

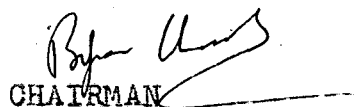
VEERESALINGAM AND HIS TIMES
(1848-1919)

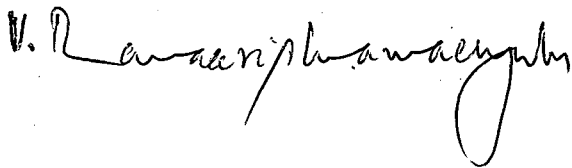
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CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
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NEW DELHI

I certify that the dissertation
entitled 'Veerasingam and his times :
(1848-1919)' submitted by Sri
V. Ramakrishnamacharyulu in partial
fulfilment of the requirement of the
Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil)
of the University is bona fide work
to the best of my knowledge and may
be placed before the examiners for
their consideration.


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ABBREVIATIONS

Sweeya.....,

Sweeyacharithramu (autobiography)
of K. Veeresalingam.

Report on

Report on Native News Papers
(Madras Presidency).

Coll. works.....

Collected works

VEERESALINGAM AND HIS TIMES
(1848-1919)

P R E F A C E

The 19th century in Andhra, as well as in India, was an epoch-making period because of the agrarian revolution set in motion by Britain and the shattering of the old institutional basis of Indian society. The destructive role of the British rule resulted in devastating famines, pauperisation of the peasantry, and universal poverty. The drain of wealth was yet another feature of the British imperialist rule over India. The village community which broke up was not immediately replaced by modern agro-industrial society. Progress is the result of the impact of external force on internal change. The British territorial conquest of the country introduced, along with the modern means of communication and transport, the elements of commercial capitalism which ultimately resulted in the creation of a national market. The stagnant feudal society in India, when shaken by external forces, began to move at a slow pace. Whereas the developing elements of mercantile commerce with its ideology were moving comparatively at a rapid pace. It may be described as a period of transition, from the old to the new. An urban middle class, pursuing various gainful professions was now added to the class-structure of Indian society. Its pioneering role in the dissemination of Western ideas and in the social and political awakening of the people cannot be overemphasised. Leadership in society was progressively transferred from the hands of the land-based and rural elite to those of this new urban

elite. The change in the economic structure of society coupled with the flow of new ideas was creating a stir in the minds of the people.

Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919) was born at the cross-roads of this historical development and at the right moment in the history of Andhra, when Andhra society was undergoing a similar change as the rest of Indian society. The efforts of the Christian missionaries and the Government in the spread of education during the period were worth noting. Motives apart, the rising middle classes began evincing keen interest in new education which brought with it new ideas of scientific thinking and rational inquiry. Veeresalingam's efforts at the creation of a new era in Andhradesa were an integral part of the larger reformation movement which had its birth at the beginning of the 19th century in Bengal. No history of Indian social reform is complete without a recognition of the pioneering endeavours of Veeresalingam and his associates in the cause of social regeneration and the liberation of men and women from the shackles of age-old ignorance and meaningless customs. Little is known of the work of Veeresalingam outside the Telugu country nowadays. Works on Indian social reform movements make only a passing reference to him. It may partly be due to the fact that not only Veeresalingam's works but those of his contemporaries too are in Telugu, and a serious attempt is yet to be made to fully explore these sources and present a connected and balance

account of the reform movement of this period in the right perspective. However, there was a time when the Brahmos of Bengal like Pandit Sivanatha Sastry and the reformers of Maharashtra like Mahadev Govind Ranade hailed him as the 'Vidyasagar of South India'. His greatness lay in the fact that he undertook many-sided reform activities at the same time and did everything at his command to make them a success. Veeresalingam was involved in the creation of all beginnings in modern Telugu life, an educator, a reformer, a feminist, a journalist, a literary historian, a writer of social satires, plays and novels - he was many in one. An attempt is made in this dissertation to present Veeresalingam as a social and religious reformer, and as a purifier of public life. An assessment of his political ideas is also attempted. However, keeping in view the limitations of the present dissertation an evaluation of Veeresalingam's literary works and style is not undertaken. This aspect may be taken up later.

The present study is not a mere discussion of reform ideas expounded by Veeresalingam. It also endeavours to present an account of the practical work done by him in the field of social reform. Also this work is not confined to a mere presentation of the work of Veeresalingam as an individual reformer. It deals with the times he lived in, taking into account the impact of his personality on the contemporary society. He influenced his times as much as he was influenced by them. In his own life-time Veeresa-

lingam himself witnessed the extent of influence his reform movements had on his times. The impact was seen in the activities of several of his younger contemporaries some of whom were his own associates and followers in the cause of social reform.

The main sources for this subject consist of the writings of Veeresalingam and the contemporary writings of his co-workers and journals published during his time. The help that the Government records render for this type of work is probably not much as the bias of official records was undoubtedly more towards political and other matters and not social. As most of the materials are in Telugu language (including the writings of Veeresalingam), the passages and references quoted in this work are translated into English by me.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge my debt to several people who helped me with their suggestions in preparing this work. I do not know how to adequately thank my adviser Prof. S. Gopal but for whose valuable suggestions and guidance I would not have completed my work. I am grateful to the Centre for Historical Studies for providing me with an opportunity to join the centre to pursue my research. I thank the governing body of my college, Jawahar Bharati, Kavali, for granting me sabbatical leave for one year to be able to stay in the Jawaharlal Nehru University to do my research. I wish to thank the authorities of the Gautami Library, Rajahmundry, and the Progressive

Union, Nellore, the National Archives, New Delhi and the Tamilnadu Archives, Madras for providing me with necessary books and records for my study.

NEW DELHI,
OCTOBER, 1973.

V. RAMAKRISHNAMACHARYULU

CHAPTER I

ANDHRA SOCIETY IN THE 19th CENTURY

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The British established their control over the Andhra region by the beginning of the 19th century. The Anglo-French rivalry ended in 1763 resulting in the decline of the French influence in the South and the ascendancy of the British. In August 1765, Robert Clive, the Governor of Bengal, succeeded in securing a firman from the Mughal Emperor who gave away the circar districts except Guntur (The Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari and Krishna districts) to the British.¹ Similarly the Nizam in 1800, one year after the close of the fourth Mysore war, entered into a treaty with the British (under the system of Lord Wellesley's subsidiary alliances), and ceded the Rayalaseema districts (Bellary, Kurnool, Cuddapah, Anantapur, Chittoor and Nellore, which from then onwards called Ceded Districts) to them. With this the conquest of Andhra was completed. Thus, the Andhra country, ruled by indifferent and distant rulers (the Mughals and the Nizam), was in a bad shape economically, socially and culturally. The rule of the Nizam degenerated into a mere collection of taxes and he had evinced no interest in maintaining even peace, security and order, not to mention of progress. The Zamindari system (in vogue then) was rotten and under it people were groaning being placed at the mercy of every freebooter and superstition monger.

CASTE SYSTEM:

Society in Andhra during the 19th century was the same

1. C.Veerabhadra Rao, History of Rajahmundry (Rajahmundry, 1915) p. 32.

as that of any part of South India. It was based on the hierarchical order of innumerable castes and sub-castes. Birth, not merit or wealth, was the principal criterion on which one's status or position was decided. Once born in a particular caste, the status of an individual was pre-determined by the rank of that caste in the hierarchy. The village community was a combination of many caste groups, each following its hereditary calling and enjoying its fixed status. In the same manner, the caste in which a man was born determined his occupation too. Along with the original four castes, a number of sub-castes emerged in the course of time. Perhaps as a result of geographical expansion and due to the growth of new crafts which brought new vocations into existence, the sub-castes might have been originated. In this respect it may be noted that certain sub-castes among the Brahmins in Andhra bear names denoting a particular area populated by them.² These sub-castes had become distinct divisions in society, and the social

2. See Edgar Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India (Madras, 1909), Vol. I, p. 366, wherein he discussed different divisions among Brahmins like 1) Vaidikis 2) Niyogis 3) Tamballa etc. Among these divisions existed many sub-divisions denoting areas. E.G. 1) Murikinadu 2) Veginadu 3) Pakanadu. Also see Suravaram Pratapareddy, 'Andhrula Sanghika Charitra' (Telugu) (Social History of Andhras), (Hyderabad, 1950), Second Edition pp. 424-25. The author quoted a verse from Hamsavamsati, a political work written in Telugu by Ayyalaraju Narayanamatyudu (1800-50) which reflected the social life of Andhra during his period. The verse mentioned different 'nadas' (territorial divisions) such as Velanadu, Venginadu, Pulugulanadu, Pragnadu, Murikinadu, Renadu. Also see Vignanasarvaswamu (Telugu), (Madras, 1959) Vol. III. p. 14, wherein it is stated that these divisions existed, on territorial basis, not only among Brahmins but other castes also. Among Reddis, there are sub-divisions like panta, pakanati, Motati, Karnati and the like. Likewise among Vysyas, Kmmas, Viswabrahmins also there exist these sub-divisions.

intercourse between these divisions was strictly forbidden. As the caste system was based on the concepts of superiority and inferiority and ideas of purity and pollution, there was no possibility of social intercourse which, ultimately led to a parochial social consciousness. The caste system divided the entire population into three broad social groups, namely, the privileged, the unprivileged, and the untouchables.

The Brahmins were at the apex of the social structure and also they were the rich landlords till the middle of the 19th century. They monopolised all learning and were the arbiters of morals in society. They were not only priests and teachers but occupied key posts in the administration,³ in the ancient tradition of acting as advisers (Mantrin) to the rulers. As a priestly community they were also entitled to other privileges like gifts and charities in the name of religion and also the leniency of punishments.

Telugu Brahmins are divided into two broad groups Vaidikis and Niyogis. Vaidikis are enjoined upon to follow religious occupations and Niyogis, secular. These two sects are sub-divided into various endogamous groups.

3. See for example Robert Eric Frykenberg's Guntur District (1788-1848) A History of local influence and central authority in South India (Oxford, 1965), p.16, where he discussed the positions of influence held by Niyogi Brahmins.

Immigrants from the Tamil country in the wake of invasions to and fro have constituted themselves into sizeable pockets, endogamous as usual. Prominent among them are the Arama Dravidas in the Godavari basin, the Dimili Dravidas of Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts and the Pudur and Tummagunta Dravidas of Nellore district. The lowest rung among the Brahmins in the ritualistic hierarchy are the Tamballa Brahmins who are priests in Siva temples. Among the Niyogi Brahmins the most outstanding in achievement, secular and literary, the pride of place goes to the Aruvela Niyogis.⁴

The Vysyas (also called Komatis) occupied a middle position between the Brahmins and the Sudras. They are divided into Arya Vysyas and ordinary Vysyas. Their position in the ritualistic hierarchy is not very much higher than that of the Sudras eventhough they have begun in recent times to claim a 'Dwijahood' (the status of twice born people). For the Vedic Vysyas and Kshaktriyas are generally considered to be extinct. The chief occupation of the Vysyas is trade.⁵

4. For an original presentation of the probable historical origins of the division of Telugu Brahmin Community into Vaidikis and Niyogis, see K.V.Lakshmana Rao 'Andhra Brahmanulaloni Niyogi Vaidika Kalanirnayamu', Lakshminarayana Vyasavali (Vijayawada, 1965), pp.1-17. Also see under Andhra Brahmins, Edgar Thurston, Vol.I, op.cit., pp.357-366.

5. See for a good account of Vysyas, Edgar Thurston, Vol.III, op.cit., pp.306-48.

Next in order came the Sudras (as they were called) who formed the unprivileged section of the society. Worshipping either Vishnu or Shiva, they were divided into a number of castes such as Reddis, Kammas, Kapus, Baliyas, Lingayats, Kamsalis, Devangas, Padmasalis, Mangalis, Chakalis, Kummaras, and so on.⁶ These castes and their sub-divisions (into endogamous groups) further fragmented the society into smaller divisions and prevented the intermingling of these caste groups.

The next social division consisted of the 'untouchables' who were treated as virtual slaves in the villages. The Malas and Madigas mainly constituted this group who were also called as 'panchamas.' Economically they were at the lowest rung of the ladder and were working as landless labourers on the fields of the village landlords. Among them, as it was the case with regard to other castes, the social inter-mixture was completely ruled out.⁷ The untouchables did not have social status nor social rights.

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6. Edgar Thurston, op. cit., p.145. He discussed the various castes among Sudras in his 'castes and tribes in South India'. To cite one example, the following sub-divisions existed in the Baliya caste:
a) Gazula b) Gandavallu c) Telaga d) Tota e) Ralla
f) Pusa g) Racha h) Jakkula i) Adapapa. Also see Suravaram Pratapareddy, op.cit., p.426 wherein he gave a detailed list of several castes that existed in Andhra during the period under review.
7. W.Francis, 'Bellary' Madras District Gazetteers. (Madras, 1904), pp. 76-77. Also see Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 332.

These different caste groups had different codes of behaviour and etiquette, one for the 'higher castes' and the other for the 'lower castes'. The 'lower castes', in the 19th century Andhra, were adopting methods and means to imitate the highrcastes and adopt their way of life. This process (called 'Sanskritisation') was followed by a caste or sub-division of a caste, which desired to improve its position by adopting Brahmin ways of life, quitting callings considered degrading, taking to vegetarianism, child-marriage, giving up the practice of widow remarriage and intoxicants and renouncing the bloody religious ceremonies.⁸

The animosity and gulf that existed among the non-Brahmin castes in Andhra could be illustrated by a division among them into the "right-hand" and "left-hand" castes, a characteristic peculiar to South India excluding Kerala. Though the origin of these divisions cannot be explained, inscriptional evidence showed that they had been in existence for the last one thousand years. It appeared from this division that right hand castes are mainly of agricultural occupations and the left hand castes are mainly of artisan communities like viswabrahmins.⁹ This division was a source of constant strife and led to large scale

8. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Madras (I
(Calcutta, 1908), p. 32.

9. Vignanasarvaswamu, Vol. III, op.cit., p. 16.

violence and the law courts were flooded with litigation of this kind.¹⁰

Though the caste system showed no signs of loosening its iron grip, with the introduction of western education, changes in the traditional economy, rise of new professions and towns and the introduction of railways and other communications, more occasions and opportunities were created for social inter-course. A Brahmin, under severe economic stress or under the lure of economic prosperity, was changing his profession (occupation) and Brahmins were the first to take to the new education and occupy salaried jobs like clerks, dubashis (translators) in the Government. However, since the spread of new learning was again limited to a few, the traditional functional division of society remained, by and large, the same till the end of the 19th century.

SOCIAL EVILS:

All social evils were supposed to have had religious sanction and hence the people were either

10. Enugula Veeraswamaiah, Kasiyatra Charitra (Bezawada, 1941. First edn., 1838), f.n. p. 370.

reluctant or afraid of opposing them. Though practices like 'sati'¹¹, 'hookswinging', and fire walking¹² were prevalent, nevertheless they were rare in occurrence. Slavery of the domestic type was more common in Andhra. Despite the declaration of the Board of revenue in 1818 that the agricultural labourers were free, they frequently worked on contract and were bound to the same villages and families during their life time.¹³ The Act of 1843 deprived slavery of its legal status by providing that courts would not entertain claims to slaves.

11. See Vennelacunty Soobrow, Life of Vennelacunty Soobrow (Madras, 1873), p.51. He wrote, "I visited the ceremony of the widow of Toomoo Paupaiah who had just died burning herself on the funeral pile of her deceased husband". It occurred in 1822. Also see John A.C. Boswell, ed., Manual of the Nellore District (in the Presidency of Madras), (Madras, 1873), p.250. He mentioned that in Nellore district the practice of Sati burning was prevalent and some of the sites were still perpetuated where these satees have been held by a shed or a rough temple being built over the spot. In some cases women who have thus sacrificed themselves have been deified and raised to the position of village goddesses. See for instance N.G.Ranga, Fight for Freedom (Autobiography) (Delhi, 1968), pp.5-6, wherein it is mentioned that a temple was raised in Midubrolu in commemoration of 'sati' performed by one of his ancestors. According to him that temple is venerated by people even to-day. This was an instance of 'sati' among the sudras. Another instance of 'sati' among the sudras was brought out by Dr. T.V. Subba Rao in his unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Telugu Veeragadhacharithramu (January, 1968). He stated that one Birudavolu Narayanamma wife of Papireddy of Gudur (Nellore District) performed 'sati' round about the year 1828 whose life is being sung today by people in that area as a ballad.

12. W. Francis, op.cited., p.64.

13. Dharma Kumar, Land and Caste in South India (C.U.P., 1965), pp. 45 - 48.

'Kanyasulka' (purchase of child brides) was very much in vogue in Andhra during this period. This evil practice was closely associated with the status of women in society. Women were treated as subordinates to men. Different standards and different moral codes decided the behaviour of men and women. Both law as well as religion combined in their denial of rights and liberties to women. The subjection of Indian women was essentially a socio-economic problem. Born in a society where the birth decided all status, and endowed with no property rights the Indian women had to lead a pitiable life until the movements in favour of their rights and liberties were launched.

A consequence of the evils like 'Kanyasulka' and infant-marriages was the problem of widowhood. The misery of a widow, mainly among the upper castes, was tragic. Widows were treated as slaves. Among higher castes, the widow's head was shaved, ornaments taken off and the unfortunate girl was deprived of all pleasures of life. "She was not even allowed to participate in family ceremonies as her presence was thought to bring misfortune.... She became often an object of contempt and maltreatment...."¹⁴ This kind of situation made some women prefer death to torture and commit 'sahagamana' (self-immolation). Some-

14. V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, Indian Society in the 18th century (New Delhi, 1969), p.106. The description of the unfortunate position of widow of the 18th century had hardly changed in the 19th century.

times the birth of unwanted babies led to infanticide. Among the so-called lower castes in the countryside widow remarriages were not unknown, though among the 'Upper castes' they were almost completely absent.

Devadasis (nautch-girls) came to be considered as a synonym for prostitutes. They developed into an exclusive caste of their own "having its own laws of inheritance, its own customs and rules of etiquette...."¹⁵ There were companies of dancing girls (Devadasis) married to a presiding deity" but who live by prostitution and who attend at private houses on all occasions of feasting or celebrations of any sort."¹⁶ No doubt there were good performers of dance and music among them. Nevertheless their performances gradually degenerated into passionate and vulgar expressions of their physique and this generally led to the deterioration of moral life in the society. To keep a prostitute and to attend a 'nautch' performance became status symbols and acts of prestige.¹⁷

15. Edgar Thurston, op.cit., p. 131.

16. John A.C. Beswell, op. cit., p. 215.

17. K.Veeresalingam, Sweeyacharithramu (Autobiography), (Rajahmundry, 1954), Part I, pp.90-91. It consists of two parts. The first part was published in 1911 and the second part in 1915. This as well as foregoing references and passages quoted, from the autobiography, in the present thesis, are taken from the original text (in Telugu) and translated into English.

Superstitions:

Since education and enlightenment were very limited, ignorance reigned supreme resulting in a legion of superstitions. If an owl perched on a house, it would bring misfortune to the inmates and if a crow cawed on the roof of a house it would bring a guest.¹⁸ Bad omens included being questioned regarding business on which one is setting out; or directly after leaving the house, catching sight of a Brahman, two sudras, a widow, oil, a snake or a sanyasi, would thwart the purpose of the visit.¹⁹ Good omens included hearing a bell ring, the braying of an ass or on first leaving the house, seeing a married woman, a corpse, flowers or a toddy pot.²⁰ Women and houses were often supposed to be possessed of devils, whom only a professional witch-doctor could exorcise. Trees and devils were supposed to be intimately connected, and a stunted or deformed tree was often pointed out as the abode of a devil.²¹ When a man was supposed to be possessed by an evil spirit, "it is often the practice to take him out to some especial tree, which is supposed to be a favourite residence of demons, and there to drive a nail into the trunk."²²

18. F.R.Hemmingway, Godavari, Madras District Gazetteers (Madras, 1907), p. 46. Also see J.D.B. Gribble Manual of Cuddapah District (Madras, 1875), p. 292 where he mentioned in detail the birds and animals which were supposed to be of evil omens.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. J.D.B. Gribble Manual of Cuddapah District (Mad., 1875), p. 284.

22. Ibid.

Child birth was surrounded by a number of superstitions. A pregnant woman was not supposed to see an eclipse or her child would be born deformed.²³ Some dreams were supposed to foretell events. It was a good thing to dream of being bitten by a cobra and if the bite drew blood it was considered specially good.²⁴

Scarcity of rain was dealt with in various ways like pouring one thousand pots of water over the lingam in the Siva temple. Another way followed to invoke Varuna (the rain god) was that the Malas tie a live frog to a mortar and take it round the village in a procession saying 'Mother frog, playing in water, pour rains by pots full.' The villagers of other castes, then would come and pour water over the Malas.²⁵

Religious life:

Brahmanical superiority in society greatly affected the religious life. The Brahmanical festivals (like Sivaratri, Vaikuntha Ekadasi) were popular. Large Brahmanical shrines were attracting^a great following, mainly from the richer sections of other communities. Besides these large temples, small shrines to the orthodox Gods were numerous. The 'gramadevatas' or village deities were numerous. Hardly was there a village without its shrine

23. F.R. Hemmingway, op.cit., p. 46.

24. Ibid., p. 47.

25. Ibid. Also see W. Francis, Vizagapatam, Madras District Gazetteers (Madras, 1909), p. 265.

to some perantamma, or woman who committed sati.²⁶ These gramadevatas, were of female sex. They included Nukamma, Bangamma, Maridamma, Paiditali, Muthyalamma, Polamma, Gangamma and others. They did not have any clear history, definite attributes or (except in some cases where buffalo sacrifices were made) any special ritual. They were all equally feared and were worshipped as averters of dreadful diseases like cholera, small pox, and as possible granters of boons to those who made vows before them.²⁷ Besides the orthodox Gods of the Hindu pantheon, and village goddesses, the caste deities (Kanyakamma of the Vysyas, the Gontiyamma of the Malas and Madigas' Matangiralu) and also the family deities were worshipped.²⁸ As the poorer and 'lower sections' of the society were generally the worshippers of the village deities their shrines were the poorest constructions of one small cell and often being merely a spot under a tree marked by a few sacred emblems.

The Hindu religion prescribed many ceremonies for marriages and funerals. Also a number of ceremonies were ordained in the life of an individual from birth to death. Women and young girls had a good number of functions to perform. However, all these functions and ceremonies were mainly confined to the rich sections of the community who

26. W. Francis, Vizagapatam, Madras District Gazetteers (Madras, 1909), p. 267.

27. F.R. Hemmingway, op. cit., p. 48.

28. Ibid.

had means as well as leisure to perform them. The poorer sections of the society remained aloof from them.

Besides the Hindus who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, there were the Muslims (6%), the Christians (3%) and the Animists (2%).²⁹ The rapid advance in the numbers of the native Christians was a marked feature of this time. Most of the converts were drawn from the lowest classes of society. It was perhaps their desire to run away from a caste-dominated oppressive society to embrace a religion which held no caste distinctions and also which promised them education and better social opportunities.³⁰

Social life:

The dwellings of the people varied vastly from the one roomed, mud-walled, thatched-roof hut of the poor to the elaborate dwelling of the rich money-lender or landowner. The dress varied with religion and caste and differed in different localities. Speaking generally, both men and women, except the richer classes, wore coarsest clothes, made usually of home-spun cotton woven by the local weavers. Though generally men wore three pieces of cloth, the poorer classes could afford to wear only a single cloth

29. Imperial Gazetteer of India, op.cit., p. 33.

30. Ibid. Also see Enugula Veeraswamayya, op.cit., pp.165-66.

(languti) round the waist. The educated men took to coats, and sometimes trousers and even boots. Women wore sarees and half-jackets, though the poor women could not afford to have the latter.

A number of festivals were celebrated both of religious and secular bias. But among them the most popular and commonly celebrated were Sankranthi (Pongal-'boiling') in January when the first rice of the new crop will be boiled in the new pots, the Ayudha Puja ('worship of implements', called Dussera also) in October, the Dipavali (literally, 'row of lights') in October or November.

