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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Second half of 19th century inaugurated series of reforms pertaining to socio-religious matters. Marriage, family, education, worship of God and social life have undergone radical changes. Old beliefs and contemporary practices were questioned with a rational base. The advent of Christian missionaries and the introduction of western education brought about new concepts, new values and new approaches. The emergence of new middle class assumed leadership in championing the cause of reason, rationality and reform. Hence, the emergence of socio-religious reform movements like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society and Rama Krishna Mission. Among them, Brahma Samaj exerted great influence on Andhra in general and Godavari district in particular.

4.2 REFORM IDEAS IN PRE-VEERESALINGAM PERIOD

Social reform movement in Andhra has been identified with the life of Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919). He was the champion of social reform in Andhra, mobilised public opinion in favour of reform and initiated series of activities towards progress. Yet there were a few intellectuals prior to Veeresalingam who bestowed thought on reform and expressed it in their writings and works. Veeresalingam might have been either directly or indirectly influenced by such ideas.
Enugula Veeraswamy (1780-1836) translator in Madras Court was the first Andhra to propagate the reform ideas. He opposed the caste differences and had contempt for untouchability. He stated that the Smrithis never mentioned untouchability. He further traced the conversion of outcastes into Christianity to the superiority complex of the upper caste people. He propagated the idea of One God.

Vennelakanti Subba Rao (1784-1839) another translator in the Madras Court was a member of the Text Book Committee. He pleaded for western education and for the availability of English Books at a moderate price. This he believed would increase the literacy rate.

Jiyyer Suri (1850-1895) worked as teacher in Bangalore. He was the author of a book in Telugu titled as “Stree Kala Kallolinti”. There he appealed to the people to bestow thought on the issues of child marriage, bride price, and dowry. He expressed that women should not be subjected to cruelty and should be treated as equals. He quoted all the scriptures in support of the proper status to be given to the women in the family and in society. He further stated that the dowry should be used as ‘Stree Dhana’ for their security. He criticised the customs of bride-price and child marriage as equal to the sale of human flesh. He quoted the Sastras in support of his arguments. He pleaded for female education. It might
me due to his appointment as Telugu teacher in the military school for girls at Bangalore. In 1876, he came to Rajahmundry and met Veeresalingam.¹

Samineni Muddu Narasimha Naidu worked as District Munsiff at Rajahmundry from 1848 to 1852. He died in 1856. He was the author of Hita Suchani wherein he expressed his reform ideas, particularly about the plight of widow. He exposed the evils in the institution of marriage and opposed child marriages. He proposed 18 years for boys and 12 years for girls as marriageable age. He traced the origin of dowry to the child marriages. He further related the evil practices of widowhood, infanticide, and prostitution to child marriages. He pleaded for the expansion of western education and for translation of English works into Telugu. He condemned the superstitions relating to the devils and ghosts. He asked the people to take medical treatment for prevention and cure of the diseases, rather than resorting to the worship of village deities. He expressed dissatisfaction about the vast expenses incurred in the name of celebrating marriages.

An interesting local factor might have also been responsible for the spread of literacy and reform ideas in Rajahmundry. That was the starting of a public library and reading room in Rajahmundry in 1839 by Mrs. Julia Thomas, the wife of James Thomas, District Judge of Rajahmundry. The library had books in tracts both in English and Telugu and a gentoo and an English newspaper. The doors
were opened before 6'0 clock in the morning. There were always people waiting outside. Always 20 or 30 at a time sit reading there. Books were available in English, Hindustani, Tamil and Gentoo. Very soon a petition was received from the surrounding villages to supply them with books of the same kind. And this led to the starting of a circulating library in the district, consigning a packet of books to the headman in one village, asking him to pass them on to the rest. When they were all read, a fresh supply of books will be followed. The success of the reading room is known from the following observation that people were sitting in the reading room for hours, copying books on their own little condjan leaves.

4.3 KANDUKURI VEERESALINGAM AND VENKATA RATNAM NAIDU

The socio-religious reform movement expressed itself in Andhra through the activities of the Brahma Samajas. Social reform in Andhra centres round the activities of two great reformers Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919) and Raghupathi Venkata Ratnam Naidu (1862-1939). The former, though born in a Brahmin family, was a fighting hero. The latter, though born to a military Subedar, was an embodiment of love and persuading saint trying to mend even the sinners. Both of them directed their energies in the eradication of social evils and in creating a healthy atmosphere of devotion to god and social purity. Thus the ideas of reform were translated into action.
4.4 KANDUKURI VEERESALINGAM

The reform ideas prevalent earlier had taken their final form under the active leadership of Veeresalingam. He conscientized the public through various forms—lectures, articles, short stories and novels and mobilised the public opinion in favour of reform. He waged a fearless battle against orthodoxy, dared to face social ostracism and championed the cause of remarriage to the child widow and education for all girls. He was one of the earliest pioneers in South India to demand and work for radical changes in society. Like any pioneer ahead of his time he suffered from misunderstanding and persecution. He braved ridicule and danger. He was a man of keen insight, great courage and dynamic energy and championed the cause of reform and progress. He stormed the traditional society with new ideas and concepts. In the words of Prakasam, “He was a slave to his resolves but died as a hero bequeathing a rich legacy of many facets to many a future generation.” In the words of Sri K. Iswar Dutt he “changed the current of life in Andhra with no predecessor in his line and no successor of equal stature.”

4.4.1 Early Life

Kandukuri Veeresalingam was born in Niyogi Brahmin family on 16th April, 1848 at Rajahmundry. His parents were Smt. Punnamma and Subba Rayudu. His father passed away when he was four years old. He was brought up by his paternal uncle Venkata Ratnam. His grandfather whose name was also
Veeresalingam, migrated from Eluru to Rajahmundry and was a Diwan to the local Zamindar. He acquired property, built a palatial house, extended hospitality to relatives and friends and began losing property through gifts of land and money. The grandson learnt a lesson from the life of grandfather – not to waste money either for pomp or for name-sake or for superstition. He observed his father to spend “most of his earnings instantly, either by maintaining relatives or making donations. Moreover, he celebrated his eldest son’s marriage with great pomp and spent lavishly on gifts of land, money and jewels. He did not save much cash because he was not in a high position from the start. He was not simply interested in earning money but wanted prestige and fame”. The hero in the novel *Rajasekhara Charitramu* was none but his own grandfather. His father and uncle were revenue officials in the Government of Madras. Veeresalingam followed them by opting for a government job and by continuing to be a loyalist to the British.

Even from childhood, Veeresalingam was suffering from setbacks in health. But he was always mentally strong, and firm in implementing decisions, even all by alone. Veeresalingam spoke about the joint family structure in his autobiography. His paternal uncle Venkata Ratnam presided over the joint family in Rajahmundry, consisting of his wife, Veeresalingam and Veeresalingam’s mother. In 1861, Veeresalingam was married to a girl of ten years old. Domestic
quarrels in the joint family led to the partition of joint family and Venkata Ratnam moved to Eluru where he died shortly afterwards. Young Veeresalingam grew up as the only heir in the two families. He assumed the responsibilities of an adult male from his 15th year. He came to understand the plight of the widows from his direct experience of his mother aunt and grand mother. He could also understand the difficulties in the joint family structure as he had first hand knowledge of the quarrels between his mother and aunt. He could find fault with his mother whose short temperament came close to him. In his novel *Satyavathi Charitramu* written in 1883, he portrayed domestic quarrels and jealousies among family members.6

Perhaps this was the reason why he maintaining a small family always consisting of he and his wife. The other possible reason could be his progressive and unaccommodative ideas towards reform, daring even ostracism. Thus acquiring knowledge of the problems relating to the Indian women, he became a champion of widow marriage, nuclear family and women education.

Veeresalingam spoke about the state of education in his autobiography. He began his formal education in the street school or pial school of Pulipaka Ammiraju in 1853, attached to the Gopala Swami Temple. Here he learnt the alphabets and reading. Then he moved to a different school where he studied grammar, poetry and Sataka literature. Then he received knowledge relating to
English & Arithmatic from his uncle Venkata Ratnam. In 1860, he joined the district school to learn more English.

4.4.2 Influences

Veeresalingam drew closer to Brahmo influence from 1867 onwards. He began to read the lectures of Kesav Chandra Sen, borrowed from Challapalli Rangaiah and started reading them with interest. He began to doubt the beliefs and practices he was accustomed and started deviating from the traditional path.7

This was intensified in the company of Atmuri Lakshmi Narasimham who joined as a teacher in 1868. The new teacher began a student discussion group centering on Brahmo doctrines. Veeresalingam, Kanparthi Lakshmaiah, Eluri Lakshmi Narasimham etc., were regularly attending these meetings. They continued till the teacher was transferred to Ganjam district in 1871.

