

Social Reformation in the 19th Century Andhra - A Socio Philosophical Study

(With Special Reference to K. Veeresalingam, Gurazada and
R. Venkataratnam Naidu)

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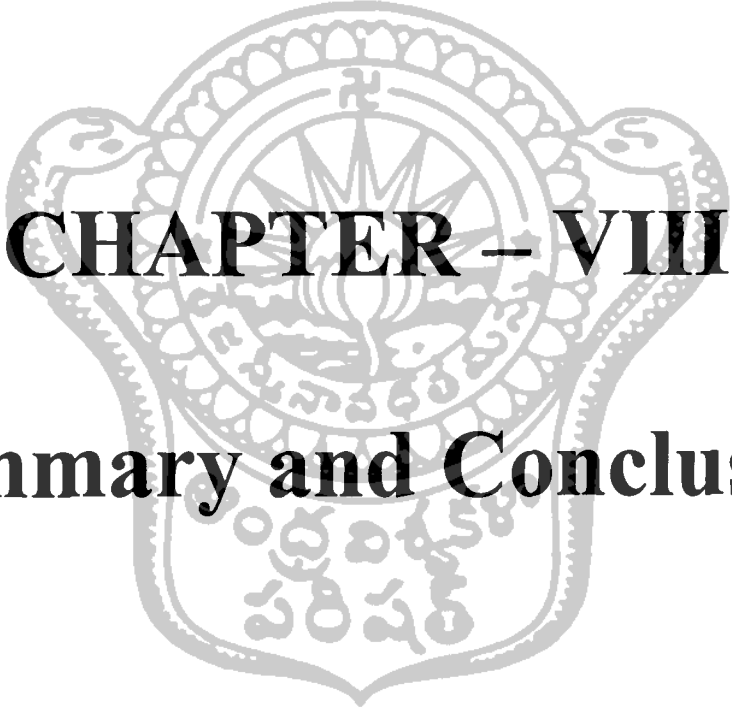
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CHAPTER – VIII

Summary and Conclusion



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During the course of the 19th century the society in Andhra underwent a process of regeneration, in spite of the constraints imposed upon it by colonial domination. A part of the general social phenomenon in India, it led to certain changes in the existing social values and practices and to the spread of modern ideas. This was not simply a result of the cultural – ideological and institutional changes introduced by the British or was an immediate consequence of the enlightenment of an educated stratum through the agency of western ideas with their rationalism and scientism¹. The long tradition of dissent and protest that existed in society also contributed to its making. This could well be traced back to vemana, if not to the religious and social upheaval called Veerasaivism. Veerasaivism and Sri Vaishnavism, which spread across the borders of the present Tamilnadu opposed caste exclusiveness and Brahminical ritualism and gave rise to new sub-castes such as Jangams, Setti-Balijas, Aradhya Brahmins and the like, while Sri Vaishnavism led to the rise of Satanis and Dasaris. An intermixture of Hindu and Muslim populations like wise produced Dudekulas or pinjaris. Vemana and Several other comparatively unknown religious leaders, like Nasarayya in guntur district and pothuluri Veerabrahmam in cuddapah district, exposed the evils of social and religious life.

The reform efforts in Andhra Pradesh is best represented by the movement initiated by Kandukuri Veeresalingam. He was influenced by the prevailing social

1. Charles H. Heimsath attributed the rise of social reform movements in India to the impact of both the proselytising activities of Christian missionaries and the western ideas disseminated through the English education. See for example his book *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, pp 46-47. And also John G. Leonard in his biographs of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, cited earlier, put forward the same challenge and response' theory while explaining the origins of social reform movements.



conditions and also by the Brahmo Samaj Movement of Bengal. He evinced, like other reformers of the 19th Century, a keen interest in the spread of scientific knowledge and the growth of rational thinking. Being a great literary figure, he made use of literature to spread reform ideas among his people. Literature, to Veeresalingam, was the means to an end. He pleaded for the spread of mass education in vernaculars and opposed a purely literary education. He championed a system of education which would liberate the reform- oriented mind from the shackles of tradition and bring about regeneration in society. Being a moderate in politics, he extolled the virtues of British rule and was thus a victim of a false consciousness as were the other reformers of the 19th century who believed in the instrumentality of British rule for the transformation of Indian society. Yet he was not an advocate of status quo; He believed in the organic theory of progress and in the given situation in India championed the cause of social reform as the immediate task.²

Veeresalingam was no mere preacher or theoretician. He was a practical reformer. Ideas for him were not ends in themselves and their worth had to be tested in the field of practical action. In short, his ideas were enriched by the movements he started and from the experiences of his movements his ideas drew their sustenance. If need be, he would even revise his ideas in the light of concrete practice. His reliance on youth as an important element in society to carry forward the ideas of reform was unwavering. Judging from the immense cooperation extended by students of Rajahmundry, the home town of Veeresalingam, to the success of reform measures initiated by him, his faith in them was well – grounded. In a society which was tradition – bound and which opposed

