Chapter III

Dalit Consciousness after Karamchedu and Chundur Incidents

As seen in the previous chapter, the ever increasing level of Dalit consciousness and discontent led to simmering tensions between the upper caste rulers and the Dalits. This culminated in the notorious Karamchedu incident that changed the nature and character of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh by providing a new Dalit leadership and organization. The present chapter seeks to analyse systematically the emergence of new leadership and autonomous organization and to explain its mode of activity, including the strategies and different course of change.

Many previous atrocities inflicted on Dalits by the upper castes produced only sympathy which did not result in the requisite revolutionary combative spirit. The Karamchedu and Chundur incidents changed all that. Karamchedu marked a distinctive break\(^1\) in the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh. In its wake the Dalits’ illusion about the established order disappeared and they completely repudiated their past experiences of passivity and apathy. Though the upper castes at Karamchedu had a temporary victory over the Dalits, the latter soon geared themselves to fight them. In the annals of the Dalits’ fight for basic human dignity,

\(^1\) The term ‘conjunction’ has been used in the wider Gramscian point of view. See, A Gramsci., Selections from the Prison Notebooks (Orient Longman, Madras, 1996 (Indian Print)) p. 177.
Karamchedu became “the glorious historical symbol of the Ambedkarite movement like that of Naxalbari of the Marxist-Leninist struggle in India.”

The Incident

Karamchedu is among the bigger villages in Chirala taluk of Prakasam district. On 16 July 1985 a Kamma boy, Pothini Sreenu, was cleaning his buffalo near the steps of the Dalits’ drinking water tank, polluting the water. A Dalit boy, Katti Chandraiah, who was lame and stood near the tank upbraided Pothini Sreenu for this irresponsible action. The latter reacted by beating him with his cattle whip. A Dalit women, Suvartha, who came to fetch water just then, saw the incident and asked the boy, “Why are you beating him?” Infuriated at this question Pothini Sreenu turned his cattle whip on her. She in turn raised her water pot to resist the blow.

The incident was an indication of the growing Dalit consciousness. It was reminiscent of the assertiveness Rosa Park, a black woman whose refusal to vacate her seat for a standing white man at the command of the white bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama (USA) in 1955, led to the infliction of widespread

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2 From the speech delivered by Katti Padma Rao, see, Dalita Rajyam, July-August 1994.


4 Ibid. For more causes which were responsible for the incident, see also Dalita Rajyam, July-August 1994.

violence by the American whites on the Blacks, which subsequently gave birth to the Black Panthers revolt. In Karamchedu Suvartha’s action of simple resistance brought a storm of retaliation on the Dalits by the Kammas. On 17 July 1985, the Kammas assaulted systematically the Dalit colony from all sides, with sticks, axes and spears. The men, women and children were hunted on tractors and motor-cycles, their belongings looted, and their houses burnt down. The walls of some houses made of bamboo and mud were pierced, the planks and tyres of their carts were destroyed, and their cooking pots were smashed. Eight Dalits were killed. All this happened in the presence of the state police, who in fact helped the Kammas.7

Unlike previous atrocities which went unnoticed in the Telugu newspapers, the Karamchedu massacre was reported extensively. Leading in this coverage was the daily Udayam. Its headlines, such as “Pantapolallo Pulichampina Leedinetturni” (The deer’s blood in the fields, killed by the tiger), and “Hantaka Bhooswamulaku Polisula Anda” (Police collusion with murderous landlords) were also bound to be inflammatory. The entire Dalit populace in Andhra was shaken by the event.

The Shibiram: The Centre of activity

Fleeing the Kammas’ attack, the Dalits of Karamchedu ran to Chirala town eight kilometres away and took shelter in the


church compound. For the first time in the social history of Andhra Pradesh the victimized Dalits en masse left the village and took shelter in another village. The trickle of victims turned into a veritable flood. Men and women with blood-spattered clothing came running like hunted rabbits into the sanctuary of the church.\textsuperscript{8} This mass of humanity was initially consoled and promptly assured a hope by the local young Ambedkarite leaders, Salagala Raja Shekar, Victor Samson, Tella Zedson and Koti James, “who exhibited spontaneous confidence and great courage”.\textsuperscript{9}

Two Dalit leaders, Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao, hastened to meet the sufferers. Their arrival instilled an immense confidence among the victims and enhanced their enthusiasm. Bojja Tarakam was a radical Ambedkarite who led the Ambedkarite Yuvayan Sangham movement in the seventies. He was also a Marxist-Leninist sympathizer, and civil activist. A lawyer by profession and son of the Republican Party leader Bojja Appala Swamy, he resigned his government law practice in the Andhra Pradesh High Court in protest against the Karamchedu incident and came to Chirala town. Katti Padma—Rao was associated with the Rationalist Movement and was the general secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association. An erudite Sanskrit scholar, he became the youngest Sanskrit lecturer in the

\textsuperscript{*} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} K. Ilaiyah, Caste or class or caste-class: A study in Dalit Bahugun consciousness and struggles in Andhra Pradesh in 1980s (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 1995).
state at the age of twenty. He was also an excellent orator, and a Marxist-Leninist sympathizer.

From the Chirala church compound the Karamchedu victims shifted to newly erected tent houses called shibirams. The shibiram (camp) became the primary centres of the Dalit protest movement. Every Dalit mind in the shibiram was filled with anguish and enthusiasm. They began their process of change by explicitly disowning the word Harijan and emphatically asserting their identity as Dalits. The inmates of the shibirams also refused to entertain whoever used the word Harijan, and made their customary visits and promises of ‘arrest of culprits’, ‘compensations’, and ‘restoration of normalcy’. The also disowned members of the established political parties, whom the Dalits termed as ‘higher caste vultures’, making sympathetic noises with huge donations and various philanthropic activities. The victims of Karamchedu did not want these political office seekers to make the shibiram a ‘pilgrimage centre’. When the district collector came with 150 meal coupons and asked the shibiram members to move to the Rotary Club premises to receive the coupons, they replied with a single voice: “No, we don’t want your meal coupons, if you want to feed only 150. There are 500 of us. Also, we don’t want to move.” The result of their non-compliance with the official’s wishes was that they did not get assistance. The state government offered to help only if the victims agreed to go back to

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10 This information was given by Tarakam (18 January 1997), Ganumala Gnanaswar (21 January 1997), and Padma Rao (7 February 1997).

