

THE LIFE OF REBBAPRAGADA MANDESWARA SARMA IN ANDHRA FREEDOM MOVEMENT

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The history of great people is the history of contemporary society and it holds a mirror of their times. The history of Congress is regarded as the history of modern India. After centuries of dull and dormancy, India woke up to freedom under the leadership of the Congress. The Congress which led a non-violent movement for over 65 years, has its significance in the history of the mankind and it is one of the greatest mass movements in the world history.ⁱ

India lost its freedom and fell into the hands of East India Company's rule in 1757 and then into the hands of the British crown in 1858. As B.Pattabhi Sitaramayya said, politically foreign rule emasculated the nation, killing all originality, and initiative and fostering spirit of servility and abjectness.ⁱⁱ

However the gigantic task of "All-round reconstruction and renovation could not have been accomplished but for the benefit of English education and the efforts of social reformers and religious leaders. As a result of English education a new class of intelligentsia emerged in India.

In the Nineteenth century, social reformers started their constructive work to reform the society. The Western education brought the doctrines like nationalism and democracy to India. It was the India's good fortune that in the hour of National crisis, she had the benefit of the guidance of spiritual and social reformers like Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Dayananda Saraswathi and Raja Rammohan Roy.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Andhradesa, Kandukuri Veeresalingam, a staunch champion of social reform gave to the Andhras their first lessons in social reform. A Brahmin by birth he put forth, extraordinary efforts towards social awakening. As C.R.Reddy said "Veeresalingam is the greatest Andhra of modern times. There was no equal to him not only in Andhra but in the Tamil districts of Madras Presidency, because of him the Andhra area took an early lead in social reform."^{iv}

By 1905, political consciousness became widespread in Andhra. The people came under the influence of Nationalism. The circar districts of Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Nellore were in particular vibrant with the new spirit. Agricultural prosperity enabled the people of these areas to increase the general level of literacy.^v Towns like Rajahmundry, Machilipatnam, Coconada and Guntur provided means that could answer the peoples literate and professional needs.^{vi} With Brahmins providing leadership, Telugu literary renaissance, education and nationalism began in the Circars, which were culturally and economically more advanced than other districts of the Andhra area.^{vii} Bipin Chandra Paul has brought to Andhra the torch of National education from Bengal.

Veeresalingam carried out his reforms mostly in Rajahmundry. There was evidence to show that people in this coastal town displayed keen enthusiasm in the Nationalist movement during its early stages.^{viii}

Mandeswara Sarma, a student of educational institutions of Rajahmundry town started his career as a social reformer, constructive public worker and peasant leader. He also worked for tribal upliftment, and became prominent political leader in West Godavari District.* Mandeswara Sarma gave up his studies and joined the National movement. Political agitator by profession and a social reformer by conviction, he took up the cause of Ryots against oppression of the Zamindars and the policies of the British Government. He agitated against Godavari, Krishna land revenue settlement, the enhancement of land rent and he opposed the government policy to introduce the ability principle instead of liability principle.^{ix}

Mandeswara Sarma started Andhra Land League on the lines of Bardoli against the enhancement of land rent. Being a Ryot in one village and the son of a Zamindari manager in another village, he helped the Ryots of Dharmavaram in their suits on the zamindar against rent enhancement. He was the father of the Zamin Ryot Movement in Andhra and established Zamin Ryot Association in 1929.^x He started `Ryotangavidyalam at Tanuku along with Dandu Narayana Raju.

