Chapter I
Socio-Economic Setting of Dalits

The Dalits in India, traditionally known as ‘Panchamas’ or untouchables, and now called Scheduled Castes by the legal dispensation of the country, have always born the brunt of the caste system. The present work is confined to the political aspirations of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, one of the twenty-five states forming the Indian Union, and stretching on the eastern coast of its mainland. Their intense and widespread discontent is a mirror to the socio-economic reality of present-day Andhra society. This chapter seeks to explain the Dalits’ post-independence social position and changing conditions. It also seeks to analyse the role of independent India vis-à-vis the condition of the Dalits and to see how far its preferential measures have accounted for the socio-economic changes and the shaping of Dalit consciousness.

A study of any social movement demands that the factors that have motivated its historically must be explained. Hence, before going into the details of the Dalits’ socio-economic conditions it would be necessary to note briefly the historical roots of the Dalit movement in Andhra.

Historical Roots

Dalit identity and consciousness is profoundly rooted in the remote past of the Andhra tradition itself. It mainly emanated from the multiple historical factors and legacies of the Andhra region: of Buddhism, Basava’s Veerashaivism, Hindu social reformism, the material conditions created by the colonial rule, the propagation and
proselytization of Christianity and Islam, the mass radical anti-colonial assertion. All these have profoundly influenced the Dalit movement.

The Buddha’s historical revolt around the fifth century B.C. against the Aryan Brahminism and its caste system was a profound impulse of struggle for freedom and humanism. In Ambedkar’s view, it “was a social and political revolution”. The Encyclopaedia of Marxism and Communism referred to it as the “movement of the poor and ideology of suffering masses, as well as an embodiment of revolutionary protest and revolutionary hopes”. The Buddha’s movement was regarded “not as religion, but as a popular philosophy which was created by the masses in an era of social crisis”. It was basically a Bahujan Sangha, a philosophical alternative to Brahminism and its individualistic rapaciousness. The Buddha negated the social hegemony of Brahminism and its chaturvarna caste hierarchy. He prudently aimed at reorganizing the hitherto neglected outcasts, Chandalas, Sudras, peasants and women, who had been perennially subjected to the cosmic doctrine of Karma, and declared that all men are born equal.

Buddhism as a universal humanist philosophy had a profound influence on Andhra society. According to historical sources, even as Andhra began its existence as a separate country under the Satavahanas, the first historical ruling dynasty of the region around the third century B.C., Andhra was a strong base for Buddhist culture. Emperor Ashoka of the third century B.C., who converted to Buddhism, noted his

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connection with Andhra in his rock edict near Gooty. The numerous ancient Buddhist inscriptions throughout Andhradesa, at Battiprolu, Gantasala, Guntupalli, Amaravathi and Nagarjunakonda reveal an illustrious Buddhist culture with popular appeal. Though the ruling dynasties were indifferent to Buddhism, and though they patronized Vedic rituals and sacrifices, Buddhism spread rapidly in their time and held sway for nearly a thousand years. Because of the deep roots of Buddhism in Andhradesa, a distinctive version of Buddhism singular to the region, called Nagarjuna Buddhism, emerged in due course.

According to historical sources, the enthusiastic social base for Buddhism in ancient Andhra came largely from the merchants, artisans and the untouchable Dalits who took to Buddhism as their own religion. Buddhist culture was generally propagated through the popular stupas or pillars and monuments. These cultural symbols were raised by the enthusiastic supporters or patrons who came from all sections of society. Perhaps the most remarkable among these was the puraghata slab donated by Vidhi, a cobbler who visited the Amaravathi stupas with his family. Apparently, the Dalits had an emotional bond with Buddhism before its eventual decline in Andhradesa.

Next to Buddhism, the most powerful anti-caste, anti-Brahmin movement in the Deccan was Basava’s Veerasaivism. Basava, who

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
lived in the twelfth century, revolted against the social evils of the caste system and Hindu religious rituals and sacrifices. In medieval Andhra, Brahminism with its temple-centred agrarian economic structure led to a highly distorted socio-economic structure. The land, the principal means of production, was the monopoly of the Brahmins and upper castes. A huge amount of cultivable land was diverted through Agraharas (land gifted to the temple) which was free from taxes. The Sudra castes were assigned to cultivate these lands. The Dalits, as outcastes of society, stayed outside the villages, restricted to work that was polluting. The caste and temple-based economic exploitation degraded the Sudras and Dalits and made them destitute. Basava's Veerasaivism offered them an alternative from their economic and socio-cultural suffocation under dominant Brahminism.