11 See Karamchedu, op. cit.
Karamchedu. The *shibiram* members, however, told the government that going back to Karamchedu would never solve their problems. They wanted justice. When the state Welfare Minister Pratibha Bharati, herself a Dalit, visited the *shibiram*, Sundaramma, one of the inmates, said: “If we live with these *rakshasas* (evildoers), they will kill our husbands. They will do what they want with us.”\footnote{Ibid.} When Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao came to visit them with fruits and flowers, they did not even allow him to address them. Veeramma, an inmate of the camp said: “Ayya (Sir), we don’t eat such fruits. You are the rulers. These fruits are yours. We live on a handful of rice we earn from our daily labour. Why do we need fruits? After you became the Chief Minister they made us their targets. We are now shattered, our families are broken, and drowned in blood.”\footnote{Ibid.} Having refused government largesse, the victims at the *shibiram* were cared for by their “youngsters in Scheduled Caste hostels, workers in mills, factories, employees, daily wage labourers and rickshaw pullers. They brought over the necessities to the Karamchedu victims, and the warmth and the sympathy that accompanied each morsel of rice, each banana, each rupee spoke volumes”\footnote{Ibid.} Not even the Dalit *pyraveekars* in the Congress, Telugu Desam or in any other organization, whom the inmates characterized as *dalita dalorulu*...
(Dalit brokers, were allowed admittance to the *shibiram*).\(^{15}\) The Congress (I) representative M.V. Kirshna Rao offered sarees and dhotis to the victims, but they said, "We will take them afterwards."\(^{16}\)

The Dalits' political struggle was advanced by the holding of protest mass rallies, dharnas, blockades and issuing of pamphlets, all of which reflected their inner spontaneous unity and concrete aspirations for justice. Initially, the struggle was assisted by all the 'democratic and progressive forces', including the national bourgeoisie of the Congress whose interests are antagonistic to the Dalits. The Congress (I) organized a state-wide bandh on 31 July 1985, which was fully supported and participated by all progressive, and Dalit organizations. The State Assembly session which started on 13 August was rocked by the Karamchedu incident. Then the Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, who declared himself 'a Harijan among Harijans', was questioned by the Congress (I), which was now in opposition and obviously tried to capitalize on the issue.

The Karamchedu massacre was seen from different points of view by different political organizations. The Congress (I) asserted that the "Harijans have no peace and security under the Telugu Desam government",\(^{17}\) and the whole problem was termed as a collapse of law and order. The Hyderabad City Congress (I)

\(^{15}\) K. Ilaiah, op. cit.

\(^{16}\) See *Karamchedu*, op. cit.

\(^{17}\) *The Hindu*, 28 July 1985 (Hyderabad).
Committee organized a protest rally and another public meeting was organized in Nellore district which was addressed by the prominent Dalit Congress leaders. The Union Home Minister Ramdulari Sinha was deputed by the Rajiv Gandhi government to attend the rally and she simply attacked the Telugu Desam party which was part of the opposition at the centre. The traditional Communist parties, CPI and CPI(M) simply outlined the incident as a 'wrangle between two groups' and maintained their political taciturnity. In fact, they joined with the Telugu Desam in accusing the Congress. The CPI(M) leader and the State Committee Secretary Lau Balagangadhar Rao said that "If the Karamchedu incident makes the Telugu Desam morally responsible and it should not continue to rule the state, then the Congress does not have any moral right to rule the country, because under it only many atrocities have been committed on Dalits".

There was also a serious debate between the CPI (ML) people's war group (PWG) and the Dalits. The PWG showed serious concern for the Dalits from its very inception, and the Dalits in turn had developed an immense of faith in it. But Karamchedu created some differences between them. A PWG pamphlet on the Karamchedu incident was headlined, "Landlords' attack on Karamchedu Harijans". The ambiguous title of the

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20 Interview with former Naxalite leader, U. Sambhasiva Rao, on 2 February 1997, at Hyderabad.
The pamphlet itself because a point of discussion at the _shibirams_. The Dalits did not take kindly to the fact that the pamphlet concealed the caste of the oppressor and termed the victim as Harijan, a term detested by the Dalits. Moreover, the boy who whipped the Dalits at the water tank was not a landlord but a servant belonging to the Kamma caste. In class terms the Kamma servant was equal to the landless Dalits, but in terms of caste, he was superior. The concealment of these ideological and cultural differences and the identification of the oppressor and oppressed only along class lines in the background of the conventional economic determinism, created a rupture among the revolutionary forces.

Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, Dalit organizations like _Ambedkar Yuvajana_ Sangham, Andhra Pradesh _Scheduled Caste_ and Scheduled Tribe Rights Protection Society, Andhra Pradesh Slum _Dwellers_ Association, Rickshaw _Pullers' Association_, Andhra Pradesh _Gudisevasula_ Sangham, Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Caste _Welfare_ Association and many other Radical and Progressive organizations came together and formed a temporary representative body called All-India Dalit Coordination Committee on Karamchedu. The committee organized a massive Chalo Assembly protest rally with some 30,000 people. The rally was addressed by almost all the prominent Dalit leaders. The rallyists demanded that the Assembly Speaker should come out, instead of

21 Ibid.; see also Ilaiiah, op. cit.

22 These details were given by Ganumala Gnaneswar (21 January 1997, Hyderabad).
their representatives going to the Speaker. When he came out, they submitted a memorandum, demanding the immediate arrest of the culprits, and rehabilitation of the victims at Chirala town.

After a prolonged debate and discussion in the State Assembly, Home Minister Vasanta Nageswara Rao made a statement on Karamchedu. According to him “nearly 150 upper caste Hindus with sticks, spears and axes, attacked Harijanwada, in which five members were killed and eighteen were seriously injured, some of their wealth was also destroyed in the incident”.23 The statement politically implied the admission of the crime inflicted on the Dalits and an acceptance of the government’s failure to provide necessary protection. Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao passed a resolution in the Assembly condemning the atrocities on Dalits in general but there was no specific mention of Karamchedu, which created a commotion in the Assembly itself. The state government also appointed a retired judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, Ramachandra Raju, to probe the incident. Later, on the demand of the victims, a commission headed by Justice Desai was constituted.

For the victims of Karamchedu, much of the political and moral support came from the Dalit bahujan leaders and other alienated minority communities. Gowthu Lalchanna, the president of Andhra Pradesh SC, ST, BC and Minorities Federation, reflecting on the incident said that this brutal incident should be an

23 Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Debates. 12 August 1985.
eye-opener to all weaker sections and minorities and asked all the oppressed to stand united to face the odds.24

The Birth of New Hope: Creation of the Dalit Maha Sabha

The leaders at the shibiram continued with spontaneous operations of struggle like demonstrations, protest rallies and bandhs. All these were done without any systematic thought out plan. The increasing response from the hapless, impoverished Dalit masses, and their hopeful search for talented political organizers made it necessary for the leaders to give serious thought to an alternative organizational work. Questions were asked about their own conscious future political motives, their constituent abilities and ebullient energies. These questions thus drove them towards the formation of new autonomous revolutionary organizations for further growth and development of Dalit movement. In the process the Dalits began to radicalize their ideological position and their demands, while abandoning the past bankrupt political leadership.

