



TELUGU WOMEN PRINT ACTIVISM: JOURNALS, SOCIAL REFORMS AND THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses the rise and development of women's print activism in Telugu from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century colonial Andhra. It argues that journals edited by women created a separate space for feminist political activity. The genre began with major works such as *Satihita Bodhini* (1883) and *Telugu Zenana* (1893). It grew significantly, with at least twenty-one women's journals published before 1947, including *Grihalakshmi* (the first illustrated Telugu women's journal), *Anasuya*, *Andhra Lakshmi*, *Hindu Sundari*, and *Savitri*. Using archival analysis of these periodicals, this study shows how they worked as a counterpublic sphere where women questioned patriarchal norms, discussed the "woman question," and expressed gendered views on education, widow remarriage, child marriage, dowry, and caste hierarchies. This article traces a key ideological trajectory: from an initial concern with social reform framed as self-improvement for women to an increasingly explicit political engagement with the anticolonial struggle under the influence of Gandhian mass movements—in particular Non-Cooperation and Quit India—where these journals increasingly articulated *stree swaraj* as essential to *swaraj*. Writing, editing, and publishing were all acts of politics challenging colonial authority as much as indigenous patriarchy. By recovering this archive of women's intellectual labour, it repositions Telugu women not as marginal beneficiaries of reform or merely symbolic participants in nationalism but rather as central actors who shaped discourse on modernity, social change, and anticolonial resistance within South India.

Keywords: Print Culture, Telugu Journalism, Women's Writings, Indian Freedom Struggle, Political Awakening, Social Reform, Feminist Consciousness, Nationalism, Colonial Andhra, Gender History.

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of print culture in colonial India is an important event in the political and social history of the subcontinent, significantly altering the patterns of the flow of ideas and the modes of engagement with themes of reform, identity, and resistance. In the Telugu-speaking districts of the Madras Presidency, the growth of vernacular journalism from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century provided unprecedented opportunities for discourse, for involving new voices in the construction of regional and nationalist identity, and for fostering nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments. Within this expanding print sphere, women's journals occupied a distinctive and critically important space, serving as both mirrors of changing gender ideologies and catalysts for women's political awakening.

Between 1883 and 1947, at least twenty-one women's journals emerged in Telugu, marking a remarkable expansion of this specialised print culture. Satihitha Bodhini (1883-1905), written by Kandukuri Veeresalingam, marks the first Telugu journal that focused specifically on issues relating to women, while other publications followed, such as Telugu Zenana (1893-1907), Hindu Sundari (1902-1942), Savithri (1904-1917). While early journals were edited by male reformers who recognised that women's issues constituted the nucleus of the social reform movement, a significant transition occurred by the early twentieth century when women began assuming editorial control. Hindu Sundari became the first women-edited journal in Telugu in December 1903, with Mosalikanti Ramabayamma and Vempali Shantabayamma as editors, followed by Savithri (edited by Pulugurta Lakshmi Narasambam), Anasuya (edited by Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma), and Andhra Lakshmi (edited by Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma) (Valasandhralo Streela Patrikalu, 1; Basha, "Lesser Known Telugu Women's Journals," 5, 10-11). This transition from women as readers and subjects to women as producers of knowledge represents a fundamental shift in the gender politics of print culture.

Women's journals played a significant role in fostering political consciousness among the people. Such publications served as a medium through which women writers could express their views on political issues, share information about nationalist activities, and promote regional solidarity. In an essay published in the magazine Grihalakshmi in 1936, Maidavolu Padmavathi Devi wrote, "The first task to be accomplished after the country attains independence is the liberation of women.... Women must develop their own individuality. Only a country that achieves gender equality can truly attain freedom" (Tiragaraasina Alanaati Stree Charitra Re, 1). Similarly, Andhra Mahila, founded and initially edited by Gummadidala Durgabayamma (later Durgabai Deshmukh), published numerous articles on women's civil and political rights, undertaking rigorous campaigns for women's right to inheritance, divorce, and greater political representation, representing the radical changes occurring in women's consciousness during the 1940s and 1950s (Basha, "Lesser Known Telugu Women's Journals," 6). Such writings resist colonial patriarchy as well as indigenous patriarchy, while at the same time promoting an idea of freedom that is political as well as individual. However, the political awareness expressed in the journals was neither monolithic nor without dissent. Conservative journals like Savithri, under the editorship of Pulugurta Lakshmi Narasambam, strongly opposed widow remarriage and orthodox Hindu practices, stating that remarriage was not the dharma of the caste and that the remarried widow could not be considered a kulagananalu (women of the caste) (On Savithri, 3). This position sparked fierce debates among reformers across multiple journals, involving figures such as Kandukuri Veeresalingam, Kotikalapudi Sitamma, and others. When Narasambam attempted to exclude remarried widows from women's organisation meetings, the resulting controversy drew in publications like Hindu Sundari as mediators, demonstrating that women's journals had become genuine arenas for political struggle where women actively contested the meanings of reform, tradition, and women's roles (On Savithri, 4-7).

