

GUNTUR: A CENTER FOR SOCIAL REORGANISATION

A.Umatarangini * and K.Somasekhar **

Introduction:

The society in Guntur district is based on Caste and Varna system. Marriages among Hindus can be considered as pious and sacred. But the marriages among Muslims and Christians are based on contract. Dowry system is an institution which is widely prevalent in all religions. The position of women is not appreciable. Women are being considered as second-rate citizens. But the social reform movement organized in Guntur during 20th century has created a new social change in the Guntur society. These issues will be discussed in this Article.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To focus on the traditional marriage system based upon personal laws.
2. To focus on the dowry system which is a social evil right from the ancient society.
3. To focus on the causes responsible for social reform movement in Guntur district.
4. To emphasis the incidents occurred in Guntur district during social reform movement of 20th century.

METHODOLOGY:

Available literature is pursued to collect the data to complete present article. Several libraries such as library of Nagarjuna University, Guntur district library and other centers are visited to have firsthand knowledge on this topic. Several experts on this topic are consulted. The eminent persons of History congress of Guntur district are met to discuss on this topic. These discussions proved helpful to prepare this topic.

HYPOTHESIS:

Guntur society is based on traditions and customs. The people have adopted dowry system right from ancient society. Women are treated as second rate citizens by all religions. Social reform movement has been carried out by the leaders of 20th century to bring a social change in Guntur society. On the basis of these tentative conclusions present article has been prepares.

* Lecturer in history, S.R.R &C.V. R GDC, Vijayawada

** Rtd principal of M.R. Government Sanskrit college, Vizianagaram,

SIGNIFICANCE:

Guntur society is divided among Varnas and Caste. Sects and sub sects could be found among Muslims and Christians. The women are to pay dowry for the consummation of marriages. Widow Remarriages are not allowed in Hinduism. But widow marriages are common among Muslims and Christians. The domination of Brahmins was severely condemned by non-brahmins and started social reform movement for the upliftment of the women and lower castes. This social reform movement has brought significant change in the Guntur society.

THEME OF THE PAPER:

Marriage is a pious institution. Marriage is defined as a union between male and female body. Marriage permits sexual enjoyment between male and female. In the ancient traditions particularly later Vedic period shows that eight marriages are existed in the society. These are Diva, Arsha, Brahma, Prajapatya, Gandharva, Asura, Paisacha and Rakshasa. Arsha marriage is arranged marriage. Brahma is also a kind of arranged marriage through agreement. Diva is nothing but marrying bride with idol. Parjapatya is nothing but to celebrate marriage through exchanging gifts. Gandharva is love marriage which is mentioned in Mahabharatha. Sakunthala and Dushyantha loved each other and married secretly. Asura, Paisacha is forcible marriages. Rakshasa marriage is nothing but taking bride by resorting violence. This marriage is mentioned in Bhagavatham. But some kind of other marriages could be observed in the ancient times. They are as Anuloma and Pratiloma (levirate and Sorate) marriages. Anuloma marriage is nothing but a marriage between the male of upper caste with the female of lower caste. Pratiloma is the marriage between the female of upper caste and the male of lower caste. Upto independence Pratiloma marriage is prohibited and Anuloma marriage is accepted. Generally the monogamy is the principle of Hinduism. But the nobles and Kshatriyas could marry more than one wife which is called Polygamy. Polygamy is the accepted norm sanctioned by Quran among the Muslims. A Muslim can marry four wives at a time. All the Hindu rulers have adopted polygamy. These systems have been continued uninterruptedly down to independence. But Hindu marriage Act of 1955 has prohibited Polygamy. Monogamy is the rule prescribed by Hindu Marriage Act. A Hindu cannot marry more than one wife. Marriage with second wife is declared as void as first wife is living. Polygamy is one of the rules for divorce to be granted by the court setting aside all the marriages consummated by a person after having first marriage.

Polyandry was also widely prevalent in India. But polyandry is prevailed only among some of the tribal castes. But Mahabharata has accepted polyandry as Droupadi had

married five husbands that is Pandavas. Upper Varnas and castes have adopted Monogamy as authorized by Hindu Marriage Act of 1955.

Among Hindus, marriage is a sacrament and although variations in the rites and ceremonies occur according to the customs of a particular caste or family, Kanyadanam (gift of the bride), Mangalyadharana (tying of Tali) and Talambralu (pouring sacred rice over the heads of the bridal pair) are the essentials. Gowry Puja, Saptapadi (walking seven steps round the fire) are some other customs to be followed by all Hindu castes. Sagotra and Sapinda marriages are prohibited. All the marriages among Hindus are endogamous.

