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# TELUGU SOCIAL ACTIVIST-WRITERS OF TELANGANA: LITERATURE, SOCIAL REFORM, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

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***Abstract:*** *Telangana has a rich tradition of Telugu writers who used literature as an instrument of social reform, political awakening, and resistance to oppression. From the library movement and anti-feudal struggles under the Nizam rulers to the Dalit movement, revolutionary cultural activism, and the movement for separate Telangana statehood, writers and activists played an important role in shaping public consciousness. Figures such as Suravaram Pratap Reddy, Vattikota Alwar Swamy, Kaloji Narayana Rao, Dasarathi Krishnamacharya, and Bhagya Reddy Varma contributed to social awareness through literature, journalism, education, and public organisation. In later periods, cultural activists and writers such as Gaddar, Guda Anjaiah, Goreti Venkanna, Ande Sri, Jupaka Subhadra, and Gaddar's fellow revolutionary performers used poetry, folk songs, theatre, and oral performance to communicate the experiences of peasants, workers, Dalits, and marginalised communities. This paper examines the relationship between Telugu literary expression and social activism in Telangana. It argues that the region's activist-writers helped transform literature from an activity associated primarily with literary institutions into a means of public education, collective resistance, cultural identity, and political mobilisation.*

***Keywords****: Telangana, Telugu literature, social activist-writers, library movement, Dalit movement, peasant struggle, folk poetry, revolutionary literature, Telangana statehood movement.*

## Introduction

Literature is not merely an expression of artistic imagination; it can also serve as a powerful means of understanding society, exposing injustice, and inspiring social change. In Telangana, Telugu writers have historically participated in struggles against social discrimination, feudal exploitation, educational inequality, and political oppression. Their writings, songs, essays, novels, and public speeches have helped communicate the experiences of people whose voices were often excluded from dominant institutions.

The history of Telugu activist-writers in Telangana is closely connected with the region's distinctive social and political circumstances. Under the Nizam rulers of Hyderabad State, Urdu occupied a privileged position in official administration and education, while Telugu-speaking communities sought greater recognition for their language and culture. Literary associations, libraries, journals, and publishing organisations became important platforms for intellectual awakening. Research on the Telangana library movement shows that writers and publishers used books, reading rooms, and literary networks to promote Telugu and encourage public awareness of social and political issues.

During the twentieth century, the role of literature expanded. Social reformers challenged caste discrimination and untouchability; progressive writers criticised landlordism and forced labour; revolutionary poets communicated the experiences of peasants and workers; and cultural activists helped articulate the demand for a separate Telangana state.

These developments demonstrate that the history of Telugu literature in Telangana cannot be understood solely through literary genres, famous authors, or aesthetic achievements. It must also be examined through the relationship between literature, social movements, and the lives of ordinary people.

**Objectives of the Study**

The principal objectives of this research paper are:

1. To examine the historical development of Telugu social activist-writers in Telangana.
2. To analyse the contribution of writers and intellectuals to social reform, education, and public awareness.
3. To investigate the role of literature and journalism in opposing feudal exploitation and political oppression.
4. To study the contribution of Dalit writers and activists to struggles for dignity and social equality.
5. To examine the role of folk songs, revolutionary poetry, and cultural performances in political mobilisation.
6. To assess the contribution of Telugu writers to the formation of Telangana's regional and linguistic identity.

**Research Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative, historical, and interpretative methodology. It draws on published scholarship, historical studies, educational materials, literary histories, and research concerning the Telangana library movement, Dalit activism, and cultural movements.

The selected writers are discussed in relation to their literary works, social activities, and historical contexts. Particular attention is given to the ways in which literature was used to communicate social grievances and develop collective consciousness.

The paper is a secondary-source study rather than an archival investigation. It distinguishes between writers whose primary contributions were literary and those whose work was principally social or political but closely connected with Telugu literary and cultural activity. Biographical details and the attribution of individual works should be checked against original editions and scholarly sources before publication.

**Historical Background: Literature and Social Awakening in Telangana**

***Language, education, and the library movement***

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hyderabad State witnessed the development of literary associations, libraries, and publishing organisations that encouraged reading and public discussion. Telugu-speaking intellectuals regarded the promotion of Telugu literature as an important element of cultural recognition and social advancement.

The Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam, established in Hyderabad in 1901, became an important institution in this process. Libraries and reading rooms provided access to books and newspapers and helped create spaces for intellectual exchange. Later, publishing initiatives such as the Deshoddharaka Granthamala supported the circulation of works concerned with society, politics, and reform.

These institutions were important because access to knowledge was closely connected with social power. Reading, writing, and public discussion helped people understand their social conditions and consider alternatives to existing structures of authority.

***Social reform and opposition to caste discrimination***

Social reform movements in Hyderabad State challenged untouchability, caste-based exclusion, restrictions on education, and discriminatory social practices. Bhagya Reddy Varma was a major figure in this movement. In 1906, he established Jagan Mitra Mandali to promote awareness and collective organisation among oppressed communities. His later activities included educational initiatives and campaigns against practices such as the dedication of girls as joginis.

These activities demonstrate that the relationship between literature and social activism extended beyond the publication of books. Lectures, public meetings, folk performance, and educational work also helped communicate reformist ideas.

***Anti-feudal struggles and progressive literature***

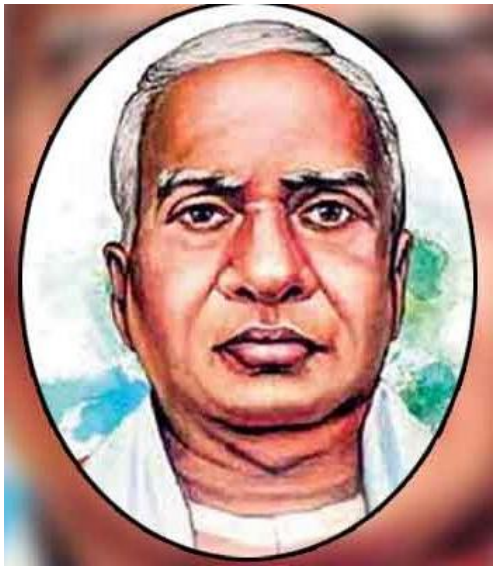
In the 1930s and 1940s, social and political opposition in Telangana increasingly addressed the power of landlords, forced labour known as vetti, and the exploitation of rural communities. Writers and activists connected literary expression with campaigns for civil liberties and agrarian change.

The Telangana peasant struggle of 1946–1951 further strengthened the relationship between literature and political mobilisation. Songs, poems, plays, and oral narratives helped communicate the experiences of rural people and made the struggle accessible to communities with limited formal education. Later revolutionary cultural movements continued this tradition.

Thus, Telugu activist-writers in Telangana emerged from a historical environment in which language, education, caste, land, and political power were closely interconnected.

**Major Telugu Social Activist-Writers of Telangana**

***Suravaram Pratap Reddy (1896–1953): Historian, journalist, and social reformer***



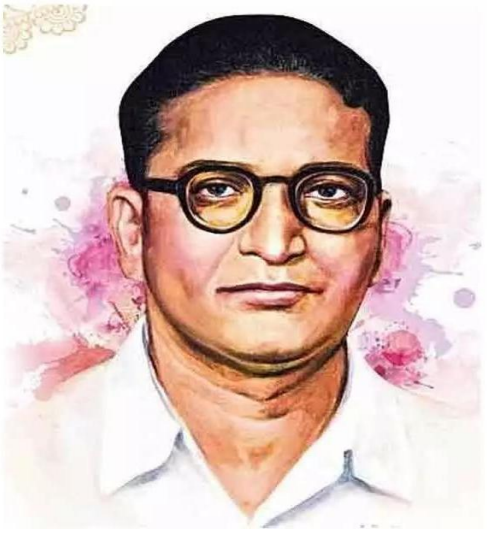
Suravaram Pratap Reddy was one of the most influential intellectuals in the history of modern Telangana. He was a historian, journalist, editor, literary scholar, and social reformer who worked to promote Telugu language, literature, and cultural identity under the Nizam rulers.

