



# **CHAPTER – IV**

## **K.Veeresalingam – Social and Political Ideas**



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### K.VEERESALINGAM - SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

The first glimmerings of the modern Indian renaissance can be traced back to the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But the new spirit gathered strength and momentum only in the first half of the next. Bengal was its pioneer. Under the powerful impact of western education and culture, it was the first Indian province to break away from the shackles of the dead past. With a freedom of mind reminiscent of the upanishadic age and the early period of Buddhism, the intellectuals of Bengal Questioned every dogma, examined every belief, probed every custom and tradition. Boldly rejecting everything irrational, retrograde and decadent in the national heritage, they welcomed from the western world whatever, they found to be rational scientific, liberal and progressive. In their zeal, some of them did, no doubt, indulge in such excesses as drinking bouts and the throwing of beef into the homes of orthodox Hindus. In spite of their stray aberrations, they were the heralds of a new dawn.<sup>1</sup>

The modern Ranaissance took a pretty longtime to travel from Bengal to Andhra Pradesh. But once it arrived there in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it found a doughty champion in Kandukuri Veeresalingam. To make up for lost time, he had to take up not only the work of Raja Rammohan Roy but that of other great religious reformers like Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen and Shivanath Sastri. He had to labour in the allied fields of social and education reforms for carrying forward the work of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Though unacquainted with the role of Rammohan Roy and Vidya Sagar in evolving a new Bengali prose,

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1. Veeresalingam, V.R Nirla, Sahitya Akadeniji, New Delhi 1955, Page.9



he had to be the creator of a new Telugu prose to put across new ideas. Again, independently of the influence of Bankimchandra chatterji, he had to pioneer new writing in Telugu. These were super – human tasks but he did not quail before them. Being (in the works of sir Raghupathi Venkataratnam) ‘a host in one’, he took them all in his stride. And at the end, he left the impress of his powerful personality on the life of the people amidst whom he had been born. He shook them out of their mediaeval stupor; he whipped them out of their ignorance; he purged them of many of their superstitions; and he gave an altogether modern, Progressive and humanistic turn to their life and thought. As Rajaji has Said;

Andhra Desh and Andhra People could not be what they are if Veeresalingam had not arrived to vitalize them. He was one of the great men of India, of keen insight, great courage and dynamic energy. He fought against untruth and championed the cause of progress with Herculean vigour.<sup>2</sup>

By training and temperament, Veeresalingam was a man of letters. But by confining himself to his literary work alone, he would not have achieved even a fraction of the mighty transformation which he wrought in his lifetime. He was fully aware of the powerful influence for good which the right kind of literature could exert; otherwise he would not have devoted so big a chunk of his life to writing it. But he felt that his times needed a man of action no less urgently than a man of letters. “Mere publication of books is of no use”, he told himself in his Diary; ‘what is more important and essential is the courage and readiness to put into effect what we believe



to be true. Courage in carrying out religious and social reform and readiness to suffer for the cause in which he had abounding faith- these were, indeed, his outstanding characteristics: No expediency for him, nor any compromise relentlessly, he must march forward brushing aside all opposition.<sup>3</sup>

Two more instances of his consistency and perseverance can be cited here. Discouraged by the apathy of his erstwhile supporters and the bitterness of his opponents, Vidya sagar, long before his death in 1891, lost interest in getting widows remarried, a reform which he himself had originated. Veeresalingam too, had to face growing apathy as well as opposition; yet he fought resolutely till the very end of his days for the rescue of the hapless child – widows. Again, he proved himself, at least on one occasion, more courageous than Ranade. Faced with the threat of excommunication for attending a tea party given by Christian Missionaries, Ranade went through the ritual of expiation (Prayaschitta). In sharp contrast to this, Veeresalingam flung back in the face of the sankaracharya of the Virupaksha pitha the fiat of excommunication which he had issued.<sup>4</sup>

About Veeresalingam, Narla says. "It is far from my intention to claim on behalf of Veeresalingam that he was a greater man than Rammohun, debendranath, Vidyasagar, or Ranade. He would have himself hotly repudiated such a claim. Indeed, he considered himself a humble follower of these stalwarts. Though of a somewhat lesser stature, both in intellect and originality, than his great masters, he was uniformly more consistent, and he showed, at all times and in every situation, greater courage of conviction".<sup>5</sup>

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3 Ibid. P.10-11

4 Ibid P 11

5 Ibid P 11



For over half a century he bestrode the south Indian scene like a colossus and dominated its public life. And yet he hardly getting his due in the histories of his times. In his book *A century of social reform in India* by S. Natarajan mentions him only twice, and that too in passing. Another recent book, *Indian nationalism and Hindu social Reform* by charless H. Heimsath, devotes just one sentence to him. Even histories of modern Indian literature have not done him adequate justice.<sup>6</sup>

Veeresalingam was born at Rajahmundry – to put it more correctly, at Rajamahendravaram – on April 16, 1848. His father, Subbarayudu, was a poor Brahmin of the Saivite sect. His mother was Punnamma. Like the rest of the womenfolk of her times, she was illiterate. Most of her life, she was in the cruel grip of sickness and superstition. Her only son, Veeresalingam, inherited her sickness, though not her fear of ghosts, goblins and other phantoms. From birth he was dyspeptic. He was subject to severe colds and fits of sneezing. The asthma which soured his life started in his infancy. When six months old, he was stricken with smallpox. So virulent was its attack that this parents almost despaired of his survival. Roughly, up to 1870 there was hardly a year when he did not suffer from some serious illness or other. Thrice during this period he nearly drowned. It was, indeed, a miracle that he pulled through it all.<sup>7</sup>

Subbarayudu was poor when Veeresalingam arrived. But he had known better days according to the standards of the times. His forbears were very rich. Some of them served as *Diwans* of zamindars. They were men of culture and generous patrons of arts and letters. Their indiscriminate charities reduced subbarayudu and his elderbrother venkataratnam to penury Subbrayudu got a clerks job in government.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid P 12  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid P 11



When serving there he died prematurely after a brief illness. This heavy blow fell on the family when Veeresalingam was in his fourth year.

Veeresalingam finished his elementary schooling and joined as an apprentice to a clerk in revenue office for a year or two. During his spare time he began to learn English and Arithmetic from his uncle and Sanskrit from a friend of the family.

