

Atheism, Rationalism and Radical Humanism in the Coastal Andhra (1920-1960)

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the award of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE**

BY

**MULUGU S. NEELOTPAL
(Reg. No. 11SPPH08)**



**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
HYDERABAD-500046**

OCTOBER 2022

DECLARATION

I, Mulugu S. Neelotpal (Reg.No 11SPPH08), hereby declare that the thesis "**Atheism, Rationalism and Radical Humanism in the Coastal Andhra (1920-1960)**", is a bonafide research work carried out by me at the Department of Political Science, School of social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, under the guidance and supervision of **Prof.Sanjay Palshikar**.

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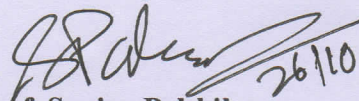
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Department of Political Science
School of Social Sciences
P.O. Central University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500046



CERTIFICATE

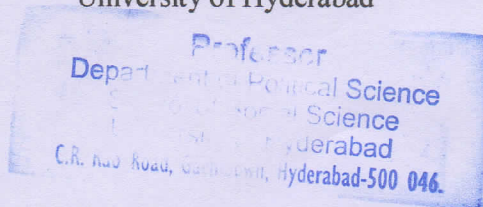
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Prof. Sanjay Palshikar

Supervisor

Department of Political Science

University of Hyderabad



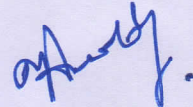


Head

Department of Political Science

University of Hyderabad

Head
Department of Political Science
School of Social Science
University of Hyderabad
C.R. Rao Road, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500 046.



Dean

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

अध्यक्ष / DEAN
समाज विज्ञान संकाय
School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-500 046., भारत
Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA.



This is to certify that the thesis titled **“Atheism, Rationalism and Radical Humanism in the Coastal Andhra (1920-1960)”** submitted by **Mulugu S.Neelotpal** bearing the registration number **11SPPH08**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted previously in part or full to this or any other University or institution for the award of any other degree or diploma.

Parts of the thesis have been:

A. Published in the following publications:

1. Mulugu Subrahmanya Neelotpal, **“The Influence and Relevance of M.N.Roy in Coastal Andhra: An Analysis”**, **The Indian Journal of Political Science**, Volume LXXXII, No.1, January-March 2021.
2. Mulugu Subrahmanya Neelotpal, **“The Concept of Freedom: Ideas of Gandhi, M.N. Roy and Gora”**, **Gandhi Marg**, Volume 43, Number 4, January-March 2022.

B. Presented in the following seminars/conferences

1. Mulugu.S.Neelotpal, **“Atheism and its Development in Andhra: The Debates”** at the Second International Seminar of Swami Vivekananda Association of Science and Humanities 2015. (Trivandrum) (Article sent to the conference held in May 2015 and read and also published as part of proceedings of the seminar).
2. Mulugu.S.Neelotpal, **“M.N.Roy and Gora: Their Vision of Morality through their Concepts of Radical Humanism and Positive Atheism”** at the **Graduate Research Meet 2021** (online event) held on November 11&12, 2021, at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.
3. Mulugu.S.Neelotpal, **“The Talisman of Tyagaraja: Music as an Art and Science to preserve Nature”**, a research paper on the broad sub-area of the thesis pertaining to the thinker Gora about the utility of art as a tool to transform society and nature. The paper was presented at 10th Anniversary conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, Gainesville, Florida (USA) which took place during January 14-17, 2016 at the University of Florida.

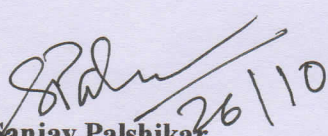
C. Attended

A National Level Workshop (online)

on **“Data Analysis Methods for Research in Social Sciences”**, sponsored by ICSSR-SRC, Hyderabad and organized by the department of Economics, Osmania University from 25th October-26th and 28th October, 2021.

Also, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfillment of course work requirement of his PhD.

Course Code	Name	Credit	Pass/Fail
PS 801	Research Methodology-I	4	Pass
PS 802	Research Methodology-II	4	Pass


Prof. Sanjay Palshikar

Supervisor

Department of Political Science

University of Hyderabad

Professor

Department of Political Science

School of Social Science

University of Hyderabad

C.R. Rao Road, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500 046


Head

Department of Political Science

University of Hyderabad

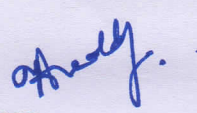
Head

Department of Political Science

School of Social Science

University of Hyderabad

C.R. Rao Road, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500 046.


Dean

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

अध्यक्ष / DEAN

समाज विज्ञान संकाय

School of Social Sciences

हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय

University of Hyderabad

हैदराबाद-500 046., भारत

Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not see the day of its fructification, but for the constant support and almost vicarious guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Sanjay Palshikar. Obstacles were many, from both personal and other fronts, but when there was an effort from my side to pursue this thesis, Prof. Sanjay always had a concern that I put up a standard version to the body of work I am pursuing. I thank him for his ability to bear with me.

Similarly, I fondly recall the suggestions of Prof. K.C. Suri, my doctoral committee member and the man who suggested the topic of this thesis in the first place. The way he guided me in the progression of this thesis, with sheer grit and counsel helped me in shaping up the content of the thesis. Likewise, Prof. Rajagopal who is also my DC member was a constant help for me, in my work in progress and other interactions I had with him. Though at times he was silent, he always co-operated with the members of committee in my doctoral work.

I would like to thank my fellow scholars, Dr. Joseph Alugula, Dr. Satri Veera Kesalu who helped me in formatting the thesis in its current form. In times of personal tragedy too, both of them steered the ship of my thesis with suggestions and inputs which improved the look of the work..

Similarly my juniors, Ashok Gurram, Akhil from IMA, staff of the department of Political Science, Prakash sir, Ather Farzana madam helped me in doing the paper work in the thesis during time of submission. I thank them.

There were a lot of intellectuals and thinkers whom I met during the research work for my thesis. Great ideologues like Mr. Ravipudi Venkatadri (B.1922-), who is still as vigilant about current trends at 100, gave me lot of encouragement when I interviewed him for my thesis. I pay my respects to him. Likewise Mr. Meduri Satyanarayana, the in-charge of the Radical Humanist Centre, Inkollu (Prakasam district) helped me a lot in sending important material for my research from Inkollu to Hyderabad through post. I thank him. Prof. Vakulabharanam Ramakrishna, a distinguished scholar on Telugu history gave his inputs while discussing the topics of thesis with him. I thank him for his time at his age!

Similarly the great literary giant of Telugu, Late Smt. Abburi Chaya Devi (1933-2019) whose father-in-law was a great associate of M.N. Roy, helped me a lot with sharing material on Abburi Ramakrishna Rao and Roy's friendship. When I interviewed her, she was so warm and forthcoming in appreciating my work. I pay my obeisance to her soul.

Lavanam (1930-2014), the great crusader son of Gora, and Vijayam (B.1942-), another son of Gora were really helpful in sharing their knowledge, both in form of interviews and by lending me literature on Atheist thinker father Gora during my Vijayawada visit. I thank them and the hospitality the Atheist Centre provided me.

Finally I cannot thank enough my family, my late father a brilliant man of words, Vishwanadham who corrected and proof read my drafts before the final draft arrived. My mother, Dr. D. Girija Kumari who is a constant source of Inspiration for me in bucking up and doing my academic work. My sister, M. Sushumna who also gave her advice regarding my academic pursuits. I thank them for bearing

with my laziness and spurts of anger in between and seeing to it that I focus on my work.

I dedicate this thesis to my late father who passed away in March 2022, on my birthday reminding me that there are still duties to be performed and the duty of a research scholar is of utmost priority.

**TO MY FATHER LATE M VISHWANADHAM
WHO NURTURED A SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE IN ME AND TO MY
MOTHER DR.D.GIRIJAKUMARI WHO STOOD LIKE A ROCK IN MY
ACADEMICS THROUGH ALL THE HIGHS AND LOWS**

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Chapter-I

Introduction

Intellectuals and thinkers contribute to the understanding of ideas, their genesis and interpret them to the betterment of the society. India has a long tradition of debates and discussions carried out by people who were influenced by various traditions of thinking, be it in ancient, medieval or in the modern era.

The area of coastal Andhra in early 19th and early 20th century was witness to such an informed debate between rationalism, atheism and radical humanism, three ideological thought processes which were products of the English education introduced in the late 18th century India.

The products of this education, especially from the Godavari and Krishna river belt, passed through three stages of social reform, rational thought and atheistic thought along with the Radical Humanism of the influential thinker M.N.Roy. The way these got manifested was many: producing of literature, conducting awareness camps with students, arranging talks by well-known speakers.

This thesis documents the influence of three principal thinkers who represented three streams of thought and the way they debated and who, in turn created a generation of active debaters and thinkers who influenced the public arena of the coastal belt with constructive ideas on the state and its functions. Most importantly they created institutions which spread ideas about the meaning of human life, one's role as a citizen, the principle of freedom and its enhancement by the state and individuals.

Significance of the Study

In an era of post globalisation where intellectual debates are reduced to television dramas, this thesis documents an era of intellectual ferment when a group of thinkers debated their ideas both at philosophical and practical levels.

In societies like India with the early introduction of English education, the first crop of intellectuals started talking about issues of social reform. Slowly these debates were taken forward by successive generations of intellectuals in various parts of India. The language used by these thinkers, the way they postulated its vocabulary and the ideas they conveyed form an important part of this project. The theses is important as at

present there is no academic research on the impact of rational thought, atheism and radical humanism in the coastal belt of Andhra.

Present Literature on the Topic

Various western scholars have done research on the districts of Guntur and Krishna belt and on the socio political set up of these areas. R.E. Frykenberg's pioneering work on Guntur district (*Guntur District :1788-1848*), and the work of Eugene Irschick on the politics of South India in the early 20th century, *Politics and Social conflict in South India: the Non-Brahman movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*, provide an account of the various debates among the Telugu speaking intellectuals are noteworthy examples. These books discuss the general socio-economic trends and political controversies of the coastal Andhra belt, but do not focus exclusively on the intellectual debates in the region.

Similarly David Washbrook did pioneering research on the political debates in South India, including Telugu districts, in his book, *The Emergence of Provincial politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920*, which also discussed about the emergence of political class from the coastal Andhra belt. But what was the nature of that class and how did it contribute to creating an open forum to debate politics through the prism of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism, was not a part of the work.

Similarly Indian scholars of history like KHSS Sundar worked on these debates but in a preliminary manner (*In Search of Self Respect: Colonial India During 19th Century, Dynamics of Social and Political Life in Andhra and Rayalaseema*) All these works discussed about the background of what served as an impetus for the genesis of the intellectual debates in the coastal districts which were in full swing in the early 20th century and flourished from 1920s to the late 1960s.

Vernacular Research on the Intellectual Debates in Coastal Andhra

Vernacular literature in Telugu discussed about the various factors which influenced thinkers like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary, M.N.Roy and Gora who stood for the ideas of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism. There were research writings on the literary works of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary and their significance as literary and ideologically significant works. Avula Manjulatha, a Telugu lecturer and later Vice Chancellor of the Potti Sriramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad, worked on the thought process of Tripuraneni Gopichand as a literary figure in Andhra. Later Telugu lecturer Thotakura Prabhakara Rao worked on the social impact of Tripuraneni's plays in his thesis *Telugu Pauranika Natakalo Hetuvada Drikpatham* (Rational Consciousness in Mythological Telugu Plays). Apart from Tripuraneni and Gopichand, work has been done on the atheist philosopher Gora and his activities in the coastal belt, but in a partial manner. There is a short chapter on Gora as a reformer in the thesis of S. Inna Reddy (1998), "Social Reform Movements in Andhra (1920-1947)", and it includes an account of his life and work in brief.

Similarly M.N.Roy and his life in perspective have been well researched in many languages like Hindi and English. Doctoral theses have been produced by scholars like Usha Krishna (2005) on M.N.Roy. Her thesis "M.N.Roy and the Radical Humanist Movement in India: A Sociological Study", has a brief account of the influence of M.N. Roy in the (undivided) state of Andhra Pradesh. The thesis discusses lesser known ideologues of Roy movement in Andhra like M.V.Ramamurthy and N.Innaiah who contributed to the public discourse, but not to the extent of Ravipudi Venkatadri who is a seminal contributor to the Roy movement.

Apart from this thesis, which devotes a small part to the regional influence of Roy, other doctoral work in India on Roy has been on his political philosophy, his place in Indian polity and his philosophy in comparison to that of Mahatma Gandhi. So, the influence of the ideas of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism in Andhra, especially in the coastal districts in the first quarter of the twentieth century is not a part of any of these theses which give a sketchy account of the works of Tripuraneni, Roy and Gora.

The intellectual debates between these three thinkers and the influence of M.N.Roy have been dealt with as preliminary information in N. Innaiah's work, *The Radical Humanist Movement in Andhra Pradesh*. Apart from the aforementioned work, no work of serious analysis has been taken up by scholars in the Telugu states, as the available literature is not in abundance, apart from persons who interacted with these thinkers and the small amount of hagiographical literature that institutions like Atheist Centre published.

In this context, this thesis wants to map the intellectual processes in which rationalism, atheism and radical humanism of M.N.Roy crystallised and the impact those ideas had on the public discourse. The area of influence is the coastal Andhra region, which includes the district of Krishna and Guntur and areas of the Godavari river belt. It takes the representative individual thinkers for each idea, namely Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary for rationalism, Gora for atheism, and Ravipudi Venkatadri as a thinker who spread Roy's radical humanism in the coastal Andhra belt. The thesis looks for the factors that led to the absorption of these ideas in the coastal Andhra belt, with an analysis of how the ideas of rationalism, atheism and humanism arose out of the social reform era in the late 18th century.

Objectives of the Study

1. To delineate and evaluate the genesis of ideas of rationalism, atheism in the coastal belt of Andhra, by looking at Andhra's history with its Brahmanism, roots of revolt against blind faith and the genesis of atheism.
2. To map the influences of social reform era from the late 18th century on the Telugu intellectual class, which slowly produced literature questioning the status quo and which in turn gave rise to a stream of intellectuals in the 19th century who carried forward the questioning the status quo through rational thought.
3. To explain the journey of the ideas of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism in the coastal Andhra belt, with focus on three representative individuals who gave rise to a school of ardent followers who carried forward their ideas through various programmes in 20th century.

4. To analyse the intellectual debates which took place between the early 1920s and the late 1960s in the coastal belt of Andhra, primarily the districts of Guntur and Krishna, with some influence in the Godavari belt?
5. To explain the percolation of these ideas into the mainstream in late 1960s and the present status of these ideas.

Methodology

The thesis is historical and qualitative in its inquiry. It discusses the political and intellectual history of a specific geographic area, during a specific time period. The thesis analyses the primary sources of the ideologues who propounded their ideas in early modern and modern era of Andhra. Representative writings of ideologues of the rational, atheistic and radical humanist thought are analysed and interpreted. This research takes the works of the ideologues, examines their content, and makes an assessment by using various perspectives on the impact of these writings in the specified time period by referring to secondary sources like interviews, published works, and discussions with academics on the topic.

Chapter Outline

The thesis contains seven chapters in totality. The first one is the Introduction. The second chapter delineates the genesis of ideas of rationalism, atheism in the coastal Andhra (specified geographic area) from the medieval time still the 17th century. It is a preparatory chapter which signifies a continuity of ideas which in turn influenced next generations of English educated intellectuals in the late 18th and early 19th century Andhra.

The third chapter discusses and explains the forms which rational and atheistic ideas took in the questioning of status quo in socio political milieu of the coastal Andhra. It discusses conflicting happenings like spread of rationalism and launching of specific caste organisations in Andhra which actually go against the model of rational society.

The fourth chapter discusses the work of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary, a literary giant and a philosopher of rational thought in the coastal belt and analyses his role in creating a questioning consciousness towards the status quo through a subversion of canonical religious texts. It posits him as a decisive figure in shaping the intellectual atmosphere of the coastal Andhra belt, and influencing various later day thinkers.

The fifth chapter discusses the thought and influence of M.N.Roy in the coastal belt and also analyses the nature of his impact in generating various debates in the public sphere directly or by his followers in the Andhra belt. It also examines the literary influence of Roy's thought in some of his followers' work.

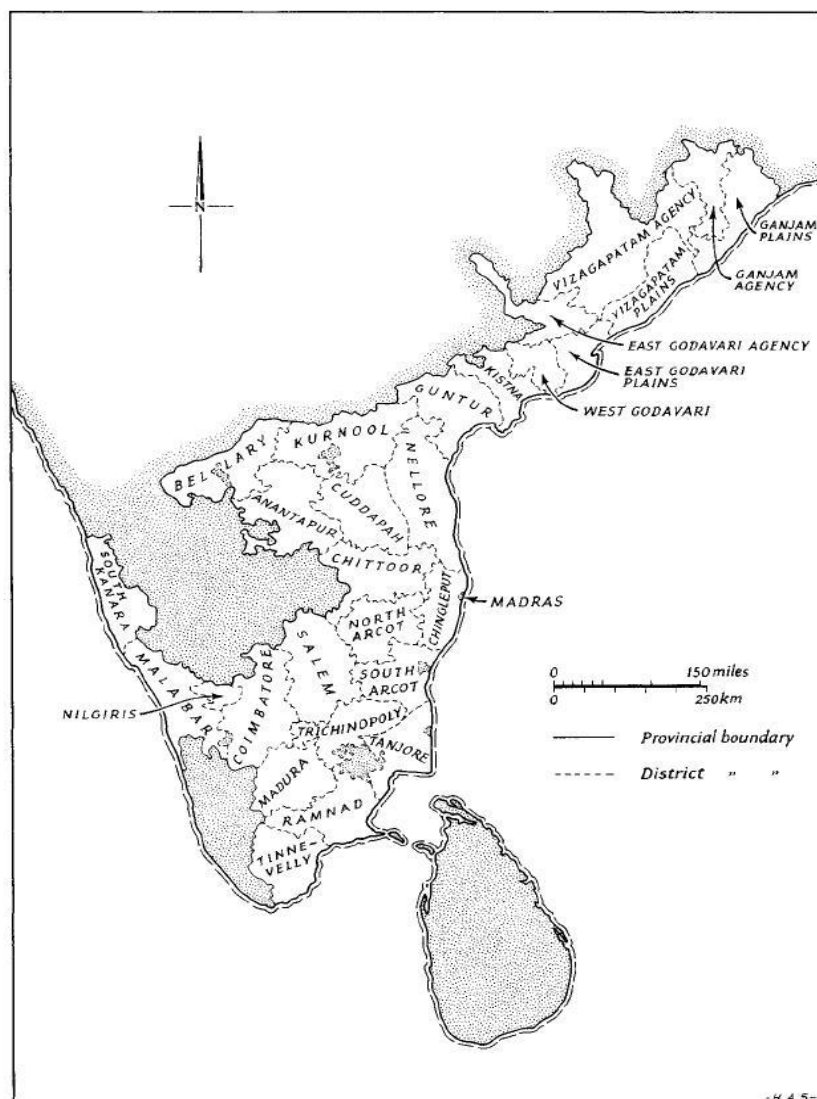
The sixth chapter focuses on the final ideologue of the thesis Gora, an atheist thinker who reinterpreted atheism in the 20th century and discusses his work and analyses the intellectual debates he gave rise to by interacting with Roy's followers. His ideas of rational thought are also examined in the same chapter.

The seventh and the final chapter chronicles the present status of the ideas of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism as envisioned by the three principal thinkers and their followers in the present socio-political setup. This forms the conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter-2

The Genesis of Atheism, Rationalism and Radical Humanism in Coastal Andhra: (Pre Modern Ages to Early Modern Period)

This chapter is an attempt to explore the origin and evolution of atheism, rationalism, and radical humanism in Coastal Andhra. It does so through the following sections: The chapter chronicles the history of ideas in Andhra region from the early age through the Middle Ages and shows how these ideas slowly prepared for the development of rationalism and atheism in the modern period.



MAP 2. Madras Presidency—districts

xxi

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History of the Coastal Andhra Region

The focus of the thesis is the coastal districts of Krishna and Guntur primarily, with towns like Masulipatnam and Guntur playing the prime intellectual role, with the

Godavari belt represented by towns like Rajahmundry and others. Krishna and Guntur of the Krishna river belt and the East and West Godavari districts along the Godavari belt played a decisive role in shaping the milieu of the coastal Andhra belt. Guntur is believed to have derived its pedigree from the Ramayana era. Some opine the area was known as the Janasthana mentioned in the epic of Valmiki. The Ikshvaku clan, to which Rama belonged, is the earliest dynasty known after the Satavahanas of Andhra (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 2).

The Krishna belt was dominated by maritime trade in places like Masulipatnam, with Ongole and Kovvur at both extremes of Masulipatnam. The area covering these towns remained in the Krishna district till the East India Company arrived with setting up district headquarters at Masulipatnam which was a well-known sea trade centre (Sastri, 2012: 8). 1905 was the year when the parts south of the Krishna River including Guntur got separated, to form a separate district with Guntur as the headquarters. Further Kovvur, the town situated on the banks of the Godavari, got assimilated to the West Godavari district in 1925 with the Godavari acting as a link between the East and West Godavari districts and Rajahmundry became the main intellectual centre in the East Godavari district (Sastri, 2012: 8-9). Further Ongole, a coastal town which was a part of Guntur district was made into a separate district in independent India in 1970 and named after the first chief minister of Andhra state, Tanguturi Prakasam, in 1972 (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 34). These areas of the Krishna, Guntur and the Godavari belts form the main focus of the thesis as the intellectuals whose ideas are discussed here come from these coastal belts.

The first linguistic state of Telugu speaking people was created in 1953 with Kurnool as the capital, and Guntur as a close second city for administrative purposes. (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 28). The Krishna, Guntur areas which were part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency were made part of the newly created Andhra state on October 1st, 1953. The High Court of Andhra state was in Guntur till 1956, when a composite Andhra Pradesh state was created including the erstwhile Telangana area (known as the Hyderabad state), which was historically under the jurisdiction of Nizam (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 28). The current administrative status of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana as two Telugu speaking states is a development that took place after the period discussed in the thesis.

Atheism, rationalism, and radical humanism, which struck roots in the Andhra region in the late 18th and early 19th century, became dominant in these parts primarily because of the efforts of the English educated intelligentsia who were influenced by western ideas. These ideas had become popular in India because of the British rule. In addition to this, several socio-cultural and historical factors also contributed to the development of these ideas. Ideas questioning the social customs and practices were in vogue in Andhra where *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* had formed the crux of religious thought. The streams of Buddhism and Jainism were prevalent in the Krishna and Godavari belts (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 2). *Charvakas* were the first to question the basic tenets of Brahmanical religion and its manifestations elsewhere in India (Chattopadhyay, 1992: 23) but in the Andhra area, the advent of Buddhism proved to be the first step leading people to think in atheistic terms. It encouraged people to think in terms of self-development (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 13). Emphasis was put on the individual effort of people who wanted to develop their personality through personal effort. According to the historians, ideas of a life free of external forces were prevalent in Andhra much before the advent of Brahmanical religion (Hanumantha Rao 1997: 5-10). In fact the Andhra history scholar Hanumantha Rao explains in his study of Buddhism, *Religion in Andhra*, that the Andhras were open to codes of self-improvement like Buddhism.

“During the time of Ashoka, the Emperor’s third Buddhist council in 250BCE, it was well noted that Andhra had already seen the influence and impact of Buddha from north of the coastal belt in Vizianagara the east in the Cuddapah areas, traces of many Buddhist viharas and relics were discovered in these areas, including the Krishna belt” (Hanumantha Rao, 1983: 56).

Historical Origins of Atheism and Rationalism in Andhra

Before we dwell on the development of atheism in coastal Andhra, it is useful to understand the theistic beliefs and practices which were dominant in the region. Historians who have conducted extensive research in the social and political history of Andhra region strongly feel that the early Andhras who were mentioned in the Vedic text *Aithreya Brahmana* were castigated as *Mlechchas* or outcastes who were

permitted to live only outside fortified villages, and which later turned into towns in the era of Satavahanas.

Noted historian Hanumantha Rao says:

“It is erroneous to believe the Andhras were aboriginals and only started being civilized at the advent of the Mauryan era. Contrary to this Brahminical history, the Andhras were well versed in doing maritime business in the coastal belts of the Krishna and the mighty Godavari. Ashoka himself wanted to conquer Kalinga as it had good maritime trade along the banks of the Godavari” (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 2-3).

The resourcefulness of the Andhra people, their practical use of the coastal belt and river basins, and their subsequent prosperity were cited as a reason for their rejection of the Vedic texts which excluded them. This may have provided a fertile ground for receiving new ideas and thought processes like the egalitarian path of Buddhism (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 1-2).

Historical evidence shows that the Andhras were animists and worshipped megalithic tombs of their ancestors. The famous Nagarjuna Konda along the Krishna River was known for a famous Buddhist university with Nagarjuna as the preceptor of the Mahayana school of Buddhism. Experts feel that original Buddhism which emphasized on self-introspection and eschewal of external symbols like idolatry had followers in Andhra.

The introduction of various schools of Buddhism like the Mahayana and Hinayana in the coastal belt led to the introduction of religious structures like the *Stupas* and *Chaityas* in this area. There was also introduction of idols of the Buddha from 2nd century CE. This was a rather problematic development as it resembled the personification of religious symbols and the practice of idolatry which got institutionalised in the Brahmanical religion of Satavahanas, the early rulers who popularised the Vedic religion (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 4). There has been epigraphical evidence to suggest that the followers of Buddhism assimilated with followers of Hinduism (Sarkar H. 1966: 76-94). The cult of Bhakti and Vaishnavism took over the Andhra region in a decisive way in the 12th century CE. The Vedic

religion clashed with the first atheistic school of thought - the Charvaka cult, which was fighting its lone battle of faith with the Vedic religion (Sharma I. K, 1988: 80-82).

The Telugu coastal belt was equally influenced by semi-Vedic movements like Veerasaivism which focused on egalitarian principles, but some adherents of this school converted to a sect called Aradhyas, who equally venerated Vedic practices and had traits of Veerasaiva worship like not propitiating any god other than Siva (Lalithamba K, 1976: 32-36).

In the late 9th century CE and early 10th century CE, these sects influenced Buddhism, which the historians of Andhra regard as the dominant religion. The Buddha imagery had already been introduced in Andhra in 150 CE (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 31). Over the course of time Brahmanism assimilated Buddhism in its fold by suggesting that Buddha was one of the avatars of Lord Vishnu. This process of appropriation of Buddhism by the Vedic religion can be termed as the first tussle between the two schools. Brahmanism included the Buddhist ideal of Vedic non-conformism as a '*Lila*' or illusory trait of the Lord Vishnu— an idea used to suggest that the path of the Buddha was the path of moral decay (Lalithamba K, 1976: 45).

Brahminical religion justified caste hierarchies in mythological terms. In this situation, Buddhism was the only religion capable of freeing man from the dogmas propagated by the Brahminical religion. However, as mentioned above, Buddhism was appropriated by Brahminism by representing Buddha as one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu in various temples. The famous Sun Temple at Alampur, where the Buddha occupies central figure as a form of Vishnu, his tenth avatar, is an example of this. (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 21)

The 9th-10th century period gave rise to great kingdoms, like the Vishnukundins and Kadambas in areas like Dhanyakataka on the banks of the river Krishna and Yeleswaram on the banks of the river Godavari. Temples were built for Vishnu by Vishnukundins in coastal Andhra. The Vishnukundins rose to prominence in the middle of 5th century CE as contemporaries of Guptas in the Andhra region (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 66). The Vishnukundin rulers including the prominent King Govindavarman popularised Vedic ritualism and Puranic cult. This influence of

Buddhism and its teachings along with Brahmanism, known for its ritualistic hierarchy and practices, made coastal Andhra a site which assimilated theism with rational thought (Hanumantha Rao, 1995: 93-95). With the advent of the Satavahanas, Vedic religion became more pronounced with Sanskrit dominating the proceedings and Pali relegated to the backseat (Narayana Rao. Ch, 1990: 184).

Over the centuries, Vedic religion came to be identified as the religion of the Brahmins. It was filled with rituals to appease gods. The system of four-fold division of labour got entrenched and was given the name, Varna dharma. Buddhist rhetoric and intellectual exercise through life in Sanghas and Viharas posed a significant challenge to the dominance of Brahmanical religion despite its appropriation by Brahmanism. (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 36)

Medieval Andhra and the Influence of Brahminical Religion on Society and Culture: Early Non-Brahmin Movements in the Coastal Belt

Buddhism and Jainism focussed on self-development and introspection. This was in contrast with the Vedic religion which emphasised *Varna dharma*, with clearly codified laws based on hereditary profession. Ethical living was understood as performing one's own duty as per the Vedas, which were interpreted by the priestly class of Brahmins. The Brahmin dominance of other castes got reflected in terms like *Aryavarttha*, the land of the Aryans (*Aryavarttha*). A point to be noted here is the way the term Arya was used to show the lower echelons of Varna system as unsophisticated. They needed to be tamed and shown their place by the upper castes. The 'Brahminising' phase, which started in the middle ages, particularly from the 11th to 16th century CE, lasted till the advent of the British East India Company (Kocchar 2000, 56-62). Andhra dynasties in the coastal belt including the Reddy kingdom in Guntur(Kondaveedu), the Velama Kingdom in North Andhra belt (Vizianagaram), and the Vijayanagara dynasty spread all over the banks of rivers Krishna and Godavari established a Brahmin culture and Brahmin domination with state support (Hanumantha Rao, 1995: 90).

The Andhras were exposed to the egalitarian views of Buddhism and the religious dogmas propagated by Brahminism simultaneously (Hanumantha Rao, 1997: 2-3). So, a ground was prepared right from the early times through the medieval period for questioning the practices and institutions of the Brahminical religion, including temples, the management of religion through state funds, rituals becoming symbols of faith, and superstitions, instead of teaching the essence of Dharma.

Thus, began the struggle between theistic and atheistic ideas. The latter had their own Contributors like the followers of Charvaka and others who based their ideas on experiencing the real world in its entirety, excluding any otherworldly entities like God and heaven. A rationalistic religion to combat Brahminical religion was much-needed strategy in the middle ages. The first initiative of such a religion was the rational critique of the Brahminical thought nestled in the Varna system. Early attempts in this direction began in the 12th century in the coastal belt of Guntur. Brahma Naidu was a prominent non-Brahmin leader. He encouraged inter dining of castes and led the temple entry movement of the lower castes then called *Panchamas* (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 94-95).

The four-fold Varna system, based on ritual hierarchy, was prevalent in the Andhra society like other parts of India. At the top of the hierarchy were Brahmins, some of whom were priests and others, ministers and counsellors in the King's court. The subsequent position was occupied by the Kshatriyas who belonged to various sub sects, mostly tracing their Kshatriya origins to the mythological Hindu solar or lunar dynasties. This group consisted of various castes like Reddys, Velamas, Balijas, Kapus and so on who were either rulers of small kingdoms or a considerable geographical area in the coastal belt.

Vaishyas came after the Kshatriyas. They were mainly engaged in trade. These included, the Sresthis (or Shetty) who were reengaged in trade of spices, rice, wheat, and other edible commodities (Pratapa Reddy. S, 1982: 2-5). The subsequent category was occupied by the Sudras who were supposed to serve all the above classes, often referred to as *sevakas* or servants. This group included people like cobblers, weavers, goldsmiths, and blacksmiths (Pratapa Reddy. S, 1982:7-8).

There was another category which turned important in the socio-political set up of the Coastal Andhra, namely the ‘untouchables’ (*Panchamas*), also referred to sometimes as Atisudras, whose mere touch was regarded polluting by the people of higher castes. These people lived outside the main village or capital city in a kingdom and worked as scavengers or cremated dead bodies at the burial ground. It was in the wake of such discrimination, that Brahma Naidu, a Vaishnava (or the follower of the 11th century sage Sri Ramanuja) rose to prominence (Ramaswamy, 2011: 26-27).

Brahma Naidu

Brahma Naidu was a Velama by birth. His family was a vassal to the Telugu Cholas of Velanadu (also known as Velanadu Chodas). Velanadu was composed of Guntur and the surrounding areas. Guntur was the headquarters of earlier Buddhist influence in Andhra. Brahma Naidu served as the Prime Minister to Malideva of Macherla, an area adjacent to the river Chandrabhaga in Krishna district. There had been clashes between the Macherla kings and kings of Palnadu (Vidyasekhara, 1955: 24-26). Once Brahma Naidu led a revolt against the Brahminical religion and introduced the temple entry of the ‘Panchamas’ into the famous Chennakesava temple in Macherla. By doing so, he attracted the wrath of both the Brahmins and the Veerasaivas of the region, but for very different reasons. The Brahmins were anxious about the destruction of the social fabric and the concept of duty, of which they were the custodians for ages. Veerasaivas were uncomfortable that their rival sect, Vaishnavism, was taking an upper hand over them in the propagation of the egalitarian principles of social inclusion (Vidyasekhara, 1955: 31).

Hence, the rival groups formed a confederacy led by Nagamma, a woman from the Reddy caste. She became the chief adviser to the group who positioned themselves against Brahma Naidu. Nagamma played a crucial role in the famous battle of Palnadu.

The battle is a part of folklore in the history of Guntur. It is also important from a historical standpoint. It is remembered as the first political feud between Vedic Brahmanism and the egalitarian inclusive religion of Vaishnavism. This battle cemented the position of Brahma Naidu in the common memory as the earliest ideologue questioning the status quo. He became a prominent figure taking up for the

cause of the socially excluded castes in Andhra. This marks a popular, recorded, and celebrated event in the social history of Andhra (Vidyasekhara, 1955: 71).

Similarly, Veerasaivism, founded by the Kannada philosopher Basaveswara, preached Siva worship, irrespective of caste or profession. It is important to note that both Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism concentrated not only on personal development but also on development of the whole society. Veerasaivism advocated taking pride in one's profession regardless of the nature of the occupation. Devotion to God was of utmost importance, both for Veerasaivism and Vaishnavism. At the same time, they took sufficient steps to remain connected to social reality.

Indirectly, these movements influenced the later age reformers in the Andhra region who worked on social reform programmes and organised gatherings of likeminded people. Many later day rationalists and humanists who made their presence felt in the intellectual debates of Andhra region including people like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (Tripuraneni) (1887-1943) have acknowledged the contribution of Brahma Naidu and his pioneering efforts in taking up the first visible effort to emancipate those who led an oppressed life in the Brahmanical social set up (Tripuraneni, 1941: 31). TRC also produced his own version of *Bhagavad-Gita* in which Brahma Naidu was presented as Lord Krishna and his son, Balachandra, as the mythical warrior Arjuna. This will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

Brahma Naidu's activities in Palnadu cemented his position as a significant voice against Brahminical ideology and entrenched caste system. The event of temple entry also showed how those dominant in matters of religion dealt with a rational thinking individual. It also highlighted the need for intellectuals in public arena and the need for the State to take care the needs of the commoners, especially the oppressed groups. Commenting on the importance of Brahma Naidu and his endeavours in Palnadu, scholar Vidyasekhara (1955) says,

“The influence of Ramanuja's preaching and Basaveswara's religious overhauling was felt in the areas of Palnadu and the currents of Vaishnavism, Veerasaivism, Buddhism and Jainism was causing agitation in South India. For the first time in Indian history, it was Brahma Naidu and his efforts to give rise to a cult of military warriors who fought for

social Equality, irrespective of caste and colour. Hence, the battle of Palnadu and role of Brahma Naidu signifies a great link in social history of India” (Vidyasekhara, 1955: 97).

The fact that Brahma Naidu, an independent leader, used a religious sect like Vaishnavism for bringing about social inclusion of the so-called outcastes is of extreme significance. This spirit of being a religious man in the larger sense of the term, but eschewing all superstitions and notions of caste superiority, has been common to all the rational thinkers in middle age Andhra, especially the coastal belt, and in modern Andhra in the late 19th and early 20th century (Hanumatha Rao, 2012: 21). Vidyasekhara opines:

“Veerasaivism and Vaishnavism had antagonistic relationship with each other. Each thought of their deity as supreme and the other sect to be inferior. Both Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism flourished in the medieval era. Both these sects tried to propagate the idea of a casteless society in competition with each other. In the process, each of these cults contributed to social reform” (Vidyasekhara, 1955: 23).

Vemana: The Pioneer of Rationalism and Non Brahmin Revolt in Andhra

Many scholars agree that the true rationalist in coastal Andhra was the 16th century poet, Vemana (Rallapalli, 2017: 89; Gopi, 1987: 36; and Ravipudi, 2013: 73). This landlord turned Yogi was undoubtedly the first thinker who openly criticised the priestly class and their ritualistic attitude of exploitation through propagation of blind faith. He emphasised the need to do away with the caste system and superstitions. Personal introspection and realising one’s own being, central to Buddhist thought, formed the crux of Vemana’s thought.

Vemana came from a non-Brahmin family. Unlike the Brahmin scholars who relied exclusively on Sanskrit, Vemana’s verses were written in a language comprehensible to the common people of that age (Gopi, 1987: 37). Vemana openly criticised the ritualistic symbols of the Vedic religion, the Brahmins, and the way temples had become places of exploitation. This was a new trend in Telugu literature, which was till then filled with canonical texts taken from mythological works like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Vemana was the first poet thinker to democratise language and literature. Until then literary activities were monopolised by scholars and poets who

distinguished themselves in Sanskrit and Vedic literature (Ravipudi, 2011: 108; Manjulatha, 2005: 94).

Vemana's biographical details are based on unconfirmed legends. According to the popular belief, he was born in the Reddy caste, in the ceded districts, Cuddapah to be precise. His verses, retrieved by an English collector, C.P. Brown, show his 'revolutionary thought' in his scathing criticism of various practices in Hinduism, the way rituals had got entrenched in the social fabric, and the politics of exclusion and exclusivity (Gopi, N., 1998: 9-10). According to the experts on Vemana, he qualified as a 'Mahakavi' or a great poet with the economy of expression, but his genius lies in preparing the land for future social reform (Ravipudi, 2014). According to noted linguist, Chekuri Rama Rao, the significance of Vemana lies in 'using the prevalent language of people to explain the ills of society', and more so, the dominant caste hierarchy, in an era when the Brahminical dominance was at its zenith. Not only the tone, but the similes that Vemana used were taken not from Sanskrit myths, but from the normal life of people. This made him the forerunner to the later social reform movement's use of colloquial Telugu (Rama Rao, 1998: 2-3). Vemana was instrumental in making the 'revolutionary thought' reaches the people. What was this thought centred on? Basically, Vemana was ahead of his time in thinking that 'everyone was equal in front of the supreme being'. This Supreme Being was not one of the plethora of Hindu gods, but a supreme spirit guiding the moral behaviour of human beings. It is noteworthy to look at some of his verses to understand his inspiring thought.

In one of the verses criticising blind faith, sectarian differences, and Hindus fighting over 'which god was supreme', he says:

"All devotees of Vishnu bit the dust ash which was a Saivite symbol and all Siva's men perished in mud the sacred symbol of Vishnu, a pun on the Vishnu's symbol 'Tirumannu'. Why should one fight in the name of religion and faith" (Vemana, 2010: 71).

"People break mountains and build temples to god. But cannot realise that god is residing in human beings, not in any structures of worship" (Vemana, 2010: 37).

The true Brahmin was one who attained the state of viewing every being as his own reflection and not one who asserted his superiority, says Vemana in one of his verses.

“To propitiate a Brahmin is justified, but to earn that respect to be propitiated, one should be a Brahmin who preaches knowledge and shares it with all, not one who preaches his superiority over others” (Rallapalli, 2017: 93).

His views on the Hindu institutions also were instrumental in influencing the later social reform, especially in the early 20th century, when the non-Brahmin movement was on upswing in the Andhra belt. Rallapalli Anantakrishna Sarma, who was the first literary figure in Andhra to study the philosophy of Vemana, says that Vemana was the one who started the whole idea of questioning caste practices along with a critique of the holy texts including the Puranas.

In one of his lectures at Rajahmundry, Rallapalli makes it clear that Vemana might be a mystic who attained spiritual status through yogic practices as is believed, but it is more important to look into his critique of the religious texts and to point out the illogical stories of heroes like Rama and Siva and also his scathing comments on irrational beliefs (Rallapalli, 1928, 91-92).

“Priests assemble and blabber some words and say the marriage is solemnised. If their auspicious time was so perfect, why did the girl become a widow?” (Vemana, 2010: 99).

Exactly this rational critique later inspired people like Tripuraneni, who revisited Hindu texts and reinterpreted them with a rational outlook.

The fact that Vemana was sympathetic to the problem of poverty is also reflected in his verses. His verses questioned the social system, where a few were enjoying riches at the cost of those who toiled. On the basis of such verses, some intellectuals have claimed that what Vemana was saying was communism in its early form, although it is a contested claim (M.P. Reddy, 1998, 4, 21).

In one of his verses he says:

“People say that they are born into a high caste, and because riches join their immoral behaviour, their whole education, if any, is useless and serves no purpose”

“To earn money by duping others and mainly the needy, to live in palatial houses, is a false life which is to be detested.” (Vemana, 2010: 29).

Regarding religion and its Brahminical character, he says in one of his verses:

“If you tonsure the girl’s head and throw her in a room, can you tonsure her thoughts, which spur her behaviour and can you people control her, when she rebels?” (Vemana, 2010: 87).

This stream of thought was evident and was celebrated in literary, as well as the social reform process of Kandukuri Veeresalingam in his capacity as the prime mover of widow remarriages, in later centuries, by using methods of secretly posting his confidants, to bring the widow girls from their homes safely and then get them married to people of their choice, which he describes with great detail in his autobiography (Kandukuri, 1911: 127, 164).

But apart from these thoughts, as mentioned earlier, Vemana’s questions on caste domination were monumental in the age he lived in, and inspired a lot. As Ravipudi puts in his article on Tripuraneni, Vemana was a perennial source of inspiration for rationalism in Andhra (Ravipudi, 2013: 19-20).

In one of his verses he asks:

“There is no room for high caste or a low caste. All castes sprouted from human caste (the caste called ‘Man’) so there is no need to double talk” (Vemana, 2010: 105).

This thought he extends further, surprisingly, to the state of being wealthy or a pauper. “The one who was said to be ‘a low born’ becomes a ‘caste’ person, by gaining riches, the one who was considered to be born in an exalted caste, attains low born status when he loses money. Hence, more than caste, it boils down to one being rich or poor” (Vemana, 2010: 65).

Inter-caste dining and mingling was suggested by him figuratively in another of his verses.

“Place a single plate to everyone on this earth and make them eat the same food. Enhance the name of caste in this way” (Vemana, 2010: 43).

He says this with a sense of humour and sarcasm.

This, according to many historians of Andhra, reflects the 11th century experiment of one Brahma Naidu, a Velama chieftain, who tried to bring in radical changes by arranging the temple entry of ‘untouchables’ into the Lord Chennakesava and Siva temples in the Guntur belt, near Macharla. However, this argument that Vemana was following Brahma Naidu is a contested claim. Vemana comes forth as a pure realist, dissecting the whole society and its institutions through his logical argument. He warns humanity to be ever vigilant throughout one’s life:

“There is no one called a ‘nice’ man in this world. There is at the same time no dearth of the wicked, same as it is difficult to secure gold by digging deep into land, but it is easy to get enough dust and filth on its surface” (Vemana, 2010: 108).

In one of his verses he makes fun of the Brahminical institutions:

“Not being able to know the supreme truth, those who create religious sects, will ultimately come to grief, just as a dog gets confused about its real truth, moving in a house of mirrors”(Vemana, 2010: 26).

Hence, he equated religion and its denominations as ‘illusions’:

“Those who make a stone into a sculpture place it in a dark chamber (the sanctum sanctorum) and worship, are fools. They do not know that the Supreme Being dwells in their mind” (Vemana, 2010:37).

“People often curse an untouchable as one ‘*mala*’, but the blood and flesh in his body and in the one who inflicts pain is the same. So what caste does the curser belong to?”(Vemana, 2010: 44).

Again, in one of his most explosive critiques of the caste system, he questions in a verse, sarcastically,

“The law books classify women of all categories, be it your mother, grandmother, great grandmother as unfit to recite or to participate in Vedic rites. So how come you became a Brahmin entitled to perform these forbidden rites to our family?” (Vemana, 2010: 45).

This logic is startling as it came in an age dominated by Brahminical primacy in all public life. This, according to some, qualifies Vemana as the first rational thinker of Andhra (Ravipudi, 1986, 15-16). His conviction of a universal faith comes to the fore in one of his verses. It tells us that Vemana was not an atheist but a votary of a singular god:

“Though the colour of cattle is different, their milk is of the same colour. Though the flowers are of different hues, the purpose of those is one, as offerings in worship. All ‘Darsana’s (schools of thought) are different, but god is one” (Vemana, 2010: 81).

“Just as a pot of toddy smeared with ash does not lose its inner dirt, same with a man who sports a glistening thread on his torso, and displays his caste supremacy, but inner thoughts are filled with malice to others” (Vemana, 2010: 107).

Further,

“Trumpeting that they are gods on the earth, reciting the Vedas, those who laugh at the commoners are no match to the one who sings god’s name, roams in the streets, who is a Mala by birth, but lives on his own daily alms”(Vemana, 2010: 119).

The way he criticised the ‘outwardly’ symbolism of Brahmins, it was evident that he was not against them, but pitied their ignorance of displaying ‘devotion’ but not recognising the god among ‘humans’. This aspect also makes him the precursor of the original nature of the non-Brahmin movement spearheaded by Tripuraneni.

This practice of introducing rational thought through literature was unique to medieval Andhra. Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism understood God and society as one entity (Prabhakara Sastry, 2013: 103). Vemana introduced a new thought of seeing humanity on par with God. He advocated using the royal resources for the upliftment of the poor

and the oppressed, instead of enriching the Brahmins and other upper castes. Vemana seems to have borrowed a lot from the Veerasaiva cult.

