ABSTRACT ON
DALIT MOVEMENT AND LEFT POLITICS IN TELANGANA:
A STUDY IN THE INTERFACE

India, the sub-continent of Asia has some unique features with regard to political, economical and cultural aspects. Among these, the social and cultural scenario of India is highly complicated. Caste system, a heinous social practice exists nowhere in the world but for Indian sub-continent. As its origins are difficult to trace, its end is also seems nowhere in near future. Dalits, who happens to be at the lowest rung of the caste system, are still fighting against the system through relentless struggles with undaunted spirit.

Caste in India was not simply produced by Hindu religious texts but shaped by ecologies, languages, religion, modes of production and political system. The exploitation of the subordinate castes in India occurs through social relation rather than economic relation\(^1\). The caste issue occupies a central position in any discussion of social transformation in the Indian context. To a large extent the credit for focussing attention on caste goes to the Dalit movements. The Dalit movement specified the point that emancipation of the untouchables is not an isolated task. Similarly, social transformation cannot ignore the various layers of caste discrimination. A century-long anti- caste movement and the 20\(^{th}\) century Dalit movement in particular forced academia to take note of caste struggles in their analysis of social movements.

Telangana witnessed many socio-political and cultural movements like Adivasi Movement, Telangana Peasant movement, Anti-Arrack Movement, Telangana Statehood Movement, Naxalite Movement, Tendu Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Movement, Students Movement, Environmental Movement. And in almost all the movements the role of Dalits is undeniable and also they played a crucial role in most of the movements. Arguably they played a major role in the transformation of the society as it is now.

The study has been restricted to Telangana State. Telangana region has an historical specificity of caste-class dynamics. A kind of solidarity between Dalits Movement and Radical Left practice is found in this region, which is specific to this region.

This study begins with Telangana region of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh State as it used to be then. During the course of this research Telangana region acquired, through its relentless struggles, Statehood. And in all further discussions the Telangana State is considered as Telangana region because the Left and Dalit movements which this study is going to analyse cannot be studied in isolation or can be restricted to strict geographical boundaries.

And also, this study focuses mainly on Radical Left politics rather than traditional Left politics. The reasons are: first, there is no noteworthy change in their (traditional Left parties) outlook towards Dalits and Dalit issues. Second, after the formation of the Andhra Pradesh state in 1956 the traditional Left party could not make a remarkable impact on state politics or could not influence the State government policies involving Dalit issues. In total, the traditional Left parties failed to recognise adequately the historicity of Dalit problem. On the other hand, the
Radical Left parties were involved in the grassroots level of rural mobilization for the last four decades, and have shown a greater degree of sensitivity to the concrete nature of the caste in the structures of dominance.

**Statement of Research Problem**

The main assumption of this study is that given the Indian specificity, the caste question has to be central and integral to any Marxist understanding. In that sense caste is opposite to class, but dialectically related to it. Thus, the Dalit Movement and Left Movement are not two exclusive practices but signify historical continuum. It is the intention of the study to disregard the actualities of the perceived dichotomies such as class/caste, which in fact assume concrete forms in all political practices as it happens in the context of Dalit Movement and left politics. However the effort is to overcome the problems posed by particular situations. This study thus attempts to contextualise source of the actual and real tensions between Dalit Movement and Left politics.

**Caste System and its Historical Background**

Hindu social system is marked by a unique and unnatural division of labour which dehumanizes and degrades all those who come under this system. The Purusha Sukta in the Rigveda, the sacred text of caste Hindus, declares that the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra have come from different parts of the Creator Brahma’s body. The Brahmins come from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his foot, to perform societal functions, as priests, warriors, entrepreneurs and the servile class. This arbitrary classification
was named the Varna or caste system.\(^2\) The rigid and congenital assignment of labour inevitably involved the legitimization of various mechanisms and ideological superimposition of Hindu sanctified dogmas of purity, pollution and heredity, over and above the impersonal doctrine of Karma by the politico-religious power, and its incorporation as a rigid division of Hindu society.

Outside of this fourfold classification is a fifth class, which comes not from the body of Brahma but to serve the fourfold classes of Hindu society. Dehumanized, this fifth class has constantly been subjected to change of nomenclature from epoch to epoch, as Pancharna, Nishad, Chandala, Pariah and, currently, Dalits. The Dalits, as the wretched of Hindu society.

**The Idea of Dalit**

Dalit as a word was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marati translation of ‘depressed class’; a term the British used for those who are now called the Scheduled Castes.\(^3\) “In 1970s The Dalit Panthers revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women, and all those being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion. “So Dalit is not a caste but it is a social category.”