A number of traditional restrictions based on caste and degrees of relationship govern the institution of marriage among the various communities of this district and the restrictions on marriage vary with the different social groups. Marriage alliances are usually contracted among the members of the same sub-caste and generally settled if the horoscopes of the boy and the girl agree, if they do not belong to the same Gotra and if the girl is not older than the boy. Menarikam marriages are accepted by Hindu customs. Marrying maternal uncles, daughter or son is called menarikam. This kind of marriage could be observed in Guntur district right from the ancient times. After the independence of India some changes have been occurred in Hindu marriages. Inter caste marriages are also celebrated but very few in number at Guntur district. Registration of marriages is made compulsory. Non registration of marriages is a ground for divorce.

The important custom of Hindu marriage is Pradhanam (betrothal). During the time of Pradhanam the parents of Bridegroom present gifts to bride in return bride's relatives offer gifts to the bridegroom. This is the first custom to be followed at the time of the consummation of the marriage. Later both the parties fix a date for the consummation of marriage. The bridegroom and his relatives reach bride's house just a day before the marriage date. But in some castes the bride and her party reach the bridegroom's house. Both these customs are prevalent in Guntur district. The marriage celebrations would be started with Gowry Puja followed by Kanyadhana (offering bride's hand to bridegroom), Mangalyadharana (tying of marriage thread on the neck of bride) and other pretty ceremonies to be followed. With the exit of marriage parties, the celebration of marriage would be completed. Dowry is the main feature of the marriage. The bride offers dowry to the bridegroom. The amount of dowry depends upon the status of bride and bridegroom. Among the lower caste, amount of dowry is very less. Among Reddis, Kammas and Kshatriyas the payment of dowry is ranges from ten lakhs to the crores. Among other castes payment of dowry is from Rupees one lakh to Rs. 30 lakhs depending upon their financial status. Custom of Oli is prevalent among the tribal caste. Presenting animals or gifts or the property forms a part in the Oli.

But dowry system is widely prevalent in Guntur along with other parts of not only Andhra Pradesh but in India. Bondilis and Perikas adopt some peculiar marriage customs. The custom of a Lambadi widow marrying her husband's younger brother is still prevalent in Guntur district. Marriage among Lambadis is preceded by a betrothal called Sagayi. Social position of women among Yerukalas is judged by the number of marriages they contract.

But the marriage among the muslimans is not sacred but a contract concluded between the parties of bride and bridegrooms. Qazi performs the marriage in bride's house. Muslim marriage is called 'Nikah'. The main feature of muslim marriage is the 'mehr'. Mehr is nothing but a kind of dowry to be paid to the bride by the bridegroom. As for Hanafi law half of the mehr should be paid at the time of nuptial. Remaining half should be paid at any time on the demand made by wife. The Mehr can be called as dower according to Muslim personal law. Muslims are allowed to pronounce Talaq. Only the men are allowed to pronounce Talaq. But now a days Talaq is granted by the court only. The marriage ceremony would be completed with the declaration of both the parties that they have consented for the marriage which has taken place at bride's house. Remarriages are allowed for Muslim women after the pronouncement of Talaq.

Child marriages have been totally prohibited under the Child marriage Act. Marriage age for boys has been fixed at 21 and girls at 18. But after independence the educated women and men's first priority is to get the employment. Hence the late marriages now became common among all literate men and women. Now the restrictions on the marriages have been wiped out. Widow marriages have been allowed. Urbanization has liberalized the system of marriages. Marriage ceremony is very simple. Entire ceremony would be completed within two to three hours. Marriage relies upon the payment of dowry. Divorce also had been simplified. Mutual divorce is an easiest method which can be obtained by the parties within six months from the date of submission an application for mutual divorce in the family court. Christian marriages are also contractual marriages. The consenting parties shall meet the church father and intimate him about their decision. A notice will be issued by church father asking the persons to raise their objections if any on the marriage of consenting parties. Thirty days time will be given to raise their objections. Both bridegroom and bride would exchange finger rings in the presence of the church father. A bible congregation would be held and teachings of Jesus Christ would be recited to the gathering and bride and bridegroom. With the holy words of the father the marriage would be concluded. On the basis of the certificate issued by church father, the marriage would be registered by the sub registrar of that area. Remarriages are allowed in Christianity. Divorce can be

granted only by the court on the application submitted by the parties who wanted to break their marriage alliance.