This can be noticed in the themes of his writings. The language used in his verses has also been influenced by this cult. Verses of Vemana follow the theme of a formless god, debunking of ritualistic religion, and a scathing critique of the Brahmin domination of the socio-political milieu. Vemana was also the first medieval thinker who raised his voice against the social inequalities of untouchability and who brought rational thinking in its nascent state to the Andhra area (Gopi, 1987: 5-7).

Some aspects like conferring the status of exalted devotees to the social outcasts, denouncing the Brahmin supremacy in the society and religion, were the chief aspects of Veerasaivism, as preached by the 12th century philosopher thinker Basaveswara. It would be pertinent to have a look into this thought of Veerasaivism which influenced Vemana.

Veerasaivism: A Decisive Factor in Revolutionising Telugu Social Life and Literary Ideas

Veerasaivism, apart from preaching social equality, also produced an epoch in Andhra literature known as the ‘age of Sivakavis’ (poets who sang about Siva and his cult) (Rallapalli, 2017: 90). Most of the Saivite literature in the period from the 12th to 14th century had works depicting the lives of devotees of Siva who were born in the ‘lower’ castes (Katyayani, 2003: 12). The chief among the literary contributors to this school in the Andhra country was Palkuriki Somanatha of the 12th century, who was inspired by Basaveswara and produced scholarly works in Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada to propagate Veerasaivism.

Somanatha was born a Brahmin, but refused to be initiated into Vedic rituals, adopted the Veerasaiva cult and produced works like the *Basava Purana* and the *Panditaradhya Charitra*, which espoused the legends of Saivite devotees in the Kannada, Tamil and Telugu areas of 12th century. Somanatha took on himself to introduce a literary metre of Dvipada, akin to the couplet which did not stick to strict grammatical rules of prosody, and also to include lives of mortals like ‘untouchables’

and other classes who were devotees of Lord Siva. Though Veerasaivism belonged to a theistic school, the element of equality was dominant in the treatment of subject and tone of the literature.

This revolution in thought and literature contributed to the idea of equality and a democratizing of epic writing in Telugu literature (Prabhakara Sastry 2013: 99,102-103). Sastry (2013) says:

“It is with an ambition to make scholarly works readable to even the common man, that Somanatha adopted the Telugu metre of Dvipada in place of Sanskrit metres of yore. He even created a new vocabulary which included compounds of pure Telugu words, eschewing Sanskritised language in his works. In the process he might have defied the grammarians’ diktats, but for the first time in Telugu, took a step of integrating art to the life of the commoners, not only the learned pundits” (Prabhakara Sastry 2013:108).

Even Veerasaiva literary scholar Katyayani Vidmahe (2003) observes:

“The Saivite literature was the first attempt to de-mythologize the main plot or story of a poetic work in Telugu literature. Poets like Somanatha chose lives of common men like cobblers, weavers, and goldsmiths who distinguished their lives with devotion to Siva, irrespective of their lowly birth. This attempt of not choosing a mythological story for a *Kavya* and instead using the stories of devotees...went a long way in inspiring the de-brahminising of Telugu society in later ages of Andhra” (Katyayani Vidmahe, 2003: 14-15).

The lives of Kannada Veerasaiva devotees were immortalised in Telugu literature through the works of poets like Palkuriki Somanatha, who represented the efflorescence of the Siva cult, by explaining the lives of various devotees who were born in non-Brahmin families and yet, proved that true devotion to god is desirable than being well versed in religious texts and officiating sermons and sacrifices (Rallapalli, 2017: 34).

So, in choosing a new subject as the theme of a *Kavya* or an epic poem, a revolution was made. Telugu language used in these works was not the highly Sanskritised

Telugu accessible only to scholars and the learned. Instead, these writers used colloquial Telugu, easily comprehended by common people. The legends of true Siva devotees, of Tamil and Kannada origin, were also depicted in a style influenced by Telugu literary trends of that era (Prabhakara Sastry, 2013: 66-71). For the first time an epic poem was produced in Telugu. Despite being theistic, these cults should be considered as progressive for a society which had an entrenched caste system. Vaishnavism and Saivism worked to achieve equality in the society with a benevolent approach to those in the lower strata of the society. These ideas may have later resulted in the formation of Justice Party in South India, which fought for democratic representation of non-Brahmin castes through state legislature (VenkataSivayya. P., 2013: 35).

Thinkers like Vemana (late 16th century) played a crucial role in laying the foundations of rational thought in Andhra. The concept of Dharma/duty was turned on its head by these devotional cults which defined duties not that which is stipulated by the Varna system, but as the ability to create an equal society where various sections of people live in harmony (Prabhakar & Srinivas, 2010: 44-45).

Despite their progressive efforts, the contribution of Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism to rationalism in Andhra had its limitations. These movements belonged to a particular region, where religion and Brahminical tenets were celebrated. Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism influenced poets like Vemana who did away with religion and its domination altogether. It is in this wake that non-Brahmin thinkers like Veerabrahmam become important in the coastal belt, as their thought included equality of people and a scant regard for the caste system prevalent in the area.

Potuluri Veerabrahmam: The Reformer Saint

Veerabrahmam (17th century), known reverentially as Brahmam Garu, belonged to a caste of goldsmiths known as 'Kamsali' in Andhra. Brahmam Garu was a yogi, a mystic who is said to be able to predict future events in his treatise, *Kalagnana Tatvalu* (Songs of Knowledge of Time). While Vemana did away with Vedas and Vedic knowledge altogether, Veerabrahmam felt every human is entitled to the knowledge of the Vedas. He argued that Brahmins do not have the exclusive right to study the Vedas (Dwana Sastry, 2003: 28-30). He condemned the exclusion of 'untouchables' from

public spaces and preached equality of every human. He argued that the same blood flows in every human being (Rallapalli, 2017: 143-144). Brahman Garu was a much sought after by the people who wanted to attain supreme knowledge of the Vedas not accessible to them. Realising this, he included blacksmiths, weavers and cobblers among his disciples who further popularised his yogic cult. This was another difference between Vemana and Veerabrahman. Vemana worked as a Yogi without creating a clan of disciples, but Brahman Garu was keen on spreading his knowledge with the establishment of an institution in his name, the 'Matham of Brahman', in his native village in the Kurnool district.

All these religious figures, in their own socio-political setup, made a long-lasting impression on the memory of the people in the coastal belt of Andhra by pioneering the reformist ideas and promoting egalitarianism in the society. Brahma Naidu started religious egalitarianism in the 12th century in the coastal belt of Krishna and Vemana and Veerabrahman pointed out discrepancies in the caste system. These thinkers produced influential literature with man as the centre of universe and his freedom as the chief goal. Many scholars who have studied the social history of Andhra believe that Vemana and Veerabrahman are the forerunners of the non-Brahmin movement which blossomed later in the coastal belt in the early 20th century. Some also classify them as social reformers. Their work inspired late 19th century pioneers like Mamidi Venkayya and Kandukuri Veeresalingam (Manjulatha, 2003: 94-95).

The themes of Brahminical domination and the British rule contributed to a clear disenchantment of Indian intelligentsia who were fighting the caste domination in the coastal belt of Andhra (Washbrook, 1977: 13). English education gave a stimulus to scientific knowledge and rational thinking. This further helped popularise rationalism and atheism among the Andhra intellectuals.

The Modern Period: Goals of a Human Life and the Compulsions of a Democratic India

The introduction of English education and subsequent improvement in communications through railways and roads, slow but steady migration of people

from villages to towns and cities, gave a much-needed impetus for the first generation educated class to know the world. It aided them to critically appreciate the elements of their society.

The migration from villages to the cities was dominated by Brahmins. They constituted over 4 laths of the population during British rule, in the first decade of 20th century coastal Andhra. The higher educational institutions in the cities were dominated by Brahmins as students and teachers (Sundar, 2015: 49). Kshatriyas, Kammas, Kapus, Reddys, Velamas, and Balijas also formed significant sections of the population. The outcastes or 'untouchables' belonging to the Mala and Madiga communities were the least in number and least exposed to education (Barnett M.R., 1976: 24-26).

Coastal Andhra reaped the maximum benefit of the development of modern facilities, because of increased agricultural production and an enhanced economic prosperity in this region (Ramakrishna, 1993: 100-105). It is generally agreed that the golden age of rich peasants in India spanned from 1860-1900, when the irrigation facilities and railways were introduced in late 1850s in the Presidency areas (Satyanarayana 1990, 104). The main river basin in the coastal districts, the Godavari anicut, was complete by 1854. The rising colonial Andhra comprised of the Sirkar districts of Andhra, the Guntur and Godavari districts. There were ceded districts (currently known as Rayalaseema) which came under the control of the East India Company by 1802 (Washbrook, 1977: 20-21). People who resided in villages were habituated to the Varna system. The village headman was a Brahmin. There is sufficient historical evidence to suggest that local political leadership composed of farming communities like the Kammas, Kapus and the merchant communities like Komatis depended on the village headman for the redressal of their land dealings. There were instances of misappropriation and corruption involving Brahmins of the Niyogi sub-sect, as they knew mathematics and did all the important administrative work of the village (Frykenberg, 1965: 16).

This pivotal position of the Brahmins made their dominance unquestioned in rural Andhra at the advent of British rule in India. Apart from being the most privileged group socially, they wielded power through village administration. Researchers who

have studied the administration in the coastal districts, primarily in Guntur, have recorded the way Brahmin accountants resorted to corruption even when they were not a part of the collectorate, which only had Marathi Brahmins as assistants instead of Telugu Brahmins (Frykenberg, 1965: 274-275). The local peasant communities including Reddys, Velamas, and Kapus were subjected to lot of physical and mental agony at the hands of these traditional Brahmin officials who formed their own network of influence in rural Andhra (mostly in the coastal areas). This led to resentment towards Brahmin domination among the non-Brahmin castes (Satyanarayana, A., 1990: 120-121).

The immediate cause of agony for the non-Brahman castes was their legitimate claim to be considered rural elite was not recognised. Villages managed by headmen called Karanam (the chief land accountant) who was always a Brahmin, had a cold war with the landed castes of Kapu, Kamma, Reddy and the Balijas. These villages were controlled by the Zamindars who were either Kapus or Reddys to whom these Karanams reported. And the internal politics of the landlord coupled with his trusted aide, the village headman, created a feeling of being neglected among other landed castes (Frykenberg, 1965: 48-49). An important aspect of this caste rhetoric was that the coastal districts were noted for their peculiar power relations of the village headmen, who, in some areas like the villages of Kurnool, where both Karanams and Kapus or the Balijas who wielded power in the revenue administration (Frykenberg, 1965: 232). Everything about the Brahmin domination and their prime role changed with the shift of power to the British in late 1850s.

The middle and rich peasant classes belonging to non-Brahmin communities (the Balijas, Kapus and Kammas and Reddys) got a shot in the arm with the introduction of English education. Brahmins took to it immediately. The peasant classes took it up mostly in missionary schools which admitted children belonging to every caste unlike village schools which admitted only the Brahmin and upper caste boys. The village schools excluded the lower strata, broadly following the rules of the entrenched Varna system (Satyanarayana, A., 1990: 122). Some non-Brahmin castes (the Kammas and Reddys) also prospered, thanks to the irrigation and waterway connectivity which the British introduced in the early 1850s (Rao G.N., 1988: 56-60). As mentioned above, the Godavari anicut was constructed in 1850, the Krishna anicut (Vijayawada) in

1855, the Pinakini anicut in Nellore was completed in 1862 (Morris, 2005: 87-90). These areas were strategic links between coastal villages at the time. As a result, villages developed a close connection to the towns in areas close to Krishna, Godavari belts and started trading with towns and cities. Similarly the railways and steamers were introduced in the region in 1890, which afforded transportation of commodities (Rao G.N., 1988: 48). This connectivity was more conducive to migrate from villages through road and railways for the communities.

Coastal farming communities, composed of non-Brahmin groups, migrated to the cities for education in the decade 1871-1881 as per the Census Records. The number of literate people from these communities increased due to this migration. The Godavari and Krishna districts were having 4.5 and 5.5 percentage of literates by 1881(Sundar, 2015: 48). The decade was also noted for the establishment of colleges in the coastal belt of Andhra, boosting the growth of secondary education. This exposed them to new ideas of duty and freedom. While ancient Indian texts defined freedom as attaining relief from the cycles of birth and death, described as *Moksha*, the introduction of British education introduced a new concept of freedom, to be able to act according to one's choice in this world.

This aspect made the non-Brahmin groups start new schools called the Rate schools, from their own voluntary financial contribution, to make English education available to their specific groups (Sundar 2015, 70-71). The term *Dharma* was also going through a transformation. Initially it was defined as performing one's own duty according to one's caste. This argument is mostly interpretative innovation of Vedic commentators, say some scholars (Mohanty, 2007: 77). With the advent of English education, social reformers like Kandukuri Veeresalingam redefined the idea of *Dharma* as developing into a good human being, based on one's role in the society (Kandukuri, 1911: 23).

A joining report of school students in 1884 clearly indicates the growth of non-Brahmin children in areas like Krishna, Guntur, Godavari districts, and even in Kurnool, Cuddappah and Nellore (Sundar, 2015: 75-77). Education and exposure to progressive ideas filled the non-Brahmin castes with a yearning to be on par with the Brahmins, be it in rural society or in the cities.

The Precursors of Rationalist, Atheist Thought in the Coastal Belt: Nature of Social Reform

The Hindu *shastras* had eulogised Brahmins and prescribed various rituals for human prosperity, to be officiated by Brahmins (Varma V.P., 1974: 297-299). These rituals and practices reinforced the supremacy of Brahmins. Exploitative practices of the Brahmin community provoked the Kammas, Kapus, Reddys, and Balijs to think about their status in the Andhra society (Srinivas M.N., 1962: 43-44).

These non-Brahmin castes challenged Brahmanical sermons, rituals, and allied practices. English education instilled Western ideas like scientific enquiry and logic among the non-Brahmin communities. With this started attempts to 'debrahminise' history. They wanted to posit a true version of history based on scientific and critical analysis. They relied on empirical evidence instead of myths and traditions.

Compared to other parts of India, social reform in the coastal belt of Andhra was centred on creating awareness about blind faith and superstition in the Hindu society. All reformers in Andhra, who took inspiration from Raja Ram Mohan Roy, including Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919), trained their guns against the upper castes. They supported the education of those belonging to lower castes, including the 'untouchables'. Interestingly, social reform programme in Andhra had several Brahmin thinkers also who had English education. They distinguished themselves as educationists, lawyers, and public servants (Ramakrishna. V, 1983: 28-29).

The main agenda of the non-Brahmin ideologues was to reposition themselves both intellectually and politically on par with the Brahmins. They also started reconstructing the history through narratives of personal experiences. They produced literature which could be considered as rational critiques of *Puranas* and Hindu epics. This was different from the approach of philosophers like Vemana who did away with religion altogether (Tripuraneni, 2011: 44-45). The non-Brahmin communities and educated intelligentsia tried to achieve proficiency in the Vedic tenets and ritualistic sermons of the Brahmin community before criticising the same. Many of them

preferred Buddhism as an ideology capable of offering a suitable substitute to Brahmanical religion (Hanumantha Rao, 1995: 25-26). Buddhism did away with the concept of God. This was a problem for many as majority of the non-Brahmin communities wanted a God, albeit a God located away from the influence and control of Brahmins. Bhakti movement of 12th century Andhra including Veerasaivism, and Vaishnavism instilled a strong feeling in these communities that devotion to god was personal and did not require any intermediaries.

The first literary movement in Telugu, aimed at making it a language accessible to all, using a colloquial style (devoid of highly Sanskritised poetic style) had been started by the Saiva poets in Andhra, the 'Siva Kavis' (poets of Siva) of whom Somanatha (as already mentioned above) was the prime mover. They used an indigenous poetic metre called Dvipada (couplet) instead of Sanskrit metres, as mentioned above. This literary movement included a secular theme. They converted local folklore and tales into canonical literature (Katyayani, 2003: 1-2). The first Telugu version of the *Ramayana* was written by a 13th century Reddy chieftain, Buddha Reddy, in the Dvipada metre. This was a daring step against the traditional Sanskrit tradition (Veturi Prabhakara Sastry, 2015: 28-29). Scholars like Veturi commented that poets like Buddha Reddy, canonised the local legends in their retelling of the *Ramayana*. This made their work very different from that of Valmiki's *Ramayana* (Veturi Prabhakara Sastry, 2015: 30-33). These literary revolts directly influenced the later day literary critiques in Andhra, as seen in the works of literary figures like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (to be discussed in a later chapter). It was clear to the reformers that fighting Brahmanical myth making and ideology could be done away with only through education and critical analysis of Hindu texts based on scientific temper. Thus began the struggle of thinkers like Mamidi Venkayya and Atmuri Lakshminarasimham, who were pioneers in challenging the ritualistic domination of the priestly community. For the first time, they supported the idea of non-Brahmin castes having their own community priests to officiate their family rituals (Ravipudi, 2013: 73-76).

The lives and contributions of these aforementioned figures will be dealt in the next chapter, with keeping in mind this background of language, literature and the emergence of non Brahmin communities as a part of the larger spread of the ideas of

rationalism, atheism and the strand of social reform which slowly created the ground for more radical ideas in the 20th century.

Chapter-3

The Coastal Belt of Andhra before the Twentieth Century

This chapter focuses on the ideas and intellectual currents in the coastal belt of Andhra from the late 17th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Those who contributed these ideas belonged to different castes and different professions and included even some Brahmin scholars who took a reformist and egalitarian position. It also presents the role of caste associations and English education. All these literary, educational and public activities form the background of the twentieth century developments of atheism, rationalism and humanism in coastal Andhra.

The Intellectual Background of the Social Reform Movement in Andhra

The coastal belt of Andhra, including the districts of Krishna and Godavari, was dominated by three important factors in the pre 20th century period. There was a wave of social reform, similar to other regions in India, and a spurt in western ideals, mostly dominated by liberalism. Secondly, there was the emergence of caste splinters, which ran a parallel discourse to the Justice Party. This in turn asserted its own dominance in shaping the intellectual choices of the learned in the coastal belt, who led the rationalist, atheist and radical humanist programmes.

Regarding the era of social reform, it is generally believed that Kandukuri Veeresalingam (referred to either as Kandukuri or Veeresalingam), with his bringing up of the issues of women's liberation, education and widow remarriage, was the man who contributed to the awakening of the whole Andhra. The fact that he did not mention or acknowledge the late 17th century poet-rebel, Vemana, who for the first time spoke about abolishing the caste system, does not make Vemana less important.

The remarkable fact of the Andhra experience was that whenever a progressive idea arose, its antithesis also arose, resulting in the reform being amalgamated by the Hindu tradition. Hence, it has been asked whether there was any 'Brahminical' conspiracy to project Kandukuri Veeresalingam as the first important figure or

whether there were any efforts before him to ‘speak or initiate a process of rejuvenating Andhra Society’ (Ravipudi, 2013:42).

The Harbingers of the Non-Brahmin Movement: Atmuri Lakshmi Narasimham and Mamidi Venkayya

According to Ravipudi Venkatadri (Ravipudi), the project of presenting Veeresalingam as the originator of reform has its own story. Veeresalingam ‘pledged his money, time and energy to reform society’, but he was a Brahminical creation and the presence of nationalism was the reason for this (Ravipudi, 2013:42-43). The so-called nationalists, by which Ravipudi meant ‘the Brahmins’ in the Congress, were the leaders who took up the main positions in the coastal belt in leading the national movement. The region was always under caste supremacy so deep that even the public discourse started claiming the Brahmins as the flag bearers of social reform in the region.

It is here that a passing mention that Veeresalingam made in his Autobiography about Atmuri Lakshmi Narasimham and, before him, Mamidi Venkayya (Venkayya), becomes important. The most important strand of non-Brahmin movement in Andhra was instrumental in deciding the course of rationalist, atheist and humanist ideologies. The case of Mamidi Venkayya as the first reformer who looked beyond the Brahmin caste is taken by the later researchers like Ravipudi as an illustration of the fact that he was responsible for starting the trend of ‘questioning authority’ and personally led the rebellion against Brahmin domination (Ravipudi, 2013:28-31). He was a Vaishya, who represented the third echelon in the caste system, and fought for equality in ritual matters for the non-Brahmin castes like his. Till then the Brahmins alone had the right to wear sacred thread according to the Sastras (law books) and who could conduct their own ceremonies. The case of Venkayya performing the ‘thread ceremony’ of his son went till the British Privy Council and got resolved after 10 years of his death in 1845. The main issue was the use of Puranic verses in a non-Brahmin ceremony by the priestly caste and the ‘Vedic’ verses in a Brahmin ceremony. The Council gave the verdict that conducting ceremonies was an ‘exclusive right of the Brahmins’, but other castes could ask the Brahmins to perform their ceremonies according to ‘Vedic verses’.

This was an ‘anti-priest craft movement,’ in the words of Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy, who was a close associate of M.N. Roy (Ravipudi, 2013). It was seen by him as a struggle for the freedom of the individual from domination and subservience. The fact remains that in India there was the deeply entrenched caste system which gave ritual privilege to the Brahmins. And since the Puranas represented Brahminical myths, the whole system was designed to help the priestly class. It was this dominance, which led people like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (Tripuraneni or TRC) to rebel and revisit themes in the Puranas with a rationalistic outlook. That rationalism was preceded by this fight for extending ritual privileges to the Vaishyas.

The caste orientation given to this movement as anti-Brahmin movement was opposed by radical humanists in Andhra, who after a careful perusal of these events, termed these claims as mere ‘human rights struggles’ and nothing to do with Brahmins or their authority (C.V, 1982:214-215). They have argued that this movement was raising a human rights issue, such as ‘If Vedas are the repository of supreme truths, then why weren’t the non-Brahmin classes entitled to know those ‘truths’, which are universal and learn them?’.

In one of his songs known as ‘The Songs of *Sutasram*’, Tripuraneni makes the claim that rebelling against the priestly class was a human rights issue. He says, “When people [who] are struggling for the independence of India, claim that what the whites are subjecting the blacks to is unfair and inhuman, [when] not allowing the blacks to sit, dine or live in the same area that the whites live in is a fight for rights, then why do not nationalists here consider ... [movement against] untouchability or against exclusion from rituals as struggles for securing a basic human right to have one’s own choice in performing the rituals?” (Tripuraneni, 2011:400).

The place where Venkayya came from also played a part in being the site of social reform in the coastal belt. He was born in the Godavari belt 1764, in Paalakollu (present West Godavari district). He was a scholar in Telugu and Sanskrit and a lexicographer in both the languages, according to the literary historian Arudra (Arudra, 1967:45). It was significant that the great Telugu savant, C.P. Brown, who restored the works of Vemana, had referred to these two dictionaries while compiling his Telugu dictionary (Ravipudi, 2013:18-19). This scholarly effort being made by a

non-Brahmin was enough evidence that the stage for more serious combats with the priestly class was in the offing. As mentioned earlier it all started when he performed the sacred thread ceremony to his son, Reddayya, one morning. Alarmed by this move, the whole Brahmin denomination rushed to the Privy Council questioning Venkayya for usurping their privilege. As said above, the Council decreed that Vaishyas could have their ceremonies according to Vedic chants, but only by Brahmins.

This anti-Brahminical debate, which started with the Vaishyas' challenge, continued with the castes of carpenters and goldsmiths, who called themselves 'Vishwa Brahmins', and who claimed their ancestry from the mythical sculptor of the Hindu epics, Vishwakarma. But these two castes did not press the challenge any further and later started their own associations to foster education, development and economic support to their own castes.

When did this anti-Brahmin rhetoric become significant? It was when the Kamma caste, more than any other influential castes in the coastal belt, the Reddys, apart from a few other castes like Velamas, Kapus, started asserting their own right of becoming proficient in the Vedas. Sanskrit was a major challenge. It was the Kammas who took the initiative of developing an alternative to the Brahmin supremacy. The Kammas were already equipped with economic stability and educational acumen, as the communication systems developed and migration from rural areas to the urban areas started. The starting point of the disputes between the Kammas and the Brahmins was the right to conduct their own rituals with 'their own men'. But, what the Kammas did and other non-Brahmin castes did not do was to become the 'flag-bearers of the non-Brahmin movement' by revisiting their history, economy and the culture of Andhra, just as the Brahminical class invented their own theories to combat and quell any rhetoric which posed a threat to their societal position and public acceptance. The intellectuals from the Kamma community like Tripuraneni, Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy, G.V. Krishna Rao, etc., took this question to the public sphere, in which the presence of non-Brahmin castes was very limited. But just when they were mounting a challenge to the Brahmin supremacy, there was another challenge that these non-Brahmin castes had to face, namely the emergence of the Indian National Congress and the wave of nationalism. Added to this was the issue of regional identity. Thus

they had to be nationalist, crusaders of non-Brahmin movement, and also fight for a separate Andhra state (Lavanam, 2014). The solution to make all these ideas to sail at the same time was to form caste associations in the coastal belt, with headquarters at Vijayawada, Guntur and Rajahmundry, places where significant Brahmin influence was present.

The social reformers used literature as a powerful weapon of their movement which they preferred to describe as a ‘non-Brahmin movement’, not an anti-Brahmin movement (Unnava, 1924:34). Language and its ‘readability’ and its nuances were a matter of prime concern for them. During this period we see the importance given to the dissemination of new ideas through literature and public discourse (Satyanarayana S.V., 2003:35). Unlike in the Tamil areas, the social reform movement in Andhra went hand in hand with the literary reform by the people like Gidugu Ramamurthy, Gurajada Apparao (Rammohan Rao, 2005:4-5).¹

This trend was started by a social reformer called Swamineni Muddu Narasimham, who, much before Veeresalingam (who wrote in chaste Telugu), gave a call for literary works to be written in colloquial Telugu, so that the common readers understood them (Hanumantha Rao B.S.L, 2012:196-197). The coastal belt could boast of people like Gurajada Apparao (Gurajada), Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry (Sripada), and Chilakamarthi Lakshminarasimham (Chilakamarthi), who used non-Sanskritised, simple language. They were all strong nationalists, who kept themselves away from the non-Brahmin movement, but when it came to the language debate, they made important contributions (Sundar K.H.S.S, 2015:42-47, 50-53).

The twentieth century reformers’ assessment of the medieval reformist figures is noteworthy. Apart from Vemana, the legend that Tripuraneni alluded to, that of inter-caste dining and advocating temple entry to ‘untouchables’, by Brahma Naidu in the coastal belt in 12th century Andhra, deserves some mention here. Though not a direct influence, it was still important.

Brahma Naidu, a Velama by birth, presented an example for chroniclers of social reform in Andhra, for questioning the Brahmin supremacy in turning temples into an

exclusive property of upper castes. His struggle was both political and cultural (Hanumantha Rao B.S.L, 2012:94-103), but, as Ravipudi puts in his appraisal of this movement in history of Andhra, the Brahmins always invented a strategy to fight any challenge to their supremacy with the help of other castes, in this case the Reddys, to fight Brahma Naidu and his influence. But, for Ravipudi, Brahma Naidu's was a 'human rights struggle' and not an anti-Brahminical move, nor could it be classified as a rationalist movement he thinks, as in the case of Vemana (Ravipudi, 2013:122-123,139).

In the period of the late 18th and early 19th century, the person who had the ability to question the system and to write on social reform was Swamineni Muddunarasimham (1792-1856), even before the advent of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, and is credited as the man who started the social reform movement. It is often lamented by rational thinkers like Tripuraneni Venkateshwara Rao (who worked extensively on Vemana) and Ravipudi Venkatadri (who led the radical humanist movement in Andhra), that the real pioneer was Swamineni, who initiated the process of practical social reform, regarding education, widow remarriage etc., (Tripuraneni Venkateshwara Rao, 1992:18-19), but he died before the announcement of the widow remarriage Act. Ravipudi goes to the extent of claiming that Veeresalingam and Gidugu Ramamurthy, who worked for evolving a colloquial Telugu in print and literature, were the successors of Swamineni, but they too did not acknowledge him. His pioneering work is contained in a small booklet *Hitasuchini* (Swamineni, 1862:1-2). Born in a Velama family, in Rajahmundry, he was educated in Kumbakonam, in present Tamilnadu, as his father was transferred there in his job under the British. He himself became a munsif in the first degree at Rajahmundry. He observed the scientific outlook of the British and the way they dealt with education. He jotted his ideas about reforms in a small book called *Hitasuchini* in Telugu, which means the 'book of morals'. The main aim of the book was to outline how education should be, how women and their plight in the Hindu society should be dealt with, and how blind faith and beliefs should be eradicated in the whole region.

Swamineni's main urge was to encourage printing of school books in an understandable, colloquial Telugu, and not in the highly Sanskritised version that was in vogue, without which he averred education will permanently be in the control of a

few classes, like the Brahmins, who doubled as teachers too (Swamineni, 1862:4-6). He writes that the aim of education should be to clear doubts, while reading a concept or a parable, and not to create further doubts. He also suggests some grammatical alterations in the written language, so that it becomes easier for the people to read quickly and without strain (Swamineni, 1862:1-4). As mentioned earlier, this suggestion remained a proposal in his lifetime, but was later implemented by the great literary figure and linguist, Gidugu Ramamurthy Pantulu, who took it on himself to start a well-planned programme to make the spoken language appear in print, whether it was a pamphlet, a book or a newspaper. In Swamineni's time, the proposal was a challenge to the Brahmin scholars' control of all the intellectual activities.

Swamineni advises on what kind of literature should be written. "A work of literary merit is not judged by its scholarly language, but by its simplicity and profundity of thought. One must keep in mind that women also could read those works" (Swamineni, 1862:6). Further, he says, "Works of myths and legends do not serve the need of the day, and people should take to English education to learn various scientific aspects in the world. Students too should focus on expanding their knowledge" (Swamineni, 1862:6). These views were a precursor of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary's critique of Hindu mythological texts. He also urged people to use medicines and not resort to unproven and age-old practices of curing disease. Diseases do not get cured by chants or by the tying of special threads, he said. He attacked the belief in witchcraft, hallucinations, the afterlife and karma theories, stating that one should be careful not to be lured by such attempts to make money (Swamineni, 1862:27-28). Criticising the old texts, he says, "Puranas are filled with imaginary stories. All sub-plots of the Mahabharata are nothing but illogical. One should try to understand and criticise these stories logically" (Swamineni, 1862:4-5). This was truly a precursor to the non-Brahmin rhetoric in the later centuries.

About women and their empowerment, he says that educating a woman is the need of the day. His main complaint was that, the institution of marriage ruined women's development, both physically and mentally. Child marriages were rampant in his time and he was the first person to talk against this practice and said that 'girls should be married only after they attain puberty' (Swamineni, 1862: 1-3). After his death, the British brought a Child Marriage Act, but it said that a girl could be married after she

attained twelve years of age, which was against Swamineni's wishes. To prove his point regarding widow remarriage, Swamineni invoked a Puranic story of Satyavathi who becomes pregnant by the Sage Vyasa and then is granted a boon by King Santanu, who says that he will marry her and bequeath his kingdom to their child (Swamineni, 1862: 1-2). He cites this as an example that women had the freedom to choose.

Swamineni, Gidugu Ramamurthy (1863-1940) Gurajada Appa Rao (1862-1915) changed the linguistic basis of social reform. Though the use of a simple language was not a deliberate move to counter the 'Brahmin's language', it was later celebrated as such by people like Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry (1891-1961), the Vedic scholar-turned short story writer and novelist, who was more inclined towards the reform programme of Veeresalingam and who openly criticised the Brahmins for their lack of rational thinking (Sripada, 2012:3-4).

The Kandukuri Era: Debates about His Contribution and His Influence

After Swamineni, begins the era of Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919). He concentrated mostly on the condition of women. There are cases of women secretly coming from Tamil districts to Rajahmundry, to escape from the in-laws, with a wish to get a new life under the guidance of Veeresalingam. He started a newspaper called *Vivekavardhani* which was devoted to his line of social reform and his thoughts on education. As an educationist, he was of the opinion that the educational system that the British brought with them was helpful in waking up Indians from slumber, by inculcating logical thinking and knowledge. His works were mostly related to a rational critique of Hindu practices, ill treatment of women, and though his focus was more on the upper caste reform, he also talked about the plight of the 'untouchables'.

It is important to note his 'satirical' works, with the mythological characters as main protagonists. According to many historians of Telugu literature, Kandukuri was the first one to recognise that literature was vital in bringing about a change in the mindset of the people and if the women at home were educated, the whole family would change to a rational way of life (Satyanarayana S.V, 2005:19-20).

He was the first writer in Telugu to give more importance to prose than verses, which were unintelligible to common people. But he was a votary of the semi-Sanskritised Telugu and not like Gidugu or Swamineni in his outlook towards language.

His works of satire were directed at the degenerate Brahmin community. His work, 'The Tale of Misery' (*Abhagyopakhyanam*), narrates the plight of women due to the promiscuous activities of the Brahmin men in an urban set up like Rajahmundry. He started a magazine named *Hasya Sanjivani*, where he focussed on the ills that were created by the Brahmin community, and focused on the women and their position. In one of his verses he says:

"They [the Brahmins] revel in the houses of whores and even bring them to their own homes at nights, they live as parasites on their ancestors' money, they covet even the neighbour's wives, they drown themselves in alcohol and are seen falling on streets" (Kandukuri, 1988:1-3). "They appear as the alibis to the deeds of the wicked for money and revel in the riches they earn illegally" (Kandukuri, 1988:35-37).

Veeresalingam took to Sastras and Hindu law books to convince the 'Brahminical elite' of the great Vedic school of Rajahmundry that women were extolled and their importance was exhorted even in these texts. Veeresalingam narrates his first tryst with giving a lecture on widow remarriage in Rajahmundry in 1879, in the presence of scholars of Sastra and traditionalist, in his autobiography. He explains the process of how he prepared for the elite debates thus:

I decided to take the plunge of equipping myself with the canonical texts, to counter attack anti-widow remarriage jibes from the pundits of Rajajmundry. I got the *Manusmriti*, *Parasasmriti*, and made myself equipped with many texts of Smriti from Kasi and Kalighat, to ponder over the suitable passages from the law books to support my arguments. With god's grace, I was able to locate the texts which had favoured widow remarriage. My first lecture was at the Maharaja's School, which was attended by both the commoners and the scholars. 1879, the date was August 8th and my speech with all the quotes from texts, made the pundits there enraged and they slowly started a hate campaign against me in the town, accusing me of being a blot on

the great city of Rajahmundry. From refusing to lend Sanskrit texts from their libraries to spreading hate through meetings, everything was on display in the Godavari belt against me. (Kandukuri, 1911: 136-139)

Kandukuri opposed the devadasi system, which had degenerated into flesh trade and many devadasis were mistresses to the wealthy Brahmins in the city. He wrote a satirical play ‘The Lament of Saraswathi and Narada’ (*Saraswathi Narada Vilapam*) where, there is an interesting conversation between the muse of letters in Hindu mythology, Saraswathi, and her son, the master musician-sage, Narada. They both lament literature and music falling into despicable hands (of Brahmins):

“My entire body is pained by the unintelligible similes, words, compounds, that these poets use. They jar my ears with mere wordplay and depict their so-called mastery of language. But they do not realise that the main purpose of any art is for the welfare of humanity and well-being of people” (Kandukuri, 1988: 4-5). Narada in turn complains that “the divine music about supreme god”, is being despised and the music of the nautch girl has become popular” (Kandukuri, 1988:5).

Kandukuri’s anti-nautch stand was related to his focus on the life of dignity for women. He made graphic references to the nautch parties in marriage processions in the coastal Godavari belt and suggested that legislation should be brought by the British to stop the nautch practice as it was ruining the life of Brahmins and other castes by luring them with pomp and show. This stand of his found support as well as indifference from many of his staunch literary followers and reformers.

The litterateur Chilakamarthi Lakminarasimham (Chilakamarthi 1867-1946), who was interacting with Kandukuri in opening schools for the ‘low-castes’ and had himself opened a school for ‘Harijans’ in Rajahmundry with his meagre funds, says in his autobiography that Veeresalingam was very clear when it came to the participation in freedom struggle. He saw himself as a total social reformer, and never got involved in politics. As a government servant, he was honoured by the British with the title ‘RAO BAHADUR’, which Kandukuri revered as a token of appreciation for his work. He also narrates that the British granted him funds and permission to start institutions or homes for the widows, which Kandukuri did relentlessly, and he remained loyal to the British (Chilakamarthi, 2009:205-206). This debate of nationalism versus social

reform became inconsequential later when Gandhi invigorated the mood of the nation in the early 1920s by non-cooperation movement, and bridged the gap between freedom struggle and social reform.

Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry: The Egalitarian Brahmin

Apart from Chilakamarthi, there were many supporters of Veeresalingam, when it came to social reform, who brought new ideas to the public domain. Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry (1891-1961), a major literary figure from Veeresalingam's own town, Rajahmundry, mentions in his works about the extent to which the whole city went in helping Veeresalingam in his efforts to give hope to the girls and young widows who came to the town looking for him. In one of his poignant stories, Sripada Sastry juxtaposes the Christian conversions taking place in the Godavari belt, on either side of the river, and a converted couple which rescues a Brahmin girl seen lying on the riverside (Sripada, 2012:51-53). The Brahmin girl had run away from her parents and relatives who were trying to 'convert her' into a widow by tonsuring. On seeing the converted couple approaching the riverbed, the relatives who followed her run away, leaving her bruised. She is taken unconscious but nursed and cured by the couple. The girl, after regaining consciousness, regrets that she had become 'impure' by stepping in a 'forbidden place', but soon realises her folly and the truth that it was not 'the so-called high classes of her own family, but the humane couple who brought her back to life. The story ends by the young Brahmin widow addressing the couple as mother and father and remaining in their house, without returning to her village (Sripada, 2012: 66-70).

This theme was clearly influenced by Veeresalingam and his social reform. But, the stand that a man like Sripada (whose family was the most orthodox and performed Vedic rituals for ages) chose to take was revolutionary because the theme was a taboo for his age and period. In fact, he proudly says in his autobiography, "Veeresalingam Pantulu has instilled a pride in me being a resident of his town. He was responsible for broadening my attitude on the role of religion, education and the nature of it" (Sripada, 2012:405-406).

Though Sripada sastry led the movement of literary significance of using 'spoken language' than 'literary language' in his works, he is seen as a social reformer who

used literature for his ideas (Sripada, 2011:97, 101, 110-11). He brought a new strand into public discourse which proved very important in the long run in the nationalism versus social reform debate. This was the separate identity of the Andhra race and Telugu language, and its historical significance as a court language in seats of power in south India. In one of his iconic short stories, he mentions the rampant deviations that intellectuals in Andhra were taking and says at the end that “The Telugu blood is getting thinner and thinner, due to lack of ambition” (Sripada, 2011:205). It is doubtful whether he supported Veeresalingam’s agenda of anti-nautch. As his works depict, he did not. For him, like Chilakamarthi, humanity and compassion formed basic aspects of looking into the problems which plagued the society. In one of his short stories *Kalupumokkalu* (The Weeds) a devadasi helps a poor Brahmin who wants a favour from a corrupt official. The official insists on bringing her to his house if he wants to get his work done. In one of the memorable lines of his story, the poor Brahmin says, again deviating from his Brahmin ancestry, “You saved my world, girl. You are not to be born in this race of yours. You ought to be born as my daughter, and I, betrayed by my own people, bow to you for your courage to satiate a hungry wolf, in order to help me” (Sripada, 2009:227-28).

The suggestiveness of the story is depicted in the humane attitude of so-called ‘fallen woman’, who saves a Vedic Brahmin from being ‘fallen’. This formed a classic statement of the mind of Sripada, who saw that caste was not the issue, but the courage to help, honesty and upright behaviour. As a scholar and as a short story writer, he did his bit in participating in the nationalist movement. But, at the same time, there was in him a lover of the spiritual aspect of performing one’s duty. As he writes in his autobiography, Indians and Telugus were losing their own individuality, by mimicking the materialistic attitude of earning money, spending it, but not utilising it for others (Sripada, 2009:217-218). He believed that the readiness to help others, which he thought was the true Aryan trait in Indians, was being buried when theories were being proposed regarding who the Aryans were and how they were different from the Dravidians. This was a reference to the rhetoric of the non-Brahmin movement so vociferously advocated later in the 1920s.

His main contribution in the social reform debate was that he systematised the colloquial Telugu and promoted its use in the public debate. He was an avid supporter

of a separate Andhra state, like his successor Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, who carried all three issues of non-Brahmin movement, nationalism, and regional identity together. Though he supported the widow remarriage reform of Veeresalingam, he openly criticised his creation of a feeling of ‘inferiority’ among the Telugus. He said, “Veeresalingam, through his works, constantly created a feeling of inferiority among the Telugus that they were not capable of social reform and they lacked the zeal. Instead of getting out of this problem and moving forward, the Telugu man is digging his own lonely furrows. He could not help himself or his men” (Sripada, 2012:405-406). Interestingly, he makes a comparison between the Bengali literary figure Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Veeresalingam. He says that in literature they were equals, in the genres that they created, and both contributed to their own language, but Bankim strengthened the Bengalis by his literature, but that was not the case with Veeresalingam.

“The Telugus who read the popular translations of Bankim, identified themselves with the theme of nationalism, but that nationalism was of truly Bengali identity. But, the Telugu, lost his identity...because, instead of instilling a feeling of Telugu pride, Veeresalingam filled his men with a ‘Brahmo’ pride, making them forget their own language, identity and the lofty land that they belonged to, in directing them to a field called social reform, where they were made sub-ordinates, not participants. This was where Bankim succeeded and Veeresalingam failed”, Sripada Sastry remarked (Sripada, 2012: 402).

The Exploited and Excluded Classes

Apart from this assertion of Telugu identity, the main development dawning on the land was that of nationalism. Understandably, it was propelled by the advent of a political party, and the whole process that it was concerned with. Here the name of Unnava Lakshminarayana (known as Unnava popularly) (1877-1958) comes to the fore as a strong nationalist, who was also the first intellectual to take up the cause of the social ‘outsiders’ (C.V, 1988:196-197).

Unnava was born in the village Sattenapalli near Guntur, passed his matriculation in Guntur. He started a young men’s literary association, to inculcate a sense of literary refined taste in Telugu, in 1900. Later in the year, he started teaching, which was his

first vocation. After two years (in 1902) he established the ‘widow rehabilitation centre’, the first of its kind in Guntur, in which he performed the first widow remarriage presided by “the renaissance man of Andhra”, Veeresalingam. In fact, his centre was named after the pioneer. After seven years as a teacher, he went to Edinburgh to study law. He was a colleague of the rationalist literary figure, Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, who pioneered the non-Brahmin movement in the Andhra belt, and both remained close friends till Tripuraneni died prematurely in 1943. After he completed law in Dublin, Ireland, he returned to India and started full-fledged practice as a lawyer in Madras in 1917, when the home rule movement was in full swing. He joined Congress in the same year as the secretary of the Congress committee in the Andhra area. He was jailed for his participation in a Satyagraha in Guntur in 1922, when he started writing his novel *Malapalli* which formed the crux of his political life (Unnava, 1922:478-479). He also conducted political debates and talks as part of the Guntur young men’s literary association founded by him. From the reports in newspapers of that era, it was widely felt that in order to combat the Tamil dominance in the presidency and to uplift Andhra and its people, a separate Andhra movement was needed (*Andhra Patrika*, 1912:12). In fact, it was he who mooted the idea of a separate Andhra state, based on linguistic identity, at the Krishna district Mahasabha, held at Eluru, in 1910. One of the main grievances was that the Andhra districts in the presidency did not have any university to inculcate a sense of scholarship among the Andhra youth (Veerabhadra Rao, 2005:18-19). When the idea of a separate association to fight for Andhra state was mooted, he was instrumental in coordinating this work, in starting the Andhra Maha Sabha in 1913, with the first conference held in Bapatla, in Guntur district in 1913. He was Secretary of its steering committee (Veerabhadra Rao, 2005:27-8).

His institution ‘Sarada Niketan’ was established in Guntur as a cooperative institution to rehabilitate and train women of all ages by imparting vocational training in handicrafts, weaving, and gardening. He was called the ‘Guntur Gandhi’, because he was a nationalist who also worked for social reform. He spoke about the negative aspects of the non-Brahmin movement in Andhra. He thought that as the movement progressed, and institutionalised into a political party like the Justice Party, the non-Brahmin leaders forgot about the real suffering class, of the lower strata. So, it was a half-hearted move of securing justice only for the non-Brahmin upper castes.

(Gopichand, 2010:83). He took up the cause of the ‘untouchables’ by writing a novel in Telugu titled as *Malapalli* (The village of ‘untouchables’) exposing for the first time the state of the ‘outcastes’ in the coastal belt of Guntur, along with a depiction of the caste politics in the village. The novel also talks about how the Gandhian spirituality and the critical philosophy of communism clashed with one another. It creates a Robin Hood like character as the protagonist, ironically named as Ramadasu. Ramadasu leads the spiritualisation of the ‘outcastes’, helped by his son, ‘Sanghadasu’, showing a change from being a servant of god to being a servant of society (Unnava, 1924:9). This idea of Unnava influenced some radical humanists, who, in the later stages, found peace in the amalgamation of the ‘spirituality’ of the Radhakrishnan mode and the realism of Gandhi (Gopichand, 2009:213- 217). It helped the early Royists like Gopichand in striking a balance between physical realism with a practical goal, and morality with spirituality (Gopichand, 2009:128-129).

To quote his political thought from the novel mentioned above, in one chapter he says, “a fair mixture of spiritualism, of bhakti (devotion) to one’s goal, and communism (which signified a single-minded focus on international community of workers)” is needed. In the scene of the meeting of the ‘outcastes’, the participants say that we as ‘untouchables’ should not allow other castes to call us with derogatory prefixes. We ourselves should use the ‘respectable prefixes’ used by them for themselves to counter their domination.” Further the participants say, “The Bolshevik ideas are making even the British shiver. The idea of popular vote, voting rights to women, etc., are now in vogue in the West. The way all the poor classes united to oppose the tyranny of the Czars in Russia gives us hope that one day we will be winning this struggle for identity and respect” (Unnava, 1924:8-9). These are the resolutions that the ‘leader of the poor’, ‘Sanghadasu’, makes his fellow ‘untouchables’ living in a prohibited area, to make.