Veeresalingam liked and followed the profession of a teacher. He worked as teacher at various places like Koringa, Dowlaishwaram and finally at Rajahmundry. He was a popular teacher explaining the students the classics. He was also explaining the issues of social reform to them. Because of his scholarship in Telugu and English, he was chosen as tutor by Mr. Barrows and latter by Mr. E.P. Metcalfe the British officials.
4.4.3 Fight against traditional society

Veeresalingam fought against superstitions ever from his childhood. He was eager to search for ghosts but could not succeed in that. He began to doubt the auspicious dates and times. He refused to cut the banana plant which grew in an inauspicious direction and joined the duty as Headmaster of Korangi High School on a full dark day, which was considered to be inauspicious.8 Veeresalingam’s encounter with the supposed ghost-driver was an epic one. He invited a person to satisfy his mother but was not able to put up with him for a long time. He drove him away from his home and the supposed practitioner, in course of time, began to believe that Veeresalingam used some tantric spell against him.9 His distrust of displaying the external forms of religious faith like bindi and tulasi beads were described in his various short stories. His belief in one God who is nameless and formless and his method of approaching Him through prayers were as per the Brahmo Samaj prescriptions. Hence, he exposed the pomp and splendour in his writings associated with social and religious practices.

4.4.4 Journals

To propagate progressive views, Veeresalingam started a monthly journal and named it as Vivekavardhini. As it was getting popular by exposing the social evils, it was made bi-weekly in July 1876 and he started Hasya Sanjeevini as an appendix to Vivekavardhini. The objective was to counteract the impact of
Hasyavardhani which was started by Kokkonda Venkata Ratnam, the traditionalist. It was through this journal Veeresalingam embarked on a campaign of fighting the social evils. In April 1883, he started Sati Hita Bhodini, a journal exclusively for women, as its articles were meant to educate them. He discussed diverse topics such as physical health, virtues of thrift, and chastity and about the evil of gossiping. On the first page of Sati Hita Bhodini a sloka from Manu Smriti was printed. Its meaning was that women protected affectionately by affectionate males were not really the protected ones. Only those who can protect themselves are the really protected.\(^\text{10}\) After three years, Sati Hitabhodini was stopped. But it earned Veeresalingam the credit of a leading protagonist of women education. On July 2, 1891, he founded another journal Satya Samvardhani. Again in 1905, he started Satyavadina a weekly.

Among the qualities to be noticed in Veeresalingam was his intolerance of vices and his repeated attacks on them. He was prepared to take any risk in fulfilling the objectives which he considered were good to the society. His denounced Chitrapu Kamaraju, the pleader with whom he worked as a translating clerk, for his behaviour and that of his concubine in the office was the earliest indication.\(^\text{11}\)

His episodic fight against corruption of the officials, especially against the newly appointed district judge Poluri Sri Ramulu in 1878 resulted in the removal
of Seristadar and the record keeper from their offices and in the suicide of Chitrapu Kamaraju, a close relation of Seristadar.\textsuperscript{12}

4.4.5 Emphasis on purity

Veeresalingam was very clear about the things he was emphasising. He began to insist on truth, honesty, sincerity and character building. His first two essays in 1874 on Truth and Non-violence indicate his notions of morality. In 1875, he published ‘\textit{Niti Dipika}’ which consisted of a series of verses stressing the need for knowledge to combat vice. He realised the need to maintain morality at a time when traditional values were being questioned by both foreigners and western educated Indians.

In 1875, Veeresalingam started a tirade against the evil of prostitution in Rajahmundry through his journal \textit{Vivekavardhini}. He found out the reason for the continuance of prostitution as follows:

"People who do not patronise prostitutes are not regarded as important. Individuals with one wife are considered eunuchs, not men, . . . those who aspire for richmen’s favours or seek wealth, must in tum emulate them. . . . It is the fault of the devils who patronise them, not the women alone. Although there are whorehouses elsewhere, there are an excessive number in Rajahmundry."\textsuperscript{13}

Thus he could see the evil of prostitution as a problem related not merely to rich alone, but also a valued one, espired both by the middle class and also by
those who try to please the rich and the higher officials. Through his articles and attacks, he was able to get closed the music and dance schools meant exclusively for prostitutes in Rajahmundry.\textsuperscript{14}

Veerasingam's fight against anti-nautch is interesting. The nautch were engaged at the time of auspicious occasions like marriages. Those who attend the marriages were feeling ashamed for contributing little or no presentations to the nautch women. Hence, they were prepared to take loans or mortgage their properties just to please the nautch. Sometimes just to avoid such payment, people were absenting themselves from such happy occasions. Sometimes higher officials were also arranging nautch parties and were insisting on their subordinates to attend compulsorily. This implied that they should attend along with presentation – money to the nautch. Veerasingam wanted to take the issue seriously as it was becoming a compulsion on the part of town people for the fear of harassment from local officials for consequent allegations and fines. He exposed how a local lawyer bore the expenses of a prostitute girl to start her professional career through a ritual called Kannerikamu in his journal \textit{Vivekavardhani} in April 1875.\textsuperscript{15} Many meetings were held and resolutions were passed to give up the practice of vassools to the nautch and a procedure had been evolved to deal with the defaulters.\textsuperscript{16}
The arguments for and against vassools had been debated in Hāsyasanjeevini in March 1878.

4.4.6 Women Education

During 1870s there was a heated debate about female education between Kokkonda Venkata Ratnam the editor of Andhra Basha Sanjeevini and Uma Ranga Nayakaulu, the editor of Purushardha Pradayini. Venkata Ratnam was opposing women education, social reforms and westernisation. Veeresalingam began to participate in debate in support of reforms. He began to publish his views in Purushardha Pradayini through poems and prose, against the views of Andhra Basha Sanjeevini. His efforts to convince the public at Dowlaishwaram resulted in the starting of a school for girls through voluntary contributions. The school was started on August 22, 1874. Malladi Achchanna Sastri was appointed as its headmaster. About twenty girls joined the school. Another school for girls was started by him at Rajahmundry in 1881. In 1905, he founded Sri Victoria girls high school in Rajahmundry to which Desiraju Peda Bapaiah was the Secretary.

To express his views on women education, Veeresalingam wanted to have his own journal. Hence, he started Vivekavardhani in 1874.
Veerasingam’s interest in furthering the cause of women education started from home. His wife Rajyalakshmi was a promising student even at the time of the wedding. He narrated the incident that his wife could recite poems from Rukmini Kalyanam and was familiar with reading and writing. He educated her and moulded her as his strongest supporter. She was his companion in action. She acquired knowledge relating to religion, philosophy, and in creative writing. She was managing the ladies wing of the Prardhana Samaj and taught the inmates, the various songs, prayers, skills and how to make best use of time. She composed songs wherein she expressed Brahmo ideas, her travel experiences, and her various feelings. They were published in book form with the title of Geetamulu. She was warm and friendly with friends, relatives, child widows and their families. Kotikalapudi Sitamma was her foster daughter who later on distinguished herself as a writer and as an orator. Veerasingam’s acknowledgement of the services of Rajyalakshmi to him and to the society could be noticed from his dedication of autobiography to her who shared fifty years of his life.

4.4.7 Widow Marriage Movement

From 1878 onwards, Veerasingam embarked on hectic career of unique events. He founded Prardhana Samaj in 1878 in his own house and was regularly conducting weekly meetings. Burra Rajalingam, Basavaraju Gavarraju, Eluri
Lakshmi Narasimham, Bayapunedi Venkata Jogaiah and Kannam Reddy Parthasaradhi Naidu were the founder members. Veeresalingam was regularly giving lectures at the end of prayer. After one year, the venue was shifted to its own building and the number of followers increased.

The name of Veeresalingam has been identified with widow marriage movement. He was sympathetic to the widows in general and child widows in particular. Inspite of his ill-health, middle class background and the profession of teaching Telugu in school, he was prepared to carry on a major fight against orthodoxy. He proceeded step by step by giving lectures, organising widow marriage associations and through celebrating the marriages in succession. In this context, it is interesting to know how Veeresalingam came to take up the issue of widow.

