The Role of Bhagya Reddy Varma in Social Movements in Hyderabad State

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Abstract

The term, social movements, refers to a kind of group action. They are huge informal assemblage of persons or establishments that are directed towards certain issues related to politics and the society. To put it across in a different way, they bring about, or put up resistance against specific policies or practices, or undo a social change. The evolution of different social movements over time and to what extent they have expanded the space for dalits, in the economy, society and polity in Hyderabad state. Hyderabad state was almost a laboratory for international institutions for experimenting with economic reforms and, according to political scientists, one of the objectives was also to capture the response to such reforms from varied social groups and those involved in social movements down the line ranging from the extreme left to autonomous groups. The state has witnessed many social movements involving marginalized and disadvantaged groups and regions. This paper is analyze the contribution of Bhagya Reddy Varma to the Dalit community in Nizam state in early twentieth century. He had immensely worked in order to reform, educate, represent and safeguard Dalits dignity and self-respect.

Key Words: Social movements, Dalit community, reforms, social change
Introduction

A social movement requires sustained collective action over time. Such action is often directed against the state and takes the form of demanding changes in state policy or practice. Spontaneous, disorganized protest cannot be called a social movement either. Collective action must be marked by some degree of organization. This organization may include a leadership and a structure that defines how members relate to each other, make decisions and carry them out. Those participating in a social movement also have shared objectives and ideologies. A social movement has a general orientation or way of approaching to bring about (or to prevent) change. These defining features are not constant. They may change over the course of a social movement’s life.

A reform movement is a kind of social movement that aims at making a gradual change in certain aspects of society, rather than rapid or fundamental changes. A reform movement is distinguished from more radical social movements, such as revolutionary movements. Supremacy of the brahmans in the Vedic period created unrest in the society and kshatriya reacted against the brahmanical domination. The vaishyas wanted to improve their social position with the increase in their economic position due to the growth of trade. All This led to the emergence of two important socio-religious movements in India in the period between 7th and 5th centuries B.C. The Bhakti movement originated in ancient Tamil Nadu and began to spread to the north during the late medieval ages when north India was under Islamic rule. The Islamic rulers were pressing public to convert religion from Hindu to Islam. The Bhakti movement had its own importance to save Hinduism. The 19th Century India witnessed a strong wave of reformation activities in religion and society. There were attempts made by the educated young Indians to end the evils and abuses in religion and society.

Social movements is a collective term used to describe all enterprises that establish a new style of life. They originate from a condition of unrest and derive their motive power from dissatisfaction, with the current form of life and from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living. In its beginning, a social movement is shapeless, poorly organized and without any form. At this stage, the collective behaviour is at a primitive level and the mechanisms of interaction are elementary and spontaneous. As a social movement gradually develops, it attains
the form of an organization. On maturity, it has a body of customs and traditions, established leadership, an enduring division of labour, social rules and social values. In short, it has a culture, a social organization and a new scheme or style of life. Structural conduciveness and strain, creation of a generalized belief, circumstances, mobilization of participants and the application of social controls are six primary factors that act as determinants of a particular social movement.

Classification of social movements on the basis of quality of change they try to attain
On the basis of the quality of change they try to attain Ghanshyam Shah classifies social movements into the following four categories:
(i) Revolt: A revolt is a challenge to political authority, aimed at overthrowing the government.
(ii) Rebellion: A rebellion is an attack on existing authority without any intention to seize state power.
(iii) Reform: Reform does not challenge the political system per se. It attempts to bring about changes in relation between the parts of the system to make it more efficient, responsive and workable.
(iv) Revolution: In a revolution, a section or sections of society launch an organized movement to overthrow not only the established government and regime, but also the socioeconomic structure which sustains it, and it further replaces the structure by an alternative social order.

Classification of social movements on the basis of issues
Social movements are also classified on the basis of issues around which participants get mobilized.

On this basis, social movements are classified into the following types:

Forest Movement
Civil Rights Movement
Anti-untouchability Movement
Linguistic Movement
Nationalist Movement

Classification of social movements on the basis of participants
On the basis of the participants, social movements are of the following types:

**Peasants Movement**

**Tribal Movement**

**Students’ Movement**

**Women’s Movement**

**Dalits’ Movement**

All these typologies, though useful, do not explain the dynamics of the movements which undergo change in the course of time. They do not take into consideration those movements whose objectives change during the development of the movement. Some movements do not have clear objectives in terms of the maintenance’ or the ‘transformation’ of the system.