The people had no lack of amusements. Wandering acrobats, jugglers and ballad-singers were touring periodically. Play acting, mainly of puranic stories, and puppet shows were commonly staged in the villages. Cock and ram-fighting were very popular, eventhough the latter was rather an aristocratic pastime. Kolatam* was a very common pastime for girls and boys in the countryside. It was also an ancient pastime, being represented in the carvings on the temples at Hampi.³¹

With regard to food habits, the Muslims, the Christians,

31. W. Francis, n. 5, p. 59.

* A morris-dance, in a ring: usually with sticks; which are struck together in harmony. See: C.P. Brown, Telugu-English Dictionary, (Hyderabad, 1966), p.323. First Published in 1852.

and the lower classes of Hindus ate meat, except that the Muslims did not touch pork and the beef-eating was confined to the 'lower castes'. The upper classes of Hindus were mostly vegetarians. Rice was the staple food of the richer classes, and cheaper food grains such as ragi, jonna were the usual diet of the other. Nearly all classes chew betel. Alcohol, to begin with, was confined to the lower sections of the society, eventhough a gradual spread of this habit among all classes could be seen in the second half of the 19th century.³²

Education:

At the beginning of the 19th century, education was mainly confined to the Pial school system in which a course in Sanskrit and arithmetic and Telugu were given to pupils by a teacher who taught them in the verandah of a house or under the shade of a tree for which he was meagrely paid by the parents of the pupils. It took quite some time to get out of this rut of unimaginative and unscientific method of learning.³³ Replying to the Minute of Sir Thomas

32. The native news papers reported during 1887-88 about the evils of drinking liquors and deplored the complacency of the Government in not bringing out a legislation prohibiting this evil. They alleged that as the Government was interested in getting an additional income and hence its reluctance to ban liquor. See for example Vivekavardhani, Report on Native Newspapers, May, 1887.

33. Vennelacunty Soobrow, op.cit., pp.65-74. Soobrow, in these pages, published the report he submitted to the Madras School Book Society when he was made a member of it in 1820. He pleaded for the reform of the existing out-dated school system and made a good number of suggestions for its improvement.

Munro, Governor of Madras, on the prevailing state of education (June 25, 1822), the Collector of Bellary, Mr. A.D. Campbell wrote that every school boy would repeat verbatim a good number of verses like a parrot without knowing their meaning.³⁴ However, the second half of the 19th century witnessed comparatively ^{greater} ~~much~~ progress in education with the establishment of Anglo-Vernacular schools in many parts of Andhra. The great impetus came to education when the 'Local Funds' were created by the Government in 1871. The ryots in Rajahmundry area applied to the Sub-Collector to establish vernacular schools in their villages, offering to meet the expenditure by a fixed annual addition to the revenue demand on their villages. This came to be called the Rajahmundry system of schooling. The establishment of schools around Rajahmundry was the first attempt made by Government for the extension and improvement of education in the Madras Presidency. This clearly showed that the desire of people in these parts to learn English in particular and receive education in general was intense.³⁵ In Cuddapah district during 1871-72, there were a total of 212 village schools, educating 4,057 scholars.³⁶ Similar strides, in this regard, were made in other districts too. Taking the

34. S. Sathianathan, History of Education in the Madras Presidency (Madras, 1894), p. 4.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

36. J.D.B. Gribble, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Madras Presidency as a whole, the total number of schools (both Government and non-Government) and pupils in 1858-59 were 459 and 14,940 respectively. In 1870-71 the schools and pupils increased to 3,479 and 1,12,776 respectively. In a period of 12 years the increase was phenomenal. By 1880-81, the position was much better. The total number of schools were 12,878 and pupils numbered to 3,27,808.³⁷ Along with the Government, the efforts of Missionaries also helped the spread of education in Andhra. The Missionaries started schools, both for boys and girls and published books in Telugu. In 1877 three first grade colleges were started in Madras Presidency among which one was established at Rajahmundry.³⁸ Since the public philanthropy was slow in coming forward to undertake the establishment of schools, the Government was exhorted to open more schools, and impart new education to the children.³⁹ However, the spread of education was confined to the upper and middle classes in society.

Economic life:

As mentioned earlier the East India Company, by the beginning of the 19th century, became a political power in

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37. S. Santhianatham, op.cit., Appendix, Statistical Table I.
38. F.R. Hemmingway, op.cit., p.155. To begin with, a Zilla School was started in 1853 and was made a college in 1873 when F.A. class was opened.
39. See for example the news item published by Sanmargadarsani requesting the opening of new schools with modernised syllabus and effective supervision. Report on Native News Papers, September, 1887.

Andhra. The traditional Zamindars (in the Circar districts) and poligars (in the Ceded districts) continued and they were collecting taxes from the people and paying to the Company. The Andhra Zamindars, mostly, were from the upper castes such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Velamas or Kamma. The wealth and social status conferred by caste combined to establish their ascendancy over the society. Agriculture being the mainstay of people, the life of peasants, sandwiched between the Company and the Zamindars, was miserable. The life of artisans was not much better. All varieties of clothes were taxed in addition to the taxes on salt, grain, cloth, inland trade, betel, arrack etc. With the ruin of the native textile industry due to the import of foreign made mill cloth and with no protection extended to the native products, the majority of weavers in Andhra were gradually forced to work as agricultural labourers. Thus the pressure on agriculture was increased.

Agriculture was in a bad shape with its heavy dependence upon favourable monsoon, infertile soil, out-dated implements and with no help or encouragement in the shape of loans to the peasants either from the Government or the Zamindars. The agricultural classes suffered heavily due to rack-renting and over-assessment in regard to the revenue they had to pay to the Government irrespective of the type of settlement that was in operation. Adequate attention was not paid either to the extension or maintenance

of sources of irrigation like tanks and wells. The condition of irrigation works was far from satisfactory.⁴⁰ Further, the lack of fixed land tenures and the intrigues of the revenue servants added to the misery of the peasants and made agricultural progress impossible.

The introduction of the Permanent Settlement, with its magic touch of land ownership and a permanent assessment, was envisaged to stimulate industry, promote agriculture and augment the general wealth and prosperity.⁴¹ The sponsors of the Settlement did not care who the land owner was, so long as it was cultivated and land revenue regularly paid. Since the respective rights of the ryot and the Zamindar were not made clear, the Settlement resulted in confusion and mischief. The Settlement enabled the Zamindars to enjoy enormous incomes, and the affluence led them to live on an unprecedented scale. Unfortunately the rights of the peasants were nowhere defined, and thus the cultivators were exposed to unmitigated oppression. They were content with mere collection of rent and never showed interest in either the improvement of land or agricultural production. Touring through the Northern Circars in 1823, as Governor of Madras,

40. A. Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency (Madras, 1941), pp. 122-123.

41. The Fifth Report of the Select Committee for The Affairs of the East India Company, (Calcutta, 1918), Vol. II, July 28, 1812, p. 172.

Sir Thomas Munro was struck by the agrarian discontent and poverty of the people and recorded his suggestions and definitive views in his famous minute dated Dec. 31, 1824 in which he pleaded for the protection of ryots in the Circars. He said that the Permanent Settlement deprived the occupant ryots of their proprietary rights and bestowed them on Zamindars and other imaginary landlords. In the Northern Circars, misrule and maladministration, anarchy and tyranny became the watchwords of revenue administration. Thus the Permanent Settlement proved a failure. Revenues decreased, population diminished and people were reduced to poverty and destitution.

With the introduction of the Ryotwari system in the Ceded districts, the condition of peasants became worse. Under the Ryotwari system, the benefit of every ryot being a peasant proprietor at a fixed assessment proved illusory. Land rent was as high as Rs.25/- to Rs.50/- per acre.⁴² The ryots, unable to pay taxes, became victims in the hands of village sahlukars (money lenders) and finally leaving the land, left their places. The condition of peasants was described thus: "There are villages in which the owners of the land have become so utterly impoverished, that their whole land is mortgaged.... In very many other cases the ryots have contracted their holdings to what is just enough to

42. A.V.Ramana Rao, Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh, (Bombay, 1957) p. 80. Y.74415:4:5 (N19←M48)



them the means of living, and cultivate that, less for profit, than because they must do so or starve, no other means being open to them to gain to livelihood."⁴³

A noteworthy feature of this period was the construction of the Godavari and Krishna anicuts on the initiative of Sir Arthur Cotton.⁴⁴ Besides developing cultivation, the British used them as channels of transport of cash crops like cotton, tobacco from the interior parts to the main centres.⁴⁵ However, they immensely helped the growth of agriculture in the Godavari and Krishna districts which from then on came to be called the granary of Andhra. In particular the overall growth of the Godavari district was phenomenal. From a revenue point of view, it has leaped from the 13th place among the 22 districts of the Madras Presidency to the second place⁴⁶ and became "The most

43. J.D. Boudilon, North Arcot District Gazetteer (Madras, 1854), p. 147. The present Chittoor district of the Ceded districts was then a part of North Arcot district.

44. See F.R. Hemmingway, Godavari, op. cit., pp. 79-85. "The Godavari anicut was the first of any real magnitude to be built by Europeans in this Presidency." The Cauvery anicut was an elaboration of native enterprise. The sanction for the Godavari Anicut was received in 1847 and was completed by 31st March, 1852. The work on the Krishna anicut was commenced in 1792 and was completed by 1853.

45. A.V. Ramana Rao, op. cit., p. 80.

46. Sir Arthur Cotton, Lectures on Irrigation Works in India (Autumn Session, 1874), (Vijayawada, 1968), p. 4. The revenue in 1843-44 from all sources was Rs. 17,25,841 and by 1898 the land revenue alone was Rs. 60,19,224, an increase of nearly 250 percent.

thriving in India from having been one of the poorest."⁴⁷ When the work of the anicut commenced there were 561,041 inhabitants in the Godavari district and according to the census of 1891, the population increased to 1,517,741 or nearly 300 percent.⁴⁸ Dr. Roseburg (the Company's botanist who conducted an experimental farm for several years) said that Rajahmundry (the birth place of Veeresalingam in the Godavari district) had some of the finest lands in India which could yield rich crops of sugar, cotton, tobacco and mulberries besides having extensive tracts of paddy cultivation.⁴⁹ Commenting upon the changes in Godavari district since the construction of the anicut, S. Nathamuni Mudaliar, a retired Tahasildar from the district, stated thus: "The wealthier classes were much benefitted and the condition of ryots was so much improved by the general high prices that instead of being in the hands of sowcars, they were sowcars themselves.... The vast increase in agriculture by irrigation has very materially improved the condition of ryots.... Roads have multiplied.... The number of village schools has so considerably increased that there are now four Deputy Inspectors (Sub-Assistants) and one Assistant Inspector for the whole district in the place of

47. Ibid., p.40

48. Ibid., p. 3.

49. M.P.R. Reddy's unpublished monograph, Agrarian System of Andhra Under the East India Company (1760-1820).

one Deputy Inspector.... This is besides an Inspecting Schoolmaster for each taluk. The Sub-Assistant Inspectors are stationed, one at Narasapur, another at Ellore, a third at Rajahmundry and a fourth at Cocanada....

The present project of Lord Connemara of connecting this part of the country with Madras by means of rail roads will still more develop the resources of the country."⁵⁰

The construction of railways in this part of the country, was commenced in 1890 and was over by August 1893 and then called the East Coast railway.⁵¹ The railways contributed to the further growth of trade and commerce and also made journeys easy and cheap for people. They also led to the flow of ideas from and a direct access to the Presidency metropolis (Madras City).

There were no industries worth mentioning in Andhra except the handloom industry. The spindle and the wheel were the two additional means of livelihood to the poor people. Thread making was an important cottage industry and nearly as many as 200 varieties of cloth were produced. However, the colonial interests of importing cloth from England ruined the native handloom industry and

50. S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar, Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency, during the last forty years of British Administration, Appendix, Section V (Madras, 1893) pp. CCXI-CCXIV.

51. C. Lakshminarasimham, Sweevacharithramu (Bezwada, 1944), p.106. C. Lakshminarasimham was a student and later a follower and co-worker of Veeresalingam in his reform activities. He wrote autobiography in Telugu. References from it are translated and given in the thesis.

spinning as a separate profession was rapidly disappearing.⁵² So millions of them became jobless and began to flock to agriculture or migrate to towns that were coming up or leave for other countries like British Burma in search of livelihood.

The growth of towns in Andhra was started by the middle of the 19th century and many well established towns came into existence by the close of the century. Availability of commerce, labour, means of communication like the Godavari and the Krishna canal system, the railways and modern education contributed to the growth of towns which became the breeding centres of new ideas. Along with the growth of towns the middle classes came into existence. They fought for liberal and democratic values and respected individual but not religious authority. They stood for intellectual freedom and social mobility.⁵³

Thus the break-up of the old political and economic order had a deep impact on society. The new revenue settlements created private property in land introducing individual ownership of land and thereby transforming society from a basis of status to one of contract. This and other new commercial and economic forces which entered the village undermined the agrarian economy of the Indian village of the pre-British period. This change in the land relations

52. S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar, OP. cit., p. 93.

53. B.B. Misra, The Indian Middle Classes (OUP, 1961), p.7.

was the most important event in the process of the transformation from the pre-capitalist feudal economy of India into the capitalist economy. Karl Marx spoke of the destructive as well as regenerative roles of the British rule in India. The destruction of the old village economy, though it involved much suffering and misery, historically considered, was a progressive event. It was a right step in the direction of uniting the Indian people economically into one unit. It put an end to the isolation of the village communities who were living in an age-long atmosphere of social passivity and intellectual inertia. Further, the urban handicrafts of pre-British India decayed under the pressure of the cheap products of foreign countries.

This process of converting India into an industrial market for the foreign goods brought untold suffering to the village artisans. But it paved the way for the transformation of India into a single economic unit. Due to these measures there developed symptoms of a structural imbalance in the Indian society as a whole during the 19th century. These events along with the spread of education, growth of towns and the rise of new professional (middle) classes led to the much desired social mobility and social change. Karl Marx, while commenting upon the crumbling of the village economy anticipated the ushering in of "The only social revolution ever heard of in Asia".⁵⁴ Thus, when once the village economy, the solid foundation of "oriental despotism", was violently disturbed and slowly melting away, the social changes were bound to take place. The break-up of the old economic structure and the emergence of the capitalist system, however, did not fully take place and hence the much anticipated social change had to be an incomplete achievement.

54. Quoted in R.P.Dutt's India To-day (Calcutta, 1970), p. 90.

CHAPTER II
INFLUENCES ON VEERESALINGAM

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The dawn of the 19th century over Andhradesa saw the Telugu society a closed one based on the steel framework of caste and other divisions. The traditional Prial school system was the rule of the day. English education did not make much of a headway into the society. Andhradesa being the agricultural hinter land of the city of Madras, new professions were very slow in their coming. So, there was no possibility of the rise of an urban middle class which alone could take the Telugu society out of its rut before 1850. It was only after the advent of Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919) that the real start was made to set things right. It is not as though the urge for reform was totally absent before in the minds of the new elite who came under the influence of western thought and philosophy and who perhaps were aware of the reform movements in Bengal during the first half of the 19th century. One or two instances of genuine urge for reform and recognition of the sorry state of things may be cited.

Enugula Veeraswamaiah¹ (1780-1836) and his young protege and relation Vennelacunty Soobrow (Subba Rao) (1784-1839),² Brahmins and both dubashis in the Sadar Supreme Court at Madras have left in their autobiographical writings traces of this recognition of social evils.

The most important contribution in this direction was

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1. Enugula Veeraswamaiah's 'Kasiyatra Charitra', was first published in 1838. The latest edition was published in 1941 by D.V. Siva Rao with notes and comments. The author undertook a pilgrimage from Madras to Kasi (Banares) via ceded districts, (Cuddapah, Kurnool and Anantpur), Hyderabad and while returning travelled through the Circar districts (Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari, Krishna, Nellore). In this book the author described in detail the social conditions of Andhra prevailing during that period with his comments against the social evils. In helping to know the social conditions of the period under review, it is a source book comparable to Bishop Heber's Journal. As one of the founders of the Hindu Literary Society in Madras, he contributed to its activities like the spread of English education and creating political consciousness among people by arranging public lectures. The society's efforts bore fruit in 1839 when Elphinstone the Governor of Madras established the University Board. In 1841 April, the Madras University English High School was established. As the book was written in Telugu, the references and quotations given here are translated into English.
 2. V. Soobrow, The life of Vennelacunty Soobrow (autobiographical account), (Madras, 1873). As a member of the School Book Society at Madras, he brought to the notice of the Government "the very deficient mode of education among the natives" and pleaded for its replacement by a well organised system of education with English as a part of it.

made by Swamyneena Muthoonarasimma Naidoo of Rajahmundry, a district munsiff, who in his book 'The Hitha Soochanee'³ succeeded in drawing the notice of his contemporaries to the social inequities connected with marriage and female education. The book, according to the author, was meant for women "as women need certain type of knowledge concerning their problems" since womens' education was slowly spreading.⁴ He pleaded, in the book, for introduction of scientific education and for the translation of scientific works from English into Vernaculars. He went on to condemn the popular superstitions like the existence of evil spirits and methods adopted by witch-doctors. He exhorted the people not to worship village deities in order to escape from the contagious and dreadful diseases like cholera but to observe cleanness and appealed to them to take proper medical care for their cure. With regard to his ideas on marriage, he was far ahead of his times and contemporaries. He stressed mutual love and affection - between the bride and groom - and severely criticised the wasteful expenditure incurred in the name of marriage

3. Swamyneena Muthoonarasimma Naidoo, Hitha Soochanee (Moral Instructor in prose), (Madras, 1862). The author was one of the earliest English educated persons in Andhra. As he died in 1856 the book should have been written around 1850. The book was written in Telugu. Extracts from this book given in this thesis are translated from the original into English.

4. Ibid, Preface.

ceremonies. He mentioned and proved with the help of slokas (read during marriage ceremonies) that marriages were, in the past, performed only after girls attained proper age and maturity of mind.⁵ Thus he condemned the system of child marriages and suggested the marriageable age of 12 for girls⁶ and 16 for boys⁷. Furthermore he attributed the practice of Kanyasulk (purchase of child brides) to the system of early marriages which resulted in widowhood and injurious practices like debauchery and other cruel and immoral practices like infanticide etc.⁸ This book which reflected the trend of ideas of intellectuals in Andhra during the middle of the 19th century perhaps had a deep impact on the moulding of the mind of Veeresalingam. We find this book in his personal collection of books. Another book, we come across, in his personal library⁹ is called 'Stree Kalakallolini' published from

5. Ibid., p. 166.

6. Ibid., p. 176.

7. Ibid., p. 195.

8. Ibid., p. 216.

9. Veeresalingam's personal library constitutes a major part of the present Rajahmundry town hall library. His collection consists of both English and Telugu books among which mention may be made of encyclopaedias, literary histories, histories of different nations and books on social histories. Standard books on Brahma Samaj are also found in good number. We find, in these books, the pencil markings and marginal writings of Veeresalingam. What remains of his personal library to-day is only a part of his huge library, which unfortunately was damaged by the Godavari floods in 1952. Consequently his correspondence (with Mahadev Govind Ranade, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar Pandit Sivanatha Sastry and others) was lost to the posterity.

Bangalore in 1875.¹⁰ It had three chapters of which the second was exclusively devoted to the cause of women's education. Veeresalingam wrote in his journal Vivekavardhani that he received the book and found it written in an easy style useful to women.¹¹ It appears that this book too had a great influence later on the writings of Veeresalingam on social problems. Veeresalingam was, therefore, not an isolated phenomenon but was the product of the growing self-awareness of the rising middle class.¹²

Veeresalingam belonged to niyogi sect among Brahmins. Niyogis were secular and worldly in their outlook and have come to occupy the key posts in administration from the days of the Muslim conquest of Andhra. They realised the importance of English education as a means to secure positions of influence in the Government and took to it early in Andhra.¹² Veeresalingam's ancestors were employed as Dewans and Deshpondees - the revenue officials - under the Muslim rule. Some of them were even the estate-holders.¹³ Veeresalingam's grandfather was a Dewan under the local estate-holders of the Godavari district and was known for his philanthropy and liberal patronage of poets and

10. Jiyar Suri, Stree Kalakallolini (Telugu), (Bangalore, 1875).

11. Vivekavardhani, May 1875. A bilingual journal edited and published by Veeresalingam from Rajahmundry.

12. The two names mentioned in footnotes Nos. 1 and 2 were Niyogi Brahmins who secured jobs in the Government service rather early in the 19th century.

13. K. Veerasalingam, Sweevacharithramu, op. cit., Part I, p. 2.

scholars.¹⁴ His grandfather, during the last stages of his life, went without a job and spent much of the money he had saved on the marriage of his eldest son, and by the time of his death, the family had just enough to maintain itself. At times they were forced to dispose of a few items of mobile and immobile property for the maintenance of the family.¹⁵

His father and uncle were according to Veeresalingam, well versed in Telugu and had a working knowledge of English too. His father was employed for some time in the office of the Godavari District Collector and then joined the service of the Rajah of Pithapur. Eventhough his ancestors were fanatical saivaites (lingayats), his great grand father married in a Vaishnavaita sect (among the Smartha Niyogis) and gave up the lingayat caste symbol. This reformist trend, though appears to be insignificant, was claimed by Veeresalingam as having its influence on him from his boyhood.¹⁶

Veeresalingam was sent to a pial school where learning was done by rote. He learnt elementary arithmetic and read conventional Telugu books like Satakas¹⁷ on morals and acquired a preliminary knowledge in Sanskrit.¹⁸ As there

14. Ibid., p. 3.

15. Ibid., p.10.

16. Ibid., p. 7.

17. Sataka is the composition of one hundred verses (some times a little more or less) mainly instructing people on morals and good behaviour. In Telugu there are many Satakas among which Vemana Sataka, Sumati Sataka are prominent.

18. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

were no examination-oriented schools, he was asked to learn work in the local Government Revenue Office to qualify for a job. During this period he was introduced to fundamentals of English by his uncle. After 1858 the certificate awarding schools were started and Veeresalingam was sent to the Government District School at Rajahmundry (in 1860) where he studied for the college entrance course and successfully finished it in 1870, qualifying himself for an admission into the first year of the college course. As the first year college course was abolished in Rajahmundry in 1870, he could not pursue his studies further and joined as a teacher in Rajahmundry Government District School as an assistant teacher in 1871.¹⁹

While he was a student at the Government School, besides acquiring a good knowledge of Telugu literature, he studied English and history, geography and science. He showed more brilliance in mathematics, history and cartography for which he was specially awarded prizes and books.²⁰ One does not know for certain what books he read in English. However, the course content of the middle schools of that period (up to the 8th standard) included Bradshaw's English Reader - V, Manual's English Grammar, Lethbridge's History of India, Collier's History of England, Geography Manual and Mathematics comprising Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry.²¹

19. Ibid., p.66.

20. Ibid., p.45.

21. C. Lakshminarasimham, op. cit., p. 35.

It may perhaps be concluded that the college entrance course (higher than the middle school course) done by Veeresalingam should have contained advanced courses on Indian and European histories and probably some classics of the English literature and elements of Western Political Philosophy.

Being a Brahmin by birth, Veeresalingam was prone to favour orthodoxy both in life and letters during the early part of his life. His faith in the validity of the Vedic and other Mantras was absolute. He was much under the influence of Brahmanical priests. After a ceremonious bath in the river Godavari, he used to visit the nearby Shiva temple and applied sacred ashes (vibhuti) all over the body. On special festival days of religious significance like Shivarathri (the birth day of Lord Shiva), he was fasting the whole day.²² In his writings too he displayed a bias for orthodoxy in style as well as content. Veeresalingam wrote two Satakas in Telugu during his early literary career which reflected clearly his orthodoxy. He addressed them to the presiding deities of two temples in his home town (Rajahmundry). However, credit should be given to Veeresalingam, who, though a saivite by birth, sang the praises of Vishnu (in the days of strong rivalry between the two denominations of Saivites and Vaishnavites) in one of his Satakas for which he claimed credit for his liberality of outlook.²³ This attitude with regard to life and letters

22. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., pp.19-20.

23. Ibid., p.57.

underwent a radical change and he deviated from his conformism. To grasp this change in his outlook, one should endeavour to understand the society of Veeresalingam's time and how it influenced his mind. As C.R. Reddy commented, "Veeresalingam reflected the new age because he was one of its potent makers. If he was its creator, it was partly because he was its creature...."²⁴

The social conditions in Andhradesa prior to the emergence of Veeresalingam were, as we have seen, far from satisfactory. The society was fragmented into fourfold caste system and sub-castes with a large population segregated as Panchamas having their own sub-sects.²⁵ The upper caste people were justifying their superiority (based on birth not merit) by the doctrine of Karma. The free social mingling of these groups was unthinkable. The practice of untouchability reached its absurd length when a touch or even a glance of a so-called lower caste man was supposed to pollute food and when such food became 'untouchable' for the members of higher castes. The higher castes appropriated to themselves social privileges. The tendency of imitating the higher castes in their habits and manners by the 'lower castes' was witnessed during this time.

24. C.R. Reddy, 'Veeresalingam', Swatantra (Madras), April 17, 1948. (An English Weekly).

25. Guruzada Souvenir (Hyderabad, 1962), p.10.

The lack of scientific and rational thinking resulted in a number of superstitious and curious notions about omens, dreams, evil spirits etc. Almost each house had a ghost and every village had ghost - doctors.²⁶

Education for women was almost forbidden. Though the system of domestic instruction of girls was prevalent among the higher castes, the spread of womens' education was extremely limited.²⁷ Women were doomed to be life-long dependents upon others as they had no property rights.