The Journals Purushardha Pradaini under the editionship Umaranganayakulu and Andhra Bhasha Sanjeevani under Kokkonda Venkataratnam began publishing articles for and against widow marriage. Since the issue had become a controversy, Veeresalingam began to take interest and publish his views in Purushardha Pradaini. Kokkonda Venkata Ratnam and Dharmavarapu Ramakrishnamacharyulu strongly opposed the idea of widow marriage. They approached Veeresalingam and sought his help in condemning the work "Punarvivaha Sangraham" written by Paravastu Venkata Rangacharyulu of
Visakhapatnam in 1875. But even by that time Veeresalingam differed with those scholars and became convinced about the remarriage of widow.\textsuperscript{18}

It was Challapalli Bapaiah, teacher in the local college who proposed the idea of celebrating widow marriages to Veeresalingam. For sometime, Veeresalingam delayed the decision as, he believed that he was lacking in resources. But Bapaiah did not leave him and insisted on the novel idea, promising him of his full and hearty support even in the midst of ostracism.

Finally on August 3, 1879, Veeresalingam gave a lecture at Rajahmundry, on the issue of widow marriage, after serving a prior notice in July itself. It created a commotion among the orthodoxy and the hall was full. He quoted extensively from Vedas and Smritis in support of his argument and finally concluded with humanistic approach. He said that forcible widowhood was a peculiarity to our country, to the Hindus and also those of upper varnas of the Hindus. He further mentioned about the evil effects of the widowhood. He answered the challenges made by the opponent scholars. The lecture attracted the attention of the public and people began to discuss it. On October 17, 1879, he gave a second lecture in Rajahmundry.

Soon after the first lecture, the widow marriage association was formed, with Veeresalingam as Secretary in 1879. Challapalli Bapaiah, B. Gavarraju, E.L.
Narasimham Chetty, B.V. Jogaiah Naidu and K. Parthasaradhi Naidu were members in it. It was strengthened when Nyapathi Subba Rao, the local lawyer and Atmuri Lakshmi Narasimham, District Munsiff joined it. The members in general and Veeresalingam in particular were threatened with ostracism by Sankaracharya of Virupaksha Matta and by the orthodox sections with physical attack.

Veeresalingam on behalf of the association appealed to the people to give up the cruel custom. He further toured in important centres to propagate the idea of widow marriage. In 1881, he gave the first lecture in Kakinada, where he was physically attacked by orthodox sections. But he was saved by his own students. In Kakinada, he was able to get the financial help and support of Pydah Ramakrishnaiah. Among the scholars that disagreed with Veeresalingam, mention should be made of Vedam Venkataraya Sastri, the author of “Stree Punarvivaha Durvada Nirupanam”. It was published in 1883 with the blessings and financial help of Sankaracharya of Virupaksha matta. Dasu Sreeramulu and K. Brahmayya Sastri opposed reform idea.

Veeresalingam continued visiting places and giving thought-provoking lectures on reform. He lectured at Machilipatnam, Guntur, Bellary, Madras and Bangalore. His tours to different places resulted in:

- conscientizing the public about the need for reform.
❖ getting, though few, dependable student followers who were interested in marrying child-widows.

❖ Securing, though few, disciples like Unnava Lakshminarayana to carry on the widow marriage movement at different places.

❖ Getting dependable friends who could stabilise the movement both morally and materially like Pydah Ramakrishnaiah.

Veeresalingam began to celebrate the widow marriages, after giving sufficient propagation through lectures and tours. He had a few dependable students around him. They were inspired by his lectures and gave their consent to marry the widows. The three institutions – Prardhana Samaj, Social Reform Association and Journal Vivekavardhini worked actively. On December 11, 1881, he celebrated the first widow marriage to Gogulapati Sri Ramulu and Sitamma. Traditionalists took every opportunity to prevent the marriage. They tried to kidnap the groom and the bride and assault Veeresalingam. They prevented the priest, the cooks and the instrument-players. Their plans were unsuccessful because of the hearty cooperation of the students. About 500 students attended the wedding and saw the function to go on. Many associates of Veeresalingam left
him in the final hour and even those that attended underwent purificatory ritual later on.19

The opposition to the wedding was quite strong. Social Boycott was severe and Sankaracharya had sent the orders of ex-communication, and these were carried in palanquins in Kakinada and Rajahmundry by traditionalist.

The Second widow marriage had taken place after four days of the first, i.e., on December 15, 1881. It was between Ramachandra Rao and Ratnamma. From then onwards, Veeresalingam began to receive letters either from the widow or from her close relative, mostly a woman and Rajahmundry became shelter home for child widows to get married. By 1884, ten marriages have been celebrated. By 1905, the total number of widow marriages celebrated at Rajahmundry, Madras, Guntur and Bellary was 63. Among them, 57 happened to be among brahmins, three among Vaisyas and the three were from Viswa Brahmins, Adi Velama and Vellala.20

Veeresalingam established widow homes in Rajahmundry and in Madras.

4.4.8 Other Activities

In 1891, Veeresalinam built Town Hall, the first of its kind in Andhra. In 1893, he received the title of ‘Rao Bahaddur’. In 1897, he started a widow’s home in his own house at Madras. He had the rare distinction of presiding over the
National Social Conference at Madras in 1898 in which Mahadev Govinda Renade honoured him with the title of South Indian Vidya Sagara. He also had the other rare honour of working as Telugu Pandit in the Presidency College at Madras. He founded another widow’s home in Rajahmundry. In 1906, he discarded the sacred thread and became Anustanic Brahmo. On 15th December 1906, he founded Hitakarini Samaj and on its behalf, he took over the school of Chilakamarthi Lakshmi Narasimham. He founded Rescue Home at Rajahmundry in 1909. On August 11, 1910, his wife Rajyalakshmi passed away. From then onwards, Veeresalingam began to feel lonely and helpless, intensified by old age and illness. This continued till 27 May, 1919, when he breathed his last at Vedavilas in Madras. All his property amounting to Rs.50,000/- was already handed over to the Hitakarini Samaj to continue his work.

4.5 RAGHUPATI VENKATA RATNAM NAIDU (1862-1939)

Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, though a native of Machilipatnam, chose Kakinada as a place of residence and action.

4.5.1 Early Life

Venkataratnam was born on 1st October 1862 to Subedar Appaiah Naidu and Seshamma. As his father was a military subedar, he spent his boyhood at various places like Chānda, Hyderabad etc. He was a student of Deenanath
Benerjee and Gangadhar Mukherjee at Chānda and of Aghoranath Chattopadhyaya at Hyderabad. Thus he learnt about Rammohan Roy and Brahmo Samaj at an young age. His teacher Dr. Miller of Madras Christian College further influenced him. By 1891, he acquired M.A. degree and by 1897 L.T. degree. He married Seshamamba and had a daughter. At the age of 27, his wife died and he continued alone with his life dedicated to social service.

Venkata Ratnam began his career as a member of editorial Board of the English journals – *People's Friend, The Fellow Worker* and *Brahma Prakasika*. Then he worked as a teacher at High Schools at Eluru, Rajahmundry and Machilipatnam. He worked as a teacher in Noble College at Machilipatnam. It was here that he began attracting both the students and the people and impressing them about the need for reform. Then he went to Secunderabad in 1899 and worked in Mahaboob College till 1904.

It was in 1905 that Venkata Ratnam began his services as Principal in Pithapur Raja's College in Kakinada. He continued in that post till 1919. Generations of students were benefitted both by his teachings and by his reform activities. He encouraged Pithapur Raja, Rao Surya Rao to start the orphanage and Brahmopasana mandir. He considered the college as rosry, orphanage as nursery and the mandir as sanctury. It was because of him that free education was given to a large number of marginalised sections – girls, orphans and members of...
depressed communities. Between 1925-28, he was elected the Vice-Chancellor of Madras University. He was the first person to be elected to that post. He introduced several reforms there. His scholarship, oratory, faith, love, humanism, kindness and his personal example made deep impression on people and he was honoured with D.Litt. in 1926 from Andhra University and the title of Brahmarshi in 1933. He was recipient of the titles of ‘Rao Bahaddur’ and ‘Sir’. He became controversial when he joined People’s Party in 1935 and Justice Party later on. On May 26, 1939, he passed away.

Venkata Ratnam Naidu’s activities were multifaceted. He wished to respect the women in general. He wished to rescue the Kalavantula women who were suffering from gender discrimination; to protect the orphan suffering from class discrimination and to uplift the status of the panchamas who were suffering from caste discrimination. He was closely associated with orphanage, P.R. College, Mandir, Harijan Lodges at Pithapur and Kakinada, Pithapur Brahmasamaj etc. Brahmopasana Mandir was built by Pithapur Raja in 1926 under his guidance, imbibing features of temple, church and mosque.