Independence Day 1985 was observed as a black day and it was boycotted by wearing black badges. Silent marches and protest meetings were conducted all over the state. Hunger strikes were started on 22 August, in response to the shibiram’s call. Even schoolchildren actively participated in the agitation. But all these actions of protest failed to make a change in the government’s position. As a last resort the shibiram leaders, Tella Zedson and Labanu started a fast unto death in the shibiram.

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24 The Hindu (Hyderabad), 22 July 1985.
On 1 September 1985, the historic Chalo Chirala huge public meeting was organized. Dalits from all over the state poured into Chirala town to attend the mammoth rally, in which three lakh Dalits marched with ferocious slogans. The strength of the Dalits, demonstrated in this rally, caused some consternation among the upper castes. In this meeting the stage was reserved exclusively for the Dalits: no members of the upper castes, howsoever sympathetic to the Dalits, were allowed to share the dais. The Dalits did not want anyone to speak on their behalf, they could manage on their own. The meeting was inaugurated by Gaddar, the new democratic cultural revolutionary singer from the PWG. He composed a poem for the occasion:

*Dalitapululamma, Karamchedu*  
*Bhoswamulatone, Kalahadi, nilakdi*  
*Polrusesina, Dalitapulamma*

(Dalit Tigers, who boldly stood up and fought with the Karamchedu landlords).

After Gaddar’s cultural presentation, which provoked considerable anger among the participants against their plight, many prominent Dalit organizers such as Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao addressed the meeting. The meeting ended with the decision to form a new state-level autonomous Dalit organization

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25 Interview with Tarakam and Padma Rao.  
26 Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar. 21 January 1997.  
27 This information given by Tarakam (19 January 1997) and Padma Rao (7 February 1997).
called the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha (DMS). Its primary objective was to consolidate the strength of the Dalits, tribals, backward castes and the minorities. According to Padma Rao, “the Dalit Maha Sabha would confine its activities to constructive work for the benefit of the downtrodden with class instead of caste as its character and organize the people to fight for their rights”. He added that “Maha Sabha will launch a struggle against the scourge of untouchability which remains alive in many villages”.28 He reiterated that the DMS would attempt to rouse the conscience of the people and it would educate the Dalits against drinking and gambling, for the abolition of bounded labour, creation of more facilities for washermen and weavers, and for an end to the ill-treatment of backward castes and Dalits. The ultimate aim of the DMS was “to see that when the Dalits come to power, it should be as an integral part of the process of building Dalit culture as an alternative”.29

Bojja Tarakam was elected as the founder president and Katti Padma Rao as the general secretary of the new organization. An eleven-member ad hoc committee was also formed, with the prominent Dalit intellectuals, elders and seriously committed activists such as Prof. Kotta Palli Wilson, Endluri Chinnaiah, Ganumala Granesuwar, Rajan, N. Babu Rao, Ramalu, Y. Katama Raju, Mastan Rao and Bathula Punnaiah.30 All these new


30 Interview with Gnaneswar, 22 January 1997.
representatives promised to bring about revolutionary solidarity among the oppressed which would lead to the new Dalit Democratic revolution.

This rapid radicalization of Dalit consciousness and reinforcement of their solidarity polarized the upper caste rulers, with the state apparatus at their command. A so-called Karamchedu Sanghibhava Samiti (Karamchedu Solidarity Assembly) was even formed, comprising upper caste reactionaries. As soon as this organization was formed, counter ideological propaganda was started against the Dalits. According to the Samiti, the Karamchedu massacre was a drama produced by the Dalits in order to escape from the heavy debts and loans taken from the upper castes. It was the Samiti’s contention that “the Harijans who had taken loans from the upper caste had thought that the best way to get rid of them was by implicating them in the cases”.  

Meanwhile, the Dalits’ voice was stifled. Though the victims of the Karamchedu carnage had identified the culprits, the state government did not even charge-sheet them. Instead, the police arrested innocent people: ten Muslims, one Dhobi and six Dalits were taken into custody, that too in the guise of their being Radicals. The pressing demands of the Dalits, that the victims should be rehabilitated at Chirala town, and justice rendered to the Dalits, were not taken seriously by the government.

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31 The Hindu, 4 December 1985.

32 Andhra Jyoti (Telugu), 29 July 1985: see also Karamchedu, op. cit.
To protest the government indifference, the DMS gave a call for a state-wide Rail Rokho and Rasta Rokho on 8 September. The agitation was a total success, disrupting the communication system and the state administrative functions. The government, in retaliation, deployed a heavy police force at the shibiram. In a midnight attack on the shibiram, the police destroyed the tents, conducted a heavy lathi charge on the shibiram members, and arrested nearly 300 inmates. It was rumoured that Padma Rao was killed in an encounter with the police. In the midst of this chaotic situation, the DMS president Tarakam sent Padma Rao to conduct underground activities. Padma Rao toured all over the state, holding clandestine meetings about the objectives of the DMS. Meanwhile, Tarakam arranged for Padma Rao’s arrest in order to get propaganda mileage for the DMS out of the event and also to avoid his encounter killing. On 6 October, a huge public meeting was arranged at the Vijayawada municipal grounds, with an estimated crowd of one lakh, which Padma Rao was expected to address. The state government deployed a heavy police force. When Padma Rao was about to address the meeting he was arrested on the dais and taken to the Visakhapatnam central jail. The enraged crowd was lathi-charged.

Padma Rao’s public arrest led to an escalation of the Dalit agitation. The DMS along with the CPI (ML) groups, resorted to the road blocks, massive rallies, silent marches and state-wide

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34 All these details were narrated by Gnaneswar, 22 January 1997.
demonstrations. This time, the leadership at the *shibiram* strategically utilized the women's militancy as a check against the state repression.\textsuperscript{35} The Dalit women's response and their participation was remarkable. A woman activist from the Rationalist Movement, Hetuwada Laxmi, played an important role in organizing the Dalit women at the *shibiram*. The DMS along with the PWG led the demonstration under the leadership of Hetuwada Laxmi. Hundreds of women went to Hyderabad and staged a dharna in front of the Chief Minister's house, demanding the immediate release of Padma Rao and other leaders, rehabilitation of the victims of Karamchedu at Chirala and the arrest of the accused. After nearly ten hours of dharna, the Chief Minister came out of his residence and promised the immediate release of the leaders. As a result, Padma Rao was released the next day.