The institutional setting in which these publications were located, including the women's organisations whose activities were represented, the reading circles in which the texts were discussed, and the examinations in which the texts were used, provided the setting for the creation of an associative network that expanded the political reach of print beyond the textual medium itself. Organisations like the Sri Vidyarthini Samajam (established in Kakinada in 1903) and state-level conferences like the Andhra Mahila Mahasabha (beginning in 1910) both depended on and generated readership for women's journals. The detailed reports of conference proceedings, publication of speeches delivered by women leaders, and announcements of organisational activities that filled the pages of journals created a reciprocal relationship between print and organisational life that amplified the impact of both (On Savithri, 3). Journals like Anasuya went further by conducting examinations for women, awarding certificates and medals to successful candidates from locations as distant as Nellore, literally creating new forms of female association and recognition (Basha, "Lesser Known Telugu Women's Journals," 9).

The present study aims to examine the politicisation of women's writings in Telugu journals during the freedom struggle, focusing on their content and the circumstances of their publication. By

analysing a range of publications from the 1880s through the 1940s, this study seeks to understand how print culture enabled women to develop political consciousness, articulate demands, and participate in the anti-colonial movement, thereby contributing to our understanding of how gender and print intersected in the formation of modern political subjectivities in colonial India.

2. WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO TELUGU PRINT CULTURE

The entry of women into Telugu print culture was a gradual change that began with 19th-century social reforms and matured during the nationalist movement. At first, male social reformers started a place for women in print. Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, thinking that schooling was the only thing that would help women, made the first Telugu women's journal, *Satihitha Bodhini* (1883–1905), to spread reform ideas to women. The second journal, *Telugu Zenana* (1893–1907), edited by Rayasam Venkata Sivudu, continued this work, focusing on women's schooling and home life. These first tries were important, but they mostly made women readers and things to be reformed. The start of the 20th century saw a key change, with women being the creators of their own conversations.

By 1947, approximately twenty-one women's journals had been published in Telugu, with a significant number—about fourteen—edited by women. *Hindu Sundari* (1902–1942), which began under male editorship, became the first to be edited by women from December 1903, with Mosalikanti Ramabayamma and Vempali Shantabayamma, and later by prominent figures like Madabhooshi Choodamma and Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma. Its significance lay in transforming "many women into accomplished writers, playing a vital role in changing women's consciousness." This was followed by journals with diverse ideologies: the conservative *Savithri* (1904–1917), edited by Pulugurta Lakshmi Narasambama, which opposed widow remarriage; the progressive *Anasuya* (1917–1924), edited by Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma; *Andhra Lakshmi* (1921–1924), edited by the activist-intellectual Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma; and the long-running and influential *Grihalakshmi* (1928–1960). These women editors were not merely managers but also writers, organisers, and intellectuals who actively shaped feminist and nationalist discourse.

A powerful confluence of social reform, education, and Gandhian nationalism drove women's entry into print. Veeresalingam and others in the social reform movement worked to end child marriage and forced widowhood. This encouraged open discussion of the issues women faced. As a result, educated women began to write. Bandaru Atchamamba, for instance, wrote *Abala Saccharitra Ratnamala* (1901), a collection of biographies of important women, to challenge the view that women were naturally weak.

The expansion of women's schools, thanks to reformers and groups like the Sri Vidyarthini Samajamu (founded in 1903), created a literate women's community and a group of possible female authors. Yet, the nationalist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi had the greatest impact. Gandhi's encouragement of women to actively participate in public life as Satyagrahis gave them a strong and acceptable reason to do so.

Women like Duvvuru Subbamma, who was the first woman leader in Andhra to be imprisoned in 1922 during the Non-Cooperation Movement, and Durgabai Deshmukh, inspired by Gandhi at the age of eleven, became iconic figures. Their actions were reported in Gandhi's journals, and they themselves used these platforms for mobilisation. K. Janaki observes that Gandhi's 1921 visit to coastal Andhra motivated women to join the fight for independence. This participation was closely tied to their increasing presence in publications. So, the nationalist movement transformed journals from simple learning resources into powerful tools for spreading political ideas and fostering a shared sense of identity.

A critical function of women's writings in these journals was to bridge the seemingly separate spheres of the domestic and the public, effectively politicising the private realm. Early publications, such as *Telugu Zenana*, centred on household management and moral tales. Yet, these subjects were presented as part of national advancement, suggesting that educated females would be superior parents and members of society. Gandhi's *Anasuya* explicitly stated that it "aims to publish on domestic management alongside the histories of accomplished modern women, thereby linking the traditional

role of women with their contemporary potential. A powerful example of this bridging is Kanuparti Varalakshamma's fictional autobiography, *Premlata - Sweeya Charitramu*, serialised in *Anasuya* in 1919. The story describes the pain of a young wife, Premalata, in her in-laws' house. It judged the domestic abuse and oppression that people thought were personal. By sharing this very intimate story, the journal made secret suffering public, calling it a social problem that needed to be fixed and asking for kinder treatment of daughters-in-law.

