CHAPTER 3
WOMEN’S ISSUES : THE REFORM AND THE LEGACY

For centuries women in India had been subordinated to men and socially oppressed. The age old traditions and orthodox religious principles riveted women to an insignificant corner of indigenous social spectrum. Time and again elements and influences of patriarchy were forcefully imposed on the social structure which ultimately clipped the wings of women. Most often the status of woman in Indian society was that of glorified slavery. In a nutshell, women have been seen as mere subjects of male members and looked upon as mere adjuncts to men.

The traditional status-quo in so far as the position of women remained intact even during the process of cultural synthesis that was affected during the rule of Muslim monarchs. Despite the process of reciprocation between Hinduism and Islam, in imbibing elements of cultural practices into one another, the status of woman did not show any considerable change. Even in Islamic tradition the role of woman in society was no better than that in Hindu society. The major consolation during this process was the indigenous tradition of dissent and protest against the established cultural practices. In South India, Veerasaivism, Verses of Vemana and Sri Vaishnavism defied the brahminical order in society. The 19th century reform movements have been

Influenced by these developments. Though there was a healthy tradition of protest in society, the problems of women became central to reform activity only during the 19th century.

The reform movement in Andhra during the 19th century should be seen as a part of all India efforts initiated in this direction. The reform efforts of earlier reformers in Bengal and Maharashtra had a bearing on Telugu people. Like other regions in the country, Andhra society during the 19th century, was dotted by caste restrictions, blind beliefs and various social evils. The consolidation of colonial rule and the destructive as well as regenerative roles played by the British during this century paved the way for social change. The destruction of rural economy, creation of a national market, introduction of English education along with western notions of liberal ideas and new modes of transport and communication provided a launching pad for social reform. The English educated middle class that took its origin during this period, shouldered the responsibility of taking the new message to others in contemporary society.

The existence of indigenous tradition of dissent provided the needed social setting to reform activity. Kandukuri Veeresalingam became a pioneer of social reform activity in Andhra. The central concern of his efforts was women's issues. His intense reform activity in these fields spread the necessary

For more details on early reform activities in Bengal and Maharashtra, see N.S.Bose, Indian Awakening and Bengal, Bombay, 1965; Sivanath Sastry, History of Brahma Samaj, Calcutta 1974 (first edn. 1911); D.S.Sharma, Hinduism Through Ages, Bombay, 1956.
consciousness among women numbers of the society. The efforts of reformers eased out various social restrictions imposed on women. The latter began educating themselves and took to various professions like teaching and journalism. G.V. Appa Rao, a literary prodigy in Telugu during late 19th century, became very optimistic of the immense impact of social reform activities on the conditions of women and declared with a prophetic inclination that modern woman would rewrite history.

The father-figure of social reform movements in Andhra, Veeresalingam died in 1919 leaving behind him a rich legacy of social awakening and the much need to continue further the attack on social evils which witnessed signs of clear decline. It is true that most of the social evils have been given shattering blows during the life time of Veeresalingam. Though the intensity of the problem was diluted, its total annihilation was still due at the time of his death. While evils like bride price yielded to heavy pressure of social reform, the problem of child marriages and widow marriages still remained major social obstacles to contend with. Further, new social evils were added to the already existing ones. The most important among them was the problem of dowry at the time of marriages. The problem of dowry was equated with the growth of English education and creation of white-collar jobs under colonial administration. It is interesting to note

3 For details, see K.V. Ramana Reddy, Veeresalingam - Gurajada (Telugu) an unpublished article obtained from the author. Also by the same author Mahodaman (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1969. This book is an authentic biography on G.V.Appa Rao and provides interesting insights into social history of Andhra during the 19th century.

4 A few contemporary autobiographies reveal that the dowry problem
that the problem of dowry was slowly raising its ugly head even during the second half of 19th century. We come across a few scattered instances of harassment of brides for dowry and the first dowry death was reported from Nellore district in the second half of 19th century itself. Though such instances were rare, still they served as a strong pointer to the magnitude of problem in future. Infact, the problem of dowry became acute by early 20th century. The post Veeresalingam period too left a achieved during the earlier period. An attempt is made in the present chapter to review and assess the activities in the field of social reform after Veeresalingam.

II

The death of Veeresalingam left many a reformer perplexed and it was considered a severe blow to the ongoing reform was gradually assuming alarming proportions for middle class people. It is reasoned out that the new employment opportunities created by the English education displaced many people from traditional occupations. When the educated people could secure a job with some surety of tenure and a fixed amount of salary, they began to feel that they were relatively secure in an era of declining economic conditions under the colonial rule. Precisely these were the people who demanded dowry at the time of marriages and this problem initially became very acute in case of middle class Brahmin families in Andhra which had more number of educated and employed people. With the growth of English education, the problem of dowry became serious in other non-Brahman castes also. For details, see Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry, Anubhavalu - Jnapakaloonu (Autobiographical Reminiscences in Telugu), Vol.1, Rajamahendravaram, 1955, pp.37-41.

For more details, see K.H.S.S.Sundar, Origins and Growth of Political Consciousness in Andhra During the Nineteenth Century. Ph.D. Theses, University of Hyderabad, 1994, p.144. Also see Apendix No.2 on p.315 in the same thesis, wherein the author gives an anonymous protest petition addressed to the Governor of Madras Presidency and which, requests for a thorough inquiry into the happening.
activity in Andhra. Describing Veeresalingam an 'angel', a well-known contemporary playwright bemoaned that the path-finder left the people leaving them without a captain to steer the ship of reform to a safe shore. He however, ends by saying that the sapling of reform which Veeresalingam planted would definitely grow and spread its branches throughout the contemporary society. Precisely it was this optimism generated by Veeresalingam and the social awakening of his reform efforts led the second generation of reformers in a right direction after his death. A few important aspects may become significant here for our analysis. Whereas the influence of Veeresalingam was explicit during his lifetime, the same was implicit after his death. Though the onslaught of revivalist movements like Arya Samaj and Theosophy succeeded in halting the pace of reform activity, they failed in arresting its spirit. The intellectual make-up of Modern Andhra and the first generation of political leaders in this region have been immensely influenced by the social reform endeavours. The legacy of Veeresalingam was kept alive after his death by the next generation. It is attested by the reform efforts of various people in society after 1920. Despite the presence of a strong hegemonic influence of national movement throughout the second phase of social reform in the pre-independence era, people never lost their insights into this important aspect of social development.

See Kallakuri Narayana Rao, Veeresalinga Vimsati (Telugu), kakinada, 1919, pp.4-6. This is a small book of poems written by the author mourning the death of Veeresalingam.

7 Ibid., p.21.
An important aspect of post-Veeresalingam period was that women members in the society began to organise themselves inorder to fight for the rights of their own. Though the social base of such women activists was narrow and their number was less, they came to the forefront of reform activity after 1920. In the pre-1920 period enlightened men, under the influence of rationalistic and humanistic sentiments, worked for the upliftment of women. By early 20th century they were replaced by self-conscious and self-confident women members who shouldered the task for the betterment of their social and economic status. They founded many organisations, institutions and initiated efforts to alleviate the miseries to which women members had been subjected to. It can be seen that during the period of present study, there was hectic activity in society for the emancipation of women from the confines of traditional roles and in removing several practices that were deterrent to their development. The wish among the women members to initiate such constructive activity was possible due to rapid changes in the social, economic and political spheres during 19th century and early 20th century.

The existing tradition of protest in Indian society coupled with the inflow of Western ideas facilitated the social change and women began to participate in social movements. Soon after the first decade of 20th century a national conference on women's education was organised which consequently led to setting up of the first ever All India Women's Conference in 1927. The

Shahida Lateef, "The Indian Women's Movement and National Development: An Over View" in Gail Minault (ed.), The Extended
organisation was expected to consolidate the efforts of all women groups and formulate policies on women's issues. However, the organisation was narrow in its scope and ignored the problems pertaining to rural women. Added to this the social base of the movement was also very narrow as most of the members of the organisation were drawn from the urban-based well-to-do families. As a result, the organisation remained confined to a small group of women from urban areas.

Broadly, the women's movement in India had three distinct phases. During the 19th century, the reform efforts were directed at improving the status of women beyond purely domestic concerns. These initial efforts were directed at improving the social position of women vis-a-vis age old traditional practices. The efforts were directed by men. In the second phase of reform activity, starting from the second decade of 20th century witnessed the emergence of women organisers and activists. The movement during the period was elite in nature and became defunct after achieving specific goals. In the later stages, there was a gradual realisation that involvement of women from different strata of society and an exposition of their problems became the primary concerns. It was further realised that the movement should be horizontal involving all women on equal footing rather than a vertical movement.

Organisational activity among Indian Women was generally


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., pp. 198-99.
higher in South India than in North India. This had been particularly marked in the Andhra region of former Madras Presidency. Scholars put forward three major reasons for this. Madras Presidency was ahead of all other parts in India in terms of female literacy. The female literate number was slightly higher in Tamil areas than the Telugu areas of the Presidency. **However,** education in parts of Andhra was relatively free from Christian missionary influence which was not so in Madras and other Tamil areas. As a result the girl students of Telugu region did not face the onslaught of missionary influence like in other parts.  


Ibid., pp.27-40.  

It is not to say that Andhra region was totally free from missionary influence. Christian missions were active in this part of the Presidency too. For details see V.Ramakrishna, Social Reform. Op.Cit., pp.50-55. Contemporary Press reports reveal that missionary activities were carried out regularly. Even reform journals like Vivekavardhini came heavily upon missionary activities and, in particular the Zenana missions which were converting Hindu females. See Vivekavardhini. January 1884 in Native Newspaper Reports (NNPR), Tamilnadu Archives (TNA). Some journals published a series of articles condemning Christian morals. See Purusharthapravadini, March 1876, p.36. Some times a few violent attacks on Christian missionaries were also reported by colonial authorities. For example see the Minute by Chamier, a member in the Governor's council of Madras in Secret Department Consultations, No.1, dt. 13.7.1847, TNA. However, large scale protest was reported from Madras and surrounding regions. For details see K.H.S.S.Sundar, Op. Cit., p.73 and p.172. Violent acts on Christian missionaries assumed serious proportions in Tamil regions of the Presidency. For more details, see R.E.Frykenberg, "The Inner Logic of Imperium in India" in Indo-British Review (IBR), Vol.VI, No.2, and "Crises of Conscience: Conversion under the company Raj in South India" in Ibid., Vol.IX, No.1.  

Protests against missionary interference in girls' schools in Andhra were a few in number. For example, it was reported around 1871 that most of the girls at Bezawada Church Mission Girls' School left the institution because of a religious panic. See
coupled with social endeavours during the 19th century, provided much needed scope for women to freely express themselves. It can be seen that the struggle for the cause of women, culminated in the establishment of women's journals in Andhra. The lead was taken by Veeresalingam and he published first ever women's journal in Andhra in 1883 viz., *Satihitabodhini*. This was followed by the publication of a few other women journals during the late 19th century and early 20th century. The unique contribution of these journals lies in the fact that they took reform ideas to women and were responsible for the spread of enlightenment among them. Coupled with the growth of education and journalism, the Brahmo Samaj and its off-shoot, Prarthana Samaj had a major impact on the Telugu speaking areas in the fields of social reform and political awakening. For example, the Brahmo Samaj Centres which were exclusively meant for women at Eluru and Rajahmundry may be cited here. In such a favourable social setting women members in the society were imbued with a new enthusiasm and took up the cause of women's issues themselves. Trained in a society that was bubbling with reform spirit, they soon emerged as activists and leaders of the

for details Report on Public Instruction, 1871-72, Appendix A, No.V, P.xlii, TNA.