In 1926, he established Golconda Patrika, a Telugu newspaper that provided a platform for literary discussion, public affairs, and the concerns of Telugu-speaking society. His editorial activities helped strengthen Telugu public discourse at a time when the language had limited institutional recognition.

One of his most important works is Andhrula Sanghika Charitra (A Social History of the Andhras), which examines social institutions, customs, and historical developments among Telugu-speaking people. He also compiled Golconda Kavula Sanchika (1934), a collection documenting the works of 354 poets associated with the Telangana region. This collection challenged the assumption that Telangana lacked a significant Telugu literary tradition.

His contribution to social activism lay in connecting historical scholarship with public awareness. By documenting the region's literary and social heritage, he helped strengthen cultural self-respect and encouraged a broader understanding of Telangana's place in Telugu literary history.

***Vattikota Alwar Swamy (1915–1961): Novelist, publisher, and people's activist***



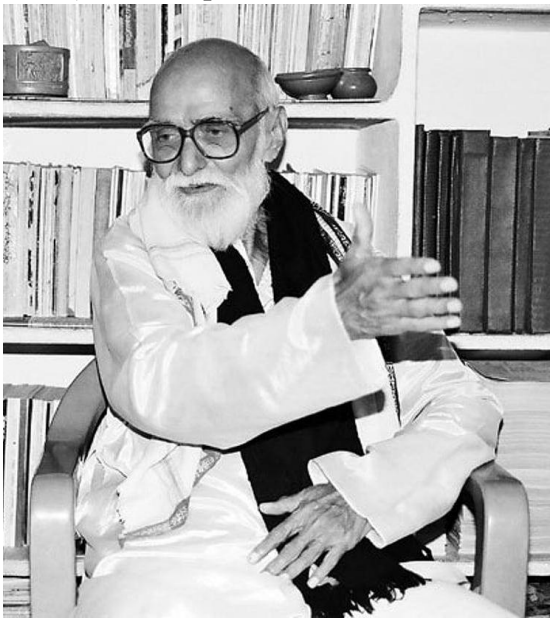
Vattikota Alwar Swamy was a Telugu writer, publisher, journalist, and political activist associated with the library movement and the struggles against authoritarian rule and feudal exploitation in Hyderabad State. He is often remembered as a people's writer because his literary and publishing activities focused on the problems faced by ordinary people.

His important works include Prajala Manishi (The People's Man), Gangu, and Jailu Lopala (Inside the Jail). These writings are associated with the social and political realities of Telangana, including oppression, imprisonment, inequality, and the experiences of people living under feudal authority.

Alwar Swamy also established the Deshoddharaka Granthamala, a publishing initiative that circulated books concerned with literature, politics, and social reform. His activities demonstrate how publishing could become an instrument of public education and political mobilisation.

His significance lies in his understanding that literature should engage directly with people's lives. Through novels and publishing, he helped make social problems accessible to readers and supported the development of a politically conscious reading public.

***Kaloji Narayana Rao (1914–2002): The People's Poet***



Kaloji Narayana Rao, popularly known as Praja Kavi (People's Poet), was a poet, freedom

fighter, public intellectual, and political activist. He participated in the library movement, the Andhra Mahasabha, and political activities opposing the autocratic rule of the Nizam.

His poetry drew upon everyday speech and the experiences of ordinary people. Rather than restricting poetry to elite literary conventions, Kaloji used it to express anger against injustice, criticism of political authority, and concern for human dignity.

His major works include Naa Godava, Kaloji Kathalu, Thudi Vijayam Manadi Jayam, and Telangana Udayana Kavithalu. Naa Godava is especially important for its critical engagement with contemporary social and political life. His writings challenged feudal exploitation and encouraged public resistance to injustice.

Kaloji's importance extends beyond his literary achievements. He believed that a writer should remain connected with society and should not remain silent in the face of oppression. His life demonstrates the relationship between poetry, civil liberties, democratic participation, and public responsibility.

***Dasarathi Krishnamacharya (1925–1987): Revolutionary poet and nationalist voice***



Dasarathi Krishnamacharya was a major Telugu poet associated with resistance to the Nizam's rule and the struggle for social justice in Telangana. His poetry expressed opposition to political oppression and feudal domination while celebrating the cultural identity and dignity of the Telugu-speaking people.