Brahmanayudu, who was the chief minister of Nalagama (AD 1170) of Palanadu (Guntur district) was influenced by the sweeping Veerashaiva movement and its humanistic principles of equality and rationality. He was a non-Brahmin Sudra and started radical anti-caste, anti-Brahmin socio-religious reformism. Brahmanayudu took a manful initiative to fight social evils. As part of his endeavour to spread the consciousness of brotherhood and fraternity, he extensively organized

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inter-caste public dining halls called "Chaapakoodu", where even the Dalits could eat with the upper castes.¹⁰

Many Sudras and untouchables, including Malas and Madigas converted to Veerasaivism, prominent among them being Katakota (who was a Golla, shepherd), Machayya (Dhobi), Gundaiah (Potter). Guddavva a well-known untouchable woman devotee.¹¹ Veerasaivism is said to have been responsible for the elevation of many untouchables from polluting to non-polluting work in the caste-ridden social order. Kannamadasu, an untouchable, became the highest ranking military officer under Brahmanayudu and played a significant role in capturing Nayakuralu Nagamma, the rival royal feudatory of Nalagama.¹²

In the early nineteenth-century Andhradesa there were also many non-Hindu alternative semi-religious cults all of them emanating from the lower castes. They were basically anti-caste and anti-Hinduism. Important among them were the Nasaraiah sect and Pothuluri Veerabramham. The Nasaraiah sect,¹³ founded by Nasaraiah, was popular among Madigas in northern Andhra. Nasaraiah was influenced by the Islamic principles of egalitarianism and humanism. He tried to emulate a model of Islam as an emancipatory doctrine for the untouchables. His main tenets were social equality, good moral conduct,

¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Vaidehi, p. 209.
worship of only one god, discarding of idol worship, and unity among the untouchables.  

Pothuluri Veerabramham’s teachings, which seemed to have a deeper, more far-reaching and purer doctrinal content than any other, exerted a tremendous attraction on members of the lower castes, particularly the untouchables and Sudra artisan classes. Pothuluri Veerabramham, who was seen by his admirers and followers as an anti-caste, anti-untouchable rebellious prophet, propagated the theme of one god and one religion and taught that one should not follow any distinctions of caste, class and gender in front of god. His attacks on the caste system, idol worship, animal sacrifice and colossally wasteful Hindu celebrations were vitriolic. Veerabramham’s teachings were documented in writing in a kind of socio-cultural literary discourse in lucid Telugu under the title Kala-gnyanam (Predictive Knowledge).

The Christian missionaries also played an important role in bringing about a change in the status of the Dalits. They were active from the early eighteenth century in spreading Christianity and converting the Hindus, particularly the lower caste untouchables. According to G. A. Oddie., the Church Missionary Society (CMS), one of the earliest Christian institutions, worked for massive Christian proselytization in the Godavari-Krishna districts of Andhra around 1860-1900. The CMS opened numerous English schools which

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14 Ibid.
15 Fuches, p. 260.
welcomed both caste Hindus and untouchables. These schools also became doorways to the proselytization process. The number of baptized untouchables steadily rose, from 1,650 (in 1869) to 3,500 (1882), to 9,000 (1885), to 22,000 (1905). The CMS mission prepared the ground for mass conversions. According to another study, the number of Christian converts in Andhra region rose from 172,319 during 1891 to 431,324 in 1921. In the Telengana region, the converts from the ranks of the Dalits were 3,992 in 1896, which number rose to 37,000 by 1920. For the Dalits, the visibly friendly, affable behaviour of the missionaries would have been in marked contrast to the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the caste Hindus, inducing these large-scale conversions.

Contributing to the changes in the plight of the Dalits was the process of reform initiated by the Hindu social, prominent among whom was Sri Kandukuri Veereshalingam Panthulu (1848-1919). These reformers inveigled against the orthodox practices of bride price, child marriage, sati and caste practices. They asked the orthodox Hindus to treat Dalits as human beings and fellowmen. Panthulu started the struggle against child marriage and also took the initiative for widow remarriage. Sri Kandukuri Veereshalingaum opened a school for the Panchama children with a liberal grant of Rs. 70,000 from the Maharaja of Pithapuram, Sri Rao Venkata Mahipate Surya Bahadur (1885-1965). The Maharaja himself established two hostels and four primary

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18 Ibid.

19 Kshersagar. p. 381.

20 Ibid.
schools for Dalit children. Among others who worked for social reform were Chilakamarthi Laxmi Narasimham, Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, Narala Setti Devendnudu, Vemula Kurmayya, Guduri Rama chandra Rao, Vemuri Ramji Rao, Nallapati Hanumantha Rao, and Vellanki Krishna Murthi. Hindu reformist organizations like the Arya samaj and Brahmo Samaj, also actively worked and contributed to the emergence of Dalit consciousness. Reformers like Rai Balmukund, Baji Krishna Rao, Justice Keshav Rao and Vamana Rao Naik were also active in trying to mitigate certain evils in Hindu society. They were not, however, for an alternative ideological and institutional form against Brahminism or Hinduism.