The Andhra Provincial Congress Committee constituted a body to make enquiry into zamindari abolition, which was headed by T. Prakasam. Mandeswara Sarma, who acted as Secretary of the sub-committee, prepared a draft on the abolition of zamindaries, which became a historical document in the history of peasant struggle.^{xi}

Mandeswara Sarma participated in Nagpur Flag Satyagraha and was imprisoned for six months in Nagpur jail. He started “*Pracharaka Vidyalayam*” which was the part of “*Congress Pracharaka Samithi*” to give training to the congress volunteers in polity, economy and Satyagraha. He took part in the civil disobedience movement and underwent imprisonment for one year in Rajahmundry and Cuddalore jails. He participated actively in the triple boycott i.e., boycott of foreign clothes, colleges and government offices.^{xii}

While the zamindari abolition enquiry committee conducted enquiry in Vizagapatam agency area, for the first time he came into contact with the tribes of Vizagapatam agency, he witnessed the suffering, backwardness, ignorance and exploitation of the tribes. Then his activities were shifted to tribal upliftment. He organized first “Girijana Sabha” at Madugole in 1938.^{xiii} For his efforts “*Gothi*” nowkari was abolished in Vizagapatam agency.*

Mandeswara Sarma established “*Andhra Sramika Dharma Rajya Sabha*” in 1941, under this banner a separate section was opened for the welfare of tribes called “*Hill-Tribe welfare Board*”. He established schools for tribes called “*Chaduvula Badulu*”. He encouraged cottage industries, conducted training camps and promoted adult education for the tribes. He conducted medical camps, distributed Homeopathy medicines for improving the health of hill-tribes and to eradicate Malaria. Though the British Government confiscated all his property at the time of civil disobedience movement, he did not yield to the Government. He stood boldly and went to jail. His whole property was spent towards the welfare of the Girijans. He never accepted any power or position through out his life. Mandeswara Sarma was a brilliant writer, political thinker, journalist and social reformer, who aimed at eradicating the miserable conditions and sufferings of the tribes.^{xiv}

The writing of biographies of great people is helpful in the writing of history of a society. The study of personality of a leader would to a large extent help to find out the real motivating forces and resulting factors of historical events and it further would help to sort out the past in right perspective.

Writing of autobiography of ones own is the style of modern times, but writing the biographies of great people, praising their greatness is common in every countrys literature. In the writing of biography one cannot fully depend on mere literary works, but has to go through the government documents. The making of a biography is interlinked with personal interest, keen observation of material and facts, avoiding exaggerations, bringing out a new look in preparing a fresh document with the help of different sources.

The present study is about the life and achievements of Mandeswara Sarma who worked in different fields. It is an attempt to bring a full picture of his multi-faceted activities.

EARLY LIFE AND INFLUENCE

In the last quarter of the Nineteenth century Andhradesa was on the threshold of modern Andhra Renaissance.^{xv} An era of social reform was ushered in. There was also intense literary activity; Veeresalingam founded in 1878 a Telugu journal "Vivekavardhini".^{xvi} It marked the beginning of Telugu literary renaissance which led to social and political consciousness in Andhra.^{xvii}

Rebbapragada Mandeswara Sarma was born on 6th November 1898 in Rajahmundry.^{xviii} His father was Venkataramayya, and his mother was Sitamma. He is the only son who survived out of eight children. Ramayya and Sitamma felt that the Lord Saneeswara angered with them and in order to avoid the anger of Lord Saneeswara they named him as Mandeswara.^{xix} His father left Rajahmundry and constructed a house near Taluk Office at Kovvur.* He had one younger sister called Vemuri Ammayamma.^{xx}

Mandeswara Sarmas father was Estate manager of Dharmavaram, 15 kilometers away from Kovvur. The Zamindar at that time was Kanchumarthi Ramachandra Rao.* The zamindar had no children, so he wanted to offer Venkataramayya his estate manager, the whole estate of Dharmavaram. But Venkataramayya refused his offer and suggested the adoption of a child so that Kanchumarthi clan would continue forever.^{xxi}

Mandeswara Sarmas father was a rich man having four hundred acres of land and was one of the richest persons in Rajahmundry. Their house was very big one with two stairs in Isukaveedhi in Rajahmundry. He had two big houses in Rajahmundry and two houses in Kovvur. He possessed mango gardens and agricultural lands in Korumamidi, Kovvur and Dharmavaram villages of West Godavari district.^{xxii}