'Kalapani' (to cross seas) was a taboo and to undertake it was to risk a social boycott. Corruption among the government officials (including the judicial officers) was common and bribes were offered to and accepted by the public servants.²⁸

The contemporary society of Veeresalingam was backward, cruel and perverse. Its atmosphere was oppressive and all free thought was throttled. It was a society based on double standards -- with one set of morals for men and another for women, one for the privileged and another for the rest of the people. In this social background, Veeresalingam was born and brought up and against this he had to wage a relentless battle.

26. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., p. 58.

27. In 1881 out of 3,27,808 pupils attending schools in the Madras presidency, only 32,341 were girls. See S.Sathianathan, op. cit., p.223 and Statistical Table-II in appendix.

28. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

In trying to establish the influences on Veeresalingam, who was in his earlier life inclined towards orthodoxy, one should take into account the time spirit and the ideals of social justice which made him devote his attention to the eradication of social evils as we do not come across any personal or emotional factors contributing to this change in him. As far as the influences of the Brahma movement of Bengal and the Prarthana Samaj of Western India on Veeresalingam were concerned, two mutually opposite views were expressed.²⁹ However, the real answer to this problem may not, perhaps, be found in this type of generalisations. It was true that Veeresalingam's discriminating and rational mind was doubting and questioning the superstitions and age old retrograde customs in society. He stated that he was not prepared to be led blindly by any established faith or hearsay and desired to go into the truth of the matter. If he got himself convinced of a thing he would pursue it sincerely.³⁰ He mentioned in his autobiography that against the popular belief or superstition, he did not cut down the banana tree in his backyard when it flowered at its

29. See the introduction to A. Ramapathi Rao, ed., Kandukuri Veeresalingam Diaries and Letters (Vijayawada, 1970) in which it is stated that he was influenced by the Brahma reformers of Bengal. An opinion contrary to this was expressed by Dr. M. Venkatarangiah in an article written in the souvenier 'Yugapurushudu Veeresalingam' (Hyderabad, n.d.)

30. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., p. 58.

stem and instead he allowed it to bear fruit and ate it against the warnings that it would bring misfortune.³¹ He took up the headmastership at Korangi (a place near Rajahmundry) on a New Moon day much against his mother's wishes who bewailed it as wanton courting of disaster.³² Again in the case of a witch-doctor, who was called in to cure his mother from faintings and fits, which she attributed to evil spirits possessing her, Veeresalingam refused to be impoverished by his demands for more money. The witch-doctor threatened to kill him by his black arts at which Veeresalingam was not frightened. Instead, the witch-doctor fell seriously ill from self-induced fright and had to be rescued by Veeresalingam from near death.³³ At this stage in his life when he seriously began to doubt the accepted beliefs and customs, we learn from his autobiography that he came across a volume of the collected speeches of Keshubchandra Sen. "After reading those speeches my faith in certain established truths was shaken."³⁴

31. Ibid., p.69.

32. Ibid., p.70.

33. Ibid., pp.71-73.

34. Ibid., p.60. Veeresalingam mentioned here that one A. Lakshminarasimham, a Brahmo, came as a teacher from Masulipatam (Bandar as it was called then) to the District School in Rajahmundry. Under his influence Veeresalingam and his co-students formed into a society to discuss social issues once in a week. The meetings used to take place behind doors and they were pointedly called as 'meetingwallahs' by the public.

Apart from this, ^{there} ~~there~~ was during this time the influence of Christian Missionaries who started their evangelical and conversion activities in the northern circars of Andhra.³⁵ Rajahmundry had, even in the first half of the 19th century, among its population, elements of enlightenment. An English lady wrote saying, "the other day we had a visit from a very intelligent native.... He told us he had three daughters and a son, and that he was determined not to be influenced by the Hindu prejudices against female education, so he had taught his daughters to read and write ... English... but he had met with a great deal of trouble and opposition from his relations on account of his innovation - especially from his wife, who for a long time allowed no peace or quiet in the house...."³⁶ In this context one may point out the influence of western education and thought on Veeresalingam. The new education generated a critical spirit of the old established basis of society and tended to create a new set of social values and made people look at life from a new angle. Though the spirit of reform did not affect equally all sections of the educated community, it did create among them a general recognition of the existing

35. Rev. R.C. Paul, History of the Telugu Christians (Madras, 1929), p.57.

36. Julia Thomas, Letters from Madras During the Years 1836-39 (London, 1861), p.112. Letter from Rajahmundry, dated November 19, 1838.

social evils and a need for an analysis of the Indian socio-religious conditions. On the transformation of ideas among his fellowmen, Veeresalingam wrote: "It is admitted by one and all that western lore has worked wonders among the natives of India. We are quite aware that English education has rendered natives more refined in their manners, has dispelled the mist of superstition from the minds of several of them if not many and has considerably developed their moral calibre whenever it is properly imparted."³⁷

The year 1874 could perhaps be considered as a landmark in the life of Veeresalingam as it marked a clear beginning in his public life when he entered the public controversy with the orthodox sections in Andhradesa over women's education and started a journal of his own to propagate his views. Thus one could observe the growth of intellectual convictions in him to the cause of eradication of social evils. However, Veeresalingam as an active and committed social reformer emerged only in the year 1879 when he started the Social Reform Association in Rajahmundry and took up the cause of widow remarriages and other activities. The evolution of his ideas on life from that of orthodoxy to non-conformism had a corresponding shift in his attitude to literature also (by the year 1874). Veeresalingam, the scholar was receding into the background and Veeresalingam the man with a mission, was emerging into the forefront. He believed that the main purpose

37. Vivekavardhani, October, 1875.

of language was to communicate ideas. The simpler and more lucid the language employed, the more effective is the communication of ideas.³⁸ Veeresalingam made his language simple so as to make his reform ideas reach people. His literary work and reforming work were complimentary to each other. His reformist zeal put fire into his writings while the dextrous use of his pen gave a thrust to his crusade against social evils. As C.R.Reddy said "In literature he commenced by writing Prabandhas* bristling with slesha**, chitrakavita*** and the entire gamut of ugly artificialities, and ended as the creator of the Telugu novel, the Telugu social satire, the Telugu drama, especially of the social type, and of science and scientific biography and autobiography in Telugu."³⁹

Finally, Veeresalingam belonged to the rising middle class of Andhradesa during the later half of the 19th century. The introduction of English education, with a

38. K. Veeresalingam, op. cit., part II, pp.173-75.

*Prabandha was a popular poetical form during the late middle ages which continued upto the beginning of the 19th century.

** It is a form of poetry in which a verse gives two different meanings.

*** It is again a form of poetry where more permutations and combinations in prosody are tried giving no importance to meaning.

39. Dr. C.R. Reddy's article, op. cited.

view to prepare Indians to serve the administrative interests of the colonial power, hastened the process of the emergence of the middle classes in India. The new professions provided these classes with urban living and economic freedom. They were largely freed from the grip of feudal social values and began to think and formulate new ideas. Both the physical as well as social mobility of this new social class facilitated the development of new thinking according to the changing times and needs. The changes of attitude arising from western ideas were more or less mainly confined to the western educated middle class. Perhaps, that is why, the reform movements of the 19th century reflected, by and large, the interests of the middle classes. The economic interests of the Indian middle classes were linked up with those of colonial interests and vice-versa. It may also be true that in its own economic interests Britain attempted to modernise the Indian society. Veeresalingam, a representative of this social class which was in the vanguard of the reform movements (or Indian awakening), operated in this broad frame-work and also in the context of his contemporary society and its awareness. "No metamorphosis recorded on Ovid is half so wonderful as the metamorphosis of Veeresalingam, from an antiquated pedant into the greatest of moderns, the most virile of the living and moving forces of the present day."⁴⁰ Some state that the man (that is

40. Ibid.

to say, a genius) makes the times and some others say it is the times that would expose the man; either way, man and times are interdependent. This was, strikingly true in the case of Veeresalingam.

CHAPTER III
VEERESALINGAM'S WORK

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Veeresalingam chose teaching as his career by the year 1874. Though he was qualified for high posts in the Government, as he had passed several revenue and judicial tests, he preferred the teaching profession. He liked to be independent in life. "One must have an-independent walk of life without being obliged to serve others", he wrote; "and he must choose the teacher's profession, where there is little occasion for sinning".¹ A number of his illustrious contemporaries like Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, Chilakamarthi Lakshminarasimham, Desiraju Pedabapaiah also chose the same profession with similar views.² Teaching was regarded as an honoured and intellectual profession and people with idealism and zeal for social work took to it as it also afforded them considerable leisure. By this time Veeresalingam's literary taste also blossomed into a strong faculty. As he began to feel he had a mission in life, the scholarly bias of his writings was slowly being replaced with simple and lucid

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1. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 78.
 2. See for example the statement of Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu: "I elected to be a teacher more for the sacred responsibilities and noble opportunities than for the ample emoluments of the profession.... They alone ought to be teachers who look upon their work as a 'vocation' with its service and not as a 'profession' with its prizes". Cited in K. Suryanarayana, R. Venkataratnam (Rajahmundry, 1952), p. 5; C. Lakshminarasimham mentioned in his autobiography, op. cit., p.46., that he was influenced by Veeresalingam who was his teacher at Rajahmundry and became a teacher. (p. 46.)

ways of prose writing. He questioned himself about the purpose of the language. He answered that the main purpose was to communicate ideas and hence the more simple and more lucid language one employed, the more effective would be the communication of ideas.³ This was indeed a turning point not only in Veeresalingam's life but in the Telugu literature as well as the social reform movement in Andhra. For the reason why Veeresalingam simplified his language was to make it a popular vehicle and a propagandistic tool. Thus we see the emergence of Veeresalingam, who wanted a reform in life demanding a reform in language too. His reform work and literary work were not two exclusively different aspects of his achievement. They were infact complementary to each other. His crusade against social evils put fire into his writings, whereas the simple and yet powerful expression of ideas secured for the reform movement a broad base of support among the literate people. He gave expression to the same in the form of a verse in his monthly journal, Vivekavardhani;

"I am a Brahmin, have learnt English and passed the entrance examination. I have liking for Telugu and I want to work for the progress of the country with perseverance. I have some capacity for verse; can write on ethical topics which are of use to the

3. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p. 173.

society, in an easy style, so as to be intellegible to all, without making use of difficult grammar".⁴

Thus Veeresalingam started his career with a desire "to work for the progress of the country". It seems that he had clearly understood the significance of the change that came in the ideas and ways of thinking of the people. The old social and religious ideas were being eroded from within. Veeresalingam saw the emergence of a new era of intellectual and moral enlightenment in Andhra. In his lecture on 'the duties of educated men' ('Vidyadhikula Dharmamulu') he stated that; "Now there is war between truth and untruth, between wisdom and stupidity and between the light of knowledge and the darkness of ignorance. The new thoughts sown by the maiden of physical science, sent among us by western scholars, have spread ^{all} around the country in their new born energy and are about to shake the foundations of old beliefs.... the dawn of new knowledge is dispersing the darkness of ancient faiths and of ignorance.... There is no doubt that the wise gradually enlist themselves on the side of truth. Again, there is far less doubt of the final result of the war.... in the end, truth shall assuredly triumph over untruth".⁵

4. Ibid., Part I, p. 79.

5. K. Veeresalingam, collected works, Vol. VII (Lectures), (Rajahmundry, 1951). The lecture cited above was delivered in 1893 under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj, Rajahmundry.

Considering the times in which he was placed, he had to play the roles of pioneer and propagandist. As an youngman imbued with idealism, he chose the right path of life namely teaching. The hope and future of the country lay in the hands of the younger generation and Veeresalingam as teacher had ample time and opportunity to sow in their receptive minds the seeds of reformist ideas and liberal thought and prepare them for solid practical work in future. He had immense faith in the capacities of youth and their cooperation in his work, which proved to be correct judging from the great support he received from them during the performance of widow marriages and other activities later.⁶ In the lecture referred above, Veeresalingam further stated -

"Our opponents are showing as a weakness on our side that the majority of our samaj - members and of those others that take part in our gatherings and talks -- are students. They take it as a drawback and feel happy that our cause is not strong; on the other hand I take it as a point in our favour which augurs well for the future. Our country looks forward with great eagerness towards the students, who will grow into elders to-morrow. The part that the elders are playing in the drama of life had come to a close. These

6. R. Venkatasivudu, Veeresalinga Samsmriti (Telugu), (Guntur, 1931), p. 133. Also see K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... Part I, op. cit., p. 158.

young students are the players in the great theatre of the world and will stage new plays with greater capacity and perfection to please the audience. If these students learn their parts well and play them, their successors will be enabled to follow their path and enhance the moral influence of the drama, so as to work for the benefit of the country with greater courage, zeal and capacity and make their motherland a heaven on earth. Our country has to progress always with the help of students".⁷ Though this may sound as laying undue stress on the help of students (which he received in full measure), it showed that he wanted to create a strong base among students to support his movement in Rajahmundry where the anti-reform (orthodox) sections were strongly opposed to him. We are informed of this by his one-time students who later became converts to reform during the life-time of Veeresalingam.⁸ One of his students wrote, "Ever since I joined in Fourth form in the Government College, Rajahmundry in 1878, Kandukuri Veeresalingam was our teacher. He taught us not only Telugu but other general works too. His teachings against social evils and superstitions and pleas for social reform left an indelible impression on our tender minds. His main aim was to break the idols of the past. He wrote powerful social satires and made us enact them. There were

7. K. Veeresalingam, coll. works, vol. VII, op. cit., pp.190-9

8. Yugapurushudu Veeresalingam, op. cit., p. 30.

almost none who could oppose his pen".⁹ Thus Veeresalingam earned the reputation of being one of the great inspiring teachers who strove hard to create an awareness and social consciousness among the youth of his times. Many became his dedicated followers professing faith in his teachings and extending wholehearted support to his activities unmindful of consequences.

As a literary figure Veeresalingam occupied the place of a giant in Telugu literature during this period. It is not our purpose to enumerate his literary achievements here, which were, however, many and all-sided. As a writer of social satire, essays concerning the social problems, books on science in simple style (the type of which were non-existent before) and other forms, he carved out a secure place for himself in the history of Telugu literature. He made the pen his sword not only to propagate his ideas but to condemn and criticise the views of his opponents. He declared,

"Those who desire to increase the sum-total of the happiness of the common people, should write in clear Telugu prose, works on astronomy, physiology, hygiene, philosophy and religion, on mechanics, logic, ethics, political economy, geography and history".¹⁰

9. V. Suryanarayanarao, Suryanarayaneeyamu (an autobiography in Telugu) (Kovvur, 1936), p. 165.

10. Cited in J. Gurunatham, Veeresalingam, the Founder of Telugu public life (Rajahmundry, 1911), p. 51. (Original source not mentioned).

As a journalist, Veeresalingam started Vivekavardhani (a bi-lingual journal) in 1874 from Rajahmundry. It was, to start with, a monthly of four pages. Soon it was made a journal of seventeen pages and from July 1876 it became a fortnightly.¹¹ He conducted this journal single handedly for several years, eventhough the promised help never came from his friends and well-wishers, fighting against odds in those days of early Telugu journalism. The journal had a laudable motto, a verse taken from the Telugu Mahabharata, "Do to others as you would have them do to you".¹² The journal had two general aims, viz., (1) The progress of the people and (2) the improvement of the Telugu language. Veeresalingam made it an effective weapon reflecting public opinion. It served two purposes simultaneously. Firstly it was the medium through which Veeresalingam propagated his reformist ideas, giving suitable replies to his critics. Secondly he made use of this organ to whip up and organise public opinion against the growing corruption and immorality in the administration, bribery, irresponsible and arrogant behaviour on the part of the bureaucracy and official high-handedness as well as prostitution and concubinage prevailing generally in society.¹³ It soon became the guardian

11. K.Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 78. Also see K.R. Seshagirirao, ed. Studies in the Histories of Telugu Journalism (New Delhi, 1968), p. 142.

12. K.Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 78.

13. J. Gurunatham, op. cit., p. 43.

angel of the public and the terror of the venal officialdom in and around Rajahmundry, and thus it became a centre of cultural renaissance with the flame of social regeneration kindled by Veeresalingam.

With these views the young Veeresalingam (who was 26 years old in 1874) set to work. To bring enlightenment to the masses and to lift the Telugu society out of the rut, he had to put in Herculean effort which needed certain mental capacities. At this juncture, in Andhra history (during the later half of the 19th century), public life had not been very clean and efficient and unable to shed the feudal vestiges of the middle ages. There was also a lack of men of larger capacity and healthier character who were genuinely interested in the regeneration of public life in Andhra. There was no towering personality to bring out the necessary response from the Andhras with inspiring and progressive ideals. Veeresalingam had a will and individuality which was unyielding to pressures and influences. He stated in his autobiography, "Wherever there appears to be wrong it is not my nature to suffer it in silence. I do not have peace of mind, until I find a remedy for the wrong".¹⁴ This gives us an idea of the keynote of his personality. He was highly intolerant of social wrong and hated it. He further stated, "I can bear any amount of pain when it affects me but when others are subjected to it for no

14. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., P. 49.

fault of theirs, I cannot put up with it."¹⁵

Another important characteristic of Veeresalingam's personality was his strong moral sense and love of justice. He declared, "I believed from the beginning that morality was essential for religion, that an immoral man could not be a real devotee of God and that in order to find favour in His eyes, we should be pure of heart and of good character."¹⁶

The most prominent trait in his character was his indomitable courage and steadfastness of purpose. "I am not disposed even as a boy to give up an undertaking or let slip my purpose, when once I enter upon it",¹⁷ he mentioned in his autobiography.

There are many instances in his life where he did not flinch even an inch from his duty. While performing his duty, he was lenient neither to a friend nor a foe. To illustrate this point, the strike he organised against the headmaster may be mentioned. Dissatisfied with the inefficiency of his headmaster as an English teacher and also hurt by his harsh treatment of the boys, Veeresalingam, then a twelve year old boy, got up a memorial against him for a transfer and organised an effective strike. The

15. Ibid., p. 50.

16. Ibid., p. 56. Also see K. Veeresalingam, coll. works, vol. VII, op. cit., p. 157, where he expressed the same feelings in a lecture on 'Manushadharmamu', delivered in 1892 at Rajahmundry.

17. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p.60

headmaster was transferred and a more efficient man was posted.¹⁸

Endowed with these traits which supplied him with dynamism and dedication to work, Veeresalingam started his epic struggle against social evils.

Before he undertook the struggle, the first act he performed was the creation of a healthy public opinion opposed to the social evils. He endeavoured to bring a change in the minds of people broadly preparing them for reform. Through his efforts he roused public interest over many issues like women's education, bribery, nepotism, prostitution, idolatry, theism and the like. To do this he utilised his capacities as a journalist (through his journal Vivekavardhani and many other contemporary journals), writer, speaker and organiser. From his boyhood he had regard for high ideals and had no ambition of acquiring wealth. He evinced keen interest in removing the immoral tendencies of his people. Even while he was a student he contributed poems and articles to the bilingual journal, 'Godavari Educationist' edited by Barrow, Headmaster of the Zilla School at Rajahmundry.¹⁹ During his

18. For a detailed account of the incident, see K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., pp.52-53.

19. T. Venkatasubbarao, Sri Kandukuri Veeresalinga Kavi Charitramu (Telugu) (Rajahmundry, 1894), p.27. Also see K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p.63.

sojourn at Dowaleswaram as headmaster of the Anglo-Vernacular school (in 1874), he started an association there with a few like-minded individuals as members. To begin with, it discussed in its meetings issues relating to female education and the opening of a Girls' school (which was started in September 1874). The above association later started discussing the religious and moral issues and also problems relating to the progress of the country and society.²⁰ As long as Veeresalingam was there the association had regular weekly meetings. Thus Veeresalingam was striving hard to spread the ideas of reform among the people around him. In this connection another instance of the kind mentioned above may be noted. During this time, the 'Rajahmundry Provincial School Club' was formed (July 1875) with Basavaraju Gavarraju as its secretary. Its main aim was to arrange lectures on ethical and social issues and also to make its members lead their lives accordingly setting an example for others. Gavarraju went to Dowaleswaram and invited Veeresalingam to be present on the opening day of the Club. He joined it as a member and spoke on the topic 'unity' on 15th August 1875. Veeresalingam used to attend its weekly meetings regularly walking four miles from Dowaleswaram to Rajahmundry.²¹

While he was at Dowaleswaram Veeresalingam joined issue

20. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 84.

21. Ibid., p. 89. For the full text of the lecture on 'unity' see K. Veeresalingam, coll. works, vol. VII, pp. 443-53.

with Kokkonda Venkataratnam Pantulu who was editing the Andhrabhasha sanjivani (Published from Madras) by publishing articles in the Purusharthaprathayini (Published from Machilipatnam). The controversy was over the subject of women's education. Kokkonda was then the leader of the orthodox section pleading against the reformist ideas like education for women, tabooing the sea journey and opposing the widow marriages. "The Editor is against female education and suggests that suitable works be written for their benefit in place of those in use at present".²² Veeresalingam was banking upon the good will of the publishers of the 'Purusharthaprathayini' for the publication of his articles. And finding it difficult to conduct an effective propaganda to counter the arguments of the orthodox sections, he decided to start a journal of his own; Vivekavardhani, (in 1874).

Furthermore, Veeresalingam focussed public opinion on many social evils by writing a number of satires exposing the degeneration of social life. The most well known of them were 'Brahmavivahamu' and 'Vyavaharadharmabodhini' which exposed the orthodox habits and superstitious practices in marriages and the malpractices of the people in the administration. They became so popular that the students

22. Andhrabhasha Sanjivani, April, 1872. Report on ...
op.cit., 1872.

of Veeresalingam staged them to the public in and around Rajahmundry.²³

The crowning effort of Veeresalingam in building up a public opinion for and creating a necessary climate to carry out his campaign for social reform was the establishment of the Rajahmundry Social Reform Association on 8 September 1878 with half a dozen dependable members to carry on the propaganda work by arranging lectures and conducting weekly meetings.²⁴

Veeresalingam was a practical man and a worker. He did not content himself with being a mere preacher or dreamer. He had a philosophy of action and a programme of work. With regard to the practical work to be done in changing the public life in Andhra, he expressed his views in one of his lectures wherein he discussed the qualities and requirements of a practical worker. "Every person of right thought thinks of leading others to right conduct; but there are only very few who can really do so We see many people who always imagine that they could improve the world only when they reach a certain position or acquire wealth and pass away miserably doing nothing for the world. Wealth and position are not got easily without our yielding to many undesirable acts. He who relies on truth ... should

23. Yugapurushudu ... op.cit., p.30.

24. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p.135.

be prepared to set aside considerations of father, mother, friends and relatives.... Unless a man betters himself first, he cannot better others. And to better himself he must leave the service of the old dame custom and worship truth.... all other means for sustained action like courage, steadfastness and patience are got in a moment. These are thousand times more efficient weapons than the old Sastras, Astras.... Even though your efforts may fail in the beginning, do not get dispirited. Show to the world the usefulness of your attempts without giving them up, by publishing books, by delivering lectures any by showing it in your deeds."²⁵

This attitude of Veeresalingam helped him much in carrying on his work. Once he stated that, "It is confidence in my character that has made men rely on my word throughout my life. When once I gave my word I kept it at all costs. Even my bitterest opponents in social reform had confidence in my character and trusted my word fully."²⁶

With this philosophy of life Veeresalingam commenced his social reform activities in Andhra. We can broadly classify his activities under the following headings:

- (1) the upliftment of women
- (2) Ideas of religious reform
- (3) Political ideas and
- (4) Purifier of public life.