Later he was sent to school for his education. Veeresalingam used to be top in his class and used to get many prizes. He used to read classics and try to purchase some rare volumes. He married Rajyalakshmi (original name was Bapamma) in the year 1861. He was 13 and his bride was 9 years old. He passed matriculation in the year 1870. Due to his illness he could not complete it in the year 1868. He used to teach Telugu to Foreigners. One Mr. Barrow appointed Veeresalingam as an assistant teacher on a monthly salary of rupees 25/-. In 1871 he sat for and passed the criminal higher grade examination. He also passed translation (lower grade) and precis writing. The low ethical standards that were tarnishing the fair name of the bar and the Bench. Made him stick to the teaching profession.

In 1872 he was appointed as a headmaster of the English school at Korangi. On salary of rupees 30/- per month. Two years later he became head master of the Anglo-vernacular school at Dhavaleswaram on a monthly pay of Rupees 44/- after two years he resigned the job and returned to Rajahmundry. He wanted to be free for public work. But on the advise of his friends and well wishers. He joined in the local government arts college as second Telugu pandit on a lesser salary of rupees 25/-. He had made various experiments in the form of literary writing in the beginning he gave importance to write in classical style. Though he continued his writings in the classical style he began to question himself : what is the purpose of language ? It did not take him long to find an



communication of ideas. The simpler and more lucid the language employed, the more effective is the communication of ideas.

If one is asked to give a definite date for the birth of modern writing in Telugu, one need have no hesitation in stating it was born on the day Veeresalingam posed a question to himself about the purpose of language.

Having come to see the futility of the archaic and artificial prose which he was writing till then, he discarded it totally and proceeded to create a new one. As in the case of every pioneer, his path was beset with many pitfalls. He had to achieve a clean break with the past without doing violence to the genius of the language of its idiom, to his lasting credit, he largely succeeded in the difficult task. Which he thus set himself.

Inspired by his friends and admirers, he started a girls school in September 1874. It was probably the first institution of its kind in Andhra, Until then the only girls' schools were schools for teaching music and dance and other seductive arts useful for the dancing girls.

Around 1881 Veeresalingam helped to found at Rajahmundry another institution for women education. About this time he launched his *Satihitabodhini*, a monthly journal, exclusively devoted to the service of women. Though it ran for three years only - it made history.

With the characteristic consistency he personally educated his wife. Who was illiterate at the time of marriage. He taught her so diligently and thoroughly that she could assist him as a teacher for the widows in the hostles, started by them. Veeresalingam started different types of schools for girls and also helped many to join in a teacher training schools and colleges, so that they can help in promoting women education.



In the year 1878, September 8, he started social reform association, and on that day social reform in the South took a big leaf forward.

Veeresalingam performed the first widow-remarriage on December, 11, 1881 in his house. He faced stubborn opposition from the conservatives. By 1892 he has performed 29 marriages.

During his stay in madras he performed some more marriages. He assumed the leadership of south Indian Brahmo Samaj and of the south Indian social reform association. On the insistence of Ranade, he presided over the Indian social reform congress, held along with the annual session of the Indian national congress at Madras in 1898. four years later, he was the president of the Madras social reform conference which met at Kakinada. In the following year, he was elected president of the Indian national theistic conference held at Madras. He had presided over many other social reform and theistic conferences and was to preside over more of them.

Veeresalingam had nothing much to complain against Madras; except that his social reform activities were not flourishing as vigorously as at Rajahmundry. His hands were otherwise full, and he was much respected.

Veeresalingam returned to Rajahmundry in the year 1905. With in few months of his return. He started a new girls school, a new weakly, a new widows home a rescue home, and an orphanage. For the continuation of the work after he was gone, he founded the *Hitakarini Samajan* on December 12, 1906 with 36 members and endowed with all his properties, cash on hand, his copywrite, his library etc.... Every bit of hit had been earned with the sweat of his brow; never in his life had he accepted for his own use any monetary help or even a costly present; he had firmly turned down the offers of large money gifts from the maharajas of vijayanagaram and Pithapuram.





In the year 1910 on August 11. his wife died in her sleep. After the death of his wife Veeresalingam was never his oldself again. 'He lost his buoyancy, his fighting sprit, his very just for life. He survived her by about 9 years and they were years of pain, sorrow and frustation for him. The death in 1909 of one of his closest associates Desiraju Peda Bapayya, Gavar Raju, greatly added to his loneliness of spirit.

As befitting a life long worker, Veeresalingam died in harness 'his pen in his hand, he was spending the summer months of 1919 in Madras as the guest of K.V. Lakshmana Rao. The founder of *Vijnanachandrika grandha mandali* on may, 27, He passed away completing his biography. He dictated his parting message. It ran "I am departing before completing many of the tasks which, I have undertaken during my life-time. I hope and trust that my friends and comrades and the lovers of reform would carry forward my unfinished work. The mass of our people are weighed down under ignorance and superstition and are devoid of all the better things of life. It is your duty to give them education and enlightenment, culture and freedom, equality and justice. I beg of you, I beseech you, to do your best for our dumb millions<sup>8</sup>."

With his last breath he finished his last message. On that dark day an epic life came to a close, and India lost one of her brave, noble and great sons.

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8. Veeresalingam, V.R. Narla (1968) published by Sahitya Akademi and printed at prominent printers, Delhi page, 76.



### **Veeresalingam Social and Political Ideas:**

Reform movements in Andhra, during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were associated with the name of Kandukuri Veersalingam (1848-1919). He indicated and led these movements providing them with the necessary ideological content and organization form. He was a pioneer of public life in Andhra as one who both inaugurated a new era in Telugu literature and strengthened the recent but inchoate elements of social reform so as to give them the force of a movement<sup>9</sup>.

Veeresalingam had undergone a great transformation before he undertook various reform activities. An analysis of this change as well as a discussion of his ideas would help us in appreciating the account of reform movements which we propose to present in the subsequent chapters.

Veeresalingam's ancestors were employed as Dewans and Deshpandeyas – revenue officials – under Muslim rule. Some of them were even estate holders. Veersalingam's grandfather was a Dewan under the local estate holders of the Godavari district and was known for his philanthropy and liberal patronage of poets and scholars. His grand father, during the last stages of his life went without a job and spent much of his saving on the marriage of his eldest son, and by the time of his death, the family had just enough to maintain itself.