Venkataramayya was a very pious man and he donated his lands to the temples of Sivalayam and Shankaramatam in Kovvur.^{xxiii} He used to perform Mahasivarathri and Nrusimha Jayanthi every year and make Annasantarpana (Free meals) to poor people.^{xxiv} Mandeswara Sarmas uncle Rebbapragada Papayya was a close associate of Kandukuri Veeresalingam.^{xxv}

Mandeswara Sarmas father donated his lands to religious institutions and the poor people. He used to give donations to the poor couple who were going to marry. The same generosity, humanity, kindness in heart, was inherited by Mandeswara Sarma. From his childhood he paid much interest in religious activities and social reform.

Mandeswara Sarmas mother Sitamma was a pious woman known for tenderness in her heart. It was the practice of his mother who made him read the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Vedas. Thus he was very much influenced by his parents.

The study of political leader calls for a study of his adolescence and adulthood, especially traumatic events or personality crisis that they have significantly influenced his subsequent behaviour.^{xxvi} Therefore it is relevant to make a brief examination of Mandeswara Sharmas childhood and adolescence in order to explain how they influenced his subsequent behaviour.

Rajahmundry is a big town situated on the left bank of the river Godavari which was founded by the Eastern Chalukyas. The town is a centre of both religious and cultural activities. Several poets and great scholars were patronized by Eastern Chalukyas such as Nannaya.

Mandeswara Sarmas family resided in Rajahmundry which stands forefront in the entire Andhra region particularly in social reform and educational facilities.^{xxvii} The most powerful effect and enduring result of British rule in India is the intellectual development of the people on an entirely new line, and the consequent changes in their political, social, religious and economic outlook.^{xxviii} Due to modern education Indian society was awakened from long isolated social life.^{xxix}

The transformation in India in the Nineteenth century was due to the introduction of English education.^{xxx} The Education Dispatch of 1854, described as the Magna Carta of English education, formed a landmark in the history of education in Modern India. It attained a comprehensive plan which supplied the basis for the subsequent development of educational system in this country.^{xxxi}

Sir Thomas Munro wished to establish in each Collectorate two principal schools. The first government school outside Madras city was founded at Rajahmundry in 1853.^{xxxii} Thus the establishments of educational institutions were taken up by the East India Company in the Madras presidency. The Presidency gave freedom to the Collectors to follow their own policy in establishing schools. The Sub-Collector of Narsapur, George Noble Taylor started *Rate Schools* in Godavari district.^{xxxiii} Kandukuri Veeresalingam and Chilakamarthi Lakshmi Narasimham Pantulu got their education in the Schools established by the Government of Madras Presidency.^{xxxiv}

The Godavari district, especially Rajahmundry town got maximum benefit from the irrigation facilities, by the construction of anicut on Godavari at Dowlaiswaram, by Sir. Arthur Cotton and on the subsequent development in agriculture. Due to the establishment of government schools and college, the Rajahmundry became a centre for educational growth in the entire Godavari area.^{xxxv}

In the Godavari district, education at the beginning of the Nineteenth century was mainly confined to the Pial school system.^{xxxvi} Rajahmundry was one of the first benefited by establishment of English Schools. Mr. Bayar, the Collector, of Godavari district established a school at Rajahmundry where English was taught.^{xxxvii}

The educational development got momentum through the Madras Education Act of 1863 and the Local Fund Act of 1871 in Godavari District.^{xxxviii}

The Brahmins were at the apex of this social hierarchy by the virtue of their high position in ritualistic hierarchy and monopoly of traditional learning^{xxxix}. Most of the Telugu Brahmin leaders were intellectuals and individualists in politics. They made able leaders but were seldom good followers especially in state politics.