4.5.2 Towards Women

Venkata Ratnam began to appeal to all men to cultivate the habit of looking upon every woman, whatever be her social background, as mother or sister. He asked them to “Respect woman, care for her, work for her, give her knightly
shelter and protection and you shall find the loftier emotions gaining security in your heart and touching your life to finer issues.”

This kind of warm regard to women inspired generations of students, followers and admirers to cultivate the same. In all Brahmo meetings, the same respect and affection were shown and hence women of all ages, could participate freely and take part in reform work. Women received the first spell of socialisation during reform movement. They were meeting outside their homes and were interacting with persons outside their family members and relatives. Thus at least in the name of weekly and special prayers, women began to participate in public life. Hence this kind of reverential attitude from the males was a must and Venkataratnam promoted this feeling.

4.5.3 Anti-Nautch

Venkata Ratnam’s attitude towards the so-called fallen women was humanistic. He said “God is the parent – the father and mother – not merely of the wise and the good, but He is really and particularly the protecting father and the loving mother of erring and the sinning.” He pleaded for the abolition of nautch parties. These nautch parties were arranged “For receiving a guest, or to felicitate a friend, or to welcome superior or to celebrate a jubilee, or to solemnise a wedding or to initiate a child into learning, aye at times to reverence a spiritual
head or to honour a religious reviver, her song is the tedeum of thankfulness, her
dance the exhilaration of enthusiasm."23

Venkataratnam tried to bring the unfortunate sections namely Devadasis,
prostitutes and Kasa women into the mainstream through marriage. Besides the
widows of the Brahmin families, these girls were also deprived of marriage. In
Godavari region, dancing girls hailed mostly from the community of bhogum or
kalavanthula. Besides this class, there were kasas serving as maids i.e., dasis in
the Pithapuram estate. Girls belonging to these two communities were subjects of
social tyranny, as they were deprived of marriages. The dancing girls were
seeking livelihood not merely through the nautch parties that have been arranged
from time to time in connection with social and religious functions, but also
through prostitution. Nautch parties provided the girls the opportunity of meeting
those males who were seeking their company. Any idea of abolition of the nautch
was portrayed to be a conspiracy against fine arts in general and music and dance
in particular. These women demanded the attention of the reformers like the child
widows earlier, for alleviation of their suffering. Venkata Ratnam began his
crusade for social purity against patronising the nautch and the work of
rehabilitating them through wedlock. The social reform of Veeresalingam was
extended by Venkata Ratnam Naidu by bringing another socially tyrannised lot
into wedlock. The privilege given to a child widow was now extended to the Kalavantula women.

As a student of Babu Gangadhara Mukherjee in school at Banda, as a follower of Aghorath Chattopadhyaya at Nizam High School, Hyderabad and as a student of the popular Principal Dr. Millar in Madras Christian College, Venkata Ratnam turned into a champion of anti-nautch. He started the social purity movement in Madras itself in 1892 and began giving lectures. Till the end of 1886, he was associated with the editorial Board of the two English weeklies – the people’s friend and the fellow worker. As the president of the social purity association, he visited many towns and delivered lectures. He inspired many with the ideas of Brahma Samaj and social purity.

Venkata Ratnam traced the root of nautch problem to the caste system. He said “Veiled vice, secret inchastity are to be found all the world over, but sexual immorality as a hereditary and acknowledged profession, living in peace and amity with and admist other avocations, fortified against the attacks of time or change, and endowed with the privileges of social sanction is special to this land.” He believed that Hindu Society fossilised every profession into a caste and thus “Could accommodate professional lewdness with a plea and a place, just as it furnished the professional thief with a guide book and a presiding genious.”
He taught the men that "Nothing can justify the pleasure purchased with another's degradation."28

Venkata Ratnam advocated anti-nautch on three grounds.

1. To effect economy as the country was poor and wealth to be used as a trust.

2. Humanly approach to be shown towards the victims of social tyranny.

3. To promote morality. He said: "He who sanctions immorality is no less guilty and punishable than he who commits it. And shall not we be held morally responsible for sanctioning and perpetuating by our silence and connivance, that social law which condemns the dancing girl to her pitiable plight?"29

The observations of Venkata Ratnam sound like those of a radical feminist. He questioned "Is it not a most damaging proof of our selfish callousness? We allow thousands and tens of thousands of God's children to be thus immolated on the unhallowed alter of man's in chastity? Is the law of repentance and reconciliation the privilege and monopoly of man alone?"30

He found the reason for the continuance of the profession to the presence of in chastemen. "If there were no men with capering hearts, the existence of dancing girls would be an inconceivability. You should fasten the blame upon the demand,
not upon the supply. It is the toddy buyers that need to be reformed, not the toddy sellers.  

Venkata Ratnam was not confined to mere lectures and propaganda. He founded social purity movement in 1892 at Madras as a student. He began to point out the declining moral values and the consequent suffering of women. He was focussing on the need to spread social purity through abolition of the nautch and prostitution. He came to Machilipatnam after the completion of studies and founded social purity movement in 1893 and intensified the activities through tours and lectures throughout Northern Circars. His early efforts appear to have started from 1893. At the VIIIth Indian National Social Conference at Madras, Venkata Ratnam spoke on 30-12-1894 about his early efforts. He said that about 18 months ago, he raised his humble voice of warning and protest against the institution of nautch.

Besides lectures and propaganda Venkata Ratnam began taking signed pledges from the youth for promotion social purity. The pledge included the following.

1. Neither attending nautch parties nor inviting them for any functions.
2. Neither using impure language nor singing indecent songs, nor listening to coarse jests.
3. Neither witnessing indecent pictures, nor paintings nor scenes.

4. Neither conversing, nor reading for the sake of impure pleasure about subjects suggesting impure thoughts.

5. Commitment to be chaste in body and promising to endeavour the utmost to be chaste in mind, and to promote the cause of purity in general.

This policy of taking purity pledges was started by Venkata Ratnam and he was inspiring the youth to take the movement forward. This was soon followed by other reformers like Veeresalingam.

Venkata Ratnam showed by his own behaviour how to conduct oneself in taking the movement forward. He was refusing to attend the marriages if nautch party was arranged. He was always referring to any dancing girl as his own daughter. When he was asked to attend the nautch party just to listen to the music, he replied that he had no objection, if they were prepared to have such public programme by their own sisters. He faced criticism and opposition on the issue of abolition. His activities were criticised as wild goose chase, silly sentimentality, unpatriotic, irreligious, anti fine arts and a wild attempt like the removal of Himalayas.
Venkata Ratnam's supporters were his own students and admirers while his opponents were orthodox people, trustees of temples and most modern people. Still the credit goes to him for focusing attention on the issues and in gaining support, however little it might be for the measures undertaken towards its abolition. He succeeded in justifying that the union of fine arts like music with a "fast life" need to be broken. Thus, Venkata Ratnam gave to the Andhra youth a capacity to "see purity in a pool of sin, to acquire spiritual power in order to conquer feeble mindedness, and instal courage that leads to soul power."35

Venkata Ratnam encouraged the male members of the nautch families to study and get employed. He was teaching them to be self-reliant and not to depend upon the earnings of nautch woman. As an incentive free education was provided to them in all the educational institutions of Pithapuram Raja. In accordance with their qualifications, they were suitably employed and thus were turned into gentlemen, from the state of being drones or parasites.36 He began to impress upon the members of the community to get the girls settled through marriages. He celebrated the marriage of a sister of his student at Pithapur Raja's College, Kakinada with Ch. Raju Naidu around 1909. It was soon followed by the marriage of that girl's cousin sister to Mr. G. Veera Raghavulu. Then followed scores of instances all over Andhra as Venkata Ratnam said, "of girls drawn away from unhappiness and sinfulness of the old custom and settled in virtuous and
honourable ways of living.” He noted this with satisfaction while delivering lectures at Kalavanthula conference at Vizianagaram on 26th December 1929.37

The Brahmo reformers thus attended to the work of celebration of marriages to Kalavanthula girls. Many kasa girls in Pithapuram estate of Rao Surya Rao were suitably married and were happily settled. The credit for initiating this humanitarian reform goes to the leaders of Andhra Brahma Samaj in general and Venkata Ratnam in particular. Gandhi’s attitude of looking at fallen women as “thieves stealing virtue” and keeping them aloof contrasts with Venkata Ratnam’s view of finding fault with the demand and rehabilitation of the community through education, marriage and employment, thus integrating them into the main stream.38

As an intellectual Venkata Ratnam was able to identify the magnitude of the problem and root of it. He began to address himself to the problem through spreading the message of social purity among the youth and by advancing social reform of Veeresalingam by bringing another unfortunate lot into wedlock. The result seems to be effective, as there was a qualitative change in the attitude.