**Characteristics of Social Movements**

The characteristics of a social movement may be summarized as follows:

*It is a collective behaviour of the people who share common traits completely or partially.

*It depicts some level of organization which may vary from a loose organizational structure, a club type, to the most highly organized structure like a party.

*It is oriented towards the transformation of the state of affairs in the existing system. But, it is not necessary that a movement would always try to bring about progressive changes in the existing social order; on the contrary, it may demand restoration of old values only.

*A social movement, in order to justify itself, invariably adopts some kind of ideology which, may range between the poles of radicalism and extreme conservatism.

*Majority of social movements are characterized by political activity and by people of a broad range of social backgrounds.

*A social movement usually adopts confrontational and disruptive tactics, such as occupying buildings, boycotting businesses and blockading streets.

Movement activists, of course, also employ legal tactics scrupulously, such as lobbying and lawsuits. But the combination of socially disruptive and legal tactics differs based on permutation of interest groups and political parties. The activists endeavour to modify the existing legal code relating to public order and public safety. However, despite opponents’
charges, it would be wrong to say that social movements are simply ‘outlaw’ organizations; some of their actions are legal, while others are illegal.

**Significance of the study**

Hyderabad was a largest princely state in India. Education was limited only to rulers, elite and rich people. Changes seen in modern times, particularly the reforms introduced by Salar Jung, development of education, especially women education, initiative of social reformers and organizations working for social reform in those days and the work done by Government slowly had its impact on the society. The evils of the society of those days were bonded labour. "Bhagela","Begari". Illiteracy, Child Marriages, Polygamy, Dowry and Jogini systems.

Aghornath chattopadhyaya and mulla Abdul Qayyam were the pioneers of social reforms in Hyderabad State. Both of them propogated women's education and other reforms. From 1899-1904 Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu had participated in various reform movements and propogated principles of Brahma Samaj. The first conference of the Brahmo Samaj was held at Residency Bazaar in Hyderabad on 20th September 1914. Narayana Govind Vellinkar as the president of this session. The organizer of this event Bhagya Reddy Varma. He made H.S Venkataramaiah, B. Ramayya, J. S. Mutthaiah, A. R. Mukndaswamy, Malthati Seshaiah, M. Raghupati, G. Balaiah, S.Durgayya, H. S. Sivaram and 14 others as members of Brahma Samaj.

In Hyderabad several organisations such as Arya Samaj and Andhra Maha Sabha strived hard against the discrimination against Dalits. Arya Samaj reformers such as Roy Balmukund, Keshavrao, Koratkar, Lalji Meghjee took up welfare of Dalits as a part of the social reforms.

In 1901, Komarraju Lakshmana Rao established Sreekrishnadevaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam" with the support of Munagala Raja Sri Nayani Venkataranga Rao and Raavichettu Ranga Rao in Hyderabad to propogate Telugu language in Telangana region. In 1904, "Raja Raja Narendra Andhra Bhasha Nilayam" was started in Hanumakonda, in Warangal District. In 1905 "Andhra Samvardhani Library" in Secunderabad, "Balabharathi Nilayam "Andhra Bhasha Varthaka Sangham", in Shamshabad etc. were founded in Telangana as part of the Library Movement. Kommaraju Lakshmana Rao, Ravichettu Rang: Rao started "Vignana Chandrika Grantha Mandal" in 1906, at Hyderabad. Now, let us focus and analyze the contribution of Bhagya Reddy Verma's various initiatives in detail.
Role of Bhagya Reddy Varma in Social Movements in Hyderabad State

We speak about so many social reformers from our Telugu States. Everybody is aware of Gurajada Venkata Appa Rao, Kandhukuri Veeresalingam and etc. However, not many people are aware of the person who was the “Father of The Dalit Movement” in Andhra Pradesh(United). Here is everything you never knew about Bhagya Reddy Varma, the reformer who fought against untouchability in the Hyderabad State.

Bhagya Reddy Varma was born as Madari Bhagaiah to a Dalit, Mala caste family in the princely Hyderabad State to Madare Venkaiah and Madare Ragmamba on 22 May 1888. He was Inspired by Jyotirao Phule, he raised his voice against discrimination by the upper castes. He was employed by, the Brahmo Samaj, where he took the name ‘Bhagya Reddy Varma’ to emphasize the rights of Dalits to claim a high social status, ‘Varma’ being Brahmanic and ‘Reddy’ indicating a non-Brahmin of high status.

