CHAPTER – V
THE INTERFACE BETWEEN DALIT MOVEMENT AND LEFT PRACTICE IN TELANGANA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with, as the title propose, and interface between Dalit Movement and Left practice in Telangana. This chapter begins with assumption that given the Indian specificity the caste question has to be central and integral to any Marxist understanding. In this sense caste question is not different from or opposite to class, but intricately related to it. As stated by Ambedkar, in India it’s not just division of labour but also division of labourers. Therefore, in Indian context, one cannot completely disassociate caste from class. Thus, Dalit movement and Marxist Movement are not two exclusive practices but signify a mutually influencing historical continuation. This study thus attempts to analyse sources, events and practices and comment on, if necessary, on the actual and real tensions between Dalit Movement and Marxist practice.

The Telangana Peasant Movement and Naxalite Movement were organised and led by Communist party and its leadership. These two movements were ideologically radical in nature. They directly challenged existing institutional arrangements of the society and sponsored non-institutional mass mobilisation which challenged the oppression of the landlords, razakars and Nizams State police. The major issues that the movement addressed were low daily wages for labourers, vetti, illegal extraction and eviction from the agricultural land. The leadership of these movements came mostly from urban intellectuals and upper caste groups but the poor
peasantry and labourers from scheduled castes and tribes were the driving force of the movement.

This study intends to analyse the dynamics of caste-class interface in four phases. Phase - I deals with interface between Dalit Movement and Telangana Peasant Insurrection. It looks at the limitations of the Peasant Movement in addressing the Dalit issues which were invariably linked to their class in the society, and how did Dalits engage with the Peasant Movement with all their apprehensions regarding the issues taken up by the Movement. Phase –II discusses the interface between Dalit Movement and Radical Left practices in the Naxalite Movement from 1970s. Phase-III deals with the interface between Dandora movement and Left Practices in the State. And lastly, Phase-IV deals with Caste-Class interface in the Telangana Agitation.

**PHASE-I: CASTE, CLASS INTERFACE IN TELANGANA PEASANT INSURRECTION**

Land was the central issue on which the socio-economic and political conditions in the State depended. This aspect is elaborately discussed in the Chapter-2 of this thesis. The exploitation of people also centred on land and agriculture since agricultural farming was the main occupation of about 60-70% of the people in the State. As it has been already discussed, in the second chapter of this thesis, the social and political conditions which had shaped up the Movement, now this study will explore the interaction between Dalits and Communists.

The growing influence of the communists in delta region slowly spread to adjacent Telangana region. A few young radical members like Raavi Narayana Reddy within the Andhra Conference turned to communism and converted the cultural forum
Andhra Mahasabha started as a cultural forum) into a mass militant organisation. Through Andhra Conference young communists voiced the peasants’ grievances, paid more and more attention to agrarian problems in Telangana. The agrarian slogans and demands of the communists included abolition of *vetti*, prevention of rack-renting and eviction of tenants, reduction in taxes, revenues and rents confirmation of occupancy (*patta*) rights of cultivating tenants and so on, which naturally attracted the poor peasants, tenants and labourers to the Andhra Conference. This strategy also held different strata of the peasantry together. The agrarian social structure was conducive to an insurrectionary movement and the post-war political developments and economic crisis provided an impetus to a sustained peasant revolt that lasted nearly five years.

Mainly the demands like- abolition of *vetti*, increase in the daily wages of labourers and call to establish *coolodi rajyam* by demolishing *dora rajyam* brought Dalits closer to the communists.\(^1\) Communist party never addressed Dalits as Dalits, because cultural specificity of Dalit’s participation in the movement was not integral to the Left revolutionary strategy. They considered these people as agricultural labourers in the fields and household labourers at landlords’ forts (*gadi*) trapped in social practice called *vetti*. Therefore, excluding some of the communist leaders like Ram Reddy,\(^2\) one has to think that Communists addressed Dalits as part of Party strategy and communist ideology of working class.

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The role of Dalits in the Movement was not well documented and an author like Gail Omvedt doubts the magnitude of their participation in the movement. I quote: “actual role of Dalits in the struggle appears to have been a subordinate one. Claims that ‘most of the recruits in the dalams came from the untouchable castes (Malas and Madigas) and from among the tribals’ are unsubstantiated, except for the obvious fact that once the communists were driven into the forests the tribals were the main group they worked among.”

Here, the question should not be whether the Dalits had played an active role or whether their participation is substantiated or not. Given the social stigma associated with untouchable castes were they allowed to play significant role and considering the fact that the Communist leadership belonged to upper caste and class, what if their participation never got the recognition it deserved? Dialectically Dalits were the most exploited people in terms of caste and class hence if there is any resentment or resistance that should have come from the most exploited lot. Therefore we can argue that Dalits were the principal and most active participants in the Movement.

In his article D. N. Danagare writes ‘Most of the recruits to the dalams came from the untouchable castes (Malas and Madigas) and from among the tribes. The caste-Hindus treated them as socially inferior. The deprived and peripheral groups had also lost all their rights in land owing to the fact that for the past several decades the

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power and instruments of justice were in the hands of the landlords and desmukhs. Lack of alternative work had rendered them weak in bargaining for their rights. They were doubly exploited, culturally and economically. It was they on whom the burden of vetti labour, illegal extractions and evictions fell more directly. By joining the communist dalams and revolting against the oppressive system they had nothing to lose and everything to gain.⁵

In spite of Dalits active participation in the Movement, it seems that the Communists never tried to address issues related to caste. It is obvious that from the writing of Danagare, Omvedt and Tirumali that the Telangana Peasant Movement did not address any caste issues. But for the organisational strength and ideological stance of the Communists, it is very doubtful that they ever would have included untouchables in the Movement. The Communists aimed at ‘unity’ (which they thought could be achieved with the acceptance of the social constraints of the old order) and within the framework sought to deal only with some of the economic problems of the poorest sections of the society.⁶

While talking about the exploiters and the exploited, the Communists considered them as the haves and the have-nots which is a class-perspective to the whole issue of exploitation. What they comfortably ignored or hesitated to recognise is the strong relation of caste to the class in Indian society. In India, class is impossibility without caste. Telangana Peasant Movement was led and dominated by relatively upper caste section of the society; they were relatively prosperous section of


the community. The leading communists in Telangana were, by and large, wealthy landholders, pattadars of substantial holdings, and men of some hereditary standing in their villages and talukas. Both Raavi Narayana Reddy and B. Yella Reddy, (who were elected as the president and general secretary respectively at Bhongiri session of the Andhra Mahasabha) were prominent landlords. D. Venkateshwar Rao, leader of the Suryapet taluka could be sited as yet another example. Some Telangana communists like Dr. Raj Bahadur Gaur and Makhdoom Mohiuddin, came from the urban intelligenta.\(^7\) Considering the castiest nature of the then society it was natural that they overlooked issues related to caste. In fact it seems that the communists very rarely took up the social issues of untouchability. D. V. Rao’s statement, ‘When we were working in the villages caste tensions did not arise. Caste differences were limited to the house, except for untouchable’ is typical.\(^8\) Here, one needs to differentiate between ideology and practice, particularly when it comes to village committees. I quote Inukonda Thirumali: “the asamis and kapus within the party seized power and largely dominated the village committees and converted them mostly to protect their interests in many places and grossly violated the state committee circulars.” \(^9\)

The demands for upliftments of the labouring class were not met. Land was not distributed to the rural poor; even if they did Dalits have many apprehensions

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\(^8\) As quoted in Gail Omvedt’s Dalits and Democratic Revolution Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994, p. 311.

regarding the occupation of doras land.\textsuperscript{10} The party itself accepted that ‘all agricultural labourers and poor peasants could not get enough lands. Much discontent has grown among these revolutionary sections of the people.’\textsuperscript{11} It seems that the Party has realised by now that the fruits of the revolution has not reached the poor labourers. Whether the Party tried to address these short comings during or after the Movement was unclear but we can see that issues were considered seriously in the next phase of Movement (Naxalite Movement) which was more radical in its mode of fighting.