2. V.Ramakrishna Social reform in Andhra (1848 – 1919) p.206



change in matters of social reform, students happened to be the real hope with their idealism, youth fullness and their receptivity to new ideas. Veeresalingam appeared to be a far – sighted leader in this regard.³

Emancipation of women:-

The central concern of social reform endeavours was the emancipation of woman. It was generally felt that unless the status of women, who constituted more or less half of the population, improved, society would not be able to register any noteworthy progress. Humanitarian consideration, though an important factor was not the only motive force for reform. The reformers perspective was clearly focused on social transformation and progress. Their efforts however had limited success. This was true in the field of girls, education, infant marriage and widow remarriages, which was the main areas of reform activity. Unable to influence the state policy, they tried to promote these causes through personal endeavour. Girl's schools were founded, widow remarriages were conducted, rescue homes were opened and institutions for training girls in music and dance were founded. But these efforts only focussed attention on these problems and did not really solve them. Their success is not to be measured in terms of the actual achievement. Their contribution was more significant in creating a social climate which recognized the harmful effects of these social practices. In this respect their achievement was of a very high order. Through lectures, conferences and Journals they tried to spread enlightenment among the people which helped the growth of a consciousness in society against customs and practices which were against human dignity. Many of the questions raised by the reformers later became part of the national movement.⁴

3. Ibid

4. Ibid p.207



Religion and Society:-

An important realization of Andhra reformers was the connection between the social and religious question in India. The social reformers, therefore, could not be effective unless their religious dimensions were also taken in to account. It was this perspective which was at the root of religious reforms. In other words religious reforms were not purely religious, they had important social implications. The movements against idolatory, polytheism and a host of other rituals bear out this contention. The religious reform as represented by the Brahmo Samaj was almost an off – shoot of the Bengal Brahmo movement. The activities of the samaj also closely followed the Bengal Samaj. Yet it did give to the members of the educated middle classess, uprooted from their old surroundings and in search of new identities, a new way of life. The emphasis on rationalist ways of thinking and anti-idolatrours and theistic ideas particularly attracted their attention.

The Brahmo Samaj movement in Andhra was also the first to champion the cause of the ‘depressed classes’ and work for their amelioration through schools, colleges, ‘hostels’, ‘lodges and ‘orphanages’. The first generation of ‘Harijan’ leaders were the alumni of these institutions. Besides paving the way indirectly for the spread of social reform movement, the samaj created a liberal and broad out look among the people in general.

The reasons for the limited success of the socio religious movements have been a matter of debate. Some of the contemporaries of Veeresalingam has attributed it to his over bearing attitude, distrust in the capacity and sincerity of his friends and followers and his tendency to interfere in the work of others. But there were deeper causes inherent in the very nature of the movement. The middle classes drawn from the upper castes



formed the main social base of these movements with traders and middle peasants involved in certain areas. The programme of the movement was oriented to the needs of the reformer. Therefore, the reform ideas never reached the lower layers of society as they did not concern them. Inevitably the reform movement was to remain a limited phenomenon. Issues like welfare of the 'depressed classes' and concepts like 'national education' were taken up actively only after the first decade of the 20th century by which time the reform movements showed clear signs of decline due to a number of factors.⁵

The Impact of Politics on Social Reform:

The swadeshi movement and its repercussions in Andhra in the year 1907 acted as a major set back to the reform movements. Students who formed the major part of the following of Veeresalingam at Rajahmundry and Kakinada, Joined the Swadeshi movement. Events that followed 1907 hastened the declining trend of the reform movements. Veerasalingam became an anushtantic Brahmo, gave up his sacred thread and performed the Sraddha of his parents according to Brahmo rites and arranged an inter – caste dinner on the occasion.

The increasing appeal of the national movement sharply posed the question of priority, whether the social or political reform should have precedence. The district social conferences that met after 1907, to deliberate on political and social issues, passed resolutions favouring precedence to political reform over the social. This was a reversal of the earlier stand. It showed that political matters claimed the first place in the society's priorities. Though need for social reform was accepted in general and the national movement tried to integrate it with the political movement the reform activists were, slowly but steadily, absorbed by the more powerful political struggles.⁶

5. Ibid p 209,

6 Ibid p.209



The rise of revivalism as a back lash against the reform movements also contributed greatly to the process of decline; Even during the hey – day of the reform movements orthodox sections in society continuously opposed them by delivering lectures and publishing books decrying the reforms.