As the nationalist movement intensified, so did the scope of these writings. By the 1930s, journals like *Grihalakshmi* were hosting fierce debates on issues far beyond the home. In 1930 alone, it published articles by several women on the "Anti-Divorce" and "Women and Divorce" bills, with some writers, such as Adurthi Bhaskaramma, arguing in favour of them. They discussed women's rights to property and representation in political bodies, and they condemned male domination. As Shaik Mahaboob Basha's research shows, later journals like *Andhra Mahila* (1944–1960s) were "eloquent advocates of the various rights of women," undertaking rigorous campaigns and political rights. By writing about their lives, their legal status, and their political aspirations, women transformed their personal experiences into public documents for change. The journals thus became the crucial bridge across which the concerns of the home travelled into the arena of national politics, forging a new, politically conscious woman who was simultaneously a homemaker and a citizen. Women turned their private stories into calls for change by writing about their lives, legal positions, and political goals. These writings were a key link that carried home concerns into national politics, creating a new type of politically aware woman who was both a homemaker and a citizen

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Shaik Mahaboob Basha, scripting a new gender politics (2023): Basha's study of women's journals from 1883 to 1960 examines them as spaces of autonomy in which women articulated their distinct political voices. He identifies three phases: a phase dominated by male reformists (1883-1910), a phase taken over by women editors (1910-1928), and a radical phase that sought political rights for women (1928-1960). His notion of "vernacular feminism" illustrates how women writers appropriated indigenous cultural resources while negotiating international feminist discourse. Through an analysis of journals like *Grihalakshmi* and *Hindu Sundari*, Basha demonstrates the active role of women in debates over reform, the ways they constructed gendered nationalism, and the intellectual networks that connected women across colonial Andhra.

Janaki, K. Role of Women in Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh (1999) : Janaki's pioneering work explores women's participation in the freedom struggle in Andhra Pradesh from 1920 to 1947 through archival research, including their role in the nationalist movement, which she argues was shaped by new forms of protest introduced by women. The work, a survey, includes pre-Gandhian reform movements, statistical data on arrests, women leaders such as Duvvuru Subbamma and Durgabai Deshmukh, and women at the grassroots level. The work focuses on the experiences of women in prison, which is essential.

Utukuri Lakshmikantamma, Andhra Kavayitrulu (1975): Lakshmikantamma's work systematically documents Telugu women poets from the mid-twentieth century to the present. It provides biographical and bibliographical information about writers active in social reform and nationalist movements, including medieval poets (Timmakka, Molla), colonial-era reformers (Atchamamba, Rajyalakshamma), and nationalist writers (Varalakshamma, Viswasundaramma). Despite lacking contemporary theoretical sophistication, it remains indispensable for identifying women writers whose contributions appeared in periodicals

4. RESEARCH GAP

While existing scholarship has effectively documented the emergence of Telugu women's journals from the late nineteenth century—tracing their evolution from male-initiated reform platforms (pioneered by figures like Kandukuri Veeresalingam) to woman-edited periodicals addressing education, widow remarriage, child marriage, and domesticity in publications such as *Telugu*

Zenana, Grihalakshmi, Anasuya, Andhra Lakshmi, and Savitri—this body of work remains largely centered on the social reform era (1880s–1920s). While recent academic work has done a commendable job of recovering lesser-known works and extending the discourse on gender politics to about 1960, a significant gap remains in the scholarly literature. Specifically, many scholars have failed to connect Telugu women's print activism effectively to the broader trajectory of the Indian freedom movement. The usual definition of traditional academia divides the areas of nationalism from social reform, so there has been no investigation into how women who contributed to periodicals, as well as those who were published in that period, operated at the crossroads of time and patriotic agency. Specifically, the role of these periodicals in mediating nationalist campaigns—Non-Cooperation (1920–22), Civil Disobedience (1930–34), and Quit India (1942)—through coverage of Gandhi's campaigns, women's satyagraha, boycott politics, and the emergence of women's organisations, remains largely unexamined. This paper examines the role of Telugu Women's Journals as a key bridge, fostering a regional public sphere in which gender emancipation was discussed alongside the political struggle for national independence in Andhra Pradesh.

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the emergence and development of women's journals in the Telugu language during the colonial period (late 19th century to 1947), tracing their historical origins, key publications, editorial shifts from male to female leadership, and the role of print culture in expanding women's access to literacy and public expression in the Andhra region.
- 2) To identify and analyse the major themes present in women's writings published in Telugu journals, including social reforms (education, widow remarriage, child marriage opposition, health, and domesticity), critiques of patriarchal structures, and the gradual incorporation of nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments.
- 3) To investigate the contribution of these journals to the political awakening and consciousness-raising among Telugu women, highlighting how writings by women authors promoted participation in the Indian freedom struggle, linked gender equality to national liberation, and encouraged mobilisation in movements such as the Swadeshi, Non-Cooperation, and Quit India movements.
- 4) To assess the transformative impact of print media on women's intellectual, social, and political roles in colonial Telugu society, exploring how these journals served as platforms for female agency, challenged dominant narratives, fostered regional feminist discourse, and intersected with broader nationalist ideologies.
- 5) To evaluate the legacy and significance of women's writings in Telugu journals within the larger context of India's freedom struggle, considering their influence on post-independence gender politics, literary traditions, and the evolution of women's public voice in South India.

6. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this article adopts a qualitative historical-textual approach, relying on archival research and critical analysis to explore how Telugu print culture in journals fostered women's political awakening during India's freedom struggle. Primary sources include key Telugu periodicals such as *Grihalakshmi*, *Andhra Patrika*, *Telugu Mahila*, *Hindu Sundari*, *Savithri*, *Anasuya*, *Andhra Lakshmi*, and *Andhra Mahila*, as well as women's essays, poems, stories, and editorials from the 1880s to 1947, available in library collections, on microfilm, and in digitised archives. Secondary sources encompass scholarly works on Indian print culture, Telugu literature, women's history, nationalism, and biographies of women writers, providing contextual and interpretive support. Analysis combines thematic analysis to trace motifs such as education, social reform, anti-colonial resistance, and gender roles, with discourse analysis to examine rhetorical strategies and representations, informed by gender-sensitive historical readings that contextualise texts within colonial socio-political dynamics in the Madras Presidency and Hyderabad State. The scope covers 1883–1947 in Telugu-speaking regions, with limitations including fragmented archives, incomplete journal runs, limited digitisation, and potential elite biases in preserved materials, which are addressed through cross-verification and

transparent acknowledgement of gaps. This rigorous, source-based method ensures a balanced reconstruction of women's contributions to nationalist discourse via print media.

7. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PRINT CULTURE AND POLITICAL AWAKENING:

The development of printing presses in Telugu-speaking lands in the 1800s brought significant change to Andhra's intellectual landscape. In the 1830s, missionary and native presses in the coastal towns of Madras, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, and Masulipatnam created a vibrant print culture (Basha, 2015, pp. 42–45). Periodicals such as *Andhra Patrika* (1908) and *Krishna Patrika* (1902) became influential publications of the nationalist movement, while reformist publications catered to specialised audiences (Veerasingam, 1999, p. 44). *Viveka Vardhani*, the journal of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, was groundbreaking for women's journalism, criticising the status of caste and the role of women (Janaki, 1999, p. 10). *Telugu Zenana* (1893–1907) was targeted at women, while *Hindu Sundari* (1902–1942), the journal for Hindu women, became the site for women's literary expression, with the number of contributors rising from twelve to sixty-six between the first four volumes (Basha, 2018, p. 34; Janaki, 1999, p. 17). Periodicals such as *Savithri* (1904–1917) followed.

Educational facilities for women gradually developed through missionary schools, governmental institutions, and reformist movements. Kandukuri Veeresalingam established the *Balika Pathasala* at Dhawaleswaram in 1874, following earlier institutions at Vizianagaram (1867), Kakinada (1871), and Vijayawada (1901) (Janaki, 1999, p. 15). Women themselves became pioneers in initiating movements for women's education. The Rani of Pithapuram patronised women scholars. Balantrapu Seshamma founded the *Vidyarthini Samajam* at Kakinada in 1910 despite financial difficulties (Janaki, 1999, p. 15). Women's organisations became essential platforms for raising women's awareness. The *Women's Association* at Rajahmundry (1902), the *Muslim Women's Association* (1902), and the *Women's Association* (1904) created spaces for the development of women's movements (Janaki, 1999, pp. 21–22). The *Andhra Ladies Conference* at Masulipatnam in 1913 adopted resolutions in favour of extending education for women, prohibiting early marriages, and eliminating caste barriers (Janaki, 1999, p. 23). The *Women's Indian Association* (1917) brought Andhra women into contact with all-India women's movements.

Early Telugu women writers emerged within the broader context of social and literary progress. *Bandaru Atchamamba* wrote *Abala Saccharitra Ratnamala* (1901), which challenged the prevailing notion of women's inferiority by including the life stories of women achievers (Janaki, 1999, pp. 15–16). *Kotikalapudi Seethamma* wrote poetical pieces and gave lectures on the eradication of social evils (Varalakshamma, n.d., p. 16). *Kanuparti Varalakshamma's* *Sharada Lekhalu* exemplified sophisticated women's writing in its treatment of themes of nationalism, social reform, and women's liberation (Basha, 2018, pp. 40–41). *Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma*, the editor of *Anasuya* (1917–1924), and *Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma*, the editor of *Andhra Lakshmi* (1921–1924), emerged as significant editorial figures.

The impact of the nationalist movement was tremendous on women's literary works. During the *Non-Cooperation Movement* (1920–1922), the number of women participating was unprecedented, and Gandhi's leadership provided them with opportunities for involvement beyond home life (Janaki, 1999, p. 34; Basha, 2018, p. 37). *Duvvuru Subbamma* was the first female leader from Andhra to be imprisoned (1922). During the struggles of *Chirala-Perala* and *Palnadu*, women participated through court arrests and by leading the movement (Janaki, 1999, pp. 41–42, 47). At the *Kakinada Congress*, women were brought into leadership, and *Vedantam Kamala Devi* was appointed as the lady commandant (Janaki, 1999, p. 49).