He established a social organization called “Adi Hindu”, which was aimed at bringing awareness in the dalit population of the time. He also formed a group called “Jagan Mithra Mandali” which used to educate the Harijans and Malas through Harikathas, a traditional folk theatre art. At the end of each program, Bhagya Reddy Varma used to add a punch line” to motivate the dalits in attendance. Slogans like “dalits are not untouchables”, “they are backbone of this country”, “we are Adi Hindu”, came to be popularised by him. Adi-Hindu movement is the first Identity and Self-respect movement in Hyderabad State, Adi-Hindu movement Started in Hyderabad state against untouchability and caste discrimination, The pioneer of this movement was Madari Bhagya Reddy Varma, He founded Jayan Mitra Mandali in 1906 to enlighten the illiterature massed through Harikatha performances and Bhajans. In the Year 1912, he founded Manya Sangham which after a decade was given the name of Adi-Hindu Social Service League. The object of the organization was eradicate the evil habits that had craps into the society, such as drinking, sacrificing the animals, dedicating the girls to the deties, and performing child marriages.
In order to achieve these objectives he organized volunteers, named, Swastik Dal. He Founded Adi-Hindu Murali Nivaran Mandali to eradicate prostitution. The Adi-Hindu Social Service League started about 40 primary schools in Hyderabad for the students. However, due to paucity of funds those schools were handed over to the government. He constructed a hostel building for the students of the Adi-Hindu community with the generous help of some philanthropists. He participated in Adi-Hindu conferences held at Allahabad and Lucknow also. He supported Dr. Bahasaheb Ambedkar who demanded separate electorate for the Depressed Classes. He opened a printing press of his own and started a Telugu weekly Adi-Hindu in the year 1930.

Bhagya Reddy had launched a movement against the devadasi pratha, forcing the Nizam to declare it a crime. He also campaigned on many social issues like Child Marriage, Black Magic, Women Education, Alcohol prohibition etc. His work was spread to neighbouring states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Andhra, people joined voices and followed the revolution. Even in modern days also the upper communities have never bothered to recognize his work and failed to tell about his gracious history to the coming generations.

Bhagya Reddy, a young boy from an untouchable Mala community grew up to lay the foundation of the Dalit movement in the Nizam‘s kingdom. The young Bhagya Reddy was also inspired by a learned Shaivite Guru, who argued that it was a historical fact that the so made untouchables had been the rulers of the land prior to the migration of Aryans to these regions of the country. This is the origin of the name Reddy (derived from redu which means ruler‘) that he suffixed to his name. The title Varma was conferred on Bhagya Reddy at the annual function of the Arya Samaj in 1913 in recognition of his laudable social service to Hindu society. We will learn about his stand and strategy about his relationship with Arya Samaj in the following discussion.

The Nizam's territory was a late entrant into the field of social reforms and cultural and literary organizations. Due to the slow growth of western education in this area, we see hardly any organizational activities either in terms of social issues or cultural and literary aspects in the nineteenth century. Only after 1900 was there a slow growth of literary and cultural consciousness in Telugu. In 1901, the Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Basha Nilyamu (Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Library) was established in Hyderabad under the patronage of the Rajah of
Munagala. The Sri Raja Raja Narendra Andhra Basha Nilayam was established at Hanumakonda in 1904 and the Vigyana Chandrika Mandal was established in Hyderabad in 1906.

In 1906 Bhagya Reddy founded an organization called the Jagan Mitra Mandal and started the work of awakening social consciousness among the untouchables. This event can be historically regarded as the beginning of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh. He organized regular Harikatha Kalakshempams, a popular narrative mode, to sensitize the community on various issues. At the end of these performances and sometimes during the performance itself, Bhagya Reddy spoke with great eloquence, telling the Dalits that they were the real and original inhabitants of the country and that the others had migrated from central Asia for their livelihood. Through Harikathas, the Jagan Mitra Mandal spread the political message of the misery of untouchables, Hinduism’s treachery, and its central role in their social disabilities. In 1911 Bhagya Reddy founded the Manya Sangham. The primary aims and objectives of Manya Sangham were: 1) to create awareness through skits that the oppressed classes are sons of the soil; 2) to impart education to untouchable children; 3) to discourage child marriages; 4) to disallow non-vegetarian food and intoxicants in marriages and other auspicious functions; 5) to abolish the Jogini‘ or Murali‘ or Basavi‘ custom prevalent in the community.