The theosophical society founded by Annie Besant at Madras championed social reforms on national lines and attacked the social reform movements and their objectives. Annie Besant and Col. Olcott toured Andhra extensively and visited Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Masulipatnam and other important reform centres. Starting of the Madras Hindu Association in 1904 at Madras with the blessings of Annie Besant and Nyapati Subba Rao, one of its ardent advocates, the visits of Vivekananda to Madras and his speeches, the founding of *Varnasram Dharma Samrakshna Mandali* in Madras during this period with its virulent propaganda against social reforms weakened the reform movements. Reformers in Andhra started defending their programme proclaiming that their reforms were not a opposed to national heritage. Moreover, the emergence of caste association also affected the reform movement.⁷

The impact of the reform movements was confined mainly to the sections of literates residing in towns and a few villages around. A very small number of petty traders and educated farmers were also influenced by these movements, especially in the two districts of Godavari and Krishna. However, it should be made clear that keeping in view the limited spread of education and the few changes that were brought about in society's economic relations, social mobility was extremely limited. In the absence of a developing capitalist economy and the growth of social layers associated with such

7. Ibid p.209



development, there from movements could not draw continuous sustenance for their growth and success. That is why the much desired social or the so – called renaissance of the 19th century had to be an incomplete measure of social change which stopped half way.

The Reforms and the National Movement:

The dissemination of enlightened ideas about man and society was the main contribution of the reform movement. Caste restrictions were loosened even though caste itself remained intact. An awareness of the need to reform the old society with its out dated customs and practices was created. This could be seen, besides the reform movements, in the rise of caste associations which introduced a host of reform measures to ensure the uplift from the social and economic morass they had fallen into. Along with the cry for social justice, there also went up the cry for social reform as far as non-Brahmin castes were concerned. Resolutions on inter – sub – caste marriages, fusion of sub – castes, denunciation of the evils of dowry and infant marriages can be found in the conferences of these caste associations. Persons like Raghunatha varma of Vayalpadu in chittor district, Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary of Guntur district and Darisi Chenchiah of the gadhar party fame were but a few instances of such isolated individuals who carried on the work of social reform movements in their own way, but to the best of their capacity. This indicates the steady rise of the rural gentry into positions of social prominence which was just a step short of political dominance.

Reform movements were urban – based while these caste associations were centred mostly in the country side. It is true that some of these associations at times were falling a pray to the traditions of the upper castes and their ways of life. Taking an overall view. One must conclude that they could achieve only a part of the aims of the reform



movements. Caste associations had the necessary homogeneity and the strength of purpose to achieve this where as the reform movements with their upper caste and upper class basis could not percolate down to the masses and create in their minds conviction of ideas, or commitment to reform programmes.

The reform movements provided the back – drop to the nationalist movement in Andhra. The first generation of national leaders in Andhra, Tanguturi prakasam. Bhogaraju Patabhi Seetha Ramaiah, Ayyadevara Kaleswara Rao, Unnave Lakshminarayana, Gadicherla Harisarvothama Rao, to mention only a few, and several others happened to be the active participants of reform movements.

The decline of the reform movements in Andhra does not necessarily imply that its impact on men's minds ceased after 1907 or 1919. On the other hand, it became part of the intellectual, climate, imperceptibly and silently, the very stuff of which the later generation was made, just as sunlight is absorbed by the plants. In the communist movement of Andhra paid homage to Veeresalingam and sought to emphasise the importance of social reform in the late thirties and the early forties, the permeative influence of Veeresalingam movement cannot be doubted. That the social and intellectual make – up of modern Andhra draws heavily upon this influence is perhaps the most important legacy of the nineteenth century reform movements.⁸

The impact of these three thinkers namely Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Gurazada Appa rao and Raghupathi Venkataratnam Naidu is found in the later reformation activities of the 20th Century. All the issues about which they struggled were taken up by many social activities. The freedom movement also took up not only political issues but also the social problems and in a way political and social struggle joined together.

8. Ibid p.211



Progress of Women:-

In the eloquent speech to the Andhra Women's Conference held at Vijayawada in 1929, Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddi said: "The ancient Hindu legislators realized that the both sexes were equal and said before the world that women have equal rights with men. So the laws depriving the Hindu woman of her rights and privileges and assigning her an inferior place in society must be only of recent origin. I feel sorry to observe that the Hindus in particular have become creatures more of custom or habit than of reason or true religion. No enlightened women with any self-respect can put up with one-sided laws which have placed us in an inferior position even to our Muhammadan and Christian sisters. To modify such unjust laws and to make it suitable to the needs of the present day society, a reformed society should be started for the uplift, protection and help of the Hindu women."⁹

This awakening magnified itself in the new women's association organized by women themselves. The earliest was the women's association at Rajahmundry organized in 1902 by Kotikalapudi Sitamma, who displayed commendable keenness in the need for educating women. In November of the same year Bandaru Atchamamba and Oruganti Ratnamamba started a women's association at Masulipatnam. Its declared objective was to get together educated women at one place as frequently as possible and persuade them to deliver a series of lectures to the illiterate on topics like the management of household affairs and the life and work of women who consecrated their lives for the country's cause.