The *Civil Disobedience Movement* (1930–1934) marked women's unprecedented involvement, with the district of *Guntur* alone providing nearly 100 women participants (Janaki, 1999, pp. 179–180). *Achanta Rukmini Lakshmi* was the first female arrestee for violating salt laws (1930). *Durgabai Deshmukh* was appointed the *Dictator of Salt Satyagraha* at Madras (Janaki, 1999, pp. 67, 84). Activities of female participants included picketing, salt manufacture, and asking for arrests, even when the police resorted to lathi charges, the use of coloured water, and the deployment of women police officers

(Janaki, 1999, pp. 68–69, 78–80). The movement gave political value to women's writings, in which female writers recorded events.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 saw women emerging as leaders in the absence of male leaders, who were all incarcerated. Women carried out operations in secret, maintained communication, and spread underground literature such as *Veera Bharathi* (Janaki, 1999, pp. 201–227). Women such as Dronamraju Lakshmiyamamma circulated prohibited literature by using young girls as messengers to evade police detection (Janaki, 1999, p. 81). Walls and pavements served as alternative media, displaying news of the day (Janaki, 1999, p. 81).

The colonial state responded to dissent with increased surveillance and suppression. The Press Act of 1910 allowed authorities to seize publications considered "offending" (Basha, 2018, p. 35). Throughout the Civil Disobedience Movement, Congress publications were declared illegal, and presses were sealed. Women writers navigated censorship through calculated manoeuvres such as publishing joint issues, writing under pseudonyms, and disseminating through women's networks (Basha, 2018, p. 35). The longevity of publications such as *Grihalakshmi* through the years is a testament to the viability of women's writing.

Publications such as *Anasuya* (1917–1924) and *Andhra Lakshmi* (1921–1924) served as a medium for women to express their views on various issues, including social and political ones (Basha, 2018, pp. 35, 38–39). *Grihalakshmi* (1928–1960) was established as the longest-running women's magazine, with comprehensive discourse on issues such as divorce rights, along with the development of women writers through the *Swarna Kankanam* award (Basha, 2018, p. 40). The scope of the discourse extended from household management to political rights, legal issues, and gender justice, thereby reflecting the changing attitudes of women in the Andhra region (Basha, 2018).

8. WOMEN'S WRITINGS IN TELUGU JOURNALS AND PROMINENT WOMEN WRITERS

In this time of print culture's blossoming in India, the rise of women's magazines is an important facet. In addition to literary promotion, these magazines played an essential role in agitating the public and propagating nationalist ideology (Hoque, 2023, p. 30). Although they were primarily responsible for publishing material, those involved were deeply committed to India's struggle for liberation from British rule. In Telugu, as in other Indian languages, men initially led the establishment of women's journals. *Satihitha Bodhini* (1883–1905) is recognised as the first women's journal in Telugu, followed by *Telugu Zenana* (1893–1907), edited by Rayasam Venkata Sivudu. The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of women editors and publishers of their own journals. The number of women's journals had already increased to twenty-one by 1947, of which fourteen were edited by women (Basha, 2018, p. 34).

9. TELUGU WOMEN'S JOURNALS

9.1. *Satihitha Bodhini* (1883–1905)

Editor: Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu (a male reformer)

Significance: First Telugu periodical written for women

Veeresalingam described his purpose in this way: "In 1883, I initiated *Satihitha Bodhini* exclusively for women, to be published monthly in Telugu" (Basha, 2018, p. 34). The periodical addressed issues such as women's education, household management, and the development of independent ideas. While a male reformer edited the periodical, it published articles by women, thereby paving the way for women's literary activities. Kandukuri Rajyalakshamma was closely associated with the activities of this periodical (Janaki, 1999, p. 12).

9.2. *Hindu Sundari* (1902–1942)

Founder: Sattiraju Sitaramaiah (male)

Women Editors: Mosalikanti Ramabayamma, Vempali Shantabayamma (from 1903), later Madabhooshi Choodamma, Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma

Significance: Longest-running Telugu women's journal (40 years); circulation 800

The number of women contributors grew from 12 in the first volume to 66 in the fourth (Janaki, 1999, p. 17). The journal condemned early marriages, opposed forced widowhood, encouraged women's education and widow remarriage, and even published matrimonial advertisements (Janaki, 1999, p. 17). Contributors included Kotikalapudi Sistamma, Kandukuri Rajyalakshamma, and Bandaru Atchamma.

9.3. Savithri (1904–1917)

Editor: Pulugurta Lakshmi Narasambama (female)

Significance: A conservative magazine with a circulation of over 1,500. It was strongly against widow remarriage on the basis that it was not "Kuladharmam" (Caste Duty) (Basha, 2018, p. 37). This sparked an intense debate with Kotikalapudi Seethamma, who opposed the views expressed. This debate showed that educated women could hold conservative views and that the acceptance of remarried widows posed significant problems (Basha, 2018, p. 38).