Interestingly, in this novel, the struggle between the rich and the poor is centred in the Guntur belt, with the adversaries belonging to the Kamma and the Mala caste. The landlord is represented by one Ramanaidu and the Mala worker is Ramadasu. In the Preface to this work, the newspaper baron and philanthropist, Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao, explains the set up of the novel, its characters, and the plot, by juxtaposing it with the Indian epics (Unnava, 1924:1-3). Here the village ‘Mangalapuram’ becomes

the site of auspiciousness, the characters become cogs in the wheel of the changing fortunes of the village, and Ramadasu is a Karma Yogi who does his duty of serving. He is like a dharmavyadha, who sells meat, as he was born in that profession, but, according to the *Mahabharata*, he is a great realised soul (Unnava, 1924:113).

In one of the chapters of the novel, Unnava explains the all-inclusiveness of Hindu religion which survived in the presence of Christian missionaries. The ‘untouchables’ in the novel, prime characters like Ramadasu and his son, though ill-treated by the landowners, do not get lured by Christian missionaries scouting in their areas but make them understand the eclecticism of Hindu religion (Unnava, 1924:295, 301-302).

The novel is interspersed with village feuds, petty wars, and economic disparities, but does not give a sense of the feelings of people. Various ballads and poems of saints find a mention in the novel, symbolising the impermanence of life and the permanence of good deeds. Another aspect of this novel is the way Unnava extols the Telugu pride, pride in the land, language and race. In a chapter dedicated to describing the Andhra country, he comes across as a passionate campaigner of separate Andhra identity, an emotional bond that he shares with the land, just as Sripada depicted in his works (Unnava, 1924:214).

Caste Associations by the Non-Brahmin Castes

As mentioned already, apart from the debate on social reform and nationalism, another current which was prominent in Andhra was the non-Brahmin movement that was carried on by non-Brahmin castes like Kammas, Kapus and Balijas in the coastal belt districts of Krishna and Godavari.

The non-Brahmin movement by educated thinkers from the other castes had an insignificant presence during the period of Kandukuri Veeresalingam. But the movement got thrust into the public domain with the advent of Nationalism. Intellectuals from different walks of life like Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak redefined the concept of freedom and propagated new ideas of duty among the Indians. Public sphere in Andhra was filled with first and second generation educationists who belonged to the Brahmin community. They

distinguished themselves as lawyers and writers. They took the lion's share of the posts reserved for Indians in the public administrative units of the British government. This total dominance of social and political sphere by Brahmin groups encouraged the non- Brahmin movement in Andhra to shift their focus from claiming the Vedic learning and priesthood duties of Brahmins, to making a claim for political representation and presence on par with Brahmins.

The caste associations mainly aimed at the development of children belonging to the respective non-Brahmin castes. They focused on providing English education and developing a new breed of graduates by providing financial help and scholarships to the poor students. Though education was the main agenda, they also took initiatives to encourage widow remarriages and tried to promote unity among the members of the same caste. More significantly, they tried to get proper representation for their castes in public employment sector. Brahmin community, who were the first recipients of English education, declined in rural administration jobs by the first half of 20th century CE. The district collectorates had Brahmin domination in 1922, with over 67.32% of the jobs being occupied by Brahmins. This percentage came down to 28.74 in 1958 (Frykenberg, 1965:281).

Hence, the site of confrontation and competition became the town/city in the coastal belt where both Brahmins and non-Brahmins started equipping themselves with the wherewithal to prove their mettle. The separate caste associations could not have come up without a united front against Brahmin domination. The meeting of non-Brahmin leaders in the political arena in 1917, under the South Indian non-Brahmin Confederation, urged the government in Madras presidency to promote legislative unification of all non-Brahmin groups and to remove legal hindrances which were making social intercourse of these groups difficult (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978: 296). In other words, they wanted a better representation of non-Brahmin communities in the legislative assembly and to give a fair play to include non -Brahmin groups into government jobs, which meant inclusion of the various societal groups in the process of administration.

The South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF) was formed in December 1917 in Madras by the leaders of non-Brahmin movement. This federation mostly included landlords of small principalities in coastal Andhra. Conferences started to be held in several

areas of Andhra. The first non-Brahmin conference was held in the Godavari belt in October 1917 (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:292-293). This gave impetus for the caste groups like Kamma, Reddy, Velama, and Kapu to discuss the development of their own groups and work harder for their caste's representation in the political units of the government.

Non-Brahmin communities got a united front when the Justice Party was formed to realise the political dreams of their communities in the presidency. The events in coastal districts, which led many Telugu leaders to join the newly formed party, included an old controversy between Brahmins and non-Brahmins regarding the knowledge of Vedas and proficiency in Sanskrit.

In Amritalur and Kollur in the Krishna district, Brahmin teachers sent a registered notice to the court, asking it to not to permit Kamma students into Sanskrit classes. According to them, non-Brahmins did not qualify to study Sanskrit or to learn the Vedic texts (Choudary S.R., 1925:23; Keiko, 2008:363-364). There were stray incidents of violence in places like Amritalur, where the Vedic conference of local scholars was taking place. A few Kamma men entered the place. Noticing these traditional 'Sudras', the Brahmins immediately drove them away and prevented them from even listening to the debates of scholars in the proceedings (Chowdary S.R., 1936:285). These fights with the Brahmins combined with the political zeal of the non-Brahmin communities gave a boost to the Justice Party. The party had among its members, those from elite families. They included the Rajas of Panagal, Bobbili, Pithapuram, Challapalli and Venkatagiri. Interestingly this movement by the non-Brahmins only included the higher castes among them, like Kammas, Reddys, Kapus, and Balijas, who had achieved a sound monetary status in the late 19th century. These castes were denied access to higher education before the advent of the British. However, they considered themselves as belonging to the higher strata among non-Brahmins, though they are referred to as 'backward' classes by some scholars who worked on their pre 20th century socio-political position (Irschick, 1969:1-10).

Justice Party garnered its popularity with an aim of getting representation for every non-Brahmin caste. However, the party failed to achieve this broader aim. Traditionally non- Brahmin communities included not only the above-mentioned

groups but also the 'Sudras', the Malas and Madigas. The non-Brahmin movement did not address the grievances of these groups, though some nationalist leaders acknowledged the lacunae in the programs of the Justice Party (Washbrook, 1977:275-276; Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:297).

These party ideologues drew heavily on the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy, which was based on the idea that all the Brahmins were settlers and not indigenous groups in India and that all Dravidians who were non-brahmins were the original inhabitants of the land (Irschick, 1969:278-304). The history of Brahmins, as narrated by the mythological texts like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* showed the non-Brahmin groups as *Dasas* or slaves, without any human value. Hence, the ideologues, including literary figures like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chaudhary (1887-1943), started reinterpreting the sacred texts using logic based on scientific rather than religious temper. This has been termed by many scholars as debrahminising history. Such efforts highlighted the 'high birth' of communities like Kammas and Reddys (Venkatakrishna P, 1924:19; Choudary V.V, 1972:55-57). They felt the need to uphold the high pedigree of the non-Brahmin groups and started delving into the roots of their history. The texts published on caste etymology and pedigree were the result of these efforts. The 'debrahminising' of history by these non-Brahmin groups led to a process by which new *Puranas* or historical texts were produced in high flown Telugu, an idiom mostly used by the Brahmins (Braj Ranjan Mani, 2013:39-40). Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chaudhary himself was a learned poet, scholar, and thinker, widely recognised as the father of the rational thought in Andhra (Ravipudi, 2013:81). He revisited themes in the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas* by producing similar poetical works, both in the form of long poems and plays (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:294-295). His version of *Bhagavadgita* was a revolutionary attempt in Telugu literature. Tripuraneni was also a prominent nationalist and a supporter of the Justice Party movement, but his fight was exclusively against Brahminical domination and not against Brahmins as such. This was also the case with great literary giants and social reformers like Unnava Lakshmi Narayana (1878-1958), who was a Brahmin by birth but sympathised with the non-Brahmin movement in principle. Unnava was also the first literary figure to write a novel based on the exploitation that 'untouchables' and how the traditional Sudras suffered at the hands of the rural elite, including the Brahmins and the Kammas. Unnava was a great

idealist. He portrayed the injustice done to the lower castes by the top non-Brahmin elite in rural Andhra in his novel *Malapalli* (the Outcaste's Village) as mentioned above (Gurunatham, 1907:124). This portrayal in a way showed the half-hearted approach of the Justice Party towards the upliftment of non-Brahmins. The depiction of landed gentry, portrayed through the role of a Kamma landlord, who exploited his farm labourers, and the way their land was seized in the name of maintaining the honour of the caste system clearly showed the general attitude of the non-Brahmins and their commitment towards an equal society. Justice party did achieve some success in getting reservations for the 'outcastes' in the Madras legislature.

However, they did not make equally vigorous efforts for similar groups in Andhra. Instead, the main programme of caste associations started by these top non-Brahmin classes was to rewrite their own caste histories, claiming a higher status for themselves within the Varna system. Thus, they did not have a program for doing away with the caste system itself. K.B. Chaudary and Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chaudary were prominent figures who rewrote the Kamma history (Chowdary K.B., 1939:301- 302). Most of their narratives were based on the claim that the Kammas were descendants of the Durjaya, the mythical king belonging to the Sun clan (*Surya Vamsa*), and the Telugu Cholas, a dynasty which ruled the coastal belt of Godavari-Krishna in the 3rd century CE, were the ancestors of Kammas (Chowdary K.B, 1939:236). This theory went to the extent of arguing that all these non-Brahmin castes used to have the sacred thread ceremony performed, as they were Kshatriyas who ruled the land. According to this theory, this was the case till 3rd century CE, when these kings converted to Buddhism and Jainism (Chowdary K.B, 1939:209).

Similarly, the Reddys produced histories to claim their ancestry to the Kshatriya caste. P.Venkatakrishna (1924), a Reddy ideologue, who wrote in a journal exclusively run by Reddy Association, says:

The Reddys are direct descendants of the mythical clan Rattus, who participated in the battle of *Mahabharata*, who also find a mention in the *Bhagavatham* and the *Markandeya Puranam*. This Aryan ethnic group migrated to Andhra, during the early part of 3rd century BCE (18- 19).

Hence, there was a clear claim to a status on par with the Brahmins. There was no call for a complete abandonment of the caste system. A rational thinker like Tripuraneni later argued that the elite layers among the non-Brahmin castes were different from the lower non-Brahmin communities like ‘Golla,’ ‘Kammari,’ ‘Kummari’ and so on, local names given for those at the lower rungs of caste system in Andhra (Chaudary V.V., 1970:55-56).

Some Brahmin intellectuals also made a significant contribution to the non-Brahmin movement and ideology. G.B. S. Saraswathi (1878), a Chittoor born Brahmin scholar, was a prominent figure among them. He took to ‘Sanyasa’ in Tamil Nadu. He was based in Nellore and used to tour other areas as an ascetic. Saraswathi’s tour to Guntur, in 1916, coincided with the Brahmin-Kamma fight in Kollur (Chowdary S.R., 1927:18-19). The argument that non-Brahmins like Kamma, Kapu, Reddy, and Velamas were Kshatriyas and were qualified to learn the Vedas and master Sanskrit was put forward by Saraswathi in the controversy at Kollur. This was vociferously opposed by the Brahmin intelligentsia there. Saraswathi’s contribution manifested in his various works supporting the theory of non-Brahmin pedigree. His seminal works of resurrecting non-Brahmin history included, *Prachanna Rajakula Nirnayam* (work theorising the Kshatriya status of non-Brahmin castes), *Agnana Timira Bhaskaram* (work theorising the right of non-brahmins and lower castes to learn the Vedas), *Paryatana Meemansa* (the work which argues that Brahmins can travel and tour beyond the seas, a taboo in the Vedic religion). Saraswathi was born in 1878 in the Niyogi Brahmin sect, which was historically involved in administration and public service. The Niyogi sect was usually looked down upon by the traditional priests and Brahmin Vedic scholars known as ‘Vaidikis’ in the Andhra society. They saw the Niyogis as ‘fallen Brahmins,’ who had forgotten the purity of the Brahmin practices (Ravipudi, 2013:93).

Naturally, the scholars and priests who dominated the rural society opposed the authority of Saraswathi to comment and debate on the caste system. It was argued that he was not qualified to indulge in debate as an ascetic and that he should be meditating in private for his self-realisation (Ravipudi, 2013:94). This unusual support from a Brahmin ascetic, who did not need any material or political gain from the movement, benefited the non-Brahmin movement, spearheaded by people like

Tripuraneni and Suryadevara Raghavayya Chaudary (1876-1937). Suryadevara Raghavayya Chaudary is credited for being the main Kamma ideologue of the non-Brahmin movement in the coastal districts (Ravipudi, 2013: 91). He was born in Kollur near Guntur and had limited education. He studied only until class Three. But he was a self-taught scholar in Telugu. He was the first to write the history of the Kamma caste. He was the first one to describe the Kamma clan as a Kshatriya clan (Raghavayya, 1925:54)

The basic premise of this non-Brahmin movement was the argument that the higher rungs of the non-Brahmin communities could intermingle, and if given a chance, marry within their groups. However, they were not allowed to marry anyone belonging to 'lower castes' within the non-brahmin community. This point was the crux on which Justice Party functioned. This also ended up becoming the main reason for the weakening of the movement (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:295). While the non-Brahmin movement was in full swing, there were other leaders from Andhra who were participating in the national freedom struggle. They found the issue of caste to be of less importance. They prioritised the fight for a separate Telugu state and Telugu identity. Their efforts led to the formation of the *Andhra Maha Sabha* in 1913 in the coastal belt.

Gradually Telugu identity started to receive primacy over the non-Brahmin identity. The elitist behaviour of the non-Brahmin leaders in the coastal belt distinguished the non-Brahmin movement in Andhra from the self-respect movement in the Tamil areas. E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, who led the self-respect movement in Tamil region, advocated eschewal of religion, mainly the Brahmanical Hinduism. Naicker invoked the Aryan Dravidian theory throughout the course of the movement (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:298). This paved the way for a separate political ethic in Tamil areas. Its focus was on egalitarianism with no caste consciousness. This movement also aimed at the capture of political power.

The Phase of Transition: Nationalism and the Non-Brahmin Movement

The non-Brahmin movement was the main development as far as the intellectuals in the coastal Andhra in the first decade of the 20th century were concerned.

An urge to get a separate state was dominant in the coastal districts of Andhra. There was a demand for a separate linguistic state for Telugu speaking people. The attitude of the Justice Party leaders played an important role in making the movement shallow and unpopular, unlike the movement in Tamil Nadu which was successful in weakening caste domination. This eventually led to the Dravidian movement which was decisive in starting the political alternative to the Congress party in independent India. The main difference between the ideologies of Andhra and Tamil non-Brahmin movements was that, while the Tamil ideologues wanted to ward off caste entirely, their Telugu counterparts wanted caste to remain, but without the Brahmin domination. In other words, they wanted to dominate the political scene in their region. Their intent was to secure prominence in public employment which was realised by the first twenty years of Indian independence. There is sufficient data to show the proliferation of non-Brahmin leaders in Andhra politics (Elliot, 2004:121-153; Ratnam, 2008:7). One result which came out of this non-Brahmin movement was that the Kammas and Reddys emerged as the main political force in Andhra. Their struggle was directed towards securing a political foothold in coastal Andhra (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:299). The non-Brahmin elite focused on securing reservations in employment for the newly educated non-Brahmin groups, who had outnumbered the Brahmins in government jobs by 1940s.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was considered as a messiah by the 'lower castes' in Andhra. He was a popular figure because of his work for the emancipation of 'untouchables' and for his disagreement with Gandhi on political reservations for the 'untouchables'. The period of late 1920s and early 1930s was the time when Ambedkar and his heated debates with Gandhi were a rage in the Southern states. Ambedkar's influence was also felt by the non-Brahmin leaders in the Presidency (Ratnam, 2008:3, 8).

Many dedicated Dalit leaders emerged and worked for the spread of Ambedkar's ideology in Andhra, particularly in the coastal regions of the Krishna Godavari belt. In fact there is evidence of the Raja of Pithapuram, principal Zamindar in the coastal belt, starting separate hostels for Dalits (Ratnam, 2008:7, 9). Disillusioned by the elitism of Justice Party leaders and the hypocrisy of non-Brahmin movements, the 'untouchables' in the Madras Presidency formed their own associations to put forward their pleas to the government by 1934 (Uma Ramaswamy, 1978:297).

In such a scenario, the ideas of freedom and duty were going through a transformation in their meaning. Coastal Andhra witnessed the influence of several strands of intellectual thought. The rationalism of Tripuraneni, the atheist thought propounded by educationists like Gora, and the ideology of communist turned humanist M.N. Roy (who wanted rationalism, atheism, and radical humanism to become the pillars of independent India), are the most significant ones. Particularly notable is the contributions of M. N. Roy who wanted Indian democracy to be an edifice built on humanist principles of self-government, with the state as the facilitator. This idea came to be known as new humanism. The following chapters will further elucidate on the interaction and debates among the rationalist thought represented by Tripuraneni, who inspired a generation of educated men in Coastal Andhra to question the status quo, and Gora, who wanted to give a broader meaning to the concept of atheism.

The newly migrated classes of non-Brahmins from the coastal belts in the presidency, who were exposed to ideas of self assertion, waited for an opportunity to establish an association which would address the issues of non-Brahmin representation in the legislative assembly and the development of their youth on par with the Brahmins who, by then, occupied both the social status and political domination. Apart from this, the local employment opportunities too were occupied by the Brahmins. At the beginning of the 20th century various caste associations were formed starting with the Kamma Jana Maha Sabha in 1910, followed by the Vaishya Mahasabha in 1911, which focused on starting hostels for their youth and started collecting funds for the education of their people (Andhra Patrika, 1914:1920). Their broad aim was to secure political influence and representation in the public sphere. The Kamma community was the first to challenge the Brahmins into public debates over the Brahmins' exclusive authority to recite Vedas and to conduct rituals to the other three castes in the hierarchy. They arranged a public debate in Koutaram in Krishna district, where the rational thinker, Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, participated and denounced all the rituals and motives behind them.

The Justice Party, which was funded by the zamindars like the raja of Panagal, the Maharaja of Vizianagaram, Raja of Munagal and Challapalle, represented an 'elitist' model, which worked for 'the upliftment of all non-Brahmins', including, on paper at

least, the 'untouchables'. But this issue was appropriated by Gandhi in his Harijan programme and later by Ambedkar. The Party formed the Ministry and started its rule in 1920, after the introduction of diarchy by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. However, the experiment of starting separate associations, for Kammas and Reddys, had contributed to increasing literacy among the non-Brahmin communities. As the census reports indicate, from 1891 to 1921 (the period when the movements of social reform, nationalism, non-Brahmin movement were on) not only a clear dominance of the Brahmin community in the presidency, but also an increase in the literacy levels of the non-Brahmin communities. Especially from the decade 1911 to 1921, the period when the separate associations for development of non-Brahmin castes were formed (Census, 1891:60, 220 & Census, 1921:11,127).

Non-Brahmin intellectuals in the late 19th century approached social issues in an informed manner, guided by a spirit of scientific enquiry. This was made possible because of their introduction to English education. Coastal districts of Andhra including the areas of Rayalaseema (predominantly Kurnool and Cudappah, and Anantapur) witnessed a new phenomenon of non-Brahmin castes establishing their own associations to get political and social benefits from the government. Reformers from the backward castes tried to equip the needy students of their castes with educational skills. The first caste to establish an association for themselves was the Vishwabrahmins, popularly known as 'Kamsalis.' Their association was called the *Vishwakarma Kuloddhara Sangham*. It was established in 1903. Their activities were primarily focused on the Krishna belt. The headquarters of this association was set up at Machilipatnam, a traditionally rich merchant area. Vaishyas, along with Vishwabrahmins, fought against the Brahmin priestly denomination in Andhra. They established an association called the *Arya Vyshya Mahasabha* in 1907. Atmuri Lakshminarasimham was one of their chief patrons. The monetarily and educationally rising Kamma and Reddy communities also established their own associations, *Kamma Jana Mahasabha* in 1910 and *Reddy Mahasabha* in 1913. The Velama community established the *Adi Velama Sreyovardhini Sangham* in 1907, just before the Kammas formed their association. The first Kamma conference was held in Koutavaram in Krishna district. The Kapus had their headquarters in Machilipatnam.

It is interesting to note the declarations given by the Kamma and Reddy associations

in leading the education and subsequently the library movement, in the Kamma dominated areas of the coastal belt. One of the advertisements reads as follows:

“We, from the Koutaram head office (Krishna district) of Kamma Maha Jana Sabha, appeal to all young Kamma men to register in the Sabha and those who are students contribute books to our upcoming library in Tenali, where things are improving, with funds coming in. We are now getting a large income of books into the libraries, other Kamma leaders from villages near Tenali, from the Amritalur library, also donated some books to our library. It is hoped that we improve our knowledge about the world and India and become politically aware of the ongoing national movement and our role in the whole programme.” (Andhra Patrika, 1914:3-4)

Similarly, the Reddy Maha Jana Sabha in its advertisement seems to be more confident of its political clout already. It reads: “To all Reddy brethren, it is hereby urged that they should make it a point in joining the cause of Reddis in political positions in Andhra and also to fight the Brahmin domination, cooperate with other non-Brahmin leaders in our coastal regions of Krishna and Guntur” (Andhra Patrika, 1914:4-5).

Another chronicle on the role of Padmashalis (the weaving community) in the area appealed to fight the domination of Brahmins in the Congress and be aware of them. “We should be ever vigilant, to fight for our due vis-a-vis the dominating Brahmins, in development”.

The Brahmin Reactions to the Non-Brahmin Movement in Andhra

Though the non-Brahmins wanted a political representation for them in the political arena, it was not that the Brahmin community were united in the so-called war against the non-Brahmin community. (Satyanarayana Sastry M, 2012:35-36). Traditionally, the Brahmin community in the Andhra belt was divided into various sub-sects, like the Niyogis, the Vaidikis, the Srivaishnavas, etc., of which the Niyogis and the Vaidikis had figured in the public discourse (Niyogi Patrika, 1913). Historically, the Niyogis formed a group of people who were well-versed in the political craft, acted as ministers, chief accountants and poet-laureates in the royal courts before the advent of the modern era. Their political economy was shifted from the kingdoms to the

villages, where they were controlling the registers of land distribution and maintaining the records. As Frykenberg details in his study of the Guntur district, Niyogis were working in tandem with the landowner class, who supervised the land relations in the village (Frykenberg, 1967:14-16, 18, 84). They were known as *Karanams*. The Vaidikis, who excelled in Vedas and rituals, monopolised priesthood in all the Hindu rituals from birth to death, and did not participate in any public debate.

The two communities were always at loggerheads (Sripada, 2012:191-205). They formed their own separate associations and held separate conferences in various towns of Andhra, where they projected a counter narrative to the nationalism and non-Brahmin movement. This was ironical given the internal disunity among the Brahmin community themselves (Sripada, 2012:144-145). In a Niyogi Mahasabha conducted in Rajahmundry, it was observed that the city of Vedic culture like Rajahmundry was becoming a site of ‘non-Brahmanical atmosphere’. “The seat of Vedic culture in the coastal belt is reduced to a site of non-Brahminical warfare. It remains a question whether the call of Gandhi, who preaches the upliftment of the untouchables, and the name of Rama in the same breath, is to be believed as a Hindu or non-Hindu” (Niyogi Patrika, 1925: 19-20). Apart from Congress and Gandhi, newspapers like *Andhra Patrika*, led by Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao, a socially concerned Congressman who was pro-social reform, were criticised by the Brahmins. “The newspapers are also acting anti-Brahminical, which ought to act with impartiality”, one speaker at the Niyogi Mahasabha in Rajahmundry said (Pathy D.V, 1914:1-4).

Again, in another session of the Niyogi Mahasabha, in the year of 1926, there was an appeal by a participant, which was included in the final resolutions of the conference, that “[I]t is high time we realised the perils of our own differential treatment of other Brahmin castes in Andhra. Let feelings of commonness prevail and let there be no differences between the Niyogis and Vaidikis and let the community develop as a whole!” (Pathy D.V, 1914:2-4).

Though the internal feud between Niyogis and Vaidikis caused a flutter in the coastal belt, its effects did not last long because the dominant discourse created by the non-Brahmin caste organisations was about a separate Andhra state, and this infighting of

Brahmins was seen by them as not helpful to their cause (Svadharm Prakasika, 1914: 2-3). This can be seen at the final resolutions of the conferences later.

It is an interesting fact reported in the annals of the Brahmin National conference that was held in Varanasi, that “Mischievous mongers from the Arya Samaj are targeting all the pilgrims, in the temples of Madhura, and creating disturbances in the performance of our rituals. They should be kept at bay by employing volunteers at the entrance of our temples” (Sastry P.S, 1925:9-13).

Thus Brahmins were internally divided on sub-caste lines. In addition, they were facing challenges from reformist Hindu trends represented by organizations like the Arya Samaj but also by Gandhi. Therefore they could not present a strong response to the non-Brahmin challenges to their supremacy in ritual and educational fields. Hence, in 20th century, the attitude of Brahmin community itself gave a much easier way for the non-Brahmin communities to venture into the public arena and provide a level playing field of competence as opposed to the Brahmin community.

End notes:

¹ The practice of bride price was common in the Andhra region those days. Some sold their daughters when they were a month old babies for getting money from the groom’s family (Gurajada, 1909, 1-3). The dowry system of buying a groom, which Gurajada, in his preface to his play *Kanyasulkam* talks about was not so much in vogue.

Chapter- 4

Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary (TRC) and his Rationalism: An Appraisal of his Contribution to the Non-Brahmin Movement

This chapter will present Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary (TRC) as the prime speaker from the second-generation English educated intellectuals of the coastal Andhra belt during the period of this study.

The dominant themes in the coastal Andhra belt which initiated and influenced the reform process

Various factors have influenced the evolution of social thought in the late 19th century coastal Andhra. The nexus between social reform movement and the consciousness of a separate Andhra identity coincided with the freedom movement. The English-educated intelligentsia of that time had created own mediums of resenting. They resented both casteism and their meagre presence in the national movement (Prabhakara Rao, 1989:163). Freedom was the concept that was used by many, but with different meanings. The social reformers used it to mean freedom from all types of domination by the higher castes (Dalton, 1938: 17). Hence, they started forming new caste associations to be on par with the Brahmin caste both socially and politically.

The main objectives with which TRC operated in his life were:

1. Acquiring scholarship on par with the dominant Brahmin caste and fighting a philosophical, intellectual battle against the Brahminical assumption of entitlement and superiority.
2. Interpreting the epics to show Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy in history, and the Aryan dominance over the Dravidian region, including Andhra.
3. Telugu self-respect and pride in Telugu language, against the Brahmin intelligentsia, who devalued Telugu and eulogised Sanskrit as the only language worth learning.

4. Alignment with the Justice Party of South India, which was founded on the premise of getting political representation for the non-Brahmin communities in the Madras State Assembly.

The 'self-respect' movement started by E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker in south India also spoke of the Aryan invasion and the north-south divide. But TRC used Telugu in classical mode to counter the Brahmanical mythological stories and also used rational thought as a weapon.

The Predecessors of TRC in Coastal Andhra

It is generally believed by the scholars of social thought in the Andhra belt that in questioning the established social norms, especially involving religion and caste, TRC represents continuity with the 18th century Telugu revolutionary poet, Vemana. The verses of Vemana were the first of their kind, questioning the social and political dominance of the Brahmin community. These verses played a significant role in shaping the social reform map in the coastal Andhra belt in the late 19th century and in the early 20th century.

TRC often invoked Vemana's verses as born out of genuine rationalism. He attempted a retelling of stories from the Brahmanical texts like the *Puranas*, the *Hymns*, etc., from a rational perspective. But he was not against the Brahmin caste. It is worth noting that while talking about Brahmanical domination, TRC talked about Hindu symbols, customs, and myths, but did not comment on similar discrepancies in other religions like Islam and Christianity. He used rationalism to question beliefs but restricted it to the Hindu beliefs. This shows that he used rationalism mainly to defend his Kamma caste vis-a-vis the domination of the Brahmin caste.

Tripuraneni: Early Life and the Shaping of his Thought

TRC was born (1887) in an affluent family in the coastal Andhra belt. He traced his lineage to a commander in chief of the Kakatiya Dynasty, named Tripura Nayaka. This belief shaped TRC's pride in belonging to the family of a man who was a progenitor of the Tripuraneni clan. Many commentators on TRC opine that his birth in a wealthy agricultural family, which also was one among the few families which were

educated, and the caste hierarchy in his village Angaluru, influenced the direction of his thought process (Sambasiva Rao 1988: 20-21). His family was unique in encouraging their children, including TRC, to learn Telugu and Sanskrit.

His experiences in school shaped TRC's view on the differential treatment of students based on their caste. The teachers and fellow Brahmin students, who showed their high birth as a reason to treat him as inferior, made TRC to start thinking about caste, its genesis and development.

TRC did his high schooling in Machilipatnam, where he learnt Telugu grammar and poetry under the influential Telugu poet of the 19th century, Chellapilla Venkata Sastry. This helped him gain command over the language, which he used effectively in his later years for his literary battles against the Brahmanical thought.

TRC also developed a rational attitude. He started approaching every text, literary or religious, in a rational manner. For him the test of a text depended on historical accuracy and the reason why it was written in such a way. These aspects meant a lot to him when he started writing on the Hindu *Puranic* texts and reinterpreting them from a rationalistic point of view. Language for him had to play a crucial role and not a mere exercise of aesthetics. This he extended to his other aim of democratising rituals, with vernacular vows instead of Sanskrit verses. He critiqued all venerated heroes of Indian epics, be it Rama or Krishna, from the standpoint of the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy.

It is pertinent to note here that TRC was an active follower of Indian nationalism and the theme of a separate Telugu state. (it is to be noted that parts of Telugu speaking districts used to be then, a part of the Madras Presidency with Madras as capital) He reinterpreted stories of Telugu legendary heroes, in lieu of the mythical heroes of the epics, and used his writings to give a voice to the unheard. The three stands of his approach to the non-Brahmin movement were nationalism, the history of the Andhra heroes, and his claim to unearth the 'real' history of the subalterns, the people who were deprived of social and political status.

He used a juxtaposition of the heroes of earlier times with the local ones, who hailed from the lower classes of society. This can be seen in his retelling of the *Mahabharata*, through the 17th century coastal Andhra heroes Brahma Naidu and his son Balachandra, who take the roles of Krishna and Arjuna respectively.

TRC's writings show that one of his main objectives was the rational retelling of various *Puranic* stories in his work, *The Sootha Puranam*. Every story of belief in God, religious symbols, etc., was refuted by him vociferously. The method he employed was to tell the story as it is, and to dissect the key points in the story and relate them to an Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy. Every story of divine intervention was exposed for its inherent drawbacks when judged by human rationality. His plays and epic poems, written on the lines of the *Puranas*, deliberately talk about the story of Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy, which he fuses with the modern context of the opposition between the one who is rational and the other who continued to follow the poetic and mythological traditions. (Ramana Reddy K.V,1998: 65).

The Launching of the Non-Brahmin movement

The non-Brahmin movement in coastal Andhra was spearheaded by TRC. One of the aims of the movement was to claim the authority to perform the rituals reserved for the Brahmins (Ravipudi Venkatadri, 2013). The movement was not against Brahmins as such, but against their claim to supremacy and scholarship. It is important to remember that he was a student of the Telugu poet and scholar Chellapilla Venkata Sastry who was from the Brahmin community. Though he was taught the intricacies of classical poetry by his teacher, he utilised his gifts to refute every claim of his teacher, and to launch a rationalist critique of the 'Brahmanical texts', as he preferred to call them.

The main ingredients in his critique of the religious texts were interesting. As a trained Telugu poet, TRC wanted to use highly Sanskritised Telugu language in his works, not only to prove his prowess as a poet of merit and scholarship, but also as a representative of the non-Brahmin movement, who could equal the Brahmin intellectuals in literary skills and output. Hence, his works display a high degree of Sanskritised Telugu, written in epic style. It might also be that TRC wanted to combat

the Brahmin community with their chief weapon, Sanskritised language and scholarship. But he also wanted to make poetry understandable to everyone. He opined that all the *Puranic* poetry depended on the principle of illusion. So he invented a method of logical refutation of the *Puranas* by removing those illusions. It is pertinent here to remember the political milieu at that time. TRC was a product of a tumultuous period of Indian nationalism, coexisting with a separate Andhra movement.

Rationalism on the Background of Nationalism

In Andhra, as elsewhere in India, the Congress Party was leading the national movement. But the party was dominated by Brahmin leaders, who had their own agenda and their own vision for the country. The main objection of its critics was that the party and the national movement were headed by a leader (Gandhi), who was Brahmanical in his views, as shown by his views on Gram Sara and village decentralisation with caste guilds. Though TRC was a staunch supporter of the national movement, he leaned towards Justice Party, because it encouraged non-Brahmin leadership. The Party fought for both social representation and political acceptance of the non-Brahmin community, though it did not concentrate on the lowest communities of the society. TRC concentrated on a rationalist critique of the so-called “principal texts of India” (in his words), the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. His approach was to simultaneously introduce themes revered by Hindu texts and to provide a rational critique, by dissecting them.

He delved deep into the histories of the *Puranic* dynasties with evidence and prefaced his attack on every established theory of the *Puranas*, by tracing the differences between the Aryans and Dravidians (TRC, 1941: 24). His works traced the “treachery” of Aryans against the Dravidians and showed how the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy played a prime role in Indian mythology by glorifying the cunning foreigners, i.e., the rulers of the *Puranic* dynasties. He juxtaposed mythology and politics, by retelling the epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (TRC, 1920: 242). He gave a rational critique of these epics, by explaining his theory of the Aryans manipulating the Dravidians to establish their dominance. He felt that the Dravidians were independent rulers, who were portrayed by the Hindu epics as non-practitioners

of Vedic principles. He questioned the authority with which those texts could be called epics and be prescribed as moral books for a righteous life. According to him, the *Puranas* and epics of Hindu faith were tools of Aryan domination and Dravidian subjugation.

Another important figure of the non-Brahmin movement, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, continued invoking the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy through political representation, while TRC did it through literary representation. His portrayal of the mythological characters was from the standpoint of the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy. TRC believed this dichotomy to be the root cause of the domination of the Brahmin castes, which was displayed in his plays *Khooni* and *Sambuka Vadha*. In these two plays the vanquishing of the peace-loving rulers, who were treading the path of righteousness, is depicted as the murder of the pious Dravidians by the treacherous Aryans. To make his characters believable and their historical descent rationally acceptable, TRC often prefaced his works with a detailed analysis of this dichotomy (TRC, 1920: 253). His later work, the *Sootha Puranam*, is an allegorical account in which the eternal storyteller, Suta, explains the illogical myths and history of India camouflaged with morality (Dharma Rao, 1960: 24).

His association with several Brahmin leaders and reformers did not deter him in criticising the belief systems related to the political dominance of Brahmins, both in the rural and the urban areas of Coastal Andhra (mainly the Krishna Godavari belt). There was a factor that should not be forgotten while evaluating his views on Brahmin dominance. This was the aspirations of the non-Brahmin upper middle classes of rural Andhra who wanted to find a space in the modern renaissance of Andhra. With their economic affluence, and their zeal to use it for the good of their communities, they wanted to counterattack the Brahmins at the political level and cultural level. Hence, they found in TRC their principal ideologue to denounce the propriety of Brahmanical texts, right from *Puranas* and *Smritis*.

TRC did this with his literary talents and rationality, refuting every 'story' as a farce. This also had to do with his pedigree and socio-political positioning in the Telugu rural society. His Kamma caste was one of the first to establish its own associations, a fact well documented and discussed in the scholarly literature. Their aim was to

develop the members of their own caste, in the areas of education, political representation and economic security. The establishment of the 'Brahmin Kamma Jana Mahasabha' had given an impetus to an open debate with the Brahmin community, on the conduct of rituals. The bone of contention was that the priests differentiated between the Mantras recited in their own community and had different chants for the lowly (according to them) placed non-Brahmins. This debate in the early 20th century was heralded by the social reform movement which, as in other parts of India, dealt with the removal of inequalities in society.

After this period, the English-educated people of the second generation like TRC started philosophically questioning and debating the dominance of Brahmins vis-à-vis the other castes. People belonging to his Kamma caste helped TRC in his efforts. It is to be noted here, that the famous Telugu film director Gudavalli Ramabrahmam did pioneering work on revisiting historical themes, with the help of literary figures like Tapi Dharma Rao and progressive writers like Chalam. He funded a project for the reconstruction of the Kamma history, by travelling through areas where they were in large numbers, particularly in the coastal belt of Krishna and Guntur (Dharma Rao, 1960: 23). Apart from this reconstructed history, TRC also used the Aryan-Dravidian theory to differentiate the Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities (TRC, 1920: 223). At this time the atmosphere in the Madras Presidency was very charged politically, with the launching of Justice Party in early 20th century (Satyanarayana, 1980: 61).

This served the purpose of TRC, who started a literary critique of everything considered sacred. He did this, with his rigorous training in the poetics of Telugu and Sanskrit under the tutelage of the great Chellapilla Venkata Sastry, who also happened to be the guru of TRC's ideological rival, Viswanatha Satyanarayana (TRC, 1935: 307) According to the famous jurist, Avula Sambasiva Rao, TRC heralded the philosophical revolution and revolutionised the use of metrical nuances with the 'Vyangya' (Double Entendre, sarcasm) in reinterpreting the epics, and wrote a rationalist critique of the epics and the *Puranas* (Avula, 1988: 52).

To many historians of Andhra, TRC was the major social reformer after Kandukuri Veeresalingam, who practised what he preached (Ravipudi, 2013). Philosophical slavery to the sacred texts had made the society subservient and led to the non-

Brahmin communities' acceptance of the Brahmin dominance as given. TRC's ideological journey can be traced from the social reform to the atheist principles. In fact, his main agenda was to end the social dominance of Brahminical supremacy and to construct a new narrative of the non-Brahmin emergence.

The Puranic Experiment: The Method Employed by TRC to Counter the Brahminical Authority

His critique of the sacred texts followed a pattern. He employed literary Telugu to bring out the various illogicalities in the stories in these books and to produce counter narratives. He did this with his rational outlook by retelling these stories. The later intellectuals of Andhra in Guntur-Krishna belt, including the radical humanist supporters of M.N. Roy, openly acknowledged TRC, because it was he who provided the base for their 'questioning the given, by applying reason of a rational human being'. One can trace the evolution of TRC in the following three ways:

1. He employed and believed in rational thought being the main weapon with which he debunked the whole *Puranic* lore. However, a reply was given to this, by Viswanatha Satyanarayana, with a series of books (twelve in all) proving the historical validity of the puranic stories. These books were titled *Purana Vaira Granthamala* (a literary answer to the *Sootha Puranam* of TRC, who had said that the Indian dynasties given in the *Puranas* were not real but were loose facts in the air).
2. Denouncing the Vedic supremacy was the main point in his plays on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and his classic retelling of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which was traditionally considered to be the essence of *Upanishads* and *Vedas*.
3. After denouncing and reconstructing those texts, he slowly started to question the concept of God. It can be said that he was not a confirmed atheist but can be classified as a transitional atheist. His plays were also an interpretation of the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy, the former (Aryan) representing the might, the latter (Dravidian) piety and sobriety, according to many readers of his interpretations of the history of the non-Brahmin communities.

In the words of the scholarly writer, G.V. Krishna Rao, TRC proved that poetic technique of double entendre could also be used for social reform, like the great pioneer Veeresalingam, who concentrated more on the practical social reform. TRC gave fillip to it by literary productions in a terse way, which prodded the educated non-Brahmins (Krishna Rao, 1986: 102)

TRC tried to prove that the epics, *Satrapas*, and the *Gita*, were instruments of the Brahmanical plot to hold the various sections of the society into a subservient position. His portrayal of traditional villains of the epics like Ravana, Kamsa, and Hiranyakasipu, as victims of the Aryan Gods was an important interpretation. He felt that they had been killed with the help of the priestly class, the 'Purohitas' or the official priests and advisers to the King. This reiterates his stand on the domination of Brahmins in key social positions. But it also earned him the praise of his contemporary reformers like the writer, Unnava Lakshminarayana (Unnava), the first Brahmin intellectual and a nationalist fighting for an egalitarian state, who had authored the first Telugu novel on Dalits (*Malapalli*). Praise coming from such a quarter was more surprising to the then literary circles, because he had portrayed the Kamma landed gentry as the main antagonistic folks, in addition to the Brahmins, exploiting Dalits. It is important here to note that both TRC and Unnava were academic colleagues when they were in Dublin (Ireland) and remained lifelong friends.

This was a period when the whole Andhra belt was experiencing a national upheaval in the Gandhian era. The demand for a separate Andhra movement took its course in 1913, just after the Kamma association started its programme of community development. Funds were pumped by the affluent rural landowners of the caste. It is interesting that though TRC projected the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy as his tool to denounce the sacred texts, he did not discuss about atheism in detail and instead started a priestly class from his community, known as the 'Kamma Brahmins', through devising a method of marriage vows in simple Telugu instead of Sanskrit.

TRC's Political Affiliation and His Approach to the Nationalist Movement

TRC was proud of his Andhra ancestry and often invoked the valour and vigour of the Andhra race. He openly supported the separate Andhra movement in his writings. His song '*Veera Gandhamu Techinaramu Veerudevado Telpudi*' (We have brought the tilak of victory to besmear the heroes of Andhra), welcoming the nationalists who were fighting for Andhra, became popular. As a non-brahmin intellectual, he supported the Justice Party in principle, though he did not actively work for the party. He wrote an article in the journal '*Krishna Patrika*', while he was studying in Dublin. In it, he said that the non-Brahmins who supported Justice Party wanted the continuance of British rule in India, and not political independence. They only insisted on their representation in the legislature. TRC made it clear that he was a staunch nationalist and expressed his desire of non-Brahmin classes having a say in the political arena, was to be fulfilled in a free India, and not under the British Government. In fact, TRC was the one who took the pledge of independence during the famous 'Salt Satyagraha' (1930) in Tenali, with the able support of Unnava Lakshminarayana (Unnava) and his educationalist wife, Lakshmibayamma, and joined the march with 300 'Satyagrahis'.

Many people in the Presidency felt that as a supporter of the Justice Party, TRC was aligned with the power thirsty, corrupt Zamindars and the rulers of principalities of Panagal, Boboli, and Vizianagaram, who were believed to be funding the non-Brahmin movement (Manjulatha, 1998: 34). But regardless of such criticism, TRC strongly believed that an organised political struggle to combat the increasing dominance of Brahmins in politics and in bureaucracy was a historic necessity. He made it clear to his critics that his resentment was against Brahmanical dominance and not against Brahmins as a group (Manjulatha, 1998: 36). When his critics questioned his proximity with Congress leaders like Unnava (his close friend), he said that he perceived his allegiance to the Congress as a tool to fight for political independence and not a group of Brahmins, as many leaders from on-Brahmin communities perceived it to be (Ravipudi, 2013) In this respect, it is pertinent to note that Prof.N.G.Ranga, the founder of *Kisan Mazdoor Party*, doubted TRC's nationalism because of his affiliation with the Justice Party: "The Justice Party argued that until

non-brahmin political class dominates the scene, political independence of India is a non-issue” (Ranga, 1939: 5).

TRC resented this strongly. He felt that non-Brahmins would be better served only if India is free to make its own choice. In other words, TRC was a consistent nationalist who fought for a democratic space for the non-Brahmin communities within free India, and he was not averse to any political party if it served his objectives.

TRC: The ‘Renaissance Man’ of Andhra

TRC’s predecessor, Veeresalingam, took the help of *Sastras* or the Hindu law books, to justify his call for social reform. TRC was the first one to attack the propriety of the canonical text’s notion of morality and straight away delved into addressing the problems concerning the equality of the society. In his words, his main concern was to question and expose the ‘rot’ in the Brahmanical enterprise, with solid rational critique through texts. Many observers are of the opinion that the only person to revolutionise Telugu language was TRC, after the great 18th century poet reformer Vemana (Ravipudi, 2013: 73).

A rational outlook, which was novel in that age of piety, was said to be the hallmark of Vemana, the 17th -18th century mystic from the coastal Andhra belt. He was an inspiration to TRC too, as observed in his works. TRC took rational method to another level by producing literature with a rationalistic critique. As has been observed by scholars on TRC, all the ideologies in the coastal belt, whether it was rationalism, atheism, or humanism of Roy took as their chief goal human freedom from every man-made structure restricting choice. (Ravipudi, 2013:76)

Professor N. Gopi, who has extensively researched on the political and sociological impact of Vemana, points out that, if the language of Vemana was the language of people and had scholarly logic, the language of TRC was scholarly but was centred on people (Gopi, 1987). In other words, TRC’s task was two-fold. One, to counter Brahmanical beliefs and symbols, in their own style of scholarly poetic Telugu, with an aim of highlighting the common man’s suffering, as the victim of the caste system. The second aim was to produce a rational critique of the epic stories. TRC says in his *Sootha Puranam* (a rationalistic critique of mythical stories): “poets of yore have been

retelling and revelling in the same old *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* with an aesthetic judgement but [have] failed to tell anything new which was of any use to the common man for his development” (TRC, 1925: 104).

His other approach was to reinterpret these stories with a historical analysis, and to depict the fallacies of faith. As he says of the early Vedic god Indra, sullied from his duping of a pious Ahalya in the *Ramayana*, “Indra is eulogised for having thousand eyes, but the hero (TRC) only saw thousand signs of syphilis on his body” (TRC, 1925: 105). TRC narrates this from his imaginary visit to heaven, as he starts his *Sootha Puranam* (TRC, 106).