⁹ B Kesavanarayana, Political and Social factors in Andhra (1900-1956), Vijayawada, 1976, p 194



Another important feature of this awakening among women was the organization of ladies conferences at almost every important town in Andhradesa to voice their grievances and aspirations. Women began more and more to participate in the conferences where their advocacy of reform of evil social customs was more effective than that of the speeches of men in influencing the Hindu public opinion in favour of social reform. These conferences helped to direct the course of women's movement in its formative stages. Issues that concerned women in general were freely discussed and resolutions passed at the conferences. The Andhra ladies conference held at Masulipatnam in March 1913 passed the following resolutions:-

1. That this conference is of opinion that the higher education of women should be promoted in all parts of the country.
2. That this conference prays the Government to multiply girls schools so as establish one in every town and village.
3. That an asylum be established in the centre of the Andhra country duly equipped for the imparting of technical instruction to widows and rescued women so as to enable them to obtain free lodging and boarding and acquire means of livelihood.
4. That it is desirable to have as teachers women, preferably widows, in girls schools.
5. That Government be pleased to establish training schools for women of advanced education in Telugu.
6. That girls who have attained puberty be sent to girls schools.
7. That women should relax their fondness for jewellery and seek to acquire 'Streebharanam' in immovable property.



8. That the curriculam of girls studies should comprise study of music, knitting, sewing, domestic economy, the care of the infant and of the invalid.
9. That early marriages should be prohibited.
10. That girls should not be married before attaining puberty or before the age of 16.
11. That kanyasulkam (bride's price) and varasulkam (bridegroom's price) be regarded as objectionable.
12. That girls below 16 should not be given in marriage to men over 40.
13. That foreign travel should not be regarded as prohibited.
14. That caste distinctions should be removed and unity should be strengthened by promoting inter-caste marriages and inter-dining.¹⁰

The appearance of Mrs. Besant on the Indian political arena was an important landmark in the development of public consciousness towards women's education and their emancipation. Her vigorous campaign to redeem girls from illiteracy and to stop the pernicious. Practice of early marriages gave a fresh stimulus to the women's movement. The Women's India Association was started in 1917 with headquarters at Madras with Mrs.Besant as its president and Mrs.Cousins as secretary. Their extensive tours in Andhra resulted in the establishment of branches of the women's association at places like Rajahmundry and Vijayawada.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid p 198

¹¹ Ibid



Social evils:-

An important aspect of the women's movement was the agitation against certain obsolete social customs and practices which stood in the way of advancement of women. As a result of the spread of new progressive social outlook following the impact of western ideals, an irresistible urge developed among educated Indians to rescue women from the social evils.

The Hindus regarded marriage as an inescapable sacrament for girls and to keep a daughter unmarried was regarded as a sin and a neglect of a sacred obligation. It was believed that girls should be married before they attained puberty and therefore parents were anxious to get their daughters married as early as possible. Thus the practice of child marriages became common among Hindus.

With the general awakening, especially among the English educated, a new class of social reformers made sustained efforts to put an end to early marriages, for, this practice sometimes resulted in weak progeny, infantile mortality, material mortality, death of the girl during child bearing age, early widowhood, general illness and debility of mothers. The educated public was chiefly prompted by these considerations in starting an intense campaign against early marriages.

Early social reformers like K.Veerasingam were able to draw public attention to the evil consequences of early marriage through the press and platform and created the necessary atmosphere for legislative measures against the practice. But the British Government, for a long time, followed a policy of non-interference out of fear of wounding the religious feelings of the orthodox Hindus. Though efforts were made in the Indian Legislative Assembly once in 1922 and again in 1925 towards raising the age of marriage of girls through legislation, they proved abortive as the official members either



remained neutral or strongly opposed them. However, in 1927 Sir Hari Singh Gour introduced a bill in the Assembly to raise the age of consent in marital cases of 14 and in extra-marital cases to 16. On this the government appointed a committee to seek public opinion in the matter. A little later Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarda also introduced a bill to check child marriages. The final passing of the bill was deferred till the recommendations of the committee were known.¹²

Alongside the agitation against early marriages, propaganda for encouraging marriages of child widows was carried on. Child widows were, in fact, a natural concomitant of early marriage. Orthodox parents cared little for age and gave their daughters even of eight to ten years to very old men. Many husbands died before their wives attained maturity and these little girls were subjected to lifelong enforced widowhood. Stringent prohibition was imposed upon marriage of widows especially among the Brahmins and the Vysyas. Other communities also copied this.