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9. Veerasalingam has been described by several scholars as the one who "Changed the current life in Andhra, with no predecessor in his line and no successor of equal stature". Ishwara Dutt, "Pioneer of modernism in Andhra", Swatantra, April 17, 1948. The idea that he was the creator of modern movements in Andhra-Social and literary – has been the unanimous theme of a number of Telugu scholars. For example, C.R.Reddy, "Veerasalingam Pantulu Garu" Andhrapatrika (Telugu daily), June 21, 1919; Arudra, "Gadya Tikkana, Samgha samskartha Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu", Vikasalahari (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1974. See also Andhrapatrika, annual number 1919, P.52. This estimates of veerasalingam, however, sounds hagiographic and uncritical. There were stray but strong trends of ideas of social reform in Andhra prior to the emergence of veerasalingam. Also there were predecessors to veerasalingam who new forms into the Telugu literature. Never the less, the uniqueness of veerasalingam lay in consolidating these trends to develop them into movements.



His father and uncle were, according to Veeresalingam, well versed in Telugu and had a working knowledge of English too. His father was employed for some time in the office of the District Collector and then joined the service of the Rajah of pithapur. Even though his ancestors were fanatical saivaites (lingayats), his great grandfather married a girl of vaishnavaites sect (among the smartha Niyogis) and gave up the lingayat caste symbol. This reform trend, though appearing insignificant, was claimed by Veeresalingam as having influenced him even as a boy<sup>10</sup>

Veeresalingam was educated in the traditional *pial* school system. He learnt elementary arithmetic, read conventional Telugu books like *satakas* and acquired a preliminary knowledge of Sanskrit<sup>11</sup>. As there did not exist examination-oriented schools. He was asked to learn and work in the local Government Revenue office to Qualify for a job. During this period he was introduced to the rudiments of English by his uncle. After 1858 the certificate-awarding schools were started and veerasalingam was sent to the Government District school at Rajahmundry (in 1860) where he studied for the college entrance course and successfully finished it in 1870, qualifying himself for admission into the first year of the college course. As the first year college course was abolished in Rajahmundry in 1870, he could not pursue his studies further and joined the Rajahmundry government District school as an assistant teacher in 1871<sup>12</sup>.

10. Veerasalingam, Sweeya, P.I.P.7

11. Sataka is the composition of one hundred verse (some times as little more or less) instructing people mainly in morals and good behaviour. In Telugu there are many satakas among which Vemana and Sumati are highly popular even to this day.

12. As a student of the government school, besides acquiring a good knowledge of Telugu literature, veerasalingam studied English, History, Geography and science. One does not know for certain what books he read in English. However, the course content of the middle schools of that period (up to the 18<sup>th</sup> standard) included Bradshaw's English Reader – V, Mannual's English gramemr, Lethbridges's History of India, Collier's History of England, Geography manual and Mathmetics Comprising arithmetic, algebra and geometry. C. Lakshminarasimham, Sweeyacharithamu (autobiography in Telugu), Bezwada, 1944, P.35.



Veeresalingam was born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family. He had immense faith in the validity of the Vedic Manthras. He wrote two satakas in Telugu during his early literary career which clearly reflected his orthodoxy. He addressed them to the presiding deities of two temples in Rajahmundry<sup>13</sup>.

### **Formative Influences:-**

In an attempt to evaluate the influences on Veeresalingam, who led an orthodox life earlier, it becomes necessary to consider the spirit of the time and the ideals of Social Justice which made him devote his attention to the eradication of Social evils. We have no evidence to show whether any personnel or emotional factors contributed to change in him. With regard to the influences of the Brahmo movement in Bengal and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay, two mutually, opposite views have been expressed<sup>14</sup>.

Veeresalingam's rational mind was beginning to doubt and question the superstitions and retrograde customs in society. He said that he was not prepared to be blindly led by any established faith or heresy and wanted to go in to the truth of the matter. He associated that if he is convinced of a thing he would pursue sincerely. At this state of life when his faith in traditional customs and beliefs was tottering we learn from his autobiography that he borrowed from one of his friends a volume of the collected speeches of Kesav Chandrasen. "After reading his speeches my faith

13. Veeresalingam, though a Saivite by birth, sang the praises of Vishnu (in the of strong rivalry between the two denominations of saivaites and vaishnavaites) in one of his satakas for which he claimed credit for his liberality of outlook. (Veeresalingam sweeya, Pt I. P57.)

14. A. Ramapati Rao stated that Veeresalingam was influenced by the Brahmo reformers of Bengal through the prevailing social conditions had a deep impact on him. See introduction in A. Ramapati Rao, ed. Kandukuri Veeresalingam Diaries and letters (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1970. A similar view was expressed by his earliest biographer T. Venkata Subba Rao, Sri Kandukuri Veeresalinga Kavi Charitramu (Telugu), Rajahmundry, 1894, P.41. An opinion contrary to this has been expressed by Venkatarangaiah in an article written in the souvenir *Yugapurushudu, Veeresalingam* (hereafter *yugapurushudu*). Hyderabad. n.d., P.33. He states that Veeresalingam was influenced neither by Benagl nor Maharashtra reforms and the interest in reform was his own. See also in this context, D. Anjaneyulu, *Kandukuri Veeresalingam*, New Delhi, 1976. P.24.



incertain established truth was shaken”<sup>15</sup>.

The arrival of Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, a teacher and a Brahmo by faith, to the District school in Rajahmundry strengthened his changing convictions towards reform. Under his influence Veeresalingam and a few of his co-students formed themselves into a society to discuss social issues once a week<sup>16</sup>.

Rajahmundry as we have observed earlier had among its population, elements of enlightenment<sup>17</sup>. It might be due to the progress made in the economic sphere after the construction of the godavari anicut or the early establishment of the government school and college, the Judicial and revenue establishments and the activities of the missionaries.

Though the spirit of reform did not effect all sections of the educated community equally, it did create at least among some of them, a general recognition of the existing social events and need for an analysis of the Indian socio religious conditions. On the influence of western ideas among his fellowmen, Veeresalingam wrote “It is admitted by one and all that Western lore has worked wonders among the natives of India we are quite aware that English education has rendered natives more refined in their manners has dispelled the mist of superstition from the minds of several of them, if not many and has considerably developed their moral caliber”

15. Keshubchandra Sen visited Madras in 1864 and delivered a few lectures. This created a stir in the public not only of Madras but of certain mofussil towns as well. This visit coincided with the beginnings of Brahmo movement in the Madras presidency. See Keshubchandra Sen, Diary in Madras and Bombay, 9<sup>th</sup> February to 8<sup>th</sup> April 1864, Calcutta, 1887, cited in J.G.Leonard, “Kandukuri veeresalingm, 1848-1919, a Biography of an Indian Social Reformer”, Doctoral thesis, university of Wisconsin, 1970, P.64.