His important works include Agnidhara, Rudraveena, and Timiramto Samaram. These writings reflect themes of struggle, freedom, human dignity, and the hope for social transformation. The phrase “Naa Telangana Koti Ratanala Veena” became closely associated with regional pride and the cultural identity of Telangana.

Dasarathi's poetry illustrates how literary expression could become a form of resistance. His work combined emotional intensity with political commitment and helped establish the revolutionary poet as an important figure in Telangana's public culture.

***Dasarathi Rangacharya (1928–2015): The novelist of Telangana society***

Dasarathi Rangacharya was a Telugu novelist and writer known for representing the social conditions, language, and cultural practices of Telangana. His writing gave literary expression to the everyday experiences of rural communities and the structures of authority under which they lived.

His major works include Chillara Devullu (1969) and Modugu Poolu. Chillara Devullu is particularly significant for its representation of rural Telangana and its use of the regional dialect. His

novels explore caste, religion, village institutions, landlordism, and the social relationships that shaped everyday life. Rangacharya's literary contribution lies in treating Telangana's language and social experiences as worthy of serious literary representation. His work challenged the marginalisation of regional speech and brought local social realities into the wider field of Telugu fiction.

***Bhagya Reddy Varma (1888–1939): Social reformer and pioneer of Dalit awakening***

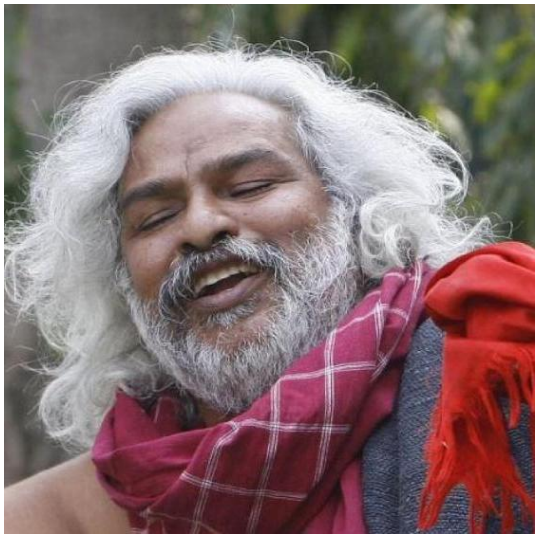


Bhagya Reddy Varma was a pioneering social reformer in Hyderabad State who worked for Dalit education, dignity, and social equality. Although he is remembered primarily as an activist and organiser rather than as a conventional literary author, his use of public speaking, popular cultural forms, and written material makes him an important figure in the broader history of Telugu social activism.

In 1906, he established Jagan Mitra Mandali to promote awareness and organisation among oppressed communities. The organisation used public lectures, storytelling, and popular performance to communicate ideas about self-respect, education, and social reform. His later activities included the development of the Adi-Hindu movement and campaigns against caste-based discrimination and the jogini system.

Bhagya Reddy Varma's work illustrates that social transformation depends not only on published literature but also on accessible forms of communication. His contribution was particularly significant because he placed the dignity and education of marginalised communities at the centre of public discussion.

***Gaddar (Gummadi Vittal Rao, 1949–2023): Revolutionary poet and balladeer***



Gaddar was a revolutionary poet, singer, performer, and cultural activist whose songs became

influential in people's movements in Telangana and elsewhere in India. He used folk music, dance, dramatic performance, and colloquial Telugu to communicate political ideas to audiences who might have had limited access to written texts.

He was closely associated with Jana Natya Mandali, a revolutionary cultural organisation through which songs and performances became instruments of political education and mobilisation. His best-known songs include Podustunna Poddumeeda and Amma Telanganama. These works express the experiences of oppressed communities and connect personal suffering with collective resistance.

Gaddar's performances were significant because they transformed public spaces into places of cultural and political participation. His songs addressed exploitation, state violence, inequality, and the aspirations of marginalised people.