As a result of these circumstances there was a large number of widows in Hindu society. There was hardly any home which did not have at least one widow. According to the Census Report of India, 1901, the number of widows whose age was below 5 was 408 and of those between 6 and 9 was 2,984. Altogether 13,722 girls were widowed before they attained the age of 16. By 1931 their number increased enormously.

It is pertinent to mention that the legality of widow marriages was a bone of contention between the conservatives and social reformers. These two schools of thought presented their own points of view quoting extensively from Hindu religious authorities and each claiming that their arguments were correct.

¹² Ibid p 201



The orthodox school asserted that widow marriage had no sanction of the sacred texts. In this connection they quoted from various Hindu religious and legal works such as those of Manu, Vasistha, Parasara, Vishnu, Narada and Angeerasa. They said that if widow married, her husband and the off-spring, if any were debarred from participating in any sacramental performances (Manu V, 16), and that no where a second husband was permitted to a respectable woman. They went to the extent of saying that even if a woman remarried because her husband turned out to be a eunuch or mad, she became 'Punurbhuvu' and as such was liable to be banished from the country and that person marrying a widow became a 'chandala' (out-caste).¹³

Against such frightful dogma wearing the complexion of religiosity social reformers had to strive hard and they in turn drew authority from the Vedas, Smritis and some other works to prove that widow marriage did have 'shastraic sanction. Some of the passages supporting widow marriages are given below:

"A widow can remarry if the husband and wife give an Ajapanchodana that they shall not separate" (Atharva Veda, 1X, 527).

"If a woman is abandoned by her husband and has had no liaison with him, she can remarry as also virgin child widow: (Manu 1X, 176).

"Get up, oh woman, you who lie down by the side of this your lifeless husband, Come to this crowd of living people about you here, and may you become the wife of some person desirous of taking the hand of a widow in remarriage". (Yajurveda, Taithariaya Aranyaka, VI, 4).

"A woman is entitled to remarry if her husband disappeared, died, became an ascetic or a eunuch or afflicted with chronic malady". (Parasara, 415).

¹³ Ibid p 204



The reformers referred to the stories from the Puranas which illustrate the story of a widowed daughter of the king of Benaras marrying, the story of Nala and Damyanti in which the second 'swayamvara' of the later was announced and the story of the wife of Sambara who was remarried to Pradyumna.

It would appear that it was a fact that widow marriages were in vogue in early times. Remarriages ceased to be popular during the period 300 B.C. to 200 A.D. and marriage even of child widows were prohibited from the eleventh century onwards.¹⁴

The spread of western education and culture, the growing popularity of humanitarian ideals, and the development of rational outlook created an urge for social reform. Further, the spirit of revivalism which was sweeping over the country as a reaction to the condemnation of Hindu culture and tradition by Christian missionaries and other Europeans led to a thorough study of Hindu scriptures and other works. It was clear to many of the reformers that many of the social evils had no sanction at all in Hindu scriptures. To social reformers with this new outlook enforced widowhood seemed to be a cruel practice which had come into vogue in later times. The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 which allowed widows to marry if they so desired was symptomatic of this new outlook. Though under this enactment widow marriages were permissible, the legislation remained a dead letter because traditional ideas of marriage and duties of wife made women reluctant to resort to remarriage.¹⁵

Anti-Nautch Movement:-

K.Veeresalingam was the first social reformer in Andhra who started an intense agitation against the continuance of this custom. Referring to the effects of Veeresalingam's agitation, C.Chakradhara rao, president of the eleventh Andhra

14. Ibid p 205

15 Ibid p 206



Provincial Kalavanthula Social Reform Conference held at Gudivada in 1945, observed:

“One effect of his destructive criticism was that some enlightened members of Hindu society gave up engaging nautch parties and extending their patronage to the prostitutes of this caste. His propaganda was not entirely lost on the members of our caste. The eyes of some of them were opened and they began to realize the harmful character of the custom. Gradually, though very slowly, some unmarried mothers began to get their daughters married; a few male members of our caste were given English education and some others were trained to professions other than that of being associates of nautch parties, which meant abject dependence on the nautch girls”.¹⁶

R. Venkataratnam Naidu carried further the work initiated by Veeresalingam. Moralistic as he was, Naidu's social purity and anti-nautch movement roused public enthusiasm and hastened reformation. He felt that purity in personal, domestic and social life constituted “the keystone of moral strength and national greatness” and stressed that the sine qua non of the reform movement were “good manners” and “pure-living”. Though comprehensive in nature and based on a higher level, Naidu's work was more of a preventive nature than remedial.¹⁷