16. The influence of Brahmas from Bengal, and in Particular Keshub Chandra sen, Veeresalingam has been pointed out by D.V.Siva Rao. In his article “Sri Veeresalingam.” In Andhra Prabha (Telugu Daily) November 17.1968.

17. Veeresalingam’s personal library which constitutes a major part of the present Rajahmundry Town Hall library. His collection consists of both english and Telugu books among which mention may be made of encyclopaedias, literary histories and histories of different nations. Standard books on Brahma Samaj are also found in good number. We find in these books the pencil markings and marginal writings of Veeresalingam. What remains to day is only a part of his huge library, which unfortunately, his correspondence (with mahadev govind Ranade, Ishwarachandara vidyasagar, pandit sivanatha sastry, Babu Hemachandhra sarkar and other) was lost to posterity. Whatever remained mostly in an unconnected and fragmented form, of his diaries and letters, has been collected and edited by A. Ramapati Rao.



whenever it is properly imparted"<sup>18</sup>.

In 1874 Veeresalingam started a Journal, *Vivekavardhani*. It is a land mark in the life of Veeresalingam in this Journal he used to criticize the orthodox sections, over women's education. Thus one can observe the growth of intellectual conviction in him and the dedication to the cause of eradication of social evils. It was only in the year 1878. Veeresalingam emerged as an active and committed social reformer when he started the social reform association in Rajahmundry and took up the cause of widow-remarriages, and other social activities.

### Starting of Vivekavardhini:-

*Vivekavardhini* was a monthly in the beginning. In 1876 it became a Fortnightly and later a weekly<sup>19</sup>. It was not the first Journal in Telugu prior to that there were *vrittanti* (1838), *Followed by Vartamana Tarangini* (1842), *Hitavadi* (1862), *Sri Yakshini* (1863) *Tatwa bodini* (1864), *Sujanaranjani* (1864), *Andhra Bhasha Sanjivini* (1871), *Purusharthapradayini* (1872). See Bangorey's article. "*Nellore Patrikala Charita*" (Telugu) in *Vikrama simhapuri mandala sarwaswamu* (Nellore, 1963);

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18. Susobhan Sarkar quoted Rabindranath Tagore who held a similar view with regard to the "magic touch of western culture that roused Bengal from its torpor, and stated that though the Bengal reformers like Rammohan and Vidyasagar were fond of quoting Hindu scriptures in defence of their reforms their "Obvious original model was western liberalism". See susobhan sarkar (General president's address, muzafferpur, 1972) *Indian History Congress, Proceedings of the Thirty-Third session*. New Delhi, 1973, P.13. However, Veeresalingam grew in his views on the influence of education (including English education) in general on men's minds motivating them towards reform: he stated, "you often hear it is stated that education is the best remedy for the evils from which our society is suffering. If by education you mean that which is imparted in your schools and colleges, this statement does not express the whole truth .... for, we know the majority of our educated men are as backward in espousing the cause of social reform in practice as their uneducated countrymen.... A friend was telling me.... That education, while it makes good men better, makes bad man worse. This program..... must.... be accepted with a good deal of reservation; but observation will show you that literary education is often double edged weapon.... this education. must be supplemented first, by a familiarity with the ideas of reform, and secondly, by the influence of personal example". See the presidential address of Veeresalingam delivered on the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Indian social conference held at madras in 1898, published in C.Y.Chintamani, ed, *Indian social Reform, Madras, 1901*, PP.204-5. Veeresalingam by 1898, might have experienced apathy, if not non-cooperation, from a number of educated people in his reform activity which prompted him to adopt this view.
19. He first issue was published from Dowaleswaram, and until a press was acquired, it was printed at Madras. Besides *vivekavardhini*, Veeresalingam published a few other journals in Telugu, namely *Hasyasanjivini* (1876), *Sathihitabodhini* (1883), *Chintamani* (1891). *Satyasamavardhani* (1891), *Chintamani* (1904) and *Satyavadini* (1905)



But it was the first Journal devoted to social regeneration. In way it was a one man show. Veeresalingam was its life and soul-editor, printer, publisher, proof reader all rolled in to one. He conducted this Journal single handedly and the promised help never came from his friends and well wishers. The journal had as its motto, a verse taken from the Telugu Mahabharata, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you". The two main aims of the Journal were, (1) to increase the moral tone of the people and thus work towards social progress, and (2) Improvement of the Telugu language.

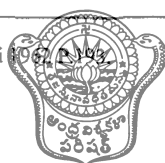
Veeresalingam made it an effective weapon reflecting public opinion against growing corruption and immorality in the administration. He attacked official highhandedness as well as prostitution and concubinage prevailing in society. Soon it (Vivekavardhani) became a guardian angel of the public and the terror of venal officialdom in and around Rajahmundry and a centre of Veeresalingam's reform activities. Thus he earned high praise as the first Journalist in Andhra who used Journal as the effective media of disseminating the ideas of reform and modernism<sup>20</sup>.

### **Attitude to Literature:-**

By 1874 the evolution of Veeresalingam's ideas on life from that of orthodoxy to non-conformism led to a corresponding shift in his attitude to literature also. Veeresalingam was naturally an heir to the ways of writing which were in vogue by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They can all be characterized as forming part of *Panditha Sampradaya*, or the scholarly tradition in language and literature, and they were intertwined with the predominant form of social organization which was decadent feudalism.

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20. S.Natarajan History of the press in India New Delhi



After the down fall of the Vijayanagara empire, subsequent to the military defeat in the Battle of *Rakkastangadi* in the year 1565, there cropped up a large number of small kingdoms and chieftaincies all over the Andhra Country and the Tamil Country. They were all supported by a motley crowd of poligars who, in their turn, were propped up by armed retainers. The fragmentation of the political authority was coupled with social disorder. The decline in the classical literary values reflected this social phenomenon<sup>21</sup>.