With all its shortcomings and failure to address the caste issues as promised or as expected, one has to acknowledge the fact that no other movement in Telangana has brought a change such as this movement in rural Dalits perception of the society. It helped them to break the shackles of upper caste hegemony. The people who lived on the outskirts of the village were made members of the village committees. In a time when Dalit were not even treated as human beings the Communist party recognised their strength and brought them into village and some of them even rose to become prominent members of the committees.

The movement, for the first time in history, questioned the normative arrangements and values that legitimised oppression and marginalisation of poor peasants and labourers in the social, economic and political systems of villages. This movement provided Dalits an alternative world view and life options which equipped them ideologically to question the legitimacy of existing oppressive and exploitative


socio-economic and political system of the rural society. It also united the lower castes, Dalits and tribals people, broke their isolation and empowered them politically to fight against oppression and exploitation. The movement provided Dalits a space to articulate their issues and express their discontent against the existing forms and organisation and values of the rural society. On the whole this movement brought in the message and promise of an egalitarian society that aimed to radically change the old values, institutions and norms of the existing society.

In spite of all the hope and promise the movement has given, caste system is not such an easy custom to be destroyed. However the movement has diluted/liberalised caste dominance and subordination relations wherever the movement was strong.\textsuperscript{12} With all their reservations the caste- Hindus worked with the Dalits in the committees. But once the movement was called off, when these people returned to their villages, again they became the part of the caste system. Practiced the same old caste related discrimination.

Before going into the next phase it would be appropriate to discuss the political conditions to that created space for the emergence of Naxalite movement in 1970s. This is the brief outline of the political development that had taken place in 1950s to 1970s.

The Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS) has been at the forefront of democratic struggles since the early decades of the 20th Century. In the beginning, it was dominated by pro-Congress Party elements, but by the 1930s it came under the control of communists who conducted a radical turnaround, by taking up issues such as the abolition of \textit{vetti}, protection to tenants and the demands of ‘land-to-the tiller’.

\textsuperscript{12} Personal interview with K. Sreenivasulu on 7th, August 2014
The anti-Nizam and anti-feudal peasant struggle, led by the communists through the AMS in the 1940s, was an important political development crucial to an understanding of political articulation in the subsequent period. The redistribution of the land of the Brahmin-Karanam, Reddy and Velama doras during the struggle was significantly influenced by the caste composition of the village committees assigned with this task. As mentioned above, the beneficiaries of these transfers were tenants and ryots predominantly belonging to the Kapu-Reddy cultivators’ community.\textsuperscript{13} The dalits, who comprised the majority of vetti agrestic labour on dora lands, remained landless even after the struggle.

And there were differences regarding withdrawal of the movement. Ravi Narayana Reddy, B. Yella Reddy and C. Rajeswar Rao argued for the abandonment of the struggle while P. Sundaraiah and M. Basavapunnaiah advocated for continuation of the struggle as a peasant partisan struggle. Though the split is argued upon ideological differences between two groups which are not discussed here but caste interests cannot be ruled out.\textsuperscript{14}

These developments were all within the communist party circles. On the other side the developments within the Congress Party which in a way prompted the next radical phase of peasant struggle needs to be mentioned here.

The Congress Party adopted two-pronged political strategy in the early years of its rule. Firstly, it sought to co-opt the radical slogans of the Left. Secondly, by


creating new institutional structures and expanding and strengthening certain social classes, it sought to win over the support base of the leftwing opposition.

The reformist agenda of the Congress Party consisted of the abolition of the zamindari and jagirdari systems. Immediately after Independence, the post-colonial Indian State sought to address peasant grievances by abolishing intermediaries and enacting tenancy laws. With these legal reforms, two of the significant issues in the radical agenda that was shaped in the pre-Independence period were co-opted by the Congress Party regime.

The beneficiaries of legislation implemented to remove oppressive landlordism and bestow rights of tenancy were members of the peasantry, the vast majority of whom also constituted the tenantry. They belonged to the Reddy, Kamma and Kapu peasant castes, while the dalit and other backward castes predominantly comprised the agricultural labour. In effect, this created a new class of landlords.¹⁵

Not only this, even the areas of Telangana unaffected by the struggle of the 1940s continued to experience that period’s feudal oppression until the 1970s. It is curious to note that even the new class of landlords that emerged in the post-Independence period resorted to old feudal modes of exploitation and oppression, as was evident in certain areas of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Warangal districts.

PHASE-II: INTERFACE BETWEEN DALIT MOVEMENT AND RADICAL LEFT PRACTICE IN TELANGANA

It was the above scenario that formed the backdrop of the peasant struggles waged by the CPI (ML) groups during the 1970s and 1980s in Telangana region. In

this phase an attempt is made to draw the dynamics of interplay of caste with class in
the Radical left mobilisation in Telangana during the 1970s and 1980s. It acquires
importance in view of the fact that it could mix the question of anti feudal struggle
with subaltern caste mobilisation by facilitating unity among them. Further, this
movement also threw up an organic leadership subaltern society, for which reason it
stands out an important political experiment.

With the first three Panchayat Raj elections conducted in 1959, 1964 and 1970
the Congress Party has consolidated its grass root leadership base in the state, by
accommodating a large section of rich peasant elite in positions of power. This class,
with their power of land ownership and caste dominance exploited the opportunities
opened up by the democratic institutions and development channels. Congress
Party’s agrarian reforms had strengthened the hold of a new and aggressive landlord
class in the countryside, and even these people resorted to old feudal modes of
exploitation and oppression. Not only that, even the areas of Telangana unaffected by
the struggle of the 1940s continued to experience that period’s feudal oppression until
the 1970s.

The purpose of the Telangana Peasant Movement got defeated completely
during the course of time. The fruits of the struggle were confiscated by few upper
class and caste sections of the society. All the forms of oppression like vetti and low
agricultural wages and caste based discrimination and exploitation continued. In fact,

16 Meganth. Com. Tharemala Nagireddy Jivitha Sangraham, Vijayawada: T.N. Memorial Trust,


in some of these areas, extreme forms of feudal exploitation and practices continued to exist until the Naxalite movement addressed them.¹⁹

Naxalite Movement, one can argue, is the result of State’s failure to bring about any substantial change in agrarian social relations and social life in the rural areas in spite of its progressive agrarian legislations. It may also be noted that the CPI (ML) groups established their support bases in the areas which were on the periphery of the earlier peasant struggle. In a sense, the CPI (ML) agrarian movement tried to finish the process that had remained unfinished since the 1940s.

CPI (ML) Peoples war began its work on a full scale when the ban on the party was removed after Emergency, that is from 1977.²⁰ The Radical Students Union (RSU), which is a student wing of Peoples War Party (PWP), started Garamalaku Tharalandi (Go to villages) campaign in 1978 to reach agricultural labourers and poorest of the poor in the villages. Several cultural youth groups comprising educated youth and cultural activists moved to each and every village and campaigned for a revolutionary path. In fact, it attracted Dalit and other weaker sections into the revolutionary struggle. They spread this message through song, dance, and speech, which the Jana Natya Mandal (JNM) activists adapted from the rural folk forms from the common man.