In 1912 he organized a band of Swasthy Dal Volunteers’ to serve the people particularly the untouchables during period of epidemics especially plague. It worked on similar lines to that of Red Cross Society, but his organization carried the sign of the yellow Buddhist Swastika, the Buddhist Cross. During the epidemic, Swasthy Dal volunteers rendered service for the general public also. In 1918, he began publishing the magazine Pancham, an English monthly, from Hyderabad. Bhagya Reddy set up new Panchayats, an ancient system of the untouchable community to settle disputes among themselves. He developed and systematized their legal practices so that justice could be awarded without fear or favor. Kula gurus and kula naiks of the community took part in the settlement of cases in their jurisdiction and the cases were quickly attended to. In these early efforts, Bhagya Reddy Varma initiated social work like Jyotirao Phule. One of Bhagya Reddy’s most significant achievements in the social activism was his effort to prevent the dedication of young girls of the community to temples to serve as murlis‘ or jogins‘. Under the guise of temple dedication, these girls were pushed into a life of prostitution. He put all his efforts into this cause and the Nizam’s Government enacted a law making this practice a
crime. After a decade the name of the Manya Sangham was changed into of the Adi- Hindu Social Service League of Hyderabad. Census reports of Nizam’s Government of 1930 mentions the initiative of Bhagya Reddy on the jogini issue.

. The system of dedication of girls to gods as muralis, devadasis or basavis and boys as waghyas or potras continues. The Secretary of the Adi-Hindu Social League, Hyderabad, says that the custom of dedication of girls is immemorial.

Aside from social awareness and reformist programmes in the community, Bhagya Reddy executed every occasion politically to demonstrate that Aryan-Brahmanism was poisonous in many ways. One of the best known of these events is a show that he arranged at Prem Theatre, Hyderabad, depicting a battle between Aryans and Non-Aryans. He invited both Savarna Hindus and Adi-Hindus as well as other eminent personalities. The Jagatguru Shankaracharya of Kurtukot was the Chief Guest. His followers and other dignitaries also attended the function; it was a mammoth gathering. The battle between Aryan and Non-Aryans, in ancient costumes, with arms and weapons was fought on stage. Bhagya Reddy exhibited the valour and skill of the non-Aryans as against the Aryans who were more apt to adopt foul methods in fighting and used their sly minds to defeat the enemy by hook or crook ignoring all norms and rules that are to be observed in a battle. This off beat performance was not digested by the orthodox and was objected to by sanatan Hindus who walked out of the theatre to register their protest. A remarkable aspect of Bhagya Reddy’s life is that though he worked with Hindu cultural organizations he never compromised on his self-respect and dignity. Rather he commanded respect among them.

Bhagya Reddy Varma felt that education was essential for the all-round progress and uplift of the depressed classes. It was essential to reform their living habits and inculcate in them a pride in the basic truth that they were the sons of the soil, and the present fallen status in the society was due to the socio-cultural and political hegemony of the Brahmin-oriented Hinduism.

In 1906, he opened a Lower Primary school for Adi-Hindu children at the Jagan Mitra Mandali office and in 1910, he opened three schools: one at Isamia Bazar, one at Lingampally, and another one at Bogulkunta. Later four more schools were opened at Chenchalguda, Sultan Shahi, Dhooppet and Gunfoundry. The number of these Adi-Hindu Primary Schools soon grew to 26
including those at Secunderabad and Bolaram. About 2500 pupils were the beneficiaries. In 1933, these schools, which were run by the Adi-Hindu Social Service League, were handed over to Nizam’s Government under the conditions that the schools be free, that the medium of instruction would be the mother tongue of the student and not Urdu as in other government schools, that the students would receive instruction in handicrafts and so on. The Nizam’s government not only honored the conditions, they opened more such schools and maintained them as special schools meant for untouchable children but open to all.

It is important to note that notwithstanding his support for the adi-Dravida cause, Bhagya Reddy continued to be actively associated with caste-Hindu reform organizations, especially the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj. These had politically a decisive impact on his ideology and agenda of action during his initial days. All the same, in his critique of Hinduism, even in this initial period his organization maintained an autonomous Dalit‘ identity despite the fact that the caste-Hindu organizations were keen to incorporate Dalits within their fold and sphere of influence. During the 1920s and 30s Bhagya Reddy traveled widely throughout India, extending the work he had begun in Andhra Pradesh and raising awareness among outcaste’ groups.