The *prabandic* gear of the days of Vijayanagar was now inflated in terms of numbers and deflated in terms of quality, producing what are known as *Kshudra* or debased *prabandhams*. They gave undue importance to the meaner variety of *Sringararasa* with emphasis on the details of coitus and sexual satisfaction known as *parakiya sringara*. Whole poems were composed to give two to four different meanings to the same terms employed by the poet. Still greater poetic feats were performed in the name of *Chitra Kavitha* and *Bandha Kavitha*.

A writer of the southern school of Telugu, Samukham venkatakrishnapa Nayakudu of Madura, had produced *Jaimini Bharatham* in a stilted, pedantic and rhythmic prose early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This style was far removed from the language current in the Andhra Country. It, however, fitted in with the scholarly school of literature and at the same time ignored or looked down upon the more popular and intelligible style of prose writing, employed by commoners as well as scholars in their day-to day intercourse, in letter writing, court documents and even in learned commentaries on kavyas. Charles Philip Brown made a conscious attempt early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the aid and guidance of his Telugu Pandits, such as

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21. V. Ramakrishna – Social reform in Andhra, New Delhi, 1981, p. 69-70





Vathyam Advaita Brahmasastry, to revive this useful style of prose writing and to give literary currency.

But Paravastu Chinnaya Suri thwarted Brown's labours by reviving the scholarly style of prose writing known as *Grandhika*, with his prose work of *Panchatantra*. As the Andhra scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were naturally partial to this more respectable style. Veerasalingam's first essays in prose writing were cast in its mould and, in fact, they went one better, as for example, in his *sandhi* and *vigrahamu*<sup>22</sup>. Similarly his early verses were also of the same scholarly stamp as in *Suddhandhara Nirryoshthya Nirvachana Naishadhamu*<sup>23</sup>. It was not until he put his shoulder to social reform that he first realized the utter uselessness of this style, both in poetry and prose, and especially in the latter. He deliberately sought to make a break with the old ways of prose writing with an eye on social reform.

Veeresaligam, the old-fashioned scholar, was withdrawing into the background and Veeresalingam, the man with a purpose was emerging. He believed that if the main purpose of language was to communicate ideas and to be an effective instrument of communication of ideas the language should be simpler and more lucid. In this context he wrote, "What is a language for? For men to communicate their ideas to one another. What are books in a language for? To pass on their ideas to those who are removed both in time and in space. Can such a thing be accomplished by books such as *vigrahamu*? No, it does not. Common readers have to have recourse to dictionaries and scholars in order to get at the meaning of words and sentences..... So how should books be? They should be intelligible to all. Thinking thus I decided to write books. Unlike *Vigrahamu*, in an easy style and gave expression to this idea in the press.

22. See for the full texts of Sandhi and Vigrahamu, Veerasalingam col. Works vol 9. Rajahmundry 1937.

23. Veeresalingam Sweeya pt.1.P.63



Further he said “He continued”, even though it has been my opinion that books should normally be written in *salakshana*, easy style, it is also my opinion that they may be written also in the style in accordance with their varying content. I thought of preparing a new grammar and a prose work in accordance with it, to suit the times and the growth in prose writing because I think that all old grammars has been composed solely for versification at a time when there were no prose works and, therefore many of the requirements of old grammar are not suited to the development of prose literature and hence the need for a change in grammar”<sup>24</sup>.

Veeresalingam wanted to make the language simple so that his ideas on social reform can be understood by the common people. This decision was indeed, a turning point not only in Veeresalingam’s life but also in Telugu literature, as well as in the social reform movement in Andhra. His social reform and his literary works were not too exclusively different aspects of his achievement. They were really complimentary to each other.

### **Telugu prose:-**

After having realised the futility of the earlier prose as a means of communication, Veeresalingam discarded it and evolved a new prose that was clear and simple and not beyond the understanding of the non pandit<sup>25</sup>. With the same end of propagating his ideas on social reform, Veeresalingam pioneered in adopting new literary genres such as a novel, the farce or *Prahasanam* and the play, both from English and Sanskrit<sup>26</sup>.

24. Autobiography of Veeresalingam sweeya PT II P.124-125.

25. Veeresalingam was never excused for his deviation from the old style and as it was in the field of social reform. He had to face strong opposition in literary sphere too. See for example V.R.Narla, Traditional Indian Culture and other eassyas, Vijayawada, 1969, PP. 10-103; G.V.Ramamurthy Andhra andita Bhishkkula Bhasha Bheshajamu (Telgu), (Gunturu, 1933), PP.3-4.

26. Veeresalingam was not the first novelist for he was preceded by Narahari gopalakrishnamma chetty who wrote Sri Ramgaraja Charitramu in 1872. In the field of essay, his predecessor was, samineni moothoo Narasimma Naidu (Satihit Soochnee). However, Veeresalingam greatness lay in the fact that he look up these infant – like genres into his lap and nourished them to establish them finally in the field of letters.



As C.R.Reddy has said in literature he commenced by writing prabhandas, bristling with *Slesha*,<sup>27</sup> *Citrakavitha* and the entire gamut of ugly artificialities and ended as the creator of the Telugu novel, The Telugu social satire, the Telugu drama, especially of the social type, and of science and scientific biography in Telugu. But he stopped half way in this regard as best relaxing some of the rules of the sandhi and reducing the number of sanskritic compounds from his new prose which he names *sulabha* or intelligible prose. He did not extend his language reform to its logical end. The more ardent and logical reformers of style such as G.V.Ramamurthy and G.V.Apparao found fault with his prose style for its inadequacies. And they failed to win him over to their side until his last days in 1919. When he consented to head the *Vartamana Andhra Bhasha Pravartaka Samajam* or the association for promotion of current Andhra language.

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27. It is form of poetry in which a verse gives two different meanings.



### **Social Ideas of Veeresalingam:-**

Veeresalingam chose the teaching profession as he liked to lead a comparatively independent life. A number of his illustrious contemporaries also chose the same profession with similar views<sup>28</sup>. Teaching was an honoured profession and people with idealism and zeal for social work took to it as it gave them considerable leisure. The teaching profession gave him ample time and opportunity to sow in the receptive minds of generations of his students the seeds of reform and liberal thought and prepare them for solid practical work in future. Veeresalingam had immense faith in the capacities of the young and their cooperation in his work, which proved to be correct. Judging from the great support he received from them during the height of his reform activity<sup>29</sup>. When some of his critics said that he was depending excessively upon students for his social reform movement he said, "our opponents are showing as a weakness on our side that the majority of our Samaj-Members and the others that take part in our gatherings and talks-are students. They take it as a drawback and feel happy that our cause is not strong. On the other hand I take it as a point in our favor which augurs well for the future. Our country looks forward with great eagerness towards the students, who will grow into elders tomorrow....if these students....work for the benefit of the country with greater courage, zeal and capacity and make their motherland a heaven on earth"<sup>30</sup>.