25. K. Veeresalingam, coll. works. Vol. VIII, op. cit., pp.47-51.

26. Cited in J. Gurunatham, op. cit., p. 47.

The Upliftment of Women

Women occupied a pivotal place in the activities of Indian social reformers in general. It is understandable for the position that women occupied in the society during feudal times was, by and large, that of a glorified slave. Among the weaker sections or the lower strata of society women might have enjoyed certain amount of freedom or liberty as both husband and wife were working as equal partners in their daily chores. However, the position of women with regard to their economic, educational and cultural status, was miserable. Women, except in certain parts of India where matriarchal system worked, never enjoyed the property rights which were essential for them to develop individuality and self-respect. The condition of women during this time was well described by a contemporary writer in the following words: "Deprived of all education, confined within the four walls of the house, seeing little of the world and knowing little of it, immersed in superstition and oppressed by custom, our women - to our shame be it said - are no better than slaves."²⁷ The same author went on to explain the place of woman as wife in a man's life. He said that wife is a companion and life's partner but unfortunately treated as a hindrance and burden by men. He quoted Mahabharata wherein a wife is described as,

27. R. Venkata Subba Rao, ed. Kamala's Letters (Madras, 1902), p. 191.

"A companion

In solitude, a father in advice,

A mother in all seasons of distress,

A rest in passing through life's wilderness."²⁸

And he summed up saying that "Indeed we have no wives but women, no homes but houses".²⁹

The lack of education for women was considered as one of the primary reasons for their backwardness and the stunted growth of their personality. Educational facilities, in general, were very much limited. There were in existence the native pial schools in every village, "but their number has much declined in the last 15 or 20 years and these institutions are now being replaced by result-combined and local fund schools."³⁰ While praising the modern methods and principles of teaching the journal criticised the quality of teachers who were inefficient as they happened to be, by and large, untrained men and it pleaded for the establishment of three Normal Schools (Teacher training Schools) in the Telugu country.³¹

By 1853 along with other important towns like Cumbaconam,

28. Ibid., p. 192.

29. Ibid.

30. Sanmargadarsini, August, 1887, Report on Native Newspapers, September, 1887.

31. Ibid.

Bellary, and Calicut, Rajahmundry too had a provincial school.³² The next step of the East India Company in spreading education was to start the Taluk Schools in which the teaching of English was not very important. This was not liked by the natives and they developed apathy towards them, for they thought that English learning was essential for securing jobs. One of the Inspectors reported that throughout his division the desire for what the natives designate as an English Education "is intense and is daily becoming more so, and that it exists not only in populous towns but in villages also".³³ So an eagerness to acquire education and that too English education could be seen during this period. This fact could further be illustrated by quoting from an appeal by a girl student for the opening of a School to teach English. A girl, signing herself Saladi Gungumma, says that she has been studying at a Girls' School in Kakinada and she has to leave the School as there is no higher class than the sixth and hence she made a request for the opening of a high School to teach both English and Telugu.³⁴

32. S. Sathinathan, History of Education in the Madras Presidency, (Madras, 1894), p. 43. Provincial Schools were of high Schools' Status and has the entrance examination equivalent to the Matriculation. Also see the Telugu Encyclopedia (Madras, 1961), Vol. V, p.1405.

33. S. Sathianathan, op. cit., p.48.

34. Sudhiranjani, May, 1874, in Report on Native News Papers, June, 1874.

When educational facilities were in general very much limited, it is needless to say that Girls' education was much more restricted. Until 1868 the Government did not take serious steps with regard to the improvement of Girls' education. However, it is not correct to say, as some writers suggested,³⁵ that there were no Girls Schools before the year 1874 when a Girls' School was started at Dowaleswaram.³⁶ The Missionaries had already started a few elementary Schools for Girls in Vizagapatam, and Masulipatam along with many Boys' Schools in several important towns of Andhra like Vijayanagaram, Rajahmundry, Guntur, Ongole, Nellore, Bellary, Kurnool, Cuddapah.³⁷ In these Schools the teaching of the Bible was compulsory. This was resented by Indians and the same was expressed in the contemporary native news papers and books. For instance, a contemporary journal wrote thus: "The missionaries at Masulipatam have been doing good work by opening and conducting several schools, and to derive the good of being educated, our boys and girls must bribe them as it were with the reading of a Bible lesson"³⁸ However, a

35. E. V.R.Narla, Veeresalingam (New Delhi, 1968), p. 36.

36. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 84. The school was started by the local philanthropists who came under the influence of Veeresalingam who was a teacher there.

37. S. Sathianathan, op. cit., p. 52.

38. Purusharthaprathayini, June, 1876, in Report on Native New Papers, July, 1876. Also see Andhrabhasha Sanjivani, April, 1873, which deplored the practice of teaching Bible and other religious books in Missionary Schools which receive grant-in-aid from the government.

few Girls' Schools supported and well maintained by the local patrons were also to be found during this period. A School for the education of Hindu girls was opened in April 1867 at Vizagapatam by Srimathi Janakiamma widow of the well known Goday Surya Prakasa Rao. After the death of the founder, this School was maintained by her daughter Smt. Rutanamma, wife of Shri G.L. Narasinga Rao, the wealthy proprietor of Anakapalle. She called in the aid of the sisters of the French convent of St. Joseph, who Superintended the education.³⁹ In 1868, 150 girls were taught in this School. Education included both English and Telugu in addition to needle-work, music and drawing. In 1868 the Maharajah of Vizianagaram established a School at Vizianagaram for Rajput and Brahmin girls at an annual cost of about Rs.12,000. Though it did not receive any government aid, yet it was put under Government inspection.⁴⁰ The Rajah of Pithapur was not lagging behind in his patronage of Girls education. In 1868 he started a Girls School at

39. Madras Revenue Register, Vol. III, August 1869. Also see for example A. Vadivelu, Aristocracy of South India Vol. II, (Madras, 1903), p. 13 in which it is stated that "..... Sri Gajapati Rao Garu headed an undertaking with a view to promoting female education... which led to the opening of the Vizagapatam caste Girls' school was now under the management of the Sisters of St. Joseph's convent, and is solely supported by the Goday family. Sri Janakayamma, known also as Mrs. Goday Surya Prakasa Rao, was most appropriately the first Patroness of what was the first institution of the kind in Southern India."

40. S. Sathianathan, op. cit., p. 75.

Kakinada and gave a monthly contribution of Rs.100/- for its maintenance and Rs.300/- every year for the purchase of prizes to be distributed to the prize-winning girls. In addition he gave a site and Rs.900/- for the construction of the School on the site.⁴¹

A stimulus was afforded to female education by a visit from Miss Carpenter (from England). Several meetings took place in which this lady took part and issues were seriously discussed and at last a decision was taken by the Government to open a Normal School to train women teachers.⁴²

Nevertheless, neither the progress of education nor the climate for the spread and reception of progressive ideas on women's education were satisfactory. There was still a strong orthodox section led by Kokkonda Venkataratnam Pantulu, editor of Andhrabhasha Sanjivani, published from Madras. It was the mouth-piece of the orthodox and reactionary forces in the Andhra during this time opposing women's education.⁴³

Veerasingam was convinced of the usefulness and purposefulness of female education, and declared that from the individual happiness point of view as well as the progress

41. Sriram Veerabrahmakavi, Sri Pithikapura Samsthana Charithamu (Pithapur, 1938) p. 252.

42. S. Sathianathan, op. cit., p. 73.

43. N. Satyanarayanamurthy, Suseela (Vijayawada, 1967). This novel, written by a contemporary of Veeresalingam, depicted the social conditions of the period under study and introduced Veeresalingam and his contemporaries as characters in it.

of the society in general, female education, was essential.⁴⁴ He pleaded for the establishment of more Girls' schools to drive out the ignorance from the womenfolk. He mentioned in his autobiography, "from the beginning I supported the case for female education. I firmly believed that unless the condition of women improved, the country cannot progress." He stated further that while he was working in a School at Korangi (in 1872, when Veeresalingam was 24 years of age) he wrote verses in favour of female education.⁴⁵ At this juncture came the articles in the Andhrabhasha Sanjivani opposing female education. It stated, "... the Hindus of former days very wisely refrained from educating their females, and considers that they did so because it was their impression that females when educated might possibly excel the males; they would then, feeling their superiority, not be so subservient to them and moreover might possibly conduct themselves with more freedom"⁴⁷ This statement clearly shows the fears and misapprehensions entertained by the orthodox section who took recourse to the citing of the ancient scriptures to justify their position. Veeresalingam replied convincingly to them through his articles

44. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works (Rajahmundry, 1951), Vol. VIII, p. 22. The reference is cited from the lecture 'Women's Education' delivered by Veeresalingam in 1875.

45. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya...., Part I, op. cit., p. 406.

46. T. Venkatasubbarao, op. cit., p. 57.

47. Andhrabhasha Sanjivani, August, 1872, Report on Native News Papers, September, 1872.

published in the Purushartha Pradayini (published from Machilipatnam), some times in his name and at other times under the pseudonym 'patriot'.⁴⁸ After moving to Dowaleswaram, he inspired the local philanthropists with his ideals who in turn opened a Girls' School there in 1874.⁴⁹

While the controversy with Kokkonda Venkataratnam Pantulu over female education was going on, Veeresalingam felt the need of having a journal of his own not only to carry on the argument with him but to propagate his views on many other social problems and to expose the corrupting local officials. The journal Vivekavardhani was started by him and he began to reply to the criticism of Kokkonda through its columns. While Veeresalingam was advocating the introduction of the English education and the Western knowledge,⁵⁰ Kokkonda accused the natives who were eager to learn English language as having "an eye on material gains". When Kokkonda started a new journal with the name 'Hasyavardhani' mainly to ridicule the writings of Veeresalingam, Veeresalingam also started a supplement to his journal called 'Hasyasanjivani', to counteract Kokkonda's propaganda.⁵¹ When Kokkonda published an article 'Women do not deserve education', Veeresalingam immediately replied with an article 'Men do not deserve education' in his journal.⁵² He wrote this in

48. T. Venkatasubba Rao, op. cit., p. 56.

49. K. Veeresalingam, Sreeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 84

50. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol. VIII, Part III p. 70.

51. K. Veeresalingam, Sreeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 96.

52. Ibid, pp. 97-98.

a light-hearted and humorous manner ridiculing old-fashioned men. He stated, "Our ancestors were never educated and education goes against our tradition. To do so is bad. Even otherwise education is leading to evils such as forgery and the like....What then is the use of education? In the past people were not educated and yet they managed to live well. Why should we put ourselves to needless strain by taking to learning? When the British Government is coming forward to open schools in our villages and thus spoiling our children, why should our patriots keep quiet? Should they not petition against this? Should not our leaders assemble and decide to place all those now receiving education under social boycott? If, as it is often said, Englishmen achieved progress through education, it is so because they are unlike us in complexion. They are white and we are black. So what is possible for them is not possible for us. The advocacy for English education is the cause for premature deaths too."⁵³ He carried on a relentless campaign in favour of female education exposing its opponents who praise the great qualities of unlettered Indian women. He wrote thus: "the enemies of female education frequently praise the ignorant Indian women as altruistic and self-sacrificing even in the acts of domestic life. They criticise European educated women as selfish.... In the first place woman feels her self-sacrifice demanded

53. Ibid., pp. 98-99.

from and forced upon her. She does not feel herself being endowed with a free will through which, and from a sense of duty she may be prompted to disinterested conduct.... Secondly does the husband feel himself under an obligation to his wife each time he receives a kindly service at her hands? No, he expects all such conduct from his wife only as a matter of course."⁵⁴ He wrote verses in Satyasamvardhani, lashing out at the opponents of women's education:

"Were women to be educated, what would happen to the sale of live human flesh,

thinks one.

What would become of the time-old domestic ceremonies, laments one.

Who would serve me as though I were her very God, mourns another.

Whom am I to thrash and belabour, rages another.

Who will look after the idols and offers worship to them, reasons yet another.

And these are now the leaders of society whose old-fashioned ways are out to safeguard evil ways of life."⁵⁵

Veerasingam, in addition to the starting of a Girls'

54. Satya Samvardhani, Jan.-Feb, 1894. This journal, printed and published by Veeresalingam on behalf of the Prarthana Samaj, was bi-lingual.

55. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, P.II, op. cit., p. 261.

School in 1881 in Rajahmundry,⁵⁶ conducted a journal exclusively for women (along with 'Vivekavardhani'), namely, 'Satihitabodhini' which contained many articles useful for women and through which he disseminated knowledge to the women folk.⁵⁷ The influence of this example set by Veeresalingam in starting a separate journal for women could be seen in the birth of many women's journals like 'Savithri', 'Telugu Zanana', 'Zanana', 'Chintamani', which were publishing material useful for women. Also published were a number of tracts, during this period, which actively espoused the cause of female education of which the most important was 'Strividhyasarasangrahamu' which attributed the misery of India to the lack of education and liberty of women.⁵⁸ The author of the book quoted intensively from the SMRITIS AND SRUTIS to prove his point in favour of female education. Veeresalingam himself wrote many books and articles on the problems of women and justice to be meted out to them. He wrote 'Deharogyadharmabodhini' an essential book that explains the various problems of the bodily health of women,⁵⁹ in 1889.

56. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part I, op. cit., p. 168.

57. Ibid., p. 406. The journal was started in 1883.

58. B. Pattabhiramasarma, Strividhyasarasangrahamu, (Gudivada, 1911) p.2.

59. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part II, op. cit., p. 208.

In 1896 he published another book 'Patnihitasoochani', which explains the problems of pregnancy, delivery of children, their proper upbringing, etc.⁶⁰ In addition to this he wrote many Kavyas, Satakas on women.⁶¹ In a sataka called 'Strinithi Dipika', Veeresalingam wrote, "As education enables people to discriminate between good and evil, girls should also learn along with boys instead of squandering away money on trifles. Women should help the poor and needy. They should face hardships with courage and find solutions to their problems".⁶²

Further, he composed verses on 'Matrpuja' (worship of mother) and 'Pitrpuja' (worship of father) for the sake of young girls. In 'Matrpuja' he stated, "Mother is verily a Goddess on earth and we should respect her feelings".⁶³ He expressed similar views in an article 'Woman as Mother'. "Mother provides the basis of the family's peace, cleanliness and grace. She is the pillar of Unity among the members of the family. If she happens to be an educated woman, it is undoubtedly a blessing. Then she would be in an ideal position to bring up children in a healthy climate imparting to them qualities of respectful obedience, truth and goodness".⁶⁴

60. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, (Rajahmundry, 1951), Vol. VI.

61. Ibid., (Rajahmundry, 1950), Vol. V.

62. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part II, op. cit., pp. 209-10.

63. Ibid., p. 211.

64. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. works, Vol. IX, pp. 4-11.

Of all the books he wrote on them the most popular and interesting was the 'Satyaraja Poorvadesa Yatralu' about which a contemporary comment is worth noting. "It is a place where the roles of men and women are reversed. Men bring up children, do household chores, they are put even under seclusion (gosha system),... men are not given education and all teachers are women... widowers are deprived of their mustache....."⁶⁵ It is a funny little book 'a'..la' Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift, mainly intended to be a satire on the conduct of the conservative men and their reactionary ideas with regard to women. Regarding the practical work done by Veeresalingam in this direction, in 1905 he opened a Girls Lower Secondary School as an appendage to the Widow Home in Rajahmundry.⁶⁶ There were fifty girls and a few family women on the rolls of the School. For those women who could not attend the above school arrangements were made to run classes specially for them thrice in a week in the building meant for women's prayer meetings. It was stated that women who were under seclusion were also attending these classes not caring for the opposition of elders in the family and orthodox sections in the society.⁶⁷

65. R. Venkatasubba Rao, op. cit., pp. 196-197.

66. Telugu Zanana (a monthly Telugu journal exclusively devoted to female education) Jan. 1905, Rajahmundry. Also see Chilakamarthi-- op. cit., p. 202.

67. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p.274.

✓ The impact of this movement on female education could be clearly seen in several ways. As stated above journals exclusively meant for women were started. Women were not only convening their own Conferences, arranging lectures and organising associations⁶⁸ but they began to attend the District Social Conferences organised annually.⁶⁹ Women began to emerge as powerful writers. Mention should be made of Bhandaru Atchamamba (1874-1905) who wrote 'Lives of Noble Women' (in three parts in Telugu language) in 1901.⁷⁰ In 1903 she toured the whole of Andhra giving lectures and organising women's associations. Following the foot steps of Veeresalingam she gave shelter to many destitutes, and when her younger brother-in-law lost his wife, persuaded him to marry a widow.⁷¹

The change in the climate of women's education and its effects were well summed up by a contemporary in an article published in the Hindu: "Female education, though still at a low level, is however rapidly progressing. In 1881, there were in all 67 schools for girls and 2,569 girls attended them; in 1908 the number of Schools increased to 329 and of girls to 17,091. There are 3 or 4

68. See for example the reports published in 'Savithri (1904), the monthly journal for women. Also see the news reports published in the Hindu dated 18th May, 1910 and 10th June, 1910.

69. R. Venkatasivudu, op.cit., p. 75.

70. B. Atchamamba, Abalasaritratnamala (Madras, 1901). The author wrote in the preface that Veeresalingam serialised the book in his journal Chintamani and thus encouraged her.

71. Telugu Zenana, February, 1905.

Telugu journals edited and published by Telugu ladies themselves. In all chief centres in the Northern circles there are found ladies associations, where women gather in large numbers, have lectures, Kalakshepams, music parties, etc. (Sometimes social matters also are discussed. In some places women have been able to establish their own schools for girls where in addition to ordinary education, music, sewing, etc., are taught. Ladies conferences are organised where lectures on female education, women in ancient India, domestic economy, home sanitation, etc., were given by ladies themselves....The Telugu woman has developed a passion for lectures, social gatherings and street processions."72

Prostitution

As a part of the programme of upliftment of women, Veeresalingam took up the struggle against prostitution. The institution of nautch or Devadasi, whatever might be its original purpose, came to be regarded as nothing but prostitution. It was well protected in the name of religion. As one of the strong advocates of its eradication well described it, "sexual immorality as a hereditary and acknowledged profession,... fortified

72. The Hindu (Madras) April 25, 1911. This is an extract from the article written by anonymous writer under the caption 'The position of Telugu Women.'

against the attacks of time and change, and endowed with the privileges of social sanction, is special to this land."⁷³ Devadasis and concubines were patronised by leading members in the society like advocates, officials and businessmen. It was considered then a matter of loss of prestige if one did not have a concubine. On the other hand it became a matter of privilege and a sign of virility to have one. What was abominable in this relic of declining feudal society was the way in which a caste was exclusively set apart for public enjoyment. Veeresalingam traced the origins of the system of Devadasis which was originally constituted with the idea of promoting fine arts like music and dance and its gradual degeneration into prostitution. He quoted verses written by others (names not mentioned) condemning prostitution. "Family men should not touch the lips of a prostitute which are kissed by all and sundry".⁷⁴ He described the mother of a prostitute as the "agent of the God of Death (Yama)" who would squeeze wealth from bidders

73. K.V.Gopalaswamy (ed) "Grace Abiding: Message and Ministrations of Brahmarshi Sir R. Venkataratnam (Kakinada, 1965) p. 148. This extract is taken from the article 'Social Purity' written by Sir R. Venkataratnam Naidu, a great reformer and younger contemporary of Veeresalingam. His main field of activity was against nautch, and temperance and he was instrumental in starting the anti-nautch movement in Madras which gained healthy momentum in the mofussil areas.

74. K.Veeresalingam, Coll. works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 49.

for her daughter's affections and desert him when he becomes a pauper.⁷⁵ Nautch parties were organised in the names of certain prominent individuals and called so by the Public as 'Pantulu's Melam' (Pantulu's nautch group), and 'Naidu's Melam' (Naidu's nautch group), etc.⁷⁶ During the religious festivals, the nautch parties became very common and people assembled in large numbers to witness them and not to worship God.⁷⁷ It was almost an inescapable practice that those who were invited to attend these parties should contribute something or other, even though one did not have sufficient funds to do so.⁷⁸ As the officials were the patrons of these parties and as they were often present at their performances, it became almost obligatory on the part of the common men to attend them and pay something. This was leading to the corruption of public life as the people were attending and encouraging such things mainly to please the officials and men of wealth and influence in the society. Veeresalingam wrote that there were many Schools existing then in Rajahmundry which were meant for Devadasis

75. Ibid., p. 52.

76. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... Part I, op. cit., p. 90.

77. N. Satyanarayanamurthy, op. cit., pp. 257-59.

78. Yugapurshudu, op. cit. This system was called 'Vosagulu' (Telugu) meaning gifts.

teaching mainly dance and music. Even the most orthodox people, who did not encourage or contribute to the maintenance of Sanskrit or Science Schools, were, for the fear or favour of the officials, paying liberally for the maintenance of the schools meant for Devadasis.⁷⁹ The number of such women were estimated to be roughly / about 2 lakhs in Madras presidency.⁸⁰ Veeresalingam made up his mind to fight against this evil. He used the columns of his journal Vivekavardhani successfully for this purpose. He also wrote satires on this problem of which the most important was 'Vesypriya Prahasanam'. Through one of the characters in this satire, Veeresalingam stated, "Due to prostitutes and nautch parties there is reckless spending through which many have become paupers. The frequenters of prostitutes' homes are ruining their health too. Also this practice has become infectious as young fellows are imitating the evil ways of the elders. People say that development of music will be affected if the institution of Devadasis is discouraged. It is a misconceived notion. On the other hand, as music is now the monopoly of Devadasis family women are loathe to learn and practise it. They

79. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeva...., Part I, op. cit., p. 91.
80. R.C. Mazumdar, Struggle for freedom (Bombay, 1969), p. 995. However, the correct figure cannot be ascertained as many of them were perhaps registered in the census as temple-servants.

are using it as a bait for men. It will be stopped when family women are encouraged to learn music which will be possible only when prostitution is rooted out from society. Further, prostitutes' children should be made to marry and settle down in life instead of following their family 'profession'.⁸¹ In the satire Veeresalingam has depicted young reformists participating in the anti-nautch gatherings taking vows not to allow their parents arrange nautch parties during their weddings.⁸² Though it was replete with ~~full of~~ humour and appears to have been written in a light hearted manner, it was educative and it raised a big controversy in Rajahmundry. As Veeresalingam stated in his autobiography, all but one school of prostitutes were closed in Rajahmundry and the people were rather sore about it and could not forgive him for this. His feelings were so strong at the public criticism of his writings on this issue that he wanted to become more independent even giving up the teaching profession which gave him certain amount of freedom.⁸³

The anti-nautch movement spread to the whole of Andhra and Madras city. The district Social Conferences met every year to discuss the social

81. K.Veeresalingam, Coll. works, Vol.I, op. cit., p.43.

82. Ibid., P.46

83. K.Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p.92.

problems and the ways and means of eradicating the social evils. In the Godavari district social conference in 1897, after the presidential address was delivered by Kandukuri Veeresalingam criticising the social evils including the 'nautch', it was resolved "not to get up nautches at the time of marriages."⁸⁴ Veeresalingam's students in Rajahmundry took vows that they would never attend the nautch parties.⁸⁵ Commenting upon the progress of the movement, a contemporary newspaper remarked that the anti-nautch movement started under the auspices of Veeresalingam (in 1881) even though at present "the student population of this place seems to have risen against the useful reform, although we are sure that such students form but a small minority even now. But the question has within the last few months assumed too much importance to be confined to students and their Debating Societies. It has engaged and is still engaging the best attention of the press and the intelligent public."⁸⁶

This issue gained momentum since it was taken up

84. 'Satyasamvardhani', op. cit., June, 1897.

85. Two such students mentioned this fact in their autobiographies. See V. Suryanarayana Rao, op. cit., p. 169. Also see the autobiography of Chilakamarthi Lakshminarasimham, (Bezwada, 1944), p. 182.

86. Satyasamvardhani, op. cit., July 1893.

by the missionaries at Madras under the auspices of Dr. Miller, the Principal, Madras Christian College. The Madras Hindu Social Reform Association also took up this issue and submitted a memorial to the Madras Government. But it received an unfavourable reply. However, "it rejoiced at the news that the question has been taken up by certain ladies and gentlemen in England who have set themselves to ensure non-attendance of Governors and other Government officials at nautch parties. The collectors and the Governors on the pretext of inspecting the country go through the districts to enjoy this singing and dancing by these fallen women."⁸⁷ The Association and also the Press protested against the system of having common schools for girls of general public and prostitutes' children. They were afraid that the children of the general public would imbibe the characteristics of the children of the prostitutes and hence pleaded "to open separate schools for dancing girls, if necessary".⁸⁸ A plea was made to

87. Sasilekha, November, 1894, Report on Native News Papers, December, 1894.

88. Vivekavardhani April, 1875. Report on op. cit., 1875. Also see for example Yatharthavasani, July, 1878. The same view was expressed by Lokaranjani in its issue of May, 1875. Report on June, 1875.

the Government, to introduce a law for abolishing the institution of dancing girls in India, similar to the one which was introduced in Ceylon.⁸⁹

Mention should be made, in this connection, of the services rendered by Sir Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, a contemporary and follower of Veeresalingam and a silver tongued Brahmo during this time. A student of Miller in the Madras Christian College, he was influenced by the writings of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the stirring lectures of Pandit Sivanatha Sastry (from whom he took initiation into Brahmadharma during the Collegiate career) and worked hand-in-hand with "Nayaka" (Leader). Veeresalingam in all spheres of progressive reform. He was the universally acclaimed exponent of social purity with its logical corollary in the anti-nautch crusade. In his words the basis of anti-nautch movement "is not in fine manners, but in good morals; its aim is not mere elegant breeding, but pure living."⁹⁰ His ideas on this subject are contained in the article 'Social Purity and anti-nautch movement'.⁹¹ He presided over

89. Sathiavedanusaram August, 1889. Report on
op. cit., 1889.

90. K.V. Gopaldaswamy, op. cit., p. 145.

91. C.Y. Chintamani, op. cit., pp. 249-81.

many social reform conferences and went out into the world delivering lectures and organising associations for promoting these objects. His protest against the admission of Eardley Norton to a place amidst the celebrities of the Indian National Congress during its session at Madras in the year 1898, on the ground that he was flouting public morals by living with a woman who had not obtained divorce from her husband, was well known.⁹² He carried on the propaganda through the columns of the "Fellow Worker" and other journals. Leading members of the Devadasi Community like Gudiseva Subbaiah Naidu, Bhaskarla Eswarudu, started associations to abolish nautch parties. They gave education to their children and got them married and well settled in life, and thus rendered their help to Venkataratnam Naidu in his efforts.⁹³

With regard to the results of the movement, it has to be admitted that, they were not of much significance. Nevertheless, the movement could impress upon Andhradesa that the introduction of nautch girls on festive occasions was not merely a stigma but truly an offence. As Venkataratnam mentioned in his autobiographical account, though the evil could not be eradicated,

92. K.Suryanarayana, op. cit., p.40,. Also see S.Natarajan, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

93. K.Suryanarayana, op. cit., p.41.

yet they succeeded in creating a consciousness among a large section of people that nautch was an institution that deserved elimination.⁹⁴ Further, under the influence of this movement, certain castes took concrete steps to eliminate this evil from their fold. Among the Jakkulas (name of a caste) in Krishna district it was formerly customary to set apart one girl for prostitution and "a written agreement was a few years ago entered into to give up the practice."⁹⁵ Finally in 1925, as a result of strong agitation, an act was passed which extended to the Devadasis those sections of the Penal Code which declared traffic in minor girls a criminal offence. However, the practice continued to exist as the alternatives (education and employment) before Devadasis were limited. Full and proper opportunities with financial aid during their education, and the

94. R. Venkataratnam, Sweevapravachanadyutulu (Rajahmundry, 1941) p.40 (An autobiographical account).

95. Edgar Thurston, op. cit., Vol. IA and B, p.140. Also see the Hindu dated June 7, 1910 wherein it is stated thus: "In Tenali Zakkula caste women were leading lives in prostitution. The community took a vow under the influence of some educated people that they will marry their females and since have acted upto their vow."

guarantee of a job later, would have solved the problem satisfactorily to an extent. But these two conditions could not be fulfilled as it was an alien colonial society in which the reformers were working and as such they had to face many limitations in their work and its fulfilment.