4.5.4 Towards Orphans

Venkata Ratnam was very kind towards the orphans. An orphan was looked after as “Challenge of God to Man’s Humanity”. He was moved at the
sight of four orphan girls who were found at the Ponneri Railway station. He brought them up, reared them personally, got them educated, and employed. They grew up under his paternal care and became staunch supporters of Brahmo faith. He was instrumental in the establishment of Gangadhar Rama Raya Karunalaya at Kakinada in 1907. The inmates around hundred were affectionately looked after by the royal household at Pithapur, Venkata Ratnam Naidu and series of Superintendents. The inmates were given basic education (till second form) in an attached school with Guruju Venkata Swamy as its headmaster from 1917-53. Along with formal education, skills like sewing and singing were taught to them. They were allowed to stay on till they complete their educational career and get suitably married. They grew-up against Brahmo background under the successive superintendents – V.P. Raju, Pillarisetti Sitaramaiah, Nabhi Jagannadha Rao, Akurathi Chalamayya and Marakani Janaki Ramaiah. Though the inmates came from different backgrounds, they were taught to be one. And they admitted that they were never felt themselves as orphans since they were cared by magnanimous personalities through out and hence did not miss happy childhood.

4.5.5 Adi Andhras

The presence and participation of a large number of people belonging to the depressed communities added a new dimension to the Brahma Samaj in this region. Venkata Ratnam appealed to the touchables to identify themselves with
"the kith and kin, the flesh and blood of those who are called the depressed classes". He further said, "It is not in a spirit of patronage, it is not from its necessity for the political advancement of the country, it is not even as an expression of social justice, it is wholly and essentially on the basis of the righteous dispensation of God, which treats all as the equal enjoyers of His blessings. While Pithapuram estate provided the external outfit of health and education the idea of self-respect was implanted in them by Devulapalli Venkata Krishna Sastry through his songs. As the education was the best solvent of all problems and leveller of society, it was imparted free in all its stages to Harijans, not in segregated institutions but in colleges and high schools which were opened to all other classes.

Among the Harijan men benefited by the charity of Pithapur estate, mention may be made of following: Sabba Neelakantam retired Secretary, Government of India, Delhi, Padmasri Boyi Bheemanna, famous poet and chief translator to Government of Andhra Pradesh, Dr. P. Rama Rao, Surgeon Government Hospital, Hyderabad, Bhupati Ram Mohan Rao, Joint Secretary (Revenue), Secretariat, Hyderabad etc. Those who chose the teaching line include D. Appa Rao, Pamu Rammurthi, Kasi Appanna, Kommu Appa Rao etc. Bojja Appala Swami and Neetipudi Ganapathi Rao, Ex-MLAs were also beneficiaries. Women beneficiaries include Doctor Boddu Sarojamba, M.B.,B.S., smt. R. Vimala Devi,
teacher, Smt. Kommu Damayanthi, teacher, Smt. R. Meenakshi, Warden, Medical College Hostel, Kakinada, Smt. K. Kamala, Hostel Manager, Smt. Pandiri Meenakshi etc. The services of Brahmo leaders were acknowledged by the contemporary Harijan community. Many Adi Andhras in those days named their children after the reformers.

Venkata Ratnam, with his multifaceted activities towards the marginalised sections of women, orphans and panchamas did influence the society in general and the youth in particular. He was honoured with the titles of Rao Bahaddur in 1912, KIH and Diwan Bahaddur in 1918, Sir in 1924, D. Litt. From Andhra University in 1926, L.L.O. from Madras University in 1932 and Brahma Rishi in 1933. He was associated very closely with the following institutions Karunalya (orphanage) Brahma Samaj Mandir, Pithapur Raja’s College, Harijan Hostels for Boys and Girls at Pithapur and Kakinada, Pithapur Brahma Samaj and Hitakarini Samaj at Rajahmundry.

4.6 CHILAKAMARTHI AS SOCIAL REFORMER

Chilakamarthi borrowed the ideas of reform from the twin stars of Andhra – Veeresalingam and Venkataratnam. He was equally convinced about the need for reforming the society. He continued certain trends set by his predecessors and extended their activities in some other directions.
4.6.1 Contacts with Brahmasamajists

Chilakamarthi came into contact with Kandukuri Veeresalingam in 1885 when he joined as a student of Matriculation in the school. Vavilala Vasudeva Sastry teacher in Mathematics and Geography, Viswanath Iyyar teacher in English, Indian History and History of England and Kandukuri Veeresalingam teacher in Telugu taught him the subjects.42 This was the beginning of exposure to reform ideas.

In 1893, Veeresalingam was awarded the title of Rao Bahaddur. In that context, he was felicitated in town hall. Chilakamarthi joined others in composing poems in praise of him. He wrote nine poems with the title of 'Navaratnas': These were published in the journal 'ChintamanV' edited by Nyapati Subba Rao.

Chilakamarthi's regard for Veeresalingam grew into a more intimate contact. From 1893 onwards, Chilakamarthi began attending the meetings and anniversaries of Prarthana Samaj. Veeresalingam was regularly conducting the samaj meetings wherein he was giving lectures. He joined the group of Veeresalingam and began going to Sarangadhara Metta wherein prayers were made as per Brahmo stipulation. The group consisted of about 50 to 60 members including the school students and the members of Prarthana Samaj.43

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Chilakamarthi heard the lecture of Valluri Narasimha Rayudu on Brahmo Samaj in 1894. Within one year, i.e., 1895, he became familiar with Brahmo Dharma and he could write an essay on puritanic life. He got it read by Durgi Gopala Krishna Rao at Sarangadhara Metta. This was later published in the weekly coming from the Kakinada with the name of Rajayogi.44

Chilakamarthi who was already influenced by Veeresalingam, came into contact with Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu from 1893 onwards. It was in that year that Venkata Ratnam Naidu came to Rajahmundry and gave a lecture in English on social purity. He pleaded for the abolition of nautch parties and insisted on getting the girls married. Chilakamarthi was very much influenced by this inspiring lecture.45

Chilakamarthi came into contact Desiraju Peda Bapaiah in 1902, when he went to Bapatla to attend a wedding. This contact also continued to be a life long contact with due respect.

Chilakamarthi maintained intimate close association with Devulapalli Venkata Krishna Sastri. He had high regard for the young and upcoming poet, who was composing several lyrics, explaining Brahmo dharma. Many of Devulapalli's songs were accepted as prayer songs and procession songs.
4.6.2 Social Purity

Chilakamarthi’s contacts with Brahmo intellectuals and activists resulted in pursuing social purity movement. He gave the purity pledge to his mentor Veeresalingam and adhered to it throughout his life. It included respect to be shown to all women irrespective of their social background. One of the conditions of the pledge was not to attend to the social functions where nautch parties were arranged, however, close their organisers might be and however talented the artists were. In obedience to this, Chilakamarthi refused to attend the marriages of his close kith and kin. He refused to attend the music recital of Dhana a reputed artist-cum-prostitute from Madras. In a similar way, he did not attend the music party of Coimbatore Taaye arranged by his friend Cherukumilli Venkata Ramaiah in connection with the thread ceremony of his younger brother. Nor did he attend the music party of the two prostitutes brought from Madras by Muluktla Atchyuta Ramaiah in connection with the marriage of his daughter.46

The students in Rajahmundry held a meeting in 1893 and sent a representation to Madras Government for the abolition of nautch.47 Again in 1897, the students in Rajahmundry and Kakinada gave written pledges that they have resolved to maintain social purity.48

From 1909 onwards, Krishna Patrika published articles on Kalavantula community. It is interesting to find a letter published anonymously by a prostitute
of Rajahmundry. She condemned her caste and Hindu society and pleaded that reform should come from the community itself.49

It is further interesting to find some families giving up their profession but they faced the indignation from customers and non-cooperations from their neighbours. For example, forty families in Peddapuram gave up their profession. The local Viswabrahmins and Devangas followed non-cooperation.50

Chilakamarthi began to address himself to the controversy of nautch from 1893 onwards. He wrote an essay on social purity in connection with the anniversary of Prartha Samaj in 1895. This was later published in a weekly journal Rajayogi. In the same year, he published some more verses condemning the nautch parties arranged in religious processions.51

The attitude of Chilakamarthi towards the issue of nautch appears to be writing articles on the need for the abolition of nautch parties and personally distancing himself from such parties. This was evident when he hesitated to take donation from the local prostitutes for the establishment of National School at Rajahmundry in 1907 and then convincing himself about its ultimate end.52

He did not take that active role as played either by the Pithapur Raja or by D.V. Krishna Sastry who celebrated the marriages of the Kasa women and Kalavanthula girls. As a creative writer he wrote several humorous skits exposing
the evil of extra marital relationship like Maharasika Prahasana, Mano Pasika Prahasana, Padakagadi Muchchatlu etc. In this, he was a close follower of Veeresalingam than that of Venkata Ratnam.