28. To cite only a few examples, Ragupathi Venkataratnam, Chil-Akamarthi Lakshminarasimham, and Desiraju Pedabapaiah were teachers.

29. R. Venkatasivudu, *Veeresalingam samsmrithi* (Telugu), Guntur, 1931, P.133. Veeresalingam himself gratefully acknowledged the help he received from students in his autobiography, Pt. I, P.158. On the demise of Veeresalingam in 1919 one of his former students was asked to write the editorial in an illustrious Telugu weekly, *Krishna Patrika*, May 31, 1919, in which he stated that the teachings of Veeresalingam on social evils and the need to eradicate them left a deep impression on their minds.

30. Veeresalingam lecture (in Telugu) on "The duties of educated men" (*vidyadhikula Dharmamulu*) in *Veeresalingam, col. works*, VII (Lecturer). Rajahmundry, 1951. The lecture was delivered in 1893 under the auspices of the *prarthana samaj*, Rajahmundry.



Veeresalingam wanted to create strong base among students for the support of his movement in Rajahmundry. Where the anti reform, orthodox sections were very strong. He earned the reputation of being one of the greatest teachers who inspired the young generation and strove hard to create awareness and social consciousness among the youth of his time. Many of his students became his dedicated followers professing faith in his teachings and extending whole hearted support in his activities unmindful of the consequences<sup>31</sup>.

For many of the reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Andhra, the spread of education in general and of education of women in particular was the main issue. Veeresalingam also held the view that the progress of nation depended much up on education of its women. With this view in mind. He strongly pledged in his speeches and writings for their education. In an article; “women’s education”, he argued that, “there are some who think that education is for securing jobs, for a living and ask, ‘why do women need education when they do not have to work and earn’? I wish to ask them, ‘In that case, where is the need for education for men who do not have to earn for their living? Though uneducated. A laborer makes a living out of his toil. One can take up a number of profession for a living; education is not that necessary to eke out one’s livelihood. Education is for something else, for knowledge, for wisdom and for the fulfillment of deeper and nobler urges of life. Women need education for the same purpose”<sup>32</sup>.

31 See V.Suryanarayana Rao, *Suryanarayaneeyam* (an autobiography in Telugu) Kovvur, 1936, P.165.

32 Veeresalingam, Col. Works, Vol.VIII, Pt I, PP.20-21 and P.VI/PP.10,14



Kokkonda Venkata Rathnam in his Journal *Hasyavarthini* argued that women do not deserve education. Answering them in a sarcastic manner Veeresalingam wrote in his journal that men do not deserve education. At times he lashed out his opponents for example.

Were women to be educated,

“What would happen to the sale of human flesh,

Thinks one.

What would become of the time-old domestic ceremonies, Laments one.

Who would serve me as though I were her very god;

mourns another.

Whom am I to thrash and to labour

Rages another.

Who will look after the idols and offer worship to them,

Reasons yet another.

And these are now the leaders of society whose

Old-fashioned ways

Are out to safeguard evil ways of life<sup>33</sup>.

The reformers of Andhra wanted to liberate people from the deep-rooted superstitions and social evils. The spread of scientific knowledge and the growth of rationalistic thinking were the two aspects. Which Veeresalingam stressed in his speeches and writings. According to him ignorance was the main cause of all superstitions and social evils. He pleaded for the spread of scientific education in the local language.

33 See Veeresalingam sweeya chanta part II, P 261



He declared.

In order to increase the total happiness of the common people books in easy and lucid Telugu Prose should be written on subject like astronomy, anatomy, physiology, Hygiene, Philosophy and Religion, Mechanics, Logic and Ethics, Economics, History and Geography<sup>34</sup>.

### **Rational out look:-**

Veeresalingam ridiculed the pseudo-scientific information given by the puranas and other Hindu scriptures and appealed to the people not to place faith in them. Veeresalingam's rationalistic out look could be seen pervading all his writings, either in criticising out dated customs or in introducing Reform ideas. Scientific education was meant to serve two purposes, to dispel the darkness of ignorance of masses, and to develop native agriculture and industries. He compared the western scientific knowledge to bright sunshine which breaks darkness and ushers in the dawn.

Veeresalingam felt the society could not improve unless the people are educated. He also wanted that mass education should be through the medium of the vernacular language. He wrote that: "Books have to be written in simple and lucid vernacular prose and made available to the people at low cost...popular books of knowledge should be written in vernaculars. Even one such book which can impart basic knowledge of one of the sciences would be able to bring enlightenment in some measure. When people come to understand the phenomenon of solar and lunar eclipses from a scientific point of view they will firmly reject the myth and meaningless rituals connected with them. People tend to become less and less superstitious as they learn more and more of natural sciences. Therefore competent

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34. Veeresalingam, Col. Works, Vol.III, Pt.III, Pp.10-11



people would consider my suggestions sincerely and undertake to write suitable books on sciences in vernaculars for the benefit of the progress of the country”<sup>35</sup>.

As a rationalist he wanted the reason should be the hallmark of any Social custom or tradition. He stated any number of quotations from the Vedas and Sastras does not in the least help the reformer to bring about even a single widow marriage. If he wants to effect practical reform he must bring in reason to his help and appeal to the feelings of reasonable men....Reason can accomplish in one week what the so-called national lines cannot effect in a year. They may say this is a violent measure. Yes, violent maladies require violent remedies<sup>36</sup>.

### **Caste System:**

Veeresalingam was against the caste system of India and considered that it has many evil consequences. He said our caste system prohibits certain castes' people from receiving education. This has largely impeded the development of their knowledge and skill. In a word while is progressing in all branches of human activity, we have to keep pace with other developing countries. Without education this is not possible. An uneducated craftsman hardly knows the improved skills and techniques employed in his vocation with the result that his growth remains permanently stunted. The present caste system has created mutual distrust and hatred. There are now among our people, not only the four castes but innumerable sub-castes...This naturally results in disunity and bitterness<sup>37</sup>.