9.4. Vivekavathi (1909–1934)

Publisher: Christian Literature Society, Madras

Significance: Missionary journal representing "maternal imperialism"; circulation 1,500

The journal promoted social reforms, was critical of certain practices labelled "evil Hindu practices," and at the same time promoted Christian values (Basha, 2018, p. 34). Despite its missionary ideology, it was critical of child marriage, widowhood, and the Devadasi system.

9.5. Anasuya (1917–1924)

Editor: Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma (woman)

Publisher: Vinjamuri Venkata Lakshmi Narasimham

Significance: Progressive fortnightly with 45 pages per issue. The cover featured a woman in a garden with 'Om' atop.

Slogan: "Jewel-like sisters! May you gain a reputation like Anasuya's by learning the histories of Saadhvi mothers" (Basha, 2018, p. 35). Contributors included Kanuparti Varalakshamma and Gudipudi Indumatidevi. The journal conducted the "Anasuya Bahumati Pariksha" examinations for women, which included subjects such as history, natural science, and Puranas. Women who met the requirements were recommended to Teacher Training Colleges (Basha, 2018, p. 38). Gopisety Suryanarayamma argued that women's education "ensured the progress of the country" (Basha, 2018, p. 37). Gudipudi Indumati Devi's "Are Women Inferior to Men?" questioned patriarchal ideology while paradoxically describing women as "soft-natured" and "delicate as flowers" (Basha, 2018, p. 37).

9.6. Andhra Lakshmi (1921–1924)

Editor: Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma (woman)

Publisher: Kallepalle Shivaramaiah

Significance: Emphasised regional identity during the separate Andhra movement. Unlike journals invoking Hindu pativratas or religious identity, Andhra Lakshmi stressed regional consciousness (Basha, 2018, p. 40). Each issue had 50 pages; annual subscription Rs. 2. The journal first published Kanuparti Varalakshamma's famous Anasuya Lekhalu (Basha, 2018, p. 41). Vadrevu Padmanbhamma's "Streekalankaramedi?" argued that true women's ornaments were education, humility, and devotion to husband, "not jewellery" (Basha, 2018, p. 41). Gudipudi Indumatidevi's "Molla Kulataya?" defended the medieval poet Molla against allegations of being a "jaarini" (fallen woman) (Basha, 2018, p. 41).

9.7. Grihalakshmi (1928–1960)

Founder-Editor: Dr K.N. Kesari (male reformer)

Significance: Second-longest-running journal (32 years); over 2,000 subscribers. The journal undertook rigorous campaigns for women's civil and political rights. It offered "Swarna Kankanam" (golden

bangle) for best writings, won by Kanuparti Varalakshamma for Sharada Lekhalu (Janaki, 1999, p. 19).

Key articles addressed: women's freedom (1929), abolition of child marriages (1929), dowry system (1929), divorce (1930 debates), women's right to property (1935), intercaste marriages (1939), and the divorce bill (1939) (Janaki, 1999, p. 20). Contributors included Durgabayamma, P. Kamaladevi, Kadapa Rama Subbamma, and Sringerakavi Lakshmi Narasamma.

9.8. Andhra Mahila (1944–1960s)

Founder-Editor: Gummadidala Durgabayamma (Durgabai Deshmukh)

Significance: Radical voice for women in the late colonial and post-colonial period. Started as fortnightly, later monthly. The journal advocated women's rights, divorce rights, and increased political representation, representing radical changes in women's consciousness during the 1940s and 1950s (Basha, 2018, p. 35). It played a crucial role in mobilising women for the Quit India Movement and subsequent struggles for women's rights in independent India.

10. WOMEN WRITERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS DURING THE SOCIAL REFORMERS AND THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN COLONIAL ANDHRA

10.1. Kandukuri Rajyalakshamma (1851–1910)

Kandukuri Rajyalakshamma, wife of social reformer Kandukuri Veeresalingam, was a perfect representation of the "new woman" of India in the nineteenth century. She was a co-founder of Prarthana Samaj, in which women met once a week. This marked the beginning of an "organised women's movement" in India. Her house was a refuge for widowed women. She was responsible for conducting several widow marriages despite strong opposition. She also founded a Home for Destitutes, which housed prostitutes and devadasis. She worked for the upliftment of Harijans. This was her contribution to social service, which went against the conventional image of Indian womanhood under colonial rule. In his autobiography, Veeresalingam recognised his wife's contribution to the reform movement, which was a stepping stone to political emancipation for Indian women (Janaki, 1999, pp. 12–13).

10.2. Bandaru Atchamma (1874–1904)

Bandaru Atchamma's *Abala Saccharitra Ratnamala* (1901), the first prose work by a Telugu woman, collected biographies of notable women, including Jhansi Lakshmi Bai and Rudrama Devi. She wrote to disprove that women were "by nature physically and morally weak." This political project recovered women's historical agency, countered colonial discourse, provided role models, and constructed a nationalist pantheon including women. She contributed to *Hindu Sundari* and co-founded the Women's Association at Masulipatnam in 1902 to educate women about those who consecrated their lives for the country (Janaki, 1999, pp. 16, 22).