For a detailed account on women's journals, see D.Padmavathi, Aspasta Pratibimbalu: Telugulo Streela Patrikalu = Oka pariseelana. 1883-1947 (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1989; Vavilala Gopalakrishnaiah, "Andhra mahilalu - Patrikalu" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila, dt.5.1.1945 and V.Ramakrishna, "Women's Journals in Andhra During the Late 19th Century: A Study of the Reflection of Reform Issues" in the Proceedings of Indian History Congress, Goa, 1981.

17 Andhra Mahila, dt.1.11.1953, p.45.
Against this background the issues and problems relating to women, the early reform efforts, various women's organisations in the early 20th century and their fight for the cause of women may be discussed. The major areas of reform during the period under present study were more or less the same issues which have been left unfinished. During the present period a few more problems were added like the problem of dowry and there was an increased emphasis on other problems like nautch. Since the same social evils were still persistent in the society among large sections of people, the issues taken up during early 20th century were almost same like in the preceding century.

What was significantly achieved in the early period was dissemination of progressive ideas, generation of social consciousness and modest beginning of actual reform process in abrogating social evils through the consistent efforts of early reform leaders and their followers. As the goals of reform were not totally fulfilled in the first phase of social reform during the life time of Veeresalingam, the second generation still felt the urgency to alleviate the ignominable practices persisting in the society. During the period of our study, reform activity and, in particular, women's issues was conducted alongside political activities and national movement. The question of social reforms was now taken up by political leaders and hence, both social and political reforms were considered together as the former was the beginning and the latter was the culmination of reform activity.
Further, significance of the study of reform endeavours during post-Veeresalingam period lay in that the serious efforts were made in the direction of dowry and nautch problems, Child marriages and other related issues were also taken up in a concerted manner. It is precisely here that the reform efforts after 1919 differ from the earlier period. In the early 20th century a number of women's associations were established in Andhra region of Madras Presidency. Such associations have been founded at places like Berhampore, Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Narasapuram, Eluru, Vijayawada, Machilipatnam, Guntur, Ongole and Kurnool. Prominent women members from all social sections actively participated in the movement. Among the caste associations, the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha had a woman wing of its own viz., Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha and this was active in taking the message of reform to the members of their own caste in the entire region of Andhra. A significant aspect of the work of these women's associations is that they inculcated a right spirit in women to work for their progress in an independent manner. Another significant aspect is that they mobilised and facilitated the movement of women. This in turn led to the much needed exposure of women members in the society which ultimately

18 Vernacular newspapers and journals are full of reports on these activities. For details, see Krishna Patrika (Telugu weekly), dt. 10.5.1922; Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Kavitam Mahila Samstha (West Godavari District, 1985); Manoranjani (Telugu Monthly), June 1911 and August 1911; Anasuya (Telugu Monthly), February - March, 1920; Vasavi (Telugu Monthly), April, 1932; Andhra Mahila (Telugu Fortnightly), 15.5.1944, 1.6.1944 and 1.11.1944; Hindu Sundari (Telugu Monthly), December 1946, January 1947, April 1947 and October - November 1947.

19 See for example proceedings of Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha (Telugu), Madras, 1940.
A major reform activity that engaged the attention of reform leaders in Andhra was the child marriages. The evil of child marriages attracted the attention of student community too. In one of the articles published in a college magazine, the author lashed out at the evil of child marriages. He opines that social progress would be adversely affected unless there was no check on growth of child marriages. Explaining this further, the article says that the children born out of early marriages would be unhealthy and become a liability to nation since the productive value of the labour of such people was of no use to the nation. The author advocates that the evil of child marriages should be dealt with in a stern manner. Such vehement protest was voiced by young students under instruction since the problem was still a serious concern in the society.

At the Presidency level in Madras, the number of child marriages for the girls under the age of 15 showed an increase between 1901 and 1931. Such number increased from 92 to 108 in Hindu community, from 44 to 55 in Muslims and from 25 to 35 in Christians per every 1000 girls married. The percentage wise break-up is shown

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20. Krishna Patriaka, dt.29.3.1924.

For more details, see N.A., "Baalya Vivahamulu" (Telugu) in the Hindu College Magazine. Masulipatam, Vol.1, No.1, January 1929, PP81-82.

22. Ibid.

24. This estimate is based on the contemporary articles and
in the following table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% of girls married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 1 Year</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 Years</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 3 Years</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 4 Years</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5 Years</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 Years</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 13 Years</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem of Child marriages was acute in the coastal region of Andhra. The following tables reveal the contemporary situation. Which gives the number of girls married per every 1000 marriages in the age group of 0-10.

calculations which heavily depended on census figures. For details, see Garimella Salyanarayana, "Andhrulu - Ati Baalya Vivahamulu" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi (Telugu Monthly), October, 1933, p. 194.

For more details see the Census Report of 1931. We have some references to caste-wise break-up of child marriages. Per every 1000 marriages performed the number of child marriages showed an upward trend in Brahmins (6 to 20), Telagas (35 to 55), Mala (5 to 26), Kalingas (180 to 353) and a downward trend in Tamil Brahmins (15 to 2) and Tamil Viswabrahmins (2 to 1). For details, see the Presidential speech of Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy, 7th Andhra Mahila Sabha conference in Grihalakshmi, December 1933, p. 196.

The table shows that the problem assumed serious proportions in the Plains of coastal Andhra. Interestingly, the incidence of child marriages was very low in Rayalaseema region. The contemporary press came heavily upon the educated sections of the society in ignoring the magnitude of this problem and appealed to all the reading public to come forward to annihilate this evil.

Alarmed by the dangerous dimensions of the problem, leaders, of reform movement as well as caste associations focussed their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>Number of Child marriages per every 1000 marriages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganjam (Plains)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganjam (Agency)</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visakhapatnam (Plains)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visakhapatnam (Agency)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Godavari (Plains)</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Godavari (Agency)</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Godavari</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishna</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guntur</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nellore</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittoor</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuddapah</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurnool</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anantapur</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellary</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The influence of social reform campaign was vigorous in Rayalaseema region too. This was affected even during the life time of Veeresalingam. The pervasive influence of his reform activity in Rayalaseema is attested by the fact that a few public associations were founded in this region with the exclusive motive of propagation of social reform. For example, Pattikonda Literary Society (1882), Chittoor Native Association (18830 and Palamaner Literary Association (1884) have been founded with such aim. For more details, see K.H.S.S. Sundar, Op.Cit., pp.205-09. Perhaps, the later day reform activity must have been influenced by these trends in late 19th century.

Anasuva (Telugu Monthly), February - March, 1920, pp.4-5.
attention towards this peril and concentrated their efforts and energies to root out the evil. Addressing the Andhra Kshatriya Mahasabha as early as 1908, G. Hari Sarvotama Rao stated that the degradation of the society lay in the fact that girl children were married at an age when they were ignorant of its meaning. He advised the members of the Sabha to abstain from performing child marriages. The second Arya Vaisya Mahasabha held at Machilipatnam passed a resolution urging its members to stay away from the evil. The conference further decided to cut off all help to those people of Vaisya community in case of violation of the resolution. On the same lines, the Gouda conference held in 1913 adopted a resolution urging its members to do away with the evil and perform post-puberty marriages.

The Kammas, among others were highly progressive with regard to their perception of child marriages. The seventh Kamma Conference held in 1919, under the chairmanship of R.V.S.Naidu, passed resolutions against child marriages and set the minimum marriable age limit at 16 for girls. The Reddy Conference held at Kurnool took a pledge to stop performing child marriages. The women’s associations were equally forthright in their criticism of child marriages. Speaking from the Presidential Chair on the occasion of the sixth anniversary of Berhampore 29


Ibid., p. 142.

Ibid., p. 143.

Andhra patrika (Telugu Daily), dt.24.6.1919.

Ibid., dt.3.1.1920.
Women's Conference, G.C. Kudutamma gave a call to perform post-puberty marriages. In order to equip the required knowledge to affect change, she urged the audience to read thoroughly the writings of Veeresalingam. The need for eradication of the evil of child marriages was further emphasised by contemporary writers and educated intellectuals. Quoting references from the early texts, where women were married after attaining certain age, the writers advocated the need to stem the tendency of child marriages. They advised the orthodox sections and legislative bodies to follow the foot steps of princely states of Mysore and Baroda where child marriages were officially banned even before the Sarada Act of 1929 was enacted. Above all, the Andhra Mahila Sabha (Andhra Women's Conference) took an official stand as early as 1923 and gave a clarion call to the entire society to put an end to the practice of child marriages.

All the efforts directed against the evil of child marriages, both at the regional as well as national levels bore

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34 Anasuya, Feb-mar., 1920, pp.4-5.

35 Furthering the argument Kanaparti Varalakshmmma, a writer and activist advised women readers to acquire an inkling of knowledge into contemporary social and political affairs by taking resort to the reading of good books such as the ones published by Vignana Chandrika Grandhamandali of Komarraju Laxamana Rao. For details, see Ibid., May-June 1920, pp.42-51.

For details, see Rayasam Venkata Sivudu, Vyasavali (Telugu), Art II, Nellore, 1926, pp.152-53.

38 Speaking at the 4th Andhra mahila Sabha Conference, the President of the session, Mrs. Kasinathuni Ramabayamma declared that she would keep aside the doubt whether post-puberty marriages were in tune with the Sastras or not and, instead she would staunchly support them. Adding further she stated that the benefits emanating from post-puberty marriages were innumerable and child marriages would definitely bring in more troubles than normal. For details, see Krishna Patrika, dt.29.6.1923.
fruit in the enactment of Sarada Act in 1929 which fixed the minimum *marriage* age at 14 for girls and 18 for boys. This was welcomed by many people throughout the country. Lashing out at the orthodox elements in society, Cuttamachi Ramalinga Reddy, a reputed intellectual and writer of the early 20th century in Andhra immensely thanked the government for the same. Speaking at the 15th conference of Andhra Mahasabha, he openly declared his uncompromising attitude with orthodox sections in case of child marriages.\(^{39}\) The enactment of Sarada Act, on the other hand caused an uproar among the traditional sections of the society which still preferred a no-changer's stand. This is reflected by the activities of these sections on the eve of Sarada Act. All sections in society including Brahmins, Vaisyas, Kammas and even *Malas* (Untouchbles) openly defied the contents of Sarada Act. Muslims too joined their hands with their Hindu brethren since they considered this as threat to indigenous religious practices, and feared that they also would meet the same fate at the hands of colonial government.

The Vaisyas were highly vocal in condemning the provisions of Sarada Act. The opinion of Vaisyas was reflected by contemporary press. Arguing that post-puberty marriages were not sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures, it was criticised that the British Government committed a blunder in enacting the present legislation.\(^{40}\) To protest against the declaration of the Act the Orthodox sections among Vaisyas convened a meeting at Guntur on

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\(^{39}\) For more contents, vide the *Speech By. the President. Reception Committee, 15th Andhra Mahasabha. Bezawada, 1929.*

\(^{40}\) *Vaisya* (Telugu Monthly), September, 1929, pp.2-3.
behest of Veluri Venkata Sivavadhanulu. The regional and state conferences further culminated in conducting "All India Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha" and "All India Stree Sanatana Dharma Mahasabha" between 30th November and 2nd December, 1929 at Madras.\textsuperscript{47}

The nature, tone and contents of the resolutions adopted at the foregoing conferences of orthodox sections of the society reflected similar concerns. The following resolutions that have been adopted at these conventions bear out this fact.\textsuperscript{48}

i) Post-puberty marriages are not in tune with the Hindu Dharmasastras. Hence, Sarada Act should be rejected by one and all.

ii) People should continue their agitation so long as the Act is not repealed

iii) People should be prepared to leave British India if the government fails to withdraw the Act and,

iv) Gandhiji and Motilal Nehru betrayed Hindus by giving their consent to Sarada Act.