With his Aryan Dravidian dichotomy intact, he wrote an elaborate analytical introduction to his two famous plays based on the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, where he brings out the argument of a hidden agenda of Aryans to show the Dravidian kings in bad light. Sarcasm and irony formed his mainstay. For example, in one instance TRC says about the injustice created by the law books of puranic age.

How come a divine being like Manu write an unjust law book which classifies the duties of sudras as only slavery, *dasya*? How come if a crime done by Brahmin is forgivable and if done by a Sudra punishable in the harshest terms? Is this the decree of gods who are known as Dharmatmas (sticklers of justice?) (TRC 1925: 106-107).

TRC’s Re-telling of the Gita

In almost all his prefaces, TRC implemented his thought process of amalgamating his Telugu pride as a Dravidian, and the injustice that the Aryans have meted out to them (TRC, 1941: 106). In the preface of his classic retelling of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (originally told by Krishna to Arjuna), he brings in heroes from popular Telugu folklore in these key roles, by portraying Brahma Naidu as Krishna and his son Balachandra as Arjuna. Brahma Naidu, a 17th century leader from coastal Andhra, belonging to the Velama caste, presided over a pioneering movement of temple entry to Sudras and ‘Panchamas’, considered to be the outcastes in the caste hierarchy (Avula, 1988: 141).

Historically too, this tale is interesting as it narrates the fight for land, similar to that of the Pandavas and Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. Here too the rulers of Palnadu (a fertile coastal principality) led by Brahma Naidu and his cousins from Gurjala, led by an influential lady Commander-in-Chief, Nagamma (said to be of Reddy caste) fought for land. In the retelling, Nagamma took revenge for Brahma Naidu's temple entry experiment (Narasimha Rao, 2012: 45). TRC cleverly deals with the battle of Karempudi (the site in Palnadu, where this battle took place) and juxtaposes it with Kurukshetra (the place where the *Mahabharata* war took place).

But in TRC's version, instead of Krishna, Brahma Naidu preaches Gita to Balachandra, the warrior in a dilemma whether to kill his own cousins, led by Nagamma, who had treacherously usurped their kingdom. As expected, his Gita is a revolt against blind faith and beliefs orchestrated by Brahmanical Aryans. Even here where TRC paraphrases the 13th verse of the fourth chapter (*Jnanakarma Sanyasa Yoga*) of the Gita, which talks of the four-fold caste system, TRC's sarcasm comes to the fore. Brahma Naidu preaches TRC's views in a verse as follows:

"It is untrue that I have created the fourfold caste system as a path of living, but I have first created the Man, and then...he created divisions of people based on their birth. I have created the first three divisions with the three qualities, fourth caste Sudra was created by the humans themselves, going against my will, and many caste divisions came to the fore, as time passed by," says TRC's Brahma Naidu in place of Krishna (TRC, 1941: 94-96).

He also establishes his classic argument of Aryans displacing the original inhabitants of India, the Dravidians (TRC, 1941: 118). Critique of religious sermons and rituals was an important element in his modern Gita. "The myth that agriculture thrives due to 'Yagnas' only, through propitiating the Gods is a non-sense. It happens through a scientific process of water evaporating through the heat of the Sun and later causing to rain" (TRC, 1941: 98).

In many ways, every theory of divine intervention is debunked through the rational critique of the main protagonist, Krishna. He further brings a modern twist to the existing literature regarding the argument of various forms of God. For example, he

parodies the 27th verse from the 10th chapter (*Vibhuthi Yoga*) of the Gita as "I am the Hippopotamus among animals, the Orangutan among monkeys, the Sahara among deserts, the digit 13 among numerals. I am the crescent among the curved ones. I am the Mala or the outcaste among the Telugus. I am Nagarjuna among the seekers of the truth (the medieval Buddhist monk of Madhyamika School) I am the art of theft among arts, Telugu among languages. I am the cave Guttikonda among caves" (The legend has it that Brahma Naidu passed into this secret cave after preaching his sermon of peace and harmony in the battlefield.) (TRC, 1941: 111-12).

TRC did not forget his Andhra identity, even while writing a satirical critique of the *Puranas* and re-writing the *Gita*. He also took up the issue of language and the Sanskritised culture. He built an argument against the rhetoric of the scholar Viswanatha Satyanarayana, who considered that only Sanskrit was deemed to be the most refined of languages and used a highly Sanskritised language in his works (TRC, 1935: 307). Some critics say that it was only after Viswanatha Satyanarayana wrote the play *Venaraju* (a play highlighting the doom of a king who did not adhere to the Varna system), that TRC started writing *Khooni*, depicting the killing of Vena, as a concerted effort of the Brahmin culture. One must remember that all these efforts were going on during the early decades of the 20th century, when nationalism was at its peak, and the student community studying in Swadeshi colleges established by some passionate public intellectuals of the coastal belt, lapped up these plays and even staged them in their colleges (Saichand 1998: 45).

A question that Balachandra raises in TRC's version of *Gita* is centred on the elitist argument of Sanskrit verses and hymns. Balachandra asks Brahma Naidu: "People say that Sanskrit is the language of Gods and whoever learns it, will be realised souls and they are saying that Telugu is the language of the unsophisticated and useless, can you clear this doubt?" (TRC, 1941: 113).

The Krishna incarnate Brahma Naidu replies, as follows: "Those are the words of the wicked, listening to which the Telugu race, which had taken birth in Palnad (aka Kurukshetra), have doomed themselves. Telugu is the most soothing and mellifluous of any tongue in this Karmabhoomi." (TRC, 1941: 114).

Clearly the regional tone of his Telugu and belief in the glory of Andhra are evident here. The way he drove his point home was straight to the heart. In the 11th chapter (9th verse) of Vishnu showing his universal form, TRC, as a modern intellectual, includes the whole humanity of the world, including people of Mongolia, England, Negros of Africa, China, the Jews, as viewed by Balachandra (aka Arjuna) (TRC, 1941: 118).

Further, the Krishna incarnate says, “I am going to recreate this whole Andhra, which is rendered feeble by the caste differences that are manifold. I am going to destroy this entire gamut of Palnad and going to procreate a whole race of Andhra. A race of vigour, verve and ambition of upholding their pride and greatness” (TRC, 1941: 123-24).

He ends his version of the *Gita* by preaching the humanist path as follows: “Why one has invented various weapons to kill each other while the truth was that the world lived in peace with one word of wisdom (cooperation)” (TRC, 1941: 124). It is interesting that TRC chose the rendering of *Gita* as his swansong (which was published for the first time in 1941, two years before he died), to state that one final sermon of wisdom.

TRC and his literary interventions as a staunch rationalist coincided with the non-Brahmin agitation to secure the right to perform one’s own ceremonies in the coastal belt, and were taken to the court by Vaishya community. The Kammas, who followed the model, not only challenged the domination, but devised methods to counter them by creating a separate sect in their own community, under the stewardship of TRC. He was against the popular Brahmanical priestly culture using Sanskrit in family rituals, which was difficult for others to follow. Equipped by Sanskrit colleges in Guntur and his hometown Angaluru, he started a new sect, which he named the ‘Kamma Brahmins’, who officiated in every ritual in the community, eschewing Brahmin domination (TRC, 1939: 407).

The Three Plays of TRC

The three plays of TRC which are available and printed are symbolic of his whole contribution to the dissemination of rational and logical thought of his non-Brahmin movement and his main idea of how one should approach the symbols of domination. It is pertinent to examine the themes and arguments of TRC's three important plays.

1. *Kurukshetra Sangramam*

Tripuraneni's first rationalist literary critique was on his own teacher Chellapilla Venkata Sastry. He took upon aspects of the *Mahabharata* as a premise to prove his point logically that Pandavas claiming five principalities itself was a fraud. He argued in the preface of the play that by the doctrine of lapse, the sons of Dhritarashtra had inherited the kingdom. The lion's share of it would be naturally that of Duryodhana, the eldest son, according to the law of inheritance. Both Dhritarashtra and Pandu were unfit to rule (as the former was born blind and the latter had a skin disease). Between the half-brothers, Dhritarashtra being the elder one, his elder son became the claimant (TRC, 1913: 136). Hence, in the first place, Pandavas, asking for a share in the legal property of Kauravas, itself was an unlawful act. In the event, they brainwashed the Yadava (Krishna) who colluded with them and brought the doom of Kauravas. In TRC's view, the play was an illustration of the fraud committed in a deceitful manner by the Pandavas. To wage a war for an unlawful cause was the treachery of Pandavas, according to him (TRC, 1941: 26).

In the first act, through the role of the interlocutor (Sanjaya), TRC proves that only Dhritarashtra was the legal monarch, and because of the ill health of Pandu, out of compassion, Dhritarashtra gave those five principalities to the Pandavas, but not as their right (TRC, 1913: 142-45). Hence, Kauravas were forced to hatch a plan of dice to get back their 'legal' territory (144). He goes on to describe the clan of Kurus to explain logically the law of inheritance by the Kauravas and more so by Duryodhana. According to the Shastras, if a ruler renounces his kingdom for 12 years, he loses his legal control over it. TRC quotes and proves this dictat of *Sukraniti* through the counsel of Sanjaya and he does this by using logical reasoning.

According to many critics, TRC is Sanjaya, who plays the devil's advocate, as was his profession in real life too (Rama Rao, 1986: 150). In the second act too, TRC goes beyond the heroic depiction of the counsel of Krishna. He gives importance to the role of Karna, again a sinner in the popular perception (TRC, 1913: 142-45). In this light, it might be noted that the famous historian, R.C.Dutt, in his analysis of epics, says that in the context of migration to India, the battle between Kuru and Panchala kings itself was depicted as the root cause of the battle of *Mahabharata* (Dutt, R.C, 1900: 34). He also said that the Pandavas and their common wife were all myths. This was prefaced by his own foreword documenting the settlement of various tribes in India from foreign lands, one among them being the Aryan tribe of Pandavas. Dutt said that the infighting between the Kurus and the Panchalas was inspired by the migration process of the Aryans. Dutt was one of the early historians who opined that the epic battle, the infighting, even the characters were myths (Dutt R.C., 1900: 110).

One aspect of TRC's thought process seems to be focussed on the Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy which he continued in his chronologically second play; the much feted and presented one, *The Death of Sambuka (Sambuka Vadha)*.

2. *Sambuka Vadha*

This play became his magnum opus of sorts as he targeted the ideal hero in Indian mythology. Lord Rama is depicted in Indian mythology as a king exemplar. But he yielded to the Brahmin advice to decimate the pious Sambuka, who being a Sudra, was practising the Brahmana dharma (TRC, 1920: 135-37). It is said that this role reversal in the play led TRC to reverse the role of non-Brahmin community, more importantly his own Kamma community, to create a new sect, called the 'Kamma Brahmins' who, till 1970s, officiated the marriages in their community as mentioned above. (Hanumantha Rao, 2012: 36).

The preface to this play extended his race dichotomy theory further, as he titled it as 'Ancient India: Dravidians' to make his hero of the play, Sambuka, a victim of the Aryan Rama. Sambuka was depicted as a king ostracised, since he was seen as a threat to the Brahmin exclusivity. TRC gives in a detailed analysis of the ancient, medieval and present times, of the process by which Aryans got settled in India (TRC, 1920: 135).

Interestingly, TRC identifies the monkeys of Ramayana as the Dravidian prototypes and the demons of Lanka as Dravidians. Using the same logic, he shows that, the north, called 'Aryavarttha', was dotted with many hermitages of sages, whereas the south did not have any, and was mostly a forest area, inhabited by animals and demons (TRC, 136).

In this play, consisting of four acts, Tripuraneni introduces Rama, as a king, fragile enough to heed to the treacherous Brahmin clergy, who, like the clever politicians of the modern era, use the king to push their own agenda of continuance of their supremacy. He quotes from the law books of Manu regarding the differential punishments for a Brahmin and a Sudra, through the character of Sambuka. He also questions the judgement of Rama, sending his wife, Sita to the forest, taking a washer man's irresponsible talk as the law of the land (TRC, 1920: 260).

TRC questioned the authenticity of sacred texts, as he felt that they were written to satisfy the whims and fancies of the upper castes, in other words the Aryan race, which victimised the Dravidians and presented Rama as a puppet in the hands of his Brahmin ministers (TRC, 1920: 260-266 & Koganti, 1986: 148).

With his characteristic humour and sarcasm, and using Brahmanical Telugu, he exposes the Brahmanical 'hypocrisy'. In the second act of the play, while quoting from texts, the Brahmins conspire to convince Rama that a Sudra by birth should be subservient to the three upper castes. He should not indulge in piety, penance and should not act as a practising sage. TRC portrays Hanuman recalling a dream in which Sita is lamenting the cruel fate she had to suffer, due to the misjudgement of Rama who listened to an uneducated washer man. She says, "Rama punished an innocent being like me". He introduces this dream as a prelude to the impending injustice that Rama metes out to Sambuka, who is also an innocent man. But an exalted king like Rama punished Sambuka not on the advice of a dullard, but the so-called learned Brahmins. He also poses a question whether to believe the *Ramayana* of Valmiki or the *Ramayana* of Hanuman, in the tone of Angada (TRC, 1920: 233-277).

The plot is hatched, and the killing of Sambuka is termed as an honourable killing, to protect the *dharma* of the kingdom, in which Aryans uphold the Varna system (TRC, 1920: 279). Rama and Sambuka have a debate, which is an illustration of what TRC called, the difference between the Aryan and non-Aryan races, in his preface. In other words, this play was written to depict the fallibility of the Hindu laws.

3. *Khooni*

TRC's third and final play, the killing of the king Vena, is based on a story from the *Bhagavata Purana*. In the preface, he says that his intellectual debates with Viswantha Satyanarayana continue to fascinate readers. He acknowledges that these debates have prompted him to write this play. The story of King Vena, who was shown in a bad light in the play titled *Venaraju* by Viswantha Satyanarayana, was an effort to portray the power of Aryan sages (TRC, 1935: 307). The mythical king Vena, who was born of a sacrifice in the yagna known as *Putrakameshthi* by his father, Anga, turned out to be a tyrant and revolted against the Vedic diktats according to the original version. In TRC's play, he was an atheist and an open critic of the Vedas. TRC shows that being a non-believer in Vedas is not a crime, but a personal choice. In this way, he juxtaposes the liberal thought of modern era to the *Puranic* form. In the play, Vena is portrayed as someone who stops sacrificing of goats in a Brahmanical ritual. This is perceived by the Brahmins to be against the Vedic commands (TRC, 1938: 316-17). The argument that TRC presents was that the times were changing and sticking to sacrifice of any kind was not rational. Some aspects of religion, priestly class, and sacrificial rites were criticised as symbols of the Brahmanical supremacy.

As TRC always believed, a debate on the attitude of the Brahmins should be based on the belief system they cultivated and the way it was perceived by them. According to him every established theory should be subjected to a rational critique and should be a lesson to other people. He saw the plays and other literature that he produced as a steppingstone for a generation, which will not readily accept anything but will subject everything to an informed debate.

All the three plays show a rational debate initiated by the heroes, who are either Sudras or Dravidians, fighting the Aryan culture of Brahmins and their ideology. heralding the non-Brahmin debate, there is a song in the last act of *Khooni*, signifying

the redundancy of the Vedic dharma (TRC, 1938: 317). In fact, while debating what is right and what is wrong, he surmises in his preface to the play *Kurukshetra Sangramam*: “How fruitful would it have been, if only Rama could give this freedom of speech to Sambuka to put his argument forward” (TRC, 1913: 135). In fact, TRC’s son, Gopichand, echoes in an argumentative tone that “Ideas of caste/community efficacy and pride take place only when these ideas are accepted mutely by the commoners. If they resist and start questioning these ideas, and develop counter ideas, the institutions of a community start crumbling sooner or later” (Gopichand, 1998: 316).

According to Gopichand, his father targeted the Brahmin’s weapons, meaning the scriptures, and produced a counter narrative, using his literary gifts (Gopichand, 1956: 23). After the death of his father, it was Gopichand again, who clarified some misunderstandings about TRC’s depiction of characters like Kamsa, Hiranyakasipu and Ravana as victims of Aryans. To the question of whether his father glorified villainy, he answered in one of his essays on his father as follows: “My father strived tirelessly to create an inquisitive thinking among the people, not to believe blindly anything they were fed, but see the merits of a person or idea using their mental faculties. He wanted that this philosophical slavery of masses be eradicated” (Gopichand, 1998: 47). Avula Sambasiva Rao, a famous jurist and an admirer of TRC, observed: “TRC was the first person to bring philosophical Renaissance in Andhra society” (Avula, 1988: 44).

TRC’s three plays, hence, were a part of a deliberate effort of asocial revolutionary to denounce the ideological slavery of the masses created by the upper castes through certain myths.

TRC’s Later Works: 1930- 1932

In his efforts to make his views as accessible to the masses, TRC extended his literary skills even to a literary tradition of writing poetic verses in 100-verse metrical style called *Satakam* (meaning hundred verses). The theme of social transformation and revolutionary debunking of the age-old beliefs and customs, started by the 18th century

poet, Vemana, and evident in TRC's earlier writings, continued to consistently appear in these later writings also.

In Telugu literary tradition, A *Satakam* is a garland of 100 verses, as an obeisance to a favourite god or deity. Like Vemana, TRC turned it upside down by writing a *Satakam*, under the pseudonym *Dhurthamanava* (1930) as a refrain to the 'ignorant man'. In this aspect too he went on a new path. Generally, it is a deity that is addressed, but here it is the man who is addressed as a prototype who sticks to the age-old beliefs and the *Satakam* is a call to bring up a change.

TRC paraphrases the classic Telugu poets, and their use of phrases, to address the common man. The first verse is a paraphrase of the verse from the *MahaBhagavatam* of Potana (the great savant of 15th century who translated the *Maha Bhagavata Purana* from Sanskrit to Telugu). The main theme in the TRC version is the denunciation of the concepts of God, the other worlds, Karma and inaction, etc. In a famous phrase he points out the rampant corruption of the temple administration, and misuse of the funds offered to the deity. In the tone of the God, he says, "Collecting donations to construct a temple and swallowing those to your own account, is this the motto guiding you people?" (TRC, 1938: 361).

Thus, he enumerates the malpractices and other malicious acts created by the universe of faith and religion in society. In another verse, there is his famous taunt on marriages, where he talks about the 'promiscuity' of Krishna. In yet another verse, TRC asks whether Krishna "asked the people to conduct divine marriages for him and his consorts every year with pomp?" TRC also criticises the sham devotion of corrupt people who crush the lives of the poor, but shower offerings on God, and asks whether the God is pleased by this (TRC, 1938: 362).

The *Satakam*, which remained incomplete due to the sudden demise of TRC, mainly focuses on the follies of people and their blind faith in temples, where a lot of illegal activities allegedly took place. This view was also shared by another of his contemporaries, Tapi Dharma Rao.

TRC wrote another *Satakam*, this time more elaborate, about the redundancy of the ancient texts of law, the *Puranas* and the *epics*. He named it as *KuppuswamySatakam*. There is an interesting story about the naming of this work. TRC was the Chairman of the Municipal Corporation of Tenali in the late 1930s, when one Kuppuswamy Choudary, an influential Kamma leader from Guntur, was the senate member of legislative Council of the Composite Madras State. The friendship between TRC and Kuppuswamy grew, as the latter was the Andhra Senate member representing Guntur in the then Legislative Council of Andhra region.

Noted poet and Kamma leader of Andhra, Kosaraju Raghavaiah Choudary reveals in his memoirs how the *Kuppuswamy Satakam* took birth. He remembers how TRC wrote the *Satakam*, on the basis of observing the people who interacted with Kuppuswamy (Kosaraju, 1986: 47).

Many TRC scholars feel that this text was his tribute to the poet reformer Vemana, who created awareness about the social evils in the public life of Andhra society in particular and Indian society in general. The work is in the form of critique of the concept of god by a common man (Manikya Lakshmi, 1998: 112).

This work was concerned more to urge the society to be honest, not to believe in jugglery, and not to be involved in any acts of killing, cheating, etc. He also indulges in his ‘hero-bashing’, as in one of the verses, he says, “Rama became a hero because of the imagination of poets like Valmiki, and not because of the fact that no other greater king existed before him” (TRC, 1938: 361).

He debunks the *Karma* theory and expresses belief in hard work. In another of his favourite themes, his love for the Telugu culture and ethos comes to the fore. It should be remembered that his love for Telugu stemmed from a resentful attitude to Sanskrit, which had become a sign of superiority for the people of his generation, who believed that only those who knew Sanskrit were real scholars. He also protests the killing of animals in the name of propitiating the gods.

He makes a fervent appeal for women's education and the benefits of having a well-educated wife. “A wife’s educated status always helps the husband. She will make her

family a disciplined one and will be an asset to her husband” (TRC, 1938: 362) - this was his justification of women’s education. In this aspect, he is influenced by Kandukuri Veeresalingam, rather than any of his other contemporaries, who were less vocal on the issue of women’s education. He invokes the theme of women’s liberation, dreaded by many reformers of that time. In one of the verses, he questions, "Who wants to live with a doubting husband? Even the paragon of chastity like Sita, took refuge in the earth, listening to the taunts of her beloved.” (TRC, 1938: 370).

TRC was a liberal, who gave importance to mutual consensus when it came to marriage, instead of tradition. He himself married thrice. He wanted both husband and wife should live in peace with each other and thought that trust should be the foundation for a marriage, and not the matching horoscopes and auspicious time (TRC, 1938: 371).

He revisits the theme of marriage ceremony without the Brahmin in his book of vows in Telugu, instead of Sanskrit, to both the bride and the bridegroom. He named this as *Vivaha Vidhi*. The reason for these vows being in Telugu and not in Sanskrit, is a sort of influence of the Puritan movement in England, where there was a move to make English free of Latin vocabulary. This insistence on using people’s language made democratisation of ceremonies and rituals possible (TRC, 1930: 406).

For this he translated the essential Sanskrit Slokas regarding marriage into Telugu in his book. The same was advocated and followed by his predecessor, Kandukuri Veeresalingam earlier, who both by his speeches and works like *Rajasekhara Charitra* (supposed to be the first novel in Telugu) criticised the unnecessary pomp in marriages. In the preface, TRC advocated English education, arguing that it is instrumental in making old superstitions and beliefs obsolete. He said, “I strongly advocate only the bride and groom to be part of marriage, who should exchange vows and contribute to their life as partners” (TRC, 1930: 307).

TRC wanted his community to take the lead in conducting such dowry-free and simple marriages. He expressed satisfaction in his preface to the second reprint of the book that his community took up the challenge to conduct such marriages, which served as models to many non-Brahmin communities. He advocated appointing an elder to

officiate the marriage as the priest, but from one's own community. This elder was not to utter unfathomable verses from Sanskrit texts but say how marriage is a challenge and how the bride and groom should be ready to face challenges of life as companions. In this TRC showed his rationalism.

The Magnum Opus of TRC: *Sootha Puranam*

Why did Tripuraneni write one more *Purana*, when he denounced puranas as Brahmanical texts? Was he aware of the acceptability of his work, as another work of rational critique against the domination and circulation of epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, with their inherent flaws?

TRC answers these questions in the preface to this work (TRC, 1938: 30-33) in his own words as follows: "I want to expose the immoral and unlawful activities of the *Puranas*, and hence I chose that very genre, but this is a cultural critique on the so-called historical texts called *Puranas*". TRC's son Gopichand reminiscences about the praise his father received from his teacher. TRC was able to get the approbation from his teacher, who said magnanimously to TRC: "I only wrote of the counsel of Krishna, but you have written a whole *Purana*, throwing light on various aspects of mythology, which are taken as precedents, showing their inherent logic" (Gopichand, 1967: 24).

The primary focus of this work was to criticise Manu's laws, through these-called truths seen in the *Puranas*, particularly the Brahmin domination. Here TRC continues his theory of Aryan-Dravidian dichotomy by criticising the stories from the *Puranas*. He does not refer particularly to any *Purana* to start his rational debate but focuses on various legends in the epics and criticises the reliability of those.

TRC says in this work, "The heaven is filled with promiscuous men and women, and its uninhabitable. Do not wish that place, as it is not for decent people, who believe in dharma and justice, as it is the place of the so-called Aryan Gods" (TRC, 1925: 332).

He creates a myth of Dravidians living peacefully in the South, away from the battle prone north, the Aryavarta, where people belonged to many tribes and indulged in infighting. He also turns the characters of the *Bhagavatha*, *Ramayana* and

Mahabharatha, on their head to create an alternative narrative. For example, Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakasipu, the so-called demons, are in his stories the Dravidian kings who were slain by the Aryan gods, as they were their rivals. Even Prahlada, the legendary devotee of Vishnu, is said to be brainwashed by the Aryan sage Narada, as per the conspiracy hatched by Indra, when Prahlada was in his mother's womb (TRC, 1925: 130).

Similarly, in the case of his criticism of *Ramayana*, he extends the theory of Aryan domination, portraying the epic as a cruel quelling of people who lived peacefully in the Dravidian forests. He even portrays Rama as one who kills on Brahmanical advice, without thinking whether it is justified. He portrays Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, as a treacherous person, who heralded the doom of the Dravidian land, and shows in unfavourable light the role of Rama in killing Vali, and doubting his own wife, after his coronation.

Interestingly TRC, opined that the *Vedas* did not make any caste distinctions among people as the *Puranas* did, and made this point in the beginning of his every canto of the *Sootha Puranam*.

The place of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary in the pantheon of intellectuals who influenced the second half of the 20th century Andhra region is very significant. His insistence on rationally scrutinizing the established religious beliefs inspired many educated professionals in the coastal belt to actively participate in the debate.

The coastal Andhra belt was noted for intellectual debates in three streams of thought. The first one was social reform, the second one was of rational thought of questioning the given rules and practices, and the atheist thought process which developed the idea of rational thought with not only questioning religion and its allied by products, but also eschewing it forever. TRC contributed to all three streams directly or indirectly through his writings.

In the process, the Radical Humanism of M.N.Roy, who was keenly followed in the coastal belt of Andhra later, became popular only due to the spirit of questioning shown and encouraged by Tripuraneni in the early 20th century.

Chapter- 5

M.N. Roy- New Humanism:

Their Overarching Influence in the Coastal Belt of Andhra

This chapter will examine the political thought of the influential thinker M.N. Roy and the impact of his thought on the region of the coastal belt of Andhra with the following sections: The philosophy of M.N. Roy and the basic tenets of his thought, which include the concept of Radical Humanism, which was a substantial part of intellectual debates in the coastal belt of Andhra from the 1940 to the late 1960s. The evolution of radical humanism - how it transformed itself from being an individual thought process of a thinker to a well discussed and debated idea among the intellectuals in Andhra.

A discussion of the life of the intelligentsia in the coastal belt of Andhra some of whom interacted with M.N. Roy and spread his thought through various public activities during the Indian national movement, followed by a political debate on the efficacy of Roy's thought in the period from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. This chapter also gives a general introduction to the socio-political background of the main followers of M.N. Roy in the coastal belt of Andhra during the above-mentioned period.

The effect of Roy's thought on the literary works of two literary giants, Tripuraneni Gopichand and Palagummi Padmaraju (both the literary intellectuals had openly declared the influence of M.N. Roy's thought had on the shaping of their political ideas post-1947. The chapter also critically examines the life and efforts of Ravipudi Venkatadri, one of the chief proponents of Roy's humanism in the post-independence era, with reference to his literary contributions.

The Basic Idea of Freedom: Genesis of M.N. Roy's thought

The basic tenet of Roy is centred on man and his quest for freedom, a trait which Roy says is very much an essential part of man's being. As a product of 20th

century thought, Roy envisioned the concept of freedom to be the only hope for mankind. He says

“The philosophy which will give modern mankind a new hope and a new faith must put a concrete content into the concept of freedom” (Roy, 1947: 471).

Roy starts with proposing his basic idea of man and his state of freedom. Man is a living being who values freedom. His life is based on a constant search for freedom. What is freedom for? It is for gaining knowledge about the reality of the world that happens to be the objective reality through his physical senses.(Roy, 1947: 470)

The quest of freedom can be referred to as man’s struggle for existence. It accounts for the triumph of man over nature in the course of his efforts to satisfy biological needs. It provides basis for his constant search for knowledge, which enables him to be progressively free from any tyranny of natural phenomena, physical and social environments. “The quest for freedom....is a continuation of the biological struggle for existence” (Roy, 1947: 471).

In the search of freedom, man turns to the natural laws which say that man is born free and, as a being living in a law governed universe, has the ability to know his good. Nature itself is a law governed one, which gives the ability to man to know the truth, which Roy says is part of the rational aspect of nature. In his theses of governing principles of his new humanism, Roy says:

“Rising out of the background of the law governed physical nature; the human being is essentially rational. Reason being a biological property, it is not the antithesis of will...the rational and scientific concept of determinism (of nature) is not to be confused with the teleological or religious doctrine of predestination” (Roy, 1947:43).

Man does not need any other-worldly force or authority to qualify his freedom. Roy says:

“Quest for freedom and search for truth constitute the basic urge of human progress... Increasing knowledge of nature enables man to be progressively free from the tyranny of natural phenomena, and physical and social environments....” (Roy, 1953: 44).

Hence, nature and its determinism play a very important role in man realising his freedom and gaining the ability to decide what is good for him.

The concept of freedom has been interpreted in multiple ways in modern Indian thought. From the 19th century reformers to the 20th century nationalists, several scholars have interpreted the concept of freedom in their own perspective. M.N. Roy visualised the concept of freedom in the modern parlance inspired by the philosophers Voltaire and Rousseau. In fact, Roy remarks in his analysis of the age of modern philosophy, as he preferred to call it that

“In the 17th century, when modern philosophy was born, intellectual creativity was highly individualised....the enlightenment of the 18th century was swept by the springtide of an unprecedented exuberance of human spirit....there lied a unified purpose: to democratise and humanise philosophy, so that it could be the instrument to promote the cause of freedom, progress, happiness” (1989, 197).

Similarly, Roy says in another instance:

“It is a testament to man’s rationality that he can know nature and its forces and the rules that run the universe. If he recognises this, he will develop a free will. To recognise the physical reality of this universe is the prerequisite to realise his urge for freedom. Once he knows that the world functions in an undisturbed rhythm, he decides what is good and what is not for his progress and happiness “(Roy, 1952: 45).

For Roy the individual is prior to the society and the state which emerges from the social surroundings is a result of human interaction. V. R. Mehta quotes Roy on the relationship between the individual and the society: “Society is the means for attaining an end, which is freedom and progress of the individual” (Mehta, 1996: 240). Individual and his relation to the society and subsequently to the state should be re-examined to recognise the fact that individual is born free and born to enjoy full freedom. Society should not stall the process of realising human freedom. If there any obstacles in the path to freedom, human beings should know how to tackle them and come out triumphant. This ability will depend on the mental ability of each individual and his knowledge of the world (Roy, 1952: 64).

Freedom: The Basic Premise of M.N. Roy's thought

The idea of freedom is not limited to political and economic freedoms. Roy starts his argument that freedom is the basic precondition of existence of the human species (Roy, 1989: 476). In other words, the individual is the prime cause for the formation of the concept of society. Many Roy scholars interpreted 'freedom' as a broad concept. They opine it includes freedom to achieve man's moral, scientific, and social goals (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 118-119). Roy himself makes a statement that the purpose of all rational human endeavour, collective as well as individual, should be the attainment of freedom in ever larger measure, and freedom is real only as individual freedom (Roy, 1989: 472). Here Roy uses liberty, a term more popular in western discussions, as equal to the term freedom (Sharma, 1965: 83). Man-made institutions like society and state cannot create freedom. For Roy freedom was the only philosophical concept which gave hope to the mankind: it represents man's triumph over nature in course of his efforts to satisfy his biological needs (Roy, 1989: 452, 471).

Roy as a philosopher went through the influence of Marxism. He had an association with the Russian leader, Lenin. But Roy was not satisfied with the views of Lenin and the internal dilemmas in the Russian Party about the role of people (citizens) in the governance of state (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 56). After Lenin passed away in 1924 and Stalin became the ruler, Roy lost his faith in the idea of dictatorship of proletariat as he saw the position of governance being turned into a position of dictatorship (Wadia, 1983: 104). This was a deciding factor for Roy as he had thought that Russia and communism are the only refuge in modern era for good governance and for the protection of freedom.

Roy's next step in the evolution towards new humanism was when he interacted with the socialists in the Congress in the early 1930s. Democracy and representative democracy were the buzzwords for them and for the national struggle in India. Roy had a great influence on socialist leaders who were also in the national movement, like Jayaprakash Narayan and S.M. Joshi. On his return to India in 1929,

Roy was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. During this period his followers from his communist phase joined the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) which functioned as a socialist wing of the Congress party (Heddurushetti, 2019: 98). After Roy got released from prison and became an active member of CSP, there were differences over functioning under the aegis of the Congress party. The main issue was about Gandhi's leadership of the Congress and his technique of Satyagraha (Heddurushetti, 2019: 99). Roy strongly felt that a party (CSP) functioning under another party and whose members were all from the Congress, was becoming a reformist party and not one fighting for political freedom. With his experience of party politics, Roy started his own party named League of Radical Congressmen in 1939, which was later named as Radical Democratic Party (and still later as a Radical Democratic Movement).

Freedom in the modern era of nation states is understood as equal to the presence of democratically elected governments. It does not mean that freedom is restricted to the supporters or members of the ruling political party. As a rational being, man is free to choose his own system of governance. In the struggle for his freedom and realisation of it, man also takes the help of a scientific outlook to make a better choice (Roy, 1989: 455). As the surroundings in which man lives are constantly undergoing change, his quest for freedom is eternal, and his will for freedom is permanent.

Reason and Morality: The Chief Ingredients of Freedom

Roy gave an important place for morality of individuals. One becomes a moral being, not because of societal compulsions or institutions like faith, God, State and so on, but based on his grounding in reason. Roy says the revision of classical doctrines of ethics, whether religious, rationalist, or idealist, includes a probe into modern biology which prove man is a product of physical universe (Roy, 1989: 490-492). Social relations should be such that they focus on congenial, mutually beneficial relations, based on reason. The common sense that one begets through rationalism is the genesis of freedom. Morality is an innate quality of a human being. It cannot be infused through the church or any other institution. It cannot be induced through fear or compulsion. Man's morality is inherent in his being a part of a biological universe;

hence the society he forms to live in does not have any authority in framing a moral code. Since man himself is influenced by moral instinct, he is never influenced by social environment (Saxena, 1978: 90). Since nature is a law governed phenomena, man as a part of nature is also law governed. This law governing principle of nature is rationality. So, man as a part of nature is rational. This rationality can be said to be the moral principle of man. Scholars like N.V. Brahman here clarify Roy's stance as to whether all humans are rational and whether they can never be irrational. Brahman clarifies:

“When man is said to be rational, it means man's way of thinking and behaviour can be explained through reason. Even his irrational behaviour can be explained through rationality, as man is a part of nature “(Brahman, 2019: 62-63).

Man, because he is basically rational, is also capable of modifying his irrational behaviour, to become rational through acquiring knowledge. This becomes the basis of morality and becomes the way to acquire freedom. Roy also states that it is not the society that makes the individual moral but the individual who makes the society moral. Moral society being a collection of moral men, individuals alone have the power of being moral inherently. Roy says

“Morality being the dictate of conscience, it can be practised only by individual. Without moral men, there can be no moral society” (Roy, 1947: 83).

Freedom and happiness of individual become the freedom and happiness of society. Hence, institutions of any society like the state and government should strive for enhancing human freedom (Brahman, 2019: 65).

Democracy, as a principle of governing a state, should develop institutions which enhance freedom. If it does not, even the idea of democracy becomes an immoral proposition (Brahman, 2019: 65). Roy's radical humanism includes morality as a means and freedom as a goal. This concept is based on Roy's stance that individual and not the society or the state is the measure of freedom.

Radical Humanism

Roy believed in not only a theory of nature and its constituents, but also a theory of action (Shah, 2019: 27). Roy's formulation of new humanism is based on human being's ability to be rational. This power to reason is not a gift from any entity, but nature itself (Roy, 1989: 495). Roy professed that the faculty of reason harmonises human will and the law governed universe. So, individual freedom becomes freedom of the universe (Roy, 1989: 496).

The chief tool which enables man to be rational in modern era is the scientific knowledge, with which individual starts enquiry and gains knowledge about his environment (Roy, 1989: 497). His philosophy of new humanism rests on modern science, which helps man to proclaim his sovereignty over the forces of universe. The evolution of individual into an ever-developing phenomenon, reinventing himself by fighting against the forces that curtail freedom, helps the society to become free. It is the human search for freedom that gives direction to history. The various emotions that a man experiences in his environment are the result of his thirst for freedom, which stimulates his sensibilities to know the truth of his life which is his eternal quest for freedom. In such a pursuit of freedom, all the situations that the individual finds him in should be helpful to him in realising his idea of freedom. This is possible only through reason, which the individual uses with the help of modern science (Roy, 1989: 491).

According to Roy, the main rival to rationalism is religion. It stops free thought in a society, by creating insecurity and fear of failure. Man should stand firm on his ground, not fearing any state of religious imposition, hindering his freedom of thought and action (Roy, 1989:40).

According to Roy Descartes, who started the era of naturalist humanism, ushered in modern thought in positing man in the universe? Roy says that the French philosopher was the main thinker who saw philosophy as a universal science and physics as the foundation of all sciences (Roy, 1989: 133-134).

This was one of the prime influences on Roy's theory that life came out of

inanimate matter and man is the highest product of human evolution. Roy was a materialist but renamed materialism as physical realism. Though Roy accepted materialism as an explanation for the origin of world, it was not social materialism, but materialism based on physical and biological factors (Bhattacharjee, 1971:107).

Roy also took a lot from the enlightenment philosophy to define his concept of the rational man as he felt he looked for a base for harmonious social order in something that was not metaphysical but scientific (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 106). Roy's prime reason for rejecting religion and metaphysics is the fact that they do not believe studying nature as a natural phenomenon, but they study nature from a transcendental point of view. The inquisitiveness in man is because he is a part of the biological stratum and not a part of religious stratum (Saxena, 1978: 30).

To stifle an individual in the name of religion or through state domination is damaging for his freedom. Since man himself created these institutions, they are supposed to help him to realise his manifold personality, not hinder his growth (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 122). More so to hinder in the name of religion or law is detrimental to a rational society. These two entities are created by man through his rational thought. Radical humanism (New Humanism) was defined by M. N. Roy as the philosophy recognising man and his capabilities through reason and rational thought, to achieve the end goal called freedom (Roy, 1946: 22). Roy traversed the whole spectrum as an individual thinker since his early days - he was a rebel, a militant, a communist, a political thinker in the Socialist wing of the Congress and finally the man who proposed an alternative intellectual vision for the world through his conception of New Humanism or Radical humanism.

Radical Humanism: M.N. Roy's Plan for a Democratic World

What then is the interpretation of freedom and its place in an individual's life in the modern world? Roy constructs his theory as a universal one, without restricting it to India and its national struggle. As a leader who worked in Indian atmosphere, Roy explains this in his seminal work *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution* (RRR).

Roy was a believer in the role of individuals as the main players in a state. In case of India, and elsewhere, he wanted the individual to be the master of his environment, both the state and its machinery.

Roy strongly felt all modern political theories started from the individual but got diverged in the stream of theories explaining the origin of state and society (Roy, 1989: 463). While discussing the theorists who gave prime place to the individual sovereignty, Roy only favours John Locke, who in his opinion was the only philosopher who retained the principle of individual as the prime factor in the formation of the state. Roy differed from Rousseau's concept of the general will which gave importance to institutions not individuals (Roy, 1989: 464). The transition to representative democracy, with its concept of political parties, is where Roy thinks the individual is undermined. He feels that while the party system forms an ingredient of parliamentary democracy, it cannot be considered as true democracy. Roy believed that representative democracy consisting of political parties is another version of a Marxist State. As a person who had closely worked with Lenin and seen the dilution of true Marxist ideals in Russia, Roy was convinced that even the Communist ideology breeds dictatorship of a chosen few (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 59). He felt that the process of elections results in the emergence of a political class, which is only interested in capturing power and retaining it. Representative democracy is not sufficient for realising human freedom. In his opinion, securing political power is equal to acquiring legitimacy to plunder public wealth. Why is parliamentary democracy, otherwise called a 'representative' democracy, serving only the interests of a few? This is due to the limited and periodical nature of electoral democracy (Roy, 1989: 474).

Here, M.N. Roy brings in the argument that man is by birth a rational being. He has knowledge of what is good for him and what is not. This aspect of rational thought also gives man a sense of morality. State, particularly representative democracy, legitimises the curtailment of individual freedom. Though parliamentary democracy is based on individuals electing the government; it does not give importance to individuals once they have elected their representatives. This Roy feels is a great flaw. People delegating their sovereign rights to elect representatives are the opposite of radical democracy (Saxena, 1978: 135). Roy also felt that though modern

thinkers like Rousseau tried to bridge the gulf between people and rulers through General Will, all these concepts led to totalitarian dictatorship and not people's democracy (Jena, 1968: 131). Just as communism failed to create a state which protected individual freedom, Roy felt that the same thing could happen in a democratically elected parliamentary state also. Roy wanted people as citizens to be more assertive of their own rights and ways to protect their freedom. After Roy had a deep experience of political parties during the national movement, he was sure that nationalism only led to concepts like dictatorship as state and its machinery become instruments of power and domination (Jena, 1968: 88). The main players in representative democracy being the political parties, they tend to become another concentrated power centres of dictatorial behaviour ignoring the individual freedom (Jena, 1968: 86). Hence, both Marxism and parliamentary democracy are antithetical to the idea of individual freedom. Roy was also a huge critic of the Gandhian idea of Satyagraha (J.K. Khanna, 1982: 134-135). As V.R. Mehta observes, though Roy rejected both Marxism and Liberalism, he did not turn to Indian traditions. "Gandhi exasperated him" (Mehta, 1996: 238). The Gandhian method of securing freedom through what he called spiritual methods of passive disobedience was against the individual freedom principle as being passive and silent is a sign of weakness. Gandhian ideas of economic reorganization, his religious vocabulary, etc., were antithetical to democracy (Saxena, 1978:135) and went against M.N. Roy's idea of human freedom.

The Evolution of a Radical Humanist: The Main Features

Roy proposed a model of complete democracy, rising from the voluntary groups of rural areas, creating institutions of governance run by small groups of people (Khanna, 1969: 145-146). These institutions should be based on cooperative efforts. Roy envisioned a radical democratic state, where individual citizen with his search for freedom and power of reason, inculcates a feeling of state being a facilitator of individual freedom. M.N. Roy also explains the economic policy of radical humanism as an extension to the freedom of the individual (Roy, 1948: 14). He says that political and economic freedom would be possible only if democracy is based on the principles of radical humanism. Roy envisioned an absence of political parties

which stood for domination, subordination of individual and corruption. He detested elections as a method of choosing representatives as it makes individuals subordinate to the people who they elect, as all the party candidates are chosen by party communities or groups leaders who have vested interests (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 198). Researchers on party politics too have commented on the ills of a party system, in that the candidates elected as representatives become the rulers and any type of contact between the people (citizens) and the representatives who were invested with the power of governance is lost totally (Duverger, 1954: 422). Hence, Roy wanted a radical democratic state based on the people as individuals being the prime players in the state governance. So, Roy advocated the concept of direct democracy. The basic unit of this democracy is the people of a locality organised in “people’s committees” (Roy, 1961: 66-67).

Phases of the Radical Humanist Experiment

Many have raised doubts about the practicality of radical humanism propounded by M. N. Roy. The main criticism has been that it is a wishful thinking and a utopian idea. Roy’s main critics were the communists. When such a critique was made by them, Roy answered it by taking the example of Marxism, which was once considered a utopian idea itself. He defended his theory by arguing that while Marxism wanted to destroy capitalism, it did not have a correct theory of surplus value (Jena, 1968: 49). Surplus value, instead of being a guiding principle, was made by Marx a reason for social injustice. Surplus value is the only reason for social progress, said Roy (Jena, 1968: 50). The chief mistake of Marx, according to Roy was the singular emphasis on the economic aspect of life, by ignoring social and ideological aspects. Judging a society only in terms of economic aspects was not correct (Roy 1961: 19-21). Roy’s love for individual freedom did not allow him to accept the Marxian idea of merging the individual with the society. Individual becoming a tool for the society or the state to be manipulated for political ends was suicidal for Roy’s main crux, the idea of freedom. Roy says

“Society is present to enable the human being to conduct the struggle for existence with greater efficiency” (Roy, 1961: 35).

Hence, Roy wanted the idea of democracy to be practised by individuals in modern era, to make them realize their hidden capabilities, through methods of cooperative group organisations building the society from bottom to the top.

Roy went through a lot of political experiments with his idea of freedom and individual empowerment. When he was dejected with the way Marxism deteriorated as a philosophy of hope, he returned to India to be a prime player in the Indian national struggle against the British rule. Roy joined the sympathizer group of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) which was formed in 1934. Most of his associates from erstwhile Communist movement were a part of this party, founded by Jayaprakash Narayan (Ganguli, 1989: 89). Soon in 1936, Roy disagreed on the organisation of the SCP, its lack of vision and criticised Congress party's leadership under Gandhi. Roy wanted Congress to be filled with leaders from the grassroots level, more precisely farmers (Ganguli, 1989: 90). The Tripura Congress session in 1939 played an important role in his evolution as a thinker and an active participant in politics. He decided to come out of the socialist party wing of the Congress. The issue was not only Roy's discomfort for divisions in decision making in the Congress, but also the meek acceptance of leadership of Gandhi in the national movement (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 61). This gave Roy a conclusive thought that any political party can function only with ideological clarity. There was also an issue that some members of the CSP were part of Congress too, thus there being no ideological entity which was well defined (Heddurushetti, 2019: 99). Hence, Roy started a League of Radical Congressmen, aimed at giving rise to a new leadership which came out of oppressed classes and one which would take the case of the individual freedom (Ganguli, 1989: 91). Later, he started his party named the Radical Democratic Party, as he knew that whatever experiment he was up to, as a philosopher, he should be doing it for a democratic independent India. Democracy was the future of mankind, but governance through democracy should be in the hands of common people or citizens.