The Dalit movement in Andhra also took its inspiration from Mahatma Jyotiba Phule’s Satya Shodhak Samaj movement in Maharashtra, Periyar Ramaswami Naicker’s non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu, and Sri Narayana Guru’s and Sri Ayyan Kali’s social reform struggles in Kerala. These early Dalit human rights movements not only targeted caste and Brahminism but also the colonial British administration. They questioned the authority of the Vedas and other Hindu sacred texts which brought about the inhuman caste system. They traced logically the nexus between the colonial Britishers and the native

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21 Ibid.
23 Kshersagar. p. 382.
24 See Gail Omvedt. “Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India”, Economic and Political Weekly (henceforth EPW), September.
26 See Kshersagar.
upper caste rulers, and asserted that both descended from the Aryan race, to exploit the non-Aryan, Dravidian Sudras and Ati-Sudras. They also raised their voice against the upper castes who dominated the colonial administration and their maintenance of deceptive land accounts which prevented the Sudras and Dalits from owing land.

Along with the mass radical anti-colonial struggle, the Dalits in Andhradesa started the autonomous ‘Adi-Andhra’ self-respect movement. Before Ambedkar’s powerful ideological entry into Andhradesa, the ground for Dalit consciousness and identity was laid by some of these ‘Adi-Andhra’ leaders, the foremost among whom was Madari Bhagaiah; popularly known as Bhagya Reddy Verma (1888-1939).

Bhagya Reddy Verma endlessly engaged himself in conscientizing the Dalits as to their identity and plight. Unlike most other reformers, he campaigned against not only the social evils but the root of those evils, that is, Hinduism and its caste order. He formed a Jagan Mitra Mandali in 1906, perhaps the first Dalit popular organization in Andhra Pradesh started by the Dalits. A politico-cultural propaganda weapon to educate the Dalits through popular folklore, the Mandali injected a new awakening among the Dalits. In

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28 See Gail Omvedt, Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India (Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994).

29 Kshersagar, pp.179-81.

30 Ibid.
1911 Bhagya Reddy Verma started a Manya Sangham, which was renamed as the Adi-Hindu Social Service League in 1921. The objective of the League was to eradicate the social customs which were imposed on the Dalits by Hinduism. Under the League’s auspices another voluntary organization was also founded, called Swastik Dal. The league published an English monthly, *Panchama*, with J.S. Mathaiah as the editor.

In 1917 the First Provincial Panchama Mahajana Subha conference was held at Vijayawada, with Bhagya Reddy Verma as president and Sundru Venkaiah as the chairman. In his presidential address Verma argued that the Dalits should be called Adi-Andhras instead of Panchamas, and the conference adopted the name of Adi-Andhra Mahajan Sabha. In later years Bhagya Reddy Verma became an Ambedkarite and supported separate electorates for the Dalits. Attracted by the philosophy of lord Buddha, he started celebrating Buddha Jayanti in 1913. He also started a weekly in Telugu called *Bhagyanagar*, later renamed as *Adi-Hindu*. Bhagya Reddy Verma’s concern throughout his life was with the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, which made him a natural champion of the Dalits.

The formation of an All-India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 under Ambedkar’s leadership and its subsequent entry into the Andhra Pradesh created an altogether different level of Dalit consciousness and identity. Many dedicated Dalit leaders emerged and worked for the formation of Ambedkar’s ideology in Andhra Pradesh.

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32 Tarakam, p.13.
Prominent among them were Gottipati Brahmayya (Machilipatnam), B.S. Murthy (East Godavari), Sardar Nagappa (Kurnool), Konada Surya Prakash Rao (Vijayawada), Nandanar Harichandra (West Godavari), M.L. Audiah (Secunderabad), Arigay Ramaswamy (Hyderabad), Mudigonda Laxmaiah (Hyderabad), B.S. Venkat Rao (Hyderabad) and J.H. Subbaiah (Secunderabad).³³

It would be seen from the brief sketch given above of the growing Dalit consciousness that from the Buddha to Babasaheb Ambedkar to Bhagya Reddy Verma there was an organic inner continuity. The essence of that continuity was the struggle against the unnatural iniquitous oppressive caste system and its ideology. Their objective struggle for freedom, equality and fraternity, their strategy for an alternative social order where there would not be any kind of oppression, was significant. Their very names have become powerful influencing ideological symbols for the present-day Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh.

Socio-economic Conditions

Geographically, Andhra Pradesh may be divided into three distinct regions, namely coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telengana, with coastal Andhra far more advanced socio-economically than the other two. This geographical unevenness in turn has had a profound impact on the socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects of the Dalits.