Harijan Uplift:-

The large scale conversion of the depressed classes to Christianity was viewed with deep concern by Hindu reformers, a majority of whom were sympathizers or supporters of the Indian National Congress. They felt that the problem of the depressed people was more political rather than a mere social reform and further, argued that Muslims and Christians would sow seeds of discord between caste Hindus and depressed

¹⁶. Ibid p.219

¹⁷. Ibid p.220



classes people by exploiting the latter's grievances. These reformers were of the opinion that one of the reasons why the depressed classes did not side with the Hindus when Hindu women were molested by the Muslims at the time of the riots in Bengal was that they did not have any sympathy for the Hindus.¹⁸ It was also said that until and unless the evil of untouchability was eradicated and the depressed classes, who formed a large percentage of the Hindus, were made to feel that they formed an indissoluble fraternity with the caste Hindus, India would not be fit for Swaraj.¹⁹ Thus humanitarian ideals, political interests and religious considerations served to quicken the zeal of the educated Hindus to work for the improvement of the down-trodden classes by removing their disabilities.

A majority of these reformers in the earlier stages of the movement were followers of the Brahmo Samaj. They applied themselves with great devotion to mitigating social inequalities by spreading education among the depressed classes. The Christian missionaries also worked in that direction. But these pioneering efforts to improve the lot of the depressed classes did not produce any striking results.

Efforts to uplift Harijans:-

Among the ameliorative measures instituted, education gained priority because it was thought that the surest way of elevation of the depressed classes lay in their education. Once they were educated and well settled in life, earning a decent living, they would be accorded equal status by the orthodox sections also. The first beginnings had been in Rajahmundry where K. Veeresalingam, while consistently emphasising the need to remove disabilities under which the Panchamas were suffering, started a school which

¹⁸ Venkata Sarma, M, "Amelioration of the depressed classes", Andhrapatrika Annual, 1919, P.173.



19 Suryanarayana V , "Temple Entry", Andhrapathrika Annual, 1927, P 246

admitted even the Panchama boys and gave them free education.²⁰ For the construction and management of this school, the Raja of Pithapuram donated Rs.70,000. Being an eminent and resourceful social reformer himself, the Raja of Pithapuram established, on his own initiative, two hostels for boys and girls of the Panchama community at Kakinada and exempted them from payment of fees in his college and high school.²¹ Ch.Lakshminarasimham also took up the task of educating these classes and established, with the assistance of active friends like the Raja of Pithapuram, the 'Ram Mohan School' for Panchama boys at Rajahmundry in February 1909 with both English and Telugu as media of instruction. This institution offered free tuition to the Panchama children. It rendered valuable service for thirteen years. Some citizens of Rajaumundry formed themselves into an association and built up by years of quiet work a net work of schools for Panchamas in or around the town of Rajahmundry. After 1922 they were all converted into national schools. These institutions were responsible for turning out leaders of the next generation of these classes who were imbued with a spirit of service.

The Christian missionaries also did sustained and effective work in educating and uplifting the depressed classes. The latter being economically backward and socially degraded constituted a discontented group among the Hindus who could be easily converted to Christianity. The Christian zeal for humanitarian service induced some of them to take up Harjan uplift work.

Untouchability:-

The urgency of eradicating the evil of untouchability, which drove a wedge between Harijans and caste Hindus, out of the body politic of Hinduism was realized by

20. Veeresalingam, K., Autobiography, Vol, II, P 352

21 Lakshmi Narasimham, Ch , Autobiography, PP 362-363.



enlightened Hindus. These leaders made sustained efforts for the removal of untouchability from considerations purely of social justice and humanity. But their work in this respect was limited to carrying propaganda against untouchability which did not cut much ice in the face of mounting resistance from the orthodox.

R.Venkataratnam Naidu was one of the early social reformers who carried on a ceaseless propaganda against untouchability. The depressed classes, in his opinion, were 'the kith and kin, the flesh and blood' of caste Hindus. He zealously advocated the removal of the age-long offence of untouchability, not in a spirit of patronage, not even from its necessity for the political advancement of the country, but "wholly and essentially on the basis of the righteous dispensation of God, which treats all as the equal enjoyers of His blessing."²² Once four Harijan girls, between 3 and 11 years, some of them stark naked, happened to be begging at the Ponneri railway station near Madras. The pitiable plight moved Naidu who got them removed to Secunderabad in 1904 with the help of Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Subbarayudu and thenceforward brought them up as his own daughters, gave them liberal education and eventually got them decently married.²³

Such instances were only exceptional. It was Gandhiji's personal efforts and the intense propaganda through the Congress organization that stirred the people's conscience and gave a fillip to the reform movement for removing the 'excrement of untouchability'. The removal of untouchability was made an integral part of the famous Bardoli programme of 1922 and the Congressmen were asked to value it as a necessity for attaining Swaraj and ceaselessly strive for raising the down-trodden Harijans from social degradation in order to win their sympathy and support for the movements launched by the Congress.