Widow marriages

The reform of marriage in general and widow marriages in particular occupied the attention of Veeresalingam. He criticised the unnecessary and wasteful expenditure like performing the marriage for five days (as per custom) with elaborate ceremonies and rituals and dinners. As he had no faith in the piety of the priestly classes, who demanded and received heavy amounts as gifts, he advised people not to pay them. He appealed to the people not to arrange nautch parties, during marriages as apart from its reprehensible nature, it would involve wasteful expenditure. The performance of marriages in a 'prestigious' fashion with all the avoidable expenditure was pauperizing people.⁹⁶ Veeresalingam suggested alternative ways of spending surplus money on marriage occasions like "digging wells in villages where drinking water is not available, and for other public purposes".⁹⁷ The hardships faced by

96. K.Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol.VIII, Part II, p.99.

97. Ibid., p. 98.

people with many children were countless. Hence this aspect of marriage reform, though looks insignificant, took an organised form resulting not only in the reduction of expenses but even in simplifying the ritual of marriage with all its paraphernalia.⁹⁸

Veerasingam, as a part of his struggle against orthodoxy and superstitions, questioned the practice of consulting horoscopes of the prospective couples before marriages. He criticised that people could only consult horoscopes but could never earn longevity to the bride or groom. Further more, he questioned how was it that many people were dying even though priests fixed the sacred time (Muhurat) for the performance of marriages.⁹⁹

Veerasingam took up arms against the infant marriages which were rather common among the upper strata of society. Though unreasonable and unsound, this practice came to be justified on religious grounds and hence people who would not perform the marriages of their children were considered as 'sinners' who flouted the sanctity of the Sastras and Puranas. Consequently, the 'lower' castes among which this practice was not very rampant, began to imitate the 'higher' castes as part of the process of Sanskritisation. Other reasons

98. Chintamani, February-March, 1898, a bimonthly journal run by Veerasingam.

99. K.Veerasingam, Rajasekhara Charitra (Madras, 1969), p.34. (First published in 1880).

like the insistence of elderly (aged) people for the marriages of their grand children for the fun and enjoyment that a marriage would give them, were responsible for the early marriages. Analysing the causes for early marriages, Veeresalingam mentioned them in detail in his lecture on 'Early marriages.' He stated, "There are many reasons for the recurrence of early marriages in our country. Some would like to perform the wedding of their children to have fun and fanfare incidental to such ceremonies during their life time. Some others do the same under the pressure of aged people and relatives in the household; some do it to earn prestige in society by lavishly spending on gifts to priests and feasts; others perform more than one marriage at the same time to avoid double expenditure; many do so for the fear of violating tradition and inviting possible social boycott if child marriages are not performed....There are others different from the above who marry their children to old and diseased people for the sake of bride-price and estates in the event of their prospective sons-in-law's death".¹⁰⁰ As the marriages were to be performed only among the sub-castes thus limiting the area of marriages, it often led to the early marriages as people were not sure of

100. K.Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol.VII (Lectures), pp. 33-34.

securing husbands to their children. So Veeresalingam advocated the marriages among sub-castes, if not castes, to eradicate the evil.

Discussion and controversies were being held in the press and in public over this issue before Veeresalingam turned his attention to this problem. 'Madras Times' published in 1865 'Letters on Hindu Marriages' which were written by D.Narasaiah but under three different names over the controversy of infant marriages quoting profusely from Manu and finally concluding that infant marriages were "not only opposed to common sense, but are also contrary to the very sentiments and doctrines expressly promulgated in the sacred formula pronounced on the celebration of the marriage itself; and in the sacred books on which our marriage rites are founded."¹⁰¹ Veeresalingam, proved in his lecture on early marriages, quoting the Shastras, that infant marriages were not approved by them. He listed ~~the~~ the pernicious effects of these marriages on the health of mothers as well as children and stated that it would finally result in physical and mental degeneration of the nation.¹⁰² This question gained momentum and the public began to bestow their

101. D.Narasaiah, Letters on Hindu Marriages (Madras, 1867), p.1 (Reprinted from Madras Times).

102. K.Veeresalingam, Col. Works, op. cit., pp.37-38.

attention on this through the press and social reform conferences. It was estimated that married girls below four years of age (excluding child widows) were 24,257 in the Madras Presidency of which 11,904 were in the northern Circars (comprising the districts of Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Godavari, Krishna and Guntur).¹⁰³

Malabari's movement on the age of marriage seems to have aroused much interest in Andhra and papers relating to it (16 years for bridegroom and 12 for bride) sent by Mahadev Govind Ranade to Veeresalingam were signed by the members of the Prarthana Samaj and the Social Reform Association at Rajahmundry for which act the signatories were considered as extremists in social matters.¹⁰⁴

Early marriages reached such absurd proportions that children of ten months old (sometimes even less) were got married¹⁰⁵ and the native press focussed the attention of the public and the Government on this issue. Bringing to the notice of the public the death of a thirteen year old mother at child birth, the Vartadarsani regretted the Government's failure for not taking any steps to ban the evil practice.¹⁰⁶ Vivekavardhani, on

103. Chintamani, February-March, 1898.

104. R.Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p.15.

105. Budhavidheyi March, 1888. Report on Native News Papers, 1888. This journal was published from Machilipatnam.

106. Vartadarsani, March, 1894, Report on Native News Papers, 1894. This journal was published from Nellore.

the other hand, suggested a few practical measures to prevent the incidence of infant marriages. Firstly, by prescribing a time limit after which married men should not appear for the Entrance University Examination and disallowing Scholarships or prizes to be given to them. Secondly, by preferring unmarried candidates for public employment. The journal also alleged that the Government was complacent in this matter because it was afraid that "it would hurt the religious susceptibilities of the Hindus."¹⁰⁷ However, the initiative taken by the native Mysore Government in this regard was some what exemplary. It abolished the early marriages of girls below the age of 8 and boys of 14. By the same law it also abolished marriages of men above fifty years of age to the girls below 14 years of age.¹⁰⁸

In the absence of any such law in British India and also due to the reasons of poverty and fear entertained by parents that they would not be able to get their daughters married later, sale of brides (Kanyasulkam) became rather common during this time.

107. Vivekavardhani, October, 1884. The Report on Native News Papers, 1884.

108. Satvasamvardhani, July, 1893. Also see S.Natarajan, op. cit., p.103.

As the child brides were generally purchased by aged men, it resulted in early widowhood and immoral life which meant life-long condemnation for them. This practice was in existence since a long time. As early as 1833, when Charles Philip Brown was the collector at Guntur, a letter was written to him by a village officer requesting to help him with an amount of sixty rupees to purchase a bride for his second marriage since he was a widower. Brown incorporated the letter in the English translation of the Telugu Reader and made a note on Kanyasulkam, "...the more daughters a man has, the better off he is, as there is always a rapid demand for them; but to get a son married is difficult and costs a large sum. A widower finds the difficulty still greater."¹⁰⁹

Veerasingam exposed this evil (Kanyasulkam) through the columns of Vivekavardhani and by lectures and writing satires. He cited the Shastras, to answer the orthodox sections, and to show that the evil was not sanctioned by them.¹¹⁰ He stated that "according to Manu and Kasyapa a purchased maiden cannot be a wife but only a ~~maid~~ ^{maid} servant. Accordingly she is not eligible to perform the religious rites to the Manes.

109. C.P. Brown, Telugu Reader, (Madras, 1852) pp.193-94

110. See for example the lecture on 'Kanyasulkam' in Vol. VIII of K.Veerasingam's Coll. Works, Part II, op. cit., pp. 26-28.

The Vaisyas and Sudras have realised this as an evil practice and ceased performing it.// However, the self-styled upper caste people (Brahmins) continue to indulge in this devilish practice unashamedly. The Brahmins, judging from this, seem to have lost the capacity to discriminate between vice and virtue".¹¹¹ Furthermore he described it as the "sale of human flesh".¹¹² His most popular satire 'Brahman Vivahamu' was written with the main purpose of exposing evils like early and late marriages and Kanyasulkam. It became so popular that the people of Rajahmundry and around were talking about it in groups at important centres when it was first published.¹¹³ Veeresalingam was evidently not satisfied with the mere publication of the satire as it merely provide certain amount of entertainment to the people. Knowing the grip of caste over people, he pleaded for the excommunication from the castes of those who got their daughters married in early age or those who sold their daughters in marriage.¹¹⁴ His ideas caught fire. Gurajada

111. Ibid., p. 27.

112. See for example the presidential address at Godavari District Social Conference by Veeresalingam, Satyasamvardhani, June, 1897. Also see K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol. VII p. 553.

113. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 27. The satire was published in 1876.

114. Ibid., p. 140-141.

Apparao, a contemporary of Veeresalingam, a great poet and playwright, wrote a famous play 'Kanyasulkam'. He stated in the preface of his play that Veeresalingam's satire 'Brahmavivahamu' and his play had "some parallel passages".¹¹⁵ He also mentioned the name of Veeresalingam through one of his characters in the play as the person who wrote tracts opposing Kanyasulkam, though at several other places we come across the mention of Rajahmundry as the centre of reformist activities. It may be said that Gurajada Apparao's great play (Kanyasulkam) was the fine and artistic outcome of Veeresalingam's reform activities.

Efforts were made to bring pressure upon the Government to make Kanyasulkam illegal. The Vartadarsani, writing on this, described it as "slavery". It further stated, "even though slavery was abolished in 1843, in this form it exists. So this sale of young girls can be made punishable under the statute banning slavery."¹¹⁶ In this connection the services rendered by Maharaja Anandagajapati of Vizayanagaram are noteworthy. As far back as 1887 the Maharajah conducted a survey and collected the statistics relating to sulka marriages in Vizagapatam district during a period of

115. See the preface of G.V. Appa Rao to his play Kanyasulkam (Madras, 1968) (First edition in 1897).

116. Vartadarsani, March, 1894. Report on the Native Newspapers, 1894.

three years. Speaking of the document Gurajada Apparao in the preface to his play stated that the number of Sulka marriages "recorded reached one thousand and thirty four, giving an average of three hundred and forty four for the year. Ninety nine girls were married at the age of 5 years, forty four at 4, thirty six at 3, six at 2, and the three at the age of one - the infants in the last instance carrying a price of, from three hundred and fifty to four hundred rupees a head. Strange as it may sound, bargains are sometimes struck for children in the womb. Such a state of things is a disgrace to society, and literature cannot have a higher function than to show up such practices and give currency to a high standard of morals."¹¹⁷ Further more, the Maharaja of Vizhnagaram raised the matter, with the assistance of Rao Bahadur Valluri Jagannatha Rao Pantulu, the treasury officer of Nellore District, in the Madras legislature in 1888. The Government, considering it as a question connected with the native religion, did not want to pass a law lest it should hurt the religious feelings of the natives.¹¹⁸

The practice of early marriages gave rise to two other evils namely prostitution and widowhood. It may not be correct to attribute widowhood to the early marriages alone. Nevertheless, the existence of a good number of child

117. G.V. AppaRao, Kanyasulkam (Vijayanagaram, 1897), edition.

118. Hindujana Samskarini, (Madras), April 1888. Also see Chintamani, February-March, 1898. T. Rajagopalarao expressed the same views in his book, A History of Indian Social Reform in the Nineteenth Century (Madras, 1901), p.40.

widows went far to prove this point. The condition of widows and the treatment they received at the hands of their own people can hardly be exaggerated. The child widow was the unique product of the Indian soil, generally unknown in other parts of the world. Veeresalingam vividly described the condition of widows in his novel "Rajasekhara Charitra", which was considered by literary critics as one which reflected the social conditions of his times. He wrote, "The sorry state of widows in our country moves even an enemy's heart. The parents, instead of consoling and comforting their grief-stricken widow-daughters unkindly deprive them of all minimum pleasures in life. The ornaments are taken away from them. Their heads are shaven to make them look ugly and confine them to a deserted corner in the house. They are not fed properly nor clothed adequately. Their lives are made miserable and they are like living corpses....they are forced to do all the manual labour in the house. A widow is treated as a servant maid in her parental home even by her own sisters-in-law. On auspicious occasions her appearance is detested and she is considered as an ill-omen. That is how the word "widow" has become a highly abusive term among us".¹¹⁹ Thus widowhood was considered

119. K. Veeresalingam, Rajasekhara Charitra op. cit., pp. 87-88. Also see K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol. VII, the lecture on 'Widow re-marriage', p. 576.

to be slow torture - mental as well as physical - and to be worse than 'sati'.

Veerresalingam's endeavours to perform widow marriages were proverbial to remember, though his efforts to improve public morals were no less great than the other. Considering the times he lived in, the opposition and persecution he faced from the established beliefs and customs, it was a great task that he carried on in favour of widow marriages. Through this movement he successfully hit at the citadel of reactionary forces and made a beginning of independent thinking as well as action, freed from the shackles of Shastras and self-styled saviours of religion and morals, namely priests.

Before Veeresalingam started his movement in 1879, there was some activity on this issue in Madras city. Pamphlets and articles in support of widow marriages were issued by Palle Chentsal Rao, the Secretary of the Widow Remarriage Association at Madras.¹²⁰ In Andhra the native journals, Purusharthapradayini and Tatwabdhini published articles on this issue.

In the meantime a tract was published by Paravastu Venkataranga Charyulu of Visakhapatnam, quoting Shastras and Smrithis, sanctioning the marriage for widows.

120. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part I, op. cit., p. 145. Also see D. Venkatarangaiah, Kondaru Nellori Goppayaru (Nellore, 1933), pp. 120-22.

Paravastu concluded: "Hence I pray to God to make the hearts of the leaders of the people, to see the need arising out of the changed condition of the present circumstances and prevent social evils like the abortions, caused by weak-minded women, by early permitting virgin widows to remarry and thus protect the weaker sex."¹²¹ After the publication of the tract, Kokkonda Venkataratnam Pantulu from Madras and Dharmavaram Ramakrishnamacharyulu, a poet and a popular playwright of Puranic dramas in Telugu, wrote to Veeresalingam to counter the contents of the tract of Paravastu.¹²² Veeresalingam did not comply with their request. He had different views on the matter. He stated in his autobiography that he was eagerly awaiting the day when he could rejoice at the sight of child widows enjoying their lives with their second husbands and thought that the time was not yet ripe for that.¹²³ His intimate friend Challapalli Bapaiah broached the matter with him but in the beginning he did not evince much interest in the issue as he thought that it was not easy for him to undertake such a heavy task without adequate resources - both human and material. However, Challapalli Bapaiah did not give up his attempts and gave enough confidence to Veeresalingam that he

121. Cited by J. Gurunatham, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

122. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., pp. 146-47.

123. Ibid., pp. 148-149.

would be with him in this movement even if it meant giving up his kith and kin.¹²⁴

A notice was circulated in the town of Rajahmundry for a meeting where Veeresalingam would deliver a lecture on the marriage of widows. This created great stir among the orthodox sections. Veeresalingam knew that Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar wrote a book on the issue of widow marriages but he could not secure it in time. It is stated that the first book advocating widow marriages in Telugu was a translation from the Kannada language published in 1868, the year when Keshub Chandra Sen visited Madras to start the Brahmosamaj.¹²⁵ He could not get this book too. All that he could get hold of were the Manu, Yagnavalkya and Parasara Smritis, the articles published in Satwabodhini and Purusharth Prathayini. With the help of these he delivered a lecture on 3rd August 1879 justifying widow marriage.¹²⁶ The meeting was well attended by Pandits and others. In the lecture he adopted both the methods of quoting the Vedas and the Smritis, to satisfy the priestly classes and appealing to reason with his arguments. Speaking about the widowhood he said, "the cruel practice of

124. Ibid.

125. T. Rajagopala Rao, op. cit., p. 32.

126. See for the Lecture K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol. VII, pp. 524-583.

prohibiting widows to marry is found nowhere in the world except in our country. Even in our country it is confined to the Hindus and among them only to the three upper castes".¹²⁷ He enumerated the various problems related to this issue like early marriages, illicit sexual contacts of widows leading to elopement and pregnancy and the like. "Due to the association with widows, even family women are taking to wrong path of illicit contacts with men".¹²⁸ Answering the criticism of opponents of widow marriage, he stated, "it is absurd to think that widow marriages would stop infanticide and start the killing of husbands.... It is not so in other countries where widow marriages are taking place. Even in our country this is not the case among those castes in which widow marriages are not forbidden. Are men killing their wives simply because they have the freedom to remarry?"¹²⁹ The lecture created big stir and commotion in the town and people began discussing the various aspects of the problem. He delivered a second lecture on the same topic on 17th October, 1879. As he stated in a meeting at Madras he had no faith in the Shastras and the Smritis. But he was citing them for self-defence

127. Ibid., p.536.

128. Ibid., p.550.

129. Ibid., p.573

as it was the only effective way to answer the arguments of Pandits.¹³⁰ Immediately after the first lecture the Widow Marriage Association was formed in Rajahmundry, with Veeresalingam as its Secretary. It issued an appeal to the Indian public to help it with funds to carry on its activities. It condemned the custom as 'tyrant' and asked people to defy it and become free.¹³¹ Veeresalingam went to Kakinada and many other places and delivered lectures on this issue. Several attempts were made to beat him up but the timely help and protection by the students enabled him to weather such storms.¹³² The Widow Marriage Association consisted of educated people, and a group of dedicated workers namely Ch. Bapaiah, B. Gavarraju, A.L. Narasimham Chetty, B.V. Jogaiyah Naidu, K. Parthasarathi Naidu and others from Rajahmundry. Sankaracharya of Virupaksha came to Rajahmundry and threatened the members of the Association with excommunication if they did not dissociate themselves from it. The widow marriage association was strengthened with the addition of new members like Nyapati Subbarao Pantulu who came to practise law and Atmuri Lakshminarasimham as the district munsiff.¹³³

130. K. Veeresalingam, *Sweeya*....., Part I, op. cit., p. 223.

131. Vivekavardhani, September, 1879.

132. References to this are to be found in Veeresalingam's '*Sweeya*....., Part I, op. cit., pp. 158-59.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 161. Also see K. Veeresalingam, *Coll. Works*, op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 758.

Nyapati Subbarao, later became the Secretary of the Prarthana Samaj at Rajahmundry and was a great source of help to Veeresalingam in his reform work. He was elected to the Madras Legislature from the northern Circars local boards constituency (1893), and was the Secretary of the reception Committee to the Conference of the Indian National Congress at Madras in 1898.¹³⁴ Atmuri Lakshminarasimham was well versed in the Vedas and the Shastras. Along with Veeresalingam he also took part in the epic battle of arguments with the Pandits of Rajahmundry over the issue of widow marriages and established that widow marriage was not opposed to the Shastras. He was one among those threatened with excommunication by Sankaracharya of Virupaksha math.¹³⁵

Veeresalingam, after collecting round him a few able and courageous co-workers, started preparations for the performance of widow marriages as he was not satisfied with mere arguments and wordy duels with pandits. Inspired by Veeresalingam's lectures and further discussions in the town, a number of students were expressing their willingness to marry widows. This made the opponents of the reform, the orthodox sections, to get their sons hastily married and shave the heads of widows and do other things to make them look ugly and unpresentable for marriage.¹³⁶ The first widow marriage was celebrated in Rajahmundry on 11th December, 1881. It was the year when the Prarthana Samaj, the

134. Vignana Sarvaswamu (Madras 1961), Vol. IV, pp. 1205-1206.

135. G.V. Subbarayudu, Atmuri Lakshminarasimha Somayazi Jeevitha Charitramu, Upanyasamulu, p. 11, The place and publication date are not mentioned.

136. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya...., part I, op. cit., p. 171.

Students' Social Reform Association and Vivekavardhani were working dynamically and Veeresalingam being the central figure of the above three organisations, got full support from them in his efforts at the first widow marriage. Nevertheless, the first marriage created unprecedented stir in the town and innumerable attempts were made to stop it. Non-cooperation came from all sides. The purohits, cooks, musicians and others were prevented from taking part in the function. Attempts were made to kidnap the bride and the groom and beat up Veeresalingam. Veeresalingam got full support from the local English police officials. The local Superintendent of Police and the Joint Magistrate were personally present to look after the security arrangements. Sixty constables were posted not only around the residence of Veeresalingam but at several points on the route of the procession. As the Hindu constables were suspected to be friendly with the opponents of Veeresalingam, Christian and the Muhammadan constables were specially brought from other places.¹³⁷ Students were keeping vigil round the clock. A contemporary student who was present on that day described the event thus:

"About 500 students of us attended the marriage. We were guarding all streets and lanes leading to our 'guru's' (Veeresalingam's) residence throughout the night. We

137. Ibid., pp. 188-192.

all ate there during the marriage and yet the priestly classes could not excommunicate us as we did not care for all that. Except Basavaraju Gavarraju, all other leading members of the widow marriage association and followers of Veeresalingam deserted him during the marriage. Those few who attended the marriage performed 'penance' and got back into the Hindu religion."¹³⁸

Veeresalingam mentioned in detail in his autobiography the after effects of the first widow marriage.¹³⁹ The grip of the Hindu orthodoxy over the society could be gauged from the fact that most of the staunch co-workers of Veeresalingam in this cause including Pyda Ramakrishnaiah who donated an amount of Rs.30,000/- and later on constructed houses for the re-married couples performed penance fearing the excommunication. Veeresalingam and Basavaraju Gavarraju on whom he had high hopes (but he died prematurely in 1888 to the great sorrow of Veeresalingam) stood like rocks unmoved by the public criticism and ridicule. The social boycott began in right earnest. It took the form of refusing to let out houses, stopping the supply of water, prohibiting the entry into temples and the like. The social boycott was followed up by the excommunication letters issued by Sankaracharya

138. V. Suryanarayana Rao, op. cit., p. 166.

139. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., pp. 184-92.

to 31 families in Rajahmundry. It was a day of rejoicing to the orthodox sections. They took out a procession with the writs of excommunication in a palanquin. A similar procession was also taken out in Kakina, the native place of Pyda Ramakrishnaiah who liberally financed the widow marriage movement (referred above).¹⁴⁰

Despite all this, Veeresalingam received letters of congratulations from Madras and other places; "Your telegram has made us all exceedingly happy. May God bless you and the couple! Rajahmundry may henceforth be said to live. You have made the 11th of December a very remarkable day in the history of our Presidency.... Madras, as some wish me to believe, will follow in the wake of Rajahmundry."¹⁴¹ Indeed Rajahmundry became a place of hope to widows as many of them began writing confidential letters to Veeresalingam expressing their readiness for marriage. But soon after this two anti-widow marriage associations were formed, one at Rajahmundry and another at Madras. Congratulating Veeresalingam, Diwan Bahadur Valluri Jagannadha Rao Pantulu wrote, "I only hope that at least half a dozen more marriages will take place in rapid succession. The excitement must not be allowed to cool down I am

140. Ibid., p. 199.

141. Letter written by P. Venkatappaiah (a social worker) on 13th December, 1881 from Tiruvalikkini, Madras. Ibid., pp. 192-93.

circulating your telegram among the Native gentry here. An anti-marriage association is just now on foot here. It can do you no harm."¹⁴² It is true that no immediate harm was done. However, when Sankaracharya visited Rajahmundry he was given a grand welcome and was taken round the town in a big procession. In this resurgence of enthusiasm, a few among the student supporters of Veeresalingam were beaten up by the disciples of Sankaracharya to which students replied with a very severe beating of the disciples of Sankaracharya. This created a tremendous commotion in the town and Sankaracharya fearing that he would be assaulted left the place in the dead of night cursing the inhabitants of Rajahmundry that he would never visit them again.¹⁴³

Veeresalingam's name and work now reached Madras. R. Raghunatha Rao and Palle Chentsal Rao invited him to Madras to deliver lectures and participate in a cosmopolitan dinner. Veeresalingam delivered a lecture on the 'Remarriage of Widows' in the Anderson Hall of the Christian College. Later, he developed the lecture into a small pamphlet entitled "Streepunarvivaha Sastrasangrahamu".¹⁴⁴ In this lecture he completely relied upon

142. Letter written on 12 December, 1881 from Madras. Ibid., p. 194.

143. V. Suryanarayana Rao, op. cit., p. 167. Also see K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... op. cit., Part I, p. 215-18.

