

Role Played by Veeresalingam Pantulu in the Upliftment of Women

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Abstract

Uplift of women means development of women. Development is a total process in which all aspects of human life; aspirations, education, health and nutrition are involved and evaluated on the touch-stone of economic growth and quality of living process. It is the evolution of art of living and working together in a community. Without the uplift of women, modernization is impossible. The position of women was, in general, secondary throughout the world prior to our contemporary times. But the degree of their subjugation varied from place to place and time to time. Women in India were denied even the personal rights till the 19th century. Though evidences of intellectual eminence in women could and traced in ancient literature, they are only few and far between. Indian history has on record only the deep rooted prejudice against all privileges for women. By the end of the 19th century with the independence movement, dawned a new era in the social, cultural, economical and political developmental history of Indian women. In the 19th and 20th centuries, several efforts were made by the social and political reformers to uplift women, educate them and train them so that they would imbibe the ideas of nationalism, patriotism, liberty, equality etc. Individuals like Veeresalingam Pantulu, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jothipha Phule, and others which occupy foremost place in the emancipation of women. They are the champion of women's rights and fought for elimination of inequalities.

Key Words

Veeresalingam's writings, Formation of Associations, Services for Uplift of women.

Introduction

Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pandulu was the first and foremost leader of the reform movement in Andhra. The great intellectual C. Rajagopalachari said “Andhra Desa and Andhra people could not be what they are, if Veeresalingam had not arrived to vitalize them. He was one of the greatest men of India, of keen insight, great courage and dynamic energy. He fought against untruth and championed the cause of progress with Herculean Vigor.” He was the pioneer of Renaissance. He was a powerful writer, brilliant orator and indefatigable worker; he was determined to eradicate the social evils rendering women constituting one half of the population, depressed, degraded and helpless.

Veeresalingam was born in an orthodox family at Rajamundry in 1848, and inspired by the writings of Keshab Chandra Sen. He became a young boy of 13, married Rajyalakshmi. His wife took to social reform with conviction. Her role is not just attachment to the cause of women's progress was passionage and steadfast. She took active interest in the widow marriage movement. Veeresalingam himself acknowledged his debt of gratitude to her by stating that but for her unfailing assistance; he would not have been able to achieve a lot of what he did in his life

His Writings

Veeresalingam was influenced by the prevailing social conditions and also by the Brahma Samaj movement of Bengal. He pleaded for the spread of mass education in vernaculars and opposed purely literary education. He championed a system of education which could liberate the reform-oriented mind from the shackles of tradition and bring about regeneration in society. In order to focus public opinion on social evils, he wrote a number of stories deploring the steady fall in social and individual values. He attacked the practice of

child marriage by writing the drama called *Brahmavivahamu* in 1876 as a serial in his journal *Hasyasanjivini*. In this book he ridiculed the custom of marrying young girls to aged man.

The satire *satyarajendrapurvayatralu* by Veeresalingam attacks the evil of polygamy. He started a journal *Satihitabodhini* exclusively for the service of women and published in it a series of serials highlighting the puranic stories of *Satyavati* and *Chandramati*. He wrote a novel *Rajasekharacharitra*, in which he mirrors the contemporary social life with emphasis on the deplorable condition of women. Through his writings he severely attacks the problem of enforced widowhood of women leading to unhappiness.

Formation of Associations

Veeresalingam met the mighty challenge of the opponents of socio-religious reforms by founding associations to serve as media for expansion and propagation of his ideals, thus translating his writings into a concrete and materialistic shape. He was aware of the formation of the *Widow Remarriage Association* at Madras in 1874. In 1878 with the support of a few legal disciples, Veeresalingam constituted the *Social Reform Association*, *Sanghasamskaranasamiti*. His powerful speeches on widow remarriage fired through the ranks of orthodoxy in Andhra.

In his zeal for the all round development of women, he founded many institutions in Andhra and Madras. He established *Madras Widow's Homes* and orphanages for the rehabilitation of destitute women and orphans. When the widow remarriage movement became articulate by the vigorous propaganda campaign of Veeresalingam, some parents of widowed daughters anxious to get them married and some young men willing to marry young widows informed him of their anxiety and desire. The first remarriage was celebrated in the house of Veeresalingam on 11 December, 1881 under heavy guard of students and police. Undaunted by untold hardships in each case Veeresalingam organized marriages of twenty nine young widows to young men by 1892. In Madras he organized another 10 marriages during his stay there.

To stabilize the remarriage movement Veeresalingam started a Widow's Home in Madras city in 1891 and another in the same year at Rajamundry. The Madras Widow's Home was shifted and located in 1897 in a part of the three storied building in purasawalkam, which Veeresalingam purchased in that year. He established his Chintamani printing press in another part of the same building. A rescue home and an orphanage were annexed to the Widow's Home by him at Rajamundry in 1905 after his return from Madras. It was named as Sri Victoria Widow's Home.

The work of Veeresalingam in this sphere was recognized by the government and he was conferred the title of Rao Bahadur in 1893. He was bestowed with the highest tribute by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade who referred to Andhra as Veeresalingam's Andhra, so far as widow remarriage was concerned. Veeresalingam founded the Prarthana Samaj at Rajamundry in 1878 and delivered weekly sermons in it. Later, he assumed the leadership of South Indian Brahmo Samaj and South Indian Social Reform Association, both at Madurai. He presided over the 12th session of the Indian Social Reform Congress at Madras in 1898. He fought for the post puberty marriages of girls and against ill assorted marriages.

His crusade for marriage of child widows, campaign for women's education, fight against corruption in public life, powerful plea for moral life, his succor to helpless women and his continuous and continual onslaught on the citadel of superstition and ignorance earned for him a place of reverence and endearment in the hearts of all Telugu people. He founded schools and journals to promote the cause of women. For his sacrifices and services, Veeresalingam was hailed popularly as the Isvara Chandra Vidhya Sagar of South India and Father of Modern Andhra. In one word, the essence of his life work was the upliftment of women.

Thus the emancipation of women occupied a pivotal place in the activities of social reform movement in India, particularly in the South. Veeresalingam's social reforms

involving women were mainly concerned with two aspects. The first was the educational aspect and the other was the breaking of the rigidity of certain customs that inflicted humiliation and sufferings on women. The pioneer in the agitation for women's uplifts and rights in India particularly in the South was Veeresalingam Pantulu.

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