10.3. Kotikalapudi Seethamma

Kotikalapudi Seethamma, a disciple of Veeresalingam, wrote *Sadhu Rakshana Satakam* and *Ahalyabai*, with speeches collected as *Upanyasamalika*. Her most significant contribution was defending widow remarriage in Savithri, arguing that those without widowhood experience should not speak against it, that crimes like infanticide decreased after remarriages, and criticising orthodox women's "hardened hearts." In 1902, she established the Women's Association at Rajahmundry, providing an institutional base for women's political mobilisation. She demonstrated that women's issues were central to national progress (Janaki, 1999, pp. 16, 21; Basha, 2018, p. 37).

10.4. Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma (1889–1950)

Vinjamuri Venkata Ratnamma, editor of *Anasuya* (1917–1924), came from a family of literary achievement. She stated she would "get experienced female writers to write for the journal." In "Streelupadhyayinuluga Undutavalani Labhamulu," she argued that only female teachers should teach

girls because "women understood the feelings of women better than men." She encouraged women to write without hesitation. Under her leadership, Anasuya introduced examinations for women, with a syllabus covering history and science, and forwarded qualified candidates to the British authorities for admission to Teacher Training Colleges. She created a vibrant community of women writers who influenced generations of freedom fighters (Basha, 2018, pp. 35–38).

10.5. Kanuparti Varalakshamma (1896–1978)

Kanuparti Varalakshamma was the foremost feminist intellectual of colonial Andhra. Her *Sharada Lekhalu* (1934), 31 letters written under the pseudonym 'Sharada,' addressed legal issues including the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) and women's voting rights (1932). Drawing on mythology, history, and philosophy to defy the prejudice that women were somehow historically inferior, her essay "Stree Abala Kadu" (1930) won the "Kesari Swarna Patakam." Her fiction, *Premalata—Sweeya Charitramu*, portrayed the sufferings of child-wives and patriarchal violence. She received the Grihalakshmi Swarna Kankanam (1935) and was the first woman writer from Andhra to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award (Basha, 2018, pp. 37–38, 41–42).

10.5. Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma (1864–1935)

Kallepalle Venkata Ramanamma, editor of *Andhra Lakshmi* (1921–1924), served six years as president of Sri Vidyarthini Samajamu, convened Andhra Mahila Mahasabhas, and revived *Hindu Sundari*. In her journal, she highlighted the identity of regions in the distinct Andhra movement; topics covered included both the history of ancient and modern *Sadhvimanis* as well as accounts of contemporary women. Despite financial difficulties, she continued publishing her journal with the support of patrons, including the Maharani of Tuni and approximately 30 female patrons ("*Kamala Vimala Samvadamu*"). She demonstrated that the movement required organisers who could create and sustain institutional infrastructure (Basha, 2018, pp. 40–41).

10.6. Tallapragada Viswasundaramma (1899–1949)

Tallapragada Viswasundaramma was a prolific poet whose patriotic songs inspired thousands. Her *Jailu Gadiyaramu* documented the experiences of women freedom fighters in prison. She was associated with the Non-Cooperation Movement (1921), attended the Vijayawada Congress, and met Gandhiji at Sabarmati. With her husband, she established *Ananda Niketan Ashram* (1923) for national education. She participated in the Salt Satyagraha (1930, 4 months imprisonment) and the Civil Disobedience Movement (1932, 6 months imprisonment), going to jail and repeating 'Vandemataram'. Her poetry mobilised, documented, and inspired, and her imprisonment gave her words authenticity (Janaki, 1999, pp. 60, 174).

10.7. Durgabai Deshmukh (1910–1981)

Durgabai Deshmukh was the most accomplished woman leader from Andhra. At eleven, she gave Gandhiji her gold bracelets and started a Hindi School at Kakinada, training 600 women volunteers for the 1923 Congress session. At sixteen, she consulted Gandhiji on the devadasi problem and managed to collect Rs. 25,000 for them. As "Dictator of Salt Satyagraha at Madras," she was at the forefront, getting lathi-charged and imprisoned. She leapt in front of the police to protect Bulusu Sambamurthi and exclaimed, "Only over my corpse." Thus, she was put into solitary confinement in Vellore Jail for "instigating co-prisoners." She established *Andhra Mahila Sabha* (1937). After independence, she was a member of the Constituent Assembly, established the Central Social Welfare Board (1953), and helped pass the Hindu Code Bill (Janaki, 1999, pp. 83–84).

