



Position of women with special reference to Rajahmundry Municipal town from 1866 to 1947

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Abstract: The following objectives are kept in mind to determine the position of women. Position of women is a traditional topic to be studied by the research scholar. Their position has changed and transmitted to successive generations with good customs and bad evils. Present study has tried to evolve the real position of women in a prestigious town Rajahmundry during the days of freedom struggle.

Key words: successive generations, Rajahmundry municipality, freedom struggle

Introduction

Position of women is a traditional topic to be studied by the research scholar. Their position has changed and transmitted to successive generations with good customs and bad evils. Present study has tried to evolve the real position of women in a prestigious town Rajahmundry during the days of freedom struggle.

OBJECTIVES:

The following objectives are kept in mind to determine the position of women.

1. To focus on the position of women in the early days of the foundation of Rajahmundry municipality.
2. To ascertain the position of women of upper varnas in the Rajahmundry Municipality.
3. To ascertain the position of lower caste women.
4. To focus on the customary life of the women.
5. To focus on the educational and academic status of the women.

METHODOLOGY:

The researcher has conducted a vigorous study on the position of the women in the Rajahmundry municipality with the help of available literature. The researcher has consulted minutes' books and administration reports of Rajahmundry Municipality to get the information about the education of the women. Godavari District Gazetteers are consulted to get authentic information about the position of women. Some of the books available on the freedom struggle in Andhra Pradesh have been consulted by the scholar. Hence doctrinaire approach has been adopted by the scholar.

HYPOTHESIS:

The position of women was precarious. The upper caste women did have some education but they have no liberty at all. But the lower caste women were free to have choose their husbands. Polyandry was prevailed among the low caste women. The women have no economic security. Very few women have entered in the politics. No high jobs were secured by women. On the basis of these



tentative conclusions the present study has been conducted.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY:

The position of women is an age old topic. But every day changing scenario of the position of women made this topic a burning one. The Rajahmundry Municipality the Girls education was slowly and steadily developed. Girl's schools were set up. The lady teachers were appointed. But the women were barred to take up the political and government jobs. The foreign Christian ladies were elevated to high position. The low caste women hailed from bogam community were good dancers. The Brahmin ladies have produced beautiful music. The ladies of Devanga have produced beautiful sarees and other clothes. Polyandry was prevailed among the lower caste women. There was a struggle between customary life of upper caste women and suppressed life of lower caste women. Present study is taken up due to its significance in the society of Rajahmundry Municipal Town.

THEME OF THE STUDY:

In general the position of women in Indian Society was changing from time to time. During the Vedic period they enjoyed full liberty and freedom. In the later Vedic period their position became submissive. Purdah system, Sati practice slowly came into existence. After the implementation of Hindu code, i.e., Manudharma Sastra their position reached the lowest level. They had no right to property. They had to depend on their father, husband and son throughout their life time. They had no freedom to do anything without the consent of the male member. In some

castes ladies were used as devadasis and prostitutes. They had no choice in selecting their husbands. Under these circumstances in the Middle Ages some Bhakti Saints like Kabir, Ramanada Vallabhacharya preached equality and tried to raise the status of women.

After the advent of Europeans, particularly during the British rule, impact of Christianity played a dominant role in changing the status of women. Rajarammohan Roy and Eswarachandra Vidyasagar started reform movements in Bengal. Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu did yeoman service for the upliftment of women in Andhra.

Rajahmundry Municipal town had witnessed remarkable changes during its initial year of establishment. The father of Andhra renaissance Kandukuri Veerasalingam, who was also a Councillor from 1881 to 1888 performed nearly 20 widow marriages, in this Muniipal town from 1881 to 1901 which deserve to be mentioned in detail.

During the 1880s Veerasalingam extended his contacts with both British and Indian Government Officials and with Indians residing in Madras. As a result of the widow marriage movement in Rajahmundry, his local reputation spread throughout the Presidency. Despite intimidating threats from the anti-reform party on the evening of December 11, 1881, the first widow marriage took place. The District Judge John Kelsall, the Superintendent of Police, the District Medical Officer, and the Chaplain attended the ceremony.

After the wedding on December 11, festivities and celebrations continued



for several days. One December 15, a second widow marriage originally unplanned, took place amidst great pomp. In addition to the British officials who had attended the first ceremony, the Collector came from Kakinada to witness the second one.

A few days after the second widow remarriage, the anti-reform party mustered seventy two members and convened a meeting to condemn the reformers. C. Yaganna Sastri presided over this session, which included many Brahmin lawyers and officials, as well as merchants like Saripalle Gopala Krishnamma, a former partner in Veeresalingam's printing press and a powerful figure in the Municipal Council. These men sent a petition to Sanharacharya requesting him to censure the reformers. On 31 December Sankaracharya's proclamation "brought terror upon the people. It proclaimed that the two widow marriages performed at K. Veeresalingam's house were against the Vedas, the Shastras and the honoured customs of the Hindus; so all those "that went to the wedding for meals, for betel-leaves, or who assisted the cause, are hereby ex-communicated."