His work also demonstrates the importance of oral literature. A song performed before a crowd can circulate through memory and repeated performance, reaching audiences beyond the readership of books and newspapers.

***Guda Anjaiah (1955–2016): Poet of village life and social equality***

Guda Anjaiah was a Telugu poet, lyricist, and cultural activist known for songs addressing the experiences of rural and marginalised communities. His writing used the language and rhythms of everyday Telangana life to challenge social inequality and promote collective identity.

His well-known song Ooru Manadira became associated with the assertion that villages and their resources belong to the people who live and work in them. His song Nenu Raanu Biddo Sarkaru Dawakhana also became widely known through its treatment of rural life and social conditions.

Anjaiah's work is important because it presents local speech, village experience, and popular musical forms as legitimate vehicles for social criticism. His songs helped connect cultural expression with questions of dignity, access to resources, and the social position of rural communities.

***Goreti Venkanna (born 1964): Folk poet and chronicler of rural distress***

Goreti Venkanna is a contemporary Telugu folk poet and singer whose work explores the experiences of rural communities, agricultural workers, and people affected by social and economic change.

His well-known song Palle Kanneeru Pedutundo expresses concern about the distress of village life and the erosion of rural livelihoods. His poetry draws on folk idioms and familiar images to communicate the relationship between economic change, rural hardship, and cultural identity.

His collection Vallanki Thalam received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Telugu in 2021.

Venkanna's contribution lies in bringing the voices and concerns of rural Telangana into contemporary literary and cultural discourse. His work shows how folk poetry can document social transformation while preserving the language and cultural memory of local communities.

***Ande Sri (1961–2025): Poet of Telangana identity***

Ande Sri, also known as Ande Yellaiah, was a Telugu poet and lyricist whose writing played an important role in the cultural movement for Telangana statehood. He was widely recognised for composing Jaya Jaya He Telangana, which became the official state anthem after Telangana was formed.

His songs often expressed attachment to the land, the dignity of ordinary people, and the cultural identity of the Telangana region. His use of accessible language and folk-inflected expression helped make his work meaningful to a broad public.

Ande Sri's work demonstrates how poetry and song can become symbols of collective identity. In the Telangana statehood movement, cultural expression was not merely an accompaniment to political action; it helped articulate the historical memory, aspirations, and emotional attachment that gave the movement its popular resonance.

***Jupaka Subhadra: Dalit feminist writer and activist***

Jupaka Subhadra is an important contemporary Telugu writer associated with Dalit feminist thought and activism. Her writing foregrounds the experiences of Dalit women and examines the interaction of caste discrimination, gender inequality, social exclusion, and cultural representation.

Her contribution is significant because she challenges the assumption that all women experience oppression in the same way. Dalit women's lives are shaped by multiple forms of inequality, including caste-based discrimination, unequal access to resources, and patriarchal social structures.

Subhadra's writing and activism contribute to a broader understanding of Telugu literature as a space in which marginalised communities can challenge dominant social narratives and assert their own identities. Her work demonstrates the importance of including caste and gender together in studies of social justice and literary expression.

***P. Yashoda Reddy (1929–2005): Writer and promoter of Telangana Telugu***

P. Yashoda Reddy was a Telugu scholar, writer, and academic associated with the preservation and promotion of Telangana's regional language and culture. Her literary work is important for its attention to rural life, local speech, customs, and the everyday experiences of Telugu-speaking communities.

Her writings include Maa Uri Muchatlu and Echamma Kathalu, which are associated with the representation of Telangana's social and cultural life. Her work helped establish regional dialect as a legitimate medium for literary expression and cultural documentation.

Yashoda Reddy's contribution illustrates that social activism through literature need not always take the form of direct political protest. Recording local speech, customs, oral traditions, and rural experience can also challenge cultural marginalisation and preserve knowledge that might otherwise be neglected.

**The Library Movement and the Promotion of Telugu Literature**

The library movement was a major force in the intellectual and social history of Telangana. During the Nizam period, libraries and reading rooms provided opportunities for people to access books, newspapers, and other educational materials. They also served as spaces for discussion and the development of public awareness.

