



Social Reforms in Hyderabad State Role of Various Organisations: A Study

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Abstract

The Hyderabad State groaned under the autocratic rule of Nizam. They exploited the poor and innocent. The society suffered from social evils such as sati, fire walking and domestic slavery. The worst of the economic evil was *Vetti* in Telangana. Dowry, infant marriages and premature widowhood worsened the condition of the women in the society. Widow re-marriages were confined only to lower castes. *Devadasi*, prostitution, *purdah* was common in Muslim and Hindu communities. As the education was mere it resulted in superstitions. Contrary to this in British India the impact of western ideas brought structural changes in Indian society. It stimulated a new outlook towards social changes, an urban based educated middle class emerged. The intellectual impact of Bengal, Maharashtra and Andhra played a key role in constructive reformation movement in Hyderabad State, people grew socially and became aware due to the efforts of the missionaries and *non-mulkis*. Several social reform organisations established to eradicate social evils in the State. This article highlights the role of social reformers and organisations in fighting against these social evils and their efforts to reform the then society in Hyderabad State. The impact of these activities also encouraged the educated sections in overall Telangana region to work for social reforms.

Keywords: Reforms, Social Evils, Education, Organisations, Reformers.

Introduction

The Hyderabad State groaned under the autocratic rule of Nizam in the early 19th century. At the local level the *Jagirdars*, *Zamindars*, *Inamdars*, *Deshmukhs*, *Deshpandes* exploited the poor, ignorant people. The society suffered from social evils such as superstitions, *sati*, child marriages, *purdah*, *devadasi*, illiteracy, casteism, proselytisation, liquor, polygamy etc. This article highlights the role of social reformers, leaders, writers, organisations in fighting these social evils and their efforts to reform the then society in Hyderabad State.

The Hyderabad State, particularly from the Qutub Shahi period to the 20th century, bore witness to a wide array of social reform movements that sought to challenge and reshape deeply entrenched socio-cultural hierarchies and orthodoxies. Women, in some contexts, were elevated to divine status post-sacrifice, as noted by N.G. Ranga and Kambhampati Satyanarayana, indicating both reverence and the complex patriarchal frameworks in village traditions. These symbolic elevations were paradoxical – simultaneously empowering and limiting women within religious confines.

The emergence of reformist thinkers and organizations marked a turning point. Intellectuals such as Suravaram Pratap Reddy and Raavi Narayana Reddy documented the socio-cultural history and class struggles of the Telugu-speaking people, exposing the exploitative feudal and caste systems that dominated the Hyderabad State. Literary voices like Dasharathi Rangacharya, through works like *Chillara*

Devullu, used allegory and satire to critique social stagnation and religious dogma.

The efforts of reformers and nationalist activists were buttressed by grassroots organizations that championed education, caste equality, women's rights, and anti-feudal resistance. The participation of marginalized communities, including Dalits and peasants, in movements like the Telangana Rebellion served as both a social and political awakening, as detailed by Ramesan and V.P.S. Raghuvanshi. These movements were not isolated from the larger Indian renaissance but were deeply rooted in regional realities.

Overall, the social reform initiatives in Hyderabad State were multifaceted – involving education, resistance against zamindari oppression, caste emancipation, and the redefinition of gender roles. These movements laid the foundation for a more just and democratic society in the Telugu region. They also signaled the transition from feudal allegiance to participatory citizenship, highlighting how regional movements contributed meaningfully to the national discourse on social justice and human dignity.

Social Evils in Telangana Region

Among the socio-religious evils prevalent in Telangana, the cruelest was *sati* ^[1] and slightly lesser was fire walking², domestic slavery, the worst of the economic evils (*Vetti* and *Adapapa*) was common in Telangana ^[3]. The subordination of the woman in the Hindu society grew with the passage of time and became a settled fact in feudal stage. Evils such as dowry,

nautch parties, infant marriages and cases of premature widowhood, worsened the condition of the women in the society. Widow re-marriages were in practice in the lower castes^[4] but among upper castes the condition of a widow was tragic. *Devadasi* (*Bhogam Melalu* and *Adapapahu*), prostitution, *purdah* was common in Muslim and Hindu communities.

Education being limited to a tiny fraction of society, ignorance stayed and resulted in a medley of superstitions. People believed in bad omens which brought misfortune and good omen which brought good fortunes. Women, house and a stunted or deformed tree were often supposed to be possessed of evil spirits^[5].

There were many superstitions related to a child. A pregnant woman if saw an eclipse, would give birth to a deformed child and it was called *Grahana solla*. A child's sickness was believed to be caused by the displeasure of deities or evil spirits. Even, vaccination was believed to provoke the wrath of the goddess. The *Sahasra Kalashabisheka* in a Shiva temple and a village procession by *Malas* by tying a frog to a pestle were done to please gods and invoke *varuna* at the time of drought^[6].