The DMS was also gaining in membership, mainly from semi-educated and uneducated daily wage earners and agricultural workers. In the second week of February 1986 the DMS held its first state-level conference at Tenali town of Guntur district. At this conference the DMS manifesto was released, explaining the mode of Dalit struggle, strategy and principles. Though the manifesto did not draw the kind of attention that the manifesto of Dalit Panthers did in Maharashtra, it certainly was an outstanding political text and its polemical formulations created contentious debate. The manifesto traced the historical emergence of Dalit struggles and

\textsuperscript{35} K. Ilaiah, op. cit.
stressed the ‘caste annihilation thesis’ implying that Ambedkar’s philosophy was central to caste-class annihilation.

The manifesto opened by giving an outline of the distinctness of DMS and portrayed it as the real united front of desperate social elements, for united action against the ruling upper castes. It defined the Dalits and characterized them as the “special class” which necessarily had the potential to overthrow the present class-caste exploitative society and to bring an intended new Dalit democratic revolution. It explained how the Dalits were systematically exploited and divided during the centuries in the Hindu social order. It also emphasized how the previous political struggles, including the Communist movement, lacked political effectiveness and revolutionary purpose to annihilate caste and stressed the crucial importance of the Dalit organic party. Lastly, the manifesto said that the primary aim of the DMS was to conscientize the Dalits about the historical role of working-class struggles at the global level, and their emancipatory zeal (see Appendix I).

Apart from the agitational struggle, the DMS also took up the legal battle against the upper caste culprits. As part of the pacification exercise, the state government filed a case on behalf of the victims, but ironically, none of the culprits whom the victims identified appeared in the list of accused. Against this gross travesty of justice, the DMS filed a separate private case citing as

36 There is much similarity between the Dalit Panthers’ Manifesto and Dalit Maha Sabha’s Manifesto. For the full translated text see Appendix I. The original text in Telugu was released at the first state level conference. Later there were many manifestos.
the accused the Karamchedu landlord, Daggupati Chenchu Ramaiah, who was the Chief Minister’s relative and the real strategist behind the massacre. In this regard, Salaha, a voluntary legal organization in Hyderabad played a crucial role. Meanwhile, the government constituted a judicial inquiry commission headed by Justice Desai. After prolonged inquiry, the commission declared that “it could not find any clear-cut reason behind the massacre, hence it is inconclusive.”

To answer the charges filed by the DMS in its private case, the prime accused Chenchu Ramaiah was summoned by the District Special Session Court. A Dalit woman, Alisamma, was the prime witness in the case. Her son had been axed to death in front of her eyes in the massacre. Because of her graphic narration of the horrifying scene, she was killed by the upper caste members after her deposition. Alisamma thus became a martyr to the cause of Dalit democratic struggle. While the court case dragged on, on 6 April 1989 (i.e. after four years of the incident) a PWG guerrilla squad physically eliminated the Chenchu Ramaiah. While claiming the killing, PWG criticized the DMS for its legal battle instead of continuing its initial revolutionary struggle. The DMS leadership, however, did not condone the killing.

\[37\] Interview with Gnaneswar (22 January 1997) and Tarakam (19 January 1997).

\[38\] Kranti, CPI(ML) PWG monthly (Telugu), vol. 14, no. 4, September 1991.

\[39\] Ibid.

\[40\] Ibid.

\[41\] Interview with K.G. Satya Murthy, 10 February 1997, Hyderabad.

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Thereafter, the DMS took up different forms of ideological propaganda. In order to create an ideological base among the Dalits, political classes were conducted on Phule-Ambedkar thought,\textsuperscript{42} and cultural programmes on Dalit identity were reinvented. When the Puri Sankaracharya made an inflammatory statement on the Dalits, the DMS conducted a state-wide agitation.\textsuperscript{43} The DMS also actively supported the Muralidhar Rao Commission which provided reservations for the backward castes in the state government. Thus the agitation for reservations once again brought all the progressive organizations together,\textsuperscript{44} against the upper caste anti-reservation agitation. The DMS started a fortnightly called \textit{Dalita Shakti} (Dalit Power), which chronicled various important incidents and day-to-day activities of the Maha Sabha. Unfortunately, not a single issue of the publication is available.

Meantime, the Government of India promulgated a comprehensive act to prevent atrocities on Dalits and to punish the culprits. The act was got the President’s assent in September 1989, as the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe Atrocities (Prevention) Act, 1989. Also, after a prolonged struggle by the Dalits, the state government announced the construction of new permanent houses, and self-employment schemes for the Karamchedu victims. The new colony constructed at CNirala town was named Vizaynagar.

\textsuperscript{42} These political classes were taken by Prof. G. Hara Gopal, Dr. K. Ilaiah, Tarakam, Padma Rao and others. Interview with Gnaneswar and Padma Rao.

\textsuperscript{43} Gnaneswar, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{44} K. Ilaiah, op. cit.
Colony (Colony of the Victorious), symbolizing Dalit pride and reminiscing the victorious Dalit struggle.

At the second state level conference of the DMS, held at Visakhapatnam in 1988, strong differences among the leadership emerged. The immediate cause was the difference of opinion on forming an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). At the district level executive convention of the DMS held in 1988 at Nellore, Tarakam proposed that the DMS should have political linkage with the BSP, which had emerged as an all-India Dalit political force. Padma Rao dissented, advocating an independent existence for the DMS. Tarakam went ahead to bring the BSP into Andhra Pradesh. A delegation consisting of B.S.S. Swamy and Dr. P. Sundariah led by Tarakam met the BSP president Kanshi Ram in New Delhi and held a series of discussions on the political climate in Andhra Pradesh. Subsequently Kanshi Ram toured Andhra Pradesh to assess the situation on the ground for Dalit activity in the southern states. On 4 July 1989, a meeting was held at the Nizam College grounds in Hyderabad to launch the BSP in the state. Tarakam issued a pamphlet to mark the occasion, entitled ‘BSP Evarikosam, Endukosam’ (BSP, for whom and why). Padma Rao boycotted the meeting.

At the third DMS state level conference, held at Ongone in 1990, the Tarakam group expelled Padma Rao, and elected new office bearers. Padma Rao held his own parallel conference and

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45 This information was given by Gnaneswar. (22 January 1997).

