



SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE STRUGGLES FOR GENDER EQUALITY: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TELANGANA ARMED MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This study explores the complex social challenges arising from traditional marriage practices, divorce, and remarriage within the context of the Telangana movement. The transition from rigid, caste-bound customs to more egalitarian principles posed significant dilemmas for the Andhra Mahasabha, Panchayat Committees, and the Communist Party. By examining case studies, particularly the struggles faced by women who sought divorce or remarriage, this paper highlights the Party's efforts to balance societal norms with emerging ideals of gender equality and individual rights. The discussion includes the Party's strategic interventions in resolving marital disputes, promoting new moral codes, and supporting widows of martyrs. Through these efforts, the Party aimed to foster social harmony and strengthen the people's movement, while carefully navigating the sensitivities of traditional communities.

Keywords: *Social Transformations, Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Telangana Armed Struggle.*

Introduction

The Telangana Armed Struggle of the mid-20th century was not only a political and agrarian struggle but also a battleground for profound social transformation. Among the myriad challenges faced by the movement were issues related to marriage, divorce, and remarriage, particularly within traditional communities where such matters were tightly regulated by caste norms and social expectations. The rigid structures of arranged marriages, along with the deep-seated disapproval of divorce and remarriage, created significant tensions that required careful handling by the Andhra Mahasabha, Panchayat Committees, and the Communist Party.

As the movement gained momentum, these issues became more pressing, especially for women who were caught between the old and the new social orders. The Party's commitment to gender equality and the right of individuals to choose their partners necessitated a nuanced approach to resolving these conflicts. This paper delves into the strategies employed by the Party and its associated bodies to address the social challenges posed by traditional marriage practices, the complexities of divorce, and the sensitive issue of remarriage, particularly for the widows of martyrs.

Marriage and New Social Problems

In the plains, traditional arranged marriages often led to sharp conflicts, particularly among the upper castes. These communities typically disapproved of divorce and remarriage, viewing them as socially unacceptable. This cultural rigidity presented significant challenges for the Andhra Mahasabha, the Panchayat Committees, and the Party. In some communities, divorce and remarriage were permitted, but the new husband was required to compensate the former husband for his perceived loss. Disputes over the refusal to pay such compensation were frequently brought before the Panchayat Committees and Party organizers. Additionally, in many cases, husbands demanded the return of their wives rather than accepting the customary compensation, adding further complexity to these issues.



The Party and the Panchayat Committees were guided by principles of gender equality, advocating for the rights of both men and women to choose their partners, seek a divorce, and remarry if reconciliation was impossible despite sincere efforts. However, the Party was careful not to endorse licentious or anarchic sexual behaviour, though they did not approach issues of sexual relations or mistakes from an ascetic or moralistic standpoint. Before making and implementing any decisions, it was crucial to explain to the individuals involved, as well as the broader community, how these decisions contributed to a more transparent and healthier social life. The goal was to ensure that the decisions supported the growth of the people's movement and the evolution of social relations without alienating public opinion.

A case from Cheerla village (Huzurnagar) illustrates the Panchayat Committees' approach to these issues. The village Panchayat Committee, composed of an agricultural labourer, a poor peasant, and a middle peasant, was faced with a situation where a rich peasant had married his daughter to another wealthy peasant boy during her childhood. As she reached adulthood, her husband began to mistreat her severely. Disillusioned with her husband, she developed a romantic relationship with a young agricultural labourer. Despite her relatives' attempts to reconcile her with her husband—offering her jewels, fine clothes, and even resorting to village quack remedies—she remained resolute in her decision to marry her lover. The case was brought before the village committee, which granted her a divorce, allowing her to marry the agricultural labourer as she wished.

The issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage needed to be addressed as they became increasingly prominent in public discourse, influenced by the evolving movement and changes in economic and social relations. This also became an urgent concern for many young women whose husbands had been killed in the struggle. The Party emphasized the need for a new moral code, advocating that remarriage was not a matter of sin or disloyalty, but rather a positive step towards allowing these women to lead normal lives and contribute to the people's movement. The Party encouraged these women to choose suitable partners who would continue the legacy of their previous husbands and strive to achieve their ideals.

This delicate issue required careful handling to avoid causing emotional harm while helping these women gradually form new attachments as they healed from their losses. The Party successfully persuaded a significant number of women to remarry, and many of them are now leading happy, normal lives, remaining sympathetic to the people's cause and supportive of the Communist movement.

One poignant example of the sacrifices women made during this period is that of a martyr's wife, whom we shall call "Comrade Padma." With a young child, she was part of the Party's underground network. Over time, she developed a close bond with one of our capable organizers, who was also involved in our technical operations. Sri Ravi Narayan Reddy and other Party members encouraged them to marry. However, when enemy operations intensified, we had to dismantle much of our apparatus, sending a large portion of our technical cadre to forest bases and reducing our urban operations to a bare minimum.

Padma was soon to give birth to another child, but her wealthy landlord brothers refused to take her in, unwilling to face the "social stigma" associated with her situation. The Party, recognizing the difficult circumstances, suggested that if she was willing to give up her newborn child to an anonymous couple



at the hospital, her brothers might accept her, relieving the Party of a heavy burden and allowing her husband to join the struggle in the forests. She agreed to this heart-wrenching decision. After giving up her child, she went to live with her brothers while her husband departed for the forest.

After the Telangana movement was withdrawn, Padma and her husband led a modest life on a limited income. Sadly, her eldest son was not permitted to live with her, as his guardians feared losing control of his inheritance. Her second son, whom she had given up at birth, could not visit her either, as his new parents, who had raised him with love, were unwilling to lose him. Padma, too, was reluctant to disrupt her son's life, not wanting to create any negative feelings towards either his biological mother or the adoptive parents who had cared for him since birth.

Conclusion

The Telangana movement's struggle for social justice extended far beyond land reforms and political rights; it also encompassed the reformation of deeply entrenched social customs surrounding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The Communist Party and its affiliated organizations, such as the Andhra Mahasabha and Panchayat Committees, played a crucial role in navigating these challenges. By advocating for gender equality, the right to divorce, and the freedom to remarry, the Party sought to align traditional practices with the evolving ideals of the people's movement.

Through strategic interventions, including the careful resolution of marital disputes and the promotion of a new moral code, the Party succeeded in bringing about significant social change. These efforts not only provided women with greater autonomy but also strengthened the overall movement by fostering a more inclusive and progressive social environment. However, the Party's approach was always mindful of the need to maintain social harmony and avoid alienating the broader public. The delicate balance between upholding new ideals and respecting traditional sentiments was key to the Party's success in this aspect of the Telangana movement. Ultimately, the Party's efforts contributed to the broader goal of creating a more just and equitable society, where individuals could exercise their rights without fear of social retribution.

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