Coastal Andhra has nine districts. Among the many factors that contributed to its growth the foremost were the innovative construction

³³ See Kshersagar, p.383.
of major irrigation anicut on the Krishna and Godavari rivers in the early nineteenth century which paved the way for rapid commercialization of agriculture, the early Christian missionary English education which provided new social reformist ideas at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the post-independence introduction of the green revolution. Having witnessed these dynamic structural changes, the Dalits in coastal Andhra have been relatively more assertive than the rest of the Dalits in the State.

The four districts that constitute Rayalaseema are in the most backward and chronically famine-affected drought-prone region. The region’s historical backwardness, in the words of G.N. Rao, is on account of the ruthless operation of the colonial interests, a hostile ecosystem and missed opportunities for agricultural and industrial advancement. The Dalits in this region have played a limited role in their socio-political assertion. The Telengana region, with its ten districts, has near conformity with Rayalaseema. Most of the region is highly backward despite its rich natural resources. Some districts like Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy do, however, have some industrial establishments.

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35 G.N. Rao, ibid.
The Dalits in Andhra Pradesh have been stratified into numerous sub-castes based essentially on occupations and related status. According to the Census of India 1991, there were as many as 59 Dalit sub-castes in the state and their estimated population was 1.05 crore, which constitutes 15.9 per cent of the state population. These sub-castes were directly or indirectly offshoots of two major sub-castes, namely Madiga, Mala, plus a distinct Dalit identity calling themselves Adi-Andhra. The Adi-Andhra are not a sub-caste, but a secular radical identity conceptualized by the Dalits during the early twentieth century against not only the hegemonic Hindu identity but also against the sectarian identity of Madiga, Mala, etc. According to the census of 1991, there were 50,12,936 Madigas, 51,57,748 Malas and 4,21,382 other sub-castes. Every single Dalit sub-caste has its own specific social and occupational history.

Article 17 of the Indian Constitution has abolished untouchability and made its practice in any form punishable. To give force to this enactment, the Protection of Civil Rights Act was passed in 1955 and a renamed Untouchability (Offences) Act in 1976. To give a better representation to the Dalits in the parliamentary democracy, out of 42 parliamentary constituencies in Andhra Pradesh, six have been reserved for Dalits; of the 294 assembly constituencies, 39 seats have similarly been reserved. The enforcing of any kind of social disability such as denying access to any shop, restaurant, hotel, public entertainment or

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denying the use of any road, river, well, tank, water tap, bathing ghat, cremation ground, etc., attracts the provisions of the Protection of Civil Rights Act. The practice of untouchability, however, still persists. In the Telengana region, the Dalits live the life ‘ayaa banchan dora’ (thy servant only, lord). Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema are also not free of these demeaning concepts. A study conducted by the Osmania University, Hyderabad, is revealing. It says that the Dalits are still discriminated against by the upper castes in the neighbouring villages of Hyderabad and Nizamabad districts. It says: “Separate sitting arrangements were made in the village schools, they were not allowed to draw water from the public wells, not allowed to enter into the temples and pass through the main village thoroughfares.” A survey conducted in Chittoor district of Rayalaseema by the Ambedkar Centenary Celebrations Committee, Hyderabad, is further evidence of the continuing practice of untouchability. It reveals that in 249 villages there were 122 eateries which kept separate glasses for the Dalits. In 80 villages the Dalits were not allowed to enter the temples. In 16 villages they are not allowed to wear chappals while walking in the upper caste streets or locations. In almost all the villages the barbers do not serve them.

The total economy of agriculture, industry and the state administration is dominated by the upper castes, mainly the Kamma, Reddy, Kapu, Brahmana and Velama, upon whom the impoverished

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40 Nalupu (Telugu), 1-30 June 1991.
Dalits are dependent. The Dalits are predominantly agricultural labourers and continue to pursue the traditional extreme forms of varna- or caste-based modes of labour like *vetti* or *vettichakiri* in Telengana and *pal eru* in Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra regions. *Vetti* or *vettichakiri* is a form of forced bonded labour. "*Vetti* or *vettichakiri* (*begar*) in all its myriad manifestations is the most striking character of feudalism in Telengana".41 *Vettichakiri* is not confined to the Dalits alone; all other artisan classes like toddy-tapper, dhobi and barber have to serve the upper castes for measly returns. The crudest form of *vettichakiri*, imposed on the Dalits, is called *jeetam*. The *jeetagadu* (permanent bonded servant) mostly lives half-naked, with low calorie intake; his children can never even think of education.42