²² Venkataratnam Naidu, R. Message and Ministrations, Vol.V., P.107

²³ Raghupati venkataratanam Naidu Birth centenary souvenir 1962, P 45



The Government of India passed the Untouchability Offences Act, 1955, applicable to the whole of India, in supersession of all State Acts in this respect. The Act provided that every person was free to enter any place of public worship, which was open to other persons professing the same religion, to worship, offer prayers, bathe and use the waters of any stream, tank, well, spring or watercourse, and to have access to shops, hotels, restaurants, places of public entertainment, hospitals, dispensaries and educational institutions. The Act specified that persons violating these rules would be liable to punishment with imprisonment for 6 months or fine up to Rs.500 or both.²⁴

Temperance Work:-

A widespread social evil particularly among the lower classes which defeated all efforts at raising the standard of life and condemned them to a state of gruelling poverty was consumption of intoxicating drinks. A drunkard squandered much of the hard-earned money at the toddy shop and set apart only a fraction of his earnings for maintaining the members of his family who were compelled to drag on a miserable existence in a state of half-starvation and half-nakedness. In many cases excessive indulgence in drinks ruined health and at the same time made such drunkards indifferent to morals and social etiquette. Some of the drunkards in an intoxicated state picked up quarrels easily with others and often behaved with the members of their families in an inhuman manner, thus rendering their life wretched.

During 1916-17 the government encouraged the setting up of many tea and coffee stalls to attract and divert people from arrack shops. But this did not yield expected results and the policy was soon abandoned. Other measures included reduction of the

24 B Kesavanarayana, political and social factors in Andhra (1900-1956) p 292



alcoholic content of the arrack by adding more water and fixing an upper limit to the quantity of arrack and toddy which one could hold either in rural or in urban areas.

Temperance work from 1926-1937:-

When the Justice Party came to power in Madras in 1920 it did not do anything to give the public an effective voice in the matter of the drink habit. However, after the Independent Ministry was formed 1926 a resolution was introduced in the Madras Legislative Council on 22nd October, 1929, recommending to the government that total prohibition of drink in Madras Presidency within the course of twenty years be declared to be their goal. Accepting the resolution the government appointed an excise advisory committee to recommend measures to implement the resolution. The committee unanimously recommended that the first essential step was the creation of an active public opinion against drink by educating the masses about its evils. The government accepted the recommendations and provided a sum of Rs.4 lakhs in the civil budget estimate for 1929-30 and set up a central propaganda board and district propaganda committees to do temperance propaganda.²⁵ But the work of these bodies was not very fruitful and an official report recorded: "It is not surprising that many officers sympathetically disposed towards a legitimate temperance movement have not noticed so far any tangible result of this propaganda."²⁶ Therefore these committees were wound up in August 1931 as a measure of economy, but non-official organizations dedicated to temperance work continued to obtain financial assistance from the government. The same policy was adhered to by the Justice Party also when it came to power in 1930 for another term. To help the temperance movement in an effective manner some arrack and toddy

25. Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, Vol LIV, 1930-31, 583

26. Report on the Administration of the Excise Revenue in the Madras presidency, 1930-31, P 17



shops were shut down and marking of trees within five miles of the shops closed was restricted to the average of the previous five years. These steps had little effect and an official report expressed the opinion that "the result so far observed show that unless real efforts are made and made with success by temperance workers to create genuine revulsion from drink in the classes that drink, the experiment cannot succeed."²⁷

The social reform work was initiated and vigorously carried on by such distinguished leaders as K.Veeresalingam, R.Venkataratnam Naidu and so on. They were not alone in the field. Political workers were also involved in the tasks of social change and reconstruction. When they were fighting against the injustices of an alien government, they could not passively submit to social injustices from their own countrymen. The intimate connection between political and social progress became more evident after 1920. The Justice Party was in power for over a decade since 1920 and during this period it was primarily concerned with improving the lot of non-Brahman sections. Gandhi put the Congress through a revolutionary programme. Departing radically from its earlier lukewarm policy towards social reform, the Congress included in its constructive programme such popular issues as the removal of untouchability and the prohibition of the use of alcoholic drinks. The significance of the programme was of a two-fold character. Politically, it provided an opportunity to the Congressmen to carry the Congress ideology and programme to the rural areas and mingle with the masses. Socially, the work of Congressmen provided a great fillip to the social reform work. This attracted many more stalwarts to its side, popularized social reform and helped to reduce effectively the opposition of reactionaries to social reform. Thus the movement for

27. Report on the Administration of the Excise Revenue in the Madras Presidency, 1931- 32, P,19.



political emancipation went hand-in-hand with the movement for the eradication of social evils and each received strength and sustenance from the other.