Edgar Thurston discussed in his book “Castes and Tribes of South India” that there were different divisions among Brahmins like Vaidikas, Niyogis and Tambalas in Andhradesa.^{xl} Niyogis were secular in character and took to the sword and pen with equal facility as generals of armies and as administrators. They were more adoptable and naturally became predominant in matters that really counted positions and power.^{xli}

To their tradition the Niyogis were quicker in responding favourably to the new English learning. They worked as Dubashees who served both the French and the British; they were drawn from the Niyogis such as Enugula Veeraswami, Vennelakanti Soobrow, Kandregula Jogi Panthulu and Burra Atchanna.^{xlii}

The chief instrument through which the nationalist minded Indians spread the message of patriotism and modern economic, social and political ideas and created an all-India consciousness was the press. The `Free Press was introduced for the first time by English man and it brought new life to India. The Vernacular press played a vital role in bringing out the public opinion of India.^{xliii} They were the pioneers of patriotism in this country.^{xliv}

Chilakamarthi Lakshmi Narasimham, a poet, laureate in his presidential address in the first Andhradesa Library conference held at Vijayawada on 10th April, 1914, said that “the suns light brightens every thing, so shall knowledge dispel, darkness and brightens every life.”, “Air gives life to all and is freely accessible, so shall knowledge be within easy reach for all, breathing life — vigour into them. Clear water quenches the thirst of all so shall knowledge satisfy the curiosity of the curious and the hunger of the hungry for it”.

As stated by Ayyanki Venkata Ramanayya in his article, the library movement in Andhradesa not only flowed like living stream in the flood of enthusiasm, but also aided the birth and the growth of other movements for the countrys progress.^{xlv}

Andhra Ratna Duggirala Gopala Krishnayya stated in his presidential address to the Andhradesa Library conference in 1924 that “It is undoubted that the Andhra library movement laid foundation of the Indian Nationalism. “I know that the success of Mahatma Gandhis National movement is due in a large measure to our library movement. The President and the Secretary of the every library became in fact the Headman and the Karanam of the village in Gandhiraj. I toured Andhradesa, visiting numerous villages

during the past two years. I found that every library was the work field for the intensification and spread of our great national movement”.

The influence of the press extended far beyond its literate subscribers and it was not confined to cities and large towns. A local library would be organized even with a single news paper. A table, a bench or two would constitute the capital equipment. Every piece of news or editorial comment would be read or heard and thoroughly discussed. The newspaper not only became the political educator, reading, or discussing it became a form of political participation.^{xlvi} Andhra Ratnas statement is aptly suitable to Mandeswara Sarma as he worked as the Secretary of Gowthami Regional library, Rajahmundry and started an open reading room in his own house in the street called Museum garden in Rajahmundry in 1916, at the age of eighteen years.^{xlvii}

The zamindar of Polavaram, Kocherla Venkata Krishna Rao established “Saraswatha Grandha Mala” and encouraged literary activity. In Tanuku, Sanivarapu Subba Rao and Mudiganti Jagganna Sastry started “Palleturi Grandha Mandali”^{xlvi}. They made the people conscious of their rights and freedom, and fearlessly advocated popular causes. The attitude of the government towards press was bitter enmity. There was an incident which took place when Mutnuri Krishna Rao was the Editor of the Krishna Patrika in Machilipatnam. For his editorials, the government warned him if he did not quit from editorship he would be arrested. Then Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya came to his rescue, by taking the charge of editorship for a period of three years.

Mandeswara Sarma started a library in his own house in Kovvur with more than three thousand books. He was also responsible for the establishment of Government Branch Library in Kovvur. The libraries became centres of discussion and debate. They were definitely the symbols of National resurgence. Mandeswara Sarma conducted quiz and essay writing competitions to the readers who attended the library with the help of Kesiraju Venkata Nrusimha Appa Rao. Mandeswara Sarma ran “*Yuga Dharma*” weekly in both Telugu and English languages for nearly fifteen years^{xlx}.