46 Interview with Tarakam and Gnaneswar, op.cit.
expelled Tarakam from his organization. Thereafter, the DMS began to have two separate meetings. A notable feature of the Ongone conference was its inauguration by Gaddar, whose cultural programme made a unique contribution to the DMS expansion. 47

Tarakam meanwhile started a socio-political fortnightly called *Nalupu* (Black) in April 1989. Its inaugural issue clarified the aims and objectives of the *Nalupu* as working for the awareness of Dalits and common masses, and disseminating information about their legal rights and the atrocities on women and Dalits. 48 The *Nalupu* played an important role of politicization, education, and the formation of Dalit ideology. It was financed and circulated by a popular progressive literary organization called the Hyderabad Book Trust (HBT), headed by a member of the upper caste, Siril Reddy. Notwithstanding this fact, the trust played a crucial role in propagating popular Telugu literature, including Dalit literature. It published some translations of Ambedkar’s writings. The *Nalupu* also started a theoretical debate on caste annihilation theory, taking up the theme from Phule and Ambedkar. 49 Though its circulation was limited to Telengana, the *Nalupu* assiduously worked as a training camp for Dalit litterateurs. In its short lifespan of four years (1989-93), the fortnightly created a tremendous political and ideological awareness among the middle class educated Dalits and other backward classes. By the time it closed because of monetary


49 A series of articles have been published in *Nalupu* from time to time. See *Nalupu* issues (1989-93).
constraints, "every educated Dalit and the whole Dalit community felt that their potent leader had vanished."

The late eighties witnessed epoch-making changes in the Indian socio-political structure. The Congress Party, which had hitherto enjoyed overwhelming majority in Parliament (with the short interregnum of Janata rule, 1977-79) failed to secure majority in the 1989 general elections, which led to the unpredictable political situation of hung parliaments. To cope with the probable discontinuity in their political fortunes, new alliances were formed by the upper caste rules. A new coalition emerged in the name of National Front led by the Janata Dal in 1989. The National Front government claimed to represent the common interest of all the Dalit bahujans and adopted piecemeal and progressive redistributive measures with the slogan of 'Social Justice'. However, the change of government at the centre altogether restyled the nature and character of the Indian state.

As a part of its 'Social Justice' slogan the National Front government took an emphatic decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission which provided 27 per cent reservation for the other backward classes (OBCs) in government services. This led to a nationwide agitation which ultimately brought down the National Front government at the

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50 See Ilaiyah, op. cit.

centre. In Andhra Pradesh, as part of the anti-Mandal agitation, the upper caste forces got polarized on the slogan of 'Save Merit'. There was frenzied activity and also a whisper campaign that the backward castes were the real enemies of the SCs and STs and that the upper castes, were their friends. As a counter, the DMS along with other progressive forces, organized the pro-Mandal agitation. The coming together of the Dalits and backward classes helped the political and ideological consolidation of the Dalit bahujan forces against the upper castes and their regressive ideology of caste perpetuation.

The 'Social Justice' platform of the National Front government extended beyond the Mandal Commission and reservations. To commemorate the year 1991 as the death centenary of Mahatma Phule and the birth centenary of Ambedkar, Ambedkar's birth centenary celebrations were announced from April 1990 to April 1992 and the centenary year was declared as the Year of Social Justice. Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award in India, was conferred on Ambedkar and a host of economic measures including proportional Plan allocation for rural areas, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, etc., were announced.

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53 Ibid., p. 91.

54 K. Balagopal, "Probings in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts" (*Perspectives, Hyderabad, 1988*), pp. 176-91; see also Ilaiah, op. cit.

55 Mathew, p. 88.
In Ambedkar’s birth centenary year the DMS, under the leadership of Tarakam, held a cycle rally. The rally was organized by the Ambedkar Centenary Celebrations Dalit Cycle Raily committee, Hyderabad, which consisted of organizations like DMS, Andhra Pradesh Agricultural Labour Front, Andhra Pradesh Agriculture Labour Organization, and Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham. The rally covered nearly 3,500 kilometres, starting from Srikakulam district and covering Adilabad, Ananthapur and Chittoor districts. Some 5,000 cyclists are said to have participated in the rally.56

On 14 April 1991, the day of Ambedkar’s birth centenary, Padma Rao announced the formation of a new party called the Poor People’s Party. The manifesto of the party said that if it came to power, it would share the power with BCs, SCs, STs and minorities according to their proportion of population.57 The party contested the 1991 parliamentary elections fielding two candidates, from Narasapuram and from Tenali, both of whom lost their election deposits. The election campaign of the party was conducted by means of foot marches and on cycles.

Meanwhile, K.G. Satya Murthy, a Dalit revolutionary thinker, who was underground for more than two decades, came out in public and started a new debate which made a considerable impact on the course of the Dalit movement. As a revolutionary intellectual who had an immense theoretical strength, he formed a

56 For detailed report see, Nalupu, 16-31 March 1991.
57 D.Mastan Rao, Samkshobhamlo Venuka badina Taragatulu (Backward Classes in Crisis), (Lokayata Prachuranaalu, Ponnur, 1992), pp. 53-4.
revolutionary group called Marxist-Leninist centre at Ongole in 1990 along with his close Naxalite co-worker U. Sambasiva Rao. The primary aim of the Marxist Leninist centre was to prepare the socio-political and theoretical ground to build a new revolutionary working class party in the Indians subcontinent.58 The centre also decided to swim against the predominant tides of pedantic economic determinism, and brahmanic and patriarchal male authority. It explicitly opposed the mechanical application of armed struggle and unorganized violence and argued that unless Marxism and Ambedkarite anti-caste theory were interwoven the democratic revolution could not be achieved.59 The centre also started a Telugu political monthly, Edureetam (Swim Against the Tide).60

The Edureetam had four political objectives: (a) to create a sweeping consciousness about the contemporary day-to-day political incidents among the Dalit masses; (b) to create democratic, socialist theoretical revolutionary consciousness about caste, class, religion, and nationality; (c) to overcome the past mistakes of the revolutionary struggles and to build a strong consciousness among the Dalits; and (d) to start a protracted theoretical debate on Marxism and Ambedkarism.61 The Edureetam brought out systematic disquisitions upon Phule, Marx, Ambedkar and Mao.62

59 Ilaiah, op. cit.
60 Edureeta was edited by U. Sambashiva Rao.
Another important contribution of Satyamurthy for Dalit mobilization was his voluntary organization called Samata Voluntary Force. The force was started on the lines of Ambedkar's own Samata Sainik Dal (Social Equality Army), started in 1928. The Samata Voluntary Force had three aims; to build caste annihilation consciousness; to organize the oppressed caste Dalits for the socio-cultural revolution; and to organize the Dalits for self-defence against upper caste atrocities. The force was intended to work as a total defence mechanism of Dalit culture against the Hindu fundamental organizations of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).  