Etymologically, Dalit means what which is made Dal. ‘According to the Sanskrit-English dictionary of Monier Williams, ‘dal’ means multi-sected, broken

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into pieces, fractured, violated, destroyed, subdued, exploited, kept disunited, and powerless. They are the Shudras and among them the Adi-shudras. They are called by different names by the dominant such as: ‘Avarnas’, Outcastes, ‘Panchamas’ ‘Dark-skinned Dasyua’, ‘Rakshasa’, ‘Nishidas’, and ‘Mlechas.’ In the strict sense of state recognition, Dalits today mean the Scheduled Caste (the ex-untouchables) of our country.

**Caste and its Interface with Left Politics**

The caste system is the historical specificity of Indian society. In the mainstream sociological perspectives which dominate social science thinking on caste, caste has been conceptualised as a traditional and pre-capitalist institution and as a primordial marker of social identity. The implicit assumption here is that with the development of capitalism caste would lose its potency and become increasingly irrelevant. But contrary to this assumption, caste has not declined in its importance but rather with modernisation it proved to be more explosive than before. In fact it would be an exaggeration to state that with the process of modernisation, caste has assumed a modern form and become part of modernisation process itself. Therefore the analysis of caste has to transcend the modernity-tradition perspective that has been influential in the study of the caste system.

The main features of the caste that can be considered for our analysis are first: caste system is an endogamous system; second: caste signifies a social hierarchy

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based on the principle of purity and pollution; and third: traditionally caste system characterised division of labour with a clear specification of occupation roles and specialisation of social functions; and therefore, caste is an important structural aspect of socio-economic dominance- subordination.\textsuperscript{7}

Apart from being a ritual category, caste also has been an important factor determining land ownership and control on the one hand and labour process on the other. It is these dynamics of caste which are crucial to this present analysis. What adds complexity to the caste system, according to B. R. Ambedkar, is the fact that caste has not only been the site of division of labour but also division of labourers. Because of this the unity of labourers on caste basis becomes difficult. This is a challenge to the social movements that have been centred around or articulated caste as an important question.

Caste system thus constitutes a crucial challenge to any project of social transformation for social relations of production and structures of domination have been crucially determined by this caste system. Any such project has to theoretically address, practically deal with caste as a structure of inequality and discrimination.

The failure of the left in India on this question is quite clear. The mainstream left as part of dominant practice of parliamentary electoral politics has not distinguished itself from the bourgeois political parties in its perspective on and treatment of caste as a consideration in the electoral calculus. The CPI (ML) groups, having been involved in the grass roots rural mobilisation for the last four decades have shown a greater degree of sensitivity to the concrete nature of caste in the

structures of dominance and its dynamics in the process of resistance to them. Yet there is a wide gap between the theory and practice of the Left including the CPI (ML) groups on the caste question while in practice, the CPI (ML) groups, in contrast to the parliamentary Left, have displayed a greater sensitivity in articulation the caste question, but there is no corresponding theoretical reflection.

Left Movement and its Ideological Stance

The 1920s saw the emergence of Marxism, asserting a new theory of exploitation and liberation, claiming to have a total analysis applicable to India as to any society. It was rapidly picked up by a group of young, educated and mostly upper-caste radical nationalists searching for a mass base of the movement and eventually founding new communist and socialist parties. It also began to assert a powerful influence on the thinking of Left Congressmen such as Nehru and his colleagues.

‘Marxism’ as a theory and ideology came into India and existed for 70 years (with the solitary exception of D.D Kosambi) in a fairly mechanical, vulgarised form; its contribution to all liberation movement was its firm assertion that social system and relations are historical (they have come into existence, change and will come to an end), material (they have a solid base in production and collective, non-ideal social forces), and characterised by conflict, contradiction and exploitation. Its disadvantage was that it took the overriding reality of ‘class’ and ‘class-struggle’ so strongly as to

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assert the fundamental irrelevance of every other sociological category\textsuperscript{10}. Indeed, at first the power of the ‘class’ metaphor seemed so strong both for analysis and as a guide to action that it was easy for the proponent of Marxism and socialism to treat family, kinship, the state, gender, and Indian of course caste, as not only secondary but practically non-existent factors. Its influence lay in its seductive strength, and it was an influence exerted not only on Indian activities but also on academics, to the extent that a large number of the Marxist-influenced theoretical and empirical studies even during the 1970s and 1980s identified their radicalism with their assertion that behind the apparent reality of caste ultimately lay class and its dialectics, a ‘class content to a caste’ form.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study, titled “Dalit Movement and Left Politics in Telangana: A Study in the interface” is an empirical study. It also, some times, analyses Dalit and Left Movement as the cognitive praxis.

The study is limited to just Telangana region. As we can see the presence of Radical Left parties and Dalits across the country; the scope of this study is huge. And it will be interesting to study the interface in states like Kerala, West Bengal where the parliamentary Left parties are strong. This study has limitations when it comes to women’s’ participation in general and Dalit women’s participation in particular in Radical Left, Dalit and Sub-caste movements.

