

KANDUKURI VEERESHALINGAM WRITINGS - THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

*Kandukuri Veereshalingam (1848-1919) is regarded as the Father of Modern Telugu Literature and the Father of Telugu Renaissance. He was a pioneer who introduced new literary forms like the novel, essay, drama, farce, biography, autobiography, and journalism into Telugu. A close observation of his writings reveals that English literature had a direct and deep influence on him. He himself admitted that he started his literary career by translating English works and later adapted them to suit Telugu society and social reform needs. This research paper examines the influence of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* on his *Rajasekhara Charitramu*, the influence of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and *Merchant of Venice* and Sheridan's *The Rivals* and *The Duenna* on his dramas, the influence of Addison and Steele's *Spectator* essays on his journals *Viveka Vardhini* and *Sati Hita Bodhini*, and the influence of Swift, Goldsmith and Cowper on his satires and poetry translations. The paper concludes that Veereshalingam digested English literature and transformed it into a powerful tool for Telugu social reform.*

Keywords: *Kandukuri Veeresalingam; Rajasekhara Charitramu; English Literature Influence; Goldsmith; Shakespeare; Telugu Novel; Social Reform.*

INTRODUCTION

Kandukuri Veereshalingam was born on 16th April 1848 in Rajahmundry. He completed his matriculation in 1869 and worked as a teacher in Korangi village. He was a scholar in Telugu, Sanskrit, Hindi and English. He believed that literature is an instrument to fight against social evils.

Before Veereshalingam, Telugu literature was dominated by poetry, prabandhas and puranas. He was the first to bring modern prose forms into Telugu. Most of these forms were borrowed from English literature. His works are considered the best example to show how deeply Telugu literature has been influenced by English literature.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the English education and background of Veereshalingam.
2. To analyse the influence of English novels on Rajasekhara Charitramu.
3. To examine the influence of English drama on his plays.

4. To study the influence of English essays and journals on his journalism.

5. To understand how he used English literature for social reform.

ENGLISH EDUCATION AND BACKGROUND

Veereshalingam studied in English missionary schools. He read widely English classics. While many Telugu educated people of his time read minor English novelists like G.W.M. Reynolds, Veereshalingam read serious classics.

He was also inspired by Brahmo Samaj leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Keshab Chandra Sen, who were themselves influenced by English rationalist thought. English education gave him rational thinking and courage to question blind beliefs.

RAJASEKHARA CHARITRAMU AND OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Rajasekhara Charitramu is recognised as the first Telugu social novel. It was first serialised in Viveka Chandrika journal in 1878 and published as a book in 1880.

Veereshalingam himself wrote that he started translating Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). After translating two or three chapters, he felt that the foreign setting, foreign dress and manners would not interest Telugu readers. So he abandoned the translation and wrote his own novel in the style of English novels.

My observation on similarities:

- ❖ The central character Rajashekara is similar to Dr. Primrose, the Vicar.
- ❖ The character of the rich and good man Sita Rama Raju is similar to Sir William Thornhill in *The Vicar of Wakefield*.
- ❖ The objective of both novels is to expose superstitions, hypocrisy and blind faith and to teach moral values.

However, Veereshalingam stated that his work is largely original and independent in themes and narrative. The majority of the content is his own creation. This novel became so famous that it was translated into English as *Fortune's Wheel* by Rev. T.R. Hutchinson in 1887 and published in London. It was reviewed in *The Times*, London and in *The Hindu* newspaper, which wrote This is the first Telugu novel. This attempt in a new direction is a success.

DRAMA AND FARCE - INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE AND SHERIDAN

Veereshalingam was the first person to write original Telugu dramas in prose. He translated and adapted many English plays:

- ❖ Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors - literal and prose adaptation into Telugu.
- ❖ Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice
- ❖ Richard Sheridan's The Rivals (1894) and The Duenna (1885)
- ❖ His original plays like Pahlada (1886) and Satya Harishchandra (1886) were written using the English five-act structure with moral instruction.

Before him, Telugu dramas were only verse dramas based on mythological stories. He brought prose drama, comedy and farce - all of which are English forms. His farces that criticize social evils show the influence of Moliere and English comedy of manners.

ESSAY AND JOURNALISM - INFLUENCE OF ADDISON AND STEELE

Veereshalingam started two important journals:

- ❖ Viveka Vardhini (1876) - a reformist journal for women's education and widow remarriage.
- ❖ Sati Hita Bodhini (1883) - a monthly magazine for women.

His essay style is directly influenced by English essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and their famous journal The Spectator (1711-12). Like them, he wrote simple, humorous and moral essays to reform society. He introduced the Essay as a new literary form in Telugu, which was completely an English form.

7. SATIRE AND MORAL STORIES - Jonathan Swift: For satire, he was influenced by Swift's Gulliver's Travels. His satirical attacks on corrupt officials, fake sadhus and superstitious beliefs have Swiftian touch.

- Aesop's Fables: He translated Aesop's Fables in 1893 as Neeti Kathalu to teach morals to children. This was the first fable translation in Telugu literature.

POETRY TRANSLATIONS

He also translated English poems:

- ❖ Oliver Goldsmith's The Traveller (1764) as Pathika Vilasam (1892)
- ❖ William Cowper's John Gilpin (1782) as Telugu translation in 1875.

This shows his deep interest in English poetry.

SOCIAL REFORM THOUGHT AND PROSE STYLE

Veereshalingam social reform ideas - widow remarriage, women's education, opposition to child marriage, opposition to caste discrimination - all got strength from English rationalism, utilitarianism and Brahmo Samaj. He used literature as a tool for reform just like Charles Dickens used novels for social reform in Victorian England.

In language, before Veereshalingam, Telugu prose was heavily Sanskritised and complex. He introduced simple, clear, spoken prose like English prose. That is why he is called Gadya Tikkana (Tikkana of Prose). Just as Wordsworth brought common man's language into English poetry, Veereshalingam brought common man's language into Telugu prose.

CONCLUSION

Kandukuri Veereshalingam did not merely copy English literature. He digested it. He took the novel form from Goldsmith, drama structure from Shakespeare and Sheridan, essay from Addison-Steele, satire from Swift, fable from Aesop, and rationalism from English thinkers, and he moulded them to suit Telugu soil and Telugu social reform needs. He started as a translator but he ended as a creator. That is why he remains the first modern Telugu writer and his writings are still alive today.

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