144. See K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, op. cit., Vol. VII, pp. 683-751.

Srutis, Smritis and Puranas from which he profusely quoted in support of widow marriages. According to Parasara Smriti, "If the husband dies or renounces the world or does not return from abroad within the prescribed time or is impotent or becomes loose in matters of sex, the wife is eligible to marry again".¹⁴⁵ Again he quoted Smritis (e.g. Parasara Smriti) to disapprove of the shaving of the head of a widow.¹⁴⁶ In the cosmopolitan dinner only six people participated among whom was Mannava Butchiah Pantulu, a founder of the South Indian Brahma Samaj.¹⁴⁷ On hearing the news of widow marriages being performed at Rajahmundry, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar from Calcutta congratulated Veeresalingam and wished him success in his "exertions on behalf of the unhappy sufferers."¹⁴⁸

The widow marriage association though started earlier, never met before 1884. It first met on 22nd June, 1884 and passed certain resolutions in favour of widow marriages. The Association lasted till 1891 as it met for the last time on 25th January, 1891. It existed hardly for 7 years

145. Ibid., p. 716.

146. Ibid., pp. 737-38.

147. R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p. 26. Also see Vignanasarvaswamu, Vol. III, op. cit., p. 574.

148. Extract from the letter written by Iswarachandra Vidyasagar to Veeresalingam, dated 24th October, 1882. Cited in K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 249.

during which only three marriages were performed. Prior to the year 1884 (from the year 1881 when the first marriage was celebrated) ten marriages were performed of which two were Vysya marriages. Pyda Ramakrishnaiah who rendered liberal help to the cause of widow marriages died in 1886. Hence, after 1891, when the Association became defunct, Veeresalingam had to carry on the work on his own spending his own money. By 1905 the total number of marriages performed were 63 of which 57 were among Brahmins (of different sub-castes), 3 among Vysyas, one among Viswabrahmins,¹⁴⁹ one of adivelama¹⁵⁰ caste and one of Vellala¹⁵¹ caste.¹⁵²

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149. The Viswabrahmins are called Kamsalas also. The name Viswabrahmin is of recent origin. They are divided into four occupational groups, Kamsali (Goldsmith) Kamchhari (Blacksmith) Vadrangi (Carpenter) and Kasi (stone masons). They claim Brahminhood for themselves very insistently and contested with the Brahmins on this question both in courts of law and out-side. But in actual practice they occupy almost the same position in the ritualistic hierarchy as other non-Brahmin communities even though they rigidly keep themselves separate from them all. See under 'Kamsala', Edgard Thurston, Vol. III, op. cit., pp. 141-49.
150. The Adivelamas claim to be the earliest of the Velama community in the Telugu country. There are many legends which describe their settlement in the coastal part of the country after their ships were blown off by storm winds. They are also called Arava Karanams in parts of Nellore district and their chief concentrations are in Machilipatnam, Rajahmundry and Kakinada. They claim Kshatriyahood but not different from the Sudras in the social hierarchy. See under 'Velamas' Edgar Thurston, Vol. VII, op. cit., pp. 336-41.
151. The Vellalas are the great agricultural community in the Tamil country and their social status is that of the Sudras. Ibid., See under 'Vellalas', pp. 361-89.
152. Nalam Krishna Rao, Vitamtuvivaha Charitra (upto 1904) (Rajahmundry 1950), p.16. Nalam Krishna Rao was a contemporary and Co-worker of Veeresalingam at Rajahmundry.

These include the marriages that took place at places like Guntur, Bellary and Madras. In Guntur the first widow marriage took place in 1902. Veeresalingam with his wife was invited to attend it by the district munsiff Viswanatha Sastry, at whose residence the marriage took place. This created a big furore in the town. The cook of Viswanatha sastry deserted them. His wife was opposed to the marriage. Yet the marriage was performed in which Unnava Lakshminarayana, an young man imbued with reform ideas, took part.¹⁵³ Unnava Lakshminarayana performed many widow marriages at Guntur later, and was called "Second Veeresalingam of Guntur."¹⁵⁴ Commenting upon the widow marriage at Guntur the 'Hindu' published a letter under the caption 'Social Reform in Guntur'. It stated, "Two or three months back a remarriage of a young woman took place for the first time at Guntur under the Superintendence of Rao Bahadur K.V. Pantulu (Kandukuri Veeresalingam) and his wife....., this was too much for the orthodox section which seemed to be strong at Guntur. All those who received the innocent pansupari (betel or Tambool) and the few students who dined were also put out of caste. The Telugu Water-brahmin of the District munsiff's house made himself scarce. Several performed 'prayaschit'

153. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., pp. 127-28.

154. The Hindu, June 7, 1910.

or penance and returned to their respective positions in society. Three gentlemen and three students are still holding on."¹⁵⁵ A five day conference was organised at Guntur to discuss the question in dispute. Several well known reformers attended it including Ch. Lakshminarasimham, the Telugu poet and a follower of Veeresalingam. The Hindu correspondence continued stating, "The conference has done one good. It made Guntur people think of social reform.... A few educated men of Guntur seem to lead the opposition to social reforms. This is deplorable. How an English educated man can ever find himself in opposition to the social reform programmes and use the old world instrument of excommunication against the reformers is inconceivable."¹⁵⁶

The above passage is quoted to give an idea of the spread of Veeresalingam's widow marriage movement in Andhra and how discussions were taking place and how an awareness was created among people towards social reform. Reformers like Unnava were influenced by Veeresalingam and were undertaking reform activities. Tanguturi Prakasam, a student at Rajahmundry, (who became a leading political figure during the freedom struggle and was the first Chief Minister of Andhra Province in 1953), when Veeresalingam was at the height of his glory, wrote in his autobiography that he decided to perform the marriage of his widow sister under the influence of

155. Ibid, January 15, 1903.

156. Ibid.

Veerasingam's reform movement. However, it could not take place as she died.¹⁵⁷

Veerasingam was striving single handed in his efforts having neither material nor human help. Appeals were issued by the editors of contemporary native press for help.¹⁵⁸ Doubts were also being expressed by them as to whether or not the movement of widow marriage would continue after Veerasingam's death as he was aging. "When educated Bengal thus leaves the tender sapling of the widow marriages movement to wither away and die what guarantee is there that Madras will have heart enough to take up the tale after the already over-worked Rao Bahadur K. Veerasingam Pantulu Garu of Rajahmundry leaves us for ever (which God forbid for a long time to come) ... shall we.... request the admirers of Veerasingam and the friends of the cause he represents to keep alive, aye, improve the cause by taking prompt and practical measures."¹⁵⁹

Two reasons prompted Veerasingam to leave for Madras in 1897. Firstly, he wanted to get his writings printed there and for this he purchased a press (Chintamani Press). The second, and probably more important, reason was that Madras being a cosmopolitan city with

157. T. Prakasam, Na Jeevita Yatra, (My life's pilgrimage) Madras, 1972 p. 52. It was first published in 1946 at Rajahmundry.

158. Hindujanasamskarini, March, 1889. Also see Andhraprakasika, June 1893. Report on Native News Papers, op. cit., 1893.

159. Satvasamvardhani, July, 1897.

large heterogenous population with their respective cultures would afford greater opportunities for his reform activities than Rajahmundry which was a comparatively small and conservative place.¹⁶⁰ Having got his expectations belied to a large extent, Veeresalingam returned to Rajahmundry in 1905 rather frustrated. No doubt he performed a few widow marriages when he was in Madras. Also he was made the President of both Madras Social Reform Association and the South Indian Brahma Samaj. He was respected and considered as a distinguished person by students. Yet, all these signs of recognition and achievement could not satisfy his restless soul. In 1898 the Indian Social Conference met at Madras. Veeresalingam delivered the presidential address.¹⁶¹ Mahadev Govind Ranade conferred the title 'Vidyasagar of South India' on Veeresalingam.¹⁶² While he was in Madras Veeresalingam also visited Bangalore and delivered lectures on widow marriages and theism. However, Veeresalingam felt that he was an alien in Madras and could not get much cooperation from people who according to him were mere talkers and no doers. Moreover, he could not meet friends often as the city was a place of distances. Hence he left for Rajahmundry in 1905.

160. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p.90.

161. See for the text in C.Y. Chintamani, op. cit., pp.202-6

162. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p.123.

One unique thing that Veeresalingam did at Madras was the establishment of Widows' Home. More than widow marriages it was a remarkable service that Veeresalingam did for widows by not only affording them shelter but by giving them purposeful and useful education such as crafts and needlework. He spent 4 thousand rupees and built a widos' hom there. At the time of his departure, he handed it over to the Hindu Reform Association at Madras and accepted only 3 thousand rupees for the building. It has been said that Veeresalingam's work in Madras was achieved against greater odds than those faced by the similar establishment of widows' homes in Poona by Prof. D.K. Karve.¹⁶³ Veeresalingam, who had carried out single handed work for 16 years at Rajahmundry in performing widow marriages, did the same in setting up the widows' Home at Madras.

Before he left Madras (in 1904) Veeresalingam started making arrangements for the establishment of a widows' home at Rajahmundry. Widows above 18 years of age were to be admitted straight and others (below 18 years) should have the permission of parents to be admitted into the Home. Besides general education some vocational training would be given.¹⁶⁴ The Home was named 'Sree Victoria Widows' Home' and opened on 16th January, 1905.

163. S. Natarajan, op.cit., p.99.

164. Telugu Zenana, September, 1904.

It was meant for poor widows who were to be fed and taught freely.¹⁶⁵ In the newly purchased site a building for the widows Home was built with the liberal help of M. Achyutaramiah (former student of Veeresalingam) who contributed 5 thousand rupees. The Rajah of Pithapur gave 12 hundred rupees towards this. Of those who were joining as widows there were some 'fallen' women. Veeresalingam, to save such women, opened a Rescue home and even performed a marriage (in Vysya Community) for an inmate of the Rescue home.¹⁶⁶ Veeresalingam found it very difficult to run the Home as it contained women with diverse temparements. Strict rules were framed not only to discipline the inmates but to mould their characters also. He found it rather difficult to run the Home which cost him 150 rupees per month and hence visited Bombay for collections in 1909 when he was sixty years of age. Nevertheless what worried him most was the lack of human help. In a letter from Madras to R. Venkatasivudu he stated that "more than monetary help I am much concerned about the lack of human help. I am worried the future of widows' Home!"¹⁶⁷ Unnava Lakshminarayana took the lead in starting a widows' Home at Guntur in 1903 and conducted it efficiently for many years. It was

165. Ibid, January, 1905.

166. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., PartII, op.cit., p. 359.

167. A. Ramapati Rao, op.cit., p. 100.

called "Sarada Niketan", of which, the veteran freedom fighter from Andhra, Konda Venkatappaiah was the founder President. The Zamindar of Munagala, who gave liberal monetary help to the Home, succeeded him as President.¹⁶⁸

The widow marriage movement, by and large, was not much of a success. It started with a big thrust and high hopes. However it could not infect the imagination of people and its impact was nearly gone in less than two decades. The reasons are many. Firstly, it was a problem that concerned only a section of the upper castes of society and thus its scope was limited. Secondly, the marriages that took place were done in haste. The main aim of the organisers was to perform as many marriages as possible not having consideration for the mutual liking and temperamental suitability of the couples. Veeresalingam himself admitted this fact and stated that certain major disparities between the wife and husband made their marital life ruinous.¹⁶⁹ Thirdly, the organisers of this movement cared more for the performance of the new marriages than to take care of the married couples. This was one of the strong points of criticism against Veeresalingam. It was alleged by his critics

168. Konda Venkatappaiah, Sweeyacharitra, (Hyderabad, 1966), p. 310.

169. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part I, op. cit., p.244. Similar criticism was made by R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p. 142.

that he delayed the payments (allowances) to them. However, Veeresalingam refuted this criticism in his lecture on the 'History of Present and future conditions of widow marriage' in which he stated that he was sometimes running into debts to pay them in time.¹⁷⁰ Fourthly, it appeared that these married couples got into the movement not with any idealism and reformist zeal but for money and greater social recognition. When all this did not take place to equal their expectations, they got disillusioned with Veeresalingam and developed jealousies and ill feelings. So when there arose personal differences between Veeresalingam and Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, over the execution of the death will of late Pyda Ramakrishnaiah who set apart 10 thousand rupees to be spent for the cause of widow marriages, they took sides and got themselves divided into two fighting groups. Lastly the community of people covered by widow marriages was small and as such they were in a fix about the future of their community. They relied literally for everything upon Veeresalingam and to some extent on Atmuri Lakshminarasimham. The former became a Brahmo in 1906, after much hesitation as he was much concerned about these families, and Atmuri Lakshminarasimham ceased taking any interest in the problem.

170. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VII, op. cit., p. 769.

Veerasingam did create a trust, giving away all his properties to it, called Hitakarini Samaj to continue the reform activities. But it should be noted that the Samaj was just established (in 1908) and was in its infant stage. Moreover looking after the families covered by widow marriages was one among its many objectives.¹⁷¹

As the scope and extent of the movement was limited one may not expect miracles to flow from this reform. The nature of the cause is such that a radical change or permanent utility was not anticipated from it. Similar movements in Bengal and Maharashtra had the same fate. However, the movement created an awareness among people that such evils should be eradicated and that they could become more rational in their thinking and independent in action. As an experiment of a successful struggle against the orthodoxy in society it was a success. The reformers like Veeresalingam with their middle class and Brahminical background could not go beyond this and demand for women the right for a share in the ancestral property even though some contemporary papers were writing that 'a portion of the husbands estate' should be given to the wife in case he married again or leaves her.¹⁷²

171. See for the Appendices A and B of K. Veeresalingam, 'Sweeyacharithramu' op. cit. for the Memorandum and trust deed of the Hitakarini Samaj.

172. Sasilekha, June, 1895, Report on Native News Papers, op. cit., 1895.

Ideas of Religious Reform

Veeresalingam was a man of strong and deep religious ideas. He took interest in religious reform too as it was necessary for any serious reform of society. One of the aims of his journal 'Vivekavardhani' was "to teach pure religious doctrines."¹⁷³ As a student he came under the influence of a Brahmo, Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, who was his teacher at Rajahmundry. Veeresalingam came across a book of lectures by Keshub Chandra Sen and was influenced by its contents. It happened in 1868 when Veeresalingam was 20 years of age.¹⁷⁴ Until then he was regularly visiting temples. Now there was a marked change in his views. From then on he and a few others of his mental make-up used to meet once in a week at his residence to discuss matters of religion.¹⁷⁵ By 1874 Veeresalingam's ideas on religion, as in matters of social reform, took a definite shape and he began writing in his journal 'Vivekavardhani' (started in 1874) that right behaviour was more essential to religion than external observations. He gave up idolatry and began worshipping one God, in support of which he wrote verses in the first three issues of Vivekavardhani.¹⁷⁶ He stated,

173. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeva....., Part I, op. cit., p.81.

174. Ibid., p. 60.

175. Ibid.

176. For verses see Ibid., pp. 81-83.

"He,

who is not visible to the eye and other external organs,
Who assumes the shape of the soul,
who is the prime mover of creation, animate and inanimate,
who punishes the bad and protects the good,

He,

who is omnipresent, looks on the good and the evil of
men everywhere and

who is the eternal, the birthless and the pure

. . . .

He,

at whose will all the worlds are created,

maintained, destroyed,

at whose behest clusters of stars hang in
heavens day after day,

whose attributes in all their true extent are

beyond the comprehension of any one whosoever,

whose command sets limits to the limitless seas and

who feeds the birds of the sky, the beasts of the
earth and the fishes of the waters --

may He, the Lord Sovereign, shower his grace upon us"¹⁷⁷

Also he wrote on topics like 'Truth', 'Non-violence',
'Theism', 'Wisdom'. The influence of Keshub's ideas on
Veerasingam could be seen in his lectures. He expressed

177. Ibid.

no faith in the avatars' (incarnations) of God. Polytheism, idolatry, and Varnasrama dharma were discountenanced by him. He declared that "Vedas, Bible and Koran are not true. The miracles therein are unbelievable."¹⁷⁸ Commenting on the same theme he denounced idolatry which reached such absurd limits as to the worship of animals, birds, trees, snakes, stones and other inanimate objects.¹⁷⁹ He condemned the degeneration that had set in in Hinduism with its meaningless rituals and dressing and decorating God and taking idols in procession in streets. He was dead set against caste and sub-caste divisions and the artificial gulf between them.¹⁸⁰ Writing about sub-castes he stated, "these sub-divisions are not sanctioned by Shastras. When it is not so why should our educated people hesitate to leap over these barriers and establish social relations between these innumerable divisions. Their lack of courage to do such good things as these make them the willing slaves of superstitions".¹⁸¹ He believed in the growth and development of individuality which according to him would lead to the progress of total society. The main defect in this type of thinking was that he ignored the fact that society was not merely a

178. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VII, op. cit., p.31.

179. Ibid., p. 60.

180. For example see, K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., pp. 144-148.

181. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 146.

collection of individual units, and that individual growth would not automatically bring about the society's progress; and on the other hand orderly and balanced growth alone would help society. Veeresalingam, probably in his crusading zeal for reform and uncompromising struggle against age old customs, deplored totally India's past where people were tyrannised by the priestly classes.

With these ideas in the background Veeresalingam started the Prarthana Samaj (prayer union) in 1878 with a few like-minded souls in Rajahmundry to worship one God and practise pure theism. It was first set up in Veeresalingam's house and then it was shifted to Vizianagaram Rajah's Girls School and finally was housed in a separate building of its own.¹⁸² There was nothing new in its inception. Nevertheless, its special feature was the impact it created upon the minds of students. In 1881 Pandit Sivanatha Sastry visited Madras and on his way back to Calcutta stopped at Rajahmundry. He delivered a few lectures which inspired the educated men and youth to undertake good and useful humanitarian work. Students now had their own Prarthana Samajas to practise Monotheistic worship. The Prarthana Samaj brought about a change of character and behaviour among many men. Night schools were conducted (as in Maharashtra

182. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part I, op. cit., p.138.

under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj) for the poor and illiterate.¹⁸³ The impact of the activities of 'Prarthana Samaj' was such that students in their new born enthusiasm to break the hold of outdated customs, took out their sacred threads and hung them on the branches of trees outside the College to provoke and ridicule the traditionalists.¹⁸⁴ This resembled the activities of Derozians of the Bengal renaissance. Sivanatha Sastry visited Rajahmundry again in 1890 and further inspired the youth with his lectures. During this visit he stayed as the guest of Veeresalingam. The progress and influence of the Prarthana Samaj, though not visibly great and deep, could not be underestimated. A separate Samaj for women was established by Veeresalingam in Rajahmundry. Similar Samajas (the Theistic Centres) were established in a number of places like Kakinada, Masulipatam, Guntur, Parlakimidi, Peddapuram.¹⁸⁵ A general atmosphere of rationalism and aversion to idolatry was prevalent. By their activities the Prarthana Samajas paved the way and prepared the minds of people for social reform. The Prarthana Samaj was different from Brahmoism as the former did not insist upon its members to give up their caste. Its chief features were in the form of worship which was congregational,

183. Ibid., p. 168.

184. V. Suryanarayana Rao, op. cit., p. 167. Also see R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p. 22.

185. Chintamani, March-April, 1893.

with songs followed by sermons and prayers. This was different from Hinduism and so it caught the imagination of the people. Also the Samaj did not accept the Vedas as Divine Revelation and questioned the age-long traditions. All this appeared to the orthodox sections as irreligious and Veeresalingam was even dubbed as an atheist.¹⁸⁶ The work of Prarthana Samaj was in a way more effective than the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal. The Brahmos remained as an elite and their teachings did not reach the lower strata of society.

The Prarthana Samaj had its influence over a "large section of the society and removed or lessened the power of the social customs."¹⁸⁷ It could not be compared with the Brahmo Samaj which was a socio-religious movement. The Prarthana Samaj was more a protest against idolatry and expounded the worship of the God who is one without a second. It brought many youngmen together, especially students. They could not work unitedly and achieve much and gave up its ideals when they entered real life after their studies. Like the widow marriage movement (a social reform), the Prarthana Samaj (a religious reform) failed to register satisfactory progress as both of them gradually declined when opposition to them

186. R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p. 41.

187. J. Gurunatham, op. cit., p. 142.

waned. They would live and thrive only in adverse circumstances.

Veeresalingam's efforts to establish a theistic high School bore fruit in 1908. It required a well-located and convenient premises and for this the Rajah of Pithapur donated 70 thousand rupees.¹⁸⁸ The School buildings were opened by Herambachandra Maitra, the principal of City College of Calcutta and the School was named after Veeresalingam according to the wishes of Rajah of Pithapur. The School had certain special features. Firstly it was co-educational, perhaps first of its kind in Andhra. This example was later adopted by the College authorities at Kakinada.¹⁸⁹ The girl students were exempted from the payment of fees. Secondly, the School admitted Harijan boys who were also exempted from the School fees. This measure created stir in society as even the missionary schools did not admit Harijans in those days.¹⁹⁰ The School became popular and consequently the local missionary high School had to be demoted as a middle School. The School curriculum included among other subjects, music, painting and sewing, and crafts useful for women in their homes.

188. Sriram Virabrahmakavi, op. cit., Also mentioned in K. Veeresalingam's Sweeyacharithramu, Part II, p. 352.

189. R. Venkataratnam, op. cit., p. 20. Also see for example K. Suryanarayana, op. cit., p. 29.

190. Sweeya...., Part II, op. cit., p. 352.

Veerasingam clearly showed a preference to Brahmoism from his student days. As mentioned earlier he was the president of South Indian Brahmo Samaj. Yet he did not become a Brahmo until 1906 as he thought that it would come in the way of his reform activities.¹⁹¹ The Brahmo Samaj was started in South India in 1871 by one youngman Sreedharulu Naidu who went to Bengal and returned after being influenced by leaders of Brahmo Samaj there.¹⁹² Earlier a Veda Samaj was established by two advocates of Madras, Rajagopalacharyulu and Subbarayalu Chetty who were influenced by the lectures of Keshub Chandra Sen at Madras in 1864.¹⁹³ Again after the visit of Sivanatha Sastry to Madras in 1881, the Brahmo Samaj was revived and organised well under the leadership of Mannava Butchiah Pantulu and R. Venkataratnam Naidu. These two, along with Desiraju Pedabapiah in whom the Brahmo flame burnt the brightest, helped Veeresalingam in his reform activities. Pedabapiah who read extensively in Western liberal thought and the Brahmo scriptures and who visited Calcutta twice and came into contact with the reformers there was easily the greatest of Brahmos in Andhra. He gave up the sacred

191. Ibid., p. 278.

192. Vignanasarvaswami, op. cit. Vol. III. p. 574. Pandit Shivanatha Sastry mentioned the same fact in his History of the Brahmo Samaj (Second edition) Vol. I, Calcutta, 1919, p. 173.