By the end of 1978, the Rythu Cooli Sangams (RCS) (the peasant-landless poor organisation) were established in most parts of Karimnagar district, Siricilla, Jagityala and Peddapally taluqs which became the key centres. The RCS became a


major force in mobilizing the rural poor, especially Dalits against the Dora and village based exploitations.\textsuperscript{21} The significance of this period of agrarian mobilisation has been illustrated as \textit{Jaithra Yatra} (Victory March).\textsuperscript{22} On 7th September 1978, more than 35 thousand people from 150 villages, comprising farm servants, agricultural labourers and toiling peasants, were mobilized in a march to Jagityala town, which culminated in a huge public meeting. The participants’ mobilization was unimaginable even to the organisers of this programme.

It demonstrated the people’s hope in the party and their trust in the struggle. This gave strength to the party and courage to the landless poor to fight against the feudal landlords and State repression. With this inspiration in Nimmapally of Siricilla and Maddunur in Jagityal and Peddapally \textit{taluq} mass mobilization took place under RCS banner and struggled against economic and social exploitations.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{THE ISSUES TAKEN UP BY RCS RELATED TO CASTE}

So far we have seen how successfully, effectively CPI (ML) party through its RSU, RCS organised people against the landlords and State oppression. The issues taken up in those struggles showed sensitivity to caste, though the Party mobilised people using class oriented language. We see two important changes in the CPI (ML) politics in general and the peoples’ War Group in particular. One is the shift to popular mobilisation by strengthening mass front organisations like RSU, RYL, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Siricilla Rythanga Poratam-Purvarparalu}, (Telugu) Vijayawada: CPI(ML)-Janashakthi, Andhra Pradesh Committee Prachuranalu, 1994, Pp. 18-23.
\end{itemize}
JNM in the cultural front. Second is the clear direction to bring the subaltern social groups into the movement not in terms of class but in specific caste terms as SCs, artisan and occupational communities.\(^{24}\)

Here, I will list out some of the issues that the CPI (ML) party has taken up which are sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly linked to caste. Since the origin and practice of Left parties is class oriented, this study is not going to lay stress on class related practices of the Party.

1) Against Vettichaakiri

*Vetti*, in its most general sense, is bonded labour but it extends well beyond that definition.\(^{25}\) It is caste specific. And it is this specificity to caste that makes it Dalits most vulnerable and most effected people by this inhuman practice. In India occupation of person depends more on caste in which he is born into and less on his talent or skill or passion for the profession. And each caste has to render its caste specific services to the landlord without charging anything for the service rendered. All the toiling castes of the village had to supply free of charge to the landlord whatever products or services they produced. Thus every caste in the village, including Brahmans, had to supply its services free of cost to the landlord. The peasant were required to supply *vetti nagallu* (free supply of ploughs) for a requisite number of days to the landlord; artisans like blacksmith (Kammari) and carpenters (wadla) were required to repair the agricultural implements of the *dora* without any payment. The toddy tappers (gouds) were to reserve certain high yielding and good


quality palm trees for the dora and supply the produce freely; Potters (Kummari), the pots and other earthenware they produce; washermen (chakali) has to wash the clothes freely; Barbers (Mangali) were to do hair cut to dora and his family freely, likewise the list extends with the number of castes in the village.  

When it comes to agricultural labourers and household servants it was Dalits (mainly madigas and malas). They were called vetti madigalu and vetti malollu. They have to work for the dora for free as and like the dora wishes and any number of days he wants. They were called vetti Jeethagallu. Their duties are not generally specified. It is mostly agricultural, household and personal works of the landlords like preparing beds, arranging baths, cleaning the house, etc. They were paid in kind just to let them survive. The landlord would lend some money for interest for these servants to perform customary duties like death rituals and marriages. And to pay back this loan he would take another loan and the burden increased year after year till he becomes bonded for life, and the worst part is that bondage would extend to their children as well. Like this daliths were born into bonded labour.

In this way vetti affected Dalits more than any other caste in the society. CPI (ML) through RCS and RSU made people stop rendering vetti services to the landlord.

2) Distributing land to landless

Land was the primary issues around which Left parties struggles were centred. Through the slogan ‘land to the tiller’ Naxalite parties have distributed the land to the poor peasants. They also have given land to some Dalits. Their publications clearly

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mentioned the names of the Dalits calling them as Harijans.\textsuperscript{27} This shows their sensitivity to caste.

3) Against the domination of Gadi

Gadi is the manifestation of social domination and oppression. It was a huge fort-like house with tall gates in which the village dora lived with his family.\textsuperscript{28} Gadi is just not a dwelling place, it’s an office and it’s also a centre of perpetuation of dominance and oppression. This is the place where caste hierarchy is strictly followed. This is where fines were collected and punishments given. This where doras authority was unchallenged. The very thought of the gadi (dora’s residence and his court) evoked terror in the hearts of the rural masses.\textsuperscript{29} All village disputes and settlements from disputes between wife and husband to disputes over land distribution were done here. It is this ‘right’ to enforce law and deliver judgement which kept their dominance intact. For resolving disputes money was collected from both the parties and was never returned to either party. They intentionally created disputes and makes lakhs out of fines. Naxalite hit the very base of their power; they conducted people’s court and resolved disputes. This has affected dora’s social dominance.

4) Against sexual exploitation of Dalit women in Telangana

In a feudal set up such as in Telangana sexual exploitation of women was very common. There are scores of stories which explains the deplorable state of women in Telangana’s feudalistic society. Landlords’ atrocities on women were outrageous.


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
Women were paraded naked, raped and killed by doras.\textsuperscript{30} They made sexual exploitation of women in the name of \textit{Jogini, Basavi} and \textit{Manthangi} became a social custom.\textsuperscript{31} This evil practice was, quite obviously, forced on Dalit women whose social standing is inferior to any other women in the society.

5) Against ‘two glass system’

Emergence of new political parties and inception of democratic politics did not alter society’s perception of untouchables. In fact untouchability penetrated into emerging new social institutions like hotels. In most of the hotels Dalits were not allowed, even if they were allowed they were made to wash the plates and glasses in which they ate and drank.\textsuperscript{32} There used to be two set of glasses and plates, one set for Dalits and the other for caste-Hindus. Political parties did not dare to stop this practice, but Naxalites seriously objected to this practice and at times cautioned the hotel owners who practiced this system.\textsuperscript{33}

6) Against untouchability in public spheres

The practice of untouchability in public sphere has hindered the growth of Dalits in the society. There was no access to common drinking water sources in the villages. Dalit children were not allowed into the schools. Landlords strongly


\textsuperscript{31} Sircilla Rythanaga Poratam-Porvaparalu(Telugu): Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh CPI(ML)-Janashakthi State Committee Prachuranalu, 1994,p.15.


objected to education for the Dalits. Naxalites had strongly advocated education for Dalits as they had advocated for land to the landless. In some villages Naxalites started peoples’ school for Dalit children and education was given to them free of cost.\textsuperscript{34}

Not only the above mentioned caste specific issues they have addressed, but also Naxalites established *sangams* in the name of caste in some parts of Telangana. In Nizamabad and some parts of Medak district it(sangam) was organised under the banner called *Chillara Kulhala Sangam or Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangam*.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore we can say that they have recognised caste as base of different forms of exploitation in Telangana and started to work towards addressing the issue. This is where one has to disagree with Prof. K. Sreenivasulu when he says:

> Although caste has been central to semi-feudal forms of exploitation in Telangana (such as vetti, for instance), it has not received any explicit attention in the CPI (ML)’s agrarian politics. If this is because of the theoretical understanding of the communist parties, it is also because the issue of caste has been subsumed into the category of class...