**Chundur and Post-Chundur**

The unprecedented politicization and mobilization of Dalits after the Karamchedu incident and the increasing level of self-creative activity through their own autonomous organizations like DMS, the entry of BSP, the formation of the Poor People's Party, the highly motivated communicative role of Dalit periodicals like Dalita Shakti, Nalupu, Edureetam—all these expanded Dalit consciousness and identity. This ever-growing consciousness and assertion of Dalit identity was not tolerated by the hegemonic opposing traditions of the upper castes. The incident at the Chundur Mandal of Guntur district demonstrated the efforts of the upper castes to perpetuate the subjection the Dalits to organized brutal suppression.

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63 For full details about the Samata Voluntary Force, see, Edureeta, January 1992.
On 6 August 1991, landlords of the Reddy caste together with the state police force at Chundur and chased the Dalits on tractors, motor-cycles and buses with axes, spars and such other weapons. In this assault more than ten Dalits were killed. The bodies of some of the dead were cut up, stuffed into gunny bags and thrown into the nearby Tunghabadra drainage canal. The massacre caught the attention of the country.64

With the Chundur carnage the Dalit movement reached a distinct phase, that of retaliation. The Chundur Dalits fled the village and took temporary shelter at the Tenali Salvation Army church compound, where they made shibiram. The news of the carnage was purposefully suppressed with the help of the police force. But Katti Padma Rao, as soon as he heard of the carnage, reached the shibiram. Later all the revolutionary organizations and civil liberties forums also joined him.65 Seething with anger, they collected the bodies from the drainage canal and the fields. Here, the dead bodies became the political contentious aspect of the Dalit movement. One section of Dalits in the shibiram suggested that the bodies should be buried at Tenali itself and the struggle should continue on the lines of Karamchedu. A militant section, however, strongly opposed this suggestion and decided to carry the bodies back to Chundur and fight the upper caste goons right in their own village. This determination of the Dalits and their combative


retaliatory nature reflected the changing nature of Dalit consciousness.

The marathon procession was taken carrying the bodies on 10 August 1991, from Tenali to Chundur, a distance of fifteen kilometres. Thousands of Dalits from nearby villages joined the procession. The state police force was also deployed in full strength to prevent any untoward incidents. The processionists reached the Reddy colony, pulled down a makeshift tea stall there and buried the bodies in the midst of the village. The place was named Rakta Kshetram (blood-soaked field).66

At Karamchedu the Dalits had en masse left the village and waged their struggle from Chirala town. But in Chundur, the Dalits returned to avenge the atrocities committed against them. When the Dalits arrived in the village, it was the turn of the members of the upper castes to flee the village. During the burial activity, a large number of enraged Dalit youth attacked the Reddy colony and killed one Reddy.67 The police then resorted to an indiscriminate lathi charge. A change definitely was taking place in Dalit consciousness. They were now retaliating the upper caste reactionary forces.

Independence Day 1991 was observed as a black day in Hyderabad. A huge meeting was organized by K.G. Satyamurthy from the Socialist Revolutionary Form; Tarakam, the editor of

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Nalupu; Sambhasiva Rao, editor of *Edureetam*, Dr. Chirangeevi, BSP leader; and Kranti, the DMS organizing secretary. They moved a resolution for the future course of action on the Chundur carnage. At Chundur, Padma Rao along with the DMS members organized a massive silent march to ‘Rakta Kshetram’ and there they took a pledge to ‘fight to the last’, in a charged atmosphere.

When the Chief Minister, Janardan Reddy came to visit the victims at Chundur town, the Dalits boycotted him with the slogan, ‘Go back’. Reddy, nevertheless, reassured the victims compensation of one lakh rupees, one acre land, permanent houses, and exclusive residential school for Dalit children. He also announced that the government would appoint a commission headed by Gangadhar Rao to go into the whole incident and promised that every accused person, irrespective of his caste and political affiliation, would be punished and his property would be taken over by the government. But the victims insisted on the immediate arrest of all the Reddy culprits and also the Circle Inspector and Sub-Inspector of Chundur, who acted hand in glove with members of the upper caste during the carnage. They made these demands a precondition for negotiations, acceptance of compensation and rehabilitation.

Chundur also witnessed growing consolidation of upper caste reactionary forces against the Dalits. The Reddys, Kammas,
Brahmins, Vyshyas, Kapus and Rajus banded together and formed an organization called Sarva Janabhyudya Porata Samiti (Council for the Welfare of All). The Dalits' demand that all the property of the members of the upper castes who were involved in the carnage should be seized and distributed, and that the Dalit dead should be buried in the centre of the village, hardened the attitude of the upper castes. The Sarva Janabhyudya Porata Samiti organized dharnas, bandhs, processions and road blocks parallel to the Dalits' agitation.

Once again, all the Dalit organizations and revolutionary groups who were divided on the course of the Dalit movement, came together and started an organized agitation. On 17 August 1991, there was a 'Chalo Assembly' rally led by the Dalit organizations and the Marxist-Leninist groups. The Edureetam coined slogans like: 'Self-Respect, Self-Defence is Dalits' birthright' and 'Protest, Struggle and Self-defence, long live Dalit unity'.71 The upper castes' Sarva Janabyudaya Samiti meanwhile gave a call to observe a Guntur district bandh against the Dalits' assertion and government's partiality towards the Dalits. It also raised counter-slogan like: 'Long live the unity of the forward castes', 'Hang Katti Padma Rao', 'Those who beg for every morsel should not be arrogant', etc.72 The Samiti processionists attacked the Andhra Christian College in Guntur town, which is the only institution that accommodates and provides the highest

71 Edureeta, September 1991.

72 The Chundur Carnage, op. cit. See also E\'W', 19 October 1991.
number of graduate and postgraduate degrees to the Dalit Christians in Andhra Pradesh. The Dalit students’ hostel was ransacked and their books, clothes and certificates were burnt down. Some students were bodily lifted and thrown down from the third floor of the hostel.73

The massacres such as at Karamchedu, Padvi Kuppan and Nerukonda had taken place under the Telugu Desam party headed mostly by the Kammas. The Chundur massacre was perpetrated under the Congress, generally dominated by the Reddys. For the Dalits, therefore, both the Congress and Telugu Desam became one and the same manifestation of Brahminical ideology. The Dalits had long ago stopped banking on the CPI and CPI (M). Both parties now sought to wash their hands by issuing customary condemnatory statements.74

The State Assembly now became the scene of the Telugu Desam and the Congress trying to gain political capital out of the Chundur carnage. The only notable voice of concern for the plight of the Dalits was that of a lone independent Dalit MLA, Narasunhulu, who was suspended from the Assembly for continuing his agitation against the anti-Dalit developments. N.V. Krishnariah and Gummadi Narasaiah, both of the CPI (ML) and from a backward caste background, also extended their genuine support to the Dalit agitation.75

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74 Ibid.