Social reform movements have been initiated by Bengal state. Rajaramamohan Roy, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda are the pioneers and done remarkable service for the upliftment of downtrodden. Eswarachandra Vidyasagar who worked as a professor was regarded as father of the movement for the upliftment of women. He has started to perform widow remarriages in Bengal. With his efforts widow remarriage Act was passed by the British government in 1856. Maharishi D.K. Carvey had followed the path way shown by Eswarachandra Vidyasagar. Carvey had started all India social congress and acted as President for this association. He had started number of schools to provide education to the female children in Maharashtra. These incidents have influenced KandukuriVeeresalingam who had launched social reform movement by making Rajahmundry as its center. He was regarded as father of social reform movement of Andhra. The Christian missionaries have played their own part to provide education to the girls to create awareness on the modernization. They have condemned the social evil like Sati and illiteracy among the women folk. The Christian missionaries have strongly propagated the widow marriages which has influenced on Indian social reformers like Eswarachandra Vidyasagar, D.K. Carvey and KandukuriVeeresalingam.

Much before the propagation of modern social reformers, Guntur was under the influence of late medieval social reformer such as PotuluriVeerabrahmam and Yogi Vemana. PotuluriVeerabrahmam had severly condemned the brahmanical customs. Yogi Vemana had rejected all the social evils like untouchability suppression of women and domination of Brahmanism through his Satakam called VemanaSatakam (hundred poems). In the early medieval period Brahmanaidu of Palnadu had preached the unity among all castes. He had arranged common dining to the people hailed from different castes. He had married his son Balachandra with a lady called Manchaladevi of Mala Community. The Christian missionaries had converted the people from Mala and Madiga of Guntur district into Christian community. The missionaries had done great service for the around development of Dalits who were converted into Christianity. Even the brahmanas and Kammas of Tenali and Bapatla have embraced Christianity.

Nasarayya who was originally a Muslim had propagated the oneness of God among the Madigas of Vinukonda and Narasaraopeta of Guntur district. He had started an organization to serve the depressed community like Madiga. He had preached against the idol worship. The Madigas were very much influenced by Nasarayya. They had turned against the worshipping of numerous Gods which is a custom prevailed in Hinduism. They

got awareness through the teachings of Nasarayya. Particularly the female of Madigas were provided education by which they got awareness on the social evils which were prevalent in Hinduism. Widow marriages were performed among Madiga community in the initial days of social reform movement which was launched in Guntur district.

UnnavalLakshminarayana had launched social reform movement in Guntur with the assistance of his wife Lakshmi bhayamma. He had started a home for widows in 1902. Krishnamanaidu and Bhavanacharyulu have rendered their valuable services for the establishment of home for widows at Guntur. Sixteen widows had been admitted in this home. Out of sixteen ten widows got remarried. Slowly this widow home was changed as a school for girls. This school was named as Sarada Nikethan which became a center for social reform movement in Guntur. A trust was created to run Sarada Nikethan. A popular freedom fighter of Guntur Konda Venkatappaya Pantulu was the first chairman of this trust. Land lord of Munagala had contributed money to run the trust. In the later days the Munagala zamindar had acted as chairman of this trust. Meanwhile Kandukuri Veeresalingam and his wife Rajyalakshmi had attended the ceremony of first widow marriage performed by Unnava couple at Guntur in 1902. UnnavalLakshminarayana and his wife were totally boycotted by the Guntur society on the call given by orthodox Brahmins of Guntur. On the request of Kandukuri Veeresalingam UnnavalLakshminarayana had visited Rajahmundry and acted as chairperson of widow marriage association founded by Veeresalingam. He had returned to Guntur in 1908.

The Guntur town had witnessed more number of widow marriages after Rajahmundry. UnnavalLakshminarayana was praised as Guntur Veeresalingam. But some differences arose between Veeresalingam and UnnavalLakshminarayana on the traditions and customs to be followed by them. Kandukuri Veeresalingam had adopted the philosophy of Brahmasamaj and performed annual funeral ceremony of his mother according to the traditions of Brahmasamaj. UnnavalLakshminarayana was of the opinion that reform should be kept out from the purview of religious ceremonies. According to him religion is different from social reforms. Kandukuri Veeresalingam had advocated that the social reform movement should not be intermingled with the politics. But Unnava had strongly supported the politicians who are interested to take up social reform movement along with political activities. After the death of Veeresalingam his influence in the social reform movement was slowly withered away. Several women organisations have been established for the upliftment of the women. All Andhra women conference was held at Guntur in 1910. Pulugurtha Lakshminarasamamba was elected as chairperson of his conference. Several issues relating to women have been discussed. Several recommendations have been

made to government and private organizations for the employment of women which provide them with self security. The enlightened women had been asked to tour all over Andhra to monitor the position of women. Several women from Guntur had visited neighbouring villages, towns and districts to propagate the measures for the upliftment of women. Unnavalakhshminarayana was very much influenced by Boleshwic revolution occurred in Russia. He was the chairperson of Srikrishnasramam established at Pedapalem of Tenali Taluq. On the basis of the principles of communist party, the people of Dalits and other depressed classes have been admitted in Srikrishnasramam as members and measures have been taken for their development. Malapalli a renowned novel written by Unnavalakhshminarayana has depicted the problems relating to Dalits in the villages. He has picturised the humiliating attitude of upper Varnas towards Dalits (untouchables).