Writers such as Suravaram Pratap Reddy and Vattikota Alwar Swamy were associated with this broader culture of literary and publishing activism. Their activities demonstrated that promoting Telugu literature was closely connected with education, cultural recognition, and social reform. Research by S. Yadagiri and Sangisetti Srinivasulu highlights the role of publishing houses and literary networks in awakening public consciousness and opposing the oppressive structures of the period.

The library movement contributed to social change in several ways:

- It expanded access to reading and education.
- It helped circulate information about social and political developments.
- It encouraged literary discussion and public participation.
- It strengthened Telugu language and cultural identity.
- It provided organisational networks that could support wider reform movements.

The importance of the movement lies in its recognition that social change requires access to knowledge. Books, libraries, journals, and publishing initiatives helped create an informed public capable of questioning established authority.

**Telugu Literature and the Telangana Peasant Struggle**

The Telangana peasant struggle of 1946–1951 was a major episode in the region's history. Opposition to landlordism, forced labour, and rural exploitation shaped the political environment in which progressive writers and revolutionary cultural activists worked.

Literature became a means of communicating the experiences of peasants and workers. Poems and songs expressed the hardships of rural life, condemned exploitation, and encouraged collective

action. Folk forms were particularly effective because they could reach audiences beyond the literate population.

Writers such as Kaloji Narayana Rao and Vattikota Alwar Swamy used different literary forms to address social and political inequalities. Revolutionary cultural activists subsequently developed this tradition through songs, performances, and public gatherings. The cultural history of the Telangana movement identifies folk performers such as Bandi Yadagiri and Suddala Hanmanthu as important voices in the expression of rural resistance.

The relationship between literature and the peasant struggle illustrates how artistic expression can communicate complex social conditions in accessible forms. Songs and stories can preserve collective memories, represent the experiences of oppressed communities, and connect individual grievances with wider political demands.

**Dalit Activism and the Literature of Social Equality**

Dalit activism is an essential component of Telangana's social history. Activists and writers challenged untouchability, caste-based exclusion, educational inequality, and discriminatory social practices.

Bhagya Reddy Varma was an important pioneer of Dalit mobilisation in Hyderabad State. Through Jagan Mitra Mandali and the Adi-Hindu movement, he promoted education, self-respect, and collective organisation. His work helped make the dignity and rights of oppressed communities central concerns of public discussion.

Contemporary Dalit writers and activists extended these concerns into literature, journalism, poetry, and public debate. Their writing challenged representations of society that overlooked caste-based exploitation and brought marginalised experiences into Telugu literary discourse.

Dalit feminist writing further emphasised that gender and caste cannot be treated as separate issues. Writers such as Jupaka Subhadra have contributed to a literary tradition that questions both caste hierarchy and patriarchal authority.

The contribution of Dalit activist-writers lies in their insistence that literature should represent the experiences of all sections of society. Their work broadens the meaning of social justice by connecting cultural recognition with equality, dignity, and access to resources.

**Folk Songs, Revolutionary Culture, and Political Mobilisation**

Folk poetry and performance have been especially influential in Telangana because they connect literary expression with the region's oral traditions. Songs, storytelling, dance, and theatre allow ideas to circulate through public performance rather than depending exclusively on printed texts.

Gaddar, Guda Anjaiah, Goreti Venkanna, and Ande Sri demonstrate different aspects of this tradition. Their songs address social inequality, rural distress, cultural identity, and political aspiration. They have used familiar language, local imagery, and musical forms to communicate with diverse audiences.

During the movement for separate Telangana statehood, cultural performances helped communicate regional grievances and strengthen a shared identity. Songs about the land, village life, historical memory, and social injustice became part of public demonstrations and community gatherings.

This form of activism shows that literature is not restricted to books or written poetry. Oral performance can also serve as a means of political communication, cultural preservation, and social mobilisation.

**The Role of Writers in the Telangana Statehood Movement**

The movement for separate Telangana drew on a long history of regional cultural assertion. Writers, poets, intellectuals, and performers helped articulate the region's distinctive historical experiences and social concerns.

