Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Since childhood I have heard from my parents stories of the exciting times of the 1940’s in Hyderabad. Family members used to discuss problems of some children being given in Jeetam (Bondage), and the various ways women needed to be protected in a feudal society. These stories of oppression as well as the struggles of liberation, excited me. What started as a general curiosity about Telangana gradually grew into an interest to understand women’s lives in the Telangana region.

The stories I heard or read were essentially of the participation of women in the Telangana Armed struggle. The question which interested me was the context or history which brought women in such large numbers into an Armed struggle. As there are already some prominent writings on Telangana Armed struggles, I decided to focus on the prior decades, and try and understand the various
processes that led to participation of women in the Armed struggle.

I have focussed on the conditions of women's life then, their attempts at organizing themselves to overcome their social and economic infirmities, and the vain attempts made by some of them to tread new grounds, the various fields they had chosen to work and serve in, and finally the numerous aspects of life they could not touch due to the handicaps they had to suffer under an unhelpful administration and an equally backward social life they had to lead.

In this study an attempt is made to examine the nature of women's participation in a changing social and political environment, in Hyderabad state in the early part of the 20th century. The early 20th century in the Nizam's state of Hyderabad is a rich period for study. During this period, society here underwent rapid change and in about four decades posed a powerful challenge to the feudal power of the Nizam. This was a gradual process, with initial demands for linguistic and cultural freedom. Over a period of time this formalized into organizations with specific political agenda.
It is within this context that this study focuses on women's role and participation, its nature and the way this process was impacted by the larger socio-political trends is also examined. ¹

There could be several questions on what constituted 'politics' in this early period. Usually the term politics conjures up an image of an organization with specific ideology and objectives and an attempt to realize these through the capture and exercise of power, of representation and elections. In this study we are using the term 'politics' in a broader sense. Given the feudal nature of the Nizam's state the very act of questioning and demanding freedom of expression and mobility is certainly to be seen as a political act. The initial questioning against the feudal state was articulated by newly emerging intelligentia, urban and upper caste in character and in its interest. This manifested itself initially through cultural and literary activities, which gradually developed into a formal political stand. This process changed in time, in its location, its social composition and in its long term objectives.²

Our understanding therefore is that any questioning whether
to successfully alter the situation or not is a political activity. In terms of women our interest is to understand the junctures within which opportunities and social spaces were created for women. We would like to emphasise that women are not treated as an undifferentiated and homogeneous group. The study examines women's participation in terms of social composition, male and female perceptions of women's role and participation. To reconstruct women's role and participation, at the same time an attempt is made to understand the nature of women's participation and gain an insight into the linkages between a particular political movement and the social composition of women it drew out.³

In any attempt to reconstruct women's participation in historical processes, several problems are often encountered, paucity of literature being the main one. A variety of sources have been used in this endeavour. In almost all such studies for the period there are bounded to be references to women. It is however in the studies done on the Telangana Armed struggle that a greater attention has been paid to the participation of women in a radical mass move-
ment. For the earlier period references and information are scattered and sketchy.

The works of prominent social leaders like Madapati Hanumantha Rao’s Telangana Andhrodyama Charitra, Vol. 1 and Veldurthi Manik Rao’s Hyderabad Swatantrodyama Charitra, Ravi Narayana Reddy’s Veera Telangana Anubhavalu, Gnapakalu and, Naa Jeevana Padhamloo, M. Narsing Rao’s 50 Years of Hyderabad, Illendula Saraswathi Devi’s Tejomurthulu, give us a vivid picture of the socio-economic and political situations and development of the period under study. These studies are of particular interest because these writers were active participants and were key players in various movements.

The diary written during 1925-35 by Yellapragada Sita Kumari, a prominent social workers of the 1930's, gives us an insight into the understanding of the social conditions of women in Telangana, through the eyes of contemporary women, and the reasons why she was moved to play an active public role to change the situation. Perhaps
the most important sources used in this study is the Proceedings of the Andhra Mahasabha and Mahilasabha for the first seven conferences for the period 1930 to 1939. In these proceedings the emerging perspective on women can be seen.

Contemporary publications like Golconda Patrika (1924 to 1947), Hyderabad Information, (1940's), Hyderabad Affairs, Hyderabad Today (1940's) Reddy Rani Journal (1924-28), Bhagyanagar Patrika (1925 to 1933) are prominent sources, among many others which have helped in reconstructing social and political events of the time.

The history of women's associations has been reconstructed based on souveniers of various associations and contemporary journals. In addition, Dharmendra Prasad's Social and Cultural Geography of Hyderabad City, (1985) deals with various recreational and social clubs for women.