The counterpart of *jeetam* in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema, though perhaps not as degrading, is *pal eru* or permanent farm servant. Such workers are variously called *kamatagadu*, *noukaru*, *jeetagadu*. The *pal eru* has to perform a wide variety of arduous services, both in the field and in the domestic sphere. "They have to work in the field or look after the livestock and engage themselves throughout the day and they feed the cattle and sleep at the cattleshed itself in the nights."43 Many become *pal eru* before even the age of ten years, and remain in that position even when they are sixty. The Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (hereafter abbreviated as


RCSCST), 1965-66, has contradicted the Andhra government's claim that the practice of bonded labour, which was more prevalent in Srikakulam, Visakhaptnam, West Godavari and East Godavari, has died out, and asked the state government to release the appropriate data on bonded labour.\textsuperscript{44}

The green revolution has also contributed to the dominance of the upper caste feudal elements. While enriching them, the green revolution has brought no benefits worth the name to the landless Dalits. What is worse, it has increased the landlessness and rural unemployment among them. Because of the green revolution that involved the use of tractors and chemical fertilizers, millions of Dalits who subsisted as sharecroppers, tenancy farmers and day labourers have become economically obsolete. Consequently they have been driven from the land by imminent starvation and eviction. Even poverty alleviation programmes like the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) have hardly scratched the surface in reducing their poverty.\textsuperscript{45} A survey by the International Labour Organization points out that “in all the states, it was the agricultural labour—the landless and near-landless families who constitute the core of the rural poverty.”\textsuperscript{46}

It is the common finding of different studies on the socio-economic impact of the green revolution that “the green revolution has

\textsuperscript{44} Quoted in Sumanta Banerjee, India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising (Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1984), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{45} D.N. Dhanagare, \textit{EPW}, May 1987 (Annual Number).

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
had a contradictory impact on rural employment and agricultural wages and that it has produced new conflicts between the upper caste landlords and the landless Dalit agricultural labourers. In order to modify these distortions brought about by the green revolution and in order to stabilize the relations between the upper caste feudal elements and the Dalits, in the early seventies, new agencies were devised such as the Small Farmer Development Agency (SFDA) and the Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labour Programme (MFAL). These agencies, expected to generate additional income and employment to the rural poor, have not had a notable impact on Dalit earnings.

In 1960, the Andhra Pradesh Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings Bill was passed with the objective of reducing the concentration of land. But in its implementation there were many lacunae. The land records were never maintained properly by the upper caste landowners. Aided by the State machinery they successfully defeated efforts at land redistribution. Hundreds of acres of waste land are still under the landlords' authority. Whenever the Dalits tried to cultivate some of this waste land, they were forcibly evicted. In the end of the sixties, thousands of Dalits and poor peasants were arrested for waste land grabbing. A number of agricultural labourers were arrested in Guntur, Krishna, Nellore, Warangal, Cuddapah, Adilabad and Medak districts.

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47 Ibid.

48 Apart from Dhanagare's study there are many other studies on this subject, the more important ones being Hari Sharma in K. Gough and Hari Sharma (ed.). Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973).

during the 1969 banjara land agitation.\textsuperscript{50} In Nallagonda district, Addagudam village, 450 acres of government land was occupied by the Dalits, but they were evicted with a lathi charge by the police.\textsuperscript{51} In Ibrahimpatnam taluk, Rachuluru village, nearly 20 Dalit families were evicted from the occupied waste land and their crops were destroyed by the upper castes with the help of the police.\textsuperscript{52} In another case, 300 acres of cultivable land was forcibly taken from the Dalits by the government in the name of rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{53} The general picture that emerges from this depiction of violence inflicted on the Dalits by the upper castes and police force is one of nightmarish poverty, humiliation and oppression inflicted upon more than half of India's rural population by a majority of rich landlords and money-lenders, through squeezing out inch by inch both land and labour from them and paying them in exchange just enough to keep them working on the land.\textsuperscript{54}

In other sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, industry, trade, construction, commerce, transport and communication, the Dalits' employment opportunities have been virtually blocked, forcing them either to pursue the traditional occupations or to remain unemployed. According to the Census of India 1971, in all these sectors, in the fifties and sixties, only 10 per cent Dalits were represented, despite the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{50} Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Debates. 4 March 1970. This matter was raised by Vemayya (MLA). According to him, the number of arrested agitators was as follows: Adilabad 174; Krishna 502; Guntur 1044; Warangal 818.
\item \textsuperscript{51} A.P. Legislative Assembly Debates. 28 July 1970.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 14th December 1970.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54} S. Banerjee, p. 6
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### Workforce Participation by Different Categories in Andhra Pradesh

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<th>III Ag. Allied Activities</th>
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<th>V Va Household Industry</th>
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Source: Chandra Bhan Prasad., The Dalit Agenda and Politics in India (1947-1995), p.31. (Unpublished)
constitutional safeguards given for their employment. Employment through reservation in the public sector establishments, which the Dalits secured at the time of independence, has always been an important factor in the advancement of Dalit consciousness. But the fact remains that the non-implementation of reservation in the public sector and the non-sharing of reservations burden by the private sector have both increased the incidence of unemployment among the educated Dalits.