The antagonism to Sarada Act did not either end with protest meetings and resolutions. To openly defy the announcement of the Act, some people openly performed child marriages. It has been reported that members of various castes were panic stricken on the eve of the enactment of Act and were performing child marriages in an indiscriminate manner.\textsuperscript{49} Such haste among them was often leading to unsuitable alliances. Citing these examples, some of the progressive Viswabrahmin leaders requested

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., December, 1929, p.10.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p.9 and p.31.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., November, 1929, pp.25-35 and December, 1929, pp.43-48.
\textsuperscript{49} For details see Rachakulla Chenchaiah, "Prastuta Vivahamulu (Telugu) in Prabodhini, January, 1930, p.186.
the members of their caste to strictly observe the resolutions at the earlier Viswabrahmin conventions which stipulated the minimum marriable age 12 for girls and 18 for boys. However, a few child marriages were performed even after the Sarada Act came into force. Such marriages were reported from Vijayawada taluq in Krishna district. Kshatriyas of Mutyalampadu village performed four child marriages in May, 1930 and during the same month Vaisyas of Pedavadlapudi village, Kammas of Poronki village and Malas of Vijayawada town performed one child marriage each. It was further reported that people were enthusiastic to perform more such marriages in future.

On the other hand, reform leaders were bent upon countering the influence of orthodox sections in the present controversy. Despite some resistance from traditional elements, Sarada Act of 1929 received a favourable response throughout the country. In Andhra the Provincial Women's Conference welcomed the enactment of the Act and recommended imposition of heavy penalties on all those who were found guilty of violating the provisions of the Act. It criticised the manoeuvres of certain educated sections

50 Ibid., pp. 186-87.
51 Vaisya, May, 1930, p. 15.
52 Ibid.
53 See B. Kesava narayana, Political and Social Factors in Andhra, (1900 - 1956), Vijayawada, 1976, p. 202. Some of the caste association also favourably reacted to the Sarada Bill. For example, the All India Padmasali Mahajana Sabha (Weavers' Conference held at Hyderabad in September, 1929 took an official stand in this regard. It passed resolutions which, severely condemned child marriages and welcomed the immediate enactment of Sarada Bill into an Act. For more details, see the proceedings of the Ali India padmasali Mahajana Sabha - 6th Conference, Hyderabad. September 13-15, 1929, Hyderabad, 1930.
of the society who mere trying to perform child marriages. It was felt that the enactment of the legislation was hastily done without proper base of favourable public opinion. It was further opined that the success of the Act in preventing child marriages became doubtful in the face of mounting opposition from powerful orthodox sections of society.

The pro-reform activists and associations enhanced the pace of their activities in drawing the attention of public opinion towards the evils of child marriages. Though orthodox elements among Vaisyas took the lead in attacking the Sarada Act, the reformist members of the same caste were more vigorous in condemning the acts of no-changers among them. The 12th conference of Arya Vaisya Manila Sabha held during 1940 at Madras asked its members to put up a brave front against the orthodox sections and work towards a successful implementation of the Act.54 Another wing of Vaisya Mahasabha viz., Arya Vaisya Vyayama Sabha severely condemned the practice of child marriages at the time of 4th conference of the Sabha under the chairmanship of Dr. G.R. Somanna. Advocating the need for a sound body, the President despised the idea of child marriages, which would result in unhealthy and weak progeny who were of no use to society. The 14th Conference of Andhra Mahila Sabha held at Cuddapah during 16-17 December, 1939 passed various resolutions

54 For details see the proceedings of the Aryavaisya Mahila Sabha - 12th Conference (Telugu), Madras, 1940, pp. 87-93.
56 Ibid.
on the Sarada Act and its implementation. One of the resolutions threw light on the continuance of the evil practice in society and asked the members to fight against this.\(^{58}\) Another resolution drew the attention of the colonial government to some of the shortcomings in the Act and requested it to take stringent measures against all those people who did not follow the provision of the Act.\(^{59}\) Yet another resolution favoured the age of sixteen years as the marriable age for girls vis-a-vis fourteen years as stipulated by Sarada Act. It was finally resolved that members of the Mahila Sabha should embark upon extensive tours in rural areas to enlighten rural women on this issue and stop child marriages. Such call was necessitated by some of the contemporary reports which published the agonising experiences of a few young women emanating from their child marriages.\(^{62}\)

The reform leaders organised themselves into well-knit units in some places to propagate the need for reform in case of child marriages. For example, in the agency tracts of Polavaram such

For more details, see Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, pp.748-59.
58 Ibid., pp.750-51.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p.759.
Ibid.

Suramamba, a young woman married at an age of six years and later deserted by husband, recapitulates her trauma in an article entitled "Naa Baalya Vivaham". She declares that child marriage is solely responsible for the sorry state of affairs in her life. She describes child marriages as "instruments of destruction" and strongly advocates the idea of mutual consent in marriages. For more details, see Kagada (Telugu), dt.1.5.1940, p.11.
committees were formed under the guidance of leaders like K.Viyyanna Pantulu and Perraja Rao. These committees were also constituted at the district level like in the case of Visakhapatnam and West Godavari. In course of time such efforts yielded rich dividends. On the part of the government, it rectified a few shortcomings in the Act. Initially the Sarada Act did not specifically prohibit early marriages outside British India. Taking this as an excuse some people migrated to French settlement area within the British India and performed child marriages. However, the government passed another Act in 1938 which provided that child marriages performed in or outside British India were liable to be treated as unlawful. This Act further strengthened the hands of reform activists. Leaders and Associations took every opportunity to condemn this practice and issued warnings whenever they found such instances in society. Under the influence of intense reform efforts in fighting out this evil, the Hyderabad State Women's Conference began to exert greater pressure on the Nizam's Government to ban the practice of child marriages. As a result of these efforts of various

64 Ibid.

For example, the All India Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha vehemently protested the few semblances of child marriages in the society. For details on its proceedings, see Andhramahila, dt.1.8.1944.

During its 11th conference in June 1944 strong appeal was made to the Nizam of Hyderabad to ban the practice. The proceedings of the conference further reveal the fact that the members of the Sabha were thoroughly influenced by the early reformers and the convention paid rich tributes to leaders like Rammohan Roy, Veeresalingam, Vidya Sagar and Annie Basant for their contributions to the spread of awakening among women. The increasing popularity of the Sabha was attested by the fact that the present convention was attended by 2000 delegates from different parts of Nizam's territory. For details, see Andhra
sections of the society, reformers, and organisations, the incidence of child marriages became less common and finally lost support in society. A contemporary report sums up the net effect of reform activity in this regard. Commenting upon the proceedings of the state level convention of Andhra provincial Women's Conference at Guntur in 1944, a report stated that "the conference does not seem to pass any resolutions on women's education and child marriages since these two are certainly things of the past".

Another problem that continued to plague the Andhra society, like many other parts of the country during this period, was enforced widowhood and orthodox sentiments against widow marriage. The root cause of enforced widowhood was child marriages. Despite strenuous efforts made by early reformers in Andhra, opinion against widow marriages was still strong and did not disappear from the society.

When reform activity was initiated with an increased enthusiasm in the post-1920 period, the number of child widows in the age group of 0-20 years was alarming. This necessitated persistent efforts by reformers inspite of immense opposition from the orthodox sections of the society. The following table gives the details about the great magnitude of child widows pertaining to two different time periods.

mahila, dt. 1.7.1944, pp.11-13.
67 For details, see Ibid, dt.15.11.1944, p.8.
68 For details, vide B.Kesavanarayana, "Widow marriage Movement in Andhra" in Itihas, Vol.11, No.l, pp.147-164.
The table reveals a few important aspects of the problem. Problem of child widows was more acute in the coastal districts than the Rayalaseema region. Among the coastal districts, Ganjam and Krishna revealed a slight decline in the number of child widows between 1921 and 1931. Whereas, Visakhapatnam, Godavari and Guntur regions showed an upward trend in this regard. In the Rayalaseema region the problem was generally of less intensity as revealed by the figures. Cuddapah and Anantapur reported a marginal decline in the number and the rest revealed a minimal increase in the number of child widows.

Efforts have been made to collate the number of widows within a particular caste group. For example, a survey conducted among Vaisyas in the three coastal districts of Nellore, Guntur and Krishna revealed that there were around eight thousand widows in the age group of 1-40 years. The following table shows this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No. of Widows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 5 Years</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 12 Years</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 15 Years</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 20 Years</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 40 Years</td>
<td>6772</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69 Vasavi (Telugu Monthly), August, 1926, p.15.
Though the above table reveals that the problem of child widows was not very acute in the age group of 1-20 years, it still points out that the total number of widows in the three districts was of serious concern. The total female population in these districts was 91174 and this shows that there was a widow per every 12 members.

The serious dimensions of the problem attracted the attention of both general public and reformers in the society. On the part of general public, members of various social sections began to support widow marriages. For example, the first widow marriage in Guntur around 1902 drew enthusiastic support from local people. Kandukuri Veeresalingam was invited to attend the function and when he arrived at Guntur he was given a rousing reception by thousands of people at the railway station. Commenting upon this, a contemporary press report said that the marriage was an indicator to public opinion against no-changes.

In the Krishna district also people were highly alert to the problem of widow marriage and encouraged it through various resolutions during the time of social gatherings. When the

70 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p.2.
73 Ibid. This marriage was a smooth affair and a reputed reformist leader from Guntur, Unnava Lakshminarayana, was instrumental in arranging the marriage. The district munisif, Viswanatha Iyer extended his full support to Unnava and even allowed people to freely use his house during the time of the marriage. Though the orthodox sections from Guntur as well as Tenali raised a hue over the marriage and though the heads of Pushpagiri and Sringeri Ashrams detested the same, the marriage was performed with great enthusiasm. For more details, see Ibid., pp.10-11.
Krishna District Social Conference met at Vuyyuru it was resolved to encourage remarriage of women. This was followed by various village social conferences in the district. At Vellatur convention it was proposed to discuss this issue and consequently two such meetings were convened. C. Chidambarama Rao of Mannava established a branch of Prarthana Samaj at the village and initiated a serious discussion on the issue of widow marriage. Commoners from the village of Ponnur convened a meeting to discuss at length the problem of widow marriage. All these efforts attest the fact that the spread of social awareness in this regard was rapid in affecting a change in the thinking of people at grass-roots level.