Social Reformation

Contrary to these conditions in the Nizam State, it was period of transition in the British India. British administration, during the 19th century, brought structural changes in Indian society. The impact of western ideas, coupled with the change in economic structure, stimulated a new outlook towards social changes. Indian peasantry suffered poverty and misery. An urban based educated middle class emerged. In this context, social reforms were initiated and led by educated intellectuals of higher castes. The emancipation of women, enlightenment of the public were on focus.

Social Reformation in Hyderabad State

Social reform endeavours in Hyderabad State were largely influenced by the reformations of Bengal, Maharashtra and Andhra people grew socially aware during the 19th century due to the efforts of the British Indian missionaries, *non-mulkis* and the intellectual of the State.

Christian Missionaries: Missionaries were the pioneers of education in Hyderabad State. In their educational endeavor's, they were far ahead of the Government. The first English public school in Hyderabad was founded by a clergy man of the Church of England about 1834 and was followed by another school opened by the Roman Catholic Missionaries.⁷ Since then, the Roman Catholic Missionary has been active in the fields of education, health and evangelistic work in various parts of the State.

The educational endeavors of the missionaries, though religiously motivated, enlightened certain sections of society and dispelled their superstitions, making them feel equal in society. These missionaries ought to be in the vanguard of social and moral advancement of the people in the Nizam Dominion. Consequently, a number of voluntary organisations, clubs and societies emerged under the leadership of eminent social luminaries, to play a historic role in enlightening the public and creating social awareness^[8].

Young Men's Improvement Society (YMIS): Dr. Aghoranath Chottopadhyaya, the father of social reforms in the State, was the first Indian student to obtain Doctorate of Science (D.Sc) of a foreign university. Back home at Bengal, he took an active part in the movement for the eradication of social evils, initiated by the first great social reformer Raja

Ram Mohan Roy. Fresh from this fight, he arrived in Hyderabad around 1878, to tackle the problem of educational needs in Hyderabad^[9].

Dr. Aghoranath, served as a Vice President for ten years and was a life member of Young Men's Improvement Society (YMIS), established on 26th February 1879, in Chaderghat. He along with eminent lawyers enlightened the young men on social and political issues^[10]. He also started a school for girls, with the help of his wife Varada Sundari Devi. He stressed the urgent need for emancipation and economic independence of women. He fought against child marriage^[11].

Men and women of almost every religion gathered everyday in what began to be called the *Durbar* of Dr. Aghoranath. The atmosphere in the State was soon charged with patriotic fervour, resulting in the formation of an association called the *Anjuman-e-Ikwan-us-Safa* (The Brotherhood Society) with the support of his friend Mulla Abdul Qayum^[12].

Anjuman-e-Ikwan-us-Safa: The society held monthly meetings and published magazines on educational and social reforms. Though Dr. Aghoranath was an orthodox Bengali Brahmin by birth, he educated his domestic servants in the evening classes held in his house. Some of them rose to high official position in the State^[13]. To facilitate Inter-caste marriages Dr. Aghoranath moved the Government made it to introduce special marriage Act of 1872^[14].

Theosophical Society: The *Theosophical* society established on 26th December, 1882 by Ramaswamy Iyer in Chaderghat secured the patronage of officers like Pestoji and Jahangirji. The society hall was inaugurated on 7th January, 1906 by Mrs. Anne Besant. This society was a center of discussion on religious and cultural matters and attracted the city elite^[15].

Hindu Social Club: The Government of Hyderabad instituted scholarships to meritorious *Urdu* and *Parsi* speaking Hindu students to go aboard for higher studies. But the policy was only to discourage the Hindu students. It was considered a sin to cross sea water (*Kalapani*). The motive of the Government was clear and to counter act it, Raja Murali Manohar Bahadur (President), Krishna Iyengar (Vice-President) and Ramchandra Pilay (General Secretary) formed Hindu Social Club^[16]. The social club encouraged young men to undertake sea voyage, quoting references from the history.

Malwala Sabha: *Malwala Sabha* organised by Raja Murali Manohar Bahadur held meetings in Malwala Devi near Charminar. Both the *Hindu* Social Club and *Malwala Sabha* discussed issues like female education, illiteracy and contemporary social issues^[17].

Albert Reading Room: Albert Reading Room of Secunderabad was established to focus on contemporary social problems^[18].

Mohib Hussain, the Bright Star: Mohib Hussain, through his Journals "*Muallim-e-Niswan*" and "*Afsar*", carried on a campaign for social and educational reforms amongst women. He was the first person to raise voice against *purdah* system. As a result, Government closed down his journals. Pamphlets were issued demanding Hussain to bring the women of his house out of *purdah*. He was also an advocate of national unity and was against two-nation theory^[19].

Arya Samaj: Due to the efforts of Swami Girijananda Saraswati *Arya Samaj* was established in Hyderabad in 1892. With Kamal Prasad as President and Mahatma Laxaman Dasji as Secretary, it moved into own building in 1905. Since *Arya Samaj* was for reforms in the existing religious observances, its lectures created a protest amongst the orthodox section of the city. The *Sanatan Dharma Maha Mandali* was established

at about the same time to counteract the activities of *Arya Samaj*. It fought against proselytization of Hindus into Islam and Christianity and tried to spread the true essence of Hinduism. Loop-holes in Hinduism such as untouchability, child marriage, animal sacrifices, liquor, *devadasi* system etc., were criticised by *Arya Samaj* [20].