10.8. Duvvuri Subbamma (1880–1964)

Duvvuri Subbamma was one of the earliest women political leaders in Andhra. Born in *Draksharamam* in 1880, she became a childless young widow but surmounted all difficulties to become a front-rank political leader from 1920 to 1947. *Tirupathi Venkata Sastri* first influenced her, and later,

Gandhiji's call to serve the nation inspired her. She entered political life during the Non-Cooperation Movement and remained active till 1947, participating in the Salt Satyagraha and the Quit India Movements. She toured the circar districts giving hundreds of lectures, condemning British rule and demanding independence. Her speeches were so revolutionary that she faced harsh police treatment. She was the first woman leader in Andhra to be sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment on April 4, 1922, and when the government tried to make her apologise, she bluntly refused. Upon her release, a vast public meeting attended by 8,000 people honoured her. She was given the title "Desabhandhavi" by the people of Godavari district for her selfless service. She went house to house selling khadi, carrying heavy loads on her shoulders. She opened a ladies' wing of the provincial Congress in January 1922 and, in 1924, founded "Sanatana Streevidyalaya" at Rajahmundry, a school exclusively for widows. She was a member of AICC for 14 continuous years and attended every session. She was highly interested in women's welfare, national education, and cottage industries. She took an active part in relief operations during the Godavari floods. She was deeply religious yet progressive, holding strong views about caste, untouchability, and the status of women. The police were always respectful toward her. Post-independence, she withdrew from active politics and was granted a pension of Rs. 100 per month. She died in Rajahmundry on May 31, 1964 (Janaki, 1999, pp. 46-48).

11. IMPACT AND LEGACY

The intellectual ferment generated by women's journals proved fundamental to the political awakening of an entire generation. By translating nationalist ideology into accessible language and providing a public platform for women to debate education, social reforms, and legal rights, these publications mobilised women across diverse communities. They transformed them from passive subjects into active, conscious participants in the freedom struggle. This print-driven discourse cultivated a generation capable of organised political activism, directly contributing to the mass mobilisation that characterised the later phases of the nationalist movement.

The immediate outcomes of this awakening were visibly realised in the 1940s and 1950s. The sustained intellectual engagement through writing translated into increased public visibility, with many contributors transitioning seamlessly from literary expression to frontline activism and, following independence, into positions of public office and institutional leadership. Publications such as *Andhra Lakshmi* were particularly influential in shaping regional consciousness, building critical public support for the separate Andhra movement and thereby directly influencing the political geography of post-colonial India. The discursive foundations laid in the colonial period thus had tangible consequences for state formation and women's political participation in the early years of independence.

The long-term legacy of this vibrant print culture is equally significant. It established a foundational template for feminist expression in Telugu literature and journalism, influencing successive generations of women writers and editors who continue to draw upon this rich tradition. By creating an enduring archive of women's voices, these journals have necessitated a corrective revision in mainstream historiography, ensuring that women's substantial contributions to the freedom struggle are documented and acknowledged rather than marginalised or forgotten. Their contemporary relevance remains profound, serving as an enduring testament to the power of print as an instrument of social change and offering a powerful historical precedent for ongoing struggles for gender equality, political representation, and women's right to public self-expression.

12. CONCLUSION

The emergence and evolution of Telugu women's journals between 1883 and 1947 represent a foundational chapter in the connection between the private domain and the public sphere of nationalist discourse. The former was able to write about the domestic violence of patriarchs, while the latter was able to identify women's liberation with national independence. In other words, these journals produced a new kind of woman who could write and think about such matters: not just an object of reformist discourse but an active subject capable of knowledge production, cultural criticism, and political mobilisation. From male-initiated reform platforms like *Satihitha Bodhini* to female-controlled

publications like *Anasuya* and *Andhra Lakshmi*, there has been a radical shift in gender dynamics, in which women were no longer merely subjects of reformist discourse but became active producers of knowledge, cultural critics, and political mobilisers. Tracing this trajectory reveals that women are no longer merely subjects but active participants in the process. Journals forged an ideological synthesis between the personal and the political. They transformed the "woman question" from a subordinate theme of social reform into a central tenet of anticolonial nationalism itself.

This study makes two principal contributions to existing scholarship. First, it complicates the understanding of gendered print culture. The heated arguments between reformers and conservatives, such as Pulugurta Lakshmi Narasambama's opposition to widow remarriage, illustrate that the women's journals were not merely echo chambers of reform but actual battlefields of ideological conflict where women themselves were actively negotiating the meanings of tradition, modernity, and female virtue. Secondly, this enhances regional historiography within Indian nationalism by revealing how print culture in those Telugu-speaking districts generated a particular political consciousness within the Madras Presidency. Periodicals like *Andhra Lakshmi* created regional identity during the separate Andhra movement and also participated in the larger national struggle, revealing the multilayered nature of anticolonial sentiment. The institutional networks of women's organisations and reading circles that surrounded these journals amplified their impact, transforming readers into participants in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements.

The legacy of this colourful print culture goes on way past the colonial era. These magazines set a basic framework for women's voices in Telugu books and journalism; they created a lasting collection that deserves to be revisited in the context of mainstream nationalist history. But this study also sheds light on the way forward for future studies! The fragile survival of these papers makes it urgent to start digitisation projects to preserve them for scholars. The lack of women's voices from these pages shows a deep archival silence that calls for new methods, including the pursuit of oral histories and alternative sources. The recovery of women writers who remain anonymous or forgotten remains a pressing task. By pursuing these avenues, scholars can continue the vital work these journals inaugurated: ensuring that women's contributions to India's freedom struggle are not merely commemorated as historical artefacts but remain a living testament to the power of print as an instrument of social transformation and a continuing inspiration for struggles for gender justice.

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