Individual reformers were sent postcards stating that they had been excommunicated and would not be allowed to re-enter their caste and participate as members of good standing. Veeresalingam's fate was more severe, for sankaracharya declared that "the two bridegrooms and brides and K. Veeresalingam and his wife are entirely excommunicated and can never be received back in society by any penance". The reformers and their supporters reacted to these pressures in several ways on January 11, 1882, Atmuri

Lakshminarasimham filed a suit against Sankaracharya in the court of the Joint Magistrate, Rajahmundry. But the judgment was not favourable to them.

Perhaps "the most serious result of Sankaracharya's proclamation occurred in April, 1882 when Veeresalingam found itself cut off from his major sources of funds". Paidam Ramakrishnayya the wealthy merchant from Kakinada had paid him Rs. 2,000 to celebrate the two widow marriages and Rs.10 per month to maintain the priests, servants and families involved in the widow marriages. But Rama Krishna was unable to withstand the terrible pressure on him to conform and so he submitted to the Rajahmundry Brahman priests. One of the conditions was to stop sending money to Veeresalingam. Ramakrishnayya complied with this. As a result the social reform leaders in Rajahmundry were beset with doubts about the future of widow marriage reforms. Neither Veeresalingam nor Atmuri Lakshminarasimham possessed any personal money that would be necessary to celebrate widow marriages in a grand manner.

Again in August 1883, and January 1884 widow marriages were performed in Rajahmundry. These made a total of ten; eight of them were Brahman couples and two were Vaisyas. One marriage had featured an inter-Sectarian between a Niyogi Brahman and a Vaidiki Brahman.

In 1884, the widow marriage reform movement gained a great deal of publicity in India due to the work of the Bombay Parsi, Behramji Malabari. Malabair's proposal that the Government should enact marriage laws for Indians



which would eliminate child marriages, thus preventing child widowhood, aroused great contention. At a meeting of the Madras Hindu Widow Remarriage Association in late December 1884, Raghunatha Rao a Brahman interested in social reform spoke out against interference from the government, urging that reform must come from within the Hindu Community. S. Subrahmania Iyer, a distinguished lawyer and later High Court Justice, argued for establishment of a government commission to ascertain the exact laws bearing on these issues.

The change in attitudes from 1883, when many Hindus accepted a government legislative role in the sphere of social change, was marked. At that time, after the widow marriage in June, 1883, Veeresalingam's old rival and former scourge of social reform Kokkonda Venkataraman had remarked that "under the protection of the English Government, Hindu widows have the opportunity of freeing themselves from the despotism of religious custom". Veeresalingam himself then had urged Lord Ripon to improve "the miserable state of Hindu widows by enacting legislation, as Lord Bentinck had done with Sati."

The funds to support widow marriages did not flow in as Veeresalingam had expected. From Madras old friends of Veeresalingam like P. Rangayya Chetty and K. Krishnaswamy Rao sent money to support widow marriages. Subha Pati Mudaliar promised Rs. 100 for each widow marriage performed. But the funds came nowhere near the sum of Rs. 10,000 that Paida Rama Krsihnayya had initially donated. He had promised a further Rs. 10,000 once the first sum was expended.

But by the end of 1885 he had not provided it.

On December 13, 1885 another widow marriage, the thirteenth, was performed in Rajahmundry. No widow marriages took place in 1886 or 1887. With no activity, and scarce funds the Brahman priests and servants were relieved, donors stopped contributing money, as there were no widow marriages. Meetings were meagerly attended. When the National Social Conference was founded in December, 1887, the Rajahmundry widow marriage Association did elect delegates, although no one attended the conference. After six years, the widow marriage campaign became dormant.

In the Council politics women played no role till 1922. After the implementation of madras Districts Municipalities Act reservation was given to women. Kanchumarti Babayamma was the first woman Councillor in the Rajahmundry Municipal Council. She was followed by Palakodeti Vankata Ratnamma and some other ladies. After the right to franchise was given to ladies, their participation in the politics gained momentum. Separate schools were set up for girls, which would be discussed in another chapter. The Rajahmundry Municipal town did not witness a lady candidate as a chairman so far.

Since the establishment of Rajahmundry Municipality till the dawn of independence, the Hindu Women were not seen in high professions as were their Christian compatriots. European ladies were engaged in nursing, teaching, medicine and some other professions. But in the Municipal Council the Hindu



ladies became councilors, after the reservation system was implemented.

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