The Dalits decided to erect a monument on ‘Rakta Kshetram’, while the Janabhyudya Porata Samiti demanded that the bodies buried at the centre of the village should be removed. When the Dalits organized a ‘Chalo Chundur’ mass rally, the police placed pickets everywhere in Guntur district, to prevent the Dalits from attending the rally. The decision to foil the rally was taken at a meeting of the police superintendents of four districts, Prakasam, Nalgonda, Khammam and Krishna. Padma Rao was arrested and shifted between nine jails within a single day, because wherever the police went, the Dalits protested. The rally was, however, successfully foiled by the police.

The pressure now grew from the OMS, other ML groups, and civil liberties organizations, for the release of Padma Rao. Unable to cope with this pressure the government released Padma Rao from jail and placed him under house arrest. On 28 August, another ‘Chalo Chundur’ rally was organized by 21 pro-Dalit organizations demanding the arrest of culprits, including police officers, and immediate relief measures to the victims. But the proposed rally was also prevented by promulgating prohibitory orders under section 144. Hundreds of activists and leaders were also arrested. Meanwhile, K.G. Satyamurthy organized a rally on 29 August at Tanuku. He appealed to the approximately 10,000 Dalits who attended, to join the Samata Voluntary Force.

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76 Frontier, 23 November 1991.

77 Interview with Tarakam and Padma Rao. See also Frontier, ibid.

The *Nalupu* and *Edureetam* brought out a special issue on Chundur carnage\(^7^9\) and deployed their own fact-finding teams. The DMS issued a series of pamphlets on the mode of struggle and strategy of bandh calls and rallies. The Viplava Rachayitala Sangham (Revolutionary Writers Association) also issued a series of pamphlets.\(^8^0\)

The government was, however, still indifferent. The victims of Chunchur, therefore, started an indefinite hunger strike for immediate justice. Meanwhile, on 6 September 1991, another 'Chalo Assembly' rally was organized in Hyderabad by the CPI (ML) Liberation, CPI (ML) Praja Pantha, UCC RI (ML) Jana Shakti, Marxist-Leninist Centre, Indian People's Front, Organization for the Rural poor, DMS and the Dalit protest committee on Chundur. The rally, attended by nearly 30,000 people, was addressed by M. Subha Reddy, N.V. Krishnaiah, G. Narasaiah, K.G. Satyamurthy, Tarakam and others. Later a memorandum was submitted to the Speaker of the State Assembly with 10 lakh signatures, demanding the immediate arrest and punishment of the Chundur culprits and an inquiry commission by a Supreme Court judge about the encounters in the state.\(^8^1\)

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\(^7^9\) See *Nalupu*, 1-15 September 1991 and *Edureeta*, September 1991.

\(^8^0\) *Mandutunna Chundur* (Burning Chundur) (Viplava Rachayitala Sangham, Nellore, 1991). *Chundur*, by the same organization from Guntur. Another undated pamphlet was issued by Janasahiti Samskrutika Samakya (People’s Literary Cultural Front), Praja Rachayitala Samakya (People’s Writer’s Front) and Viplava Rachayitala Sangham (Revolutionary Writers Association).

\(^8^1\) *Edureeta*, September 1991.
On 10 September 1991, the state resorted to an unprecedented show of brutal force against the victims of Chundur. As a counter to the indefinite hunger strike commenced by them, hundreds of policemen ransacked the shibiram, broke the human chain formed by the women, resorting to a heavy lathi charge, searched for Padma Rao and opened fire without provocation. Kommerla Anil Kumar, who was the main witness of the Chundur carnage and emerging leader of Dalit voices, was killed in the firing. In the case of Karamchedu, the main witness, Alisamma, had been killed by the upper caste members on their own; in Chundur, the police performed the job on behalf of the upper caste rulers.

After this ghastly incident, a division appeared in the course of the Dalit movement mainly on the issue of getting justice to the Chundur victims. In Hyderabad, a forum was formed by the Dalits and other ML organizations, called Andhra Pradesh Chundur Porata Samiti. Another united coordination committee was formed at Guntur by another set of organizers. This created some communication gap between the two organizations. Efforts were initiated to unite the Dalit leaders, and as a result, a steering committee was formed which proposed to hold a huge ‘Chalo Vijayawada’ rally on 19 October. The rally was addressed by many outside leaders like George Fernandes, Prakash Ambedkar, Gawtu Latchenna, K.G. Satyamurthy, Botta Tarakam, N.V. Krishnaiah, Gaddar, Kannabiran, K. Nagaiah, J.B. Raju and Vimala.

Meanwhile, the Dalits boycotted the Justice Gangadhar Rao commission. Later, the commission submitted a 98-page partially conducted report to the government.\textsuperscript{83}

Katti Padma Rao meanwhile mobilized nearly 10,000 Dalits along with the victims and gave a call for 'Chalo Delhi'. This was the first time that such a massive number of Dalits from Andhra Pradesh came to Delhi. They organized demonstrations and dharnas which rocked Delhi. They also met Prime Minster P.V. Narasimha Rao. Initially Rao was reluctant to meet them, but in view of his forthcoming election, he agreed to some of their demands. The Andhra Chief Minister Janardhan Reddy, however, categorically refused to implement even those promises. Then twenty bottles of blood taken from the Chundur victims were sent to the Prime Minister in protest against the brutal state repression.\textsuperscript{84}

Members of Parliament belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from all political parties, numbering 105, also tried to meet and submit a memorandum on 'atrocities against Dalits' to the then President of India, R. Venkataraman, but he refused to meet them. Then these MPs, irrespective of their political differences, made a firm resolve that the next President of India should be from the Dalit community.\textsuperscript{85}

When P.V. Narasimha Rao contested the by-election from the Nandyal Lok Sabha constituency as the Prime Minister-

\textsuperscript{83} See \textit{Swechcha} (Free), January-February 1993 (APCLC Journal).