The class-oriented struggles of the communists did help Dalits. Their daily wage was increased. Some of them even got land for themselves. They got education and a social space in the society to articulate their grievances. Dalits were definitely more close to Naxalite party than any other political party. Naxalite party on the other hand, within its theoretical limitations, has recognised certain sections of poor as

\textsuperscript{34} Personal Interview with Chalapathi Rao (leader of Rythu cooli Sangam in Sircilla), on 04\textsuperscript{th}, 2014.

Harijans, and worked to eradicate the practice of untouchability in the villages. Therefore there were never tensions between Naxalites and Dalits. There always existed a kind of solidarity between Left parties and Dalits in Telangana by 1980s. The powerful presence of radical left parties and anti feudal struggles throughout the 1970s and 1980s could be cited as the main reasons for the absence of an autonomous Dalit Movement; and yet it would not be an exaggeration if we say that the roots of autonomous Dalit Movement in Telangana lie in the Left Movement.

KAREMCHEDU , CHUNDURU MASSACRES: IMPACT ON DALIT AND RADICAL LEFT POLITICS

In the history of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh the massacres of Karemchedu in 1985 and Chundur in 1991 are the most shameful events. There were many incidents before and after Karemchedu and Chunder in which many innocent helpless Dalits were killed, but I have chosen these two events. The reasons for choosing these two are: first, no other incidents had generated so much debate and discussion about Dalit and Radical Left politics as these two incidents; two, due to constraints of time and space and to stay focussed on my study of the interface, but not to undermine the severity of other incidents. Though the incident took place in Andhra region of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state, Karemchedu massacre becomes indispensible in the study of dynamics of caste-class interface. With this incident both radical left movement and Dalit movement went through a remarkable transformation. The independent Dalit movement that emerged after Karemchedu had forced Radical left parties to reconsider their ideological stance.


KAREMCHEDU MASSACRE

On 16th of July 1985 a Kamma boy bathed a buffalo at the steps of the water tank of the Dalits and directed the dirty water into the tank which was meant for their drinking water. A lame Dalit youth and a young dalit woman protested against this. The Kamma community retaliated against this protest by massacring several Dalits in the early hours of 17th July. Six dalit men were killed and more than 25 others, including several women, were injured. The incident has severe repercussions in terms of the physical and mental health of the Dalit community of the village.38

Immediately after the incident, the Dalits fled to the nearby Chirala town and set up a shibiram (camp). It is around this shibiram that the Dalit struggle with demands and issues ‘specific’ to the community emerged. Initially, leaders began to mobilise their community all over the state around the issue of cultural assertion against the dominance of upper castes.39 This assertion for an autonomous movement is remarkable because it demanded autonomy from both the state institutions and the mainstream parties and also the radical left movement led by the various Radical Left parties groups.40 Dalit leaders protested and rejected the CPI (ML) People’s War party’s depiction of the incident as ‘landlords attack against labourers’ in their pamphlet. Instead, they represented it is an attack by ‘Kamma landlords on Madiga

Along with demanding autonomy from the ML groups, Dalit leaders rejected state institutions and even the Dalit leaders within them, both political representatives as well as bureaucrats. Dalit bureaucrats were characterised as *dalit dalaries* (dalit compradors). As a symbolic representation of an autonomous struggle, Dalit leaders decided that only Dalits’ would occupy the dais and address others on the issue of Karamchedu. It was decided that no upper caste, however radical and sympathetic to the Dalit cause, would be allowed to share this space. This demand of ‘only Dalits’ was one of the earliest forms in which autonomy was articulated in Andhra Pradesh (erstwhile). All those Dalits who were part of the communist movement were now, *discursively* re-articulated as ‘Dalit communists’. Ambedkarism emerged as the guiding philosophy for an independent Dalit ‘social revolution’, which was later referred to as a ‘New Dalit Democratic Revolution’ both as a continuation, and to counter the ML group’s struggle for ‘New Democratic Revolution’. Such alternate articulations created conditions for movements to rethink their position vis-à-vis each other.

In course of two months struggle after the incident, Dalit leaders also argued that there is need for ‘Dalit organic intellectuals’, who could alone conceptualize the aspirations of Dalits along with ‘political power for Dalits’ as the essential demand of an independent Dalit movement.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF DALIT MAHASABHA (DMS)

Struggle for both rehabilitate the dalits who left Karamchedu and punish the culprits began soon after. August 15th was observed as a black day, followed by dharnas, and indefinite hunger strikes. However none of this could pressurise the government to take proactive measures. On 1st September 1985, a public meeting was organised where dalits from all over the state were mobilized, rallying under the slogan ‘Chalo Chirala’. Jana Natya Mandali, PWG’s cultural wing, took an active part and its lead singer Gaddar (a dalit) inaugurated the meeting’. This signified both the proximity an independent Dalit movement wished to have with the ML groups such as the PWG, as well as its firm resolve to maintain autonomy by projecting Dalit leaders, writers, singers and conceptualising a discourse specific to the caste problem.

At the end of this historic meeting, the formation of a state level autonomous Dalit organisation – Dalit Maha Sabha (DMS) was formally announced. Two prominent Dalit leaders Bojja Tarakam, a civil libertarian and advocate Kathi Padma Rao, a rationalist were elected unanimously as its president and general secretary respectively. Later, in February 1986, DMS held its first state level conference at Tenali and released its manifesto. It created interest among various sections of the

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society in general and the ML groups in particular as it were the first attempt to articulate and conceptualise the idea of an autonomous dalit movement.45

**CHUNDURU MASSACRE**

Chunduru incident, which happened six years after Karemchedu, has to be seen with respect to the changes that occurred due to the raise in dalit consciousness, advancement in education, hence the betterment in the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits in the village.46 What differentiated Chundur from Karamchedu was the relatively high level of literacy47 and fairly large-scale employment among the *dalits*. Due to modern education, public sector employment and easy mobility due to the railway connections, the *dalits* of Chundur demonstrated a great sense of awareness of their rights and, accordingly, assertion. Employment in the public sector gave the *dalits* of this village a high sense of security and confidence. The *dalits* also displayed a significant presence in the political arena.

The socio-economic specificity of Chundur made the *dalits* relatively less dependent on the Reddys and, therefore, less vulnerable to Reddy domination and manipulation. Upper caste Reddys, quite naturally, did not like this change in the lives of dalits which fairly reduced their domination and hold on the village.


On 7th of July 1991, a trival argument that took place in a cinema hall triggered a series of events. A dalit youth, Ravi, a PG college student in Nagpur, went to a cinema theatre in Chundur. He ‘rested’ his foot on a seat in front which was occupied by an upper caste boy Kurri Srinivas Reddy. A minor altercation ensued between Ravi and Srinivas Reddy when the latter abused the dalit youth in the name of his caste.  

On the following day, Ravi’s father, who was a schoolteacher in a neighbouring village, was subjected to torture by the Reddy youth as a measure of retaliation. Fearing further assaults from the upper castes the family decided to leave the village. Neither Ravi nor his father lodged any complaint with the police. Their decision of the family was not accepted by the Dalit community, describing it as an act of surrender to the upper castes. So they lodged a complaint against Reddys. This obviously attracted a severe response from the Reddys and their supporters in the village and even from those of neighbouring villages. They have decided to put an end to the mounting assertion of the dalits.