Bhagya Reddy Varma became increasingly recognized as a social reformer and activist through extensive travel and organization of various forums where untouchable voices could be articulated. As a part of this initiative, he organized the first All India Adi-Hindu (Untouchable) Conference in Hyderabad from the 29th, to 31st of March 1922. Delegates from Bombay, Poona, Karachi, Nagpur, Yavatma, Raipur, Bezwada, Machilipatnam, Rajahmundry, Eluru and many other places attended the conference. Most importantly during this conference, the Manya Sangham was renamed the Central Adi-Hindu Social Service League to serve for the uplift of Adi-Hindus, Adi-Andhras, Adi-Karnatakas, Adi-Dravidas and Adi-Maharashtrians. Significantly, Bhagya Reddy did not confine his organizational activities to untouchables, but attempted to bridge the gap between caste-Hindus and untouchables. On the last day of the conference, therefore, speeches were made by prominent social reformers of Hyderabad who were also part of Adi-Hindu movement: Justice Rai Balmukund, Pandit Keshav Rao, Seth Lali Meghju Jain, N.G. Wellinker, Pandit Rahavender Rao Sharma, R.E. Reporter and T. Dhankoti Varma.

It was also the beginning of the engagement of the Adi-Hindu identity to do away with the stigma of Untouchability. By employing this inclusive category as an overarching identity for
untouchables, the conference tried to unify untouchables by reclaiming a historical heritage as the original inhabitants of the nation, and with it, a sense of self-respect. In our estimate Bhagya Reddy played historically significant role by shifting from a social and reformist position to a political position in the 1930s, the period that witnessed and generated the potential of the Dalit political stand against the dominant nationalist project to integrate Dalits into its fold in terms of nation and religion.

Conclusion

Bhagya Reddy Verma was the first person who laid the foundation for Dalit movement. He led the movement in Hyderabad during early 20th century and also founded an organization named as jagan mitra mandali. The main aim of this organization was to encourage and awaken the social consciousness among Dalit. In 1911 Bhagya Reddy Varma founded Manya Sangam for removal of social evils like intemperance and sacrifice of animals. The main aim of such organization was to disallow non-vegetarian food and intoxicant in marriages. Bhagya Reddy set a clear agenda for Adi-Hindu/Ad-Andhra Movement. The agenda was to create a new socio-political and religious path for the Dalits. Dalits were treated shabbily by the Hindus who for political motives considered them as part of their religion. Arya Samaj was making frantic efforts to bring the Dalits back into the Hindu fold who had proselytized into Islam and Christianity. Bhagya Reddy intervened at this appropriate juncture to espouse the cause of Dalits by carving out an independent identity of their own. Bhagya Reddy worked towards constructing an autonomous identity for Dalits through the Adi Hindu ideology in opposition to the Arya/Brahma Samaj model of Hindu reformism. He had meticulously utilized the colonial policies such as the communal award and the census reports for the advancement of the dalits welfare. He strongly supported Dr. Ambekar in his all efforts for the development of dalits. He was influenced by the Buddhist ideals from the early stages of his career, even though there is no clear evidence to suggest that he himself converted to Buddhism. There were many historians who wrote volumes on Raj Ram Mohan Roy at national level and Kandukuri Veeress Lingam in Andhra context but there were hardly any historians paid any attention in their studies to document his greatest contribution to the dalit reformation. Reddy had launched a movement against devadasi pratha, forcing the Nizam to declare it a crime. During the Telangana Movement in 2017, the students of Telangana region renamed the G. M. C. Balayogi Athletic Stadium at Gachibowli as Bhagya Reddy Varma Stadium. Bhagya Reddy Vanma became pioneer of Dalit self-respect movement in Hyderabad and in also Andhra. In 1917 he presided over the first. Andhra Desa Punchama conference at Vijavawada. Arige Ramaswamy, B.S. Venkat Rao also played a significant role in Dalit Movement in Hyderabad State. However he invoked Hindu Puranic tradition to eradicate caste. They set up schools and also persuaded the Nizam to allocate special funds for the education of dalits. They also led successful agitations against the practice of dedicating girls, especially dalit girls, as devadasis or joginis to temples and forcing them into
prostitution. As a part of their campaign to fight the Hindu caste system, they took keen interest in the teachings of the Buddha and promoted the adoption of Buddhism by Dalits.

REFERENCES