Though the title says it is the study of Dalit movements and Left Movements in Telangana, it focuses mainly on Radical Left parties. The reasons, I have

mentioned in the introductory paragraphs. Therefore it also fails when it comes to the interface, however less, between parliamentary Left practices and Dalit movements.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the dynamics of caste and class in Dalit movement and the Left politics.
- To study the impact of the both movements mutually and their consequences on Telangana Politics.
- To study the strengths and weakness of the identity politics.
- To know whether the left intervention opens any possibility for Dalit’s emancipation.
- To know the interplay of class and caste factors in India society.

Hypothesis

- Caste is a crucial factor in understanding the relation between Dalit Movement and Left Practices in Telangana.
- The politics of intersection of class and caste struggles in Telangana shaped the Dalit movement.
- The consciousness created by class and caste struggles in Telangana has played a crucial role in guiding the Movement for Telangana statehood.
Methodology

The thesis is an interpretative exercise which seeks to explore research questions, that is search for interface between Dalit Movement and Radical Left practice. This study traces the interface through different Movements like Telangana Peasant Movement, Naxalite Movement, Dandora Movement and Telangana separate statehood movement. The material for the present study has been gathered from primary as well as secondary sources. The primary sources comprise government reports, first person accounts of the Communist and Dalit leaders of the struggle, memoirs of nationalists, historical accounts based on primary documents, mainly the Report of Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Andhra Pradesh State Assembly debates. For secondary source, it would like to explore a vast literature that is already emerging on the Dalit and Left Movements. Books and published articles as also publicity material issued by the Dalit organizations and Left Movement in the state were used extensively both as primary and the secondary sources.

Extensive field work has been done to understand the influences of Left parties on Dalits and Dalit organisations influence on Left parties. The districts that were chosen are Warangal, Medak, Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy. Karimnagar and Nizamabad are selected to study Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangaalu and Ambedkar statues.

For collecting the resource material extensive face-to-face personal interviews were conducted with Dalit and Left movement leaders. Focused group interview method has been followed. It includes not only contemporary leaders and activists but also veterans who participated in yesteryear movements. Conversational mode of interviewing has been adopted to allow the interviewee to say what they felt about the
sensitive issues like ‘caste’ from within and outside the movements. The interviews were held in Telugu. The study, to some extent, uses participant observation, open-ended questionnaire to understand the issue at hand from different perspectives.

**Brief Chapterisation**

The present study comprises of five chapters excluding Introduction and Conclusion and the following is the synopsis of each chapter.

**Introduction**

This chapter deals with a general introduction to Dalits Movement and Left movement in Telangana region. It discusses historical background of both Dalit Movement and Left Movement. It briefly introduces to the idea of Dalits. It discusses, briefly, how these movements got shaped up and engaged with one another in an effort to transform the society. It briefly discusses Dalits role in Communist movement, Non-Brahmin movement, Telangana Peasant Struggles, and Telangana Movement hinting the detailed discussion and analysis of these movements in following chapters. It also states different modes of Dalit articulations in a century long struggle for casteless society. It also introduces to sub-caste movement within the Dalit movement for equal share of reservation benefits that the constitution has guaranteed to the Dalits. It touches up on the role of people in general and Dalits in particular in Left Movement and the way in which Left movement accommodate and dealt with Dalits in the process of its struggle to establish socialist society. Apart from these it also states statement of research problem, the significance of study, aims and
objectives of the study, hypothesis, methodology and sources are also covered in this introduction.

1) Dalit Movement in Telangana

This chapter traces the history of Dalit Movement in Telangana from 20th century to present day with its political roots and implication. It moves to Dalit Movement via Bakthi Movement and Reformist Movement. Dalit movement in Telangana can be categorised into different phases. It began with reformist mode, trying to transform the way Dalits lived. Then it moved on to address the more specific caste related atrocities like abolition of vetti, Jogini practices. Then it realised that lack of education was the main reason for Dalits deplorable condition, so it fought for the establishment of educational institutions for the enlightenment of Dalits. With the entry of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar into Dalit politics the movement has taken a drastic transformation which this chapter discusses in detail.

Depending upon the mode and method of the movement and also for the convenience of discussion and analysis, the movement is discussed in three phases. From 1906-1930s is considered as first phase which the Chapter argues as beginning of the Dalit Movement in Telangana region. The period from 1930s-1950s is treated as second phase of Dalit Movement which is termed as ‘the phase of turmoil’ in Dalit Movement. And the third phase starts from 1950s which is when the Dalit Movements in Telangana began to recede. In this phase, special emphasis is laid on Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangalu.