In addition to this various Government publications and documents belonging to the Home department, Education department,
Industries and Commerce departments, Court of Wards, confidential records of Andhra Pradesh State Archives in Tarnaka and also at Secretariat office of Government of Andhra Pradesh have also been used.

During the course of this study I was fortunate to have been able to interview some prominent women leaders like. Burgula Anantha Lakshmi, Pramila Mahendra, Illendula Saraswathi Devi, Smt. Satyavathi, Smt. Brij Rani Gour, Jamalunnisa Begum and Saraswathi Rao daughter of Yellapragada Sita Kumari. These interviews helped in getting a flavour of the times.

There have been some prominent studies like Pro. Sarojini Regani’s ‘Highlights of Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh’, which describes the nationalist movement in Hyderabad State vividly. The same author’s Who is who’ of Andhra Pradesh Volume one and two which deal with women activists in various movements. Prof. Vaikuntam’s ‘Education and Social Change in South India, Andhra. (1880-1920)’, gives us a vivid picture of women and their educational
status in Nizam's State and efforts to change it.

Sheela Raj's 'Medievalism to Modernism Socio-economic and Cultural history of Hyderabad 1869-1911', has helped to understand the social conditions in Hyderabad State.

There have been many works on the Telangana Armed Struggle, for instance P. Sundaraiah's Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons, (1972), in which mention was made about the women participants. He devoted one chapter to women participants. This struggle has also been studied under peasants uprising in Dhanagare's 'Peasant Movement in India 1920-1950'. In Ravi Narayana Reddy's 'Naa Jeevana Padhamlo', also dealt with Telangana armed struggle. Barry Pavier's (1981) The Telangana Movement 1944-51' is an excellent work which gives us a vivid picture of Telangana socio-economic conditions and Telangana movement. Renu Chakravarthy's 'Communists in Indian Women's Movement 1940-50'.

One of the significant works on Telangana women in recent
times was carried out by a women's group, Stree Shakti Sanghathan. Their work *We were making History (1985)*, reconstructs history of woman's participation, through oral narratives of women who were active in the Armed struggle. This work is unusual in that it attempts to capture women's perception of their participation in their own words.

As already indicated, the focus in this study is primarily on the period prior to the Telangana Armed struggle to examine and reconstruct the growing participation of women in public affairs.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The brief introduction chapter focuses on the significance of the theme under study, the questions that are sought to be examined, and locates these details in other works on the Telangana region.

Chapter two deals with the slow and steady awakening in the province, which led to the formation of strong social organizations focusing on minority concerns, literary pursuits and political aspira-
tions. The chapter also deals with the varied organizations through which the demand and hopes of the different social groups were articulated. In this process women’s problems, women’s issues were taken up.

Chapter three deals with the literary and cultural renaissance and the increasing political activity. This process is sought to be seen through the various organizations that came into existence.

Chapter four deals with the social context in which women’s associations emerged. The earlier caste and community associations, the library movement and the growing political articulation in the Nizam’s dominion, created a space for women to organize. Women’s problems and women’s education which were core concerns of these varied trends, created an environment in which women started organizing. In this chapter a detailed history of women’s organizations, their establishment and goals are studied.

Chapter Five deals with the Andhra Mahila Mahasabha confer-
ences held in Telangana region simultaneously with Andhra Mahasabha and other, Women’s conferences held in Nizam's dominion. The speeches and the political participation of women through their own organizations is examined in great detail.

Chapter six focuses on the radical phase of women's participation i.e. Telangana Armed Struggle. Here the study deals with demands for freedom of social expression and organization, which were essentially concerns of the urban middle class of Hyderabad. The focus in the phase is on the structures of oppression, questioning the feudal nature of the state and compelling a shift of activity from the urban and semi-urban areas to the rural areas is examined thoroughly.

Chapter seven deals with the major conclusions of the study. Biographical sketches of prominent women who have participated in various social movements in Telangana have been included as an annexure.
REFERENCES

   

2. Tanika Sarkar, 'Politics and Women in Bengal, the conditions and meaning of participation', *IESHR*. vol xxi, no. 1, 1984, pp. 91 -93.
   
   also see Gail Minant 'Women and History : some theoretical considerations', in *Samya Shakti*. (A journal of women's studies), no. 1, 1983, pp. 59.


   For elaboration of this point see....


   c. Stree Shakti Sangatana, *We were making history.... life stories of women in the Telangana People's Struggle*, kali for women, 1989, pp. 28.