On the part of reform leaders and contemporary intellectuals they shouldered the responsibility of widely canvassing the need for widow marriages. They argued that there was no scriptural opposition to these marriages and instead Vedic pronouncements favoured widow marriages. Some of them favoured that the child widows were to be given sound education, economic self-sufficiency and then married. It was also advocated that Widow Homes should be generously established on the lines of those founded at Bombay by Sasipada Benerjee. Equating the

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 For details, see Kolachalam Srinivasa Rao, Madyapanamu, Judamu, Streela Gunamulu (Telugu), Bellary, 1926, p.25.
80 Ibid., p. 145.
problem of child widows with the worst possible social evil, it was even felt that the freedom given to male members in marriage also should be curtailed.\footnote{N.A., \textit{Sammar janamu}, Bellary, n.d., p.5. This source is located in Saraswata \textit{Niketanam}, Vetapalem.} Enforced widowhood devoid of all pleasures was more sinning than sin and some people went to the extent of saying that given a choice between \textit{Sati} and enforced widowhood, the former was better than the latter.\footnote{Ibid., p.7.} It was advised to revive and revoke the ancient system where every person had to undergo celibacy before getting married after certain age.\footnote{Ibid., pp.14-15.} Suggesting an innovative and practiceable solution to the problem it was said that a law should be enacted binding upon all the widowers to go in for second marriage only with widowed women and not virgins.\footnote{For details, see Darisi Chenchaiah, \textit{“Vaisya Samskarana Sangham”} (Telugu) in \textit{Vasavi}. August, 1926, p.30. Chenchaiah was a pioneer in social reform activity in Vaisya Community. Though he was in total agreement with widow marriage movement he too was given to some of the views on widow marriage which have been self-contradictory. For example, he dilates upon three eligibility requirements for widow marriage. They are a) the girl should not attain the age of 16 b) her earlier marriage should not be a consummated one and, c) the girl should be chaste in character. Any child widow who is found lacking any one of these qualities is not fit for remarriage. For details, see Ibid. These ideas of Darisi Chenchaiah immediately invited counter attacks from other people. Criticising the stand taken by Chenchaiah, others viewed this to have baneful effects on child widows and as an anti-thesis to the very idea of widow remarriage. For details,}
associations supported this and the Arya Vaisya Sabha conference held at Visakhapatnam in 1921 favoured this. Some of the contemporary writers and social activists of the Vaisya community further demanded the organisers of Vaisya Mahasabha that they should pass resolutions to the effect that the remarriage of men also should be prohibited.\(^87\) This was in response to the no-changers in society who were opposed to widow marriages tooth and nail. Even among the no-changers two sections were identified by the contemporary society.\(^88\) One section was totally given to age old traditions and customs and such people were very few in number. The other section could be described as pseudo-traditionalists since they were acting against the reform leaders to settle their own personal scores.\(^89\) Condemning this attitude the male members of the society were urged to shed down these narrow feelings and join hands in extending their support to the genuine reform activity in the case of child widows.\(^90\)

Though public opinion was in favour of widow marriage, women’s organisations were late comers into the field of remarriage movement. Since many of the women were still under the strong influence of domestic orthodoxy, it took a long time see the readers’ mail in \textit{Vasavi}. September, 1928, pp.35-37.

\(^87\)Ibid., August, 1926, p.30.
\(^88\)Ibid.
\(^89\)Ibid., September, 1927, p.228.
\(^90\)Ibid.

Ibid. This was not the case only with Vaisyas. For example, the orthodox elements who stood in opposition to widow marriages in Viswabrahmin community have been severely condemned by editorials in their caste journal. For details, see \textit{Prabodhini}, January, 1930, p.185.
for them to come out openly to proclaim their support for the movement. For the first time, the Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha passed various resolutions on this issue during its 6th convention in 1928 at Salem which was presided over by Karnapati Chandramma. These resolutions are as follows.

a) all those child widows whose early marriage is not consummated would be treated as virgins and hence, they are eligible for remarriage.

b) always post-puberty marriage is highly recommended. If the marriage is performed before 16 years, the girl should not be allowed to derive carnal pleasures till she attains an age of 16 years and,

c) in any case the age difference between the boy and girl should not exceed 10 to 15 years.

The above sentiments expressed by the Mahilasabha have been discussed by the 13th Arya Vaisya Mahasabha with a few reservations.

91 For details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha, 6th conference, Salem, 1928, p. 197.

92 The 13th Arya Vaisya Mahasabha was held under the chairmanship of Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta in August 1928. A few of the orthodox elements in the Sabha objected to the inclusion of the issues viz., post-puberty marriages and widow remarriage on the agenda of deliberations. In order to conduct the sabha in a smooth manner, these two issues have been excluded from the agenda. However, Nalam Ramalingaiah in his introductory speech raised these issues and said that most of the Vaisya families accepted post-puberty marriages in principle and asked the members to further consolidate their position on this and also to give their consent to widow marriage in near future. His speech drew enthusiastic response from the audience as his points of contention were not opposed during his address to the Sabha. For details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha, 13th convention, Salem, August 1928, pp. 170-173. The differences among pro-reformist and orthodox groups within the Vaisya Mahasabha were not new. Even during the early conference at Guntur in 1924. There was a bitter fight between these two groups. For details, see G.Sudarsan Reddy, Op.Cit., p.148. In some cases people took report to extreme measures against reformers. For example, kandukuri Veeresalingam was ex-communicated by Orthodox Brahmans and the was not even allowed to fetch water from the houses of others. See karen I.Leonard
Widow marriages were opposed on other counts too. Apart from cultural taboos attached to it, there were economic dimensions to the problem. When a young widow inherited her husband's property, the parents of the widow would not like their daughter to marry again since any such act would deprive them of enjoying their daughter's property. Rather, they would encourage her to go on pilgrimages and read scriptures so as to divert her attention from material pleasures. In case the parents were wholly dependants on the earnings of their daughter, they wouldn't even try to marry her again since it would immediately result in the loss of earning as well as working member of their family. Most of the middle class families faced this problem in the society.

Inspite of various hurdles and difficulties, the reform leaders were successful in their campaign for widow marriage. Social reformers, progressive individuals and various caste associations supported the cause of widow marriage. In 1925, young and enthusiastic members belonging to Vaisya Community organised "Vaisya Youth Association" under the leadership of Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta. The Association was later given a great fillip under the dynamic guidance of Darisi Chenchaiah. The first widow marriage was arranged under the auspices of this Association. The orthodox sections among the community tried

93 For details, see Darisi Chenchaiah, Nenu-Naa Desam (Telugu), Vijayawada, 1967, pp.358-59.
95 For a list of Presidents and tone of the resolutions passed by Arya Vaisya Yuva jana Sabha (Youth Association), see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Yuva jana Sabha, 8th Convention, Madras, 1940.
their best to foil the present attempt but could not succeed in doing so.

Darisi Chenchaiah, Mote Narayana Rao, Rao Bahadur Tumpudi Dhagavantam Gupta and Kollurl Suryanarayana Gupta became leaders of widow marriage movement among Vaisyas. Among these people Darisi Chenchaiah took the lead in performing these marriages and providing the necessary information to all the people who were willing to marry young widows. In one of the articles he published during the heyday of widow marriage activity among Vaisyas, he accounts for five important reasons for the success of his efforts. They are:

i. There are no financial constraints on the movement. Just like Pyda Ramakrishnaiah came to the rescue of Veeresalingam, Narasepalli Chennappa extended monetary help to Chenchaiah.

ii. Mote Narayana Rao was hell bent upon the activities of widow marriage movement. Narayana Rao's entry, a wealthy and highly respected nationalist leader among Vaisya community, served as a boon to the entire movement.

iii. Even the orthodox sections and traditional elements in the community timely recognised the winds of change in society and they were not as rigid in their attitude as in the past.

iv. The rapid changes in the socio-economic conditions where caste divisions were slowly disappearing from public life were responsible for a change in the attitude of general public and finally.

v. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi was sweeping the youth day by day. Gandhiji openly declared that the earlier marriage of a young widow is totally null and void if the girl was married before the age of 15 years and she should, at once, be considered as unmarried. Gandhiji's propaganda had a direct bearing on the minds of Vaisya youth.

Under the dynamic leadership Darisi Chenchaiah and other such persons a number of widow marriages have been performed. In the month of December, 1929 the marriage of the young widow, Mahalakshmamma was performed with Ramiah and the marriage was attended by a number of prominent personalities of Vijayawada town. The marriage of another young widow, Narayanamma of Cuddapah district was celebrated and the bridegroom was Viswanatham Sresti. In order to effectively supervise the widow marriage movement, the Arya Vaisya Social Reform Association was founded at Machilipatnam and it performed ten widow marriages before the year 1931. The frequency of these widow marriages left a very positive impression on the minds of other people throughout the state. Under the influence of the movement in Krishna, Guntur and Godavari districts, parents of young widows from other parts of Andhra began openly proclaiming their readiness to accept young widows as their daughters-in-law. In an advertisement released in one of the contemporary journals, K.V.L. Narayana Setty of Madakasira taluq in Anantapur district invited proposals from the parents of young widows in the age group of 14-16 years for his son's marriage. This example is self-explanatory in giving us an idea about the extent and

97 Vasavi, January, 1930, p.368.
98 Ibid.
99 For details see Ibid., December, 1931, pp.306-07. Out of these ten marriages three marriages were arranged by Darisi Chenchaiah, two each by Mote narayana Rao and Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta, one marriage by Kolluri Suryanarayana Gupta and the rest by others.
influence of widow marriage movement.

Widow marriages were performed in other castes also such as **Kammas** and **Reddies**. The first widow marriage in **Kamma** caste was that of Dr. Mulpuri Rangaiah and Chukkamma and the marriage was secretly performed. The openly celebrated widow marriage in the community was that of Darisi **Bapaiah** and Lakshminarasamma. The marriage was performed at Vijayawada in 1927 by Darisi Chenchaiah. He faced stiff resistance from other numbers of Kamma caste for doing so. However, this marriage was much publicised despite various odds and nearly 5000 members belonging to Kamma community attended the marriage. On the same lines a few widow marriages were performed in Reddy community too. 104

During the vigorous campaign for widow marriage movement, some of the women's associations, other than those affiliated to caste associations, took an active part in spreading the message of reform in rural areas. For example, the Godavari District Women's Association and its regional branches fought against the 'Purdah' system which was prevailing among **Kshatriya** families in the district. Responding to the prevailing reform tendencies in the contemporary society, members owing allegiance to the

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102 Ibid.
104 For more details, see Reddi Rani (Telugu monthly), February 1930, p.25; November, 1930, pp.34-35 and September, 1931, pp.30-31.
Association toured the entire district and spread the message of the need for reform in matters of child marriages and widow marriages. The Andhra Mahila Sabha asked its members to enhance the rate of their reform activity. It felt that the state of poor and young widows in particular was distressing and hence called upon the members to help them in education which would ultimately enable them to eke out livelihood on their own.

Along with the widow marriage movement, the orthodox tendencies in marriage rituals and the lavish expenditure at the time of celebration of marriages have been severely criticised and questioned. During the entire period of reform activity contemporary journals came very handy to strengthen the movement further. Journals like Andhra Patrika, Krishna Patrika, Hindu Sundari, Grihalakshmi and Andhra Mahila threw their might behind the reform movement. Apart from these journals, a few other caste journals like Vaisy, Vasavi, Prabhodhini and Devanga Prabha also contributed to the spread of reformist ideas in society. They were the mainstay of the reform movement and immensely helped the reformers to disseminate reform ideas in society. Among these journals, women's journals devoted most of their time to the problems of women. These were moderate in their tone in the initial stages and gradually became aggressive in championing the cause of women. They fought for the cause of women in particular and carried a crusade against social evils.  

For details on the proceedings of the 14th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha, see Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, pp.759-60.

These journals generally propagated progressive, reformist and at times...
The efforts of reform leaders, caste associations, women's associations, journals and progressive people in society brought about a visible change in the general attitude towards widow marriage. The impact of widow marriage movement was so impressive that tone of the speakers at the 19th convention of Arya Vaisya mahasabha held at Madras in 1940 categorically stated, "there is absolutely no need to specially dilate upon problems like post-puberty and widow marriages since these are accepted by all others in society. The people who oppose reform movement are negligible now". This reflects the general public opinion and the strong influence of widow marriage movement.