35. Veeresalingam wrote two separate articles on vernacular languages in his journal vivekavardhini, October 1861 and November 1886, included in his collective writings, Vol.VIII. Pt.II, PP. 556-70 and Pt.III, PP.667-70.

36. This extract is taken from the inaugural address delivered by Veeresalingam as president of the sixth madras provincial social conference held at Kakinada. See Indian social reformer, Vol.XII, No.43 (1901-02). Veeresalingam, in this speech, was answering critics of social reform movement who suggested that reforms should be organized on “national lines”. He asked what those “national lines” were by which that reform (widow marriage reform) could be brought about

37. V.Ramakrishna. *Social reform in Andhra*. P.79.





### **Veeresalingam as a Moderate (Political Ideas):-**

In the assessment of Veeresalingam, from the beginning, a controversy arose as to his attitudes towards the Raj. By Comparing the British rule to the earlier post-mughal India which witnessed anarchy and lawlessness. He praised the British rule for its achievements in law, administration and security of life and property. As it was the case with other reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Veeresalingam too believed that the British rule was a god-given boon (Divine Dispensation) to the Indians. These ideas of Veeresalingam were expressed in his lecture on "The national congress and its aims", delivered in 1889 and incorporated in his col. Works, vol., VIII, pp.3-50. That he was a reactionary in politics has been asserted by K.Venkaiah<sup>38</sup>. Another view point, that he was loyal to the British Government and Cultivated good relations with top ranking district officials, for he needed their help in his social reform activities, was expressed by K.Punnaiah. Also this view was, to some extent, based on the incidents that took place in Rajahmundry in 1907 in the wake of swadeshi movement. He openly condemned the terrorist activities of people like Khudiram Bose and removed his portrait from the reading room, which was placed there in his absence. The students of the local college, who were once his loyal followers, were no longer with him. He was ridiculed for his attitude stemmed from two grounds. (1) he was a moderate in politics, and (2) the movement of 1907 was reactionary socially<sup>39</sup>.

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38. Deseeya Bhashala, Jatula Samasys. Praja Swamika Pariskaramu, Telugu guehr.P.18-24

39. He described these incidents in detail in his sweeya, pt. II, pp.317 and 320-24.



It is not correct as some are inclined to suggest that Veeresalingam was socially a progressive but politically a reactionary. But it can be said that he was a typical representative of early Indian nationalism. He can be classified as a moderate among moderates.

He glorified of the benefits of the British rule. He was convinced that the elements of civilization introduced by the British government like education, administration civil and criminal courts, modern needs of communication and other scientific advantages, would place British rule as a great benefactor in proper Historical perspective<sup>40</sup>.

Veeresalingam compared the relation ship between the British government and Indian people to that between mother and child, the child, according to him (India), was perfectly justified in asking for freedom and the mother would grant all that the child merits<sup>41</sup>. He feared that if the British were to leave India, it would result in lawlessness and disorder and above all it will give a set back to the efforts for social reform and felt that the majority of the people are yet un enlightened. He stated that because of the British rule there are no civil wars and there is peace and order in our Country. If the British were to entrust the whole political power and responsibility of the Management of state affairs to Indians even for one year, India would soon (with in months) be Balkanized into many warring factions resulting in the infighting between different religions castes and nationalities. The illiterate majority would brand the educated minority as atheists and evil doers and suppress them and revive the dying social evils and traditions. All this would ultimately result in anarchy. Hence in order to avert this catastrophe befalling our nation, let us pray to

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40 Veeresalingam collected works Vol VIII pp 10-13

41 Ibid P 16



God to ensure the British rule over us for ever<sup>42</sup>.

Veeresalingam wanted for the representation of Indians in the local government and also in the viceroy's council. Unlike other moderate nationalist he had no grasp of the nature of British colonial rule in India. He failed to make a sharp criticism of the economic content of colonialism. In a way he was not a moderate nationalist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and for greater resemblance to the reforming intellectuals of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Still Veeresalingam as a representative of the educated middle classes who were the ideological spokes men of the raising bourgeoisie of India, had great enthusiasm for swadeshi as early as 1880 and Advocated the manufacture of Indian products.

He wrote that "Almost all the clothes worn by the rich as well as the poor are manufactured in England. It is much cheaper than the cloth that our weaver produce here. It is manufactured by machines and hence cheaper. Hence everyone has given up buying swadeshi cloth; they are all buying clothes manufactured in Europe. Crores of rupees that are spent every year in the purchase of foreign cloth are thus flowing out of our country in to foreign lands impoverishing further a country which is already poor. If on the other hand, textile mills are set up in our country, all that money will remain here"<sup>43</sup>.

Veeresalingam was one of the delegates elected to attend the third session of the Indian national congress held at Madras in 1887. However he did not attend the session as a delegate since he was advised not to do so as he was teacher in the government service<sup>44</sup>.

42. Ibid., pp. 17-18, lecture on Indian national congress in 1889. It is clear from this that the freedom he wanted was of a limited character within the general frame work of the British empire. Even about this, in the early stages, he did not have clear – cut ideas for he did not specify the type of relation ship that should subsist between England and India.

43. He raised, though vaguely, that there was drain of resources.

44. 'From out the India and he desired the profits to accrue to the Indian entrepreneurs. Vivekavardhani, April 1880.



In the lecture in the congress (1889) he spoke of the rights of the people and how the congress aimed at striving for these rights. The founders of the congress hoped that the British would help in securing these rights. Veeresalingam too nurtured such hopes. He stated "at a time when we were ignorant, not knowing our rights, they taught us how to demand them; they helped us attain maturity. How can such enlightened and kind-hearted people fail to bestow on us those rights when we become qualified for them?"<sup>45</sup>

The demands of the early nationalist movement, may appear humble, when judged from the present day standards. We should not assume from the tone of these declarations that the early congress leaders were reactionary on the contrary they represented the most educated and enlightened force in Indian society. The Indian peasantry was not organized on a mass scale and the working class was still to come into being as a force to reckon with. The bourgeois intellectuals of the time strove hard for social reforms, for enlightenment, education, industrialisation and technical progress. "The intelligentsia of those days derived inspiration from the congress resolutions. And Veeresalingam was not exception in this respect, though his political understanding and activity were far more limited and conservative compared to the moderate nationalists of the time"<sup>46</sup>.