Kaloji Narayana Rao's writing had already established a strong tradition of public dissent and

cultural consciousness. Later poets such as Goreti Venkanna and Ande Sri used folk expression to represent regional identity and the aspirations of ordinary people. Gaddar's performances, meanwhile, connected the language of popular culture with wider questions of social justice and political representation.

The cultural dimension of the statehood movement was important because political demands required more than administrative arguments. Songs and poems helped communicate the emotional and historical significance of Telangana identity to a broad public.

The formation of Telangana as a separate state in 2014 gave institutional recognition to a regional identity that had been expressed through literature, music, public debate, and political activism over many decades.

The role of activist-writers in this process demonstrates that cultural production can shape political movements by preserving collective memory, expressing shared grievances, and giving symbolic form to aspirations for change.

**Major Themes in the Works of Telangana's Activist-Writers**

The writings of Telugu social activist-writers in Telangana reveal several recurring themes.

***Social justice and human dignity***

Writers and reformers challenged social practices that denied equal dignity to marginalised communities. Their works questioned the legitimacy of caste discrimination, forced labour, and social exclusion.

***Education and public awareness***

The library movement and publishing initiatives demonstrated the importance of literacy and access to information. Writers used books, newspapers, and public discussion to encourage independent thinking.

***Opposition to feudal exploitation***

Novels, poems, and songs exposed the hardships faced by peasants and workers. Literature helped make the consequences of landlordism and forced labour visible to wider audiences.

***Telugu language and cultural identity***

The promotion of Telugu literature and regional speech challenged the marginalisation of Telangana's cultural heritage. Writers documented local traditions and established the region's language and literary production as important parts of Telugu cultural history.

***Caste, gender, and marginalisation***

Dalit and feminist writers broadened the discussion of social justice by highlighting inequalities that affected particular communities and social groups.

***Resistance and political participation***

From opposition to Nizam rule to the Telangana statehood movement, activist-writers used literature to express dissent, mobilise audiences, and encourage political participation.

**Major Findings**

The study identifies the following findings:

1. Telugu social activist-writers played an important role in the intellectual and cultural awakening of Telangana.
2. The library movement and publishing initiatives helped expand public access to knowledge and strengthen Telugu literary culture.
3. Suravaram Pratap Reddy and Vattikota Alwar Swamy connected literary activity with historical documentation, public education, and social criticism.
4. Kaloji Narayana Rao and Dasarathi Krishnamacharya used poetry to challenge oppression and express political aspirations.

5. Bhagya Reddy Varma helped develop social reform and Dalit mobilisation through education, public communication, and organisational activity.
6. Gaddar, Guda Anjaiah, Goreti Venkanna, and Ande Sri demonstrated the power of folk poetry and performance in communicating social and political concerns.
7. Dalit and feminist writers broadened the representation of marginalised experiences in Telugu literature.
8. Literature contributed to the development of regional consciousness and played an important role in the cultural dimension of the Telangana statehood movement.

**Conclusion**

The history of Telugu social activist-writers in Telangana demonstrates the close relationship between literature and social transformation. From the library movement under the Nizams to the peasant struggle, Dalit mobilisation, revolutionary cultural activism, and the statehood movement, writers and activists have used literary expression to question inequality and communicate the experiences of marginalised communities.

Suravaram Pratap Reddy's historical and journalistic work helped preserve Telangana's literary heritage. Vattikota Alwar Swamy connected publishing and fiction with the struggles of ordinary people. Kaloji Narayana Rao and Dasarathi Krishnamacharya developed powerful traditions of socially committed poetry. Bhagya Reddy Varma advanced the cause of Dalit dignity and education, while Gaddar, Guda Anjaiah, Goreti Venkanna, and Ande Sri brought social and political concerns to public audiences through folk performance and song.

These contributions demonstrate that literature can function as a medium of education, cultural preservation, social criticism, and political mobilisation. The activist-writers of Telangana expanded the boundaries of Telugu literature by making the experiences of peasants, workers, Dalits, and other marginalised communities central to literary expression.

In conclusion, Telugu social activist-writers have played a significant role in shaping Telangana's modern history. Their works remain important for understanding the region's social movements, linguistic identity, struggles for equality, and continuing commitment to cultural and democratic expression.

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