On July 9, Reddys and Telagas held a meeting under the leadership of Sarpanch Sambi Reddy and decided to enforce a social boycott of the Dalits (Malas). Since then, the Dalits were not allowed to work in the fields of upper castes nor were they permitted to enter the upper caste locality. Land tenancies of the Dalits were cancelled, in many cases the upper castes did not return the money which was paid as rent in advance for the land they had rented. The upper castes even messaged Reddys.

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of neighbouring villages to not to employ Dalits of Chunduru in their fields. This forced and enforced social boycott of the Dalits led to tensions. At this stage, the police imposed section 144 in the village. While the upper castes engaged outside labour to work in their fields, the Dalits left to places like Tenali and Ponnur in search of work. A 50 strong police picket headed by Tenali Rural Circle Inspector was posted in the village since then. The presence of the police deterred them from a head-on collision and the next few days remained incident free. The prohibitory orders were lifted on 29 July, and in two incidents that occurred on 4 and 5 August, two Dalits were attacked and injured and on the same night additional forces were rushed to Chundur even as prohibitory orders were reimposed in village.\(^\text{50}\)

The final attack on the Dalits came on the morning of 6 August. From the report of APCLC it seems that this brutal incident was pre-planned and well-executed by the upper castes with the alleged connivance of the police officials present in the village.\(^\text{51}\)

‘One version is that a few dalit youth attacked and inflicted minor injuries on some Reddys... However this was blown out of proportions by the upper castes who spread the falsity that three Reddy men were hacked to death by the dalits... The upper caste men of nearby Valiveru, Manchala Munangivaripalam and Vellaturu villages were also mobilised for an assault on dalits. Around 11 a.m. Saibabu [the CI of police] and Vemuru Sub-Inspector Sheik Madarvali came to the dalit quarters and asked them to flee as CRPF men from Mangalagiri might raid the village to pick them


up following a complaint lodged by the upper castes. *When the dalits were hesitant to leave the village the police virtually chased them away. However all the dalit women stayed back.*

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The police terrified and hunted all the Dalit men towards the Tungabhadra canal. As all the Dalit men in the Dalithawada started fleeing, they found the Reddys and Telagas belonging to Chunduru and other neighbouring villages. They were all armed with deadly weapons. When they ran towards the railway track, they found another group of armed upper caste people waiting there as well.

What followed was a systematic and brutal assault on Dalits. The marauders, who came in tractors and scooters and were well armed, first caught the fleeing Dalits, beat them with iron rods and killed them with daggers and axes. They then leisurely packed some of the bodies in gunny bags and dumped them in the Tungabhadra drain and irrigation canal. Though the final tally of deaths could not be clearly ascertained immediately as most of the bodies were thrown in the canal, but at least eight Dalits are murdered in the heinous manner and many more injured in what could be described as an unparallel case of brutality.

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As mentioned earlier, these two incidents have brought in a set of radical changes in both Dalit and Radical Left practices. There was serious discussion between and among Dalit leaders and Naxalites on how to address the issue of caste and how to construct their future course of action. In this regard, it is necessary to mention and analyse the role of two magazines *Nalupu* and *Edureeth.*

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THE ROLE OF ‘NALUPU’

It is against this backdrop of an emerging politics of solidarity that the DMS officially launched its journal called \textit{Nalupu} (Black) in April 1989. Its focus and purpose clearly reflected this need to evolve a broader strategy for the Dalit movement. It also reflected the need to forge solidarity with ML parties like the PWG and yet fight for the benefits the existing socio-legal system offered. \textit{Nalupu} emerged as an important platform reflecting the nature of the Dalit movement and the possible directions it would take in times to come. Though it was published for a short span of four years (1989-93), when it was discontinued, ‘every educated dalit and the whole dalit community felt that their potent leader had vanished.’\textsuperscript{54} In fact, in most of the issues of \textit{Nalupu} it was repeatedly propagated that it is not just a journal but in fact a ‘movement’ by itself.

The president of DMS edited \textit{Nalupu}. However, it is interesting to note that the editorial board had leading civil rights activists, academics and journalists from the upper castes along with Dalit writers. The structure and issues in focus in the journal are also symptomatic of the ‘broader cause’ Dalit movement stood for in AP. It carried detailed discussions on social movements such as NBP, anti arrack movement; on issues such as problem of housing, health policies of the government leading to ‘brain drain’ in the medical field, privatisation of education; struggles in Kashmir and other international issues. Most of these issues were analysed with an ideological proximity with the Left politics.

\textsuperscript{54} K. Ilaiah. \textit{Caste or Class or Caste-Class: A Study in Dalit Bahujan Consciousness and Struggles in A P in 1980’s}. New Delhi: NMML, 1995, p. 27.
Another significant feature of *Nalupu* was the various debates it carried on regarding issues pertinent to the ML movement. It repeatedly argued through its editorials that the ML movement was a political struggle for demands affecting the lives of lakhs of adivasis and Dalits. It also argued that the violence indulged in by the naxalite groups was only ‘counter violence’ to the violence unleashed by the State. *Nalupu* protested against the ban on the PWG and the series of fake encounters against them and focused throughout on the issue of land and various militant land struggles taking place in remote villages of AP and that ‘revolution’ is a plausible means of transforming the society.\(^{55}\) This however does not mean that *Nalupu* did not carry many ideological debates with the ML groups. Most important of them was the debate on using the available legal and constitutional means. *Nalupu* carried a series of articles on various institutions, part of the State structure. For instance, it constantly argued that Panchayat Raj institutions should be used for the empowerment of the weaker social groups, along with the various legal provisions in favour of land reforms.\(^{56}\) It also projected the caste bias among some of the ML groups, for instance it carried a detailed coverage of an incident on March 7th 1993, where activists of the CPI (ML) Praja Pantha attacked and killed a Dalit boy, due to organisational differences between them and Dr. Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham. They criticised ‘sectarian tendencies’ in the ML groups that made any meaningful alliance difficult.

*Nalupu* also attempted to expand the contours of the dalit movement by addressing the emerging ‘internal’ dynamics around the issue of larger unity with the ‘bahujans’. For instance, it reported incidents of attacks by the OBCs on the dalits, reflecting the caste-class complexities. It highlighted the necessity to agree with

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\(^{56}\) Nalupi. op.cit, June 1-15, 1992.
Ambedkar’s interpretation that caste is both base and superstructure, in order to overcome the bifurcated nature of the movements. The dalit movement under the leadership of the DMS and its ideological propaganda through *Nalupu* – (a) on the need to pursue both militant as well as legal methods; (b) articulating a broader identity of dalit around caste-class dimensions; (c) emphasising ideological unity between Ambedkarism and Marxism for innovative combinatory discursive articulations; (d) realizing the need for proximity with radical left struggles around social, cultural and economic issues – provided conditions for a fuller articulation on politics of solidarity. However, it is pertinent to ask whether the naxalite movement was in a position to grapple and coordinate with the changing *material, discursive* and *strategic* dimensions, initiated by the dalit movement.