M N Roy wrote his famous 22-point thesis on radical humanism and its principles (Roy, 1948: 22). His disillusionment with Marxism, after he left the Comintern-II in Moscow, followed by his disillusionment with the national movement in India, spearheaded by Gandhi, and his method of politics made him propose a new philosophy. This philosophy focussed on man and his quest for freedom and

confirmed that any man-made institution should be secondary to man and the individual must have a prime role in governance (Roy, 1942: 256). In 1948, Roy took the final decision to forego the notion of a political party—and converted his party to the Radical Democratic movement. Roy never claimed that his theory was final and eternally relevant. But as a rationalist, he wanted his supporters and thinking men to come up with alternatives, if they felt his ideas were not in sync with contemporary times. He also wanted the practitioners of the radical humanist movement to follow the same rule. If they felt they could make any modifications to his core thesis on the lines of enhancing man's freedom, he was more than willing to accept them.

Roy's humanism should not be confused with the concept called humanitarianism or the feeling of compassion to others. This does not qualify as humanism. The philosophy of humanitarianism is about having compassion to the sufferings of fellow humans and acting accordingly, whereas the new humanism of Roy is a philosophy which recognises the fact of nature that humans are born free, and their life is a continuous quest for freedom and enhancing the possibilities of promoting freedom (Roy, 1989: 497).

Roy's 22 Principles of Radical Humanism: An Analysis

As mentioned earlier, Roy elaborated his whole theory of new humanism, which was radical in its outlook of looking at the individual in relation to the state. We can see the contemporary relevance of these principles by discussing them here. (Jena 1968: 159-164)

1. Man is the archetype of society. Human being, rising out of a law governed universe, is basically rational and the reason in man ensures his state of freedom.

Implication: Human beings are thinking individuals who are the prime entities of a society, in modern parlance, the state. They created the

society, hence they also hold a prime place in it and in any conception of a democratic state.

2. Quest for freedom and search for truth constitute are the basic urges of human existence and progress. Struggle for freedom is a continuum of biological struggle for existence.

Implication: Freedom and knowledge of truth are basic human urges; any state should work to promote these two traits in its people.

3. The purpose of any rational human behaviour, whether individual or collective, is to attain the state of freedom. Freedom in turn is the disappearance of restrictions on individual potentialities. The role given to the individual is the measure for human progress.

Implication: Any social organisation which promotes collective effort should give prime place to the individual.

4. Rising out of the law governed physical nature, human being becomes rational, and his rationality is a biological property. Hence historical determinism does not exclude human will.

Implication: Human reason is the prime mover of the universe; it is not antithetical to common will of the society. Recognition of human will as a deciding factor and not merely material factors is important for any society/state.

5. Economic interpretation of history is deduced from wrong interpretation of materialism. It is a minimalistic philosophy; whereas history has many causative factors, human will cannot be directly related to economic will.

Implication: History is not a monotonous entity, which is singularly influenced by a single factor. Hence, the importance of human will and individual freedom should be recognised.

6. Ideas and their origin are a physiological process, derived from observing the environment. Once an idea takes birth, it becomes an original and self-governed entity.

Implication: Human reason is the genesis of ideas and once they are formed, they make humans the masters of their environment by infusing in them an urge for freedom.

7. From creating a new world of freedom, revolution must accomplish not merely an economic reorganisation, but also a democratic reorganisation of society. Capture of political power alone is not a revolution.

Implication: Freedom is a multi-dimensional concept, which cannot be reduced to economic and political sections.

8. Communism and socialism cannot be the only means for the attainment of freedom. They should be subjected to a thorough test by reason. Any political system subjecting man as subordinate to a nation or class cannot attain freedom. Individual sovereignty is the goal of a social revolution.

Implication: Systems which preach freedom and equality should be constantly tested by human reason. The failed communism in Russia and in India is examples of what happens if one subordinates man to an abstract goal through state dictatorship.

9. In modern parlance, State is the basic political organisation of society. Planned economy based on socialised industries is a symbol of guaranteeing freedom. Democratic control of political machinery is helpful only when individual freedom is guaranteed.

Implication: Dictatorship of communism type cannot be conducive to individual freedom. Only effective political control by individuals assures their freedom.

10. State ownership and planned economy do not necessarily guarantee an end to exploitation of labour and equal distribution of wealth.

Implication: The Marxist experiment which failed due to inappropriate implementation of methods is an example that state ownership should be used in the right way.

11. Political dictatorship mostly perpetuates economic exploitation. Individual freedom is compromised in such a case.

Implication: Dictatorship in the name of bringing about justice results in doing the opposite.

12. Parliamentary democracy also proves ineffective if delegation of power is not in the hands of the people. Periodical elections do not help individuals to wield power as the real sovereign power has to be exercised every day. Atomised individuals become powerless.

Implication: Political parties and periodical elections only promote subordination of individuals.

13. Liberalism is misinterpreted as formal parliamentary democracy. Similarly concept of economic man negates the doctrine of the individual. These ideas should be replaced by the idea of the rational man who is also a moral man.

Implication: Human conscience should guide him in dealing with his environment. So, the society and state can only be built by a rational man.

14. The only alternative to dictatorship is the creation of an organised democracy, based on bottom to top committees. The political organisation of society will be then coincident with the development of rational men.

Implication: Decentralisation of power is of primary importance for development.

15. A philosophy should always place the individual at the centre as the maker of the world. Revolutionary philosophy should focus on men realizing their creative power, through rational ideas which give rise to a free society and makes democracy successful.

Implication: A state should recognise the primacy of the will of the individual and facilitate his rights.

16. A social revolution aimed at progress should be based on educating people in the values of freedom and rational cooperative living. People's committees of governance will be based on principles of freedom, reason, and social harmony. This cooperative principle will make any monopoly redundant.

Implication: Grassroots level committees of rural organisation will increase the chances of success of social revolution in realising freedom.

17. Radical democracy presupposes the reorganisation of society through economic reorganisation. Satisfaction of necessities of the masses is an important aspect of radical democracy. This should be done by an efficient economic reorganisation. This would raise the standards of living of the masses and then they can become the true participants in the radical democratic world.

Implication: The role of masses in fulfilling basic needs of food, water, shelter should be facilitated by the state, through various schemes of distribution of economic resources. This should be the main aim of the state.

18. The new economy will be based on production for use and distribution with reference to human needs. Delegations of power, participation of adult population of the country through people's committees, are the main parts of this economy. The new society will be based on reason and

science; it will be a planned society. Its aim will be the individual. There will be democracy in every aspect, political, cultural, and economical.

Implication: The state in modern times should embody all the aspects of the new economy where the distribution of resources will be efficiently planned through various government programmes.

19. The idea of radical democracy will only be attained through the collective effort of spiritually free men, united with the urge of attaining freedom. In this radical democratic world, people unite under the urge for freedom and create a radical democratic state, where the focus will be on diffusion of power into people's groups rather than concentration of it in few hands.

Implication: Aspiration for freedom and radical democracy are inseparably linked.

20. Education is the basic tenet to gain the rational and moral capacities for being an effective citizen in a radical democratic state. People's committees must function as the training centres of this education which will train the citizens with civic and political rules.

Implication: The rational and moral capacities of the individual are the foundation of an equitable society and a programme aimed at enhancing these capacities is therefore most important.

21. Radicalism is a method of integrating social organisation and the individual. It provides a strong base for freedom of an individual and creates a process of economic integration.

Implication: Radical democracy means vesting power in the hands of people. The state should create an atmosphere in which citizens' potential is realised.

22. Radicalism aims at creating commonwealth of a world in which free men collectively endeavour for a better society, a society where man is the measure of development and progress.

Implication: Society should be based on creating moral men who pursue their development through thought and reason.

These principles form the basis of a democratic society envisioned by Roy where the modern state is a facilitator and not a dictator of rules. With his experience in Marxist politics, Indian freedom struggle and the ensuing political battles within political parties, Roy was convinced that until the focus shifted from the groups to individuals, there will be no human progress (Jena 1968, 165). There is an influence on these ideas of aspects of liberalism and socialism, but Roy corrected the flaws of these philosophies to make the aspect of human freedom paramount.

The atmosphere that Roy he was operating in, the period of national freedom struggle, made Him face a formidable opposing philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi (Dalton, 2019: 116). As a leader who wanted to spearhead a revolution in India, Roy had to tackle the Gandhian challenge in his own way.

New Humanism: The Philosophical Challenge of Gandhism

Roy believed that he was proposing a theory of contemporary relevance. He believed his theorisation was of enormous importance to India. However, in India, he had two formidable strands of thought going on namely the idea of Indian nationalism and the influence of Gandhi and his philosophy of nonviolence and Satyagraha. Roy had always criticised Gandhi's approach to Indian political question from the time he returned to India in late 1920s (Samaren, 1997:108). His ideology had to face some strong challenges, especially from Gandhi and his philosophy of Satyagraha, which aimed at bringing a moral change in the mind of the adversary (Roy, 1938: 2). He dealt with this aspect, first as a sympathiser of the CSP, and then coming out of the

party, after seeing the politics being played in the name of electing the president of the party in Tripura Congress in 1939.

Influenced by his stint at the Second Comintern, Roy rejected any ideas of spiritualism. He was against the invocation of religion in public life unlike Gandhi, for whom religion was an integral part of his political thought and vocabulary. Gandhi and Roy had difference of opinion regarding the methods to be adopted for political struggle. When he started as a Marxist, Roy did not approve of the way Gandhi's programmes and followers included both 'exploiters and the exploited', that is both the ordinary and rich class in his anti-colonial struggle. Roy termed this element in Gandhian philosophy as a form of fascism (Roy, 1938: 47). According to Roy source of Gandhi's morality and approach was his religious idea of God and his authority in shaping the world (Roy, 1938: 47).

Roy was critical of Gandhi's focus on the economics of rural India and his advocacy of *Charkha*. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* recommended commitment to indigenous industry. Roy was critical of Gandhi's aversion to western science and western civilisation (Roy, 1940: 119). But, after his disillusionment with Russian Marxism because of its limitations and his reservations regarding Comintern, Roy started appreciating the ideal of rural empowerment and started devising a plan for independent India. Most of Roy's criticism was about the nature of Gandhi's thinking and his leadership of the Indian National Congress (Dalton, 2019: 115). From the beginning Roy had a premonition that parties like the Indian National Congress (INC) did not lead to a revolution when the Indian question came up at the Second Comintern. While Lenin felt that there was no alternative to a political party like Congress and Gandhi as a revolutionary leader, Roy wanted to devise an alternative. His philosophy navigated from Marxism to Party politics, and then to non-party movement (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 69-71). Gandhi had chosen the method of Satyagraha and integrated it as a strategy into a political unit called Congress. Roy felt that in no other alternative strategy was being used (Roy, 1940: 24-26). He felt that the suspension of the non-cooperation movement in 1920s was another mistake of Gandhi. In his opinion Gandhi had failed to convert a movement into a revolution. In fact, observers like Dalton, who extensively wrote on Roy and Gandhi, feel that Roy wanted to spearhead the national movement with his own philosophy, but he was

unable to do so, as Gandhi with his personality and charisma got the support of the larger masses (Dalton, 2019: 116). Roy saw the Congress as a political party funded by the propertied classes. In Roy's opinion the INC did not address the question of the common man. However, it must be remembered that Gandhi was the first person to address the question of "untouchables". Gandhi tried to convert the INC into an inclusive political party with a mass base. But Roy did not approve the way Gandhi handled the question of caste oppression and inequality. Roy also criticised the religious vocabulary and symbols of faith that Gandhi evoked, while addressing masses, to make his ideology a practical one. Roy thought that Gandhi was ideologically manipulative in evoking religion in politics. But he also realised that it was a practical necessity at that time and was instrumental in the mobilisation of large masses in uneducated India (Roy, 1938: 7-9). Roy wanted even the terms that a leader uses to be as clear as his thought, without any hidden agenda. It is pertinent here to cite the opinion of the philosopher S. Radhakrishnan, who interpreted spirituality as the realisation of soul force in man (Gopal, 1989: 161). This was an argument which Radhakrishnan interpreted as integral to the Indian way of life. Radhakrishnan further argued that the presence of a universal human spirit manifested in Gandhi's idea of Truth (Radhakrishnan, 2009, 27). Gandhi's integration of spirituality and politics did not convince Roy. Roy generally equated Indian philosophy, with its spiritual character, as a form near to fascism (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 63). Incidentally Gandhism, with its base in spiritual view of life, is also equated by him to fascism. Roy says

"If Gandhism is to be regarded as a body of religio-ethical doctrines, the quintessence of ancient Indian culture, then the world has already experienced its modern political expression. Gandhism as a philosophical tradition has led to Hitlerism" (Roy, 1938: 47).

This initial assessment of Gandhi during 1920s and 1930s made Roy a political mis-fit in the Congress. However, there was also an element of appreciation for Gandhi, in the sense that through hartal and non-cooperation, for the first time in history Indian national movement had entered into an active struggle (Dalton, 2019:117). Roy had reservations regarding Gandhi's idea of negotiating for peace with non-violence. Roy and his activist wife, Ellen Roy examined Gandhi's view of programme of action (nonviolence) through a Marxist lens and found that Gandhi's

programme of development did not include a strong economic plan for masses and both of them felt that Gandhi did not give importance to class conflict in Indian national movement (Dalton, 2019: 118).

Much later, Roy accepted Gandhi's role in Indian politics as a revolutionary leader, like Lenin in the Second Comintern. Roy had established his party in 1938 and contested for interim elections in 1946. Through his experiences within the party system, he realised the vagaries of a political party (Roy, 1948: 20). Roy had a philosophy based on rationalism, technology and modern science as opposed to Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and Satyagraha. By the early 1940s, his party had enough supporters in parts of India, like the coastal Andhra belt, which was already full of revolutionary ideas of intellectuals like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, Gora and a host of educationists. Roy's vision of new humanism as a moral philosophy also led him to appreciate Gandhi's contribution to the world of politics. Roy appreciated the concept of nonviolence as a means of getting things done as a monumental contribution of Gandhi to the world of philosophies (Dalton, 2019: 122).

In fact, the introduction of morality in politics by Gandhi was the core principle of humanism, Roy felt (Dalton, 2019: 122). Roy saw a possibility in Satyagraha and nonviolence, a moral base which can change politics of India from party politics to the politics of masses, where individuals wield power (Dalton, 2019: 123). Roy's philosophy was dubbed by the communists as an antithesis to the Marxian dream. Interestingly Roy was identified later as one who wanted to purify politics with a moral philosophy of new humanism, where basic belief in individuals and their rationality is pivotal.

The Programme of Radical Democracy: Roy's Plan for Independent India

Roy made his Radical Democratic Party into a radical democratic movement in 1948, soon after India got its independence. He developed his version of new humanism and its scope for a developed India, based on individual freedom in his 22 Principles Thesis for radical democracy. Roy recognised the necessity of the state in modern era, to help the human to realise his potentialities as a citizen, as is evident in

his principles of new humanism, especially the ones from 9th to 21st principles. These are used to propose a radical democratic state, based on people's committees from the bottom to the parliament at the top (Jena, 1968: 132,161). Like Gandhi, Roy also believed in the idea of decentralisation, but devoid of Gandhi's use of religious symbols. In a way Roy devised a model for a parliamentary democracy, where people have the right to throw out an underperforming government (Roy, 1947: 2-4).

Since the government in a democratic State is a practical reality, it was envisioned that the State would be acting as a facilitator of human freedom. Roy tried to reconcile the two ideas of realism and idealism, in proposing his theory of believable means and ends, and this is combined with materialism, not based on Marxist theory, but on theory of scientific knowledge (Roy, 1948: 462-465).

This merger led to the notion of ethics in his theory and led to New Humanism, where the individual was free and his constant search for knowledge was to be facilitated by the State. Roy did not subscribe to the monistic determination of history as Marxism did. He opined that, a social revolution is possible with both idealistic and moral base. He was against determinism of history based on economic means as the sole factor.

Some historians recognise that in shifting away from Marxism to a new ideology, he moved closer to the Gandhian ideology (Bhattacharjee, 1971: 72). Similarly, Roy argued that freedom was integral to human life. The source of inspiration to him was man, not the idea of God as for Gandhi. Unlike Gandhi, Roy strongly desisted spirituality (Saxena, 1978: 221). Man is a part of the universe which is law governed and he has an inherent morality as he has reason naturally. Roy (1989) famously said

“Man did not appear on the earth out of nowhere: with his mind, intelligence and will he is an integral part of the physical universe. His being and becoming are defined, therefore he is rational. Morality must be referred back to man's innate rationality. Only then can man be moral, spontaneously, and voluntarily” (Roy, 1989: 496).

He was for a party-less democracy, where sovereignty of a State is entirely dependent on the morality of the individual. He wanted to place democracy beyond political competition of interests. Roy saw the nepotistic trend in parties and wanted to do away with them in his ideal State (Saxena, 1978: 151-152).

Roy dismissed parties as units which breed class struggle and domination. Roy does away with parties and gives that position to people's committees. For Roy truth is the ability of man to assert his freedom, through self-action. Gandhi supported a world government of nation-states. Roy did not agree with this idea because having boundaries would not lead to a world government as it starts with a premise of division (Ravipudi, 2013: 314-315). In other words, Roy was against the dominant ideas of Indian nationalism, which Gandhi was leading from the forefront.

Impact of M. N. Roy's New Humanism in the Coastal Belt of Andhra: An Analysis of Its Nature

The influence of Roy and his works was a slow process among the English educated intelligentsia, who gradually came to welcome his ideas. Andhra society was already experiencing a revolution of rational thought through the works of intellectuals like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (TRC) (Ravipudi, 2014: 12). TRC had started a literary critique of the sacred texts. He used 'Brahmanical' language to show the world the illogical misconceptions and legends in epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He also participated in debates on replacing the Brahmin priests by the priests of each community officiating ceremonies of their respective communities. Because of this he came to have followers who responded to his call of questioning authority and making one's own choices (Sambasiva Rao, 1988: 32-34).

The intelligentsia in coastal Andhra was thus already influenced by TRC and his thinking about a philosophical revolution. Subsequently, they were also influenced by the ideas of M. N. Roy. Roy visited Andhra and shared his ideas for the first time during a farmers' meet in Nellore. He readily accepted the invitation extended by a local farmer and labour leader, Vennelakanti Raghavayya, in 1937 (Abburi, 1996:

132-133). The educated folk from the dominant non-Brahmin castes like Kamma and Reddy in the rural belt of coastal Andhra, from the Krishna-Guntur region, dominated the intellectual scene in this region. They supported Roy's ideas and stood by him as he experimented with the idea of a political party, and later, a political movement.

The districts of Krishna and Guntur were strong centres of non-Brahmin movement and the rise of affluent non-Brahmin castes, mostly agricultural castes, which migrated from villages to towns in late 19th century for more opportunities in public life. We can notice the nature of Roy's influence in these districts in various forms. It is important to analyse the nature of this influence and the forms in which this thought manifested itself in the activities by his followers both at the stage of Radical Democratic Party and Radical Democratic Movement. The followers of Roy displayed some characteristics which are listed below.

1. Most of the followers of Royist philosophy came from villages of Guntur and Krishna districts which were agricultural mainstays of the coastal Andhra region. In other words, the second generation educated strata from an agricultural background had come to take up the Royist thought and made significant effort to spread his ideas in rural and urban centres of coastal belt.
2. Most of them were from non-Brahmin communities influenced by the non-Brahmin and rational thought popularised by TRC. Most of them acknowledge the debt they owe to TRC, who taught them "to ask questions about everything". People were naturally attracted to Roy's ideas as they were already exposed to a rationalist upheaval.
3. Main activity of the Royist followers was to attend the various study camps Roy conducted at Dehradun (when Roy started his Radical Democratic Party), to spread this ideology in rural areas of the coastal belt. For this they arranged weekend study camps, talks by well-known rational thinkers of the day (e.g., Gora, the atheist thinker, was a regular invitee).

4. An important trend was most of the followers got attracted to Roy after the Second World War. Many of the followers and ideologues of Roy were a part of national freedom struggle too, but after Roy converted his Party into a movement, they were immediately able to identify with him.

5. Most of the followers who carried out activities of Royist thought in these districts gave importance to the principles of freedom of the individual and radical democracy. Some started schools with an equal admission policy for all denominations of castes, some were lawyers who toured India spreading Roy's ideas, and some became village sarpanches to make Roy's idea of people's committees a reality. Educational activities were an important part of this influence of Roy.

6. Most significant contribution of these followers of Roy was to start journals, weeklies, quarterlies in Telugu to spread radical humanism among the intelligentsia in the coastal belt. Tenali and Chirala became centres of intellectual activity. Some of the intellectuals started printing presses and schools to spread this ideology. Rural camps were organised to disseminate Roy's ideas of freedom and citizenship among labourers and village folks.

7. Some intellectuals influenced by the Royist ideas were part of the Telugu literary world. They created works of literature like short stories and novels taking inspiration from Royist ideas. This is how Roy and his new humanism impacted the intellectual mind of the coastal belt of Andhra.

The following table enlists some of Roy's followers and their backgrounds:

S.No	Name	Place	Period	Caste	Family Background	Educational Background	Profession	Ideological Positions	Public Activities
1	Avula Gopala Krishna Murthy	Muluru Tenali Taluk, (Guntur District)	1917- 1966	Kamma	Agricultural Community	M.A. L.L.B (Lucknow University)	Lawyer	Rational Thinker, Atheist, and Roy's associate	Main architect of the Royist thought, its dissemination in the coastal belt of Andhra. Editor of many journals like <i>Vibhari</i> , <i>Samiksha</i> which were devoted to Royist literature and thought.

2	Tripurane ni Gopichan d	Angaluru (Krishna District)	1910- 1962	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A.B. L	Writer, Think er Chief Produ cer, All India Radio	Rationalist Agnostic But became a believer in his last stages.	First Chief Secretary of the Radical Democratic Party in Andhra. Spread Royist thought through camps, lectures, and public talks.
3	Koganti Radha Krishna Murthy	Kuchi- pudi (Guntur District)	1914- 1989	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A (Hindi) Hindi Pracharak (Visharada)	Princi pal of the High School establi shed in his native place, Kuchi pudi	Rationalist Philanthropi st. Roy's Associate	Started High School and printing press. Published many journals like <i>Radical</i> to spread Royist thought and gave many talks on Royism.
4	G.V. Krishna Rao	Kuchi- pudi (Guntur District)	1914- 1979	Kamma	Agricultural Community	M.A (Telugu) PhD (Telugu)	Lectur er in Telugu , at VSR Colleg e, Tenali	Rationalist Thinker, Literary Figure and an Intellectual	Gave talks, participated in Radical Humanist conferences in Andhra. Was Chief Broadcaster in All India Radio. Member of the Spoken Word Reform Committee, Government of Andhra Pradesh.
5	Koganti Subrah- manyam	Kuchi- pudi (Guntur District)	1917- 1978	Kamma	Agricultural Community	Inter- mediate Andhra Christian College, Guntur	Sarpan ch Kuchi pudi Village	Rationalist. Editor of <i>Andhra Labour</i> (weekly) published from Guntur, and <i>Radical Humanist</i> , a fort-nightly Published from Tenali (1958-1959)	Sarpanch of Kuchipudi village (1964- 1970). Took up programmes like economic planning for education, setting up a permanent building for village healthcare, and Streamlining the public distribution system in his village.
6	Aluri Bairagi	Aitha- nagaram (Guntur District)	1925- 1978	Kamma	Agricultural Community	Rashtra Bhasha Visharada (B.A. (Hindi)	Hindi Teach er, Prattip adu (Gunt ur Distric t) On the Editor ial Board of Chand a- mama,	Rationalist Royist Worker	A close associate of Roy, worked for inculcating Royist ideals among youth, along with Gopichand, G.V. Krishna Rao and Koganti Radha Krishna Murthy

							a popular Children's Magazine		
7	Guttikonda Narahari	Yala-varru (Guntur District)	1917-1985	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A.B.L Lawyer	Early Ideologue who organised anti-fascist conferences in Guntur from 1941-1943 when the Radical Democratic Party was in vogue.	Rationalist Thinker, Activist	Editor of journals <i>Vibari</i> , and <i>Andhra Labour</i> (1943-1948). Principal Secretary RDP (Andhra). Orator who organised students' camps on Radical Humanism. Member of Indian Renaissance Institute.
8	Narla Venkateshwar Rao	Jabalpur (Ancestors were from the Krishna District)	1908-1985	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A.	Journalist. Introduced rationalism and logic into mainstream Telugu journalism	Rational Thinker, Poet, Writer, and practicing Buddhist	Editor of weeklies (<i>Andhra Jyothi</i> , <i>Andhra Prabha</i>). Strove to make journalism a social democratic weapon to inculcate awareness among readers
9	Jasti Jagannadham	Kuchipudi (Guntur District)	1931-1962	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A(Telugu)	Lecturer in Telugu (V.S.R College, Tenali), Sub-editor of <i>Andhra Prabha</i> , under Narla Venka	Rational Thinker. A young Ideologue who spread Roy's Humanism in Andhra especially in the Guntur District.	An active crusader who spear-headed the Royist ideas, spreading them in post RDP (Radical democratic Part) era, when Roy converted his Party into a movement.

							teshwa ra Rao		
10	Kolli Sivarama Reddy	Kathe- varam (Guntur District)	1922- 1971	Reddy	Agricultural Community	B.A.B.L (Pune) L.L.B.	Advoc ate, Started as a junior to Avula Gopal a- Krishn a Murth y	Rationalist Thinker Educationis t.	Owner of a rice mill. Started a scheme of distributing rice at the minimum price to his villagers.
11	Abburu Rama- Krishna Rao	Ananta- varam (Guntur District)	1896- 1979	Brahmin	Middle class Family	M.A (Library Science)	Educa tionist. Close associa te of M. N. Roy in Andhr a. Pione er in Royist thoug ht in Andhr a. Lectur er in Librar y Scienc e in Andhr a Univer sityVis akha- apatna m (1929- 1959)	Rational Thinker, Prominent Literary and Theatre figure in the Telugu region. Introduced social themes in Telugu theatre.	First person who did the spadework for publishing Roy's works in Telugu. A close friend of M. N. Roy (from Roy's first visit to Andhra in 1937). Was instrumental in inculcating humanist zeal in his students, which included the famous poet Sri Sri(1910-1983).
12	Palagummi Padmaraju	Tirupathi- puram (West Godavari District)	1915- 1983	Brahmin	Middle class Family	M. Sc (Chemistry)	Lectur er in Chemi stry P.R. Colleg e, Kakin ada (1939- 1952). Later Screen -play writer for	Rational Thinker who revolution- ised the Telugu short story and novel genre with his political satires, strongly criticising the state.	Pioneering short story writer in Telugu, noted for themes which depicted the political choices Of men.

							Telugu films with progressive themes.		
13	Gurijala Krishnaiah	Kuchi-pudi (Guntur District)	1922-1989	Kamma	Agricultural Background	B.A. (Hindi)	Lecturer in Hindi (Pundit) Kuchi-pudi High School	Rational Thinker, First time RDP member. Teacher	Credited with the creation of a considerable youth pool of Roy followers in Guntur district, by organising camps and inviting eminent rational thinkers like Gora, V.M. Tarkunde, V.B. Karnik for talks on Roy's principles. Started a cooperative programme for self-employment (on Roy's principles) in his village, involving only the locals.
14	Nannapanni Subba Rao	Aitha-nagaram (Guntur District)	1921-1989	Kamma	Agricultural Background	B. A (Hindi)	Hindi Teacher (Vetapalem High School, 1949-1952) Was in Tenali Municipal Services (1952-1976)	Rational Thinker, Activist	A close associate of Bairagi. Actively contributed to the literature of Roy by producing poetry and prose in Telugu, Hindi and Bengali. Literary critic from a Rationalist perspective
15	Kalluri Basaveswara Rao	Pedagadelparru (Guntur District)	1930-1980	Kamma	Agricultural Background	M.A (History) (Madras Christian College)	Lecturer in History, Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada.	Rationalist. A thinker who viewed history from a rationalist perspective	An academic, who produced a rational critique of Indian history, while working in the college. Wrote the book <i>Indian History and Culture</i> (An enquiry into the truth of India's past)

16	Ravipudi Venkatadri	NagandlaPrakasam District (Earlier Guntur)	1922-	Kamma	Agricultural Community	B.A discontinued from Hindu College, Guntur	Teacher Started Kaviraja Tutorial at Surivari-palem in Prakasam district, from 1948 till 1972)	Rational thinker and an ardent radical humanist who interacted with Roy and a lifelong Royist	The prime propagator of Roy's ideas in the Andhra region, Was the president of Indian Rationalist Union from 1989-2002 and from 2008-2010. Founder President of the Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association (1979-1989) Started Hema Foundation in 1997 to publish his work. Gave speeches on Radical Humanism, made it known in the intellectual circles of Andhra, and also toured the USA on invitation to spread the ideas of Roy and the nature of rational thought.

As can be observed from the table, Roy's followers were mostly the youth, who invariably had come under the influence of TRC and his rationalism in the coastal belt of Guntur-Krishna (also to an extent the Godavari districts). Having already been exposed to the ideas of rationalism, science and technology and modern English education, they took to Roy's new humanism readily. The list includes pioneering educationists like Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, who was the first intellectual whom Roy got friendly with when he came to Andhra for the first time (Paul, 1996: 13).

As mentioned earlier, Roy's followers functioned in various capacities like youth wing leaders of his erstwhile Radical Democratic Party, organisers of talks by known Royists. Most importantly the list shows various individuals like Koganti Radhakrishna Murthy, Gurijala Seetaramaiah, who also functioned as village Sarpanches and tried to implement the Royist principle of village regeneration through co-operative direct democracy. Similarly, we also find intellectual activity in Telugu literature by literary giants like Tripuraneni Gopichand and Palagummi Padmaraju, who combined their education with intellect to create literature which talked about the humanist model of M.N. Roy. People belonging to journalism like Narla Venkateswara Rao also produced literature which included various plays based on the epics Ramayana and the Puranas where they subvert the text to show the theistic

agenda of myths and epics (Prabhakara Rao, 1989: 474). Another significant trend of these Roy followers was to attend study camps and organise debates about Roy's vision for independent India among rural youth. Men like Chalavadi Pullappanaidu, Matta Ramasubbaiah, who had limited education, participated in Royist programmes in their areas (Achyutram, 1988: 11).

The main work of these followers of Roy was to generate a strong sense of freedom and confidence among commoners through Roy's new humanism, to make them realize their role as citizens in independent India and to make them equipped with rationality to question the elected government, when their rights were encroached. A detailed examination of the participants of Radical Humanism in Andhra will throw more light on these aspects of their contribution.

Abburi Ramakrishna Rao (1896-1979)

Abburi Ramakrishna Rao was a close associate of M N Roy in coastal Andhra. He can be considered the first intellectual from Andhra who saw merit in Roy and his ideas. As an academic himself (he was a master poet and the chief librarian of Andhra University, Visakhapatnam), Abburi developed a close bond with Roy and his wife Ellen Roy, right from his first visit to Andhra (A.V.R 1988: 132). Basically, Abburi was a rational thinker and a political observer. Abburi started his political foray as a Congress worker, and then became a communist and finally a strong associate of M.N. Roy and a lifelong humanist.

Just as Roy was instrumental in starting the Communist Party in India, Abburi was instrumental in starting the Communist Party in Andhra in 1932 (Narasimha Rao 1988: 24-26). He was instrumental in bringing extensive communist literature to the Andhra University library in the late 1930s (Chandrakanth, 1995: 57).

He was a Sanskrit scholar and an important literary figure who contributed to Telugu theatre, with his new techniques of performance. Abburi's contribution to the Telugu theatre by introducing social themes at a time when mythological plays were in vogue was said to be inspired by Roy who advised him to "concentrate on developing the theatre" (A.V.R, 1996: 21).

Roy looked forward to intellectuals of Andhra like Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, who made a seminal contribution in spreading his philosophy. Rao played a crucial role in publishing Roy's works in the South in Telugu. Abburi's son VaradaRajeswara Rao (1996) explains the bond between the two, as follows:

“After falling ill on his first visit to Andhra, Roy and his wife Ellen were flown to Visakhapatnam from Nellore, to recuperate. My father hosted the Roys....father used to discuss political situations of the country with Roy. Those six weeks of stay at Waltair(Visakhapatnam) were fruitful. Roy's affection and regard for my father grew. His unlimited intellectual power fascinated my father. Then my father became a follower of Roy and worked under his leadership in the political and renaissance fields”(Abburi, 1996: 19).

The correspondence between the two included matters of publishing Roy's works in Telugu, organising camps in areas of Guntur and Godavari districts, Roy's requests for men, material and money for his publications and information about his all-India tours(Abburi 1996,28,34,59).In all these letters which date from 1937 to 1950,Roy addresses Abburi as “Dear” or “Comrade”.

G.V. Krishna Rao (GVK) (1914-1979)

G.V.K, a lecturer in Telugu and a scholar-thinker, came from a farming community. G.V.K. and the other followers of Roy were attracted to his ideas on freedom. This freedom was undoubtedly individual freedom, which was the crux of a dignified human life. In fact, GVK says in one of his works:

“Societal Development is possible only when the individual develops an all-round knowledge about various streams... To be dependent on man himself, and not on God or any other entity for development is the main point in this pursuit”(19).

GVK, Avula Gopalakrishnamurthy (AGK), and Koganti Radha Krishnamurthy (KRK) are considered to be the pioneers of radical democratic ideals through their chosen vocations. GVK was a literary figure, AGK was a lawyer, and KRK was the head of an educational institution (Achyutram, 1989: 11).

G.V.K. is often credited with introducing a moral philosophy based on radical humanism. His novel 'Puppets' (*KeeluBommalu*) was a social commentary with a humanist stance. It portrayed various trials and tribulations that a man had to undergo in the process of becoming a rational being. This clearly reflected Roy's influence (G.V.K., 2008: 127-134).

GVK wrote stories which depicted rural themes and empowerment of rural people, in a socialist mode, which spoke about the wage inequality and the way rural small farmers were conditioned to believe everything as part of their own fate(Karma) (GVK, 2010: 164). Writing on such themes was a new idea in Andhra then because most short story writers used to write on fantasies and ignore the social reality around them. Influenced by Roy, writers like him were concentrating on the common man's travails in a newly independent India. The problems of new land ceiling acts and the amount of displacement rural small scale farmers faced during the early 1950s in rural Andhra were an important theme of GVK short stories. These problems ranged from displacement of acceded rural lands under the act to loss of employment in villages (G.V. Krishna Rao, 2008: 35-36). In his plays based on *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* –*Bhiksha Patra*, and *Yadava Pralayam*, G.V.K. takes up the case of a rationalist critique of epics, like Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (Prabhakara Rao, 1989: 422, 437). He was influenced not only by Tripuraneni, but also by his illustrious son, novelist and story writer, Gopichand, who encouraged him to join the Radical Democratic Party .He edited two Royist magazines *Radical* and *Samiksha*. He was also an active literary figure and a member of the Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Academy (Achyutram, 1988: 15-17).

Koganti Subrahmanyam (Koganti) (1917-1978)

Koganti Subrahmanyam was an early Royist who worked tirelessly to spread Royist literature. Koganti was brought into the Royist movement by Tripuraneni Gopichand when he was a student at the Andhra Christian College, Guntur. Later, Koganti left his studies to work for the party (Achyutram, 1988: 14). In the letters that M.N. Roy wrote to Abburi Ramakrishna Rao, he mentions the work of Koganti in distributing printed booklets and pamphlets of the party in the Andhra area.

This was during Roy's pre-Radical Democratic Party phase, when he started League of Radical Congressmen, much before launching a separate party (Abburi, 1996: 34-35). During this period, Koganti was working with Gopichand, discussing strategies to invent an alternative to Congress. This era signalled the beginning of Koganti as the chief and one of the early translators of Royist literature into Telugu. The first translated work of Roy into Telugu was *World War 2: India's Role*.

According to many observers of the Royist movement in Andhra, by 1942, Koganti was the chief force in spreading Roy's ideas in Guntur district (Achyutram, 1988: 4-5; Ravipudi, 2014:32). He also edited the *Radical Humanist* (1958-1959), and before that, a weekly 'Andhra Labour', during the Second World War days in Guntur (1942-1944) both devoted to spreading radical humanist philosophy. As a rural leader inspired by Roy's Organised Democracy, he contested the *Sarpanch* polls in his village, Kuchipudi, in Guntur district and won. His achievements in his period (1964-1970) were creating infrastructure to protect rural animal husbandry and getting funds sanctioned from the government for the Panchayat. He advocated a legal enactment to regulate village Panchayat. He recognised the fact that, in India, even Royist intellectuals must function in an environment dominated by political parties (Achyutram, 1988: 15-16).

Tripuraneni Gopichand: (1910-1962)

Gopichand, the only son of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, took up from where his father left. When Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary died in 1943, Roy's party was in its early stages. Gopichand not only contributed to the process of spreading Roy's ideas in the region, but also introduced this philosophy to his fellow intellectuals, G.V.K and Koganti, who were working in Tenali, in an atmosphere of fierce nationalism (Achyutram, 1988: 13-15). In the words of a local Roy supporter, "Gopichand was the big brother among the Royist intellectuals in Andhra in late 1940s" (Achyutram, 1989: 9). By the late 1940s, Gopichand was disillusioned by the

concept of party politics. He was disappointed with the internal discrepancies in the party system and left it to others to take care of the party² (Koganti, 1962: 84-86).

After his Radical Democrat stage, from a rationalist, Gopichand became a Radical Humanist, but he was simultaneously attracted to the nationalist thought of Sri Aurobindo. Gopichand went through a lot of personal and ideological metamorphosis due to his disillusionment with ideologies (Veluri, 2009: 232-234). He was an important literary figure and his novel (titled in Telugu as *Asamarthuni Jeeva Yatra* (The Journey of an Incapable Man). explains the life of a man unable to transcend his surroundings and who, as a result, dies in the end. Through the character of an old man (Ramayya Tatha) in the novel, Gopichand portrays a man's search for freedom and the hindrances he faces in his journey towards it (Gopichand, 2009: 33-37). Gopichand was criticised for abandoning Roy's philosophy, and then becoming a believer in a superhuman force.³ One of his close friends, D. Ramalingam (2014) evaluated Gopichand's ideas as follows:

"Gopichand was principally a seeker of truth. His quest for the truth of human existence began with being a rational thinker, having had a father like Tripuraneni. He grew up in an era of rational thought. His father being an atheist at the end of his life, Gopichand too followed the suit. Gopi always preached that every idea should be made to go through the rational litmus test and then accepted if it passes the test of truth. In the process he got attracted to Marxism, whose idea of societal justice attracted him. With the impact of M.N.Roy who presented a rational critique of Marxism, Gopi turned to Radical Humanism and became a prime mover of Roy's philosophy in Andhra. Roy's idea of human freedom and the way to achieve that way of life attracted and inspired Gopichand to create a deeply philosophical work like *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra*....the novel is a reflection of current state of human dilemma which cannot decide what is good and the way to achieve the quality of an independent man" (Ramalingam, 2014: 65).

Gopichand wrote several short stories highlighting the dilemma faced by nationalists while engaging with various streams of thought like Marxism, Socialism, and Royism. In his classic short story, *Desam Emayyettu?* (What will be the fate of this Country?) he depicts the life of people who were jailed for their participation in the national struggle. He portrayed them as people imprisoned in their own ideas,

unable to reach an agreeable political ideal for development of independent India and the welfare of its people (Gopichand, 2009, 90-98).

Guttikonda Narahari (1917-1985)

Narahari presents another facet of Roy's influence in Andhra. This manifested itself in an active journalistic career as editor for many Royist philosophy-based journals like *Vihari* (Fortnightly from Madras) and another fruitful period as the pioneering Roy ideologue who spread this thought in Guntur-Tenali areas (Achyutram 1988: 15). Narahari was influenced by N.G. Ranga, the well-known nationalist and the founder of the Kisan Party and a farmer's welfare movement in the Guntur belt (N.G. Ranga, 2000: 122-124). It is interesting to note that all the Royists in Andhra were mostly influenced by some or the other idea before they became a confidantes or followers of M.N. Roy. Most of them came under his influence during World War-II. When he was a law student in Madras, Narahari started a Royist magazine *Vihari*, generally to present his views on the national struggle. The magazine focused on how one should deal with political parties like the Congress. Anti-Fascist *Mahasabhas* (Conferences) used to be organised in the Guntur-Krishna belt during war days, in which all Roy supporters including Narahari participated (Achyutram, 1988: 13-15). In the provincial elections of 1946, he campaigned in the constituencies where independent candidates like Ravipudi Venkatadri, Koganti Radhakrishna Murthy (Koganti Senior) contested following the principles of Roy. When Roy disbanded the party and made it a movement in 1948, Narahari stepped aside from his role temporarily. Subsequently, realising the merit in it, he again joined the radical humanist movement. Narahari's place as an organiser of Radical Humanist movement in the early 1940s, as All-India General Secretary, as an author, translator and as a Royist who worked for organising informed debates about Royist philosophy in the coastal districts of Guntur and Krishna, make him an important figure in Royist history of Andhra. He was one of the early members of the Indian Renaissance Institute, which Roy launched in Dehradun and one who directly interacted with Roy in developing a strong base for Royist thought in Andhra.

Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy (A.G.K): (1917-1966)

Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy, an admirer of Vemana, Tripuraneni and Ambedkar (A.G.K, 1967: 3-5), occupied a significant place among the supporters of radical humanism in Andhra till the mid-1960s. His importance stayed consistent through the transitional state from a party to a movement. After studying law in Lucknow, he started practicing as a lawyer in Madras and Guntur, and later in Tenali in 1942 from where he tried to inculcate Royist philosophy in the politically conscious Guntur-Krishna area.

In his musings titled in Telugu as *Nalo Nenu* (personal musings) he criticised many nationalists and proponents of other ideologies like Gora. As a journalist, he can be said to be one of the earliest Roy supporters in Andhra and remained a Royist throughout his life. He devoted his time to attend and organise seminars, workshops, camps, and other activities of significance to Roy's philosophy (Achyutram, 1989: 4-5). He successfully conducted The All-India Rationalist Conference in Tenali in 1952. In 1963, he toured the country and spoke on the principles of organised democracy as conceptualised by M.N. Roy. His last days were spent in Chirala and in Tenali from where he edited a magazine *Sameeksha*, devoted to Royist literature. The magazine stopped due to paucity of funds. His followers like Kolli Sivarama Reddy, a junior lawyer helped him to continue the publication of the magazine.⁴ When it again stopped due to the shortage of funds; he collected money by touring extensively in the Guntur belt. Royist followers in Andhra were also influenced by the social reform movements of Veeresalingam and Tripuraneni. Kolli Sivarama Reddy was the one who used to conduct inter-dining programmes in the villages. He was mentored by A.G.K himself. He spread Roy's idea of 'no philosophy is a closed one, it is open and anyone who modifies it can do so on the merit of benefitting the Individual' (Achyutram, 1989: 5-6). A more detailed account of AGK's works will be attempted later in this chapter.

Narla Venkateshwara Rao (Narla) (1909-1985)

A literary heir to Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary and Tapi Dharma Rao, Narla wrote a rationalist critique of Indian epics (Prabhakara Rao, 1981: 471-476). Inspired by Tripuraneni, he dabbled in various literary genres. Narla's contribution was the subversion of mythological texts (Prabhakara Rao, 1981: 473). His essays and

plays show contempt for the exploitative Brahmins. He chose *Ramayana* and the Puranas to prove how the original inhabitants of south were dominated by the Aryans (Narla, 2016: 3). The way he critiqued Ramayana and its parts in his plays like *Sita Josyam* (the prophecy of Sita) symbolizes Narla's approach. He followed the Tripuraneni model of writing lengthy prefaces to his plays which analysed the historical illogicity of mythological epics (Narla, 2016: 85). Narla portrays Ramayana as a manifestation of encroachment of indigenous lands of original inhabitants by the foreign Aryan race with the help of the ascetic class (Narla, 2016: 96). His plays depict the so called Rakshasas (demons) as the original inhabitants of nature (forests) and Rama as someone used by the Rishis to kill the original inhabitants of nature. He was also a fierce critic of Hindu nationalism which was slowly beginning to raise its head in Andhra in the late 1960s.

Koganti Senior (Koganti Radhakrishna Murthy)(KRK): (1914-1989)

Radical Humanists in the coastal belt always credit Koganti Radhakrishna Murthy as one of the three chief architects of Roy movement, apart from Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy and G.V. Krishna Rao (Achyutram, 1989: 11). From 1939 to his death in 1989, Koganti remained a Royist. His main contribution was to supervise various meetings of the party. In the year 1946 KRK became very close to Roy in the Dehradun camp of Radical Democratic Party. He attended study camps of Roy in Dehradun and Calcutta regularly. The most seminal contribution of KRK was that of starting a High School in Kuchipudi run on the Royist principles in 1944 and making it an educational centre based on Humanist principles (Achyutram, 1989: 7). Coming from an affluent family, KRK funded the school himself and enhanced its position as a distinguished institution in the Guntur district. KRK also initiated the publication of Roy's work in the coastal districts by launching a press (Nalanda Press) in Tenali. He started Praja Sahitya Parishat in Guntur to encourage writers to translate Roy's works into Telugu (Achyutram, 1989: 6).

Jasthi Jagannatham: (1931-1962)

He is credited with integrating journalism and radical humanism, in the initial years of the movement. Born in the Kuchipudi village near Tenali, he graduated in

Telugu from Andhra University. After being influenced by Roy's works, Jagannatham returned to Tenali, and worked closely with A.G.K., in editing articles and publishing works of Roy, including the translations of his speeches. His work as a humanist began when he was a leader of the Student's Union at Andhra University. He conducted many seminars and speeches by radical humanist leaders (Achyutram, 1989: 11-13). He started his professional life as a lecturer in Tenali's V.S.R. College, where G.V. Krishna Rao was his colleague. The management took notice of Jagannatham's revolutionary talks with students and removed him from service. Infuriated by this, G.V.K. also relinquished his job in protest. Thus, began Jagannatham's career as a career journalist. As a sub-editor in *Andhra Prabha*, an influential weekly edited by another rationalist, Narla Venkateshwara Rao, he spread Roy's literature through his regular columns. His writings tried to link Royist ethics with contemporary happenings in the country. His role in unravelling a fraud by a God man was a much talked about event⁵. Jagannatham was more famously remembered for his translation of Roy's magnum opus 'Reason Romanticism and Revolution', parts of which were published in Royist magazines (Innaih, 2012: 12).

