



THE WOMEN REFORM ACTIVITIES IN 19th CENTURY ANDHRA: PIONEERING STRIDES FOR CHANGE

Mrs. G. Lalitha, M.A., M.Phil,
Head, Department of History,
Vice Principal,
St. Ann's College for Women,
Malkapuram, Visakhapatnam

Abstract: *The early 19th century witnessed a series of reform activities in Andhra society, particularly focused on addressing the precarious status of women. In the medieval and early modern periods, women in Andhra faced a multitude of social challenges that consigned them to a particular position of profound disadvantage. Factors such as the absence of accessible educational opportunities, prevalent child marriages, restrictions on widow re-marriages, and the persistence of the Devdasi System, among others, were instrumental in perpetuating the subjugation and suffering of women, relegating them to a role akin to glorified servitude.*

As we transitioned to the 20th century, there was a notable shift in the status of women, marking a positive and significant change. This paper offers a comprehensive examination of the reasons behind the declining status of the women and delves into the pivotal contributions of prominent figures like Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Raghupathi Venkataratnam Naidu, Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham, Gurujada Apparao, Mahatma Gandhi, Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant, Muthu Lakshmi Reddy, etc. Their concerted efforts to eradicate prevailing social ills and elevate the overall position and status of women had a profound and enduring impact on Andhra society.

INTRODUCTION:

The reform activities of Andhra society that were experienced during the first half of the 19th century, became more prominent and spread more by the entrance of Kandukuri Veeresalingam during 1870s. Kandukuri Veeresalingam, The father of social reform and literary renaissance in Andhra and may be regarded as the "Morning Star of the Great Movement for the Emancipation of Women". He came to occupy a very prominent place in the social history of Andhra. Social reform, education and

literature were his primary interests in life. He was shocked and provoked by the evils, cruelties, superstitions and low level of morality which prevailed in the society around him. He carried on a systematic crusade against them.

Veeresalingam was the Prolific writer and he used his literary talents to condemn false belief. For this purpose he started and conducted a number of Telugu Journals like the Vivekavardhini (1874), Hasya Sanjeevani (1876), Satihitabodhini (1883), Satyasamvardhani (1891) and



Satyavadini (1905). His lively articles and constructive views created a great stir in society. He emphasized the need for education of women, Harijan upliftment, and interested in Widow Re-marriage.

Among the followers of Veeresalingam, Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, deserved special mention. He carried on a Nationwide Campaign propagating Anti-notch activities and Social purity. He challenged the current religious beliefs and social practices of the Hindus as not being in consonance with the scriptures. He advocated female education. For this purpose he secured admission to girls in the Pittapuram Raja's College and that without fees.

Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham (1869-1945) was greatly inspired by the Nationalism and zeal for Social Reform of the Andhra Stalwarts, Veeresalingam and Nyapati Subbarao.

Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham advocated education of Backward Classes, female education, Marriage of widows and abolition of Dowry system. He contributed to newspapers and magazines in numerable articles on literary subjects as well as on Nationalism and Social Reform.

Gurujada Apparao was a reformer of Women. He began fighting for the Women's freedom. He started to prevent social evils through literature. He wanted a change in all fields regarding freedom and prosperity of women.

Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao was a carping critic of social evils. He

advocated female education, marriage of widows and social injustice, etc.

The modern reform movement of the 19th century, like those of the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and The Theosophical Society did commendable work in social reforms.

In this context we cannot forget Dr. Annie Besant who choose India as the field of service. She belonged the Ireland. She came to India in 1883 and rendered invaluable service earned for herself a pre-eminent position amongst the social reformers of India.

Mahatma Gandhi, The Father of Nation, was not only a man of action but also a man of ideas. In response to the Clarion call of Gandhiji Andhra women in large numbers joined the Non-Violent Freedom Struggle.

Dr. Mrs. Muttulakshmi Reddy one of the greatest women of India. She was the first Indian lady doctor. She was also the first in many other things. She was the first woman in the whole world to become a Deputy Speaker of the State Legislature and the first Indian Woman to become a member of a Legislative Council. She rendered welfare service of her profession and an ardent Social Worker.

Mrs. Durgabai Deshmukh was a tireless Social Reformer and a fighter for the Rights of Women. Her service for Women's Welfare in India is truly invaluable.

CONCLUSION:

The pioneering work of Reform for Women was conducted by personalities coming both from men and



women; a new friendly and congenial atmosphere was created by these pioneers. The initial scepticism, reluctance and unpreparedness passed away. Many became convinced of reform for Women as a need of the hour. Thus it marked the right beginning for the upliftment of women which went on progressing henceforth.

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