4.6.3 Follower of Brahma Samaj

Chilakamarthi, even as a student came under the influence of Prarthana Samaj. He used to attend the weekly lectures of Veeresalingam at Sarangadhara Metta. He attended the lectures given by Pandit Sivanadha Sastry and by Raghupathi Venkata Ratnam Naidu. He began to believe in formless and nameless God. His concept of God was detailed in the poems of Kripambonidhi Sataka. He developed disinterest in continuing the traditional practices. He had little or no faith in religious rituals. Even while performing the monthly and annual ceremonies of his father, he did them only for the satisfaction of his elders and relatives. A radical change in his attitude towards the rituals was noticed even in his late twenties and early thirties. He criticised the rituals like death ceremonies, Sraddhas and Shodasha Brahmanardhas in his writings. In a similar way, he did not believe in the Brahmin monopoly of Gayatri Mantra. As a boy of five years, he taught the hymn of Gayatri, to his friend, a barber boy. An elderly Brahmin who happened to witness this, grew wild and scolded the boy. Then Chilakamarthi started his introspection of what crime he committed by teaching the hymn to his playmate. This incident later on made him to ponder over the
caste structure and the very seed of reform began to sprout. In a similar way, he questioned the auspiciousness of taking bath in river Godavari during Pushkara period. He neither did attend the Pushkaras nor took the bath in the river. He involved himself in interdinings, cared for Harijans and opposed the religious pontiff.

Chilakamarthi waged a war against tradition, superstition and the rituals like animal sacrifices. He warned the people not to kill goats, sheep, buffalos, cocks, and hens during the time of festivals or jataras in honour of village Goddesses like Gangamma, Ankamma, Poleramma etc.

Chilakamarthi criticised not merely the rituals and animal sacrifices but also the vratas, fastings, devils and ghosts through his writings and thus tried to create social awareness. The illiterate people were particular of observing religious formalities like vratas and fastings as the only means of reaching God. When they fell ill, they went to a witch doctor, instead of going to a medical doctor under the belief that the ailment was inflicted on them by devils, or evil-spirits. They were giving importance to the almanac for deciding the auspicious time for any new venture or for a journey. Omens, both good and bad also played a major role in deciding the day-to-day activities of the common people. Catching the sight of a single Brahmin, a widow, a snake etc., was considered to be inauspicious. Good
omens include the hearing of a bell ring, the sight of a married woman, flowers etc. Child birth was surrounded by a number of superstitions. A pregnant woman was not supposed to see an eclipse as it was believed that her child would be deformed. Sorcerers and fortune tellers were in great demand, as their advice was sought by the common people. Women folk were consulting yerukala tribal women who were considered to be competent in accounting for the present troubles and in foreseeing future. Propitiation of minor deities was considered essential at the time of epidemics as people believed that their wrath would bring wide spread devastation.

Chilakamarthi tried to persuade the people to give up those blind beliefs and superstitions. He warned the people to be careful from the cheating persons like saints, sanyasis, pseudopandits and astrologers, since they were playing tricks to loot money. His prahasanas, Kanaka Sunaka Prahasanam, Kailasa doota Prahasanam, Apoorva Yachakudu etc., indicate these things. As a brahmo and also as a rationalist, he questioned the contemporary practices both through speeches and through literary works. Chilakamarthi’s preparedness to be a palbearer was a reaction against the commercialised bargainers of the profession. As long as his sight permitted, he was rendering the service, since he believed that no bargain should take place at such a sad time.
4.6.4 Fight against the Pontiff

Chilakamarthi attended a dinner hosted on the happy occasion of the arrival of Tanguturi Prakasam from England in the house of Rayavarapu Rama Murthy. A few friends also attended the dinner. This incident led to a great commotion in the town, as it was considered to be a sin to dine with foreign returned who did not undergo the purificatory rites. The matter, after being discussed at length by the orthodox Brahmins was reported to Swamy Sri Sankaracharya of Abhinava Virupaksha Matt. The office of the Swami issued notices to Prakasam, Chilakamarthi and others, charging them with religious lapses, supposed to be committed by them. Chilakamarthi replied suitably but the Swamy was not satisfied. Some time later, a meeting was held in the local temple. The Swamy was invited and he was brought in a procession on elephant ride with all fan fare. The local lawyer G. Rama Murthy requested the Swamy to take away the expulsion orders, as Prakasam had gone to the foreign country for the purpose of barrister education. This disturbed the house as the two sections for and against expulsion orders began to clash. The Swamy retreated from the backdoor of the temple. This incident happened in 1906 in Rajahmundry. It indicated the consistent stand of Chilakamarthi with progressivists. He was prepared to question the authority of the pontiff of Matta.53
4.6.5 Widow Marriages

The widow marriage movement launched by Kandukuri Veeresalingam was taken forward by Chilakamarthi. Chilakamarthi joined Widow Remarriage Association formed by Veeresalingam. This association at a later time, appealed to the government to rectify the defects of the widow remarriage act of 1856 such as the refusal of property rights to a married widow. By 1905, the total number of widow marriages performed was sixty three, of which fifty-seven were among the different sects of Brahmins, three among Vaisyas, one among Viswa Brahmins, one of Adi Velama and another of Vellala caste.

When Veeresalingam was working at Madras, Chilakamarthi played a crucial role in continuing widow marriage movement in Rajahmundry. He performed three widow marriages in 1906 at Rajahmundry. In performing the widow marriages, he received support from Rama Pragada Venkata Ramayya, Peddada Samba Siva Rao, Aravapalli Subba Rao, Kandukuri Venkata Ratnam, Pranutharthi Hara Ayyer. The first marriage took place between Nallacheruvu Krishna Rao and Krishnavenamma. This Krishna Rao married a widow earlier and as she had passed away, he again preferred to marry a widow. The second widow marriage was an intersect wedding between the vedic Brahmin Dheram Venkateswarlu and the Niyogi Brahmin widow Seshamma. The third one was between Bhattiprolu Sarabhaiah aged 18 and a widow Rajeswari aged thirteen.
Both of them belonged to the Niyogi Brahmin family and they were brought from Machilipatnam by Unnava Lakshmi Narayana for the purpose of marriage celebration. A grand procession took place in the streets of Rajahmundry in connection with the wedding.54

Chilakamarthi celebrated the wedding of a teacher in his school and a member in his dramatic troupe, Turumella Venkata Subba Rao with a Vaishnavite widow. Kandukuri Veeresalingam came all the way from Madras to Rajahmundry. The wedding was well attended by teachers, students and important personalities in the town. The sons of old traditionalists opposing widow marriages also attended the marriage feast.55

The District Munsiff in Guntur, Viswanath Ayyer was a supporter of widow marriages and a social reformer. He decided to arrange lectures in support of widow marriage. Hence, he invited Chilakamarthi, Aravapalli Subba Rao and Tanguturi Sri Ramulu to come to Guntur and deliver lectures. Chilakamarthi spoke in Telugu while the other two lectured in English. These invitation lectures occurred in 1903.56

4.6.6 Founder of Schools

Chilakamarthi, as a close follower of Veeresalingam earned a permanent place as an educator in Andhra and founded schools not merely for upper caste but
also for the marginalised Harijans. Chilakamarthi founded primary school on 17th January 1899. It was up to the fourth class. In course of time, first and second forms have been added. The school was already famous with the services of dedicated teachers like Akondi Vyasa Murthy, Kunduri Venkata Ratnam, Ajjarapu Parvateesam, Koduri Dakshina Murthy Sastry, Narasimhadevara Venkata Ramanaiah etc. In 1901, he added third form to the school. Satyavolu Lakshmipathi a qualified teacher was appointed as Head Master. This school was recognised as Hindu Lower secondary school. Many poor students joined the school. Most of them, roughly half, were receiving free education.