### **Social and Political Reform:**

Veeresalingam belonged to that section of the reformers who believed that the social reform should take place along with political reform, if not precede it. In this he was one with the Maharashtra reformers – Bhandarkar, Malbari and others. He held the view that when social evils like ignorance, Superstition, caste and sub-caste

45. Veeresalingam ed. works Vol. VIII. Pp. 15-16

46. V. Ramakrishna. *Social reform in Andhra* P.82.



were prevalent, there was no use in securing political freedom <sup>47</sup>.

Veeresalingam stated in this connection that like the uniform growth of all limbs in a body, various facets of life in society – social, political economic and cultural – should be developed without detriment to any one of them <sup>48</sup>. Delivering the presidential address of the 12<sup>th</sup> Indian social conference at Madras in 1898 Veeresalingam declared. “.... I believe the political development of a country must largely depend upon the social condition of the community which supplies the physical, intellectual, moral resources of the people”<sup>49</sup>.

While realizing the need to bring reforms in all fields of country's life, he argued that social reform and political reform should go together. He said “If we demand Justice from our superiors in matters relating to the government of the country, we ought as well to do justice to our inferiors in social matters .... How can we with consistency, be liberal in politics and conservative in social matters” <sup>50</sup>. He asked By the turn of the century the trend was clearly in favour of political reforms through vigorous political agitation, and the same period witnessed the comparative decline of the social reform movement. This was the reason why Veeresalingam was harping on this theme repeatedly.

The growth of Veeresalingam's ideas was a continuous process. When he set out to work in 1874 he was very young, only 26 years old. Never the less he had a will and individuality which were unyielding to pressures and influences. He stated in his autobiography. “Wherever a wrong appears it is not in my nature to suffer it in

47. Veeresalingam, Col. Works, vol.VIII, P.5., He published an article, “Political and social reforms “ in Vivekavardhani. Ibid., Pt, III, PP. 81-82.

48. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Pt., I. P. 80. Mahadev govind Ranade expressed similar views on this questions. See. T.V. Parvate, Mahadev Govind Ronade (a Biography), Bombay, 1961, P.150.

49. C.Y. Chinthamani P. 202.

50. Presidential address to the 6<sup>th</sup> Madras provincial social conference held at Kakinada in 1902. see also Indian social reformer Vol. 12, No. 43, (1901-1902) First Published from Madras and than shifted to Bombay.



silence. I do not have peace of mind, until I find a remedy for the wrong. "This gives us an idea of the Keynote of his personality"<sup>51</sup>

### **Man of action:-**

The most prominent trait in his character was his indomitable courage and steadfastness of purpose "I am not disposed even as a boy to give up an undertaking or let slip my purpose, when once I enter upon it"<sup>52</sup>. He wrote in his autobiography.

Veeresalingam was not content to remain a mere preacher, or dreamer. He had a philosophy of action and a programme of work. With regard to the work to be done, in transforming public life in Andhra, he expressed his views in one of his lectures where in he discussed the qualities and requirements of a practical worker.

He says "every person of right thought thinks of leading others to right conduct; but there are only very few who can really do so ..... We see many people who always imagine that they could improve the world only when they reach a certain position or acquire wealth and pass away miserably doing nothing for the world. Wealth the position are not got easily without our yielding to many undesirable acts. He who relies on truth ..... should be prepared to set aside consideration of father, mother, friends and relatives .... Unless a man better himself first, he cannot better others. And to better himself he must leave the service of the old dame custom and worship trust... all other means for sustained action like courage, steadfastness and patience are got in a moment. These are thousand times more efficient weapons than the old sastras..... Even though your efforts may fail in the beginning. Do not get dispirited. Show to the world the usefulness of your attempts without giving them up, by publishing books, by delivering lectures and by showing it in your deeds"<sup>53</sup>.

51. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Pt.I, P. 49.

52. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Pt.I, P.60.

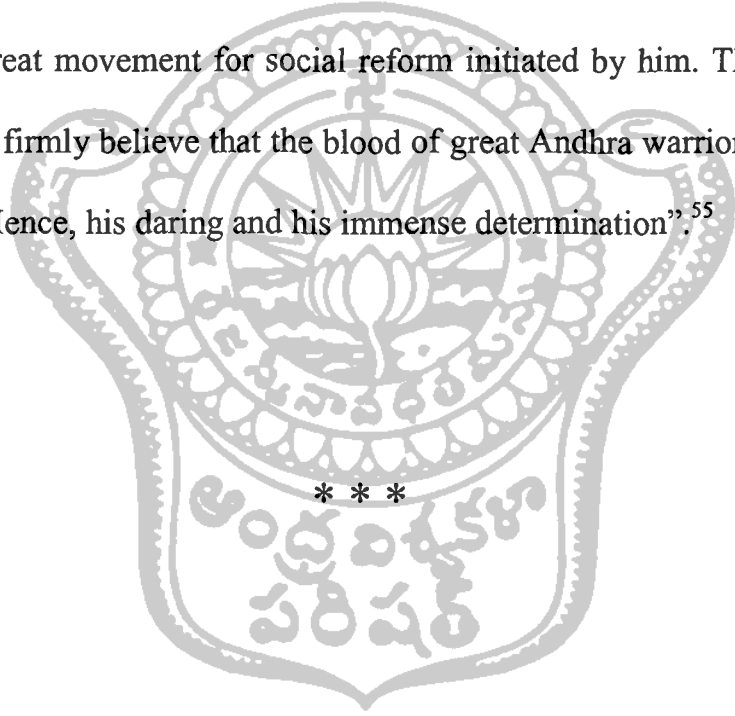
53. Veeresalingam, Col. Works, vol.VIII, Pp. 47-51, translated and edited by gurunatham, pp.43-45.



This attitude of Veeresalingam helped him greatly in carrying on his work. As he once said, “It is confidence in my character that has made men rely on my word throughout my life ..... Even my bitterest opponents in social reform had confidence in my character and trusted my word fully”<sup>54</sup>.

**Appa Rao on Veeresalingam:-**

Gurazada Appa Rao rightly remarked: “Veeresalingam is indeed a great man. I honour him for being the originator of a definite trend in our modern literature and for the great movement for social reform initiated by him. This is superb human task. I firmly believe that the blood of great Andhra warrior Chiefs runs in his veins. Hence, his daring and his immense determination”.<sup>55</sup>



54. Ibid P.47.

55. Gurazada commemorative volume, ed, M.Chalapathi Rao