Progress in Social Reform:-

Before independence, social reformers looked to the British Government for support in the form of legislative measures. But the British shrank from interfering in social customs. They made no real attempts for the reform of evil practices existing in the Hindu social system particularly after 1857. Nor they openly encouraged social reformers for fear of estranging the orthodox sections. If their interference could be avoided they did so conveniently. Therefore the progress achieved in the field of social reform before 1947 owed chiefly to the efforts of individual reformers, local associations and political organisations. After the attainment of national freedom the mantle of rule-fell upon Congress leaders. They continued to support radical social changes as they did before and carried out reform work expeditiously by passing a number of legislative measures removing legally and technically social inequalities.

The progress of women's education, the eradication of social evils like child marriages and enforced widowhood, the prohibition of bigamy and dowry, the legal provisions that ensured equality to women with men in the matter of their eligibility for jobs, their earnings and property and the facility for the dissolution of marriage, enabled women enjoy untempered individually. The crusade against untouchability and the revolt of the non-Brahmins tended to remove social inequalities and to create a homogeneous population. The temperance campaign and enforcement of prohibition improved the economic condition of the poor and illiterate masses and created a happy atmosphere at home. These changes were an index of the progress made during the last six decades.²⁸

²⁸ B Kesavanarayana, political and social factors in Andhra 1900-1956 p 336



Thus the stage was set for progress on all fronts. As such it is hoped that the Andhras, with their intense patriotism supported by broad-based homogeneous culture provided by the formation of Andhra Pradesh, blessed with abundant man-power and material resources besides its size, would march forward to greater heights of glory. And for this the role of K.Veeresalingam, Gurazada Appa rao and Venkataratnam is significant and great.

During the last 100 years we have made a good progress in all fields from the beginning of 20th century, the struggle for Indian Independence gained momentum under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. The influence of the moderates and the revolutionaries became weak and almost the whole of India followed the leadership of Indian National Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Indian National Congress wanted to fight for freedom through Satyagraha and Non-Violence and they were successful in gaining freedom. The congress fought for freedom and at the same time gave importance to social reformation. In a way reform and freedom movement went hand in hand.

Mahatma Gandhi gave importance to womens education and strived for women progress. He also fought against untouchability and preached Temperance. He was both a social reformer and freedom fighter. He wanted both social and political progress at the same time.

Progress Through Legislation:-

After great struggle for freedom India got Independence in 1947 and it has adopted a constitution of its own in the year 1950. It is considered as one of the best constitutions in the world, giving great importance to human rights. It has adopted the



provisions of the universal declaration of human rights (1948)²⁹. Similarly it has also accepted the provisions of International Covenant on Civil and political rights, 1966, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966. and International convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, 1966.

Our National parliament has enacted some other Acts for the welfare of the people. Some of them are:

1. The National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 (Act No.19 of 1992)
2. The Scheduled castes and the schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
3. The protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (Act No.22 of 1955)
4. The Bonded labour system (Abolition) Act, 1976. (Act No.19 of 1976).
5. The child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 (No. 61 of 1986)
6. The Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 (Act No.53 of 1986)
7. The persons with Disabilities (Equal opportunities, protection of Rights and Full participation) Act, 1995. (No.1 of 1996)
8. The Indecent Representation of women (prohibition) Act, 1986. (No. 60 of 1986)
9. The National Commission for women Act, 1990. (No.20 of 1990)
10. The Family courts Act, 1984 (Act No.66 of 1984)

To reform Hindu society and to protect the girl child and the widow the following Acts are enacted. They are:

1. Hindu marriage Act, 1955
2. Hindu Succession Act, 1956
3. Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956

28 General Assembly Resn 217-A(III), dt, 10-12-1948, U.N.General Assembly official Records, 3rd Session, supp No.13, page, 71- 77.



4. Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956
5. Dowry prohibition Act, 1961
6. Child marriage Restraint Act, 1929
7. Hindu widows Remarriage Act, 1856
8. Special Marriage Act, 1954
9. The commission of Sati (prevention) Act, 1987.

These acts remove the drawbacks in the Hindu Society will help to make the Hindu society, a Just progressive and Modern.

Other progressive Acts are the law relating to free Legal Aid & Lok Adalats called as the legal services authorities Act 1987. and the Right to Information Act of 2005. Which makes the Administration accountable and transparent.

As we are a free Nation there is immense possibility to find out the weaknesses and the drawbacks in the socio political Economic life of the people and to regulate and enlighten them. Through proper legislation, information and awareness and social Engineering and thus make India a prosperous. Harmonious, and modern society with a due place in the comity of Nations.

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