In January 1903, the School was upgraded with the addition of fifth and sixth classes. Two more teachers were appointed, one being Digumarthi Kodanda Rama Swamy and the other Tanikella Purnaiah. He had to face strong opposition from Williams Pillai who complained against the upgradation. Chilakamarthi tried his best to convince the School Directorate to continue the school and he was successful. Then he requested Veeresalingam to take up the school and manage it, as Veeresalingam expressed the idea of starting a theistic school long back. But Veeresalingam was silent at this time.57

Finally, Chilakamarthi had to close the higher secondary school due to the consistent opposition of school authorities. In this context, he compared his school with the Mission School which was recognised by the Education

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Department, even though it admitted more boys than the sanctioned number. He was unhappy to close the school as he was strictly adhering to the rules of school education with regard to the number of students, number of staff, and their qualifications. With a view to enable his students to join in training college, Chilakamarthi accompanied by Kunduri Venkata Ratnam had gone to Marc Hunter, the Principal. He requested him to admit the boys in the higher classes as his school was closed. Marc Hunter helped the students in getting admitted. Chilakamarthi borrowed money from Ajjarapu Veeraiah (Rs.150/-) and paid the salaries to the teachers.

Chilakamarthi still aspired to start a school. He selected Bhimavaram where there was only one middle school. There was no other high school either in any other taluk or in Bhimavaram. All aspirants had to go to Narsapuram to receive higher education. So he wanted to start a high school in Bhimavaram. In January 1904, he founded the school with fourth and fifth forms. He appointed Vangala Venkata Narayana as Head Master. Rayasam Venkata Sivudu’s younger brother Krishna Murthy and Narasimhadevara Seshaiiah Sastry were appointed as teachers. Anew teacher Srinivasacharyulu replaced Venkata Narayana who was irresponsible and undependable. But by the end of 1904, the Bhimavaram school had to be closed as its continuation required corpus fund and infrastructural
facilities. The profits from the school were just enough to meet the expenses of maintenance.

Veeresalingam requested Chilakamarthi in 1906 to hand him over the Hindu lower secondary school to him. He told him that he wanted young teachers to work in the theistic school who were prepared to extend their voluntary services in the three institutions – widow’s home, Home for depressed boys and girls and in refuge home. He wished to make the school into a high school and maintain the three institutions through the employees here. He expressed his willingness to give him monthly sum as compensation. To this Chilakamarthi replied that he was glad to hand over the school with all its accessories without the expectation of compensation. Veeresalingam could take over the school on September 16, 1907 and began managing it through the Hitakarini Samaj. From January 1904, fourth form was added and Jayanthi Ganganna was the first Head Master of the high school. In course of time, fifth form and sixth form were added and the school was named as Hitakarini High School. Chilakamarthi was made a member of Hitakarini Trust and a member of the School Management. He continued his services in improving the school with the addition of eligible and suitable teachers. Yet, he did not hesitate to resign voluntarily to the membership of school management when he came to know that his patriotism was a hindrance to the school getting grant from the government.58
National School

Chilakamarthi had taken an active role in popularising Vandemataram movement. He tried to popularise the concepts of Swaraj, Swadeshi and national education. He did take immense interest in the founding of National School. He began to contribute articles to the journal Andhra Kesari and addressed several meetings in Rajahmundry about that issue. Along with Nyapathi Subba Rao who was enthusiastic in founding the National School, he participated in various meetings in old town Innespet and in town hall. Chilakamarthi was one of the volunteers for raising the donations. In fact, it was he from the third ward that could raise the highest contribution. On this school issue, he did not hesitate to accept the contribution of the prostitutes.59

The individuality of Chilakamarthi could be seen when he refused to be a member of the management of the school on the ground of his differences with Nyapathi Subba Rao. Chilakamarthi was of the view that only secular education be taught in the proposed school whereas Nyapathi Subba Rao believed in introducing religious education. Subba Rao argued that in the absence of religious education, students would likely to become atheist. But Chilakamarthi was of the view that religious education would lead to rivalries and would embarrass others following non-Hindu religions.60
Chilakamarthi withdrew himself from the management. But when Nyapathi Subba Rao withdrew himself from the school in 1909, Chilakamarthi was taken as a member of the management.\textsuperscript{61}

As Secretary of the National School during 1914-15, Chilakamarthi was able raise some donations amounting to Rs.3,000/- and thus could secure solid assets to the schools.\textsuperscript{62}

**Ram Mohan School (1909)**

The social group consisting of the untouchables also called as Panchamas was at the bottom of the social hierarchy. They were treated as untouchable classes and were not allowed to enter into temple and draw water from the common wells and tanks. They were expected to live outside the villages and cities. The Malas were closely associated with the agricultural operations while the Madigas were engaged in artisan and husbandry functions like curing and stanning of hides, the manufacture of crude leather articles especially sandals, trappings for the bullocks and large well buckets used in irrigation.

Chilakamarthi, like other Brahma Samajists shared feelings of sympathy for the Harijans. He discussed the pitiable conditions of the untouchables in his autobiography.
"The so called upper classes treat the oppressed as untouchables, by getting done all kinds of mean jobs by them. Domestic animals and dogs are allowed to stay in our houses but not the panchamas. What a pity! As menial servants they can graze our cattle but we should not touch them or talk to them. Are they not created by God by whom we are created? Do they not have hunger and thirst, pains and pleasures as we have? There are very rich and wise people among us. We spend money for construction of choultries and for performing rituals. But never do we try to improve the conditions of the dwellings of Malas and Madigas (untouchables). Should they live only on the outskirts of the villages?"

This kind of attitude led Chilakamarthi to think in terms of doing something for Harijans, as he was constantly listening and witnessing their sufferings. His idea could be noticed in an article published in the Krishna Patrika dated February 6, 1915, "to raise the status of the low caste people is doing service to the lord. It is devotion to God. It is devotion to the country. It is religious beauty. It is to raise those who are in a degrading position . . . is for more a sacred act than building temples or choultries or offering prayers or making contributions to temples." He conceived the idea of starting a school for them, which was going to be different from the three or four municipality schools meant for the Panchamas in Rajahmundry. Then he thought of introducing English to benefit the Harijan boys, as Telugu alone was taught in the municipality schools.
In February 1909, Chilakamarthi founded the school for Harijan boys and named it as Rammohan Pathasala. It was difficult to secure a rented building. Cheruvu Somayajulu, a friend, came to his rescue and gave his tiled house in Aryapuram freely for this purpose. The school was thus started in a Brahmin locality. Then began the search for students and with difficulty, a maximum of five students joined the school. It was even more difficult to procure the services of a teacher. After a long search, Ande Subba Rao, a Telaga by caste was appointed as teacher in the school on a monthly salary of Rs.12/-. The school was started with two classes — three and four. This teacher worked for one year and left for higher studies. The strength of the school also increased a bit. A new teacher Meda Rajaiah, another Telaga was appointed in his place. The school continued to be a service institution as free education was provided to the boys. Even the required books and slates were provided freely. Thus Chilakamarthi continued the uplifting of Adi Andhra work started by the Pithapur Raja Rao Suryarao and his mentor Raghupathi Venkata Ratnam Naidu in Pithapur and Kakinada. The Pithapur Raja could meet the expenses of Harijan lodges and harijan education through the revenues of the estate. But Chilakamarthi, as a single person, tried to do his best.

Ram Mohan School was shifted, as the strength increased, to a Muslim house in 1911 in Lakshmi Varapupeta. Chilakamarthi had to appoint two more
teachers with a view to meet the requirement of increased strength. He alone had to bear the expenses of school maintenance which amounted roughly to Rs.30/- per month. From the donations received, he has been able to provide some amenities to the students. Once Nyapathi Subba Rao visited the school and gifted Rs.150/-. With that Chilakamarthi was able to meet the requirement of school furniture like benches, chairs and desks. At another time, Nalam Pattabhi Ramaiiah brought some slates and books and they were distributed to the boys. New classes were added every year and the school became higher elementary school.67

Ram Mohan School started with less than ten students increased its strength to 100 by 1915. It had at that time seven teachers.68 The highest strength reached was 150. Chilakamarthi maintained the school for 13 years as an act of service and spent more than three thousand rupees. There was no school exclusively for Harijans, before this school and hence the credit goes to Chilakamarthi for founding the first school and for maintaining it for thirteen years successfully. Instead of getting profits he incurred much expenditure. But still he never regretted as the very idea of educating the Harijans for future prospects from the royalty received from his books gave him immense happiness. He considered it as a continuation of the work done earlier by Pithapur Raja Rao Suryarao, Venkata Ratnam Naidu and Veeresalingam.69

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Pithapur Raja began giving an annual contribution of Rs.500/- to this school so as to strengthen the institution. Chilakamarthi appointed a harijan teacher by name Narasimha Rao, so as to strengthen school and was prepared to pay higher salary. But he was taken away by the Mission School on a still higher pay and converted him to Christian faith.\textsuperscript{70}

In December 1919, the Madras Governor Wellingdon came to Rajahmundry and visited Ram Mohan School and complemented him that he was “turning out good work.”\textsuperscript{71} Another dignitary that visited the school was C.R. Reddy. He visited the school 1920 and gave some suggestions for improvement.