Another major problem that invited the immediate attention of reformers was women's education and the problem of illiteracy among them. Though there was a perceptible change in the activities of some women in education, journalism and social reform, the overall position of literacy of women was far from satisfactory. The returns of education did not indicate any discernable growth in the field of women's education. The revolutionary ideas through their columns. For details, see S.Harikrishna, Contribution of Telugu Journalism to the Social Reform in Andhra 1874-1920, M.Phil., Thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1991, pp.13-33. Women's journals at times questioned the domination of men and advocated the cause of economic freedom for women. Though they were highly progressive and active in spreading the message of reform, they were handicapped by fiscal constraints and low circulation. Further, these journals were run by middle class members and often reflected the concerns of a particular class like in the early period. Infact, their nature became a stumbling block in understanding and helping the cause of other classes of the society. For details, see Ibid., pp.143-45.

109 For details, vide the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Mahasabha, 19th convention, Madras, 1940, pp.20-21.
The following table reveals this. 110

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Percentage of Literates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>7.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>10.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>10.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the highly discouraging picture of women's literacy. Education of women did not show any favourable results because of the expenses involved, the tradition of early marriage of girls and the indifference of the parents before marriage and of in-laws after the marriage. Before the impact of social reform movement in the society, women were never considered as individual entities. It was only during the period of social reform endeavours that the problem of women's education became one of the main priorities on the agenda of reform movement. Education of women was considered as an instrument of change by contemporary reformers which, they believed would relieve women from the present state of ignorance and illiteracy.

110 Cited in B. Kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op. Cit., p.239.
Initially, differences existed among the votaries of women's education on the nature of curriculam. Some suggested mere elementary education while, some others favoured vocational education to make women confident, self-reliant and self-assertive.

From the beginning of 20th century onwards education of women was a topic of discussion at various public fora. The Andhra Mahila Sabha took an active part in propagating the need for women's education. As early as 1910 it encouraged its members to work for this cause. A few of contemporary activists and writers asked people to open their eyes to reality in society and counter the influence of Missionary schools where a number of Hindu girls were admitted due to internal constraints imposed by narrow Hindu traditions. These divisions in the society had their effect on women's education too. A society deprived of women's learning would be disunited and adversely affect social progress. A few of the contemporary women's associations, on the other hand were very active in the field of women's education. The "Women's Educational Development Society" at Narasapuram in Godavari region used to conduct periodic examinations to women students in the surrounding regions and issue certificates to the successful candidates. So also, the "Dharati Samajam" at Visakhapatnam was actively working in this

For details, see Manoranjani (Telugu monthly), November, 1910, p. 153.

Ibid., pp. 159-160.

Ibid., January, 1911, p.79.

Ibid., June, 1911, p.232.
field under the leadership of Bulusu Suramma. In collaboration with the Kakinada Women Students’ Association she conducted a few special conferences for women wherein they were instructed in essential elements of different branches of education. Crowning the achievements of these efforts was the contribution made by Kakinada Women Students’ Association. The Association was established in 1904 and was not very active in the initial stages. It became defunct within a few years of its establishment. However, the Association was revived in 1910 by M. Rajabayamma. The revived association was registered on 27th September 1927 with the following objectives.

a) to initiate efforts in developing women's education
b) to train some of the members of the Association as women teachers and
c) to establish girls schools, women's colleges and widow homes and to impart vocational skills among women so as to make them self-reliant.

These sentiments on women's education were further reiterated by contemporary nationalist leaders. Konda Venkatappaiah Pantulu, a renowned leader during national movement, strongly advocated the need for women's education on par with male members. Extensively quoting from the census

115 Ibid., August, 1911, p.313.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., pp.317-18.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid., October, 1911, pp.379-80.
120 See for details, Andhra Patrika (Telugu weekly), Golden Jubilee Special Number, 1965, p.59. The present article by Venkatappaiah
figures he added that there was an increased need for more number of girls' and vocational schools to train girl students. He favoured the idea that women teachers along should be appointed in girls' schools and requested the government to open institutions for those women who were willing to continue their studies after marriage.

Consistent efforts were made by other enlightened members of society in the direction of improving the state of women's education. The Maharaja of Vijayanagaram was instrumental in opening four schools at Madras and one at Vijayanagaram during the period 1919 to 1921. An exclusive institution for girls came into existence at Machilipatnam. The 10th Andhra Maha Sabha held in 1918 under the presidentship of Gadicherla Ramabayamma passed a few significant resolutions urging its members to establish primary schools for girl children and appoint female teachers to teach the students. It is interesting to note that exclusive women educational institutions have been promoted throughout Andhra by various agencies. The following table shows this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Institution</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Founding Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vaisya Seva Sadanam</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Rajahmundry</td>
<td>Nalam Ramalingaiah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarada Niketanam</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Guntur</td>
<td>Unnava Lakshmi-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

is a reprint from the 1913 Annual Number of the journal.

121 Ibid., pp.60-61.
122 Ibid.
123 For details, see Krishna Patrika (Telugu Weekly), dt.2.7.1919 and 9.10.1920.
The Vaisya Seva Sadanam was modelled after Pune Widow's Home. It used to provide training to girl students in elementary education, subjects like History, Geography, English, Mathematics and Vocational subjects like tailoring, embroidery, drawing, music and weaving. Under the influence of national movement the Seva Sadanam used to admit students belonging to all castes including 'lower' castes and provide then free lodging, boarding and education.

The "Sarada Niketanam" at Guntur was promoted by the wife of well known social reformer of 20th century, Unnava Lakshminarayana. The institution devised a curriculum of its own spanning into eight years and impart academic and vocational

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Kasturi Devi Vidyalayam 1923 Nellore bayamma
Mahila Jateeya Vidyalayam 1924 Kakinada Kakinada Women's Association
Vaisya Yuvati Vidyalayam 1927 Guntur Kalangi Seshumambri

126 Ibid.

Ibid. It was around the same time and under the influence of Harijan upliftment movement of Gandhi, the first harijan Girls' Hostel was established in Andhra. The Home, known as Anjana Devi Adi Andhra Girls' Hostel, was founded at Vijayawada in 1929 by Eda Venkaiah and Vemula Kurmaiah. The well known reform leader and a staunch nationalist, Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu was highly instrumental in founding the hostel along with the aforesaid two members. The Chatapalli Zamindar, the local rice millers. Harijan sympathisers and the collectors of Krishna and Anantapur districts helped the smooth functioning of the Hostel. It used to provide free lodging facilities to harijan girls who were prosecuting their school as well as collegiate studies in the town. For more details on the Hostel, see Grihalakshmi. October, 1941, p.489.
skills to the students under instruction. During the first five years students were generally given basic training in Sanskrit, Telugu, painting, handicrafts, domestic medicine and history. During the second phase students were instructed in their optional subjects. The institution was generously helped by local municipality, taluq boards and district board.

**Kasturi** Devi Vidyalayam at Nellore was promoted by the women's wing of Indian National Congress. This is an explicit example showing reformers and nationalist leaders together in an activity of women's development. The founder of the institution was Ponaka Kanakamma. Students had been imparted knowledge in languages and other non-academic subjects like cane work, music, theology etc. Education was given free of cost and within five years of the establishment of the institution 400 students received training.

The Mahila Jateeya Vidyalayam at Kakinada was sponsored by the Kakinada Women's Association. The institution was highly dependent upon the donations received from general public. Like Sarada Niketanam, this institution also imparted training to students in a fixed time period of three years. During this period learners were provided with some basic skills in tailoring, music and weaving. The institution used to prepare

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128 **Grihalakshmi.** August, 1929, p.661.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., p.662.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid., p.663.
students for the Hindi examinations conducted by "Hindi Prachara Sabha".

The Vaisya Yuvati Vidyalayam at Guntur was conceived by Kalangi Seshumamba, daughter of Majeti Sriramulu, a reputed member of Vaisya community of the town. It instructed students in handicrafts, tailoring, painting, music, embroidery, aspects of elementary medical knowledge in ophthalmology and other subjects like Hindi, Telugu, History, Geography and Mathematics. 134 Within two years of its inception the institution had 140 students on its rolls. 135

A brief look at the contents of curriculum in all these institutions brings out a significant aspect. All of them were bent upon imparting vocational skills to women students so as to make them economically self-reliant. Infact, most of the contemporary reformers, associations, writers, journals and intellectuals of the period advocated this. The establishment of the above institutions was exactly in tune with the demand of reformers and women activists. Some of the writers propagated the idea that education of women alone would bring momentum to social reform activity and hence schools should be established in all rural areas of Andhra so as to bring women into the fold of main social stream. In tune with this some women activists demanded that all girl children should be invariably given

134 Ibid., p.664.
135 Ibid.

education for at least twelve years. A few others recommended compulsory education for girls for at least thirteen years. Being impressed by the division of curriculum in contemporary educational institutions like Sarada Niketanam, they suggested a break-up of 5-10 years and 10-13 years in school curriculum where the students would be instructed in essentials of 3 R’s and other vocational subjects like tailoring, cooking, domestic medicine etc., A few other contemporary writers proceeded further in demanding adult education for rural women. Recognising the intense need of rural reconstruction in India, it was observed that without the constructive help of women the former would be totally incomplete. It was then imperative, the argument said that adult women in rural areas should be given elementary knowledge in education so as to make them active participants in the process of rural development. Further, they should be trained in cottage industries in order to achieve self-reliance in economic activity. Citing all these causes, government as well as private agencies were advised to educate adult women in rural areas. The Women’s organisations of the day criticised the government that adult education centres were established only for

For more details, see Sriram Venkataratnam, "Female Education" (Telugu) in Prabodhini, January, 1930, pp.181-83.
Ibid.
For details, vide Kamaraju Maitreyi, "Rural Reconstruction and the Duties of Women" (Telugu) in Grijhalakshmi, June, 1931, pp.298-301.
Ibid.
Ibid.
men and women were totally ignored. They felt that the need for adult education was more important in case women and that all the local bodies should come forward in promoting this.  

Caste associations also played an active role in serving the cause of women's education during the period under study. The third Reddy Annual Conference held at Nellore in 1920 felt that the root cause of development and progress in society was a healthy growth of education. The Conference stressed that Women's education was of pivotal importance in the harmonious growth of family institution. The Conference went even to the extent of calling upon its members to open libraries in as many places as possible to enable women to get acquainted with the knowledge about contemporary society. The conference urged the members to raise funds for propagation of education among women. The 7th convention of Arya Vaisya Mahila Sabha recommended compulsory education for all girl children for a period of not less than ten years. Some members of the Viswabrahmana Maha Sabha urged the orthodox elements in the Sabha to shed down traditional notions on female education and realise that the progress of women's education also would result in the well-being of the entire Viswabrahmin Community. However, the Niyogi Mahajana Sabha (an association of Niyogi Brahmans) was reserved

143 For details, see the proceedings of 14th Convention of "Andhra mahila Sabha" in Grihalakshmi. January, 1940, pp.750-51.
144 Ibid.
145 Krishna patrika. dt.29.5.1920.
146 Ibid.
in its views on female education. Though the Sabha agreed in principle to imparting education to Brahmin girls, it maintained that the girls should be instructed in those subjects only which would suit the Traditional practices and religious observances followed in the Brahminical households.\textsuperscript{149} Despite such aberrations, generally in all the conferences of caste associations it became customary that speakers emphasised the importance of women's education and resolutions were passed regularly to this effect. The positive sentiments on women's educated have been reiterated in a constant manner.