Gurijala Krishnaiah:

Gurijala Krishnaiah could be called a nationalist among the humanists. He was a Hindi teacher in Kuchipudi village near Tenali. He worked to spread Hindi in villages under Gandhian influence. But during the Second World War, he became a member of the Radical Democratic Party. He invited leading Royists, like V.M.Tarkunde and V.B. Karnik to his village, Kuchipudi. Roy himself had big plans to propagate his ideas in Andhra. During his first visit to the coastal belt, he recognised that the soil of the region was ready for his ideas (Achyutram, 1989: 31-33). The speeches of V.M. Tarkunde and V.B.Karnik had a huge impact in the region (Achyutram, 1989: 32). Krishnaiah ran a cooperative store and a centre which imparted training for women in weaving, to encourage them to take up employment. As a follower of Tripuraneni, he also conducted marriages without Vedic rituals according to the tenets of the *VivahaVidhi*⁶ written by Tripuraneni. Krishnaiah often spoke of the need for a moral revolution in men. He wanted education to instil a sense of duty and equality among them. He worked hard to spread the rationalist movement

and organised a number of talks, to develop awareness among the masses about rational outlook. In a letter written to one of his friends, he says (1989)

“I am against any isms and think the main point one should keep in mind is to transcend these narrow Versions of the philosophy of man. Humanism at the end will be the last resort of any individual. It is a way of life” (Achyutram 1989: 33).

Kalluri Basaveswara Rao: (1930-1980)

Kalluri’s contribution lay in his humanist perspective of analysing history with the primacy of the individual. He said

“Man forms the primary part of the universe and the world formed by individuals is a constant experimental area for man to lead a free life....human history is a continuum of the rational reality. One should review the study of history through this rational lens” (13).

He was one of the historians who felt that history should be rewritten in order to understand it in a new light, which includes a rational outlook. Kalluri was of the opinion that history should be about explaining the process of man’s pursuit to exert his freedom through ages, rather than studying the dates, eras and epochs of kings and kingdoms (Achyutram, 1989: 13). But he was a fierce critic of the dialectic of Marx and its view of history. Two works of Kalluri on history are very important. These are titled ‘*Indian History and Culture*’ and ‘*A Short History of India*’ (Achyutram, 1989: 13).

Lavu Ankamma

Lavu Ankamma, from the village Nandipadu near Tenali, was one of Roy’s followers who were N.G. Ranga’s disciples earlier. He was instrumental in advocating and creating awareness of farmer’s problems in the Guntur district. He used to gather famers and speak to them regarding new methods and techniques, equipment, prices of seeds, land irrigation and so on. He was once considered as the ‘Man Friday’ to Prof. N.G. Ranga. He enrolled many young men into the ‘Ramineedu Farmers Centre’ (Ranga, 2000: 122-123). During the Second World War, there arose

an ideological difference between the two on the attitude of Congress and the means it should have chosen during the war. Ankamma was against the 'Elitist democracy' (the way upper caste politicians presented their personal agenda as that of the party) of the Congress. This included the leadership of Gandhi and the ideological stand of Congress regarding the strategy of India during the war. Subsequently, he got influenced by Roy's thought and joined the Andhra Radical Democratic Party and later became a secretary in the party. He was jocularly described as 'Ankamma is un-Kamma', stressing the fact that though he was a Kamma, he was subscribing to a rather unpopular ideology unlike fellow-Kammas (Ranga, 2000: 145-146).

Palagummi Padmaraju: (1915-1983)

Palagummi Padmaraju was a pioneering short story writer and a novelist who spoke extensively on the human condition. He was instrumental in getting wide recognition for the Telugu short story by depicting the human suffering in his work 'The Storm' (*GaliVaana*). Born in the West Godavari district of Andhra, he studied Chemistry and worked as a lecturer in the P.R. College, Kakinada. His contribution lay in the sympathetic depiction of the poor and the 'outcastes'. His portrayal of the humanist way of life reflected his affiliation to Roy's thinking. His humanist way was to propagate was to show how his central characters overcome obstacles in democratic India and its world of political parties (Innaiah, 2012: 7). He also wrote a novel on the anomalies in parliamentary democracy and political parties. He criticised the Congress for drifting into appeasing politics even in the Gandhian era, naming it as 'Second Ashoka's rule lasting a fortnight' (Padmaraju, 1969: 18-19). Known for his concern for women and the lower castes, Padmaraju's short stories centred mostly on providing a voice to the members of subaltern communities.

Ravipudi Venkatadri (1922-)

The modern link to the radical humanist movement in the coastal belt of Andhra (post-AGK period) is that of Ravipudi Venkatadri. Born in 1922, Ravipudi was influenced by TRC, and he recounts the way he became an atheist and a critic of religious texts after reading TRC's play *Sambuka Vadha*. He explains his transition from a believer to non-believer thus (2007):

“I used to be a hardcore devotee of Rama, before I was exposed to the play *Sambuka Vadha*, which my high school teacher Ramayya gave me to read. It was the turning point. The way religion prescribed certain rules, made them sacrosanct, and the way humanity was insulted in Ramayana as brought out by TRC made my bold boil. It was that time when I decided to start my literary campaign on the unacceptable aspects of Indian epics. TRC was the turning point in my intellectual makeup and remained a source of constant inspiration” (5).

Ravipudi’s contribution to the Royist thought and the way of life is completely based on his understanding of Roy, as the only thinker who saw the aspect of democracy as a process of inculcating Indian people with powers (Ravipudi 2012,21). His interpretation of Roy’s new humanism is summarized thus in his own words (2012):

“Though humanism is as ancient as the human race, it was Roy who interpreted it in a scientific and rational manner. New humanism does not intend to develop society merely with social reform. It focuses on the dated mental behaviour of humans, which was made a slave by forces like religion and faith. Man must come out of this mental makeup, to become a humanist. New humanism is this ideological revolution which inculcates free thought to humans, with the help of rational thought and science “(21).

Ravipudi followed this thought by first starting to write critiques of religious texts, then started as a village head to inculcate ideas of rational thought and became a part of institutions which spread ideas of freedom and rational thought. His first work as a literary critic of religious texts was on the Piety of Sita (Ramayana), which he wrote in poetic metres. The poem *Sita Pathivratyam* questioned the piety of Sita through logic (Ravipudi 2007, 5-6)⁶.

The basic work of Ravipudi has been to spread the 22 point programme of Roy like empowerment of villages, by being a Sarpanch of his village (Nagandla) for more than four decades, carrying out camps, inviting rational thinkers to inculcate positive attitude towards life and to let go religious blind faith (Ravipudi, 2012: 12-13). Ravipudi chose interpreting Roy’s works and contextualising the new humanism as his goal of life. His essays, works are predominantly on the wrong interpretations of philosophical concepts like rational thought, atheism, and new humanism. In the

process of interpreting the meaning of these ideas, Ravipudi wrote lot of critiques of Atheist interpreters like Gora and made it clear that philosophical concepts of radical humanism should be beyond any doubt. Ravipudi's work also branched out to institutional work. He was one of the earliest members of the Indian Rationalist Association (IRA).⁷ This role was instrumental in establishing the Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association in 1979, of which Ravipudi became the president. After this, Ravipudi also was the unanimous president of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations (FIRA) in 1997 which was an umbrella association integrating all working rationalist organisations in India. He also founded a Rational Humanist Centre in the village Inkollu near Chirala in 2001, to initiate talks, discussions and debates on Royism and rational thought (Satyanarayana, 2012: 16).

The main activity of Ravipudi was to introduce Roy to the Telugu readers, write on rational thought extensively, to publish those works and to fight against religious bigotry and superstitions. He was instrumental in conducting awareness camps and study camps regarding Roy's thought and contemporary relevance of it. For example, when religious events are organised with the help of government in Andhra, like the Somayaga (a ritual event on a large scale) or a Puskaram (an event occurring in 12 years for a river, a time for holy bath like Kumbhamela of the North), Ravipudi openly lodged a frontal attack on the state machinery for catering to superstition (Satyanarayana, 2012: 58). Ravipudi is of a strong opinion that all arts be it cinema, literature, or dance, etc., should have a social commitment, they are meant not to thrill people but to expose injustices and inequalities perpetuated in the name of religion. So, all religious literature and art is according to him a big hindrance to the development of man, and they act as brakes on the free flow of human thought and rational thinking. Ravipudi (2007) says

"I agree arts give joy and entertain the consumers of it, but they are a big hindrance to the modern era of science and a big drawback to rational thought. Arts cast a spell on humanity and take them far away from the true philosophy of human race and development" (Ravipudi, 2007: 11).

This is the reason for Ravipudi to start his campaign fighting against the wrong

Interpretations and criticism of concepts like rationalism, atheism, and radical humanism. The year 1978 saw him raise a strong objection to the philosophy of Gora in a comprehensive work, explaining the shortcomings of Gora's philosophy. The book *Nastikatvam-Nastitatvam* (the concept of atheism and the philosophy of atheism) was a point-by-point critique of Gora's seminal work, '*Positive Atheism*'.

Ravipudi mentions the primary reason for critique of Gora thus (2007):

"I met Gora for the first time in 1953 at an All-Philosophers Conference in a village Veldurthi in Guntur district. His main objection was that there was no need to have a scientific study or careful analysis of science or knowledge of it. I felt after reading his works later that he did not interpret atheism in a true philosopher's manner. He seems to be oblivious of concepts like science, rational thought, and the nature of man. The main point that the entire universe is imaginary (not real) made me appalled at the entire argument of an idea standing on a baseless philosophy. I felt I should retort in a similar manner. Hence my book on Gora's atheism and its reality" (Ravipudi, 2007: 25).

One of the chief literary contributions of Ravipudi was to revisit the history of Andhra social reform era. The general belief that Kandukuri Veeresalingam was the father of social reform in Andhra was contested by Ravipudi by presenting the forgotten personalities of Andhra like Swamineni Muddunarasimham and Mamidi Venkayya, as the people who primarily started the social reform movement ideologically, through their work. This was a revelation in the world of Telugu literature and history (Ravipudi, 2007: 88-93). He had a rebellious attitude against the Vedic customs and festivals in his village. He organised open discussions on the *Puranas* and the heroes of those texts. He explained the ideal mode of life to be adopted by an individual. His ardent follower, Prafulla Chandra puts Ravipudi's understanding and philosophy as follows

"Ravipudi master's rational thought is strongly influenced by his critique and rejection of religious institutions and the ill effects they bring on humanity. Master wants individuals to follow their own rational thought by developing a questioning ability, questioning the injustice, the surroundings and their knowledge helps an individual to know what is in favour of his development and what is not. Science and technology should become the basis for this human freedom" (Ravipudi, 2007: 89-92).

According to Innaiah, a radical humanist educationist, it was Ravipudi who succeeded as a worthy heir to the programme of rational and humanist thought. He took it forward by adding to it the philosophy of M.N. Roy and proved practically the efficacy of Roy's thought in independent India (Innaiah, 2012: 37-38). Innaiah says that Ravipudi used the opportunity to contest in the 1946 provincial elections, to spread Roy's thought while campaigning as an independent candidate. Ravipudi fought a lifelong battle against blind faith in religion, its allies like astrology, etc., and the reality about communist ideology being a restriction on the freedom of individual. Ravipudi did everything in the way of arranging meetings, camps, and orientation programmes in his constituency of Bapatla-Ongole (erstwhile Guntur district).

Ravipudi also dealt with the growing communist influence in the coastal belt. In his memoirs, M.V. Ramamurthy, a member of Roy's party, explains how 'under the garb of fielding candidates for the 1946 general elections, the communists fielded Makineni Basavapunniah' in Guntur as he was a Kamma and it appealed to the maximum population of Guntur belt, which consisted of a majority of Kamma population. Ravipudi rose above any caste affiliations and stood for Royist ideas of appealing to the people on the basis of rational thought even during elections. This polarisation by the political parties was a main contentious issue which made Roy disband his party later in 1948 (Ramamurthy, M.V., 2001: 45-46). Both Ravipudi and A.G.K. worked extensively to expose the reality of Marxism to the common people. The Marxist party, in their opinion, was perpetuating class domination in the name of being a people's party. His scientific temper and argumentative power were the main features of Ravipudi's public career. These same qualities aided him in his campaign against the communists.

The death of A.G.K. in 1966 was a huge blow to the supporters of Royism, and it adversely impacted the dissemination of Roy's thought in Andhra (Innaiah, 2012: 45). It was left to people like Ravipudi to perpetuate Roy's ideas through camps, debates, discussions and seminars and literature. Ravipudi's efforts made him the 'Voice of Roy's ideology in Andhra'. With the death of Gora in 1975 (while giving a public lecture), prominent intellectual debates surrounding revolutionary thought came to an end in Andhra. The organisations which continued to support these two streams

of thought continued their work in isolation. The absence of leaders like Roy, Gora, or TRC, made the intellectual debates started by them pass into oblivion. The democratic state, with its paraphernalia of political parties, assimilated the whole gamut of social reform within its activities, through reservations and electoral politics. This in turn created a vacuum. Intellectual debates have been on the decline in India. Party system in India has been reduced to mudslinging between political parties, thus proving the predictions of Roy and Gora. But still the followers of Roy and Gora continue to organise programmes to keep their ideas alive.

The Influence of Roy on the Telugu World of Letters: Understanding the Nature of Roy's Influence on Telugu Literary Field

The literary impact of Roy and his thoughts, his idea of individual freedom can be explained with respect to the nature of influence Roy and his thought exerted in the intellectual atmosphere of this region. It is a fact that the literature of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (TRC) had already initiated the rational thought among modern age educated non-Brahmin classes in particular and educated class in general. The subversion of texts, the celebration of the subaltern and the importance given to an egalitarian life based on questioning injustice and upholding individual freedom of TRC made a lot of members of the Telugu intelligentsia to take forward his views by producing literature which gave importance to rational thought, with the common man being the hero. The mythological theme got a deep focus by writers like Narla Venkateswara Rao, who was inspired to produce similar plays subverting the *Ramayana* and the Puranas like TMC.⁸ Broadly the reflection of Roy and his thought in the Telugu literature can be classified into two categories.

1. Roy followers like A.G.K who produced literature in the non-fictional category. Apart from carrying out public talks, arranging discourses and touring countries spreading Roy's thought, A.G.K produced works like '*Nalo Nenu*' which portrays his interactions with Roy and in which he delineates the path to radical democratic state as visualised by Roy. This will be discussed in a later section in this chapter.

2. Second category, to be discussed first, belongs to literary figures like Gopichand and Padmaraju who were directly influenced by Roy and his rational thought. These

people reflected the ideas of freedom of individual, a sense of rebelling against the societal norms which made the human subservient to the dominant forces. The main themes in the works of these writers were a critique of religion and critical commentary on the prevailing political manipulation of democratic ideas. The prime medium chosen by these authors was the short story and the novel genre, where a lot of the early 20th century dilemmas about independent India were discussed and the primacy of individual choice and the right method of choosing governance were discussed.

It is a well-documented fact that G.V.Krishna Rao's (GVK) contribution as a novelist and a playwright also reflected rational thought. But the influence of Roy is seen in the espousal of new humanism philosophy in novels like *KeeluBommalu* (The puppets) (Innaiah, 2012: 7). GVK's significance as the prime mover of the Royist idea of freedom and progress also made him create a theory of analysing Telugu Kavyas (Poetic works) from a rational point of view and not from a communist perspective of aesthetics(Innaiah, 2012:7). N. Innaiah who worked extensively for Roy's thought and its dissemination in Andhra says (2012):

“Mr. Palagummi Padmaraju and Mr. G.V. Krishna Rao emerged as powerful writers in support of M.N.Roy and humanism. G.V. Krishna Rao emerged as theoretical writer of Roy's philosophy” (Innaiah, 2012: 7).

The works signifying the 'Royist' ethics towards 'freedom of man' will be analysed here. In this section I take some pivotal works, both novels and stories, to illustrate how their authors participated in the party or movement of Roy have contributed to it. These people, kindled by the philosophy of New Humanism, penned their vision in the form of literature. The works of Tripuraneni Gopichand, Palagummi Padmaraju will be analysed in the context of Roy's influence on their works at different stages of their lives.

Tripuraneni Gopichand

Gopichand, the son of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, was influenced by western writers like Edmond Burke, Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx, Jean Paul Sartre,

and others (Chalasani, 2009: 1-3). He introduced these thinkers to the Telugu world, by writing and publishing compact biographies. He was a keen follower of his father's fierce non-Brahmin movement in his writings. Like his father he attempted a rational critique of Hindu texts like the *Puranas* and the two epics of India, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The first long essay that Gopichand published was an essay on *Sambuka Vadha* his college days⁹. The influence of rational thought and analysing power is clearly seen in this essay. Gopichand says (1928):

“A day will come when people will realise the quality of Rama's rule, which consisted of the killing of a king practising asceticism and craving to attain the supreme knowledge of self. May they decide whether the killing of such a harmless individual is just or unjust! Ye Brahmin folks! Observe the changing world; if you think you dominate this society singularly, with your superiority complex, you will one day be engulfed by the society” (Gopichand, 1928: 46).

The Roy influence on Gopichand and his works can be traced roughly to a decade. from the first visit of Roy in 1937 and his launching of 'Radical Democratic Party' in 1939, to the dissolving of the Party and converting it to new humanism movement in 1948. The short stories and novels examined here signify Gopichand's change from being a rational thinker to a thinker who turned into a believer in God , more precisely into the thought of Sri Aurobindo (Ummethula, 2009: 4). The timeline of short stories discussed here ranges from 1939 to 1956 and that of novels ranges from 1947(the last phase of Gopichand as a Royist) to 1963(novels *Yamapasam* and the semi-autobiographical *Chikatigadulu* published in 1962) a year after his death, which was the period in which he turned an ardent believer in Aurobindo's super mind and transcending any human feelings and becoming a capable individual to do anything to uplift the soul (Gopichand, 2009: 41).

Gopichand's role as a short story writer gave him an opportunity to portray the conflict between humanism and other ideologies. His close associate, Royist intellectual and writer, Palagummi Padmaraju wrote an obituary on Gopichand. He says, “Gopichand did not write stories as any other short story writer, but as a philosopher” (Padmaraju, 1962: 105-106). His short story, 'What about this Country?' (*E Deshaniki Emayyettu*), is seen by his contemporaries as reflecting the various political positions held by Gopichand. Through his writings Gopichand attempted to

synthesize realism and spiritualism. He subscribed to Aurobindo's notion that realizing the supreme soul is in one's own self, it is the highest goal of man (Gopichand, 1957:162-174).

The plot of the story is a prison, where freedom fighters belonging to different ideologies like Gandhism, communism, socialism and Roy's radical humanism are serving their term (Gopichand, 1939: 91). The story is told in the format of a personal narration by a character named Rama Rao, who is Gopichand himself. According to Padmaraju, Rama Rao is someone who wants to be free of all prisons and be a free individual, in the free world (Padmaraju, 1962: 105-106). In this story, a Gandhian, who also happens to be the supporter of Indian National Congress, is arrested, and imprisoned for staging a Satyagraha? While serving his term he spins the Charkha and keeps on harping on the supremacy of his method and the relevance of the Congress Party. He talks in a patronising way to the socialist, Royist, and more interestingly a Kisan Sabha member (Gopichand, 1939: 94-98). He says, 'we just allowed you Socialists in the Party, so that you will develop into a Congress worker.' Through this novel, Gopichand suggests that the concepts 'Congress Socialist Party' and 'Congress Socialism' are 'ideologically inept, politically a mistake, strategically a blunder', as the Congress turned out to be an 'elite party of in-fighting' (Gopichand, 1939: 93). The Gandhian prisoner in Gopichand's story accuses the Royists of constantly changing their party affiliations and the communists are accused of having a power-hungry mentality (Gopichand, 1939: 95). The conclusion of the story suggests that according to the author, everyone is using power-mongering rhetoric (Gopichand, 1939: 97-98). The twist is heightened when Rama Rao meets a Hindu Maha Sabha inmate, who warns him that 'Congress and other Parties are going to sell the Hindu nation to Muslims. So, beware of the Party Politics of all those'. As Rama Rao comes to the gate of the prison, another man, dressed in traditional Andhra attire, asks him 'what about our ideology?' Perplexed by this, Rama Rao asks what? (Gopichand, 1939: 96-98), and then says, 'Separate Andhra state'. The timing of the story forms an important link, as it was published in 1939. The year marks just two years of Roy's first visit to Andhra in 1937, and the stage of his party formation. The story clearly symbolizes Gopichand's interest in Roy's decision to launch a political party and the need for a rational political alternative to govern the prospective independent India. The extent of influence of Roy's philosophy and Gopichand's processing of it via

other dominating ideologies of politics is a case in point here. Gopichand visualised ideologies of political parties as ‘divisive and detrimental to individual freedom.’ He saw the party system as replica of the Indian caste-system replete with hierarchies aimed at dividing people.

In another remarkable story, *Lopali Manishi* (The Inner Being), Gopichand narrates in first person the predicament of a practising lawyer in a world full of economic inequalities and sufferings (Gopichand, 1943: 125-129). He describes a day when the lawyer is going to attend his case. At the doorstep of the court, he sees a beggar asking for justice because of the hunger she is suffering from. The lawyer puts his hand in his pocket and finds thousand rupees, but he remembers his family and withdraws his hand. The story can be described as a psychological portrayal of a modern day individual, hesitating to help others. He is stifled by his own personal and societal pressure of getting into a ‘respectable profession’. The story ends with the lawyer stating, “my inner being died when I confronted the reality of this world” (Gopichand, 1943: 129).

Gopichand’s novels are a testament to his journey through different ideological spectrums including rationalism, radical humanism, and atheism, which he called spiritualism. The novel titled *Asamarthuni Jeeva Yatra* (The life journey of an Incompetent Man) is regarded as his magnum opus. This work is a paean to new humanism, in which the diminishing human values are given a magical realism twist through the narrative by Gopichand as one of the Gopichand scholars put it. It narrates the idle life of one Sivarama Rao, a middle class man without any achievements, but who finds fault with everyone in his life and hides his incompetence in dealing with the world, by becoming a loud man, wanting to ‘assert’ himself in this world (Suramouli, 1962: 262-263). This novel, written in the late 1940s, depicts Gopichand’s dilemma about various political choices he made, including the new humanism of Roy. The protagonist commits suicide in the end, disappointed with himself and his life as an incompetent man. In another political novel named *Yama Pasam* (The Clutch of Death), Gopichand describes the life of a petty clerk in the State Secretariat. The whole network of corruption in the administration of justice is presented through his indirect reference to the failure of the national movement for political independence. He criticises the methods employed by the freedom fighters.

Gopichand's characters suffer from a lack of freedom (Gopichand, 1961: 14-18). But the Royist philosophy also leads him to depict strong characters in a non-judgemental way who rises above the surroundings. Critics of Gopichand term his later novels like 'Will of Pandit Parameswara Sastry', 'The Clutch of Death', and so on, as attempts to arrive at a theory. It is interesting that Gopichand uses the motif of the 'city' as the playground of competing interests and forces which subject man to manipulation. From the above analysis it seems that Gopichand respected Roy and his vision as an idea, but, at a philosophical level, he was a disturbed soul who was struggling to formulate his own ideology.

Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy (A.G.K)

After Abburi Ramakrishna Rao (Abburi), AGK was the prime mover of the radical humanist movement in the coastal belt of Andhra, who created a base for it in the Godavari belt. M.N.Roy, while touring the coastal belt, felt that the field was ripe with educated people participating in movements like the non-cooperation and were receptive to social reform more than any other areas in the Telugu heartland (A.G.K, 1967: 18-20). In one of his letters to Abburi, he mentions the need for the party to spread in various coastal districts, the most important ones being Guntur and Visakhapatnam, the two prime centres of learning with their own educational institutions (Roy, 1937: 37). Avula Gopalakrishna Murthy (A.G.K.)'s primary role, as mentioned in this chapter above, included starting magazines, namely '*Radical*', '*Radical Humanist*' and '*Sameeksha*' which reflected on Royism. His columns in radical humanist weeklies like *Sameeksha* commented on the happenings in the nation in a rationalist spirit with a humanist turn. A.G.K's take on the parliamentary discussions of the Nehru era about the foreign policy and his detailed analysis of the process of governance of Andhra were popular (A.G.K. 1967: 34-35). Avula Sambasiva Rao, the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Andhra (a participant in the radical humanist movement), opined that the movement was strengthened by A.G.K., who filled up the gap left by Kandukuri Veeresalingam and Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary (Sambasiva Rao, 1967: 56-57).

AGK's main strategy was to arrange talks and seminars to analyse the contemporary political scene, while combining the strands of rationalism and Royism (Sambasiva Rao, 1967: 57). A.G.K was a sympathiser of Gora, the famous atheist. In spite of coming from the influential Kamma caste, A.G.K strived to bring a revolution to remove the caste differences (Ramachandraiah, 1967: 42-43). It is alleged that the non-Brahmin movement of Justice Party and the Kamma ideologues stopped with the development of their own caste and did not extend their efforts to the lower castes below. It was in this situation that A.G.K. tried to make a difference to the lives of the lower castes and thus proved him to be a worthy heir to Tripuraneni (Ramachandraiah, 1967: 57). Ravipudi, the famous follower of Roy, claimed that A.G.K was directly influenced by Tripuraneni regarding the redundancy of Hindu Brahminical symbols and texts. He was a firm believer in the potential of science and technology (Ravipudi, 2014: 12). A.G.K was functioning in an era where leaders like Radhakrishnan and Gopichand were trying to combine both spiritualism and rationalism. His social reform efforts must be seen in this context. His idea of reforms was very different from that of other reformers who advocated widow remarriages, inter-caste marriages and inter-caste dining. His main activity was to initiate a culture of secular marriages of consenting men and women from different communities who faced the wrath of their elders (Innaih, 2012: 34). He started and encouraged the practice of a priest less marriage, sometimes loosely called '*Svakula Pourohityam*' and thus went beyond Tripuraneni who started the practice of 'Kamma Brahmins', conducting marriages with priests from their own community.

His programme as a humanist and rationalist stretched to conducting meetings on the Godmen and other religious figures who, in his opinion, tried to mislead people. A G K was against the *diktat* of humanists also. He was particularly against the views of humanists who claimed that "only inter-caste marriages can remove caste system." (Achyutram, 1988: 7). This view, according to A.G.K, was against the main tenet of radical humanism, which gave maximum importance to the freedom of individuals to make choices, free of external imposition. He brought out a resolution regarding the same at the conference of All India Rationalists Association held in Madras in 1958 (Achyutram, 1988: 6-7). A. G. K. spent his final years in Tenali where he stayed until he died in 1967. While in Tenali, he openly criticised the Gandhian movement and Gandhi's methods. He believed Gandhian methods were dictatorial either directly or indirectly (Achyutram, 1989: 7-8). This dictatorial method

was against the tenets of radical humanism. A. G. K.'s most important contribution was in mentoring a generation of Royists in and around Tenali. Tenali functioned as the prime centre for all progressive movements, primarily due to the association that Tripuraneni had with Tenali.

In a letter that A. G. K. wrote to a Royist just a week before he breathed his last, he agreed to campaign for a radical democrat's candidature in the upcoming elections because this candidate believed in a party-less democracy (M.V. Ramamurthy, 1967: 84-85). According to Ravipudi and M.V. Ramamurthy (a close associate of A. G. K.) his death in September of 1967 was the beginning of an end of intellectual discussions on the significance of radical humanist ideology in the coastal belt (Ramamurthy, 1967: 85; Ravipudi, 2014: 65).

End-notes

1. A culture of staging the plays by forging the poetic, contemporary and viable dramatic forms. Chief aspect was to introduce more social themes with a religious study of folk attitudes, speech forms and rural theatrical forms.
2. Avula Gopalakrishnamurthy (AGK) strongly felt that Gopichand's penchant for writing for cinema made his rational thought go haywire. AGK says that Gopichand was not able to fit into the cinema conundrum and slowly drifted towards theistic ideas and started getting attracted to Aurobindo and his philosophy above any other "ism" (AGK, 2014: 43). But another close Royist, P.V. Subba Rao says that the truth about Gopichand leaving Radical Democratic Party and later the movement itself was that it was due to the local leadership of Radical humanist movement who were fighting for positions of superiority and recognition and not for the ideal of upholding man's freedom and his role in democracy. The absence of clarity within the leadership made him disillusioned. The change took place in early 1950s, a time period when Gopichand experienced all philosophies including his father's rationalism, Roy's radical humanism and his own avowed atheism (Subba Rao, 2014: 82).
3. This criticism came mainly from Avula Gopalakrishnamurthy and also from Gopichand's other Royists like Narahari, but his literary friends like Palagummi Padmaraju were sympathetic towards him (Subba Rao 2014,80).
4. Sivarama Reddy, born into a farming household, worked more for rural development, using efficient agricultural methods of irrigation, etc. His programme was to concentrate on rural employment, by growing alternate crops like wheat instead of rice, poultry farming etc. (Reddy, 1967: 70-71).
5. Jagannadham was involved in revealing a plagiarism fraud of an Ascetic of the Ramakrishna Mission who under the name of translation of the biography of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa from English to Telugu was awarded prize money of Rs

10,000 by National Academy, Delhi. Jasthi Jagannatham took this to press and made the Academy to withdraw the prize money wrongly awarded to a literary fraud.

6. The logic was based on the text of Ramayana itself which said Sita spent 13 years of exile with Sri Rama, then was abducted for a year by Ravana and then on the return she became a pregnant. The poem was Ravipudi's take on the piety expected by Indian epics for women and the trials they faced due to such prescribed texts.
7. Indian Rationalist Association (IRA) was established in 1949, by the Dravidian movement torchbearers like C.N. Annadurai, with R.P. Paranjape as the president, also actively participated by the chief Dravidian ideologue, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker.
8. Narla produced two plays (satires) on the Ramayana, namely *Jabali* (the atheist sage in Ramayana) and *Sita Josyam* (the prophecy of Sita warning Rama of dire consequences if he killed the original inhabitants of forests). Both the plays focus on the aspect of encroaching of nature by man, with the help of foreign class. Narla wrote detailed prefaces to these plays like TRC explaining his research and portrays the plot of these plays as a document of the dominant and the submissive traits of human species. Some researchers like T. Prabhakara Rao who worked on Telugu mythological plays and their rationalistic critique, opine that Narla's viewpoint was more Marxist than reflecting Roy's philosophy. Narla's another play *Narakamlo Harischandrudu* (King Harishchandra in Hell) also portrays the clan of Rishis (sages of the forests) as the main culprits in perpetuating violence and encouraging divisions among men.
9. A popular episode from the Ramayana of Uttara Kanda, where a Sudra king Sambuka is killed by Rama at the behest of the priestly class of Ayodhya. This was allegedly done to hold the class structure of domination intact.

Chapter 6

The Atheism of Gora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao)

The chapter discusses the role of Gora as an intellectual thinker, who initiated a public debate about atheism and reinterpreted the concept of atheism, propounded the concept of positive atheism. Also, the chapter discusses the ideological debates he had with his prime opponents, the followers of M.N. Roy.

Gora: The Intellectual Development

Gora's family belonged to the Guntur area. He belonged to the Niyogi Brahmin sect, which was traditionally a scholarly caste. Many poets and ministers of kings in the 14th, 15th and 16th century came from this sect of Brahmins. As Frykenburg mentions in his authoritative work on the Guntur district, Gora's forefathers were village accountants who were wealthy and had a stature in the village (Frykenberg, 1967:31-32).

Later Gora's grandfather settled in Vizianagaram, the northernmost part of Andhra region. Gora's father Venkata Subba Rao took to western education but was a pious Brahmin who observed every ritual that a Brahmin of his time was supposed to perform and followed every custom. Venkata Subba Rao himself settled as a Government Forest Officer in Vijayanagaram and later was transferred to Parlakimidi, Orissa, as an officer in the Court of Wards. It was here that Gora was born in November 1902.

To begin with Gora was a pious Brahmin too, who followed every tenet of a practising Brahmin till he completed his education. Till he was 20 years old, his father Venkata Subba Rao got transferred to various places and finally settled in Kakinada (Viswanadham, 1993: 15-17). The location proved to be crucial for Gora, as it was the place of the Brahma Samaj established by the social reformer, Raghupathi Venkataratnam Naidu. The respected academician was a pioneer in denouncing idol worship and constructing the Brahma Samaj building in Kakinada, whose very architecture depicted the styles of Hindu, Muslim, Christian architectures.

Gora studied at the high school in Kakinada. The period was around 1914-15, when Mahatma Gandhi was about to return to India from South Africa. The young Gora keenly followed the major events of his era and became a sympathizer of the national movement.

Gora took Botany as his main subject in college and graduated from the Kakinada College. Gora married Saraswathi of Vizianagaram in 1922, the daughter of a close friend of Gora's father.

Gora went to Madras to pursue his B.A. Honors with Botany as the main subject. He graduated in 1925. Being in the good books of Professor Parthasarathi Iyengar, Gora secured a lecturer's job in Madurai's American Mission College. The Madurai stint made him an atheist. The process started with a chance event. The house that Gora was staying in was believed to be haunted by ghosts. Locals warned him against moving to that house, but he did not listen to them and started staying there. As nothing untoward happened, Gora felt vindicated and his students and the people in Madurai started noticing him (Viswanadham, 2016: 19).

Madurai College brought out the teacher in Gora. He also started reading about Christianity. The college authorities, impressed by him, offered a PhD seat on the condition that he converted to Christianity. Gora resisted the offer and shifted to Coimbatore in 1926, where he took up a government job and became a successful Cotton Crop research assistant. But he continued to read about Christianity and started comparing it with Hinduism (Saraswathi Gora, 2014: 35-39).

He also read the Vedas, commentaries on the Vedas, various tenets of the Vedanta, the Bible, and the Quran while in Coimbatore and then formed an opinion about the redundancy of religion and its allied aspects. He started believing in humanity and human endeavours, more than in God.

Soon he started feeling restless and came to see the government job as an impediment to his free-flowing mind. As he came to value freedom from external or internal restraints, he resigned his job in 1927 much to the disappointment of his father

and his in-laws. But he persisted in his efforts and returned to Kakinada (Viswanadham, 2016: 25).

Gora's teacher, Prof. Parthasarathi, sent him a letter asking him to join the Ananda College in Colombo, Sri Lanka, as a lecturer in Biology (Viswanadham, 1980: 29-31). This stint at Colombo gave Gora an opportunity to study Buddhism, as the college was run by Buddhist missionaries. Gora and his wife stayed in a Muslim household in Colombo as tenants. Hence, he had an opportunity to learn about Islam also.

All these academic pursuits as a lecturer helped Gora to form a critical view of religion and its politicisation. He developed an aversion to all outward symbols and started looking into the human predicament. The things which stop human progress were attracting his attention slowly. His study of religions led him to critically analyse the basic tenets of religious faith and observe the tenets like 'rebirth' in Hinduism and the absence of it in other faiths (Lindley, 2009: 11).

Gora started experimenting with rational thought in Colombo, during a lunar eclipse. He, along with his wife Saraswathi, went on a stroll in his college park, during the time of lunar eclipse, much to the amusement of the Hindus in Colombo. He displayed a commitment to logical thinking and, through this demonstration; helped people around him get over the irrational fear of eclipse. It was in Colombo that his activism began.

Gora's Colombo stint was unique in another respect, namely his letting go of prejudices regarding people's dietary habits and their way of life. Gora and his wife Saraswathi were invited to many get-togethers where meat was served. To let go of his inhibitions Gora ate meat for the first time in his life, along with his wife. This gesture, according to him, was not to prove a point or meet a challenge, but to inculcate a tolerant attitude to the food habits of other people (Viswanadham, 2016: 31)¹. This experiment helped Gora in his later endeavours in Andhra, while working with the backward classes whose food habits were very different from the upper castes.

Developments before the Atheist Centre

Being one of the few postgraduates in Biology from Andhra, Gora was invited to the college at his native Kakinada to teach Biology in 1928. The Andhra University was established in 1927 and started its first Botany courses in 1928 at the Kakinada College. Gora worked as a lecturer there, and soon became the Head of the Botany Department in 1929 (Viswanadham, 1980: 41-43).

During his stint at Kakinada College, Gora started experimenting with the implications of rationalism by entering the 'Harijan' localities in Kakinada and starting night schools for their community. Gora's 'educational' activities included encouraging people to read newspaper, explaining to them the irrationality of observing untouchability by dismissing the false notion of fate and Karma.

While Gora was working to bring about social change in Kakinada, the wave of nationalism took him by force and the personality of Mahatma Gandhi created a great influence on him. The method of non-violence as a potent weapon of resistance attracted Gora, and he actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930.

Due to his newly developed nationalist outlook, Gora was 'relieved' from the Kakinada College. Another reason for Gora coming out of the College was his efforts to inculcate atheistic thought among the students, which did not go well with the college management. The management asked him to change his views, but Gora persisted and was relieved from the services with a three-month notice. Gora then tried running a Tutorial College in 1933, before joining the Hindu College at Machilipatnam (Viswanadham, 1980: 61) as a lecturer in 1934 – a job he got through the good offices of the then Vice Chancellor of Andhra University, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Sunanda, 2000: 62).

Gora started giving public speeches, with the help of his students, at various places including cities like Visakhapatnam. His first speech on his version of 'Atheism' was at the Hindu library at Visakhapatnam in 1935, where he spoke at length about religion and how a person can lead a decent life without the need of a God.

God is an idea created by man and is a symbol of being subservient to an external force, which does not have any validation. You do not need a tool like God to be moral and live in a free state. Society can only be free if thoughts of humans are free. It is possible by belief in the hidden strength of man himself (Viswanadham, 2016: 30).

These speeches were the turning point in his intellectual life, as it was the first time he took up questions like the existence of God, how religion nullifies human intellect, and what are the ways to overcome the lure of the idea of God and its allied aspects.

Gora followed it up with several speeches on theism and its redundancy. In a way he was acclimatising people in the coastal belt of Andhra to his version of atheism. Slowly he started making inroads into the Krishna district and gave his first talk on atheism at a place called Kankipadu. The year was 1938 and the place was significant as the local Kamma educationists like Surapaneni Sobhana Rao, a Sanskrit scholar, supported his activities and encouraged him a lot. Gora gave speeches at many other places in Krishna district, with him cycling along with his students. His main objective was to persuade people to eschew blind faith in God and to inculcate in them a feeling of self-confidence and will power to develop one's own efforts (Viswanadham, 1980: 80-82).

Gora's popularity among the students and his tours to various places in and around Machilipatnam made the College management rethink about his position as lecturer. When in mid-1938, the students started a boycott seeking upgrade of hostel facilities, the college management thought that it was due to the speeches and popularity of Gora that students had become so bold and rebellious. When the students came to know that a show cause notice was being issued to Gora, they requested the college committee to retain him in the service. But Gora felt that continuing in an institution with restrictions on his activities was an impediment to his broader goal of spreading atheistic thought among people, and also a restriction on his freedom as an academician. So before the college served him the notice (which it withdrew before it was handed over to him), Gora submitted his resignation in mid-1940. This marked the end of Gora's academic career and the beginning of his career as an intellectual

who went on to influence his region through the idea of atheism (Lindley, 2009: 15).

The Development of Gora's Atheism and His Shift to Vijayawada

Gora's thinking was a product of three streams of movements, which were in vogue in his time. These were the national freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi, the rational movement, which was started by Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudary, and the non-Brahmin movement in Andhra. Though Gora was open to these movements, he did not want to participate in politics (Lavanam, 2014:23). Instead, he wanted to continue with his reformist social work.

When Gora was touring a suburban area of Vijayawada, he was invited by the local Congressmen to the village named Mudunuru, where the 'untouchables' were in large numbers. This place became the ground for his atheism and rationalism implemented into reality. Gora started a night school for the elders in the village, by training young volunteers in the village, to teach people read and write. The lessons continued, with him teaching them Geography, Social Sciences, Botany and other allied sciences. Gora also initiated the first inter dining programme as a part of his atheistic experiment in Mudunuru. He invited the 'Harijans' and the people of other castes for a common meal. The upper castes in the village were not happy, but Gora openly declared that he did not believe in untouchability (Viswanadham, 2016: 80).

It is pertinent to note here that the Gandhian ideal of making villages self-sufficient was at the back of Gora's thought. He also believed in practising what he preached. Uniting people on the basis of their common identity as humans was Gora's chief goal, and for this he set an example through his experiments in the village of Mudunuru.

Also, it is interesting to note that Gora took up an activity that Veeresalingam had started, inter caste marriages. In December 1941 Gora had an inter caste marriage performed in the presence of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, the precursor to Gora in rational thought (Viswanadham, 1980: 130).

All these experiments led him to think of establishing an organisation which focussed on the propagation of atheism and on bringing about social change through atheism. Thus he started the famous Atheist Centre in 1942.

Many of his students who were part of his night schools helped Gora use two and a half acres of land on the banks of a stream in Mudunuru, where he constructed a hermitage like 'Atheist Centre' which became his home and propagation centre for his idea of atheism.

Gora also decided to write down his thoughts in a systematic form and distribute it among the people in his village and in other parts of Andhra. This was when Gora wrote his seminal work "Atheism", which systematically presents his thoughts, and his innovative meaning of atheism. The book 'Atheism' logically and philosophically delineates Gora's thoughts on atheism and its aspects. The book forms the seminal work of Gora which gave rise to his philosophy of atheism. The book delineates the concept of atheism according to Gora, who deduces the prime role of individual through the principle of morality and rational thought of an individual. Gora gives hypotheses of his vision of politics, economics, technology and social ethics. The work is based on Gora's understanding of political and religious milieu after he started his atheist centre (Gora, 1999: 1-2).

Gandhism and Gora's Atheism

Mr. Lavanam, Gora's son, says that Gora followed the path of truth force, or Satyagraha, preached by Gandhi, to win over the enemies (Lavanam, 2014: 52). Villages were important for Gora as he believed in disseminating and implementing his ideas in villages. Villages were the first step in his plan for further social work. Gora also aimed at teaching self reliance to the villagers. But he believed that if they were to become truly self-reliant, they had to see the redundancy of the concept of God and acquire the confidence that they as a community could fight for their own development. Gora aimed at creating a self-sufficient village as visualised by Gandhi, but one without any religious symbols or faith. Another influence on Gora was that of Gandhi's chief disciple, Vinoba Bhave, who persuaded the rich to part ways with their lands and gives them to the landless poor so that the country's agriculture would

develop, and the problem of rural poverty would be solved. Gora accompanied Vinoba on his tours in Andhra (Gora, 1999: 45).

Gora's Atheism Explained

Having faith in one's own abilities to develop oneself, without seeking help from any external forces, is what Gora calls atheism. Freedom is the chief component of this atheism. According to Gora religion gives a sense of dependency and submission. Gora did not want any control from outside over the inner urge of an individual to develop. As said earlier, Gora's work 'Atheism' created a lot of waves in Krishna, Guntur, and Godavari districts. Gora defined atheism as the state of being free from any external forces, be it God or any other entity. In this sense Gora modified the usual meaning of atheism as mere disbelief in God which has a negative connotation (Gora, 1941: 135-137). Gora called his atheism as Positive Atheism, because of its positive aspect of being free to do anything for one's own development. Gora's Atheism combined the aspects of man gaining a hold over the forces of the world and declaring freedom from those forces. This freedom and its expression meant true atheism for Gora. In short, atheism is the total freedom of man, says Gora. He regarded theism as a type of mental slavery. "Man either surrenders to the forces of the world or asserts himself upon the surroundings and moulds those to shape his character" (Gora, 1972: 7). This assertion of freedom is the chief tenet of atheism, according to Gora. Surrender to the surroundings or to the external forces is slavery to him. This slavish surrender might be to the entity of God, or it might be to other forces like the State, or a person.

Gora's critics asked in what way his version of atheism was different from the atheism of ancient age. Gora answered this question by invoking the Charvaka School, which opposed rituals, sacrifices and offerings to God as nothing more than a mere creation of the priestly class (Gora, 1982: 45). Gora's main argument about the Charvaka School was that it criticised only the idea of soul and not the idea of God. This Gora felt was because of the Vedantic idea of the supreme soul, the *Brahman*, being more than the popular idea of God. Because of the transcendent *Brahman*, human birth and rebirth were supposedly determined by Karma. Gora identifies the teaching of the Charvaka School that there is no other world and everyone should be free to do whatever one is capable of in his capacity. Extending this argument of the

Charvaka School, Gora says that since man is free to do anything, he should assert himself against the forces which stop him from doing what he needs to do to preserve his freedom and individuality (Gokhale, 2015: 131).

Gora starts from the premise that man is born as a free and responsible being. To exert himself on the surroundings and to find out the truth, man should know what the truth about the world is. This thirst for truth makes him search for morality. Morality springs from dealing with fellowmen for securing their widest cooperation for the fulfilment of one's desires. This morality needs honesty and tolerance. If man considers his well being as the same of the society, this gives his morality a tinge of honesty, which in turn contributes to work in co operation with fellow beings and which again leads to common good of the large strata (Gora, 1972: 45-47). The best method of ensuring this morality in a democratic era is appreciation of moral values of honesty by every individual, which is best manifested in Gandhi's concept of self discipline and constructive programme. To be successful in this era, morality should only be from individual thought and not from external forces like religion (Gora, 1972: 51).