\textsuperscript{84} Interview with Tarakam and Padma Rao.

designate, all the established political parties (except the BJP) decided to withdraw from the contest on behalf of this Telugu bidda (Telugu son). But the Dalits decided to field their own candidate, on behalf of the wives of the Chundur victims. The state government then came down for negotiations. After three days of hectic negotiations, the government agreed to pay Rs. 1 lakh compensation for the family of deceased, 1 acre land, to build up an exclusive residential school, to provide jobs for all Chundur Dalits and a special court at the Chundur. With this deal, three-fourths of the Chundur victims' demands were fulfilled. As a mark of the victory, nearly 60 inter-caste community marriages were conducted on the site of Rakhta Kshetram, under the auspices of the DMS. To mark the event, a new journal Dalita Rajyam was also started under the editorship of Katti Padma Rao, which today has more than 20,000 readers in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema.

The 1994 Assembly Elections

The 1994 Assembly elections brought yet another gigantic change in the history of the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh. The DMS remained only a cultural and ideological mobilizing organ; it could not metamorphose into a political instrument. The founder leadership of the DMS got divided and the gaps began to widen. The BSP had made its foray into Andhra politics in 1989, but it came into its own as a political power only after its capture of

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87 Interview with Dalita Rajyam Editor, Katti Padma Rao, 7 February 1997.
state power in Uttar Pradesh, along with the Samajwadi Party (SP), in the November 1993 elections.

This new political alliance between the Dalits and the backward classes of Uttar Pradesh created a new trend in the Andhra political process as well. As a part of political mobilization for the 1994 assembly elections, the BSP organized its first public meeting at Nizam College grounds in Hyderabad on 23 January “which evoked the spontaneous gathering of over one lakh people”. This meeting was presided over by Bojja Tarakam who had brought the BSP into Andhra. At this meeting many leaders from different political parties and organizations joined the BSP. The more notable among them were: K.G. Satyamurthy from the Marxist-Leninist Centre; Katti Padma Rao from his own Poor People’s Party; B. Vijay Kumar from the Janata Dal; P.L. Srinivas and Balachari from the Congress. The BSP’s public rallies were held in Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, and Nalgonda, to gauge the public mood.

The success of these public meetings and apparent merging of Dalit bahujan forces created some alarm among the ranks of established political parties, mainly the Congress and Telugu Desam. The Telugu Desam started organizing ‘melas’, ‘Sadassulu’, and ‘Gharjanas’. Three ‘melas’ were organized at

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89 Interview with Gnaneswar, 22 January 1997.
90 “Andhra Politics: BSP and Caste Politics.
91 Edureeta, May 1993.
Rajahmundry, Nalgonda and Kurnool of coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions, besides one Karshaka Sadassu (Farmers convention). As part of its populist strategy the Telugu Desam also promised at the 'Praha Gharjana' (people's roar) meeting of three lakhs, that if it came to power, the Chief Ministership would be given to the Dalits and more representation to the backward classes. The Congress, though a little belated in its response, also promised to give the Chief Ministership to the Dalits. Against the BSP's homogenizing strategy of Dalit bahujans, the Congress adopted the strategy of 'sub-castewise' conferences, such as Madiga Sabha, Arudatiya Sabha, Yadava Sabha, Weavers Sabha, Fishermen Sabha, Dhobi Sabha, Barbers Sabha, Blacksmiths Sabha, etc.

The entry of the BSP into Andhra also created a significant impact on the CPI (ML) groups, particularly the PWG. The PWG's understanding of the BSP is of a party "led by the comprador dalit bureaucrats and urbanized petty-bourgeois intellectuals, and backed by a section of the comprador big bourgeoisie—a party in service of the Indian ruling class". With this basic nature, the BSP had "faith in the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, absence of any land reform programme". With its "auto-imperialist programme" it was "reluctant to take up any grass-roots level movement of the masses", which made it "an acceptable party for the ruling classes"

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92 Ibid.
93 Interview with Gnaneswar, 22 January 1997.
too”. In the PWG’s view, therefore, “the BSP, like any other bourgeois parliamentary party, can in no way solve the basic problem facing the Indian people.” 95

Despite this reading of the BSP’s bonafides, in the 1994 elections, the BSP was allowed to enter the PWG-dominated base areas, a privilege not allowed to any other political party. In a public meeting at Manda Marri (Karimnagar district), the BSP state president Dr. Sundaraiah promised that if the BSP came to power, it would lift the ban on PWG, all the paramilitary forces would be sent back and encounter deaths would be stopped.96 Kanshi Ram also appealed to the PWG to take up the caste issue apart from the land issue.

On 5 June 1994, the BSP organized a huge ‘Pradarshana’ (parade) at Gymkhana grounds, in Secunderabad, where nearly two lakh people attended. While speaking to the Dalit masses, Kanshi Ram appealed to them to unite and fight against the caste system. He said that, for the Dalits to capture political power the number of votes were important.97 The BSP’s last election meeting culminated with the ‘Shakti Pradarshna’ in which four lakh people gathered, the first ever Dalit political meeting on such a massive scale. In the battle of electoral reckoning, however, the BSP lost its deposit in

95 Ibid.
97 Interview with Gnaneswar, 22 January 1997
all but one constituency. At Bapatla in Guntur district, Katli Padma Rao did quite well though he did not win the election battle.98

The BSP's electoral failure in 1994 may be ascribed to the following factors. (a) The party suffered in its organizational structure and leadership projection. (b) Its caste- and region-specific identity could not garner the popular vote. (c) The BSP lacked proper communication channels between the party leaders. (d) It also suffered considerably from financial problems. (e) The Telugu press gave very limited coverage to the BSP. (f) In the media, the party was projected as a Scheduled Castes party.

Summing up

From Karamchedu to Chundur, the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh witnessed a tremendous radicalization process which altered the whole political process in Andhra. The formation of an autonomous organization called DMS brought about three distinct features. One was the unprecedented politicization and ideological mobilization which was associated with the rapid radicalization of Dalit consciousness and identity. Secondly, there were profound signs of confluence between the revolutionary Naxalite movement and equally growing Dalit movement. Thirdly, this produced a direct dangerous threat to the established interests of the upper caste rulers, thereby polarizing them.

Another important aspect which emerged in the course of the Dalit movement from Karamchedu to Chundur was that the

98 Ibid.
Dalit movement was not confined to rallies, dharnas, and other forms of protests. They also started new propaganda organs like *Dalita Shakti*, *Nalupu*, *Edurectam* and *Dalita Rajyam*, which played a tremendous role in creating an alternative, ideological and cultural ethos among the Dalit bahujan forces. Lastly, the BSP's entry into Andhra and its electoral experiment was well received by the Dalit bahujan forces in Andhra, but because of its own internal organizational problems, as well as external factors, it could not produce expected hopes.