

Rehabilitation of Pothurajus and Jogins¹

Asok Kumar , Collector and District Magistrate, has virtually eradicated an uncivilized barbaric system perpetuated for centuries in the name of tradition in the telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. In the process he restored the dignity of human life to pothurajus who were asked to perform barbaric rituals and forced to perpetuate the system of sexual exploitation of young girls in the name of Jogins. This helped to cut the jogini system – a bane on the self-respect and dignity of womanhood—at its roots. This required a lot of guts and sheer will power to fight out the political and socio-economic system trying to perpetuate this cruel practice.

Braving the opposition he organized marriages for jogins. In another historical step fifteen jogins were got married or their “living-in” relationship with the person with whom they were staying was legitimized in the mass marriages organized for them. It took a lot of counseling to convince the young girls that they can “actually marry” a “mortal” human being, even though they were married at their young age to the village god. The Governor of AP attended one of such functions.

In Telungana area of Andhra Pradesh there is a system of dedicating young girls to the local gods. These girls are married to the local god at a very young age and are sexually exploited by the landlords. They are called Jogins. They become village properties. Their conditions are pathetic. A sect of people called “Pothurajus” who seem to have “divine powers” converts them to Jogins. The “divine powers” of Pothurajus is believed to be in their hair and they are not allowed to cut their hair from birth. They act local priests and practice black magic. They are forced to dance around the dead bodies and perform barbaric acts like killing a lamb by biting its neck and draining off its blood till it dies. Pothurajus are asked to perform such type of barbaric acts to ward off evil affecting the village. They do not get any other work in the village due to fear of their magical powers “stored” in their hair. Their children do not attend schools as with their long hair they are easily identifiable and are pulled around and made fun off. This system has been continuing for centuries and nobody had taken any step to stop it for fear of incurring the wrath of the village elders.

On 22nd July 2001 Asok Kumar, Collector, Nizamabad organized a mass function in which 200 Pothurajus cut off the tuft of their hair severing ties with their evil traditional bondage. They surrendered the musical rattlers, trinkets, blood stained clothes and whips and lashes used for self-flogging during the barbaric rites they are asked to perform. This was a shocking and bold initiative much to the chagrin of the traditionalists who were misusing these people in the name of tradition for their wicked ways. This was the first time in the history such a function was organized. National press and media covered it and described it as a social revolution of historical importance. These pioneers were given assistance from the government welfare programs to lead a settled life. Embolden by this, remaining Pothurajus came forward to be shorn of their magical powers and to lead a normal life. Mass programs were organized to facilitate this because as individuals the “reformed pothurajus” would not be able to withstand local pressures. They would be blamed for all the ills in the village. The historic nature of the event can be judged by the fact that Dr. Rangarajan, Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Mrs

¹ Extract of a paper by Indur Junior Jaycees, Nizamabad on rehabilitation of Pothurajus/Jogins

HariPriya Rangarajan, Lady Governor attended one of such function held in Nizamabad on 28th October 2001. Another program was organized on 1st August, 2002 in which 41 pothurajus cut their divine hair and another 235 pothurajus surrendered their “magical” implements to join the main stream. With this almost all pothurajus with “magical powers” in the district have joined the main stream and the evil system is almost totally wiped out from the district

Dr. Justice Ramaswamy, member of the National Human Rights Commission, India in his report to the chairman NHRC has complimented the Collector for taking such steps to enhance the dignity of people. Now the system can be said to be almost dead in the district.

This act cut the root of another evil system- jogini system- as there would be no more “ordained priests” to covert young girls to jogins causing severe heartburn to those with vested interests. The landlords never bothered much when steps were taken earlier by the administration and some NGOs for resettlement of aged jogins as long as these Pothurajus perpetuated the supply of fresh and young girls as jogins. Nowthat the system of Pothurajus have been eliminated there is little scope for getting young recruits as jogins. There was tremendous opposition from the ruling class, political leaders, landlords and vested interests who were keen on continuing the system. However with a strong resolve and using the powers of the law and administration it was overcome and the historic step was taken.

This was a path-breaking act of historical and great social and moral significance in the history of Andhra Pradesh.