In modern times, Rajahmundry Arts College became a seat for higher learning. Eminent principals worked in this college like George Muller and Cooldrie. They encouraged the students in art and paint, such a great stalwarts like Adavi Bapi Raju, novelist, Damerla Venkatadri, painter, Rallabandi Subba Rao, a Historian. Mandeswara Sarma and Adavi Bapi Raju were close friends and they worked together in the National Movement.

The story of Mandeswara Sarma was the history of resistance, strife, struggle, suffering and sacrifice for the cause of the liberation of his mother land.

His primary and secondary education took place in Rajahmundry. He pursued his secondary education in the National school. When he was a student he was influenced by Pals visit to Rajahmundry during Vandemataram Movement. He was a brilliant student during his school days. At an early age he

inculcated Nationalistic ideas. But he left the school when he was studying ninth form with the inspiration of Damerla Ramana Rao who was a senior student to him with the feelings of freedom. When he was in school days he started an open air reading room in the museum gardens, Rajahmundry in 1916. He used to collect books, news papers and pamphlets from his kith and kin and placed them in the reading room.¹

As a student of National school, he founded “*Bharat Sevak Sangh*” along with his childhood friend Pusuluri Kodanda Ramayya to inculcate patriotic feelings among the students. It is an organization linked with social service.^{li}

Mandeswara Sarmas family moved to Kovvur in 1920 because of the sad demise of his elder brother. His elder brother died when their parents made arrangement to perform his marriage due to some sickness. As also his elder sister called Sita Mani who died due to sickness in young age. These two incidents affected his parents very much. So they wanted to shift their family to Kovvur where a big house was constructed by his father near Taluk office.^{lii}

Mandeswara Sarma married Lakshmi Narasamma, daughter of Bodapati Rajanna native of Tuni. His father-in-law worked as Diwan of Bobbili Estate, when he got married Lakshmi Narasamma. His father-in-law, Rajanna also worked as Estate Manager and Diwan of the Estates of Darakota and Saluru. He was very sincere and hard working man. His father-in-law performed their marriage with great splendour and pomp. He gave him much gold and five acres of land as “Pasupu Kumkuma” during the marriage ceremony.

Mandeswara Sarmas wife, Lakshmi Narsamma was a very innocent woman. She simply followed the foot steps of her husband. She was very generous and helpful to the poor people. She equally treated the rich and poor. She equally treated her daughters and daughter-in-laws. She wore always Khaddar clothes. She worked as the President of Womens Association in Kovvur for several years.^{liii}

Even though Mandeswara Sarma was rich he led simple, austere, and humble life like a Rushi. He did not acquire any chairs, sofa sets to exhibit his richness, but had only carpets and country-made mats in his house.

The students of Sanskrit School and college in Kovvur were provided with free meals in his house. His house was just like a choultry and many people came and had food at their will, one quintal of paddy rice was being consumed in three days. Mandeswara Sarma had to forgo the benefits of higher education for the sake of service to the society and country. He was an intellectual who could analyze the problems of the day, in their true perspective and suggest ways and means for their solution. He was a brilliant writer and political thinker.^{liv}

The next chapter deals with his political activities as freedom fighter, a nationalist leader and peasant leader.

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 Rama Krishna. V., “Social Reform in Andhra”, Hyderabad p.4 Niyogi Brahmins claimed that they have been famous from ancient times the familiar work mentioning Niyogi Brahmins were Timmarusu, Tenali Rama Krishna and Nannaya in medieval ages and Yenugula Veeraswamy, Tanguturi.Prakasam, Kandukuri Veeresalingam in modern age. This sect among Brahmins belonged to poets and ministers. they served in royal courts as ministers. There were a few families with the surnames of Pragada which means Minister. For instance some of the surnames were like Rebbapragada, Tallapragada, Mantripragada and Yellapragada.
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