This aspect of self discipline always keeps a man moral in the larger interest of society and its good. This morality in turn leads him to happiness. With his moral attitude, he throws out old customs and ideas and brings in new ones. The tool with which man creates new ideas and develops his surroundings is rationality. The human faculty of intelligence is central in Gora's atheism. It is with intelligence that man develops the sense of right and wrong and changes himself. This is Gora's evolutionary theory of rational being (Gora, 1972: 6-7). Gora scholars have found this idea similar to Jean Paul Sartre's notion of free will. Free will is only possible when men are rational and believe in their own ability to distinguish what is good for them from what is not (Lindley, 2009: 104). Rationality comes from man's quest for freedom, which leads him to examine the world he is living in, to verify each circumstance which presents itself to him, and to verify the truth of things which affect his daily life.

Man secures accurate knowledge of the world and himself with his rationality. This view led Gora to classify Gandhi's method of Satyagraha as an atheist way of

asserting one's free will and the urge to know the truth. Satyagraha is a potent weapon of the strong-willed man according to Gora. But Gora clarifies that though Gandhi believed in the efficacy of truth, he was religious in his quest for truth, and he associated truth with God. In other words, Gandhi's version of Satyagraha did not suit the modern atheistic model of Gora. Gora argued that self discipline through the method of Satyagraha is a great tool for this quest of truth (Gora, 1999: 28).

Though Gora prescribes atheism, he deduces his method by discussing the shortcomings of thought processes which are like atheism. Gora opines materialism is a good alternative to atheism, but it lacks the morality and ethics needed for an individual's wellbeing. Materialists do not consider man more than a part of nature and do not accord him any role (Gora, 1999: 29).

The dominant school of thought that Gora tackled while establishing his atheism was that of Marxism. Gora adds that materialism comes into the Marxist thought, as Marxists classify societies into capitalist, feudal or bourgeois based on material wealth and its ownership. Hence, for Gora, theistic determinism and Marxist determinism are no different, as both the schools talk of freedom but do not believe in free will. In fact, they deny free will. Gora associates his concept of freedom and free will of the individual as a corollary to his concept of morality (Gora, 1999: 23-27).

Gora avers that one should be living a moral life, that is, with freedom. If an individual is denied his freedom, he loses his moral base. The main prerequisite for an atheist way of life is to recognise the freedom of the individual. Gora never denies the fact that man lives with fellow individuals and every individual has his own free will, but he regards morality as a condition which allows all individuals to cooperate among themselves to achieve their goals, using their capacities (Gora, 1999: 29).

It is in this context that Gora favours science, technology, and their use. This is done by the process of verification of every act by the individual, whether it stands the scrutiny of reason or not. When Gora says atheists gain strength to master their surroundings and use their capacities, he is thinking of the help of technology to control non-human factors (Gora, 1972: 30).

Gora had a great faith in science and technology. He believed that medicines can be developed to remove any human maladies, thus relying not on the mercy of God, but on the human mind and its great ability to overcome problems with reason. Gora regards it as the ultimate truth that humans are born free. This is proved by the fact that through knowledge and morality, they can cooperate among themselves to achieve their goals.

Free mind in atheism does not mean being opinionated or judgemental about everything, but always keeping the mind open. To be able to think and form an opinion with a free mind is an important aspect of atheism, Gora says. But after forming an opinion, it should be subjected to scientific enquiry and only if it is proven with evidence, it becomes the truth. The process of acquiring knowledge in this way is the continuous quest for freedom (Gora, 1999: 29). Though atheism allows scope for imagination and opinions, those opinions should be subjected to the test of reason. Gora used this test when he toured villages propagating rationalism and demonstrating to the people the falsity of blind beliefs and belief in miracles and ghosts, etc. (Viswanadham, 1980: 80-85). Gora says instances of some spirit possessing a person or someone having the vision of God are all fake and wishful thinking. They result from a human psychology of weak mind.

Gora wanted to develop a practical philosophy to help people come out of various mental blocks and to have the ability to decipher what is truth and what is just an illusion. This will come only by adopting the ideology of atheism which helps individuals to know the reality with the help of science and technology.

Atheism contributes free thinking, science, technological advancement, and morality. In the words of Gora, atheism is a method of creating an equal world, in which individuals have a receptive and an open mind which encourages the progress of mankind through constant cooperation (Gora, 1992: 12-13).

He credits causal theory as giving a belief in special creation and dispelling the chance of superstition. The argument that cause precedes effect is one of the positive aspects of this theory, says Gora. But the main negative aspect of the causation theory is that it does not leave any room for an open thought process. The chain of cause and

effect certainly leads to the determinism of events and does not give any scope for improvement (Gora, 1972: 14). These chains of causes will prevent man from exercising free will and make him a slave of the external factors (Maron, 1995: 145). Gora also asserts that determinism in the form of destiny or fatalism is the basic cause for theism, as people who believe in determinism aver that their lives are destined in a way, by an external determinant, here the entity is called God. Gora adds that in materialism, this determinant changes to the law of causation, means of production in Marxism, or state authority in the modern democratic parlance. All these determinants block human freedom and the exercise of free will. Belief in God or fate is slavishness and atheism is the only way of coming out of the slave mentality. This makes man enter into a theistic universe and stifles the progress of the individual and makes him meekly accept his situation. Atheists do not believe in the certainty of the event, but they institute the probability of an event.

Gora prefaces his hypothesis with his definition of atheism as a philosophy based on an open mind and not involving any set rule. Here he finds fault with the theory of causation, which says that there is a cause for every happening in the universe. This for Gora is a meek surrender to mere theories and he feels it is a symbol of slavery of thought (Gora, 1972: 28-30).

Gora wants every individual to look at the theory of causality as only a probability in each situation and time and not as a rule. Gora regards theories as only possibilities, but not as rules which are sacrosanct and unchangeable. It is here that he brings the argument about natural laws are mere interpretations and personal experiences at a given time. Fresh facts emerge and new insights develop, then they form a law with new interpretations (Gora, 1972: 31). He says:

Though Dalton regarded the “atom” is the smallest invisible particle and named it such, the discovery of phenomenon of radio activity changed the concept of atom. Also, natural law applies wholly to an event in all respects (Gora, 1972: 31).

While theists consider the concept of natural laws to be given by a source called god, atheists create their own laws pertaining to their experience in the age they live in, and they think with a free will. The natural laws will be dealt with according

to the requirement of the individuals in the age of atheism. One should not surrender to the laws but should gain mastery over them, says Gora. He strongly favours empirical methods of proving the truth, instead of simply believing something as true.

In summary, Gora's model was based on the constant quest for new knowledge with an open mind. Finding out truth is the goal of human life, but that has to be combined with not absolute truth but a truth which will stand the test of empirical proof over time. Discovering that truth is a constant quest in human life and it is in the process of knowing truth that one becomes an atheist.

Gora wanted his idea of atheism to suit the India of democratic era in which he was operating. The first challenge for him was spiritualism prevalent in India. For Gora spirit and matter coexist with each other and are indistinguishable from one another. Spiritualism for him was not renouncing one's body and aligning with the Supreme Being but aligning with the material world and the human body. Gora felt that pursuing spiritual goals was like running after mirages (Gora, 2007: 100-103). He felt the creations of imagination like God and the other world, which did not lead to substantial truth on verification, were not required for the present era. These opinions might be respected in a democratic world, but they do not qualify as truths. Only those opinions which are supported by solid proofs qualify to be truths. Gora says one must allow free flow of opinions, allowing individuals to think on their own. But only those opinions qualify to be truths which can be verified with the help of scientific procedures (Gora, 1972: 50-51).

Gora says any religion which stands on an imaginary basis will not be useful to individual freedom, but only stifle the ability of a free mind. Human behaviour should be determined not by beliefs and superstitions involving God and his paraphernalia, but by the quest for freedom, based on morality. For Gora, God, State, Government, are all examples of external authority and they should all be dealt with through atheism using the powers of rationality and free will (Gora, 1972: 11).

On Satyagraha

As a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, Gora classifies Gandhi's Satyagraha as one of the chief tools of free will. Gora devotes a lot of time analysing Satyagraha as one of the chief aspects of freedom of the individual and an ideal tool for an atheistic way of life. The chief reason for this is Gandhi's insistence on truth. Winning over the enemy and dealing with situations through morality is the way both an atheist and a Satyagrahi work. Atheism and Satyagraha are two names for the same philosophy according to Gora (Gora, 1972: 20).

Gora's insistence on truth and the importance of being a moral individual with a conscience of his own are best illustrated in his discussion of Gandhi's Satyagraha. This concept combines all the goals of atheism, recognition of free will of the individual to know the truth, and awareness that the individual is the most supreme entity in the world and the fact that these lead to an ethical and moral way of knowing what is important in one's own life.

Gora avers that Satyagraha is the main method to assert human free will in the modern age, in a democratic world. This presents a question whether Gandhism and his symbols of God, Truth, and equating the concept of God with truth clash with Gora's atheism (Ravipudi Venkatadri, 2014: 7). Here, Gora makes a distinction between Gandhi's concept of Satyagraha and his own concept of atheism though he continues to think that Satyagraha is one of the most effective methods of leading an atheistic life. He says this in the context of exercise of free will of the individual. However, Gora clarifies that the truth to be discovered cannot be an imaginary one. It must be verifiable and demonstrable (Gora, 1972: 20).

It is pertinent here to note that some scholars feel Gora might have been influenced by the philosophical thought of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (Lindley, 2009: 103). Radhakrishnan was in correspondence with Gora during the early 1930s (Viswanadham, 2016: 50) (Lavanam, 2014: 43). It is likely that Radhakrishnan's idea of free will and his argument that this free will has to be initiated by the individual himself might have influenced Gora through his correspondence with Radhakrishnan. Radhakrishnan had said:

“The cards in the game of life are given to promote our ideals. We do not select them. There are traced to our past Karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or lose. And there is freedom” (Radhakrishnan, 1927: 54).

For Gora, Gandhi equating God with truth was a problem. He eschewed this idea of Gandhi, and equated truth as the ultimate tool of atheism, to exercise free will. The method of Gandhi in pursuing the truth through Satyagraha was a very potent instrument against injustice.

Apart from the Gandhian Satyagraha, Gora finds existentialism as one of the powerful protests against theistic systems (Gora, 1972: 21). In his view existentialism made the individual and his existence the real purpose of life. This recognition encouraged an individual to free himself from the impositions of custom, governmental authority, and other forms of curbs on freedom. In Gora’s point of view this is atheistic. But he also finds fault with existentialism, as it lacks social obligations. It does not encourage social association but promotes the exercise of free will by the individual at the cost of the society. Hence in the end, Gora concludes that his own idea of atheism was an improvement on all the above modern philosophies and believes that the atheistic correction of all these methods alone will lead to human progress.

Gora makes a distinction between the Asian and African countries vis-à-vis Europe. He says, the Asian and African continents need a cultural revolution as it happened in Europe (Gora, 1972: 20). The advent of Protestantism, materialism and existentialism helped Europe to come out of the darkness of the pre-modern belief in God. Europe learnt the exercise of free will through a lot of developments in science and technology. Gora feels that Asia and Africa remained in the clutches of theistic religions, like Hinduism and Christianity respectively. It was this belief in God which made Asia servile to Europe, as theism breeds a slave mind and makes one servile. When one recognises the fact that one was born free and exercises one’s free will one becomes an atheist. The individual gains the power to express his freedom entirely, only when he understands his surroundings. This method of understanding and appreciating one’s own environment and exercising free will is the atheistic way of life. This forms the crux of Gora’s atheistic philosophy (Gora, 1972: 22-24).

Gora and Atheism: Further Implications

While developing his philosophy of atheism, Gora encountered the major problem of making it practicable in a country like India where politics is dominated by religion. Gora, while proposing his philosophy of atheism, said that the idea was very much contemporary and practicable everywhere. His argument was that atheism recognised the free will of the individual, which applies to every individual in the world. As far as the question of religion and its overarching influence in public life is concerned, Gora expresses the hope that people will strive through their free will to achieve the development of their society by keeping personal beliefs as a private matter. Religion and the beliefs associated with it should be kept in the personal space of an individual's life (Gora, 2007: 135-137). The task of social reconstruction springs from the reasoning power of the individual. Gora returns to his main argument that everybody is born free and recognising this basic fact of human life will give morality to the deeds of the man. Morality in turn comes from the reasoning power of an individual. For Gora, the individual is more important than the society. He emphatically says,

“Individuals are the only real entity and society is a fictitious entity. It is the human creation which lacks the consciousness of its being” (Gora, 1972: 12).

Gora differed significantly in his view of society from the Marxist and Gandhian thought. These two thoughts became significant in Gora's atheistic project, because they were much in vogue in his time and dominated the public life of independent India. Gora's comments on the views of these two schools of thought about society vis-à-vis the individual is worth noting.

The Marxist view of a society as an organic whole is the main drawback according to Gora. He says individual and his free will is more important. The individual is not subservient to the society. It is individuals' decision to form a society, through an exercise of free will that makes social reconstruction possible (Gora, 1972: 13).

As far as the Gandhian thought was concerned, Gora took objection to Gandhi's use of theistic ideals like *Ramarajya* (denoting the ideal form of

governance). He felt that they took the country backwards to an era of blind faith and belief.

So, after deliberating about the idea of society and social reconstruction, which is the chief goal of any progressive philosophy, Gora defines what an ideal society is. Gora stresses ethics by recognizing that honesty is a social need. Self discipline makes the individual moral in contrast with people who are moral because of taboos and religious faith. Gora comes back to his starting point, that individual freedom precedes being moral (Gora, 1972: 44). One lives a self-disciplined life in an atheistic society. If any lapses in the moral conduct occur, they will be resolved by non-violent methods of discipline like Satyagraha. Gora valued Satyagraha so much because Gandhi recognised the inherent moral strength of the individual.

Gora also felt that Satyagraha can become a method for exercising moral freedom. The insistence on truthfulness is not antagonistic to the freedom of an individual. The fact that Satyagraha implied a social obligation turns the freedom of an individual into moral freedom. In other words, an atheist is free to do anything he likes, provided he practises what he says. This implies, if he preaches free will of an individual he will also work for the recognition of this free will in the society.

Gora interacted with Gandhi very closely. Both discussed a lot of issues which directly affect society (family, religion, caste, class, etc.). The crux of their landmark discussion on the concept of God and truth is recounted fondly by Gora.

“Gandhi said the concepts of truth may differ. But all admit and respect truth. That truth I called God. For some time, I was saying “god is truth”, but now I say ‘truth is god’...I was very much impressed by his spirit of accommodation. He showed me by example, how to give practical shape to principles” (Gora, 1951: 30-31).

The reason Gora concluded Satyagraha as the most effective tool of exercising atheism was also because Satyagraha implied the establishment of equality among all. In the process of striving for a common goal, all sectarian attitudes of caste, class, race, and nation will be removed. When all people feel free and open, they feel equally human. Atheism treats one and all as equal individuals with a free will of their own. When people feel free and confident of their own will and its exercise, all cultural differences of race, caste, creed, and nation vanish from their mind (Gora,

1951: 22-30). Gora recognises the fact that family is the prime institution from which all the individuals work for the exercise of their free will. Hence, Gora extends his argument of atheism to family as well, in the form of individuals marrying inter caste, and inter community, etc., free individuals making their own choices in life. He also speaks positively of unwed motherhood as a form of exercising a woman's free will without succumbing to a slave mentality of believing in an institution like marriage, which has strong religious undertones (Gora, 1972: 98-99). Gora says that if an individual does not know his father, then the caste system would slowly cease to operate. This, Gora felt, was necessary in order to remove the differences which stifle human progress. The end goal of atheistic philosophy was to achieve an equal society where an individual reigned supreme and his abilities are recognised by institutions like the state, government, and law. Individual is the first priority for him, and the state was only an institution created by individuals to facilitate his freedom. Once the individual is free to exercise his free will, the good of the society will be automatically served (Gora, 1972: 100).

Atheism and Politics

As mentioned in the previous section, Gora extended his concept of atheism to every sphere of life. The most important part of social life in the period Gora lived was the political arena. India was on the threshold of political independence and soon become a nation state. Though Gora started experimenting his version of atheism much before 1947 (his Atheistic Centre was founded in 1942), the advent of political democracy posed a new challenge to Gora, as to how to make his atheism relevant in Indian politics.

Gora regarded democracy as a harmony between individual freedom and governmental authority, though he gave importance to the individual and his freedom. He also gave equal space for the social relations in the society formed by individuals. Democracy comes into existence by the free will of individuals. Hence certain obligations on the individuals arise for the smooth functioning of the democratic political institutions and to establish equality in society. This equality in turn is extended to equality of opportunity, power and respect for each other (Gora, 1961: 15-17).

Gora visualised a society which consisted of men who were moral and self-disciplined. This idea of self-discipline formed the crux of his atheist politics. However not every individual is self-disciplined. Greed and hatred do come up in individuals' behaviour at some point or the other. This should be controlled by an authority, or an institution created by the individuals themselves (Gora, 1972: 19-20). In the medieval ages this authority was in the hands of religion and religious heads, but religion made people subservient and inactive. In the modern era, democracy is a method which is needed to regulate the behaviour of the erring individuals. The atheistic way of making everyone in the society work for the common goal of human progress is the use of governmental authority (Gora, 1972: 22). Unlike religious power, democratic government does not focus on beliefs and blind faith. The main objective of political power is to punish crime. Gora defined crime as anti-social behaviour. If inequalities arise in society, political power should correct it. But most of the time political power with its instrument of government coerces people into submission. How to combat this and see to it that a government works for the common good by promoting equality? The basic principle of positive atheism is that man has free will and he is the master of his own actions. In the modern era, it lies on the individual to see to it that the government functions with the objective of promoting individual freedom.

Having a sound political outlook in people is the first condition of a successful democracy. The knowledge that the government is the servant of the people and that they should get work done by the government, is the most important prerequisite (Gora, 1972: 23).

As Gora's individuals in his atheistic pattern are self disciplined and conscious, half of the democratic set up is taken care of. But as the social contacts enlarge many tasks are created which are beyond the capacity of a single individual. Democracy succeeds only when the people understand political authority which is transferred through them to the state (or the government).

As there is equality in the form of the right to vote for all the individuals, there is also an equal amount of responsibility on them to keep a check on political power and the government (Gora, 1972: 47). Gora distinguishes between parties and movements. While associations or people's movements educate the public, political

parties impose their own positions on the people. Gora traces the genesis of the parties from movements to the greedy and corrupt people associated with the movements (Gora, 1972: 50). A big rift is created between the people and the government when political power is misused. Each political party uses the policy and prestige of the initial movement to build a political asset. This makes political parties into units interested in power politics, rather than in providing a suitable atmosphere for the people to exercise their free will. Capturing governmental authority will be the prime goal of a political party. In Gora's view, the party system itself, whether a single party or a multi-party system, exhibits a tendency to split and fragment. People become the casualty as political parties play out the game of power politics to win governmental authority. Gora equates this infighting among the political parties to the Marxist idea of the factions of the bourgeoisie who fight with each other (Gora, 1941: 134-135). Gora finds this problematic. Hence, he moots the idea of party less democracy. This, according to him, is a true democracy. In a democracy power should be in the hands of the people who should know that they are the masters. Political atheism empowers them to exercise their authority on the government. There should be a harmony between individual freedom and the governmental authority. This will only be possible when one dispenses away with political parties. Therefore, efforts should be made to form a party less democracy.

Gora's Version of Democracy

Gora was a close follower of various movements in his time, like the Bhoodan movement of Vinoba Bhave or the Sarvodaya movement of Jayaprakash Narayan. Taking inspiration from them, he advocated a party less democracy involving no pomp and excessive expenditure (Gora, 1961: 96-99). Partyless candidates do not need a manifesto; they will start working for the welfare of the people straight away. Political consciousness should be the main qualification of such candidates.

Gora advocated small sized administrative units like *Gramraj* in the Gandhian model. In Gora's view, everyone who gets elected to the legislature should have clear plans. As far as the question of the leader of the legislature is concerned, Gora says, decisions by majority vote will be the solution. The legislator thus elected should always be open to any suggestion from the fellow legislators. However, such

suggestions will only be accepted after testing their feasibility to contribute to the people's welfare.

The stability of a government will be possible only through a party less democracy. People who are elected representatives should let go of their use of public revenue for personal comforts, at the expense of people's welfare. (Gora, 1961: 122) pomp and party less ness are the main tools of achieving a successful and stable government.

The most effective method of controlling a government in a modern democracy, Gora felt, is Satyagraha. According to him Satyagraha is the best method of training people in the spirit of democracy. If the elected representatives forget their duty to the people and misuse their powers for their selfish ends, people should inculcate self-discipline in the legislator by taking to Satyagraha (Gora, 1961: 71-73).

Gora penned his thoughts on a party less democracy, in a book in 1961, with the same name. The following year, he was also invited to Calcutta to preside over all India party less democracy conference. The conference resolutions were enumerated by Gora. These are as follows:

1. No symbol should be issued to anyone contesting the election.
2. Every legislator should be seated in the houses of legislature assemblies according the order of their constituency and not by their party blocks.
3. Both the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister should be elected by the majority vote of the whole house by the method of repeated ballot This method is already in vogue while electing the speaker of the legislative assembly. For example, if four candidates contest for the top post, the members of the house will vote for both equally. This is known as the two-round system, where if two candidates do not get absolute majority in proportion in first round, then a second round will be conducted. Those who secure least votes will be eliminated subsequently. So the candidate elected at the end will be automatically getting more than half of the house strength.

4. When the question hour takes place, they should be based on the merit of issues of instant public interest and not based on party affiliations.
5. The resolution moved by any minister can be questioned, modified or unanimously agreed by the members of the house (either legislative assembly or the parliament). Rejection or amendment of a cabinet proposal by the house should be only accepted through the confidence motion in the house. A Separate no confidence motion is needed if the people of the house decide to remove a minister (Gora, 1961: 109-110).

Gora strongly felt that if the above five points are implemented sincerely, a nation will slowly come out of an unstable government and party less democracy will be established (Viswanadham, 1980: 221-224).

In the years 1962 and 1963 Gora toured extensively all over India to explain his ideas of pomplessness and party less democracy. He followed this with a Satyagraha in 1963 in front of the official residence of the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy. This became news all over India. Gora aimed this Satyagraha asking the Chief Minister to cut down on his extravagant expenses as a legislator and to practise simplicity in approach. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, observing the impact of the Satyagraha, came down to talk to Gora. He agreed in principle that Gora's idea of pomp less democracy was very ideal theoretically, but it would be fruitful if an all-India plan regarding the expenses on government servants was chalked out, with due consultations with all the four Chief Ministers of the southern states. Sanjeeva Reddy wanted the veteran Gandhian Vinoba Bhave to preside over this conference. He requested Gora to end his Satyagraha immediately (Viswanadham, 1980: 224).

Gora ended his Satyagraha and started the deliberations. The then Tamilnadu and Karnataka Chief Ministers, K.Kamaraj and S.Nijalingappa participated in the talks. Sanjeeva Reddy also had personally deliberated on this issue with Vinoba Bhave. Vinoba felt that his presence was not necessary, as they already had come to a conclusion. But slowly this talk of a spartan way of life of politicians took a back seat. Gora resumed his Satyagraha in 1964, when K.Brahmananda Reddy was the Chief

Minister. One of the results of Gora's efforts was that Brahmananda Reddy agreed to remove all the flower giving trees and bushes from the official garden and issued orders to grow vegetable plants which would be useful to people. This was one of the small victories of Gora's atheistic outlook, as per which any object should be useful to human beings and not merely decorative.

Following Gora's views on simplicity, Brahmananda Reddy ordered that government servants and ministers should not conduct any lavish events, unless and until it was of utmost importance (Viswanadham, 1980: 227). The ministry of agriculture of Andhra Pradesh devised a plan to augment vegetable production all over the state. Vegetable Day was conducted on a large scale in Vijayawada in 1965. The Atheist Centre in Vijayawada started the practice of exchanging vegetable garlands during atheistic marriages, as a part of practising the atheist outlook of life.

Lavanam, son of Gora, mentions that his father had a reason in encouraging the use of vegetable produce (Lavanam, 2014: 34). Traditionally the cultivation of crops and vegetables was considered as a lowly job by the upper castes in India. Gora wanted to change this attitude. To him vegetables and agriculture were symbols of the productive power. To promote vegetable cultivation is like giving recognition to the right to food and giving importance to the ability of an individual, rather than his birth.

Atheistic Economics

The argument of Gora that everything should be useful to humans was extended to his idea of Atheistic Economics. It might be noted that political democracy springs from the people. The same argument holds good for economic democracy (Gora, 1999: 74-76). Gora strongly believed that Economics dealt with the satisfaction of human material needs. In Gora's view an ideal life starts with the fulfilment of material needs. He says this is the precondition to lead an atheistic way of life. Equality should be the main criterion in distribution. Gora believes that atheistic economics is the only way to a happy life. As all men are born equal and are equally free to choose for themselves, they strive to have equal opportunities for a decent living. The promotion of equality in the satisfaction of material needs should

be the main goal of political democracy. In his view, the two methods proposed to achieve this are Marxism and Gandhism.

The Marxian socialism aims at common ownership of means of production. Gora raises a doubt here. What is the concrete form of commonness in which ownership can be vested? It is the government that is vested with the executive powers of managing social relations. This government is the symbol of commonness. Marxism meant the state ownership of the means of production. It replaces private ownership with state ownership of means of production and promotes equitable distribution for equal satisfaction of material needs (Gora, 1999: 72-73).

Gandhism uses a different approach to achieve economic equality. This is the principle of trusteeship, which recognises individual ownership of means of production in the interests of the society. Here Gandhi makes an important contribution. Though some individuals own the means of production, they should act only as trustee of the property and should share the benefits from the production equally with others for the common good.

Gora was an ardent follower of Gandhi. Though he disagreed with Gandhi regarding the use of religious symbols in his discourse, he was very much in favour of the Gandhian faith in the moral force intrinsic in every individual (Gora, 1972: 35-36). Gandhi was aware of the imperative of the need for economic equality. Economic equality was the “master key” to non-violent independence. This he envisaged to achieve through the principle of trusteeship (Gora, 1999: 75). Though he worked hard to achieve political freedom in India, he could not focus on his model of trusteeship. Gora was also a close follower of Vinoba Bhave, who himself was a disciple of Gandhi. Gora felt that it was Vinoba who popularised the principle of trusteeship and made it a practical reality.

This was in the form of the *Bhoodan* movement. But it failed, as both Gandhi and Vinoba adopted the language of religion in their enunciation of the principle. Gora finds fault with the non-political character of this idea of trusteeship. These movements could not develop a strong sanction for their promotion, except persuasion. Gora felt, it led people to the old ways of theistic slavery, as religious

ideas of donation (dan) were invoked, rather than encouraging people to work for equality. In a country with economic inequalities, like India, trusteeship became an act of charity. This made it non-political and ineffective. Similarly, Gora also finds fault with Marxism. Though it made positive contributions to the idea of economic equality, the concept of class struggle had a problem. The government and its actions at any time are said to be a reflection of the stage of class struggle. This was the argument of Marx, which was not true in reality. Gora quotes the practical example of the communist party gaining power in Indian states like Kerala and countries like Chile (Gora, 1972: 36). He says the party won at these places not by class struggles, but by mass revolt and coup in one case and elections in another. He says that in India the communist party could get into power through open democratic elections. Once it got into power, the elected communist governments did not work for socialism.

A revolution in the mindset of people living in a democracy to enjoy economic equality is much needed. Otherwise, the communist government will become authoritarian. In his view even the trade unions formed in a state symbolise the selfish interests of its members rather than the common good. According to him, asking for higher wages is the only desire of the trade unions, and not food for all (Gora, 1999: 79-80).

The modern world poses many complex economic problems which are not resolved by the Gandhian method of trusteeship and Marxian class struggle. So what is the solution? Gora says that only atheistic economics, which gives a political approach to the problem of distribution of goods, is the solution. Since the atheist form of government is necessarily a democracy, control of government and checking whether the legislation favours economic equality, ought to be done by electing proper personnel and checking their parliamentary propriety through method of protest. This method is *Satyagraha* (Gora, 1999: 82). He urges every citizen to demand from the government an effective economic change. The government personnel are the servants of the people, and a citizen can directly question them for not providing equal opportunities (Gora, 1961: 72-73). Gora's whole experiment of controlling the government hinges on electing deserving candidates and checking their abuse of power through *Satyagraha*. One can control the government through this method and ensure legislation passed for realising the dream of economic equality. Gora was very

much aware that his model of atheism should be useful to the democratic set up of a government in the 20th century.

In short Gora's atheistic economics had two aspects. The first one was personal, where the individual can get a life of basic comforts with dignity. The second aspect is social, where the comforts are provided for all the people. Atheists who have the humanist outlook will always go beyond personal comforts and think of the whole of humanity. Gora believed that this is a natural tendency of an atheist. He presses the government to share the economic benefits with the needy.

Gora wanted the developed nations of the world to display this atheistic outlook. He thinks that countries with surplus food should share it with nations which are hungry. This sharing within and between nations will make economic inequalities disappear. Gora also advocated liberalisation of rules of movement between nations, so that population is distributed evenly over the globe (Gora, 1980: 34-35). This would subsequently lead to a sharing of natural resources like food all over the globe. Utilisation of resources in favour of the needy countries should be the goal of the developed nations. This aspect of Gora's atheist economics promises equal sharing of food and facilities. But this sharing should be done with dignity, and not as an act of charity. Hence Gora recommended the organisation of small communities to distribute material resources equally (Gora, 1972: 40). He gives the example of water, power and educational services being commonly managed by individuals, and the housing facilities shared personally. In such a community all members will be participating equally and will be satisfying their material needs with cooperation. Since every individual belongs to one community or the other, his material needs will be attended to with dignity, in his respective community. These communities will subsequently form into a federation tier by tier and finally become a world federation. Gora visualises that in such a federation every individual will grow beyond his own community. This proliferation of communities includes many tiers of federations. Each federation will manage aspects like distribution of resources and wider needs like communication.

Hence, Gora advocates a community life for the development of all. It might be noted here that Gora took this idea from the Gandhian economic plan, which was

written in 1941. Thirteen main points were mentioned by Gandhi to usher in a democratic state. Thirteenth point was economic equality. Gandhi mentions in his points that people should become equal participants in societal development. Social welfare is only possible when resources are shared equally (Gora, 1972: 40).

Not only did Gora advocate this point of Gandhi, but he made it a reality by establishing an organisation called the Gandhi Community in 1951. He also conducted conferences focusing on the promotion of economic equality with delegates coming from all the south Indian states (Viswanadham, 1980: 173-178). In the first conference of the Gandhi Community held at Gudivada in Krishna district in March 1951, Gora gave a presidential address presenting his main ideal as “economic equality, political consciousness and the knowledge of democratic principles” which will empower “us to bring in an equal distribution of resources. In order to achieve this, we as citizens should continue to educate the legislators once we elect them. We should prepare an economic plan and hold open debates in every constituency by inviting the legislator of the concerned area. Then the responsibility of development of an area will lie on the legislator as we have already provided him with a clear-cut developmental plan” (Viswanadham, 2016: 120-121).

Gora strongly disapproved of the fact that the citizens quarrelled among themselves to resolve their issues in a particular constituency, instead of questioning their elected leader. The laziness of people to impress upon their leader the issue of development makes the leaders turn into dominant authorities rather than public servants. He also advocated that all the ministers and legislators should cut down on their salary and travel in the third-class transport as a symbol of promotion of economic equality (Gora, 1961: 89).

Gora implemented this cutting down of expenses during the time of first general elections of India in 1952. He contested independently as a representative of the Gandhi Community from the Vijayawada constituency. He himself carried the mantle of electoral campaign in many adjoining villages of Vijayawada. He asked people to question the person contesting and about his development plans (Viswanadham, 1980: 183). Though Gora lost the election, his method of educating the masses was noticed and talked about.

Gora later changed the name of the Gandhi Community and converted it into a movement. He named it the Economic Equality movement. Veteran Gandhian economist, and a close associate of Gandhi, J.C. Kumarappa was its president, and Gora was the secretary. As the secretary of this organisation Gora participated as the main resource person in Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan movement in the early 1950s. However, this experimental economic equality organisation was cut short due to the health problems of J.C. Kumarappa and the limited success of Vinoba's Bhoodan movement (Lindley, 2009: 46-47). Nevertheless, Gora made significant efforts to disseminate his idea of economic equality.

Gora and Technology

Though Gora was an ardent follower of Gandhi and his thought, he did make a departure sometimes. One of the points on which Gora differed from Gandhi was the aspect of technology and its place in human life. He visualised technology as an important tool for the development of the society. Modern technology empowers individuals to achieve security and comfort. Gora adds the aspect of moral consideration, giving technology an atheistic orientation (Gora, 1972: 43). This is nothing but to assess the social benefit accrued from technological advancement. Hence, he felt that division of labour with equality among individuals was important for the use of technology. A free individual naturally thinks of sharing his work equally with the other, in order to achieve the required result.

Decentralisation of technology through division of labour is the solution for promoting equality. For this to be a reality, Gora advocates use of small machines in an industry, instead of specialised and technologically advanced machines. Though Gora praises the socialist way of promoting the work place environment, it is clear he does not acknowledge any influence on his ideas (Gora, 1972: 90-91). In his vision, every worker in a factory will be using the same machine with a basic knowledge and will be working equally for an equal distribution of economic benefits. Anyone can help any other as everybody has knowledge of the technological tool. This also avoids the domination of a particular individual on the other, due to superior technological knowledge. Gora's atheistic method of decentralisation contains the distribution

within the method of production itself, where each one produces what he needs. When he does this in a group it promotes socialisation and atheistic technology.

Atheistic Aesthetics: The Use of Arts to Promote Atheism

Gora envisaged a method of practical use in every element of his Atheistic thought. Just like he had a version of his own regarding politics, economics and technology, he had a version of promoting atheism through arts. He says aesthetics is the freest expression of human imagination. However, any art that does not address people's cause is misleading. Gora's view of arts is that in an atmosphere of inequality only some could indulge in fine arts at the cost of others. He quotes the example of the Roman emperor who saw gladiators die, while performing a duel as a part of sport and as a form of entertainment (Gora, 1972: 44).

Atheism which stresses on morality and equality has a definite plan as to how to use art. Art should come next only to food. So, economic equality should take priority over enjoyment of arts (Gora, 1972: 45). Atheistic aesthetics regards production of material wealth as an activity of art. In totality atheism advocated the freedom of choice of an individual. It treats all people alike in the ethos of humanity, with the individual as the basis of all civilisations. The individual fashions his attitude to suit the formation of social association. The proliferation of these associations will in turn act as the check on the government. So, atheism becomes an act of political action.

Gora regarded the act of a free sexual conduct as an aesthetic process, which is necessary for procreation and perpetuation of the world. The objectification of women and seeing the woman as a pleasure giving entity is the basic result of looking at aesthetics of life in a bad way. Hence, Gora proposed the principle of promiscuity as a solution for eschewing all differences of race, sex, caste, and colour (Gora, 1999: 101).

Gora considered arts like music and dance as vital influencers of public opinion and thought. He encouraged his team to include social themes and non mythological texts for music and dance performances in his Centre (Herrick, 2012:

60-61). His concept of aesthetics and enjoying the nature was extended to having a free sexual environment, where women and men have consensual contact with one another without any hindrance of a social stigma or economic inequality.

Gora and His Critics

Gora formed an important part of the early 20th century intellectuals who made an impact in the coastal belt of Andhra. In this period, he actively participated in an informed debate about the ideal way of common living through his positive atheism. He also had critics who attacked some of his assumptions in atheism.

It might be recalled here that Gora's period from the early 1940s to 1970s was preceded by two important streams of thoughts in the coastal belt of Andhra, as this was the main region where social reform and the idea of rational thought were in vogue.

Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary was the pioneering intellectual from Guntur, who first produced literature which questioned the popular beliefs and religion entrenched in the closed caste system in the coastal belt of Andhra (Ravipudi, 2013: 81). His literature on the Hindu epics bringing out a rational critique of the illogical fables served as an inspiration to the next generation graduates who took his thoughts further. Gora was his successor.

The early 1940s, when Gora started his practical experiment of atheism (when he started his Atheistic Centre at Vijayawada), was noted for the spread of the thoughts of M.N. Roy. Many of Roy's followers, who were already exposed to the idea of social reform and the rational movement of Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, became members of M.N. Roy's party. Followers like Avula Gopala Krishna Murthy, Ravipudi Venkatadri, M.V. Rama Murthy became the prime movers of this thought in the coastal belt of Andhra. The followers of Roy had serious problems with Gora's version of atheism. Ravipudi Venkatadri was the man who fought Gora's arguments tooth and nail both by producing literature and by engaging in a direct debate with Gora and his followers.

For both M.N. Roy and Gora their concepts of democracy were universally applicable. Both believed that human life was an endless quest for freedom. Both believed that spiritualism of India created a slavish mentality and hindered the development of the individual. The main criticism of Roy's followers started from the way Gora explained his idea of a society. Gora said in his main work, 'Positive Atheism', that society is a concept of human imagination. Royists questioned this. Ravipudi Venkatadri posed a question to Gora, "If society is an imagined entity, then who are the individuals forming the society? Are they real or imaginary?" Ravipudi asked whether Gora was reverting to the theistic school of thought of Adi Sankara, who proposed the theory of *maya* (illusion) (Ravipudi, 2013: 224-225). The view that the world is imaginary does not stand the ground, as Gora himself believes that the individual is the only real rational being. How can an individual be a real being with the world being a creation of imagination? Ravipudi concludes that this assumption of Gora does not qualify as a concrete system of thought (Ravipudi, 2013: 301).

The next point of criticism by Ravipudi was the haste in Gora's actions to bring about a democratic government. Gora's belief, that no talk will yield a concrete result, but only action does, is a faulty method to propagate a political thought (Ravipudi, 2013: 303). Ravipudi gives the example of Gora's campaigns aimed at the removal of flower plants, cutting down government expenditure, and the haphazard way they were carried out (Ravipudi, 2013: 303). Not thinking of the method of resolving disputes rationally and directly jumping into action is detrimental for rational thought and does not qualify an atheistic principle. In other words, the radical humanists had reservations regarding Gora's style of functioning.

Gora is also mistaken in thinking that "all theists are immoral, whereas all atheists are moral" (Gora, 1972: 23), says Ravipudi. There can be immorality among atheists and morality among theists. The next disagreement comes from Gora's statement, "Everything in the universe is not in a natural rhythm, but the individual rises above this and restores a sense of precision to the world" (Gora, 1972: 17). This does not qualify to be atheism, says Ravipudi. In fact M.N. Roy mentioned in his works that the world has a natural sense of rhythm, which initiates the individual to function with reason and self-awareness.

Ravipudi says that being an atheist is to “view the physical reality of the universe, and not to dismiss it as an imagined entity by man” (Ravipudi, 2013: 306). Hence radical humanists make a distinction between Gora’s version of atheism and that of M.N. Roy. According to them the power of reason is inherent in an individual by birth, which is helped by the scientific outlook, and then it concretises into atheism (Ravipudi, 2013: 307). Not believing in God was only an allied part of being an atheist. Gora, instead of providing an intellectual concept, gave a peculiar interpretation to the concept of atheism and propagated it for his personal glory. Ravipudi minces no words when he declares Gora’s arguments as “mere emotional outpourings and not qualified truths” (Ravipudi, 2013: 313).

One of the most controversial parts of Gora’s thought was his idea of encouraging promiscuity. Gora’s argument that unwed motherhood and inter caste marriages are the best solutions to remove the differences of caste, religion, and nationality were ridiculous at best (Gora, 1972, 46) and not central to the social reconstruction model of atheism (Ravipudi, 2013: 321-323). This was like giving an old wine in a new bottle, as historically India had a long series of inter community marriages in religions like Islam and Christianity. To single out the Hindu marriage reform as Gora did, while talking about unwed motherhood, was senseless (Ravipudi, 2013: 327). Getting married or being single springs from the personal choice of an individual and has nothing to do with the philosophy of atheism.

Gora’s advice to come out of institutions of family and marriage and indulge in promiscuity, which will subsequently lead to the blurring of any differences of caste, creed, nation, colour and ethnicity, is a highly problematic one. This act of promiscuity practically had the possibility of separating the social fabric, and not a unifying factor. This model cannot be universally applicable. This is more so in a country like India where the institution of family has produced a strong social bond.

Likewise, an argument about cutting down the flower plants and growing vegetables was questioned. How can an act of growing flower shrubs, maintaining a park full of floral growth be an act of pomp and uselessness? To have a park so that people may relax and have a soothing effect is not promoting wrong attitudes, says Ravipudi (Ravipudi, 2013: 303). Insisting on replacing flower plants with vegetables

will lead to the impression that atheists do not love nature. He also argued that to view things like owning a car, or a big house as acts of slavery and theism is totally unfounded. To live a spartan life based on action rather than preaching might be a Gandhian trait which Gora adopted. But the question arises, as to how this prescriptive norm by one person can be imposed on everyone when Gora says every individual has a free choice of his own (Ravipudi, 2013: 311). Similarly, Gora also prescribes that people should use Khadi, and desist wearing synthetic clothes, which is pompous in his opinion. This too is a tame argument of imposing an ideal on people instead of leaving it to their choice.

The basic criticism of Ravipudi comes from the fact that Gora couched his thoughts in a way which was opposite to his own central tenet of the importance of the individual. Gora said every family should be atheistic and every individual in a family should impress upon others the importance of being an atheist. Ravipudi says, that if parents are atheists, it does not mean that their children should be atheists. “Everyone is born natural to have their own choice. To give such a prescriptive theory as the only solution is not a sound argument” (Ravipudi, 2013: 308). The followers of M.N. Roy believe in the freedom of the individual and leave things to the choice of the individual. The first step of becoming a radical humanist is to be rational. The second one is to be an atheist, and third one is to subscribe to new humanism (Ravipudi, 1995: 112-113). But all these processes should be based on the freedom of the individual, and not on compulsion or imposition. In a way the above critique shows that Gora went against his own theory which upheld individual freedom and human development through individual freedom.

In fact, many rational thinkers of the coastal belt of Andhra, like the veteran educationist Narla Venkateshwara Rao, supported Ravipudi in his critique of Gora’s atheism. Narla appreciates Ravipudi and says, “You have the courage in your convictions....It gives both clarity....” (Narla, 1982: 197).

Lavanam was not only the confidante of his father Gora, but also the principal commentator on his father’s thought. In one of his interviews, Lavanam mentioned that he was always protective of his father and answered all the criticism heaped on him (Gora) (Lavanam, 2014:56). But the letters written to Ravipudi by Lavanam did

not yield any positive debate regarding the principles of Gora (Lavanam, 1978: 374). The root cause of Gora's theoretical failure, according to Ravipudi, was his assumption that the world/society is a result of human imagination. In order to magnify the individual and his role, he depicted the world as a non reality. This is not atheism, but another form of philosophical escapism. Ravipudi classifies Gora as more of an illusionist than an atheist (Ravipudi, 1995: 346-347).

Ravipudi explains what real atheism is. Atheist recognises the presence of many conflicting ideas but believes in reason and rational thought. Nature is an ever-evolving phenomenon whose causality is not beyond its existence but within it. This should be the correct starting point of atheism, and not the argument that the world is imaginary as Gora said (Ravipudi, 1995: 345). Not enjoying the fruits of nature, like flowers, creates a counterculture, where an individual and his freedom are restricted to a proposed norm. How can such a negative thought be termed as positive atheism, questions Ravipudi.

Gora comes across as a thinker who does not recognise physical reality and focuses on the imagination of a person. In fact, it is the god of the theists who is imaginary and not the world of an atheist. If the world is an imagined entity, where does the question of man being part of the universe come from? If the very hypothesis about an imagined universe is to be believed, how can Gora say that only theists have a universe and atheists do not? This might be a reading of Ravipudi of Gora who said that imagining the universe and its cause is a theistic idea (Ravipudi, 2013: 275). Gora (1999) says:

An important aspect of theistic philosophy is the concept of the universe as a law bound cosmos and phenomena, including man as part of it. This notion is consistent with the theistic attitude of surrender, since man becomes a part of the universe and subordinate to the whole. But the recognition of freedom of individual interprets the universe in a different way. Atheists regard the universe in a different way...as a collective concept of a flock. When each bird comes together and sits together, they give an impression of a flock. But when each bird flies away in her own way, it (flock) does not exist any longer. In the same way the universe does not exist. It does not exist on its own, except as a concept of imagination (Gora, 1999: 34-35).

The Atheist Centre registered its rebuttal in the form of letters to Ravipudi published in the periodical *Charvaka*. One of the atheists named Bhanu replied by saying that the world is imagined what Gora meant was that an explanation to highlight the fact that the universe does not exist as a separate entity on its own, without the individuals who come together to become part of the universe. What is the existence of this world without its parts? Imagination is different from illusion. This subtle difference could not be grasped by Ravipudi (Bhanu, 1978: 348).

Associates of Ravipudi subsequently have given an answer to this argument of the Atheist Centre. N.V. Brahman, one of the radical humanists from Guntur, said that the argument of Bhanu lacked a real counter argument. Brahman replied that while Gora's comparison of the universe as an assembly of birds flocking together to give an illusion of a group was an imaginative perspective, Royists view the universe which consists of permanent components like nature and its components which are permanent. To trivialize the concept of universe to a flock of birds it is a reflection of half-baked understanding of the concept of universe (Brahman, 1978: 353). To compare a group of birds and a group of individuals is not founded on a sound argument. A group is different from the universe. Group of birds flock together and get separated without any aim or concrete result, while the universe consisting of the animate and inanimate is a permanent entity. Not to recognise this subtle difference and denounce Ravipudi was ridiculous. Another lacuna in the argument of Gora is that before the birds come together there is no group, nor is there any group after they disperse. Hence flock does not have any existence, but only imagination, so it's actually Gora's conception of universe which is not a reality, but only imagination (Brahman, 1978: 353).