This chapter also focuses on sub-caste movement, limiting itself to only Madiga Dandora Movement. This chapter argues that Dandora Movement which brought to the front the discrimination within Dalits and raised the curtains for sub-
caste movements. This Chapter also argued that Telangana Dalit movement never disassociated itself with Radical Left movement, and also the class conscious generated by Radical Left movement has helped the Dalits to introspect and see the class differences within the Dalit communities, which in turn has led to the formation of Madiga Dandora Movement.

2) Telangana Peasant Insurrection: An Historical Study

This Chapter traces the trajectory of the Telangana Peasant Movement in Telangana in detail; from the beginning including the conditions that laid the foundations for the rise of Left Movement via Library Movement, Andhra Mahasabha through a wide range of primary sources. It includes first person accounts of the Communist leaders of the struggle, memoirs of nationalists, historical accounts based on primary documents, sociological analysis of the insurgent villages and oral histories. This chapter discusses the history in different phases from 1947-1967. First it gives detailed description of geographical features; second it discusses economic and political conditions that led to the social settings that have finally favoured the leftist movement, and finally the Telangana Peasant Movement.

3) The Radical Left Movement in Telangana

This chapter discusses the Naxalite Movement in quite detail including Naxalite Movement specific to certain geographical regions like Peddapalli and Siricilla. It seeks to describe the nature of the movement and how it progressed over the years; and finally, to draw parallels and contrasts between the Telangana Naxalite movement and the Naxalite movements of the late 1960s. Naxalite Movement, this Chapter argues, 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.

This Chapter also discusses the State’s response to Naxalite Movement and the role of Civil Liberty Movement in addressing the problem. And the chapter concludes with Peace Talks.

4) Mapping Caste-Class Debate

The debates on caste-class relationships and social versus political changes which were initiated in the Ambedkar era are being carried forward even today. This chapter attempts to map the class, caste debate to understand how these two concepts are understood in relation to one another in trying to understand the society. The relationship between caste and class has been perceived by various intellectuals and activists in diverse viewpoints. These different perspectives on class and caste debate are considered in this chapter by broadly classifying them into four categories. First is the Marxist perspective on class and caste; second, the Ambedkarite perspective on class and class; third, class-caste perspective; and the fourth is liberal perspective on class and caste.

Through these four perspectives, this chapter presents broad spectra of the debate on class and caste.

5) Interface between Dalit Movement and Left Politics in Telangana

This Chapter discusses the interface between caste and class. I could see the Telangana Dalit movement never disassociated itself with radical left. This Chapter covers the caste-class interface in Peasant Movement, Naxalite Movement, Dandora Movement, and present Telangana Movement. It argues that the first phase of Left
Movement focussed on the class based issues. In the 1967 Naxalite parties emerged to overcome this problem. They started taking up Dalit and Adivasi issues without directly hinting at the caste but not taking up of issues directly related to caste. As almost all of the agricultural coolis and people involved in the bonded labour are Dalits, they could directly relate themselves to the Naxalite parties.

This chapter argues that post Ambedkaraite Dalit movements in Telangana has got its roots in Radical Left Movement of this region. Left Movement has successfully exposed the hegemony of upper castes on Dalits and gave Dalits a cause and reason for united struggle against the oppressive regime. This consciousness has helped the Dalit in furthering their cause and fight for the social justice. Madiga Dandora Movement is a contemporary example which has shaped up and supports my arguments. Even the huge support base of Dalits and their active participation in separate Telangana State could be viewed from this perspective. In Telangana there a solidarity between Left Movement and Dalit movement which is specific to this region.

Conclusion

Both the movements at their regional specifications have a long and cherished history of political struggles and in raising demands for social equality and economic freedom. It will be hegemonic and undemocratic to argue that one set of political ideology is more valuable in promoting the emancipation of deprived and oppressed. However, both the movements operated with a conscious aggression about their own ideological merits and hardly built any systematic dialogical relation with the other about the strategies for the defence of the oppressed sections.
With all these ideological differences and limitation, I have argued in this study that post Ambedkaraite Dalit movements in Telangana has got its roots in Radical Left Movement in this region. Left Movement has successfully exposed the hegemony of upper castes on Dalits and gave Dalits a cause and reason for united struggle against the oppressive regime. This consciousness has helped the Dalit in furthering their cause and fight for the social justice. Madiga Dandora Movement is a contemporary example which has shaped up and supports my arguments. Even the huge support base of Dalits and their active participation in separate Telangana State can be viewed from this perspective.

Finally a consensus, or even an agreement, between these two forces of changes can only be built if both manage to move beyond the contestations of the past and also liberate themselves from their specific ideological canons to be open to constructing new radical alternatives. For both the Dalits and the Marxists, there is need to rethink their theoretical model based on the doctrines of Ambedkar and Marx.