The Andhra Women's Conference that met in 1932 emphasised the importance of the need for introducing compulsory education for women, establishment of arts colleges, Ayurvedic colleges and industrial schools. In the following year the conference appealed to authorities to encourage medical education among

\textsuperscript{149} For details, see the proceedings of the 13th convention of Niyogi Mahasabha held at Pamaru in Krishna district in \textit{Niyogi} (Telugu Monthly), December, 1919, p.15. There are a few others who advocated that women need not be educated for longer duration of time. However, these people never based their arguments on notions of traditionality. Instead they were given to a strong belief that the present education would only fit for obtaining service positions under the colonial bureaucracy and hence there was no need for such education for females. For example, see Grihalakshmi, December, 1941, pp.506-07. A few youth associations also were not in favour of colonial education. It was felt that the process of learning would be justified only when it promotes national feelings. That education which fails in driving out blind beliefs and social evils is of no use. A system of education that would promote social and national awakening alone is needed to suit the present times. For details, see the proceedings of the \textit{Arya Vaisya Yuva\texta{}Jana Maha Sabha}, 8th Conference, Madras, 1940, pp.114-115. Such sentiments among youth reveals the sweeping influence of social reform activity and national movement.


women by establishing more medical colleges and providing more seats for women in the Visakhapatnam medical College. Some of the organisations opined that women's education was long over due and its promotion was the immediate need of the times since progress of women's education would have positive effects in the domestic circles as well as social progress.\textsuperscript{152} The 16th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha further reiterated its stand on women's education and demanded the establishment of more number of primary, secondary and higher educational institutes for girls.\textsuperscript{153} Along with higher education, women should be imparted that kind of education which would help them sorting out the economic problems in the society. In other words, they should be given instruction in the necessaryart of achieving economic self-sufficiency.

Barring a few scattered antagonistic tendencies, the reform campaign for women's education may be said to be a smooth affair. The intensity of opposition from the orthodox sections of the society was very mild when compared to the magnitude of the same in case of child and widow marriages. The reform endeavours in promoting the cause of women's education yielded rich dividends even during the period of our study. The number of girls studying in various educational institutions showed impressive results. By the end of 1943 there were 11,84,979 girl students enrolled in various schools and colleges in Andhra.\textsuperscript{154} The success

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For more details, see the proceedings of the Arya Vaisya Maha Sabha. 19th Convention, Madras, 1940, pp.16-17.
For details on this, see Hindu Sundari, June, 1940, pp.1-2.
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\textsuperscript{154} This is cited in Andhra Manila, dt.15.11.1944, p.7. The reform campaign for women's education was slowly picking up momentum in
of the reform campaign was visibly reflected in some of the contemporary writings. Reflecting over the progress of women's education, a contemporary writer expressed satisfaction over the state of women's learning in society and attested to the fact that "every village in Andhra has a few educated females" and a number of women's organisations were founded in various places. This statement may be considered as a conclusive verification to the influence of reform campaign emphasising the need for women's education.

A heinous social practice that has been perpetuated by blind traditional observances and age old cultural norms was the problem of Devadasis. This problem, also known as the Nautch problem or kalavantula problem, was one of the most important issues which the contemporary reform leaders took up and fought for its abolition. The efforts of Muthulakshmi Reddy, a prominent and reputed woman social reformer of early 20th century in fighting against this evil assumed greater significance. She

the Nizam's territory also. Invited to preside over the 8th Conference of Nizam State's Andhra Maha Sabha, Ravi Narayana Reddy, a central figure in the Telangana Communist Movement, emphasised on the need for women's education. Brushing aside all existing traditions as imposed by male members, he said that women also should receive sound instruction in all branches of knowledge and attain independent outlook and economic self-sufficiency. He openly declared that all those hurdles in the path of women's development should be removed at once. For details, see Grihalakshmi, May, 1941, p.319.


Before Muthulakshmi Reddy initiated her efforts in this direction, we have a few and scattered references to the opposition expressed by some of the Devadasi women against the profession even during late 19th century. For example, a devadasi woman from Bellary petitioned the governor of Madras Presidency to strike off her daughter's name from the police registers as a prostitute. She informed the governor that her
strongly pleaded in favour of passing a law to ban this practice in the Madras Legislative Assembly.

Devadasis were originally dancing girls in temples supported by land grants and patronised by kings or local ruling chiefs. They were intended for service in temple. Devadasis found scattered all over Andhra and according to census figures of 1901, there were 50, 891 Devadasis in Telugu-speaking areas. Social reformers addressed themselves to effect a change in the socio-economic conditions of these people. As the reform efforts were carried on, there was a gradual awakening among the members of the community. The reformers genuinely felt that it was their duty to reform this evil practice and improve the conditions of Devadasis.

Reformers felt the urgency of immediate social action in this regard as the dancing girls began to be hired as prostitutes when they lost the earlier royal patronage and were thrown out of temple lands. Even otherwise, they were hired by private parties to provide entertainment during the time of marriages, festivities and other such auspicious gatherings. Generally Devadasi girls were patronised by local potentates and this was looked upon as a status symbol. In course of time, the youth daughter should not be treated a prostitute for the sheer fact that she was the daughter of a prostitute. She also brought to the notice of the governor that the police authorities were harassing them since they refused to bribe them. She finally requested the governor to arrange for striking off her daughter’s name from the register of prostitutes. For more details, see petition Nos.1109, dt.20.4.1874; 1197, dt.27.4.1874 and 1531, dt.18.6.1874 in Petition Registers, TNA.


from affluent sections of society have been adversely affected by keeping nautch girls both in terms of wealth as well as health. Various caste associations of the period paid their attention towards this problem and began to discuss this question in a number of conferences.

The attack on the evil of nautch issue was multi-faceted. It was not only the reformers and caste associations that played a role, but a few progressive women from Devadasi community itself had a major role in the reform efforts. The efforts of Yaminipurna Tilakam, a Kalvanthula woman by birth, went so far into the make-up of reform initiatives. She was strongly committed to abrogate the evil from the community and tried to bring changes in their status. Her immediate task was to enlighten the community and arrange for marriages of nautch girls. She was amply supported in her activities by Darisi Chenchaiah. As Tilakam was a gifted orator, Chenchaiah arranged a number of meetings at various places in Andhra where she used to deliver lectures on the nautch problem. On the advice of Chenchaiah she founded a new journal, Hindu Yuvati. It was a Telugu fortnightly and began its publication in 1923 from Madras. The journal used to publish critical essays on various social issues and political happenings in the contemporary period. After an active period of publication for seven years it became defunct in 1930 during the Salt Satyagraha movement.

162 Ibid.
Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu joined the band of these reformers and performed a commendable work in supporting these reform efforts. In defense of the reform activity he used to publish various articles in his Andhra Patrika. The ideas and expressions abhorring the nautch practice as articulated by reformers found place in the columns of his journal.

Mahatma Gandhi’s tour of Andhra in 1921 electrified the reform efforts in this direction and immensely enhanced their pace. Gandhi was visibly moved by the accounts of members from Kalavantula community and later he lashed out at the male dominated values of the society in the columns of Young India. A perceptible change was witnessed in all those areas where Gandhi and Yaminipurna Tilakam toured. Funds were collected to keep the movement alive and the same have been used to further the reform efforts. Tilakam’s association with Theosophical Society during her stay at Madras and her extensive tour of Andhra paved the way for founding a society in 1925 known as Kalavantula Social Reform Society. The intense campaign of Tilakam soon yielded desirable results. Marriages of nautch girls were performed on a competitive scale in various areas of the state. Under the impact of Tilakam’s painstaking efforts and influences of current reform movements independent Kalavantula

B.Kesavanarayana, Political and Social, Op. Cit., pp.220-21. During the visit of Mahatma Gandhi to Kakinada members of the Kalavantula community brought to his notice that theirs was not a social problem, but an economic problem. It was only their economic dependence that made them stick to the profession. For more details, see Andhra Mahila, dt.15.3.1945, p.20.

institutions sprang up in places like Guntur and Narsapur.

The first Kalavantula social reform conference was held at Guntur in 1924 under the Chairmanship of S. Anjaneyulu and adopted various resolutions against the social evil. It urged the people to financially support young girls of the community and work for the general progress of the same. It further emphasised that young girls should not be, at any cost and under any circumstances, forced to take up the profession and instead they should be married. It called upon the government to tighten the provisions of the Indian Penal Code so as to punish those who would support prostitution. By 1926 the Kalavantula Social Reform Propaganda Committee commenced its activities and started visiting the houses of dancing girls in towns and villages to dissuade them from pursuing the disreputable vocation. Under the impact of the present propaganda, twenty five families in Rajahmundry, forty families in Machilipatnam, and a few other families in Eluru abandoned the profession.

But the economic dimensions of the problem of the members belonging to Kalavantula community became a hurdle in the way of reform. The women of the Devadasi community had been accustomed to a luxurious life earlier since they were provided Inam lands

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165 Ibid., pp. 275-77.
166 For details, see Krishna Patriaka, dt.25.4.1924.
168 Ibid., dt.5.6.1926.
169 Ibid., dt.19.7.1926 and 26.7.1926.
170 Ibid., dt.4.9.1926.
and Temple grants. They, therefore, were not enthusiastic in the initial phase to give up the profession. It was at this juncture Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy sought the intervention of the colonial government. As a member of the Madras Legislative Council, she argued in favour of immediate reform of the community and introduced a bill to this effect in 1927. She urged the government that any delay in curbing the practice would become a bane on womanhood of the society. Consequently an Act was passed in 1930 and yet it remained a partial attempt on the part of government.

Along with the agitation spearheaded by members belonging to the Kalavantula community, various other agencies and the general public opinion also were gradually turning against any furtherance of the practice. The Andhra Maha Sabha held at Vijayawada in 1929 passed serious strictures on the problem. The President of the Reception committee described the practice as a worst sin of humanity and urged the members to take corrective steps. Some contemporary writers even published books and articles condemning the practice. One of the books on Devadasis


The Act came into existence under the title of The Madras Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1930. For details, see K. Narayana Rao Naidu (Transl.), Vyabhichara Nirmulana Sasanamu (Telugu), Nellore, n.d. Though the Act was passed in 1930 it took a long time to apply the provisions of the Act to various places in the Madras Presidency. For example, the Madras Government announced in 1938 that the Act would come into force in various villages of Nellore and Kovuru Taluqus with effect from 1.4.1938. See Ibid. The long gap between the enactment of Act and its application shows the apathetic attitude of the government in dealing with a social evil that already assumed alarming proportions.

For details, see the Speech of the President of Reception Committee - 15th Andhra Maha Sabha, Op. Cit., p.16.
brought out the transition in the community under the influence of social reform activities. The book presents two characters in the form of mother and daughter, the former symbolising no-changer's position and the latter reflecting the reformist stand. While defending her stand, the mother informs her daughter that their position is far better than those Brahmin widows who have been steeped deep in blind Brahminical traditions. The daughter instead argues that they also should toe the line of reform under the changing socio-economic conditions and not cling to the fast dying Devadasi practice. The book depicts that the daughter finally won the argument and her marriage was celebrated with the help of progressive elements and prominent members of the town where she is living. The book ends with a call of the young girl to other girls in the community to shun the practice and get married soon.