193. Ibid. Also see T. Venkatasubbarao, op. cit., p. 106, in which verses are cited from Brahma Prakasika, a Brahmo journal published from Madras in 1880's



thread and became a Brahma in 1905 and thus set an example to Veeresalingam to follow suit after some time. Easily this young man was leader to Veeresalingam in this regard. Veeresalingam's decision to turn into a Brahma, practising the ideas of pure theism was strengthened when Pedabapaiah came to Rajahmundry and joined Veeresalingam with a view to help him in his activities.¹⁹⁴ When Pedabapaiah threw away his sacred thread he performed the 'Sradha' of his mother according to Navvidhan method of Brahmaism and the ceremony was conducted by Veeresalingam.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, a cosmopolitan dinner was arranged at Pedabapaiah's residence which Veeresalingam attended. It was remarked that this set the Godavari river on fire.¹⁹⁶ Its consequences were such that Pedabapaiah was totally boycotted by society, had no house to live in and hence stayed with Veeresalingam for some time, and when he died prematurely in 1908 at the young age of 30 at Madras, he had nobody to nurse him or help him. Veeresalingam also performed his father's 'Sradha' according to Brahma method and arranged a cosmopolitan dinner on that occasion too.¹⁹⁷ This he followed up by relinquishing the

194. D. Pedabapaiah, op. cit., pp. 135-37.

195. From the diary of Desiraju Pedabapaiah dated 21.8.1905 cited in D. Pedabapaiah, op. cit., pp. 100-01

196. Ibid., p. 108.

197: The dinner was arranged on 15.2.1906. See K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p. 289.

sacred thread also and as a result two of the Brahmin inmates of the widows home left it.¹⁹⁸ As expected, this act of Veeresalingam created much controversy and the orthodox section took advantage of it by denouncing his reform activity. They started a fortnightly 'Hindudesabhivardhani' and abused Veeresalingam alleging that he deceived Hindu widows who joined his Home with high hopes and ruined their future.¹⁹⁹ Even his well wishers and former students were unhappy about this, for they thought that by this step the remarried people were left hopeless and leaderless and consequently went back to the Hindu fold where they could not enjoy the same status as before.²⁰⁰

Political Ideas

Born in the pre-1857 period Veeresalingam grew to manhood in the second half of the 19th century. He was a typical representative of the early Indian nationalism. It is not correct to say, as some people are inclined to think, that Veeresalingam was socially a progressive but politically a reactionary or pro-British. At best he can be classified as a moderate among Indian nationalists without their strong and trenchant criticism of the British

198. Ibid., p. 290.

199. Ibid., pp. 300-01.

200. V. Suryanarayana Rao, op. cit., p. 168.

rule. Like Ranade and other great social reformers of his age, he was a patriot and desired political freedom. No doubt, he glorified the benefits of the British rule. He strongly believed that the British rule was a God-given boon to India. "The fact that we are meeting and fearlessly discussing political issues to-day is due to the benevolence of God-given British rule over us in the interests of our country".²⁰¹ He extolled the numerous benefactions conferred by the British administration on the backward Indian society. He was convinced that the elements of civilisation introduced by the British Government like the English education, well-knit administration, civil and criminal courts, modern means of communications and other scientific advantages would place the British rule as a great benefactor in historical perspective.²⁰² The contribution of the British rule, though unconscious, to the forces that moulded Indian nationalism need not be ignored. Lala Lajpat Rai, considered a fire brand in his days, said, referring to the foundation of the Indian National Congress: "...The methods of the English Government in

201. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 9. Veeresalingam made this statement during the lecture he delivered on 'The National Congress and its aims'.

202. Ibid., pp. 10-13.

India, their educational system, their press, their laws, their courts, their railways, their telegraphs, their post-offices, their steamers had as much to do with it as the Indians' love of country...."203

However, Veeresalingam hastened to add that this would not mean the British rule was perfect and faultless. He compared the relationship between the British Government and Indian people to one that exists between mother and child. The child according to him (India), was perfectly justified in asking for freedom and the mother (England) would grant all that the child deserves.204 He wanted people to rely upon the British to introduce constitutional reforms to ensure peace, justice and good government. However, the freedom he wanted was not complete political freedom to the nation. He feared that if the British were to leave India, it would result in lawlessness and disorder. He stated, "Because of the British rule there are no civil wars and there is peace and order in our country. If the British were to entrust the whole political power and responsibility of the management of state affairs to Indians even for one year, India would soon (within months) be Balkanized into many warring factions resulting in the infighting between dif-

203. Lala Lajpat Rai, Young India (New Delhi, 1968), p. 108. (First published in 1916).

204. K. Veeresalingam, 'National Congress and Its Aims', Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 16.

ferent religions, castes and nationalities. The illiterate majority would brand the educated minority as atheists and evil-doers and suppress them and revive the dying social evils and traditions. All this ultimately would result in anarchy. Hence in order to avert this catastrophe befalling our nation, let us pray God to ensure the British rule over us for ever".²⁰⁵ Hence the freedom that he wanted was of limited character within the general framework of the British empire. Even about this, in the early stages, he did not have clear-cut ideas for he did not specify as to the type of relationship that should subsist between England and India. He pleaded for the representation of Indians in the local government institutions and also in the Viceroy's council. He put the blame upon the local government officials -- revenue, police and judicial -- for all the ills of the people and pleaded for the reform of these officials which would secure clean administrations. He saw no use in criticising the laws of the Government when their implementation was defective and corrupt at the local level.²⁰⁶ From this it appears that he had no proper grasp of the nature of the British colonial rule and the foundations on which it was laid. He could not

205. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

206. K. Veeresalingam, Swæya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 80.

appreciate the fact that, after all, the officials were a part of the larger system of State machinery.

In its earliest phase Indian nationalism reflected the hopes and aspirations of the upper strata of society - the rising industrialists, progressive land owners and well-to-do intelligentsia. The founders of the Indian National Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta, Romesh Chandar Dutt and others belonged to this class. Veeresalingam too was a representative of this class. These leaders swore loyalty to the British crown. They extolled the blessings of British rule. They desired the establishment of Parliamentary system in India. They expected the British to give a helping hand in this respect.

As a typical representative of the rising Indian bourgeoisie, Veeresalingam evinced great enthusiasm for Swadeshi as early as 1880. He advocated the manufacture and use of Indian products. Five years before the birth of the Indian National Congress he wrote: "Almost all the clothes worn by the rich as well as the poor are manufactured in England. As they are produced with machines, they are available at cheap prices. Hence everyone has given up buying Swadeshi cloth; they are all buying clothes manufactured in Europe. Crores of rupees that are spent every year in the purchase of foreign cloth are thus

flowing out of our country into foreign lands. The result is, our country is becoming poorer and poorer. If on the other hand, textile mills are set up in our country, all that money will remain here. The time has come when the educated people should shed their stupid attraction for services and realise the need for entering other trades."²⁰⁷ He realised, though vaguely that, there was 'drain' of resources from out of India and he desired the profits to accrue to the Indian entrepreneurs.

Veerasingam was one of the delegates elected to attend the third session of the Indian National Congress held at Madras in 1887. However, he attended the session not as a delegate since he was advised not to do so, as he was a teacher in the Government service. In the speech delivered at Rajahmundry on the Congress (referred above) he spoke of the rights of ^{The} people and how the Congress aimed at striving for those rights. The founders of the Congress fondly hoped that the Britishers would help in securing these rights. Veerasingam too nurtured such hopes. He stated, "At a time when we were steeped in ignorance, when we did not know our rights, they taught us how to demand them; they helped us attain maturity. How can such benevolent and

207. Vivekavardhani, April, 1880.

kind-hearted people fail to bestow on us those rights when we become qualified for them."²⁰⁸

It is with such an understanding that the Congress functioned during the first two decades. During this period no basic demand for self-government, leave aside independence, was advanced by the Congress. The only demand was for a greater degree of Indian representation within the British system of government. Increase in the number of elected representatives in the Viceroy's and Governor's Legislative Councils, competitive examinations for the I.C.S., to be held simultaneously in India also, abolition of income tax on all those earning less than Rs.1000/-, reimposition of the import duty on foreign textiles, establishment of institutions for technical education, abolition of judicial powers given to district collectors, were some of the main demands of the Congress in those days.

Veerasingam also voiced the same demands in his speech on the Congress, and in his journal Vivekavardhani.²⁰⁹

208. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

209. It is contended "that the income tax does the country a great deal of harm. A person with an income of Rs.500/- or £35 a year must pay this tax in India, while people with an income below £150 are in England exempt from it." Report on Native News Papers op. cit., June, 1890.

Judging from the present day standards, the demands of the early nationalist movement may appear too submissive. It should not, however, be assumed from the tone of these declarations that the early Congress leaders were reactionary. On the contrary, they represented at that time, the most progressive force in Indian society. So long as the peasantry did not become an organised force, so long as the working class remained a nascent force, the rising industrialist class was the most progressive force in India. They and their ideological spokesmen (the educated middle-class) strove hard for social reforms, for enlightenment, education, industrialisation and technical progress. The educated intelligentsia of those days derived inspiration from the Congress resolutions. And Veeresalingam was no exception.

Veeresalingam belonged to that section of the reformers who believed that the social reform should take place along with political reform, if not precede it. In this he was one with the Maharashtrian reformers, Ranade, Bhandarkar, Malabari and others. He held the view that when social evils like ignorance, superstition, caste and sub-caste systems were prevalent, there was no use in securing political freedom. ²¹⁰

210. K. Veeresalingam, Coll. Works, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 5.

He did not tolerate those nationalists who, according to him, caring little for the social evils that were eating into the vitals of Telugu society, confined their activities to political agitation. He subjected them to biting criticism. He wrote, "No doubt it is very essential to strive for political rights. But, we are of the opinion that, keeping aloof from crucial problems like reform of the caste-system, while being active in striving for political rights, is not conducive to our country's welfare Those who are heroes in wordy wars about political rights are cowards on questions of social reform like caste-system. This is not without reason. In the first place, it is easy to criticise from a distance the acts of the Governor-General or the Secretary of State or the Governor In the second, those who expose the evils among the people, become objects of their anger and abuse, and bear several hardships. One generally chooses a path without hardships and which earns him reputation."²¹¹ Veeresalingam, in saying so, failed to understand that in India with its variety and multitude of problems, only political issues would move the general mass of Indian people towards progress.

211. Vivekavardhani, September, 1885.

Perhaps the local problems also had a bearing on the mind of Veeresalingam and influenced his thought. It should be noted that Nyapati Subbarao Pantulu who was a close associate of Veeresalingam in his reform activities broke away from him and established a Hindu Samaj and collaborated with the activities of theosophical society of Anne Besant who visited Rajahmundry to deliver lectures on 'Theosophy' at the invitation of the Samaj.²¹² Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu who later became the General Secretary of the A.I.C.C., broke away from Veeresalingam because his brother, under the influence of Veeresalingam, married a widow. This was one of the widow marriages, performed by Veeresalingam, to which Subba Rao Pantulu did not give his approval.²¹³

By the time Veeresalingam returned to Rajahmundry from Madras (1905) there was a change of atmosphere at Rajahmundry. It was not the same old place where he enjoyed maximum support for his activities from students, and even among the elders the earlier zeal for reform

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212. Satyasamvardhani, November-December, 1893. Col. Olcott accompanied her to Rajahmundry on 15.12.1893. The incident connected with her visit was the arrangement of a nautch programme by the local theosophists, which Besant and Olcott did not oppose.
213. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya, Part II, op. cit., pp. 114-16.

was absent. Due to the influence wielded by the Hindu Samaj (mentioned above) among the educated, apathy towards social reform had increased. Stopping the subscription for the 'Indian social Reformer' to the reading room in the town hall was cited by Veeresalingam as an indication of the changed mood.²¹⁴ By 1905 conditions in India changed radically. The growing sweep of the nationalist movement reflected a more militant mood. The idea, that petitioning to the Government for petty reforms had got played out, slowly gained ground. Tilak's slogan "Swaraj is my birth right" became the clarion call to the countrymen. Lord Curzon's decision to partition Bengal added fuel to the fire. The Swadeshi movement, started in Bengal under the aegis of the Congress, spread to the Andhra Districts. Bepin Chandra Pal, the Bengali fire-eater, came to Andhra and Addressed mammoth meetings in towns like Rajahmundry and Kakinada. Though militant in its nature, this movement had a revivalist colour about it which was characterised by Jawaharlal Nehru as, "Socially speaking, the revival of Indian nationalism in 1907 was definitely reactionary."²¹⁵

This trend in the nationalist movement took Veeres-

214. Ibid., p. 273.

215. Jawaharlal Nehru, An Autobiography (New Delhi, 1962), p. 24. (First published in 1936).

lingam, who was already a loyalist among moderates, further away from the main stream of the nationalist movement. Instead of criticising this trend and still be associated with nationalists, he moved away from them failing to keep himself abreast of the times. Referring to the reactions of the speech of Bepin Chandra Pal on the youth, which roused the passions of youngmen against the British government, he wrote in his autobiography: "they (youngmen) considered me to be anti-patriotic; they did not consider me as fit for moving with patriots like themselves. They treated me as an outcaste, and stopped moving freely with me."²¹⁶ The speech of Pal created much stir in Rajahmundry. Students, wearing Swadeshi badges and holding flags in their hands, went round the town shouting 'Vande mataram'. For violating the orders of the local Government College principal, Mark Hunter, and participating in the procession and the public meeting of Bepin Chandra Pal, Gadicharla Harisarvottama Rao (the student leader), and several other students were expelled from the College.²¹⁷ Later on Harisarvottama Rao was tried for sedition (the first case of sedition in the Madras presidency during

216. K. Veeresalingam 'Sweeya....', Part II, op. cit., pp.308-09.

217. M. Venkatarangaiah, ed. Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh (Andhra) Vol. II, (1906-1920 A.D.) (Hyderabad, 1969), pp. 52-53.

the nationalist movement) and convicted. In November 1908 Veeresalingam went to give testimony at the sedition trial of G. Harisarvothama Rao, the principal leader of April 1907 student revolt in Rajahmundry. Some of Harisarvothama Rao's newspaper articles challenged the government which declared the pieces seditious. Veeresalingam's testimony helped to convict Harisarvothama Rao.²¹⁸

All this information did not find place in Veeresalingam's autobiography. Though generally considered as a well wisher of students, Veeresalingam did not condemn the action of the principal in expelling a number of students from the College. Moreover, his testimony in the sedition case could be considered as a serious issue but for the fact that many leaders of the Congress during this time differed with the militant trends in nationalism which ultimately resulted in a crisis at the Surat Congress in 1907, which ended in a pandemonium. Veeresalingam was averse to violent methods. Referring to a nationalist's speech at Bhimavaram, he wrote: "It was unbearable for me to hear him appealing to make 'Englishman's blood flow in streams."²¹⁹

This attitude was well reflected in his severe

218. Madras Educational Proceedings Nos. 385 and 386,
June 18, 1907.

219. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya... Part II, op. cit., p.322.

condemnation of Khudiram Bose, a Bengal revolutionary, as a traitor and murderer, and removed his photograph (put up during his stay at Madras) from the reading room of the town hall at Rajahmundry and profusely apologised to the district collector at whose instance he acted.²²⁰

The conferring of the title of Rao Bahadur on Veeresalingam and his acceptance of it in 1893²²¹ went to prove further that he was a loyalist among nationalists and may be classified perhaps as an anglophile.

Purifier of Public Life

The part played by Veeresalingam in purifying the public life in Andhra was notable. The Andhra society in the later half of the 19th century was still feudal in character. Hence the diehard feudal customs and age long traditions held their tight grip over the mental make-up of the people. The advent of western knowledge and the growth of society along the path of western civilisation brought in new vistas of opportunities in public life. With the spread of education and with the establishment of courts and government offices educated Indians were being recruited into these establish-

220. Ibid., p. 321.

221. Ibid., p. 71.

ments. It was transition period during which the 'old' set of values were giving place to the 'new'. The lure of position and pelf led to evils in public life such as nepotism, corruption and the like. The British officials occupying key posts at the higher level depended upon their subordinates who were mostly Indians, and these became corrupt. The local self governing agencies like municipalities, district boards and taluk boards were not functioning properly even within their limited jurisdiction of power and autonomy. The natives who became members of these bodies cared very little for the general welfare and did nothing to improve the tone of their functioning. Veeresalingam worked with a missionary zeal to combat these evils and improve the standard of public life in Andhra. This was in fact one of the aims in starting his journal Vivekavardhani.²²² While explaining the objects of the journal, he declared thus: "In those days it was a very common practice among officials to take bribes, and not to accept them was a dishonour. All were under the belief that bribery, far from being immoral, was the natural function of the official. Therefore, one object of the journal was to stop bribery among the officials. But bribery cannot cease without the moral standard being raised both among the people

222. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... Part I, op. cit., p. 79.

that offer bribes and the officials that accept them. Hence to infuse a moral tone among the people was a second object of the journal. But how can morality advance among the people, so long as practices like the entertaining of the nautch girls, are not looked upon as evil things? So to reform social customs was its third object."²²³ Vivekavardhani, though not literally the first journal in Telugu--prior to that about half-a dozen journals existed which were either news sheets or periodicals with a limited purpose--was yet the first journal devoted to a thorough-going social regeneration. Though modest in size it was not feeble. It was more or less a one-man show. Veeresalingam was its life and soul--the editor, the printer, the publisher, the proof-reader--all rolled in one. To start with, it was a monthly, in 1876 it became a fortnightly and later weekly. Its popularity was such that it acquired its own press in 1875. Thus he earned the high praise as the founder of journalism in Andhra and the 'master artist' who used journals as the effective

223. Ibid., pp. 80-81.

media of disseminating the ideas of reform and modernism.²²⁴

Outlining his task as editor and the hardships he faced, he wrote in one of the early issues of Vivekavardhani: "If bribery is condemned the local officials would be enraged; if concubinage is disapproved of, the rakes of the town would become angry; if dead customs are criticised and attacked the ignorant and the illiterate would feel unhappy; if the external forms of religion (rituals) are denounced, the priestly classes would be displeased - if the journal were to justify its existence, it has to defy such a wide range of people."²²⁵

224. K.R. Seshagiri Rao, ed. Studies in the History of Telugu Journalism (New Delhi, 1968), p. 150. Also see S. Natarajan, History of the Press in India (New Delhi, 1962), p. 193, where Veeresalingam Pantulu is described as "the father of Telugu journalism". And also see J. Natarajan, History of Indian Journalism Part II of the Report of the Press Commission, (New Delhi, 1955), p. 201, which stated that Veeresalingam made a beginning in Telugu Journalism through his Vivekavardhani. A similar view was expressed by 'Chronicler' in an article 'Telugu Journalism, Leaders and Landmarks' in V.R.G.K.M. Prasad et al, ed. Half way (Vijayawada, 1958).

225. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 81.

It did defy and carry on its tirade against these evils. An instance in this connection is worth mentioning. The district munsiff at Rajahmundry during this period (1878) was P. Sriramulu. He was notoriously corrupt. There was a novel method of quoting sections by vakils (advocates) in the court namely that if a vakil mentioned Section 200, it was meant an amount of two hundred rupees to be paid to the munsiff as bribe. The other vakil might mention section 300 which meant that he was prepared to pay an amount of three hundred rupees. Likewise, the bidding would continue until the munsiff declared in favour of one section. Moreover, this munsiff was not writing judgements. Instead he made the Government vakil C. Kamaraju, who happened to be his brother-in-law, write judgements.²²⁶ Veeresalingam resolved to put an end to this. He not only exposed them in the journal but also he caught hold of one original manuscript of the judgements prepared by the Government vakil. He wrote in his journal, "Our acting district munsiff is P. Sriramulu Garu..... In violation of the long standing orders and rules of practice, on the point, he takes up the trial of not less than two cases simultaneously. He directs his

226. The whole incident is narrated in detail in Ibid., pp. 112-15.

attention to one case before him and entrusts a goomastha with the conduct of the second case. He must observe that this sort of procedure is very objectionable and detrimental to public justice.... He never takes them up in the order or the serial number in which they stand in the register of suits. Another circumstance that we may note down is the way in which judgements are pronounced and dated. They say that long after the cases were heard, reserving judgements, he would one day deliver them putting a previous date he holds the court in the room or hall seating himself on a bed spread on the floor with pleaders, goomasthas, clients, etc., standing or sitting around him, thus presenting altogether a disorderly appearance we feel confident that this may not fail to rouse the attention of the higher authorities"²²⁷ The Madras Government ordered the High Court to enquire into this and Veeresalingam proved his charges with the copy of the judgement as proof. Anticipating serious consequences the government vakil, Kamaraju, committed suicide by taking poison and the district munsiff, Sriramulu, had a sudden death.²²⁸ Thus death saved both of them from punishment. Another evil which he successfully exposed and set right was the practice of granting sunnuds (pattas) to anybody and everybody to enrol

227. Vivekavardhani, April, 1877.

228. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., pp. 133-34.

as vakils through giving bribes to the district judicial authorities. Nearly eighty new vakils were controlled who had no even working knowledge of English. Veeresalingam exposed this boldly through the columns of his journal.²²⁹ The High Court authorities, knowing that the malpractices occurred, withdrew the sannuds issued to the new vakils.

Veeresalingam was a fearless journalist. But he was more of an evangelist than a journalist in his writings. He did not spare anybody--high or low--in his journal if he considered that what they were doing was not conducive to social well-being. On one occasion he criticised the Zamindar of Polavaram in strong terms for giving up his first wife and marrying a ten year old girl.²³⁰ The Zamindar of Polavaram was formerly sympathetic to the cause of social reform and widow marriages. He also had donated thousand rupees to widows' home started by Veeresalingam. However, he later on shifted his earlier stand and started opposing social reform activities. He became the chief patron of a journal Aryamatha Bodhini, devoted mainly to criticising people working for social reform and also to promote obscurantism in society. Veeresalingam was severely criticised for his denunciation

229. Ibid., P. 108.

230. Satyavadini March, 1905, cited in K. Veeresalingam, Sreeva..., Part II, op. cit., p. 202.

of the Zamindar in the columns of Aryamatha Bodhini the editor of which was a pronounced opponent of Veeresalingam both in matters of social reform and literature.²³¹

To show what impression his writings in the journal created on his contemporaries the following passage may be quoted: "I get very nervous whenever I read some of the articles of your paper when you attack big men. I fear in any one of the occasions you will get into trouble. You have many enemies I do not advise you to get into a row with Magistrate and criminal judges...."²³²

Thus Veeresalingam set the tone for healthy traditions in Telugu journalism. Several of his contemporaries started journals which drew the attention of the Government on several issues like the extreme poverty of the people, the burden of heavy taxation, wasteful expenditure on the army and civil administration, corruption among officials; neglect of the education of the masses and of medical facilities, growing

231. See J. Purushottam, Kasibhatta Brahmayya Sastry Jeevitha Charitramu (Kakinada, 1936). K. Brahmayya Sastry started Aryamata Bodhini in 1905. He was one of the arch opponents of Veeresalingam who severely criticised his activities in the columns of his journal.

232. An extract from the letter written by Pyda Ramakrishnaiah, a great patron of widow marriages, to Veeresalingam, dated 1.10.1881. See K. Veeresalingam, Sweeva..... Part I, op. cit., p. 212.

crime and lawlessness, the excise policy through which drinking of liquor was encouraged and the like.²³³

Commenting upon the growing poverty of India, in 1887, the Andhraprakasika wrote: "while the natives of the country state that the Indian ryots are getting daily poorer, the Anglo-Indian authorities affirm that the ryots are in a far better condition than previously.

The impoverished Indian ryots borrow money at a very high rate of interest as there is not much chance of their ever being able to repay it....The English Government have neither constructed irrigation works, nor have they properly repaired those constructed during the Mohammadan and Hindu administrations, so that these are gradually falling into decay. Moreover, Government officials visit annually every village on the pretext of jamabandy, but in reality live on the supplies provided by ryots."²³⁴

233. M.Venkatarangaiah, ed. Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh. (Andhra) Vol. I, (1800-1915), (Hyderabad, 1965) p.79.

234. Andhraprakasika, October 1887. Report on Native Newspapers. As early as 1881, Vivekavardhani had an article on "Poverty of India". It refuted the contention that poverty was due to increase in population and pointed out that the principal cause of it was the defective administration of the country, the annual remittance to England of a sum of twenty crores, and the decay of indigenous industries due to the importation of machine made goods from abroad. These ideas clearly reflect the thinking of the early nationalists. See for example Report by Native News Papers, 1881.