To begin with, the ML movement was reluctant to accept an ideological combination of Marxism with Ambedkarism; autonomy (or giving equal significance) to cultural and identity related issues with economic (land) struggles and combining armed-militant struggles with the use of legal-institutional means. This was seen as diluting of revolution and gravitating towards reformism. More immediately, reflection of this was the refusal to recognize Dalit movement as an independent political struggle. The Naxalite movement also strongly believed in the centrality of the armed wing and a hierarchised relation with various mass organisations. The Dalit movement therefore could not fit into their scheme of political organisation and modes of protest and mobilisation. In fact, building mass organisations itself was considered for a very long time as compromising with revolutionary politics. By the end of 1970s and early 80s, due to various historical reasons, most of the ML groups

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57 Ibid.

did begin to experiment with alternative forms of mobilization. Revising their earlier aversion, they began to organize ‘open’ mass organizations. Thus the People’s War’s Central Committee wrote in early eighties that, “today almost no revolutionary group in our country clearly holds it as in the 70s that either building ‘mass organizations itself is revisionism’ or ‘carrying out partial struggles itself in revisionism.’”59 However, they continued to enjoy very little autonomy and were considered ‘secondary’ in forging a revolution. Mass organisations were characterized as mere ‘Propaganda agencies’ or ‘recruitment centres.’60

They were divided into three broad types on the basis of the nature of work they carried out. Firstly, there were the ‘secret mass organizations’ that propagated revolutionary (read armed) politics and recruited members for the party. Secondly, there were the ‘open mass organizations’, which used the available legal-democratic and constitutional means to build ‘pressure, expose the state and contribute to further revolutionary politics’. Thirdly, there were the ‘cover organizations’, which aligned with non-party organizations and carried the agenda of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggles into these organizations.61 Such ‘tactics’ were necessary in conditions of extreme repression.62 Most of these categories of mass organizations reflected the necessity of propagating the agenda of ‘new democratic revolution’ into various sections of the society rather than trying to develop independent methods of integrating diversified sections and their demands into the overall goal of forging a

socialist revolution. It is with this backdrop that the Naxalite movement dealt with the independent dalit movement as one of ‘its’ mass organisations and looked to ‘co-opt’ it both by entering the leadership positions and by characterizing it is a ‘partial’ struggle (the metaphor used was a ‘stream that needs to flow back into the ocean’). The first phase of independent and autonomous struggles thus remained bifurcated and dichotomized and the issue of solidarity ambiguous and under problematised.63

THE ROLE OF ‘EDUREETA’

It was to explore further possibilities of solidarity with the naxalite movement that the Dalit writers started yet another journal called ‘Edureeta’ (Swimming Against the Tide), in May 1990. Two important Dalit leaders who were previously part of the Naxalite movement (while the editor of the journal came out of the UCCRI (ML) group, another important member of the editorial board was previously a COC member of the PWG) started it. They together also started the Marxist-Leninist Centre. It is interesting to note that while the journal declared its perspective as ‘Marxist-Leninist’ and as a ‘journal for revolutionary politics’, none of the ML parties owned it but it was the Dalit organisations and writers who identified with it. A more explicit articulation of an ideological basis for solidarity in a synthesis of Ambedkarism and Marxism was acceptable to most of the Dalit groups, not so for many of the ML parties.

Edureeta’s editorial declared that the purpose of the journal is to,

a) Critique the anti-democratic, authoritarian tendencies within the various revolutionary groups vis-à-vis the newly emerging caste and gender perspectives.

b) Invite discussions on caste by both revolutionary groups and autonomous Dalit organisations. It was supposed to be a platform for all progressive groups to negotiate their theoretical and ideological differences so as to make unity between them possible.\(^6^4\)

*Edureeta* was autonomous of both the dalit movement led by the DMS and the various revolutionary groups. It strongly believed that critical intervention into the politics of both the Dalit and the Naxalite movement alone would make a meaningful dialogue between them possible and purposeful. As for the Dalit movement, (a) It was critical of DMS for appealing to the same upper caste State, which was perpetuating caste discrimination in the state; (b) It analysed the shifts in the programme of DMS and cautioned it against its politics of mobilising just SC’s and ST’s and not addressing issues concerning the Bahujans and other poorer communities; (c) It also criticised DMS for neglecting its original agenda to struggle for land and other economic issues and instead restricting to demanding compensation and reservations from the government. It argued that dalit movement in course of time has restricted itself to the ‘socio-cultural’ domain and fought as if dalits could be emancipated without addressing the issue of economic equality and redistribution. *Edureeta* was definitely in search of a new framework that could radicalise the Dalit movement against its possibilities of getting ghettoised.

On the other hand, it raised series of critical issues on the practice of the ML groups in the state. Among various others criticisms it highlighted that while the ML groups though express outward support for autonomous women’s and Dalit movement by being active within them, they also always attempted to either merge

these movements with the Naxalite movement or actively participate in them to take over the leadership positions so that they could be subsumed under class struggle. Similarly, it was also pointed out that ML groups hegemonised the discourse over autonomy by branding all those seeking autonomy as ‘revisionists,’ ‘careerists,’ ‘opportunists’, ‘stooges of ruling class’ and ‘agents of imperialism’. *Edureeta* argued that this was so primarily because the ML movement believed in recognising autonomy only as a ‘tactic’ to accommodate these independent struggles, which enjoyed mass support. It was also argued that constituting most of the separate women’s and caste wings by the ML parties was again only a ‘tactical’ move and these mass organisations do not enjoy any organisational or ideological autonomy. In the political discourse on autonomy, *Edureeta* pointed towards a significant dichotomy between ‘tactical’ notions of autonomy as against ‘substantive’. The debate on the moral, political and ideological legitimacy of a ‘tactical’ approach as a strategy of transformation opened new dimensions in the dialogue on solidarity.

The dichotomy of ‘tactical’ versus ‘substantive’ notion of autonomy leading to ‘fragmentation’ between the movements subsumed a more important (hidden) dimension within the ML parties. *Edureeta* traced it to the lack of representation in leadership of members from more organic social groups such as the dalits and women. They argued that most of the leaders of the ML groups came from the ‘upper’ caste, petty bourgeois strata that joined the movement during the student days from elite/urban institutions. Their petty bourgeois’ and ‘upper caste’ tendencies get reflected later on in their functioning and the decisions they took. They also suggested that the Naxalite leaders such as T. Nagi Reddy, C. Pulla Reddy were all perceived, in spite of their radical credentials, as upper caste leaders belonging to the landed

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community. The movement therefore failed to get organically integrated at the grassroots where dalits constitute the struggling majority. As a possible solution, Edureeta suggested that it should be made mandatory to have only members coming from SC, ST and OBC communities of the society to assume leadership positions. Most of the Dalit organisations fiercely agreed and propagated this idea in A. P. They felt that it was only by mutually adopting and incorporating the principles evolved in each movement that they could forge solidarity. In other words, while the Dalit movement was taking up the land issue and recognised armed method as valid and a legitimate political method, the ML groups should have incorporated the principle of distributing land in accordance with caste, so as making it mandatory to have ‘only dalits’ as their leaders.

The various ML groups rejected ‘Dalits in leadership positions’ as a means to overcome the problem of ‘tactical approach’ and ‘fragmentation’. They countered by arguing that communists are those who have genuinely overcome caste, class and gender prejudices and therefore to fix them in these categories (acquired by birth) was a reductionism; and they also argued that the underlying assumption of Edureeta’s experiment was to either combine or equate Marxism with Ambedkarism, which would always remain an aborted attempt, as Ambedkar at worst was a ‘petty bourgeois reformer’ and at best a ‘radical reformer’. They cited instances of atrocities on SCs and STs as part of the repression on the armed movements in Tebhaga and


Telangana that Ambedkar did not condemn. He therefore had a narrow and constitutionally constrained notion of transformation.  