The 14th convention of Andhra Mahila Sabha urged the government to bring in a uniform legislation in the entire country to ban the practice. In tune with the sentiments expressed by women's organisations like Andhra Mahila Sabha a few others demanded that the members of Devadasi community should be immediately extended all help in the field of vocational education so that they could come out of the profession and

174 For details, Vide S.Ramanatha Sarma, Vesvaratnamu (Telugu), Tirupati, 1935. the book is written in a dialogue form.
175 Ibid.
177 Ibid., p.13.
attain economic independence. On their part, members of *Brahmo* Samaj convened meetings of Kalavantula community to fight against the evil. One such meeting was arranged at Kakinada in the month of November, 1944 and it was presided over by the local Zamindar, Pyda Venkata Narayana. The meeting was attended by a large section of town's public and considerable members belonging to Devadasi community from places like Tuni and Pithapuram. Pyda Venkata Narayana came down heavily on the evil practice of Devadasi and appealed to all members in the gathering to speed up the reform activity in bringing about the much desired change in their community. Various other speakers on the occasion reiterated the same sentiments. On one occasion members of local reform bodies at Kakinada staged a Satyagraha at the venue of a nautch party and convinced its members to recede from its performance. The movement against nautch parties in Godavari region became intense in Narsapuram and infact it became a centre of reform efforts. During the time of Dasara festival in 1945 there was a lot of commotion in the town when the Trustees of local temple were planning to go ahead with the arrangements for nautch party on the occasion. Sensing this local people, under the leadership of Bhaskarla Hemachandra Rao, published pamphlets against the attitude of temple trustees. Though the trustees

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180 Ibid., July, 1940, pp.277-78.
181 For details, see *Andhra Mahila* dt.1.12.1944. p.8.
182 Ibid.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., dt.1.11.1944, p.17.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
did not bow to the pressure of reformists, members of the proposed nautch party realised the gravity of the inhuman practice and expressed their unwillingness to the trustees to perform the party. Instances like this reveal the strong determination of reformers in attacking the problem. Under the influence of intense reform efforts the practice of nautch parties showed signs of clear decline and almost ceased their existence in a few regions.187

The urgency to affect immediate change in the evil practice was even recognised by the Congress government. In 1946 it appointed an assistant provincial women's welfare worker who extensively toured districts like East Godavari and urged the people to support the reform measures. In the following year the Government of Madras passed a bill with regard to nautch practice in the entire Presidency.188 The reform bodies and various associations immediately undertook the task of propagating the contents of the Act. All of them unanimously asked the people to strictly observe the provisions of the Act failing which they would be liable to be prosecuted. By 1947, the practice of nautch parties and the profession of dancing girls have been officially banned by the law of the land.

187
For example the practice of nautch parties and Devadasi system was intense in Godavari region of Andhra. It assumed dangerous dimensions and hence the movement against it mainly concentrated in this area. The intense and aggressive reform campaign was successful in breaking the evil tradition and it was reported that the practice of nautch parties was almost driven out from places like East Godavari district. For details, see Ibid.

188
An important social evil against which reformers unsuccessfully fought has been the problem of dowry. Ironically the intensity of the problem was increasing day by day and even today it is a problem of serious dimension and dangerous magnitude. Most unfortunately the victim is the bride whether it is bride price ("Kanyasulkam") or dowry ("Varasulkam"). Though the former almost ceased its existence by the end of our study period, the problem of dowry has become virulent and widespread in Andhra society among all castes. The gravity of the problem attracted the attention of reformers, writers and journals like in the case of other social evils.

Varasulkam, popularly known as dowry was initially offered by the parents of bride. In the subsequent period dowry began to be demanded for two major reasons. First, growth of education among boys and secondly, growth of opportunities for jobs for the educated people under the colonial administration. These two factors led to the further precipitation of the problem. The middle and lower classes of the society were the worst sufferers of this evil due to their poor economic conditions.

As the problem of dowry was becoming a common feature of each and every caste in society, the caste associations of the day began to discuss and pass resolutions against the problem. Some of the caste journals too focussed their attention on this and outrightly condemned the practice. The most traditional

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190 For details, vide Prabhodhini, April, 1915, p.1. This is a caste journal promoted by Viswabrahmins in Andhra.
section in society, Brahmins who almost were tight lipped over the reform activity in child and widow marriages, was now much agitated. In the case of dowry they also began to feel the pinch of the problem since it would affect them in hard monetary terms. As a result the Brahmana Maha Sabha conventions also began adopting resolutions against the problem of dowry. The 13th convention held at Pamarru, Krishna district and the 15th Convention held at Amalapuram, East Godavari district of Niyogi Brahmins, categorically stated that dowry had been a major impediment to the general progress of the community and hence it should be immediately abandoned. These sentiments against dowry have been seconded by the writings of a few contemporary writers. The youth wing of Vaisya Association condemned the practice and it may be noted that the Vaisya Yuvajana Maha Sabha did so under the guidance of young and energetic reform leaders like Darisi Chenchaiah and Mote Narayana Rao. It can be further seen that the first few conferences of this association passed very critical resolutions on the problem of dowry.


For example, see Rayasam Venkata Sivudu, Vyasavali, Op. Cit., p. 155.

Vasavi, September, 1927, p.229. Darisi Chenchaiah, Mote Narayana Rao, Kolluri Suryanarayana Gupta and Kolla Viswanatham Gupta became highly influential reform leaders among the Vaisya youth in Andhra. In fact, they served as presidents of Vaisya Yuvajana Maha Sabha conventions in 1926, 1927, 1928 and 1940. The 8th convention of Vaisya Youth held at Madras under the Chairmanship of Kolla Viswanatham Gupta in 1940 went to the extent of warning the youngsters against the practice of dowry. One of the resolutions stated that marriage should not be equated with a money spinning affair and asked the members to open their eyes to reality before young women would take to agitational methods against dowry mongers. For details, see proceedings of the Eighth Arva Vaisya Yuvaiana Sabha, Madras, 1940, pp.116-17.

For example see Vasavi, n.d., pp.218-19 and September, 1927,
influence of Vaisya Youth Association, the regional conferences of Vaisya Community also followed the line. For example, the very first convention of Arya Vaisya Sabha of Nandigama taluq in Krishna district urged its members to stay away from the social evil of dowry. So also, the regional Women's Association of East Godavari and West Godavari districts held in 1933 under the presidency of Sarangu Seetha Devi severely condemned the practice of dowry.

Even during the early decades of 20th century the rates of dowry were enormously increasing. Bringing this into light, a contemporary report says that the problem of dowry has been a universal problem with every caste in society. The author brings out the fact that parents of boys who passed F.A. (Faculty of Arts) and B.A. (Bachelor of Arts) examinations were demanding dowry to a tune of Rs.5,000 and Rs.10,000 respectively. Acquiring educational degrees was immediately identified with more and more dowry and some times young girls committed suicides in order to bail out their parents from economic difficulties arising out of their marriages. Various women's associations began addressing themselves in suggesting a few solutions to the problem of dowry. The first All India Women's Conference, held at Madras in 1927, under the presidency of Muthulakshmi Reddy

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198 Vaisya, June, 1929, p.25.
196 Grihalakshmi. October, 1933, p.754.
197 For details, see Kongara Annapurna, "Varasulkamu" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi. December, 1929, pp.805-807.
199 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
condemned the practice of dowry. At the same time she urged the parents to transfer any amount of money given (in the form of dowry) in the name of their daughters. It felt that this money should be allowed to be freely used by the bride at will. Choice of life partners was another solution suggested by the conference. These ideas have been further supported by Andhra Mahila Sabha. In its fourteenth conference held at Cuddapah, the Maha Sabha asked its members to extend economic freedom to all female members of the society so as to enable them to lead a life according to their own will and never come under the pressure of any sort. Dilating upon the need for economic freedom for women, regional women's associations felt that women should be given an equal share in parents' property before the marriage in case the parents are sound in their assets. Otherwise, the only solution to the dowry would be giving right to women to half of the property of the husband after the marriage.\(^\text{204}\) A few others suggested that women should become economically independent before marriage. Only after receiving a sound education to achieve economic self-reliance and after attaining certain age girls should get married. A few contemporary left activists opined that the present social set up was characterised by

\(^{200}\)See for details, Vasavi, May, 1928, pp.490-91.

\(^{201}\)Ibid.

\(^{202}\)Grihalakshmi, January, 1940, p.759.

\(^{203}\)Ibid.

\(^{204}\)This idea was expressed by Vaddadi Kamala Devi during her Presidential speech to the 7th Ganjam Mandal Women's Conference at Barampuram held in October, 1941. For details, see Ibid., December, 1941, p. 549.

\(^{204}\)Ibid.

For details, see Dulla Venkata Ramanamma, "Economic Independence to Women" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila, dt.23.9.1944, p.13.
excessive exploitation and hence people should fight for economic equality which alone would provide relief from social evils like dowry problem. In a society built on the basis of equal opportunities for all, men and women would freely decide on marriage where the principle of mutual consent and love would be the driving force behind such alliance.

It can be seen that the problem of dowry had been aggravated due to the absence of freedom for girls in the choice of their partners. As a result parents of the brides always would have their own say over the alliance. It was felt that intimate and friendly relationship between husband and wife in an arranged marriage would be a distant dream. The consequence of such a marriage was that there was a kind of mechanical relationship between the partners. The parents were requested to realise this and provide higher education to their daughters so as to face any evil consequences in the post-married life. Such a step would ultimately help the family and the parents of prospective brides not to go in for early and hasty marriages of the girls. It was suggested that liberal and free education at higher levels should be provided to the young girls irrespective of any considerations. The content of such education should be vocational and this would enable young women to stand on their own legs and escape unwanted early marriages. Along with sound

For more details on this, see the article by Chandra Savitri Devi in Ibid., dt.15.2.1945, pp.19-20.
207
208
209
Ibid., dt.11.7.1927.
Ibid., dt.31.7.1927.

Andhra Patrika, dt.16.6.1924.
education some people suggested three other measures to avoid the problem of dowry. They are, a) property rights to women b) free choice of husbands in marital alliances and c) choice of divorce in case of any serious problems after marriage.\textsuperscript{211} Above all, contemporary writers asked young women to initiate a serious movement against dowry without which there would not be any real solution to the problem.

The reform activity in the problem of dowry has been incomplete. This is the only problem where the reformers as well as women's associations failed to succeed in bringing about a change. The positive aspect of the entire campaign was to generate a serious discussion and a general awakening in the society. The discussion on dowry problem is still on. The reform efforts did not succeed due to some inherent weaknesses and also lack of strong determination on the part of those who advocated reform. On the other hand, factors that have been working in favour of dowry are getting stronger day by day. Even legislative enactments against dowry did not deter the people to be away from the practice. The lack of strong will to fight the evil is reflected in the contemporary journals. One of the reports stated in 1922 that the problem of dowry was really bad and it deplored double standards of the reformers in pleading against dowry system, while at the same time indulging themselves

For details see Chandra Savitri Devi, Op. Cit.\textsuperscript{212}

See Harikrishna, "Varavikrayam" (Telugu) in Grihalakshmi, July, 1947, n.p. It may be noted that a reputed dramatist (K. Narayana Rao) in early 20th century Andhra wrote a play entitled "Vara Vikrayam" wherein he criticised the problem of dowry in society.
in the practice. The reform efforts were not substantial as in the case of other problems and they never aimed at changing the material conditions which perpetuated the evil. As a result the practice of demanding and accepting dowry is still seen today. Even after the period under study there was absolutely no change in the perceptions of people on the problem. Reviewing the genesis and growth of women's movement in Andhra one contemporary writer was deeply pained to note that the problem of dowry was still posing serious threat to society. Unfortunately the communist party members who openly pleaded for a system of marriage based on mutual love and consent were accused of adopting the practice in their households. This was, perhaps a death blow to the entire reform activity against dowry problem. One of the pioneering left historians of modern Andhra, Kambhampati Satyanarayana brought this to light in one of his articles almost four decades ago. He severely attacked the communist party cadres because the spirit of Kandukuri Veeresalingam's social reform campaign which served as a major fountain of inspiration to the entire party between 1927 and 1947 was totally lost after 1950. He further targetted the party cadres that they abruptly stopped propagating reform ideas of Veeresalingam in society which they were doing earlier. Quoting

Andhra Patrika, dt. 22.11.1922 and 11.6.1923.