The Elayaperumal Committee on Untouchability, Economic and Educational Development of the Scheduled Castes, which submitted its report to the Government of India in 1969, severely blamed the Andhra Pradesh government for its utter failure even to furnish the necessary data, in spite of reminders from the central government. The committee observed that the Andhra government was particularly guilty of not fulfilling its minimum constitutional obligations to reserve 14 per cent of the posts in a number of state departments. There were 3,196 Dalit constables but one Superintendent of Police (SP) against the sanctioned strength of thirty-four, one Director of Inspector General (DIG) against the actual strength of six, and no Inspector General (IG) against the strength of two posts in the Police Department. Apparently, meritorious and competent candidates among the Dalits were not getting due recognition on account of caste prejudice and other kinds of discriminatory attitudes of the upper castes.

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56 U. Ramaswamy.
One reason cited for not fulfilling the reservation quota in the public sector was the lack of qualified candidates from the Dalit community and their low levels of education. This is a reflection of the gross failure of the post-independence State and its low governmental outlays for the Dalit educational development. According to the Census of India 1961, literacy rate among the Dalits was 8.50 per cent compared to the all-India Dalit literacy rate of 10.70 per cent.\textsuperscript{58}

The present state of the Dalits is a reflection on the failure of the post-independence State to carry out its promised objectives of banishing the deep-seated economic and social inequalities. Over the decades, the socio-economic environment of the Dalits has increasingly deteriorated. In the early seventies, Andhra Pradesh was severely affected by drought, which ravaged 19 of the 21 districts in the State. The Dalits, who subsisted entirely on agricultural labour, were the worst affected. Many perished in rural Andhra itself. Many of those who survived migrated \textit{en masse} to nearby towns in search of employment as rickshaw-pullers and coolies. Some have also taken to theft and other illegal means for bare survival.

There have also been many "grain looting" reports, and attempts to hold up vehicles to collect money from the upper castes who amassed wealth and hoarded the grains. In 1972, near Nandigama village in Krishna district about 200 Dalits of Raghavapuram village looted seventy bags of paddy from the godowns of the upper castes.\textsuperscript{59} In a village near Mahaboobnagar district, when an impoverished Dalit boy

\textsuperscript{58} RCSCST 1975-76 and 1976-77.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Hindu} (Madras). 14 August 1972.
committed a small theft, the frenzied upper castes “made the naked procession of all Dalit women in that village”. Reacting to reports of the Dalits’ indulgence in looting and theft, the then agriculture minister, P. Thimma Reddy described them as thieves and said that they should be kicked. An immense furore followed both in Parliament and in the State Assembly in the wake of this statement. The Collector and Superintendent of Police of Krishna district admitted that “these offences seemed to have been committed by those who were affected by the drought conditions.” It may be noted in this context that more than 85 per cent of the Dalits live in rural areas. Their basic amenities are insignificant. Only 3.8 per cent of the Dalits in the state have access to electricity and safe drinking water and toilet facilities.

The growing acute socio-economic discontent of the Dalits and landless peasants inevitably created objective conditions for the emergence of a powerful radical Naxalite movement in West Bengal and Andhra and the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra. To diffuse this enormously accumulating discontent among the Dalits and to divert their attention from the powerful forces of Naxalism and Dalit Panthers, the upper caste rulers initiated the political process of State-based social services. In 1971 the Garibi Hatao (Away with Poverty) Programme was announced, and in 1975 the 20-point Economic Programme. These anti-poverty programmes included the implementation of agricultural land ceiling and speedier redistribution of surplus land, compilation of land

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60 Lok Sabha Debates. 4 April 1968.
61 Ibid., 8 May 1968. (Debate on this statement continued for many days).
records, stepping up of provision of house sites for landless Dalits, liquidation of rural indebtedness, abolition of the system of bonded labour, review of the laws of minimum agricultural wages, supply of essential commodities, and books and stationery at controlled prices to Dalit students in the welfare hostels.  