With the intervention of Edureeta in the on-going dialogue between the Dalit groups and the ML organisations, the debate got concretised in terms of (a) distribution of land on the basis of caste, (b) making it mandatory to have Dalits (and women) as leaders in all the ML groups and (c) to theoretically accept the combined philosophy of Ambedkarism-Marxism as the only alternative for the Indian situation. These alternatives got further legitimised at the beginning of the decade of 90s with the Chundur massacre. It was again, on the lines of Karamchedu, retaliation by the upper caste communities, not against demands for higher wages or land, but about identity assertion by the dalits for self-respect and dignity.  

Immediately after the Chundur incident, in spite of the fierce ideological differences, the ML and the Dalit groups formed ‘Joint Action Committee’, with the DMS, CPI, (ML) Vimochana, UCCRI (ML), Socialist Revolutionary Forum, and Ambedkar Youth Association.

MAROJU VEERANNA- CLASS, CASTE DEBATE

The discussions carried in Nalupu and Edureetha have led to intellectual churning in Dalit and ML parties. These discussions stressed the need for a strong ideological base, especially among CPI (ML) parties, to include and address Dalit issues. This period of ideological conflict and uncertainty led to the rise of another dynamic leader, Maroju Veeranna, from Left parties.

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68 Personal Interview with Bojja Tarakam on oct 8th 2014.
Maroju Veeranna was an active student leader for PDSU (Vijrumbana) which was affiliated to CPI (ML) Janasakthi. It is under his leadership that PDSU (Progressive Democratic Students Union), for the first time, supported reservations. It had also demanded to include Ambedkar’s writing in school curriculum. With the same spirit he had taken up the issue of caste within the CPI (ML) Janasakthi Party. He felt that the present communist ideology is insufficient and does not suit to Indian society. He strongly argued for the adoption of Ambedkar’s ideology into Marxist ideology. Veeranna proposed that without social transformation class transformation is not possible. He proposed a new revolutionary path for India which includes Phule-Ambedkar’s thoughts and prepared a document towards this end which is called May 17th Comrades Document. In 1998 Veeranna’s group submitted their document titled Indialo Emcheyyali (What is to be done in India?) to the Party for discussion on the new revolutionary path to be adopted by the Party. But, the CPI (ML) party not only did not accept this document but also expelled Veeranna’s group from the party.

Veeranna’s group came out and formed a new party called Communist Party of United States of India (CPUSI)-Dalita Bahujana Sramika Vimukthi (DBSV) on 25th December, 1998. The document became their manifesto. They aimed at establishment of casteless, classless India.

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72 Maroju Veeranna’s group is called May 17th Comrades for which Veeranna was the leader and the document submitted by them is called May 17th Comrades Document.

DANDORA MOVEMENT - CASTE VS CLASS

Radical Left politics in Telangana has made Dalits more aware of their status and rights in the society. The awareness in terms of caste and class among Dalits has helped them not only to perceive the discrimination from outside their community but also from within their community. By ‘90s, the constitutional safe guards like reservations have improved the economic status of certain sections of the Dalit community considerably. In other wards the resources provided by reservations were effectively used by only few castes that happen to be at the top of the ‘caste-ladder’ within Dalit community. Therefore, there arose uneven/unequal distribution of resources among Dalit community; and the primary observation of the Dandora Movement was that there is an imbalance in the equality of opportunity in receiving the benefits of reservation and demanded a share in the present reservation policy based on their populations. Madiga has become more assertive to the inequality that they experienced in relation to the Malas while sharing the reservation benefits.

The debates and discussions that followed after the formation of MRPS between madigas and malas help one to have an insight into the class-caste conflict within the Dalit community.


Madigas demanded categorisation of SCs into four sub groups and the 15 percent quota allotted to the SCs as a whole should be distributed in proportion to the population of each sub-caste. And the Mala Mahanadu, which was formed in response to Madiga Dandora, strongly opposed the demand.\textsuperscript{78} It has based its opposition on different aspects but for this analysis only three main stances are considered. They are: 1) the blame that Madigas lack in merit and does not work as hard as Malas; 2) the belief that categorisation will limit competitive capabilities of the dalits; and 3) finally the fear that categorisation will destroy the unity among the Dalits.\textsuperscript{79}

1) Merit Argument:

Mala Mahanadu argued that the cornering of reservation benefits by Malas is due to their individual ‘merit’ and Madigas are simply not willing to do the hard work. The whole argument of ‘merit’ is class based which was effectively used by the upper-castes against Dalits whenever they raised the issue of uneven distribution of resources. They argued that caste should not be the criteria to decide the benefits of reservations, why because there are also poor people among upper-caste Hindus. Therefore, class should be the deciding criteria and from among this poor people meritorious candidates should be given preference. It is unfortunate that same argument is used against the Dalits by the Dalits.\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{80} Personal Interview with Krishna Madiga on July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2014.
2) Competency Argument:

Bojja Tarakam, one of the prominent Dalit leaders, criticised the categorisation demand of the Madigas in public meeting in Hyderabad by observing: “as categorisation guarantees limited but definite share in the quota of reservations for each Dalit caste, every Dalit group competes against its own members of the group for that limited share, and this potentially destroys their competing potentialities. This argument if extended, according to Gundimada Sambaiah, could lead us to end the reservations policy itself. Apart from Sambaiah’s argument, the concept of competence itself is closely linked to class. Even within the same caste, class plays a crucial role when it comes to competition. It is injustice to ask a relli caste person to compete with a mala or madiga person.

3) Homogeneous Class Argument:

While the Madiga Dandora demanded that caste be taken as the unit of justice so that every caste in the Dalit group will have its share in reservations opportunities; the Mala Mahanadu, on the contrary, has argued that such a categorisation would disturb the unity among Dalits. In other words, it has favoured class based justice, i.e., the treatment of Dalit group as one homogeneous class of people, or to be plain, it has asked for the continuation of the existing unit of the distribution of justice.

81 Personal Interview with Bojja Tarakam on Oct 8th, 2014.
DANDORA MOVEMENT AND RADICAL LEFT PARTIES STAND

Left movement in Telangana rightly recognised the fact that Dalits constituted most of the poor agricultural labourer and they were the most exploited in all spheres of life. From the first phase we can argue that the Communist Party did not succeed completely in realising its goals, however through Left Movement it has created sufficient awareness, among the Dalits, of the kind of oppression they are subjected to and has provided a platform to voice their rights and demands. From Karemchedu incident Dalits rejected the Left platform to voice their grievances and Dandora Movement is the manifestation of the awareness created by Left parties and Dalit movements.

Radical Left parties expressed their solidarity to the Dandora Movement. The demand for categorisation of SC reservation into four sub-groups is aimed at stopping the dominant group from using all the benefits and thereby to new class differences within the Dalit community. Malas emerged as a new class within Dalit community.

The role of reservations in the socio-economic development of the Dalits has been immense. They have facilitated Dalits access to educational institutions and government employment, which in turn, invariably fostered the emergence of sizeable middle class among them with

guaranteed earnings, security, and the prestige that comes with government employment.\textsuperscript{84}

They supported the Dandora Movement because the demand is not in conflict with its ideology. The demand is about the equal distribution of resources among the Dalits and to neutralise the class differences that arose due to unequal distribution of reservation benefits, which is in tune with Radical Left parties’ ideology.\textsuperscript{85} But, they did not prepare any action plan to address this issue and resolve this problem among Dalit community. Because Dalits have been driving force in the Radical left movement.