For details, see Kanaparti Varalakshmamma, "Women's Movement" (Telugu) in Andhra Mahila n.d., November, 1953, p.49.
Kambhampati Satyanarayana, "Dowry and Duties Before the Communist Party" (Telugu) in Sandesam (Telugu Monthly), July 1957.


Ibid.

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particular examples from the families of reputed communist leaders where dowry was freely exchanged in marriages, the author took them to task in describing them as followers of feudal traditions under the garb of Communist party.\textsuperscript{218} He advised the party members to abandon the practice immediately and follow the line of Veeresalingam.\textsuperscript{219} These advices and other efforts were in vain. Dowry is still posing threats to the institution of marriage.

\textbf{IV}

The foregoing aspects of reform activity in the post-Veerasingham period bring out certain new dimensions of the same during our period of study. Though the nature of social issues and number of social evils did not show any major change (except for addition of a few new problems like dowry), the orientation given to reform activity in the post-Veerasingham period exhibited clear signs of ideological manifestations.

The Gandhian method of struggle was a major ideological force that attracted a major chunk of social reformers. Most of them were acting under the guidelines set by Gandhian programme of action, both political and social. Reform issues were undertaken under the social reconstruction programme of Gandhi. For example, mass literacy, women's education and untouchbility were considered under this programme. Women activists too took

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., pp.41-42.
active part in national struggle and were responding to major social issues within Gandhian framework. Many prominent women leaders of the period were Gandhians and active participants in the national freedom struggle. These activists were often drawn from middle and upper castes of urban and semi-urban areas in Andhra.

The slow but significant growth of left movement and communist ideology had a greater influence on rural women specially in the post-1930 period. Organisation of rural communities on class basis with economic aspects on the top of its agenda attracted working class members towards communist ideology. The left ideological force had its converts from urban areas too. A few middle class and upper caste women were drawn towards communist action programmes. Reputed women activists of the period like Dr. Komarraju Achamamba openly favoured leftist modes of struggle as a remedy to some of the existing social evils. Though the social base of the communist movement was narrow, the same was consolidated by the end of our period of study. We have increasing number of evidences by 1940s when women members of Communist Party took an active part in social conferences of various women's organisations. Their participation, according to contemporary reports, electrified the discussions during these conferences.

Ideological orientation to social reform issues was a major development in the post-Veeresalingam era. Along with this, reform activity was given an institutional orientation. Various
caste associations and women's organisations took up the cause of social reform and placed reform issues on the agenda of the respective bodies. Ideological orientation and institutionalisation of reform issues consolidated the earlier strands of reform activity of Veeresalingam period. While social reform programmes were given a solid institutional support and ideological backing, there was the growth of second line of leadership of reform activity. Social reform campaign during the earlier period drew its major sustenance from the personal influence of towering leaders like Veeresalingam. Growth of multiple leadership strengthened as well as consolidated reform activity.

All these dimensions of reform activity in our period of study were not explicitly visible due to the influence of national freedom movement. Most of the social reform activists, irrespective of their ideological affiliations, were active participants in the freedom struggle. In quantum terms, reform efforts pale into insignificance before the influence of freedom movement. Social reform activity, though overshadowed by liberation struggle, never lost its separate identity as exemplified by exclusive reform efforts of various organisations. That the social reform activists were highly contributory and complementary to India's freedom movement is evidenced by their active participation in the same. Women members as well as male activists like Saraswathi and Gora took a brief respite from their revolutionary social reform campaign and participated in freedom struggle. All these aspects of reform programmes in
post-Veerasingam period made them more resonant and different in orientation.

Social reform campaign suffered from a few shortcomings during the present period of study. Though the social base of the movement was widened, it was still confined to certain urban-based upper castes in society. An analysis of the lists of memberships of a few contemporary women's associations throw light on this aspect. The Andhra Mahila Sabha and various other district as well as local women's organisations had their members mostly drawn from upper castes. The limited social base of the movement invariably resulted in the promotion of sectarian interests of a few sections in society while ignoring others. Further, this became a hindrance in championing new problems. Another impediment was the absence of rural base for exclusive reform activity. A few contemporary writers were pained to observe that women's organisations cut a sorry figure in taking the message of reform to rural women. An editorial in a contemporary Telugu writes "Women activists should be aware that the country does not mean a few 'civilised' people living in urban areas, but it only refers to large masses living in rural villages."

The caste associations during this period and their reform activities had certain adverse effects. Doubtless, they provided greater scope for intra-caste reform activity and succeeded in generating awareness among their caste members. The caste associations never tried to project common reform issues from a single platform. We have no references to such efforts on the part of caste associations. This was a glaring flaw that could be seen during the reform movements. Moreover, caste associations rather remained narrow social groups propagating reform issues within the orbit of a particular caste. The influence of non-Brahmin movement can't be brushed aside. Most of the prominent members of caste associations were active members of non-Brahmin movement. As a result they failed to identify caste as an issue for social reform. Instead, the vigorous activities of caste associations sowed the seeds of narrow casteist tendencies among its members. This can be seen in the activities of Vaisya Mahasabha which repeatedly asked its members to blindly follow Mahatma Gandhi since the latter, though accidentally, belonged to the same caste. Unfortunately, these narrow social sentiments were slowly influencing various women's organisations. A contemporary writer felt ashamed to note the fact that "the venom of casteism was slowly getting accelerated among women members of society too". The tendency of blind devotion to caste reached it obnoxious proportions when contemporary women's associations barred 'lower caste' women from

For details, see Kanaparti Varalakshamma, Op. Cit., p.49.
being admitted as members. For example, one of the by-laws of Kakinada Women Students' Association say that the membership in the Association is open to all women from respectable families except those women hailing from the despised castes like Malas and Madigas.\textsuperscript{224} When the institution of caste had been a major social impediment from the ancient past, the reiteration of same rigid sentiments even during active reform period was a major factor responsible for undoing the reform efforts. Infact, the role of caste associations was less complementary to reform campaign and more contributory to the rise of casteist tendencies.

Some times it has been criticised that a kind of apathetic attitude of a few women was responsible for the sluggish activity of both the women's organisations. It was felt that this apathy would often result in the decline of women's organisations and their activities.\textsuperscript{225} A contemporary writer expressed her anguish that most of the women's organisations have been marred by lack of cooperation and coordination among members and there was a clash of ego and status. It was advised that the spirit of reform should guide the founding of societies and people should not establish them for the sake of name and instant fame.\textsuperscript{227} Even some of the caste associations did not escape such criticism from contemporary public opinion. For example, the activities of

\textsuperscript{224}Vide Manoranjani. October, 1911, p.380.
\textsuperscript{225}For more details, see Anasuya., February-March, 1920, pp.5-7.
\textsuperscript{226}See Alladi Annapurnainma, "Women Organisations" (Telugu) in Grihahalakshmi. February, 1942, pp.652-53.
\textsuperscript{227}Ibid.
Vaisya Mahasabha have been subject to scrutiny. It was opined that the period between two consecutive Vaisya conferences did not witness any reform activity when compared to high sounding resolutions adopted at the conventions.  

The rise and consolidation of Communist Party attracted many women members from working class. The Party began to organise various sections of society on economic issues. Though it followed the spirit of Veeresalingam's reform campaign, social reform was not the only issue on its agenda. Even the 'affiliated' cultural and women's wings of the party have been moulded in accordance with the ideology of the party. Many of these party workers used to participate in social reform conferences of other women organisations. In course of time, the Party itself took up a few reform issues.

The few shortcomings in the reform movement in the post-Veeresalingam period did not, however, adversely affect the pervasive influence of reform efforts. A contemporary estimate says that the spirit of Veeresalingam's reform campaign was responsible for the awakening and development of women in early 20th century. Though national movement circumscribed reform

228 See Vasavi, December, 1933, p. 100.
229 Whenever participated in general women's conferences, they would surcharge the atmosphere with their remarks on various social issues. It was reported that the attendance of women member from Communist Party during the State Conference of Andhra Mahila Sabha at Guntur electrified the entire proceedings of the convention. For details see Andhra Mahila, dated 15.11.1944, p. 8.
movement, it can be observed that the association of political reform with social reform was a new dimension given to the reform movements in 20th century. This is attested by the fact that most of the prominent women leaders of national movement were active participants of reform endeavours earlier. For example Kanaparti Varalakshmamma, Pulugurta Lakshminarasamamba, Kotikalapudi Seethamma, Chunduri Ratnamma, Unnava lakshmibayamma, Achanta Rukminamma, Ponaka Kanakamma, Choladam Ammanna Raja, K. Ramasubbamma, V. Padmasenamma, Gummididala Durgabayamma and a host of others have been very active members of reform movements in 20th century.\textsuperscript{231}

Despite the fact that women's organisations during the period under study suffered from the lack of a strong social base, the reform efforts yielded the cherished results. Child marriages almost disappeared by the time our period of study comes to an end. Most of the members in various social groups could give up their narrow sentiments in case of widow marriages. Various caste associations performed widow marriages on their own. This was a significant departure from earlier period because reform campaign for widow marriages was undertaken by individuals in 19th century and the same was conducted by institutions like caste associations during early 20th century. Institutional orientation to social reform was another new dimension during the period of our study. The problem of Devadasis was effectively tackled by reformers and the practice

\textsuperscript{231}More details on this can be had from Alladi Vaidehi, Andhra Desamu-Streelti (Telugu), Hyderabad, 1975, pp.59-66.
of nautch parties was officially banned. Most of the members from Devadasi families joined the main stream by the end of the first half of the present century. Above all, women's education registered a highly satisfactory growth during the present period. Separate women's educational institutions have been promoted by various agencies and in course of time women's education made rapid strides. By 1950s most of these problems confronting women have been solved much to the satisfaction of general public opinion.

The Gandhian method of mass mobilisation brought women into lime light and women reformers as well as activists began to take active part in social reform as well as political movements on par with the members of the opposite sex. Women who have been traditionally confined to homes came out of their narrow shells and took an enthusiastic part in contemporary social and political movements. This can be said to be a far greater achievement. The left ideology also attracted a few prominent educated women workers during early 20th century. For example, Dr. Komaraju Achamamba used to believe that communist pattern of society was the true remedy to many of the evils which the country was facing.233 The receptivity and open-mindedness to


233 For details, see Mallampalli Somasekhara Sarma, Doctor Komarraju Achamamha Jeevitan (Telugu), Bezawada, 1946, pp.6-14.
different ideas was certainly a direct consequence of prevailing social reform campaign and the kind of awareness it generated in contemporary society. It may be conclusively asserted that the rapid strides made in areas like women's education, child and widow marriages and the problem of Devadasis resulted in bringing about the much needed social consciousness among women in the society.