These preferential policies or programmes of the government, though not far-going enough, created a fundamental change in the traditional socio-economic structures, with implications for Dalit consciousness and their political mobilization. The foremost such change occurred in the traditional agrarian structure. State intervention through the commercialization of agriculture, initiation of redistribute reforms, and opening up of avenues other than agriculture made the Dalits slowly to withdraw from their traditional Varna caste-based extreme forms of traditional vetti or vettichakiri and paleru occupations to being independent agrarian wage earners or daily-wagers. According to the Census of India 1961, the proportion of Dalits as agricultural labour was 61 per cent. The annual budget of a Mala family at the time was just Rs. 580, of which Rs. 420 were earned through agricultural labour. In 1971, the percentage of Dalits in agricultural labour had increased to 71 per cent and the trend continued in 1981. Also, Dalit family earnings at the time were Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 2,000 per annum earned from agricultural labour.

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[65] U. Ramaswamy, op. cit.
A macro-study of the impact of this shift in the agrarian structure in Andhra, by Nancharaiah, in a delta village in coastal Andhra which was exposed to the green revolution and various other developmental measures initiated by the government, for the period 1971-72 to 1981-82, says that out of 138 main Dalit male workers, 80 were agricultural labourers. Out of them, 42 worked as paleru before 1971-72. Twelve of them gave up paleru by 1971-71 and by 1981-82 there were only five persons who worked as paleru. Nancharaiah concludes that “there was an appreciable decline in the number of bonded labour of paleru and became daily wagers.” This is an indication that the people who were bonded serfs are becoming tenants and small peasants with tiny plots and cultivators.

Welfare programmes like health, drinking and housing sites, credit facilities through cooperative societies and banks, self-employment programmes, development of transport and communication facilities have also given some relief to the Dalits. By the end of 1972-73 over one lakh house sites had been provided in the state. Joining in the welfare hostels, availing of educational facilities and scholarships also slowly increased their literacy rate. In 1971 the Dalits’ literacy rate was 10.7 per cent which increased to 17.7 per cent in 1981 and to 31.6 per cent in 1991 (Table 1.3). These various development programmes undoubtedly have brought considerable minimal mobility in the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. But this relative exceptional change has shown no progress in relation to the Dalits’ legitimate expected

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share. The mass of Dalits still continue to be concentrated in the less skilled most oppressive occupational categories.

Table 1.3

Literacy rate among Dalits in AP and India 1981 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Andhra Pradesh Dalit (1)</th>
<th>All India Dalits (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>17.70</td>
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Source: (1) Census Reports 1961 to 1981  
(2) RC SC ST, 1986-87

The occupational mobility of Dalits in Andhra Pradesh from the mid-seventies has been stagnant. They have been subjected to disproportionate levels of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and land alienation. The discontent engendered by this underdevelopment also brought about retaliatory violence and atrocities from the upper castes. For the Dalits the rhetoric of land reforms and land redistribution has remained an unrealized dream. According to the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms Act 1972, the maximum allowed land per family is 10 acres of cultivable land and 25 acres of uncultivable land. The state government itself has estimated that it would get nearly 10 lakh acres of surplus land for redistribution among the landless Dalits and other low castes. With all that, it was estimated in 1978 that as much as 15.62 lakh acres was in
excess of the prescribed ceiling. Only 5.94 lakh acres of land was actually distributed to the agricultural landless labourers, the Dalits, tribals and the backward classes. Where the Dalits were concerned, 2.1 lakh families secured 2.2 lakh acres of land, i.e. an average of one acre per family. The agricultural census of 1988 revealed that there were 2,000 farmers in Andhra Pradesh holding 100 acres and above. Most of the land surrendered by the landlords was unproductive and unfit for cultivation. Even when the Dalits claimed this waste land they were forcibly thwarted and the land was taken back. Where a supposed land redistribution took place, the title deeds (patta) were distributed to the landless Dalits but the upper caste landlords actually controlled the land ownership. According to the Census of India 1991, 89.05 per cent of the Dalits are marginal and small category landholders. “The average size of the holdings for the Dalits was nearly 0.91 hectares as against the state average of 1.56 hectares.”

Though the Government of India has passed to Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, according to a recent (1989) study, “the estimated total incidence of bonded labour in Andhra Pradesh is 3,25,000 (4.96 per cent of the total number of agricultural labour) which is next to that of Utter Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Out of the total incidence in Andhra Pradesh, the Telengana region accounts for

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70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 C.B. Prasad, op. cit
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1,70,000 which is more than half of the total estimated bonded labourers in the state.\textsuperscript{73}

The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Caste Cooperative Finance Corporation Limited was set up by the government in 1974 as an exclusive financial corporation for Dalits. Its primary objective was to set up a comprehensive network of employment-oriented industries like cottage and small scale industries by providing required technological know-how and marginal assistance, for the establishment of the Dalits' own industries. The corporation advanced some Rs. 1.41 crore during the period 1973-74 to 1975-76. But the banks' actual participation was only Rs. 4.5 lakh by the year 1975.\textsuperscript{74} A study analysing the ownership pattern of 78 industries in Andhra Pradesh discloses that there was no industrial ownership of Dalits up to 1980.\textsuperscript{75}