After 1920s the social reform movement in Andhra was slowly weakened. The social reform movement became a part of freedom struggle. Important politicians were turned as social reformers by which the social reform movement became an integral part of freedom struggle. But the Guntur district was different from other districts in coastal Andhra and continued to pursue with the social reforms initiated by Unnavalakhshminarayana and Lakshmi Bayamma who are the stalwarts of freedom struggle in Andhra. An organization called 'Strihiteshini' was founded by Kanaparthi Varalakshamma in 1931. She was very much encouraged by Choragudiseetamma and enlightened lady of Bapatla who was the founder of 'Tripurasundarisamajam'. She had rendered valuable service for women community of Guntur district. Kanaparthi Varalakshamma was a great social leader who had touched upon each and every issue pertaining to women. She had occupied high position in social reform movement after Unnava couple. She was a great feminist writer. The theosophical society had started its activities by making Adayar as its center. The activities of theosophical society were spread to Guntur district. Its activities were published from Divyajnanadeepika from Guntur town.

Arya Samaj founded by Swamy Dayananda Saraswathi has strongly condemned the social evils such as Sati, Untouchability and division of castes in Hinduism. Arya Samaj has tried for equality between men and women. Pandit Gopadev was very much interested in study of Vedic literature. He learned Sanskrit and taught that all the people irrespective of upper Varnas are eligible to learn Vedas. Brahmana and Madiga are having equal opportunity to get information from Vedas. Guntur and other coastal districts are very much influenced by Pandit Gopadev.

Saraswathiswamy a learned man in Sanskrit came to Guntur from Chittoor district. Kamma, Kapu, Reddy and Telaga are Kshatriyas according to Saraswathiswamy. By

wearing thread (Yajnopaveetha) they can attain the status of Kshatriyas as opined by Swaraswathiswamy. All the people are Children of Brahmha. Saraswathiswamy is an excellent writer and published a book called "JayarthaPrakasika". Another book published by him in 1928 is "Prachchana Raja Kulanirnayam". In this book he has proposed a new theory called no caste is attached to a man right from his birth. On the basis of his virtues and knowledge, a man can attain the status of a caste. Wearing thread and performing Yajna and Yaga are the rights of men who took birth in India. Thus he condemned the castism and supported the Vedic Karmas (actions). His teachings had shaken the philosophy of Varna system and caste system which is a feature of Hinduism. For the first time YerramsettiVeerayyanaidu hailed from Kapu community had celebrated thread marriage and wore a thread called "Yajnopaveetam". He was followed by SuryadevaraRaghavayyaChowdari hailed from Kamma community has worn a thread. Later the non-brahmins had continued to wear thread at Nalluru. In 1900 at Nalluru of Guntur district VeeramachaneniAnjaya became a priest for the first time from non-brahmin community. He had performed funeral activities of his father at his sister's house. This was an incident which has shaken the roots of Hindu society. Orthodox brahmanas were greatly disappointed with the activities of non-brahmins in Guntur district. At KolluruAnjaya had set up a school to provide knowledge on Vedas. The non-brahmin children were admitted in this school and provided them knowledge on Vedas. This was a first school of this kind. The non-brahmin children have learned Vedas and attained priest hood and acted as priests in various temples of Guntur district. Gopadev and other social leaders had encouraged women to learn Vedas. They had argued that women are eligible to take up the priesthood. Women are encouraged to perform priestly activities in the temples of the Guntur district. These teachings and activities of non-brahmins brought a remarkable change in the social life of Guntur.

CONCLUSION:

Guntur society is relied upon traditions and customs. The marriages among Hindus are celebrated on the sanctions of Hindu Dharma Sastras. Widow marriages are un common in Hindu society. The Hindu women have better place in society in compare to the position of their counter parts in Christian and Muslim societies. Widow marriages are common in Muslim and Christian societies. Dowry is common among all religions. The lower castes have no voice in the society. The position of Panchamas is so deplorable. To condemn the brahmanical culture, movements have been organized by non-brahmin societies. These movements are responsible for social reorganization in Guntur society.