Lavanam in his defence of Gora said that Ravipudi did not understand Gora's thought in totality. Ravipudi's statement that "Gora tries to philosophise reality into an illusion" is not correct. Ravipudi's main objection was that Gora wants evidence for every happening in the world but theorises the universe (which is a reality) as an imagination. His main lament was that Gora was unable to distinguish between an imagination and a thought (Lavanam, 1978: 372). Lavanam elaborated that his father did not impose his thought on anyone and did not want it to be followed blindly. He advocated an open-minded quest for freedom. In the debate about universe and being,

he was simply proposing a different stream of thought from what was in vogue (Lavanam, 2014: 68).

Ravipudi said that his only concern in evaluating Gora's thought was the fact that Gora was perpetuating unscientific and illogical ideas in the name of atheism. To disseminate lies in the name of a practical philosophy is really a disservice to knowledge, and to equate atheism with Gora is also not a good sign of understanding the true nature of atheist thought (Ravipudi, 1978: 370). Science should be useful and important in verifying the true nature of the universe. Instead of theorising unfounded truths, Gora and his followers should tread the path of scientific assessment, Ravipudi said.

An Appraisal of Gora and His Place among Intellectuals

Gora was a product of this period who distinguished himself as a bold thinker and a man of action. His idea of atheism comprising elements of rationality, openness, and a true democracy, found a language of its own in his thought. Despite being a follower of Gandhi, he gave an atheistic interpretation to the idea of Satyagraha. This was his intellectual contribution. His goal was to establish and realise the rule of people in a democratic India through an atheistic way of life.

The 'Atheist Centre' founded by him is functioning to date on the ideas and ideals proposed by Gora by encouraging educational institutions, vocational training and medical care, with a view to enabling individuals to lead a life of self-discipline and freedom (Saraswathi Gora, 2014: 197-200).

The 'Atheist Centre' could be best described as an institution which spreads positive outlook and progressive thinking among people. The 'Vasavya Mahila Mandali', an organisation for the vocational training of women, addresses both domestic issues of married women and which cares for the deserted women (Herrick, 2012: 54-56). Similarly, the 'Ardhika Samata Mandal' is another organisation working for economic and social upliftment of villages in areas of the Krishna coastal belt. There is another organisation called 'Samskar' for rehabilitating criminals (Herrick, 2012: 45-47). The successful experiment of Hemalata Lavanam in rehabilitating Joginis of Telangana and bringing them into the mainstream has been

well documented. Likewise, the reform of the Stuvartpuram pickpockets, taking them away from crime and helping them lead a normal life was another successful attempt (Saraswathi Gora, 2014: 226-227).

In the post-1975 period following his death Gora's ideas were taken forward by others. Saraswathi Gora, wife of Gora and a well-known social worker, initiated the practice of bringing together all atheist organisations of the world, and organising international atheist conferences, which aimed at sharing ideas of cooperation and in cultivating rational thinking and generating a scientific outlook among people by educating them (Saraswathi Gora, 2014: 234-236).

The role of Saraswathi and her family including the activist Lavanam and his wife Hemalata who worked for the eradication of many social evils in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh including the highly exploitative practice of Joginis (young girls attached to the local temple and who are at the service of the landlords in the village) is noteworthy (Hemalata, 2004: 55-60). The local pockets of robbery in areas around Vijayawada were places where Lavanam and Hemalata implemented their social reform plan by educating the robbers and helping them with an alternative livelihood (Hemalata, 2004: 122-126).

Though Gora's idea were criticised to be too radical and simplistic since Gora gave it as a single solution for all the ills of society, he set a personal example by his practical work in taking his thought to the people. He tried to demonstrate the validity of his concepts through his painstaking social work, making him a prime representative of atheist thought in India (Herrick, 2012: 85-86).

Gora had his critics who felt that Gora would have been more successful as a full Gandhian instead of mixing Gandhism with atheism. In this light, it is pertinent to mention the name of the self-respect movement leader from South India, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (EVR) who initiated the debate on the Aryan and Dravidian dichotomy and postulated atheism as a philosophy to uplift the downtrodden. EVR, popular as a Tamil icon, was at the forefront of the 'Anti-Brahmin' movement which took Tamil Nadu by storm, and spread its wings to the Andhra region too, though in a different way.

Gora consciously kept away from this stream of thought as he did not believe in the method of confrontation. If one studied Gora's political thought in detail, one would know that issues like caste, class and colour had a very negligible effect on his thought as he thought that practical solutions like promiscuity and unwed motherhood will work. A similar attitude can be found in Gora's evaluation of Marxism too, which he termed as godless theism. The main reason for this classification was that he felt that in Marxism, man was depicted as a slave of his economic conditions. For Gora, this meant believing in a master above man's capacity for free thinking and it was not compatible with his idea of atheism. Likewise, though Gora participated as a volunteer in the Bhoodan and Sarvodaya movements, Gora was never an advocate of voluntary donation of lands, as it makes it an act of charity and not giving what is due to the individual as his legitimate share (Viswanadham, 1980: 196-200). And when it came to parliamentary democracy, a period which he envisaged to usher in as an atheist way of living, Gora wanted a party less parliament. Partyless democracy would only create a feeling of duty and responsibility among the legislators as servants of the people whereas the party system instilled a feeling of mastery among political leaders (Gora, 1961: 88).

Some scholars feel that Gora's thought remained an isolated one, as he envisaged programmes like uprooting flower bushes, staging protests in front of political leaders to change pompous life (Sunanda Shet, 2000: 62). The truth is that Gora wanted the elements of constructive work and the method of nonviolence in making the experiment of educating the villages around Vijayawada and working for the development of the 'untouchables' in the area. The chief aspect of Gandhi's thought which proved definitive in Gora's thought was a 'belief in the practicality of a theory and shunning speaking high philosophy (Gora, 1951: 44-46). It is in this respect that Gora was criticised on the grounds of his chosen methods to display this practicality of thought.

With the Gandhian way of work being popular across the country, Gora could not make an equal impact with his atheism, but he was successful in the places where he chose to implement his ideas (Sunanda Shet, 2000: 58). Gora presented the idea of atheism as a potent alternative to the prevailing religious, social, economic and political setup. It was Gora's spirit of action and practicality that made him interpret a

lot of ideas in vogue in a different way and initiated intellectual debate on issues of importance to the Indian society at large. Although Gora propounded the theory which he felt was applicable all over the world, the reality was that he responded to the specific problems of his time and his society.

Atheism, as a philosophy, is not new to India. The concept had always been held as a negative one, as opposed to Theism, which is a way to seek Truth and attain salvation. Atheism meant denying God and any reality beyond the sensible world. Gora modified this though with his positive atheism, which was not merely godlessness, but asserting the centrality of the human individual and creating conditions that enable human beings to live independently, without any need for a belief in God. This implication of atheism was new. Gora reinterpreted ethics, morality, politics, and economy in the light of atheistic understanding.

In retrospect Gora contributed a lot to initiate an intellectual dialogue in the coastal region, along with the rational thought school spearheaded by Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary and the radical humanist school of M.N. Roy. Gora undoubtedly forms an integral part of the modern intellectual history of South India.

Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusion

What the Thesis is About

Intellectuals and reformers contribute to social change through actions and ideas. India has a long tradition of debates and discussions carried out by people who were influenced by various traditions of thinking, be it in ancient, medieval or in the modern era. The area of coastal Andhra in late 19th and early 20th century saw several debates between the followers of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism. These three currents of thought resulted from the English education introduced in the late 18th century and India's traditions of reform and intellectual debates which were appealed to by the early graduates.

The products of this education, especially from the Godavari and Krishna river belt, were exposed to rational thought and atheistic thought along with the Radical Humanism of the influential thinker M.N.Roy. These ideas got manifested through the production of books, journals, awareness camps with students, and talks by well-known speakers.

This thesis has shown how the new ideas emerged, who were the main thinkers who represented the three streams of thought, on what points they agreed or disagreed with each other, and how they created a generation of active debaters and thinkers who influenced the public arena of the coastal belt. The thesis has discussed how they created institutions and spread ideas about the state, ideal society, one's role as a citizen, the principle of freedom, progress, and the meaning of human life.

The Relevance of the Thesis

The Thesis is important as at present there is no comprehensive research in English on the impact of rational thought, atheism and radical humanism in the coastal belt of Andhra. The existing works are limited in scope though some of them are of high quality.

Various western scholars have done research on the districts of Guntur and Krishna belt. R.E. Frykenberg's work on Guntur district (*Guntur District 1788-1848*) is regarded as pioneering. On the politics of the early 20th century South India, Eugene Irschick provides an account of the various debates among the Telugu speaking intellectuals in his *Politics and Social conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. These books discuss the general socio-economic trends and political controversies in the coastal Andhra belt, and have been used in this thesis. But they do not focus on the intellectual debates in the region. David Washbrook wrote on the political debates in South India, including Telugu districts, in his book, *The Emergence of Provincial politics: The Madras Presidency 1870-1920*. He also discussed the emergence of the new class from the coastal Andhra belt. But he did not explain fully the nature of that class and how it contributed to debates on politics and society through the prism of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism.

There has been some literature in Telugu or by Telugu authors on individual thinkers by scholars like Avula Manjulatha; Thotakura Prabhakara Rao which has been used in this thesis. The debates between these three thinkers and the influence of M.N.Roy on young English educated men have been dealt with in N. Innaiah's work "The Radical Humanist Movement in Andhra Pradesh" but it is presented in a preliminary way. There have also been some doctoral theses on some parts of the subject discussed in this thesis. But the influence of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism in the coastal districts of Andhra in the first quarter of the twentieth century is not dealt with in detail by any of them.

One of the challenges of doing research on this topic is that the available literature is not in abundance apart from the small amount of hagiographical literature that institutions like Atheist Centre published. The main participants in those debates are no more except one or two very old individuals.

Objectives of the Thesis

1. To delineate and evaluate the genesis of ideas of rationalism, atheism in the coastal belt of Andhra, by looking at Andhra's history with its Brahmanism, roots of revolt against blind faith and the genesis of atheism.

2. To map the influences of social reform era from the late 18th century on the Telugu intellectual class, which produced literature questioning the status quo and which in turn gave rise to a stream of intellectuals in the 19th century who carried forward the questioning the status quo through rational thought.
3. To explain the journey of the ideas of rationalism, atheism and radical humanism in the coastal Andhra belt, with focus on three representative individuals who gave rise to a school of ardent followers who carried forward their ideas through various programmes in 20th century.
4. To analyse the intellectual debates which took place between the early 1920s and the late 1960s in the coastal belt of Andhra, primarily the districts of Guntur and Krishna, with some influence in the Godavari belt.
5. To explain the percolation of these ideas into the mainstream in late 1960s and the present status of these ideas.

In fulfilling these objectives, all the available writings of the major figures in Telugu have been used. In addition, works by their predecessors and less known contemporaries have also been used. Wherever possible, the surviving members of the Royist-Atheist generation were interviewed. Secondary works on the history of the region and on the various currents of thought were consulted. The thesis has tried to explain the philosophical positions like atheism and rationalism taken by the major thinkers and the criticisms by their contemporaries. Since context is important for understanding ideas and the historical context of their writings and debates has also been dealt with. Thus, the thesis deals with both history and philosophy. It also pays attention to literature – stories and novels – produced by writers influenced by rationalism and atheism and treats those works as part of the larger movement.

Historical Background

The thesis has presented the main ideas in the works of religious figures from the medieval period. The reason for this is that the first few generations of the English educated

intellectuals took inspiration from them. The first initiative of this type was the rational critique of the Brahminical thought and the Varna system. Such criticism began in the 12th century in the coastal belt of Guntur. Brahma Naidu was a prominent non-Brahmin leader. He encouraged inter dining of castes and led the temple entry movement of the lower castes then called *Panchamas*. The influence of Buddhism has also been noted in the thesis.

Veerasaivism, founded by the Kannada philosopher Basaveswara, preached Siva worship, irrespective of caste or profession. Both Vaishnavism and Veerasaivism concentrated not only on personal development but also on development of the whole society. Veerasaivism advocated taking pride in one's profession regardless of the nature of the occupation.

Vemana (16th century) was another important thinker. He came from a non-Brahmin family in the coastal region. He held ideas like the value of introspection and the importance of realising one's own being. These ideas were similar to the Buddhist philosophy. Unlike the Brahmin scholars writing in Sanskrit, Vemana's verses were written in a language that common people could understand. Vemana criticised the ritualistic symbols of the Vedic religion, the Brahmins, and the way temples had become places of exploitation. Telugu literature used to be filled with stories from epics and mythological works like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Vemana was the first poet thinker who democratised language and literature and challenged the monopoly of scholars and poets who distinguished themselves in Sanskrit and Vedic literature.

The period from 17th to early 20th century

The link between the reformers of the earlier period and the modern period is provided by the thought and activities of the period from the 17th to the early 20th century. The thesis has pointed out that the reformers during this period came from non-Brahmin castes like Vaishyas, Velamas, Kapus and Baliyas.

Unlike in the Tamil areas, in Andhra social reform and literary reform were closely associated with each other. This is seen in the works produced by authors like Gidugu Ramamurthy and Gurajada Apparao. But there were also some differences among them. Swamineni Muddu Narasimham, the predecessor of Veeresalingam, argued for literary works

to be written in colloquial Telugu, so that the common readers understood them, whereas Veeresalingam wrote in chaste Telugu.

Apart from producing socially relevant literary works and concern with language, concern with women's condition in Hindu family was an important feature of the reform activity of this period. Swamineni worked for women's education and widow remarriage, Veeresalingam used the Sastras to argue for better conditions for women and opposed practices like the *devadasi*.

Working for the so-called lower castes was another reform activity of this period. Veeresalingam opened a school for the 'Harijans', with the help of Chilakamarthi, the writer, in Rajahmundry. Unnava, also called 'Guntur Gandhi', was another reformer to work for the 'outcastes' through his literary works.

This shows that rationalism and atheism in the twentieth century did not come out of a void but had strong precedents in the non-Brahmin thought of the pre-modern and early modern period. Important figures like Brahma Naidu and Vemana were an inspiration for the modern reformers. They came from non-Brahmin castes, opposed ritualism, tried to make temples accessible to all castes (Brahma Naidu), severely criticised the priests, wrote poetry, made innovations like the use of a new meter (Somanath), questioned the Vedas (Vemana), or argued for making the Vedic knowledge available to all the castes (Veerabrahmam), and thus along with Buddhism and Veerasaivism, prepared the intellectual ground for the later change. The thesis shows (chapter three) that the spread of rationalism, formation of caste associations and the questioning of the socio-political status-quo went hand in hand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Andhra.

This was combined with the political and economic changes in the modern period. Coming of railways and irrigation facilities brought prosperity and new facilities to the Andhra region. The introduction of the British education brought new ideas and mobility. There were also large scale migrations to cities. This resulted in exposure to urban life. All this gave confidence to the non-Brahmin castes to challenge the Brahmins.

The Non-Brahmin Movement

This challenge became a movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was a non-Brahmin movement with most of the thinkers and activists coming from the

Kamma and other non-Brahmin castes. Geographically, they were concentrated in Krishna, Godavari and Guntur districts though their influence was not limited to these parts. Most of them, especially the followers of Roy, had agricultural background. Many of them, however, had taken white-collar professions like law, journalism, and teaching. (See the table in chapter five.)

Their activities included running of study centres, holding public meetings, running journals devoted to rationalism and atheism, and writing literary as well as philosophical works. They started educational institutions and hostels for the children of the hitherto excluded castes. Some of them also took part in politics by participating in the freedom struggle or joining a political party.

Their relations with the Indian National Congress were complex. On the one hand INC was a major organisation leading the national movement. On the other hand, it was seen by the Andhra rationalists as dominated by upper castes. Though the INC had members with all shades of ideologies, it was seen as not keen on social reform.

The intellectuals in the Andhra region were not arm chair academics but reformers. They wanted the Brahmin monopoly over the old knowledge in Sanskrit and the new knowledge in English to be broken. They opposed the traditional hierarchy of status and Brahmins' claims to being born superior to the rest. They wanted educational and occupational opportunities to be available to all irrespective of their caste.

These thinkers used various strategies in their fight against superstition, privilege, and discrimination. They produced new versions of old Sanskrit texts (like the *Gita*) by re-telling them from a non-Brahmanical perspective, questioned the stories in the Puranas by taking them literally and then asking logical and factual questions, and subverted the old myths by radically changing the plots and the qualities of their characters. They also tried to see these texts as rationalisations of the marginalisation and subjection of some castes in distant history. This can be seen as an effort to 'de-Brahminise' history. This led in some cases to the claims by or on behalf of the middle peasant castes to 'Kshatriya' status.

Though Brahmins were their main target, they were against Brahminism and not against Brahmins. In fact one of the major thinkers discussed in this thesis (Gora, the atheist) was a Brahmin. They found rationalism to be an effective weapon in their fight against Brahminism because they saw Brahmins having used superstitious beliefs to perpetuate their dominance

and to keep the lower castes down. With the same rationalism they questioned belief in gods, rituals, and the other world. Thus, they were also atheists in their philosophical position.

The thesis discusses (fifth chapter) the thought of M.N.Roy though he was not a Telugu thinker because of the influence of his humanism in the coastal belt. Roy visited Andhra and had many friends and followers in the region. His influence generated various debates among his followers in the Andhra belt. There was also influence of Roy's thought on some of the literary works produced by his followers. But, as shown in the thesis, ideas of rationalism and atheism had already spread in Andhra before Roy's visits. It has been argued in the thesis that these new currents of thought prepared the soil for Roy's humanism.

However, not everyone agreed with Roy. As shown in chapter six, Gora, one of the major thinkers, expressed his intellectual differences with Roy and Royism. It is also not the case that on the question of what is atheism, all the Andhra thinkers of the period under study agreed. Their differences formed part of some of the debates that continued for a long time. Thus atheism, rationalism and humanism were not homogeneous ideologies produced by a single body of intellectuals.

It has been argued in the third chapter that there was a contradiction between the spread of rationalism and the launching of caste associations. But both these developments contributed to the non-Brahmin movement. They were taking place in Andhra at the same time. Each caste association worked for the welfare of the members of its castes only. But if rationalism is followed, then there should be effort at the improvement of all the marginalised castes, because rationalism questions all discrimination and exclusion and hierarchy based on irrational criteria like birth. Therefore those who call themselves rationalists should go beyond individual castes and work for all the poor and the excluded. But this did not happen in case of the atheist-rationalist reform movement in Andhra.

The opposition of this movement to Brahminism was in some cases limited to the Brahmin privileges. For example, they opposed the monopoly of Brahmin priests and tried to replace them by priests from one's own caste. Thus their opposition in these cases was not to the rituals but to the ritual function being monopolised by one caste. This was also inconsistent with rationalism.

With respect to the connection between Sanskrit and the Brahmin monopoly, the achievements of the reform movement are mixed. Some of them advocated use of Telugu; others advocated Sanskrit being made accessible to everyone regardless of their caste. Some (TRC) used very Sanskritised Telugu to show that they can write like the Brahmins or to fight Brahmins with their own weapon. Others wrote in simple Telugu.

The thesis has pointed out the connections and differences between the non-Brahmin movements in two adjoining regions of south India. The Andhra reformers took inspiration from the Tamil reformers but differed in some respects. The main difference between the ideologies of Andhra and Tamil non-Brahmin movements was that, while the Tamil ideologues wanted to ward off caste entirely, their Telugu counterparts wanted caste to remain, but without the Brahmin domination. In other words, they wanted to dominate the political scene in their region instead of the Brahmins.

This is also seen in their attitudes towards the British. Veeresalingam did not participate in the freedom struggle. He saw himself as a total social reformer, and therefore did not get involved in politics. He was a loyal government servant and had been honoured by the British with the title 'RAO BAHADUR'. The British gave him funds and permission to start institutions or homes for the widows. Gora on the other had difficulty holding on to his jobs due to his political views. Unlike Veeresalingam, Tripuraneni (TRC) was a supporter of the nationalist cause. Though on the caste question he leaned towards the Justice party, he strongly disagreed with it on the issue of the British rule.

Regarding their attitudes towards Gandhi, Gora came under the influence of Gandhi in 1930 and also worked for village reconstruction on Gandhian lines. But he could not share Gandhi's religious idea of truth because for him truth had to be something that could be verified. He became convinced that man can lead a decent life without the concept of God.

Gora's atheism was his main difference with Gandhi. Having faith in one's own abilities to develop oneself, without seeking help from any external forces, is what Gora calls atheism. Freedom is the chief component of this atheism. In this sense Gora modified the usual meaning of atheism as mere disbelief in God which has a negative connotation. Gora called his atheism as Positive Atheism, because of its positive aspect of being free to do anything for one's own development. Gora's Atheism combined the aspects of man gaining a hold over the forces of the world and declaring freedom from those forces. This freedom and its expression meant true atheism for Gora. In short, atheism is the total freedom of man, says

Gora. Assertion of freedom combined with morality leading to happiness is Gora's atheism. In this man's intelligence helps him. His rationalism took him to the excluded castes and he started working for them. It included inter caste marriages, inter dining, not practising untouchability, educational activities among the marginalised.

Roy also disagreed with Gandhi but unlike Gora, he did not have a close association with Gandhi. His opposition to Gandhi was much stronger. His reliance on science for change was opposed to Gandhi's use of religion and spirituality. But as argued in the thesis, the importance he gave to morality in politics was not different from Gandhi's philosophy.

Gora believed in democracy, and in the fact that all men are born equal, believed that atheists who have the humanist outlook will always go beyond personal comforts and think of the whole of humanity. Gora believed that this is a natural tendency of an atheist.

Roy also believed in democracy but because of his insistence on freedom made him reject parliamentary democracy where parties and the government rule individuals and search for models in which man made institutions would serve men and not dominate them. There are similarities between Gora and Roy on the importance they gave to the value of freedom. For Roy, man's quest for freedom is reflected in his struggle for existence and improvement. Urge for progress is basic. Using reason and scientific knowledge in modern era, man can understand how nature works and decide what is good for him. Like reason, Roy saw morality as innate to man. For him there was a natural connection between the two. Like Gora and TRC, Roy saw religion as the opposite of reason and progress.

It is interesting to note these thinkers' attitudes towards Marxism. For Roy, the individual comes before society. Society and the state are means to the ends of the individual. Freedom to be real must be individual freedom. The dictatorship of the proletariat amounts to the loss of individual freedom. The chief mistake of Marx, according to Roy was the singular emphasis on the economic aspect of life, by ignoring social and ideological aspects. Judging a society only in terms of economic aspects was not correct. In Gora's opinion materialism is a good alternative to religion, but it lacks the morality and ethics needed for an individual's wellbeing. For Gora, theistic determinism and Marxist determinism are not very different from each other, because both the schools talk of freedom but do not believe in free will.

To be able to think and form an opinion with a free mind is an important aspect of atheism, Gora says. But after forming an opinion, it should be subjected to scientific enquiry and only if it is proven with evidence, it becomes the truth. Gora had a great faith in science and technology. He believed that medicines can be developed to remove any human maladies, thus relying not on the mercy of God, but on the human mind and its great ability to overcome problems with reason. In this regard he was like the other major thinkers.

Achievements and Limitations of the Movement

Thus, all three major thinkers discussed in this thesis believed in the power of human reason, valued questioning attitude towards authority, and hoped that with the use of its intellectual capacities, mankind can make progress. Their rationalism and criticism of Brahminism contributed to the weakening of the Brahmin domination in the Andhra region and contributed to social mobility.

The non-Brahmin movement influenced the production of socially relevant Telugu literature of high quality. It contributed to the development of Telugu identity. Tripuraneni (TRC) was an advocate of a separate Telugu state who also invoked the Aryan-Dravidian divide. He proposed a myth of Dravidians living peacefully in the South, away from the battle prone north, the Aryavarta, where people belonged to many tribes and indulged in infighting. He even read this divide into the epics. All this made the Telugus of the region aware of their history and connected opposition to Brahmin dominance to pride in Telugu identity. The literary works, both in Sanskritised Telugu and in simple everyday Telugu, enriched the Telugu language.

The movement also brought the condition of women and the excluded castes in public discussion. But since the movement was not led by members of those sections, the public discussion did not result in radical action. The mobility produced by the movement remained restricted to castes like the Kammas. Thus, it can be said that the ideas and ideals proposed by the movement were radical and there was a lot of discussion and debate but the political change was not radical. The movement was not homogeneous. It did not have one ideology, one programme and one organisation. Because of the influence of Gandhi and the national movement, the non-Brahmin movement got absorbed in it. Royism remained away from

Congress but could not compete with the influence of Congress. Moreover, because it was opposed to party politics, it could not effectively challenge Congress. Its opposition to religion also did not lead to long term changes. The insistence of the movement on scientific temper has survived in the activities of the rationalist association but the influence of religion remains strong.

The movement has left behind rich debates which took place in the twentieth century. Currently these debates are still carried out at a few scattered places in the institutions established by the followers of atheism, rationalism and radical humanism but only in a select closed group of intellectuals.

Making use of the modern technology and the internet today's rationalists and atheists continue to comment on several contemporary issues and thus try to keep the tradition of rationalism and atheism alive. They also organise conferences, seminars and public lectures to register the ideas of the intellectuals of the bygone era in public memory. But, as movements and an intellectual force in the contemporary public life, they have no presence in the Andhra region any longer.

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Appendices

Glossary of Terms for Chapter 3

Balijas: A martial and mercantile community originally from Andhra area of the river Godavari, who migrated to areas of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and some areas of Kerala. Mostly these became land lords later.

Devadasi: A community dominant in the coastal districts of Andhra, known locally as the *bogam* caste, who were officially the temple dancers and musicians who propitiated the local deity through their art.

Kamma: A class of agricultural practitioners from Guntur and Krishna areas of Andhra, who claim martial inheritance from the Vijayanagar period, who became one of the main supporters of the non-Brahmin movement in Andhra.

Kapu: A dominant class from coastal Godavari belt of Andhra, which later became dominant caste in deciding the economic status of villages in Andhra. This class held sway over the agricultural cultivation.

Karanam: A post /community of Andhra equalling that of village chief account officer, in land administration. A post invariably held by the Brahmin community of the Niyogi subsect till 1983, in which the post was terminated by the N.T. Rama Rao government through a government ordinance.

Niyogi: A Brahmin subsect belonging to Telugu origin, who distinguished themselves in not only priesthood, but in secular activities like teaching, village administration, poetry, music and dance, social reform etc. A community which was noted for its martial and military dominance in the Kakatiya, Reddy and Vijayanagar reign in Andhra area.

Padmashalis: A community noted for their weaving finesse, also who wear a sacred thread as a symbol of their belief of being descendants of the Hindu divine sculptor, Vishwakarma. Dominant in Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka areas.

Puranas: The prime branch of Indian literature distinguished from the Vedas, which gave inspiration for many epic poems in India. These texts have an author, as opposed to the authorless Vedas. 18 in number, the Puranas describe tales of gods and mostly considered devotional literature.

Reddi (Reddy): A dominant rural community of Andhra and Telangana who distinguished themselves as having an ancestral royalty. Areas of Coastal belts in Guntur and Rajahmundry were ruled by the Reddis who apart from being warrior kings, were learned men of Sanskrit and produced great literature including commentaries on plays of poets like Kalidas which are still considered the most prominent. The community had agriculture as their main occupation and then became merchants and also wielded political dominance in the coastal belt of Andhra.

Vaidikis: The sub sect among Telugu Brahmins who enjoyed the stature of priestly dominance, officiating in every religious ceremony in village and kingdoms before the advent of modern era. The first Telugu poet Nannaya Bhattaraka belonged to this community, on the banks of

river Godavari. Sects of Vaidiki Brahmins migrated to Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala later where they became more prominent as village priests.

Vaishya: The primary community of trade and merchandise in the coastal belt of Andhra, known as Komatis, who monopolised the rural merchandise. They also were claiming the status of prominence as that of Brahmins in the coastal belt.

Velama: A community from coastal Andhra, who were noted for their trade in maritime and who later became landlords, patronised by the British in the 18th and 19th century.

Veersa S(h)aivism: The movement started by 12th century Kannada poet mystic, Basaveswara which preached casteless society and an unswerving faith in god. The chief motto of this school was the work/profession of one's community itself is a way to reach /realise god. An influential thought which was a precursor to various social reforms in religious institutions in the South of India. The chief aspect of god was Lord Siva in this school.

Zamindar: The title which is derived from the land lordship of wealthy classes in India, who were appointed by the British to overlook the agricultural revenue in areas, appointed as their middlemen. This position later was abolished, when the land ceiling act was legislated by the government of India, after country's independence.

Glossary of Terms for Chapter 6

Bhoodan Movement: The movement started by veteran Gandhian freedom fighter, Vinoba Bhave(1895-1982), in order to make rural self sufficiency in villages. Land reform of donating the landlords' land to the landless rural communities to achieve self sufficiency of villages.

Determinism: The theory which focuses on the idea of human existence as every event being pre planned by existing causes.

Existentialism: The theory which gives the prime place for existence of an individual, over the essence in other words, the theory which gives importance to human free will and choice. The human makes rational choices, though he lives in an irrational world according to this theory.

Gram Swaraj: A broad term invented by Mahatma Gandhi in his experiment of making Indian villages self sufficient in all the basic human development indicators like governance, education and health. The traditional professions of these units of villages form an important part of achieving self-sufficiency.

Harijan: A term literally translated ‘people of god’, coined by Mahatma Gandhi to denote the untouchable backward community of India.

Materialism: The school of thought which lays primacy on human relations and everything in the conscience of the world is defined in terms of material existence. This concept is a corollary to physicalism, a school of thought which proposes each existence of a human being is physical.

Niyogi: A sect of Telugu brahmin community, who are traditionally known for their outreaching attitude and as officials, administrators, and literary figures in public life.

Sarvodaya Movement: Literally meaning ‘the progress of all’, this idea was a brainchild of Gandhiji, used in the sense of an ideal social order. However, this was employed by his disciple, Vinoba Bhave as a land reform movement of Bhoodan. Later veteran leader, Jayaprakash Narayan adopted this idea to achieve freedom, equality, and brotherhood. All three individuals had a close relation with Gora and appreciated his views.

Satyagraha: The method employed by Mahatma Gandhi, as an effective tool to bring in transformation in the enemy. The method includes nonviolence as the chief tenet, which proved influential as a potent tool all over the world.

Vedas: The principal texts of what is now known as the Hindu school of thought. The Vedas include many verses which talk about the world, its existence and the way one should approach life. The Rg Veda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda are the main Vedas, which have their own branches in India.

Vedanta: Literally, ‘the essence of Vedas’, this term denotes the sub texts of Vedas, known as the Upanishads. While the Vedas are in the form of chants, the Upanishads are in the form of dialogues between the teacher and a disciple, sometimes various disciples. The texts elaborate on various aspects of human existence

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The Indian Journal of Political Science



Volume LXXXII, No. 1

January-March, 2021

Editor
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व्याघ्री यथा हरेत् पुत्रान्
दंष्ट्राभ्यां न च पीडयेत्।
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The Quarterly Journal of Indian
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Rani Chennamma

THE INFLUENCE AND RELEVANCE OF M.N. ROY IN COASTAL ANDHRA: AN ANALYSIS

Mulugu Subrahmanya Neelotpal

Early 20th century witnessed the emergence of an intellectual who redefined the concept of freedom and proposed an alternate philosophy for a democratic India, post its political independence. Manavendra Nath Roy (M.N.Roy) was a great thinker who proposed the theory of 'Radical Humanism' which defined democracy through the standpoint of people and their role as citizens. This paper examines the deep influence that his thought had in the coastal belt of Andhra from the 1930s till 1960s, where the educated intelligentsia discussed the concept with a practical bent of mind.

The Philosophy of M.N.Roy and its Relevance

M.N.Roy was a man ahead of his times. He was a thinker who predicted the true rule of people before India got its independence. It was he who said people ought to be true rulers and deciders of their fate, and political class of party and other aspects should be monitored by people who know the value of the concept of freedom, one which is a natural right which people have by virtue of being born in a state¹. The main concept of Roy was that it required a strong vision from the people, who will constantly fight for their freedom as citizens and the state remains the chief facilitator of this freedom². His concept of new or 'radical humanism' focuses on the individual who forms the society rather than the state which governs them. Roy's genius lay in the fact that he cautioned India about the concept of political parties which will manipulate the idea of freedom and use it to capture power rather than helping citizens to realise their dream of a facilitating nation³. The nation should create opportunities for citizens to prosper by creating opportunities of free development of human personality. This idea is mostly relevant today, in this era of post globalisation where democracy is facing a challenge through various forces like society and the state. Roy was of the view that institutions are to be created by man who is rational by birth and can think quite decisively about his wellbeing. No institutions, be it religion or state should hinder human progress. This view of Roy was termed quite path breaking

in an era, where he passed through a lot of political ideologies including communism and Indian version of political socialist movement in the early 20th century⁴. Roy clearly enumerated the misgivings of communism, which ought to bring dignity to human life, but in lieu of surrendering human urge for security and dignity, gave rise to great amount of dictatorship, a concept it preached, was against the ideals of human dignity⁵. Roy and his principles of 'radical humanism' influenced many intellectuals in India, most of them who were products of the western education post 19th century⁶. Academics, writers, and social reformers in South India, especially in the coastal belt of Andhra got influenced by the progressive thoughts of Roy and attended his camps at his main centre at Dehra Dun. The announcement of the Radical Democratic Party in 1940 and subsequent conversion of the party to a movement, made a significant impact on the minds of intellectuals in Andhra and makes for an interesting analysis to examine, as no other South Indian state adapted Roy's debates in as widely as the region of Andhra did in its entirety.

Roy and his democratic ideas which were focussed on the state being only a facilitator of human freedom and not a curbing unit, struck the chord in intellectuals who were noted for ushering in rational, atheist ideas in the coastal belt of Andhra (the Krishna and the Godavari districts) which were noted for their educated class of people, who lead the social reform movement and political struggle for independence in

GANDHI MARG

VOLUME 43 • NUMBER 4 • JANUARY-MARCH 2022

Gandhi Peace Foundation
New Delhi

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Published by Ashok Kumar for the Gandhi Peace Foundation, 221 & 223 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg, New Delhi-110 002 (Phones: 23237491, 23237493; Fax: +91-11-23236734), Website: www.gandhimargjournal.org, e-mail: gpfl8@rediffmail.com, gandhipacefoundation18@yahoo.co.in, and printed by him at Gupta Printing and Stationery Service, 275, Pratap Nagar, Street No. 18, Delhi-110007

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Gandhi Marg Quarterly

43(4): 451-466

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ISSN 0016-4437

The Concept of Freedom: Ideas of Gandhi, M. N. Roy and Gora

Mulugu Subrahmanya Neelotpai

ABSTRACT

Both philosophically and practically, the idea of freedom is an interesting aspect of 20th-century political theory. The idea has undergone a lot of defining and redefining in the parlance of India's freedom struggle. This paper examines the idea of freedom through the prism of three original thinkers: Mahatma Gandhi, M.N. Roy (the great communist turned political thinker), and Gora (the man who redefined the concept of atheism in Independent India). These thinkers represent three thought streams: Mahatma Gandhi's moral idealism, M.N. Roy's radical humanism, and Gora's atheism. The paper also examines how Gandhi shaped two different philosophies of India's two distinct intellectual minds and how they implemented the Gandhian aspects in their thought.

Key words: Freedom, Mahatma Gandhi, M.N.Roy, Gora, Satyagraha

Freedom: An Eternal Concept

THE GENERAL AIM of any social or political philosophy is to find solutions to the problems human life generate in this world. When propounded by profound thinkers, such concepts show a way or put up a road map for the development of human society. India is a country where many ideas were redefined and reinvented to suit the needs of the common people in a particular period. Various socially and politically involved thinkers have contributed to contextualising western ideas and Indianized them to suit the psyche of India. Right from the days of ancient India, the idea of freedom was one that emanated from the concept of *Dharma* or being righteous to the canonical texts (The Dharma Sastra).¹ Epics like the *Mahabharatha*

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL
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VOLUME-III- SOCIAL SCIENCES

ATHEISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN ANDHRA: THE DEBATES

Mulugu.S.Neelotpal, Research Scholar in Political Science, University of Hyderabad

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ATHEISM IN INDIA ;ITS INFLUENCE ON INDIAN SOCIETY

The word atheism in Indian philosophical thought means a system of thought which has no use to the concept called God and a system opposed to all forms of speculation and religion.¹ Generally in India, the systems which are regarded as atheistic are the *Charvaka*, *Sankhya*, *Mimamsa*, *Buddhism* and *Jainism*. But, when applied the above definition of atheism, only *Charvaka*² qualifies to be the only atheistic thought and the other thoughts exhibit the denial of reality of god, but they openly embrace spiritual and religious ideas. The correct meaning of the word Atheism in contrast to the term Theism, which Prof.A.E.Taylor defines, is a doctrine where ultimate ground of things is a single supreme reality which is the source of everything other than itself and has the character of being intrinsically perfect, as a consequence an adequate object of unqualified adoration and worship. Thus, theism stands for a doctrine of personal god who is the ultimate principle of the universe, the primordial guardian of moral values and lastly the highest object of religious worship.³

¹ L.R.Joshi. "A new interpretation of Indian atheism," *Philosophy of East and West*.314 (1966)189.

² The school of *Charvaka* forms part of non-Vedic schools of thought in Indian philosophy, it is also known with other names as *Barhaspatya*, as it is believed to be taught by the Hindu preceptor to Gods, *Brihaspati* and also known as *Lokayata*, as they believed in the mortal world and not in other world.

³ Ibid.314(189-190)

An atheist is a 'naturalist' who tries to explain the worldly phenomena in terms of 'physical nature' without any references to God. All physical objects originate here from a fortuitous combination of elementary particles of matter. An exception in this respect is the '*Charvaka*' which said that the Soul, God, Heaven and release are all false notions as it doesn't accept the law of *karma*, as don't believe in teleological creation of this world.⁴ In the moral field too, atheism rules out God as the moral custodian of moral values. Hence, the atheists stress on materialistic attitude, hostile to all forms of spiritualism and religion.⁵

The '*Charvaka*' school of thought is said to be real atheistic system in India, which said that there are no 'otherworldly pleasures, no God to protect morals and life is born and dies in matter, hence there is no life after death, no thing called soul exists after death. It was first school of thought which focussed on physical reality of the world.

THE MODERN ERA; THE REINTERPRETATION OF ATHEISM AS A BROAD CONCEPT AND ITS INFLUENCE IN INDIA[THE TELUGU REGION INCLUDED]

Modern thinkers of the west have influenced a lot on relating atheism to human values. British atheists like Charles Brad laugh, Joseph .Lewis⁶ explained

⁴ Ibid.314(191)

⁵ Ibid314(191)

⁶ Charles Brad laugh (1833-1891), was a famous political activist of England and Joseph Lewis (1885-1968) was a noted American atheist activist.



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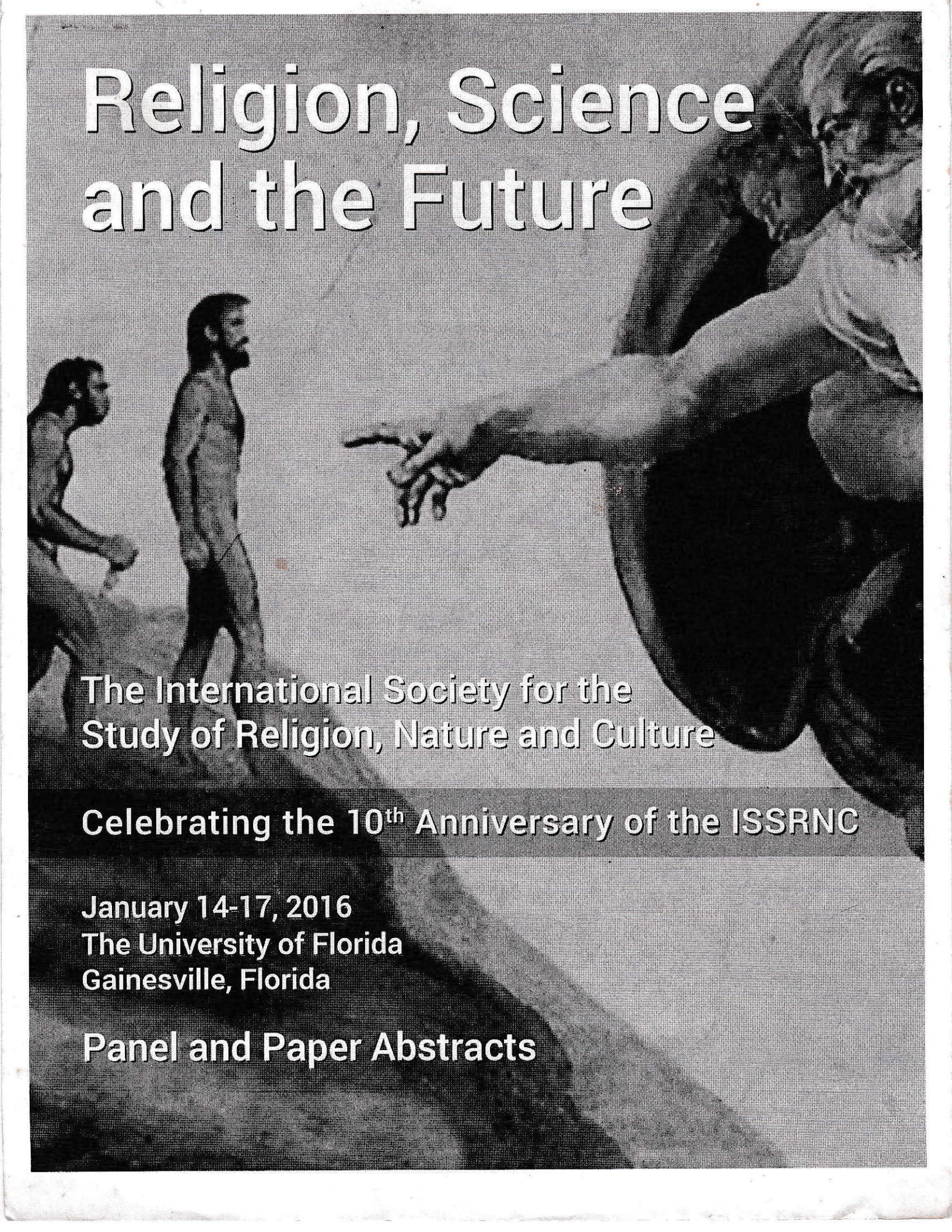
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Panel and Paper Abstracts

Mulugu.S. Neelotpal (University of Hyderabad, India)

Title: *The Talisman of Tyagaraja: Music as an Art and Science to Preserve Nature*

The current age of modernity is in a constant search for a new faith, to forge a union of man, science and nature. As David Tacey put it, this is the age of spirituality, where a direct contact with the divine, is more advocated, rather than belief in "religious" ideas and dogmas. This approach leads to a search of the soul of the being. The Eastern religions, mostly the intellectual Tradition of Hinduism, gives a permanent solution for a peaceful coexisting of man and nature. This paper looks into the Classical music tradition of South India, by focussing on the eighteenth composer, Tyagaraja and his successful use of music as a promoting force of nature and its symbols, by using the Bhakti (Devotion) cult of singing minstrels of India. This was done by creating a new paradigm of music using science of Indian music, aesthetics of art, including effective use of language.

Catherine Newell (University of Miami, United States)

Title: *Darwin's Diet and St. Francis's Menagerie: Spiritual Well-Being through Food*

This paper examines how food cultures unite science and religion in American society; in particular, how popular science and Internet media have facilitated an integration of science and religion at the level of individual spiritual practice. I illuminate how science is used to justify a diet/lifestyle and explore the world of "diet cults": people who identify themselves not by a religion but by their diet (vegan, Paleo, gluten free, locavore). Diets are based in sciences such as anthropology, ecology, systems biology, nutritional studies, and physiology, while adherents view their diet as a lifestyle and path to spiritual enlightenment. Evidence for this is found in online "conversion narratives," personal stories describing the conversion to a particular diet. While on one level this project explores how food, health, and diet can be a source of spiritual fulfillment, on another level I illustrate how food can serve religious as well as physical needs.

Amanda Nichols (University of Florida, United States)

Title: *Gaia Evangelical Christianity and Resistance to Mountaintop Removal in Appalachia*

The implementation of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining in West Virginia in the 1970's brought devastating anthropogenic environmental change to the region. Examining the role religion has played in the ongoing conversation to end MTR, I show that traditional forms of Evangelical Christianity have been hybridized through the negotiation of social and cultural identity and emerging forms of ethical environmentalism. Utilizing the works of historian Anthony Harkins and sociologist Rebecca Scott, I relate the formation of an articulated social and cultural identity, expanding on the role of religion in identity construction. I argue that, afflicted by MTR, some Evangelical Christians have begun to develop new dimensions of religious identity. Re-negotiating their interrelationship with a land considered sacred, these Evangelicals merge ethical environmental practices and activism with religious beliefs and practices. The emerging hybridized 'green' Christianity has inspired a synergistic community response, hindering mining and strengthening the ongoing fight against MTR.

Elaine Nogueira-Godsey (University of Cape Town, South Africa)

Title: *Indigenous Medicinal Knowledge as Commodity among San People of Southern Africa*

The thought that indigenous medicinal knowledge could become a preferable alternative to western medicine in modern cities has been imagined by many scholars of religion and nature as signalling the advent of more progressive, even liberating, mindsets. Some scholars have proposed that to learn from indigenous medicinal knowledge and practice represents a biocentric and sustainable option, which has the potential to lessen the effects of the ecological crisis and instill ecological values and ethics in a market-oriented society. Yet, empirical studies with the San people in Southern Africa have shown that it has been a pragmatic choice to reveal their medicinal knowledge, a choice informed "by experiences of deprivation and economic hardship" (Vermeylen, S. 2008). This paper employs a qualitative content analysis to such studies and draws attention to the ways that this social dynamic has contributed to not only undermining the cultural meaning of medicinal knowledge for the San themselves, but also to put into question nature's traditional healing powers.

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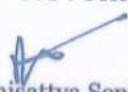
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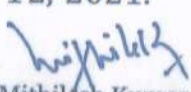
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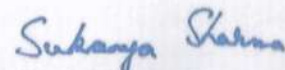
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by Mulugu S. Neelotpal

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