The literacy rate among the Dalits remains stagnant. School enrolment of Dalit children in fact deteriorated, as the data for 1974-75 shows. The enrolment of Dalits in classes 1-5 was 4.4 lakh and in classes 7-8 it was 59,000.\textsuperscript{76} The welfare hostels were closed in 1974-75. There were at the time 46 boys' hostels and 22 girls' hostels with 4,458 students.\textsuperscript{77} The dropout rate among the Dalits was 76.5 per cent during 1988-89. The total school-going Dalit pupils in the age group of 6-14 years was 18.4 lakh in March 1995. The total Dalit literacy rate in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{73} Haiah, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{74} RCSCST 1975-76 and 1976-77, pp. 213-17.
\textsuperscript{75} G. Ram Reddy, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{76} RCSCST 1975-76 and 1976-77.
\textsuperscript{77} Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly Debates, 26 August 1985.
\end{footnotesize}
state according to the 1991 census was 31.59 per cent, compared to the national average of 37.41 per cent.

Some of the reasons for the low literacy level among the Dalits are: the shortage of facilities in government-run schools, the expensive private education, the state government’s indifference to the problems of the Dalits, and the poverty of the Dalit families who prefer to get some economic benefit out of their children’s employment rather than send them to school. The literacy rate among the Dalit women is the lowest. As Ambedkar says, “Malnutrition would make a person weaker in body and result in a premature death. Likewise if she/he is not educated, she/he is reduced to slavery. Due to lack of education women have become living corpses. Mentally they are slaves.”

Their poverty and high level of illiteracy have become the stumbling-blocks for the Dalits’ employment. RCSCST, 1975-76 and 1976-77 says that the Dalits’ recruitment in Andhra is not satisfactory. The Dalits’ representation in Andhra Pradesh government Class I and II services was less than even half of the percentage prescribed for them. Also, during 1976-6 and 1976-77 the RCSCST received about 29,000 representations from the Dalit employees alleging various types of service-related grievances at the all-India level. A study conducted in 1981 reveals that out of 5.7 lakh government employees in Andhra Pradesh, the Dalits comprised only 83,000, the bulk of them forming

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59 RCSCST 1975-76 and 1976-77.
60 Ibid.
class IV employees as sweepers sanitary workers. In gazetted posts, the Dalits constituted just 1500 out of 28,000 posts. According to the Andhra Pradesh Employment Exchange statistics, by the end of 1988, there were some 2.9 lakh educated Dalits registered as unemployed in various departments. Meanwhile, 14,000 posts were vacant. According to the All-India Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Rights Protection Society report, there were 4.1 lakh educated Dalits (only SCs) unemployed by January 1995. Further, 4,888 class I, 19,007 class II, 15,86 class III and other 1,051 backlog posts were yet to be filled by the Andhra government. In total there were some 26,536 backlog posts and Dalits were not filled into the posts. According to the Andhra Pradesh Employment Directorate, there were some 4.6 lakh Dalit unemployed in the state by February 1996.

Inevitably, there has been simmering discontent among the Dalits and an assertion for social dignity and equality. The increasing level of their consciousness, which led to protest at every level, caused tensions between the upper castes and the Dalits. The decentralization of the political process, and restructuring of panchayat raj system have given a greater role to the numerical votes which altogether changed the rural power structures. But in many cases the Dalits have been prevented from democratically exercising their universal franchise. They have been subjected to violent retaliation by the upper castes. Some 238 cases were registered under the PCR Act in Andhra Pradesh during 1981 and

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81 G. Ram Reddy, op. cit.
82 Enadu (Telugu daily) 26 December 1995 (Hyderabad)
in 1984 the number increased to 274.\textsuperscript{84} We also need to take into account the fact that not all cases are registered with the police.

**Summing Up**

Despite the State-initiated welfarism and the modernization process during the past decades, the Dalits, particularly in the rural areas have not witnessed any improvement in their lot. In fact, the process of modernization and development has invariably reinforced the dominance and arrogance of the upper caste landlords and the capitalists who have usurped and monopolized all the advantages. However, the various development programmes, particularly reservations in the public sector which Dalits secured at the time of the post-independence state formation, have yielded some results, beginning in the seventies. The changes in the agrarian structure also led to the Dalits slowly detaching themselves from the traditional modes of bonded labour to being wage earners. A change for the better in some segments of the Dalit populace may, thus, be seen. What is more important, however, is that the flood of change has brought about a new consciousness among them regarding their identity and their rights as citizens of post-independence India, with a right to economic independence, social dignity and self-respect.

\textsuperscript{84} RCSCST 1986-87.