What is the nature of Telugu poetry during the colonial times?

During colonial times Telugu poetry mainly focused on social problems in India such as child marriage, dowry, child marriage, widow remarriage, women’s education, illiteracy, caste system, superstitions and more along with supressing colonialism. It was mainly focused on internal cleansing of the nation and social reforms rather than focusing on colonial oppression and independence. Major part of Telugu poetry focused on changing the country from within that is by changing ourselves than fighting with other countrymen and getting freedom. The anti-colonial Telugu poetry was having a minor part in poetry.

There are two kinds of anti-colonial Telugu poetry in colonial period. The first kind which resisted colonialism was inferior towards it and rather mainly focused on developing patriotism and fighting spirit but mostly not about suppression because of colonialisation. The second kind was the poetry which mainly focuses on the greatness of motherland, praising it and teaching why you should be grateful to be born in this country. This difference in Telugu poetry raised due to difference in language. Most of the Telugu poets in those times preferred to write in sanskritized Telugu or classical Telugu rather than colloquial (general/daily used) Telugu. Most of the poems which were written on anti-colonial or patriotism were in classical Telugu and was not able to reach masses because most of the people did not understand the meaning of the poem. Even though many poets adopted new literacy styles of romanticism, imagery, ballads and even the core ideology of nationalism these poems failed to reach majority of masses as there was lot of illiteracy in those times and most of the women were not allowed to study sanskritized Telugu. This problem was addressed by 1940s, literary figures, such as Gudipati Venkatachalam or Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, by introducing the importance and relevance of writing in colloquial Telugu than classical Telugu. They argued that the regular version of language had more benefits and impact on people and reached majority of them where as classical Telugu was incomprehensible to most of the people. Poets may get name and fame of their works but people, country will not change.

**Poets and their poetry in colonial times:**

Many poets wrote their poems in one of the two kinds mentioned above. Example of the first kind is like “Maakoddu ee thella dorathanamu” by Garimella Satyanarayana which supressed colonialism with its words and even equated it with white racism. It tells how people suffered without food and how taxes took everything from people he emphasises the situation by saying people are fighting with dogs for food because of colonialism. He addresses the problem introducing of wine and beer in India due to which they are making money and people are dying. He complained about section 144 which supresses people not to discuss anything about freedom fighting and songs of freedom through his poem. He even addressed on unnecessary fights and killings started by British like jaliyanwala bagh. He does not and want to be shackled by British and supresses their one-sided ruling. Garimella Satyanarayana also wrote poems like “Dandalu Bharathamatha” which was of second kind focusing on importance of India. He wrote in colloquial Telugu which helped people to understand they are being used and exploited and rise their voice against colonialism he even went to jail many times due to his writings and poems.

Example of second kind is like “Maa Telugu Thalliki malle poo danda” by Sankarambadi Sundaracharya which focused on praising mother and motherland of Telugu people. In his poem he focuses on landscape and monuments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana like praising Godavari river Krishna river, Amaravati statues. Thyagaraju voice and Thikkaya’s writings were complimented. Other great things on Telugu land like Mallama’s devotion towards her husband, Rudhramadevi’s power, Krishnadevaraya’s greatness his minister Timmarusa intelligence and were mentioned in this poem and by including all these historical events he emphasises Telugu Thalli’s greatness (Mother of Telugu People).

Rayaprolu Subbarao wrote famous poem of second kind “Ee Desemegina” which has a line like “Whichever country you may go; wherever you may tread; praise your mother land, Bharati; maintain the pride of your nation.” He also wrote a poem “Amaravathi” where he glorifies the culture heritage of Telugus by pointing our historical remnants of Indian legacy, such as praising generosity of kings, maintenance of educational institutes, flourishing trades and so on. Another poem by Rayaprolu “Srilu pongina jeeva gadda” (This is the land where riches just overflew) praises the Vedic culture and heritage. As we can see most of his poems were mainly focused on praising the history of our country and having patriotism and love towards your country and his poem emphasises never to forget the greatness of India.

Gurajada Apparao another patriotic poet wrote songs praising India and telling to love the country you are born in. His main aim is cleansing and eradicating social evils such as child marriage, dowry, widow immolation, illiteracy, superstitions and so on. One of his poem “Deshamunu Preminchumanna” has a line which tells “Love your country; strive for goodness; stop unnecessary blabber; aim for a greater welfare; nation means people not just mud (land)”. Some of his other literacy works like “Puthadibomma Purnamma,” were on the evil practice of marrying small girl children with old men for money. He addresses this problem through a story in this poem where Purnamma a little girl who got married to old man in her childhood and how she suffered in her life. Gurajada Apparao’s literature works are mainly addressing problems in the society which existed even before colonialism it was rather less focused on anti-colonialism. Kandukuri Veeresalingam Panthulu, another great reformer, focused most of his life on erasing illiteracy, the devadasi system, child marriage, and so on

Nanduri Subbarao and Krishna Sastry were great literacy figures during colonial times were romanticist poets who wrote mostly on themes of love, nature, and beauty. Viswanatha Satyanarayana wrote the poems such as “Andhra Pourusham” and “Andhra Prasasthi” where he glorified the valour and fame of Telugus (in the history). He also wrote a poem titled “Jhansi Rani,” which faintly involved the themes of anti-colonialism and patriotism by Jhansi Rani fighting towards British oppression. But most of the literary works of Viswanatha Sathyanarayana were based on religion.

**Example of Telugu Poem in Colonial period:**

**Poem:**

Bharathiya Veerulam (We are Indian Warriors) by Daasaradhi

Bharathiya veerulam – Bharathamatha biddalam

Mathrudesha gauravam – kapade dheerulam

Shanthi korupapalam – Samathi penchubalalam

Memu bhavipaurulam – Thyaganadhula varasulam

Veshabashalevaina – mathacharamedaina

Manam bharahteyulam – Okethalli pillalam

Prapanchana manadesham – Prathibha nillabetudam

Jathisvecha sapaharichu – Shathruvuni edirinchu

Vijayamsadnichutham – Jayapathakani egiredam

Himashaiyla kiritayi – Samudhra padapeetayi

Ganga Yamuna Godavari – Krishnaveni sahithayi

Villasele bharathamatha – Manathalliki joharu

Bharathiya veerulam – Bharathamatha biddalam

Bharathiya veerulam – Bharathamatha biddalam

**Nature and Meaning of the poem:**

The above poem is mainly of second kind with some first kind characters. It is written in colloquial Telugu and easily readable and understandable. People can sing the poem to gain confidence and feeling of equality. It emphasises mainly on equality and patriotism and some on anti-colonialism. The above poem is inferior towards colonialism and rather tells us to be proud being an Indian. It tells we should protect the pride of our nation indirectly telling to fight British. In the next line it tells we want peace and every one in the country is an ally and we need to be one. We are the future and we should remember the sacrifices in the past. Though our dressing and language might be different we are Indians children of our motherland. We should forget about all the differences we had and fight our enemy. We will win and hoist our flag. Our Himalayas, seas, rivers we should feel the power of nature and fight against colonialism. Praise the nation praise the country. We are the warriors and children of our country.

This poem by Dasaradhi does not emphasise more on anti – colonialism but indirectly gives patriotic feeling towards the country and the confidence to fight with the Shatru (enemy). He does not say more about how we are being supressed and exploited but his poem says to fight as one. He tells even though there are different people with different social status, language, tradition we Indians are all fighters, children of our Mother India and we need to protect the resources and pride of our country.