Some of the news papers published during this period were Andhraprakasika, Desabhimani, Krishnapatrika, Sasilekha, Survodayaprakasika, Rasikollasini, Savithri and Zenana. //

As a member of the municipal Council of Rajahmundry town, Veeresalingam endeavoured to set right its mal-administration. Not only through the writings in Vivekavardhani but through the literary form of satire, he exposed the graded rates of bribes that were being collected right from the Chairman at the top down to the level of peons. Influential citizens of the town were illegally occupying the empty spaces around their houses and no action was taken against them. The contractors were eating away the funds in the hospital and consequently proper diet was denied to the patients.²³⁵ He wrote, "Among the municipal councillors, corruption became rampant and some of them having no other livelihood were entirely dependent upon taking bribes. The rates of payment of bribes were fixed right from the top to the level of a peon. The street lamps were so fixed by the council that all councillors had them arranged in front of their houses. Kerosene which should have gone into these street lamps, was used by the councillors

235. See for a detailed picture of the administration of Rajahmundry municipality, K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part I, op. cit., p. 390.

in their houses. Contractors were having a free hand in eating away the funds meant for road repairs. Favourites of the councillors and other leading lights of the town were freely and fearlessly encroaching upon the public spaces, constructing houses and pials".²³⁶ Veeresalingam took special care to rectify these defects, and in a particular case he had to demolish a pial built by a citizen encroaching into the street.²³⁷ He opposed the system of Government officers becoming Chairmen of municipality. He questioned the claims of Hamnett (Sub-Collector at Rajahmundry) for the Chairmanship on the valid grounds that his hands were full with official work and as such he could not shoulder both the responsibilities satisfactorily and also the members would not criticize the Municipal administration freely in the presence of government officials. Hence he requested the Government to appoint natives as Chairmen.²³⁸ Vivekavardhani

236. Ibid.

237. Ibid., p. 397.

238. Vivekavardhani, May, 1886. Report on Native News Papers, 1886. As far back as in 1880, Vivekavardhani, for the first time, suggesting municipal reforms stated that ". . . . the Commissioners should be elected by the people and that able Natives be appointed as Presidents in preference to Collectors and other public servants." Report on Native News Papers, 1880. Also see Vivekavardhani which stated that: "In towns, with educated inhabitants, the Commissioners should be elected by the people." Report on the Native News Papers, 1882.

criticised the Rajahmundry municipality as catering to the needs of the rich and influential people. The poor and common people had no chance of their grievances being redressed.²³⁹

Public opinion in favour of the temperance movement was organised during this period and Veeresalingam held the view that it was the root cause for many ills in society and that organised steps should be taken by all those interested in public welfare to eradicate that evil.²⁴⁰ The economic motives of the Government in not introducing necessary measures to prohibit liquor were clearly understood by the enlightened Indians which found expression in the contemporary press. Drinking was increasing due to Governments' policies and it was "disgraceful to a civilized government to encourage drunkenness which leads to all evils. Let the Government not bother about the income, but consider the welfare of the people."²⁴¹ The same concern was expressed by other journals too. A correspondent of the *Andhraprakasika* "condemned that the sale of liquor should be made a source of revenue and requested the Government to take proper measures against its spread."²⁴²

239. Vivekavardhani, August, 1893. Report on Native News Papers, 1893.

240. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... Part II, op. cit., p.422

241. Vivekavardhani, April, 1887. Report on Native News Papers, 1887.

242. Andhraprakasika, December, 1891. Ibid., 1892.

Mandaramanjari accused "the British Government of encouraging this vice in order to increase the revenue"²⁴³ Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, the contemporary Brahma leader and co-worker of Veeresalingam, was very keen and uncompromising in his opposition to drink. He was president of the Metropolitan Temperance and Purity Association, Madras.

Resolutions were regularly passed on the problems of temperance and Kalapani (crossing of the seas) in all the district social conferences which became a regular feature after the origin of the Indian National Congress in 1885.²⁴⁴ Young Andhra gentlemen were seen crossing the Kalapani for foreign studies and soon after they returned home, the enlightened section of the community, made of lawyers, students and officials were coming to their support against the threat of social excommunication. In Rajahmundry attempts were made to excommunicate Tanguturi Prakasam who returned from England after securing the Bar-at-Law Degree. Veeresalingam met Prakasam and asked him not to perform penance under the threat of the pandits.²⁴⁵ The advantages of travel including sea journeys were explained to the people by the press. An Indian lady who visited England remarked that "such voyages and journeys may be made

243. Mandaramanjari, January, 1882.

244. See for reports of these Conferences, Chintamani, January, 1898. Also see similar reports in the Hindu dated June 13, 1910. June 5, 1909, June 23rd, 1909, etc.

245. T. Prakasam, op. cit., p. 100.

without the slightest infringement of the customs and caste-prejudices of this country and she attributed the advanced knowledge and experience possessed by Europeans to their practice of travelling about the world from one country to another...."²⁴⁶ Vivekavardhani requested the Government to prevent priests and the caste guilds from discouraging the journey over seas which would be beneficial both to the individuals concerned and to their country.²⁴⁷

During the controversy over widow marriages, Veeresalingam was often deprived of a meeting place from where he could deliver his lectures on the issue.²⁴⁸ It was then, for the first time, that Veeresalingam thought of providing a town hall to Rajahmundry where such public gatherings could be held. He made efforts in 1880 and again in 1887 to build the hall with public help. But they did not bear fruit. In 1889 he made up his mind to go ahead with the construction of the hall without asking for donations from the public. In a letter written in 1889 Veeresalingam stated, "there are no chances of our Town Hall ever coming into existence by means of public subscriptions and that I have therefore made up my mind to have the hall built at my

246. Andhrabhasha Sanjivani, January, 1874. Report on Native News Papers, 1874.

247. Vivekavardhani, April, 1883, Ibid.

248. T. Venkatasubbarao, op. cit., p. 28.

own expense (independently of public subscriptions).... in the site which I already purchased.... I will hand over the building for the use of the Rajahmundry public to a Committee of respectable townsmen....²⁴⁹ The construction of the hall was completed by 1890 and an amount of 7 thousand rupees was spent on it. In 1897, when all debts incurred on its construction were repaid, Veeresalingam prepared a trust deed and handed it over to the trustees. A proposal came from some of his followers and co-workers that the hall should be kept exclusively at the disposal of Prarthana Samaj but Veeresalingam did not agree. His reasoning was that it should be useful to all shades of opinion and to all religious sects without any discrimination.²⁵⁰ He mentioned the same in the trust deed and the only restriction he laid down for its use was that it should not be given to idolators, nautch parties, dinners where liquor was served and for holding meetings to excommunicate people working for social reform.²⁵¹ He also laid down the condition that among the trustees there should at least be one from Muslims, Christians, Vysyas and Sudras each.²⁵² The town hall in Rajahmundry was the first of its kind in Andhra the example of

249. Extract from the letter cited in K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya..... part II, op. cit., pp 2-3.

250. R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p.18.

251. Chintamani, January, 1898. The full text of the trust deed is given here.

252. Ibid.

which was emulated by public philanthropists from other towns like Kakinada, Machilipatnam and Guntur.²⁵³

Apart from his voluminous writings in Telugu literature, especially of prose, for which he was called the 'maker of modern Telugu prose', Veeresalingam wrote a number of satires and farces in Telugu severely exposing the evils in society. Writing about his powerful and biting satires, a contemporary remarked that the influence of Jonathan Swift was marked in them. His satires on the maladministration of Rajahmundry municipality and corrupt officials became very popular and quite often had a deterrent effect upon them. From his facile pen flowed a perennial stream of articles, pamphlets, humorous skits, plays and appeals directed against social evils, superstitions and religious fanaticism.

The first Telugu novel was written by Veeresalingam called 'Rajasekharacharithramu'. The inspiration to write this novel came after reading Oliver Goldsmith's 'Vicar of Wakefield'. This novel reflected the habits and customs of a Telugu Hindu family and it became a model for the later Telugu writers who adopted several techniques of Veeresalingam in their novels.²⁵⁴

253. C. Lakshminarasimham, op. cit., p. 141.

254. Ibid., 103. C. Lakshminarasimham acknowledged this fact in connection with the writing of his prize winning novel 'Ramachandra Vijayamu' which won the prize in the competitions.

It dealt with a typical middle class Telugu family and home of the Godavari district in the 19th Century. The novel contained the description of the early marriages, marriage expenses, nautch-parties, ghost-doctors, superstitions, festivals for village Goddesses, astrologers sycophants, the hangers-on, a true picture of the dying feudal society. It may be considered as social history of Andhra during the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁵⁵ Its impact on the native languages and people could be gauged from the fact that it was then translated into Tamil and Kannada and had so far ten editions.²⁵⁶ It had the distinction of being translated into English under the title 'Fortune's wheel' by Rev. Hutchinson. The translation was first serialised in the Madras Christian College Magazine (in 1886) and was published as a book in 1887 from London. The London Times in its issue dated September 30, 1887 reviewed it as "an almost unique example of a Hindu novel. The author, Pandit K. Veeresalingam is described by the translator as an ardent reformer... the pictures of Hindu domestic life, of religious ideas, modes of worship and superstitions, and the condition of women, with their denial of all rights of choice in marriage, are so well drawn and illustrated...."²⁵⁷

255. K. Veeresalingam, Rajasekhara Charitramu, op. cit., p.27.

256. Ibid. See preface by Dr. A. Ramapati Rao.

257. Cited in K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p. 162.

In a lengthy review of the Telugu version, the Hindu (Madras) commented: ".... His style is pleasant and idiomatic, neither cumbrous and difficult nor flagging and tame.... We may well say that Rajasekhara-charitra marks an era in the annals of Telugu literature. It is the first Telugu novel that has yet appeared, and as an attempt in a new direction, we must consider it as a success...."²⁵⁸

Veeresalingam was a pioneer in realising the need for Telugu books on natural sciences which contributed a great deal to the progress of European society. The knowledge of natural sciences, he held, was essential to drive out superstitions from people.²⁵⁹ He made a translation of Huxley's physiology and wrote books on scientific Astrology and Zoology. Here was a pathfinder whose work in this direction was not continued till after half-a-century of his death. Commenting upon his translation of Huxely's book, a contemporary journal Hindu Desabhimani wrote thus: ".... from the preface of the book we learn that the Pandit has taken great pains in going through all the books relating to the subject both English and Telugu, such as Anatomy, Susruta Astanga Hrithaya and many others, some of which have

258. Ibid., p. 164.

259. Ibid., p. 213.

not as yet seen the light of publication.... he has added an Appendix in the terminus of the book giving the English equivalents or those technicalities for the guidance of the reader. The book has 22 diagrams illustrative of the different parts of the body...."²⁶⁰

It was a fitting conclusion to his half century of dedicated services and self-sacrifice in the cause of his countrymen, when he established Hithakarini Samaj and made over all his properties worth 41 thousands of rupees to the society in his deed of trust registered on 2nd May, 1908. Except that what he would earn through the royalty of his books, he gave away everything to the society.²⁶¹ The main aim of the Samaj was to establish and maintain Widows' Homes, Orphanages for destitute children and running Schools for general education as well as handicrafts.²⁶² It has been running a High School, a Widows' Home, prayer hall, library and reading room, garden home and retreat. The School has been the only Theistic School in Andhra. As it was not a self supporting institution and had been lacking in funds, Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, the President of the Samaj after the death of Veeresalingam, was managing funds

260. Hindu Desabhimani, April, 1889. Cited in Ibid., p.216.

261. Ibid., pp. 305-06.

262. Ibid., p. 304. The Memorandum and trust deed of the Hitakarini Samaj are included by Veeresalingam as appendices of his autobiography.

somehow helping it to get on fairly well. Likewise, he was also looking after the Widow's Home securing money in some form or other.²⁶³ As the recurring expenses were more than what the Samaj was getting through the deposits of the property given by Veeresalingam, an appeal was addressed to the public for funds. Veeresalingam visited Secunderabad and was a guest to Govindarajulu Naidu and his wife, the well known poetess Sarojini Devi, whose inter-caste and inter-state marriage he performed in Madras in the year 1898.²⁶⁴ From there he visited Bombay and got liberal help from K. Natarajan, G.N. Chandavarkar and Kasinathuni Nagesh-wara Rao (the founder of 'Andhrapatrika' the first Telugu daily) who were all his colleagues in social reform working in other parts of the country. He was the guest of Pandit Karve at Poona and observed the working of Widows' Home managed by him.²⁶⁵ This tour for raising funds ended with a visit to Bellary, and on the whole he collected 5 thousand rupees through these visits.

263. K. Suryanarayana, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

264. Padmini Sen Gupta, Sarojini Naidu, (Bombay, 1966) p. 33. An interesting account of the wedding which took place in Madras, appeared in an Indian newspaper. ".... Rao Bahadur Pandit Veeresalingam Pantulu Garu officiated as the Minister for the sacred occasion." In the footnotes (p.34) it is mentioned that "Pandit Veeresalingam Pantulu was a leading reformer of South India somewhat in the category of Keshub Chandra Sen of Bengal."

265. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya...., Part I, op. cit., p. 404.

CHAPTER IV

ESTIMATE

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E S T I M A T E

Veeresalingam has been acclaimed as the person who ushered in modernism in Andhra during the second half of the 19th century when the darkness of ignorance and evil grip of superstition were preventing the growth of reason and knowledge. Though not very original in his ideas compared to the great masters of reform in Bengal and Maharashtra, he perhaps showed more courage and conviction than most of them. This can be illustrated by two things he did, namely, giving up his sacred thread, and defying the excommunication orders of Sankaracharya and refusing to perform 'penance'. Veeresalingam's greatness lay in the fact that he single handedly did great many things at the same time like combating corruption, reprehending impurity, dispelling ignorance, attacking superstition, the upliftment of women, and starting many new trends in Telugu literature. The work of this noble career marked a new era in the public life of the land. He was great for putting into practice what he considered just and good while a number of his contemporaries had no moral courage to do so. In his efforts to lay the foundation for many modern movements in social reform as well as literature, and being the initiator of the progress of the Telugus at the turn of this century he was, no doubt, helped by the factors like

contact with the western knowledge (through education and the flow of ideas) and the work of Christian missionaries which was primarily the spread of their gospel. Yet, by denouncing the outdated and meaningless customs and superstitions, they made people think of the other side of the coin. At this crucial juncture when the old social order was showing cracks, Veeresalingam introduced the faculty of reason to hit at it. He inspired youngmen and students around him with loyalty to duty and individual responsibility. The sterling qualities that went in to his making as observed in the course of his work, were iron will, sacrifice and dedication to the causes he undertook. A number of public spirited men were influenced by him and became prominent men of Andhra contributing to its social, political and intellectual advancement.¹

The citizens of Berhampore (a prominent centre of social reform then) paid him glowing tributes when he visited the place in 1907 to perform a widow marriage. They welcomed him, "the pioneer of social reform movement in Southern India.... the apostle of Hindu widow re-marriage movement in this Presidency.... You have been to us, what

1. A few names, in this context, may be given. T. Prakasam, Konda Venkatappaiah, Darisi Chenchiah, Rayasam Venkatasivudu, Valluri Suryanarayana, Chilakamarthi Lakshminarasimham mentioned in their autobiographies how they were influenced by Veeresalingam in their lives.

the late Pandit Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar was to Bengal or Madhva Das to Bombay.... Your tremendous sacrifices, your fearless preaching and exposure of the fallacies of your adversaries and your daring practical efforts, are now matters of history.... We know you as a hater of sham and a fearless opponent of social tyranny; your trenchant pen was a terror to corrupt officials and evil administration.... In thousands of Hindu homes, your works are now daily read, especially by ladies, and it must cheer your heart to learn that your works serve to dispel ignorance...."²

A noteworthy incident of the recognition of his work was a token financial help of 50 pounds (about Rs.660/-) given by an English lady, Miss Manning, in her will from London.³ She was in Madras earlier and visited the Widow's Home run by Veeresalingam. She was one of those who along with Miss Carpenter nursed Raja Ram Mohan Roy during his illness in London.⁴

His reform activities had such an impact that the well known modern Tamil poet Subrahmaya Bharathi (1882-1921) in his incomplete novel 'Chandrika' intro-

2. Cited in K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya...., Part II, op.cit., pp. 385-86

3. Ibid., p. 287.

4. Ibid., p. 288.

duced the characters of Veeresalingam and his wife Rajyalakshamma in it.⁵ We are not sure whether Bharathi and Veeresalingam knew each other. Perhaps Bharathi might have known Veeresalingam through the press reports on reform activities as Bharathi was a sub-editor for some time in Swadeshimitran edited and published from Madras, by G. Subrahmanya Iyer, a great reformer and a contemporary of Veeresalingam who got his widow daughter remarried.⁶ Commenting upon 'Chandrika' Prema Nandakumar, the biographer of Bharathi, stated that by the inclusion of Veeresalingam and his wife Rajyalakshmi as characters in his novel, Bharathi did not merely pay a fictionalised tribute to Veeresalingam as 'Father of Modern Andhra Renaissance'; she stated further that the silent heroism of Veeresalingam's wife deserved a separate book.⁷

Dr. C.R. Reddy has said that the lives of Veeresalingam and his wife were a splendid chapter in the history of Indian liberalism.⁸ Rajyalakshamma's silent and sympathetic assistance to Veeresalingam in his activities can hardly be exaggerated. The day when she died the whole town of Rajahmundry mourned her death, and felt

5. Chandrika Katha, translated into Telugu by Gopala-Krishna-Raghavan (Nellore, 1971).

6. S.A. Govindarajan, "G. Subrahmanya Iyer (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 51-52.

7. Swarajya, November 2, 1968.

8. See Dr. C. R. Reddy's article, op. cit.

that Veeresalingam was orphaned.⁹ Publishing the obituary news the Hindu stated thus: "For over 30 years, she toiled hard in the cause of social reform along with her husband bravely facing excommunication and social persecution. Her life had been an unbroken record of self-sacrifice, and her labours contribute largely to the success of the Widow remarriage movement."¹⁰

With all his great qualities, Veeresalingam possessed certain personal traits which were often acting as obstacles to the progress of the movements he initiated. He became more irritable and short tempered as he had to lead a solitary life fighting against the opponents when his friends and followers in the movement deserted him for fear of consequences like excommunication. He was individualistic by nature and was uncompromising in his convictions. He had an invincible will and tenacity of purpose. All these qualities marked him out from others of lesser abilities who found it rather difficult and irksome to work in association with him.¹¹ A contemporary news report stated thus: "The work of Veeresalingam Pantulu has been mainly his own.... Mr. Veeresalingam has an oppressive personality, his genius, his strength of will, his peculiar

9. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeya....., Part II, op. cit., p.413.

10. The Hindu, August 12, 1910.

11. R. Venkatasivudu, op. cit., p. 28.

humour and stubbornness, his uncompromising attitude have always been in the way of his weaker followers. They prefer to admire and adore him from a distance rather understand and sympathise with him from near. This is certainly due to utter lack of definitiveness and smoothness in his methods of work His troubles and persecutions made him to entertain a general distrust in the capacity and the sincerity of his friends and followers. He used to interfere with the work he entrusted to others (the management of any of the important branches of the work) of which he is the head. He was highly a religious man; but he always lacked sweetness and soothing balm of love. Mr. Pantulu has all that is needed for the work of a pioneer; he has the pickaxe of biting satire; daring courage and steadiness of aim. But he lacks the power of building, uniting and cementing the materials before him".¹²

12. The Hindu, April, 17, 1911.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

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. The turn of the century (from the 19th century to the 20th) saw the growing sweep of the nationalist movement which naturally turned men's minds away from matters like social reform to political matters. After 1910 (the year of his wife's death), Veeresalingam settled down to a more or less sedentary life at Rajahmundry till his death in 1919.

Veeresalingam emerged at a crucial period in the history of India in general and of Andhra in particular. It was nearly two decades after 1857 that he became prominent in the field of social reform. It was the period during which millions of Indians were starving and suffering due to the exploitation of colonial rule. The drain of Indian wealth by the British, to serve as an investment to earn more profits through the newly acquired production methods during the Industrial Revolution, was drying up the springs of capital in India. The class of merchants and the intelligentsia, who would have spearheaded the Indian Renaissance, was made to cling on as a slavish appendage to the British colonial power in India. The British bourgeoisie which led in the overthrow of feudal State and patronised the progressive religious revolts against the Catholic church

made a compromise with Indian feudalism. After extinguishing the last flicker of feudal protest (the Revolt of 1857) the British became supreme in the sub-continent. Due to the slow rise and indifference of Indian middle class, the impending Indian renaissance was bound to be an incomplete process. For the forces of feudal obscurantism still prevented the growth of the spirit of enquiry into the foundations of ancient thought. The historic role of bourgeoisie, in destroying the traditional ideological basis of the Catholic church and old aristocracy in England and France during the Revolutions there, was not played in India. Consequently the orthodox Hindu society with its attending evils, caste system, immobility of labour and unchangeability of custom remained unaltered. The Indian Village community which stood like a rock amidst the rising billows of sea water, began to wake up, but finding no proper direction and lead, became a prey to both the feudal nobles and bourgeois profiteers. No doubt the heroic efforts of our social reformers and the laws of the Government had altered the position slightly, providing new hopes. Nevertheless, the basic problems like the emancipation of oppressed sections of Indian society still remain unresolved.

In this broad context of Indian conditions, we have

to look at the work of Veeresalingam. He belonged to the rising middle class among educated professionals. Though a teacher by profession not endowed with much of ancestral wealth, he had enough earnings through the sale of his books to carry on the reform and public activities. He was the first Telugu poet who could maintain himself through the royalty of his writings and donate 41 thousand rupees to establish the Hitakarini Samaj. He received financial help for his reform activities mainly from Pyda Ramakrishnaiah (who donated 30 thousand rupees for the cause of widow marriages), a Vysya Zamindar from Kakinada, who turned into a prosperous merchant. The others who helped Veeresalingam were the professional classes among educated men like lawyers, teachers and government officials. The other enlightened section which extended its crucial support was the student community. During the later half of the 19th century, when educational opportunities were limited, it could be assumed that students came perhaps from upper strata of society, economically and even otherwise. The European officers and to some extent missionaries too extended their support to Veeresalingam. Instances were given in his autobiography of the Superintendent of Police being personally present to make security arrangements during widow marriages and of some local missionaries taking part in such marriage processions.¹

1. K. Veeresalingam, Sweeva....., Part I, op. cit., p. 192.

The main elements that opposed Veeresalingam were the orthodox sections among Brahmins and other castes and their religious leader Sankaracharya, and a few others, who, though they belonged to the educated professional class, were still clinging on to the feudal ideas.

Thus it is clear that, by and large, the rising bourgeoisie gave its support to Veeresalingam's activities and the last bastions of declining feudalism opposed him. Hence it was a middle class movement attempting to reform the society at fringe level and not bothering to go into the root of the social malady. This is borne out by the fact that Veeresalingam, claimed as the champion in the cause of women, never put up the demand for a share in property for women. Being middle class in its nature, its scope also was limited. Hence the extent to which it could spread had to be necessarily restricted. Nevertheless, Veeresalingam's work was a pioneering work and it was mostly preparatory. He was the harbinger of a new epoch in the history of Andhra. With his advocacy of reason and scientific method and his relentless struggle against dogma and superstition, he showed his fellowmen the path of free thinking and independent action, thus changing the intellectual tendencies of the younger generation.

The impact of his activities on society was visible even during his life time. He inspired many youngmen with his reforming zeal and made them take to reforming activity in several parts of Andhra. His missionary zeal to cleanse the public life in its several facets bore fruit. Social reform associations, journals and conferences were organised. From 1890's, it became the order of the day that a social conference was attached to the political conference at the district level. Resolutions urging the eradication of social evils were passed year after year. A climate conducive to reform was created. This new trend could be perceived from the proceedings of one such conference--the Krishna - Guntur Social Conference--reported in the Hindu as follows: "Social reform movement took deep roots in Circars and succeeded much in Krishna and Guntur districts. Unnava Lakshminarayana had been a second Veeresalingam to Guntur. Under his leadership a good number of widow marriages were celebrated. In Tenali Zakkula caste women were leading lives in prostitution. The community took a vow under the influence of some educated people that they will marry their females and since have acted up to their own vow. In Guntur, a female association.... is doing splendid work, organising social gatherings and meetings and maintaining schools and also organised a ladies conference for the Andhra country. In Masulipatam (Krishna district) widow remarriages were performed

and a National College was started, second of its kind in the whole of India.... Resolution on widow marriage was proposed by a Pandit named Vemuri Sivaswamy Sastry.... Decided to start a widows' Home at Guntur for Krishna and Guntur. Mr. Suryadevara Subbanaidu, a wealthy ryot, subscribed Rs. 700/- for the National College, Masula, and promised to maintain two widows in the Home.... It is significant that the resolution on marriage after puberty which was unanimously passed was proposed by Peddenti Narasimhacharyulu garu, Sanskrit Pandit.... Resolutions on female education, foreign travel, social purity, were passed. Kanyasulka and Varasulka* were emphatically condemned. The President felt glad that people have realised the need for social reform in the building up of the nation and for Pandits moving resolutions."²

A contemporary tribute paid to Veeresalingam stated, "the strenuous labours of Mr. Veeresalingam Pantulu in the cause of social reform and the liberal ideas and high ideals of life which he preached in his various writings and which were exemplified in his remarkable life roused the Telugus from their lethargy and helped to create in them a love for public life and a degree of public spirit...."³

* Kanyasulka is the price to be paid to secure a bride (bride price), and Varasulka is the opposite of Kanyasulka.
2. The Hindu, June 7, 1910.
3. Ibid., January 23, 1913.

If this was the appreciation expressed by his contemporaries, similar views were expressed in 1948 during the centenary celebrations of Veeresalingam. The efflux of time did not in any way diminish the estimate of Veeresalingam in the eyes of the Telugus. Perhaps a more balanced and objective view of Veeresalingam and his times is being taken now since we are viewing him from a distance. On this occasion Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan stated that Veeresalingam was one of the early pioneers in South India who demanded and fought for reform and was misunderstood and persecuted.⁴

C. Rajagopalachari said that South India is proud of Veeresalingam but for whom the Andhras could not be what they are now.⁵

4. The Swatantra, April 17, 1948.

5. Ibid.

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