Vivekananda School

In 1915, Chilakamarthi founded Vivekananda School for Adi Andhra adults, whose day-time would be engaged in bread earning. It was a night school and an Adi Andhra teacher was appointed. Along with Ram Mohan School Chilakamarthi was personally supervising the two schools.

Chilakamarthi, unable to maintain the two schools, handed them over in 1922 to Guduri Ramachandra Rao, a Gandhian and a committed activist to abolish untouchability. But this proved to be the beginning of the decline of schools as Ramachandra Rao converted them into National schools and the government stopped the regular grants. Students discontinued and new students never joined.\textsuperscript{72}
In Rajahmundry, a systematic attempt was made by a society to educate the Adi Andhras. Its President was Chilakamarthi and its Secretary was Tallapragada Prakasa Rayudu. One of its members was Jayanthi Ganganna. All these were anustanic Brahmos. The committee set up 10 schools around Rajahmundry and ran the schools through donations and government grants. These also declined when P. Gurumurthi moved a resolution to the effect that these schools be turned into nationalist schools by foregoing government grants, thus severing connection with British Government. The advice of Chilakamarthi was not heeded.73 This proved to be fatal and the schools slowly declined.

The services of Chilakamarthi were recognised and appreciated by the harijans. Markandeyulu an old student of his school spoke in a meeting on 30-10-1938, appreciating his services to him and to his community and said that he named his son after the reformer. In a similar manner, Venkanna studied in his school. Chilakamarthi recommended him to Raghupathi Venkata Ratnam Naidu to admit the boy in P.R. College. He could complete his graduation and was appointed as Deputy Tahsildar in Selam district. He also named his son as Lakshmi Narasimham.74

Chilakamarthi tried to better the position of harijans in society by attending to the issues of removal of the taboo on defilement, encouraging interdinings and
caring for their health and education. All this work did take place before Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the champion of harijan upliftment at national level.

Chilakamarthi’s services to harijans were recognised by the contemporary social reformers also. Justice Narayan Ganesh Chandravarker of the Bombay High Court congratulated him for his services in the conference at Madras in 1914. Chilakamarthi in the conference arranged at Anderson Hall, Madras, to discuss the harijan issue spoke about his services to the harijans. He concluded with the following words: “I am a blind man. I did this little work I could not do more.” Then the President of the session said, “You are not blind. We are blind.”

The Governor of Madras Lord Pentland complimented him for his good work and presented him a book “Optimism” written by Hellen Keller, written by a physically challenged lady, thus encouraging him in his work.

The pioneering efforts of Chilakamarthi encouraged the community to come up through education, the leveller of all social inequalities. Literacy was encouraged to develop the idea of self-respect.

4.6.7 Attitude Towards Women

From his boyhood Chilakamarthi showed care and concern for women. He was an affectionate person bestowing respect to elderly women, and concern for younger ones. From his boyhood, he was feeling sorry for his mother because his
father and paternal grandmother were unkind towards her. Even during the period of pregnancy, his mother had to attend to endless domestic chorus which pained him much. Since that time, he developed sympathy for the sufferers and began to understand the problems of women folk. His attitude towards his wife Venkayamma was soft. When she died in 1930, he recollected her services as partner in his life and the way she helped him in looking after a large family. He was kind to his relatives on both sides and willingly supported them both morally and financially. He was sympathetic to the widows in general and child widows in particular. He looked after affectionately the three widowed sisters and their children, spending a lot of time, energy and money. This he considered as his duty as the head of a large family. His sympathy for child widows might be due to on personal experience. He witnessed the child marriage at the age of five of his sister Subbamma, nine year old girl marrying sixty year old Appa Rao. It was the decision of the father who did not care for the consent of the other family members. Chilakamarthi could see his mother sad throughout the ritual. His sister passed away after one year of her marriage. Chilakamarthi considered death as a great relief as she could escape the plight of widowhood. Perhaps this personal experience was the reason for him to discourage uneven marriages and to support widow marriage.
Chilakamarthi encouraged education for women in general and for widows in particular. He imparted knowledge of Telugu to a child widow Seetayamma and made her a scholar in Telugu. In the same way, he trained his niece Ravuri Subbamma who had lost her husband at the age of twenty-two in 1918 and her mother who happened to be an younger sister of Chilakamarthi. He taught her Neeti Chandrika, Molla Ramayanam, Vikramarka Charitra, Raghuvamsam, Kumara Sambhavam, Megha Sandesamu and Bharavi. Under his able guidance, she was able to qualify herself in examination in Ubhaya Bhasha Praveena. She was the first lady to receive the Bhasha Praveena degree from Andhra University in 1928. After taking the degree, she began working as Telugu Pandit in government girl’s school. Thus a lady who became a widow of the age of 22 and with a child could become an employee and support her family. Chilakamarthi could fulfil the word given to the deceased sister in taking care of the niece. He was not merely happy but was also proud of her achievement, since she happened to be the first woman employee in the family. In a similar way, he taught his younger niece Kota Venkata Ratnamma and trained her in epics. His aspiration to educate women whether western or traditional was fulfilled to a certain extent. In his works also, he projected social reformer as an important character. For example, in Vijayalakshmi novel, the father of the heroine was a social reformer arguing against child marriages and forceful widowhood.
4.7 CONCLUSION

Through out the life, Chilakamarthi lived as a committed Brahma samajist. Though he was not an anustanic Brahmo, he continued to be a sympathiser. He was attending to all Brahmo meetings wherever they were held. He presided over the Brahma upasana meetings during November 18-20, 1916 at Machilipatnam which were attended by anustanic Brahmos like Peddada Ramaswamy, Palaparthi Narasimham, Raghupathi Venkataratnam Naidu and Kamaraju Hanumantha Rao.79

He further attended the Brahmo meetings in December 1926 at Epuripalem.80 He participated actively in the meetings held at Kakinada on September 27, 1933 in connection with the centenary celebrations of Raja Rammohan Roy’s birthday.81 He authored a Sataka “Krupambonidhi” to mark the significance of centenary celebrations of Rammohan.

Thus, Chilakamarthi lived the life of a practising Brahmo, believing in One God without name and form, rationally questioning the old customs and traditions, striving hard in implementing reforms like even marriages, widow marriages, women education and dalit education and opposing the authority of the religion over issues like foreign travel. He lived the life of a puritan and carried forward the anti-nautch movement.
When the services of Chilakamarthi were reviewed, service to education in general and to the dalits in particular occupy premier position. Opening schools exclusively for dalits and successfully running them for more than a decade appears to be an adventure. Here he displayed his special contribution. In continuing widow marriages, he followed his mentor Kandukuri Veeresalingam. In his fight against nautch and his propaganda of social purity, he was a follower of Venkataratnam Naidu. But in dalit education, he proceeded a step further and started separate schools and gave free education to them. Regarding women education, his services were limited to the relatives and closer circle and not through a separate school. In a similar way, it appears strange that he did not associate his wife in public activities, as Veeresalingam did. No closer relation except the widowed niece could opt for a job. All the five daughters of his brother and three daughters-in-law continued to be housewives and did not take part in public life. Perhaps, his ideas of women education were limited only to make the girls more equipped to handle domestic work and to appreciate the classics. In short, it was only to make them better wives and better mothers and not to get into professions. He comes closer to Veeresalingam in the attitude to women.

It is true that “If Veeresalingam was the path-finder Chilakamarthi was a torch-bearer along the path, as the former went on breaking new ground.”

It is also true that if Veeresalingam was the pioneer and the commander, Chilakamarthi was a seconder, a militant follower and a soldier in frontline.
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