness, Hindu religious observances retained their hold on the society. There was no psychological explanation for members belonging to Hindu religious fold why they should detest it in its present reformed form. Even radical thinkers and rationalists like Tripuraneni did not question the validity of the existence of religion. Given the present context, atheism with its areligious profundities failed in carving out a larger social space for its operations and activities. Added to this, the rise of communist party had a severe bearing on the growth of atheism. In principle, Marxian theory believes that religion is the opium of the people and never tried to encourage it. But, Marxian theoretical postulates have been mistaken by general public as atheist in nature. Though indifferent to organised religion, Communist Party was misconceived as more atheist in nature than Gora's atheist movement. The Communist Party thus, proved one of the hurdles to the free growth of atheist movement in Andhra.

The reform endeavours and atheist movement could not succeed in affecting a radical change in the minds of people with regard to issues like caste, dowry problem and untouchability. As already stated they failed in recognising caste as an issue for reform.

Instead, caste associations and, to some extent, a few women's organisations were responsible for the growth of narrow casteist tendencies. The Justice Party and its activities drew their major strength from caste affiliation. Foundations for a harmonious relation between caste and vote were fairly laid even before independence and the nexus is to continue still. Though problem of dowry was recognised as a major social impediment, it was not addressed at individual and family levels. The proclamations of caste associations, women's organisations and social conferences on the problem of dowry were proved to be only a lip service and hollow protestations. Even the Communist Party cut a miserable face and its adherents too were given to the habit of free exchange of dowry at domestic fronts. Left historians like **Kambhampati** Satyanarayana were much peeved over these anti-Left tendencies within the Communist Party and warned them against the problem of dowry. These exhortations to members of Communist Party had not positive reciprocation and the problem still persists in the entire society. The monetary aspects, rather than reform aspects of dowry have been more attractive to people and the problem has been evergreen. While caste is imposed from above as a political plank in view of its elective potential, the problem of dowry has been supported from below without exception of any caste in society. Social reform drives were not complete in their role in affecting a change. Caste in political terms and, dowry in social and monetary terms, became increasingly acceptable to people in general. Without a support from society, caste and dowry have become superficially attractive slogans for all social agitations during and after the present study period.

They have become elusive ideals and conceptual realities. The problem of untouchability increasingly became a concern of political parties and, social reformers of this period joined hands with political wings in addressing the problem. Social reform endeavours as such cut a sorry figure in registering an **impressive** result on this front.

The contributory role of reform endeavours in the **post-Veerasingam** period is noteworthy on a few accounts. The consistent efforts of reformers and various associations like caste and women's associations were responsible for the spread of reform ideas and rational thinking in society. Despite the fact that the growth of education in our study period was not encouraging the spread of these ideas was satisfactory. Thanks to the national freedom struggle which, in fact, prepared people to welcome positive ideas. People slowly became receptive to the ideas of reform, both social and political. Unlike in 19th century reform drives, the efforts of reformers with a plural leadership and relatively large outreach during the present study period collectively represented the first intellectual break in modern Andhra. The transition was facilitated by a free and mutually beneficial interplay between social reform and national movement. The liberation of individual from innumerable social and traditional bonds is a far reaching legacy of these efforts. At the material level many of the social evils vanished from the society and the credit goes to reform activities. Bride price was forgotten. Child marriages became a rarity. Almost all social groups shed their narrow sentiments regarding widow marriages.

While widow marriage was an individual concern in Veeresalingam era, it received organisational support during our study period. Various caste and women's associations favoured widow marriages. Institutional orientation to social reform was a new dimension during the period of our study. The problem of Devadasis (nautch girls) was effectively tackled and many Devadasi families joined the mainstream of social life. Liberation of women from domestic and social impositions was fairly visible in the society. The reform efforts were truly complementary in their role and completed the process that was initiated by Veeresalingam in late 19th century. The slow but significant growth of women's education and proliferation of exclusive women's journals and women's associations are our supportive evidences in this regard. Barring a few shortcomings, the reform endeavours in our study period left an unmistakable impression that the zeal for reform was not lost. The national movement overshadowed it, but did not devour the same. The reform activities and the awareness generated from it were, in fact, instrumental in creating the necessary political consciousness in contemporary society. The significance and importance of social reform endeavours never vanished. Rather, they amalgamated themselves with the mainstream of political manifestations where, they remained strong undercurrents of freedom struggle. That the mental make-up of modern Andhra, growth of social movements like feminism and rationalist thought heavily depended and drew their sustenance from the awareness and enlightenment created by these reform endeavours is a true legacy of their influence.

## GLOSSARY

Agrahara	Village granted to Brahmins by government for charitable or religious purposes, either rent free or at a favourable <b>assessment</b>
<b>Aksharabhyasamu</b>	initiation of the pupil into the process of learning
Dubashee	an interpreter
<b>Karnum</b>	Village accountant
<b>Manyam</b>	glebe-land granted by a ruler on quit rent or other favourable tenures
Mofussil	rural locality
Moturpha	tax on professions or trades
Patel	the headman of a village
Pattah Land	a grant or lease specifying the land occupied by a cultivator and the assessment due on it
Peshcush	revenue paid by Zamindars to government.
Poligar	a local chieftain : derived from the word " <b>Palem</b> " (Telugu) or " <b>Palayam</b> " (Tamil)
<b>Pooty/Putti</b>	an Indian measure of capacity equal to 20 tooms of grain ranging from 800 to 1000 seers
Pullery	grazing tax
Ryot	peasant
<b>Srotrium</b>	a village held at a favourable assessment; a glebe-land held by a man of learning in gift or a quit rent.
<b>Toom</b>	an Indian bushel equivalent to 15 English bushels.
<b>Zamindar</b>	a landlord

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