Humanitarian League: In 1913, the Humanitarian League was established by Rai Bala Mukund, a retired Judge of the High Court (President) Lalaji Meghji (Secretary) and Ganesh Mul (Joint Secretary). Rai Bla Mukund was the pioneer of reforms among *Harijans* and tribals in those days. Members of the League advocated against animal sacrifice and untouchability. Bhagya Reddy Varma, a social reformer, who belonged to schedule caste, also joined Humanitarian League. He started a paper *Bhagyanagar* for mobilisation of depressed classes [21].

Social Service League: Keshav Rao Koratkar and Waman Naik conceived an idea of holding a social conference under the auspices of “Hyderabad Social Service League” established in 1915. The main focus of their conferences was primary education, female education, libraries and enlightenment of depressed classes [22].

Andhra Janasangh and Andhra Mahila Sabha: After the Nizam State’s official Reforms Conference held in Hyderabad on 11th and 12th November, 1921, *Andhra Janasangh* was found. In 1930, *AJS* renamed itself as *Andhra Mahasabha* and carried on social reform movement up to the formation of the State Congress. With the support of *AMS*, women’s Conferences called *Andhra Mahila Sabhas* were also held up to 1942 [23].

AMS adopted resolutions on women’s education, widow remarriage, eradication of prostitution, *Harijans* upliftment, abolition of *Purdah*, *Devadasi* and *Begari* systems, introduction of primary education, promotion of private schools, advocating Telugu as the medium of institution in girls’ school, revival of *Ayurveda* [24] etc. All the conferences of *AMS* brought major reforms for the betterment of the society. But from the 6th session, the focus shifted to politics and by the last sessions there were no social reforms as the *AMS* took a political path by then [25].

Jeeva Daya Prachara Mandal: *Jeeva Daya Prachara Mandal* and *Harijanoddhara Pracharam* under the leadership of Bhagya Reddy Varma, B. Mallesh Rao, Chitarayya and Arige Rama Swamy mobilised *harijans* to educate themselves and fight against casteism and eradication of social evils like animal sacrifice in the name of God [26].

Widow Re-Marriages Bill: Pandit Keshav Rao Koratkar introduced widow Re-marriages bill in the Legislative Council in 1930 in the midst of the protest of Hindus and Muslims. This bill was passed into a law through the efforts of Pandit Vinayaka Rao Vidyalkar, son of Pandit Keshav Rao. The legal position of Hindu widows has strengthened after 1936 [27].

Akhila Bharatha Harijan Sevak Sangham: All Indian *Harijan Sevak Sangham* was started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1932. In Hyderabad State, Waman Naik was President and Ravi Narayana Reddy as General Secretary. The *Sangham* worked for the upliftment and education of *harijans*. Schools and hostels were opened for *harijans*. A fund was raised for all this [28].

Conclusion

Influenced by the western education and ideas the social reforms movement pioneered a constructive reformation in the Hyderabad State in 19th century. Many social reform

organisations established in Hyderabad under the leadership of eminent leaders and writers made a yeomen service to eradicate social evils in the society. The impact of these activities also encouraged the educated sections in overall Telangana region to work for social reforms. The Hyderabad State, under the Nizam's rule, was a significant theatre for social transformation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Despite the autocratic and feudal nature of its administration, a strong wave of social reform began to reshape its socio-political fabric. The role of various reformist organizations in this process was both impactful and enduring, laying the groundwork for a more egalitarian and enlightened society. One of the foremost contributions came from the *Arya Samaj*, which challenged orthodoxy and caste discrimination while promoting education, especially among the marginalized communities. Its emphasis on Vedic values, social equality, and female education brought about a cultural awakening in the Hindu society of Hyderabad. Likewise, the Theosophical Society and Brahmo Samaj also created platforms for rational discourse and religious reform, advocating universal brotherhood, the upliftment of women, and eradication of social evils.

The Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, though initially a cultural body, played a role in mobilizing the Muslim community around education and social upliftment. Simultaneously, the *Arya Bal Sabha*, *Students Union*, and *Women's Reform Movements* promoted secular values and emphasized the need for women's participation in public life, challenging patriarchal norms entrenched in the region. *Dalit* movements in the Hyderabad State, inspired by the broader national movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, raised critical issues of untouchability, caste oppression, and access to education and employment. These organizations not only influenced policy reforms but also sowed the seeds of political consciousness and collective identity among the oppressed.

In conclusion, the social reform movements and organizations in the Hyderabad State served as catalysts for change, challenging deep-rooted inequalities and promoting values of justice, equality, and modern education. Their legacy is visible in the democratic and progressive ethos of modern Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, making their contributions historically significant and socially transformative.

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