The sub-caste movement raised issues similar to the demand made previously by the ML movement. Both the leader of this movement, Krishna Madiga and Krupakar Madiga, were previously associated with Radical Left partice. MRPS raised the issue of ‘classes within the caste groups’ that got consolidated due to the disproportionate appropriation of reservation by the Mala community.\textsuperscript{86}

Dandora Movement has helped the Radical Left parties to bridge the gap created by Karamchedu and Chunduru incidents. Dandora movement is a caste based movement with a class conflict. It is a result of Radical Left Parties failure to address


\textsuperscript{85} Personal Interview with Krishna Madiga on july 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2014.

the caste issue and also internal caste discrimination among the Dalits. Dandora Movement brought to the front the inherent link between the caste and the class in the Indian society. In India it is caste which decides the class and the Radical Left parties has to recognise this fact at some point in time and Dandora Movement has forced them to reconsider their stance with regard to caste. On the other hand Dandora Movement’s roots, we can daresay, lie in the consciousness and awareness given by Radical Left Movement. Radical Left Movement created so much awareness among Dalits about the concept of class and its relationship with the distribution and misappropriation of resources that they questioned the misappropriations of resources within themselves.

TELANGANA MOVEMENT –CASTE, CLASS PERSPECTIVE

Ever since the formation of Andhra Pradesh, there has been discrimination against Telangana in resource allocation, development schemes, education of locals, and employment generation. Injustice and discrimination are also evident in denying spaces in Telangana and Telanganites in decision-making economic, political, social and cultural spheres. In fact, this is only a continuation of the state policy, as Telanganites could not get their share.

The state of Andhra Pradesh has a distinct place in the history of social movements in India, having witnessed movements by Peasants, Dalits, Tribals, Women and Naxalites. The Telangana movement is not merely the demand for statehood, but also for demand for economic and cultural autonomy, from the Andhra


The rebirth of the Telangana movement in the 1990s raised the question of distribution of land, self respect, and self rule for an equal share in political and economic domains, along with bifurcation of the state. The movement is rooted in a historical context and development model. The regional disparities, in economic, social and cultural spheres, are a part of reality.

Telangana Movement is one of very few mass movements which have witnessed participation from all sections of people. The movement gave enough hope to every section of people to come out and protest against the Government. And also they brought in their own issues with them to be addressed. Telangana movement is a conglomeration of hundred demands and thousand wishes. Based on the issues there are many perspectives to the movement, of which I will consider the most prominent ones for my analysis.

The group which belonged to dominant caste and class of the region gave first priority to formation of separate state. They argued that if one brings in the issues related to class and caste, the movement itself would get diluted and it would become very difficult to pressurise the government to concede to the separate statehood demand. Instead they argued that once the Telangana state is realised we can address the issues and sort out internal differences. In this demand one can sense the desire to consolidate their dominant class and caste in the new state and also their desire to

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acquire power. They projected Andhra leaders and people as the enemies and the root cause of all the problems faced by Telangana people.\textsuperscript{91}

The ML parties went for ‘class analysis, had a ‘political economy perspective’. Their first priority is to fight against economic exploitation rather than the social exploitation; however they also have taken up social and cultural issues. They argued for the equal distribution of the resources to all the sections of the society. They stand for the empowerment of all sections of the society. They are against the privatisation of the resources. They are against the feudal system, imperialism of global capital and imperialist policies of the government.

With this stand the Radical Left parties supported separated Telangana movement. In fact, they have put forth the demand for separate Telangana much before the birth of Telangana Rastra Samithi (TRS) party. Way back in 1997, through their Warangal declaration document titled “Prathyeka Telangana Udyamam - Telangana Abhivruddi”, they framed their programme on separate Telangana.\textsuperscript{92} The following are some of the important points of this document.

1) Land to the farmers
2) To solve the water (both drinking and irrigation) problems
3) Social justice for Dalits and minorities (muslims)
4) Adivasis’ rights on the forest.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{91} “Surya Peta Declaration”, \textit{Telanganalo Samajika Prajarajyam}, Hyderabad: Samajaka Telangana Mahasabha, 2010, Pp. 27-42.


Radical Left parties, though they had included Dalits and minorities issues in their programme, did not make it clear whether they consider Dalits and minorities as part of class analysis or on the basis of caste and religion. Any concrete plan of action to work with Dalit organisations and minorities is also missing. They seem to consider Dalits on the basis of resource deprivation and lack of participation in political economy of the society.

The Identity groups and Radical left parties should have come together and formed an alliance why because they have a common ‘enemy’. Their main aim is to target internal and external exploitation of the poor based on class and caste, and liberate these oppressed sections in Telangana. Srikrishna committee itself agreed that the subaltern communities are driving force in the recent movement.

**TELANGANA MOVEMENT: A CASTE PERSPECTIVE**

The people who looked at Telangana from caste perspective, mainly, consisted of Dalits. In the initial stage, these agencies also fought against the discrimination and exploitation by Andhra (caste/class dominance) leaders and capitalists as everybody else. Its only late in the movement they began to question the movement on caste lines. We can see the participation of Dalits in the separate Telangana movement from the beginning to the end, that is, from 1956 to 2013; however it

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was only from 2009 that their participation became ‘visible.’ Most of the student union leaders from Osmania University are Dalits. The autonomous student groups emerged from Dalit movement. Left and liberal student organisations which are affiliated to the parties as front organisations on the campus already gained relative autonomy from political parties on Telangana question. The autonomous SC/ST student organisation on the campus working on democratic anti-caste lines were joined by the class oriented Left student organisations to fight for the Telangana statehood representing regional autonomous aspirations. Thus the struggle regional autonomy in Telangana provided a space for class and caste categories to come together without have to lose their specific nature of respective struggles, i.e., Left and Dalit. Though they represented the entire Telangana people and their aspirations, and worked hard for the realisation of Telangana, they never undermined the caste question. Identity groups participated in Telangana Movement, without having to give up their particular claims. They fought united, yet remained to hold their specificities. They never compromised with the movement and they had fought to include the question of ‘social justice’ into the Telangana agenda.

They argued that Telangana was backward because of the existence and perpetuation of the culture of dominant castes. They have realised that both the people who are obstructing the formation of Telangana and who are leading the Telangana movement belonged to dominant castes.


98 Gaddam KrishnaReddy. “Key Note Address” in the National Seminar on Democracy, Development and Justice, in Department of Political Science, Osmania University, Hyderabad, March, 2015, March 26-27.
The subaltern group’s position therefore has been that if the caste is not addressed, then the crux of the Telangana problem would remain untouched. Because even if a separate state is obtained, benefits like water resources, land, political power, economy, etc., would go to the upper-caste sections in the new state.99 The Dalit issue, woman’s issue, etc., cannot be separated from the Telangana movement because they are all interwoven. Therefore, the socio-cultural dimension is equally important. A region cannot be seen only as a physical entity.100

Moreover, two demands define their political fight: the formation of separate Telangana state and equal opportunities and equal representation in the socio-political economy of the newly formed state. Movement based on the Dalit-Bahujan ideology was spreading and claimed more political and economic space for the exploited and backward castes of Telangana and the recognition of their identity and culture. The objective could be seen both as a fight against the social and economical influence of the forward caste and the political influence of the BJP. There was strong hope in Telangana concerning the student movement and its ability to influence the policies of the future state as noticed by Kannabiran “students from oppressed classes are not only holding mainstream political formations to account in unprecedented ways, but are also providing direction to the movement.”101

The movement for separate statehood is a political articulation of various social identities for due share in the resources which was denied to them in the integrated state. These concerns were presented in the form of ‘samajika Telangana.’


The demand for separate state was not driven by primordial loyalties. Social dynamics in Telangana clearly indicate that the struggle was driven by an urge for inclusive growth. It is in the context that the development discourse needs to be given serious consideration. Future mobilisation will take place around the issue of development.