CHAPTER - I

DALIT MOVEMENT IN TELANGANA

For many reasons Dalit Movement in Telangana occupies a special place in the history of Dalit politics in India. First reason: it is one of the foremost movements in India for the emancipation of Dalits from the clutches of Brahmanical Hindu ideology. Second: it started a decade before Dr B R Ambedkar’s arrival into Dalit politics. Third: it began in one of the princely states of British India where the effect of colonial modernism is least. Fourth: it was autonomous, urban and to some extent radicalized movement in Telangana when compared to Dalit Movement in Andhra. Dalit Movement in Hyderabad began with the establishment of Jagan Mitra Mandali in 1906 by Bhagya Reddy Verma.

This chapter traces the history of Dalit Movemnet in Telangana from 20th century to present day with its political roots and implication. This chapter 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 illiteracy was the main reason for Dalits deplorable condition, so it fought for the establishment of educational institutions for the enlightenment of Dalits. And then with the advent of Ambedkar into the Dalit Movement, it fought for political space in the State.

Social Conditions in Telangana

Social conditions of the region are important to understand the social practices and social position of communities in India which are directly related to caste. The identity of the region is, indeed, strongly rooted in its social landscape and vice-versa. Caste in India was not simply produced by Hindu religious texts but shaped by ecologies, languages, religion, modes of production and political system. In this sense, caste in Telangana is different from the other regions as the regions in India are conditioned by particular socio-economic and political practices. The socio-economic life of the Telangana region is generally characterised by feudal practices which involves ruthless exploitation of masses through the caste relation. The exploitation of the subordinate castes in India occurs through social relation rather than economic relation. One is exploited and made poor and subordinated perpetually because of low status of his/her caste. There was a continuous conflict between castes and communities. A range of autonomous castes and communities were subordinated by the dominant castes throughout the history of Telangana. The dominant castes further imposed a series of restriction and humiliating practices on the subordinated castes to ensure the subordination perpetually.  

Telangana has been basically a region of adivasis, nomads and pastoral communities and service and artisans castes. The geographical setting of the region, indeed, provided home to many such communities. It has occupied almost the centre of the Deccan plateau. The Sahayadri hills that run along the north were home to rich forests. Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda and Mahbubnagar districts were particularly covered to a large extent by forest. These forests were

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found at the source of the rivers Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra, Manjira, Maner, Wardha and Pranhita. Adivasi and pastoral and service communities such as Gonds, Rajgonds, Kolams, Nayakpods, Kondareddis, Koyas, Chenchus, Gollas, Kurmas, Waddiras.

The Velamas came from the north of the Narmada River in search of settlements. Initially they worked as army men and local chiefs under the Kakatiyas. Almost around the same period the Reddy Nayaks came from the coastal county in search of land, owing to widespread intra-community conflicts in the Andhra region and became powerful local chiefs under the Kakatiyas. After the collapse of the Kakatiyas the Velamas and Reddys emerged as independent rulers at Rachakonda and Kondavidu respectively, and had control over large parts of the Telugu-speaking areas. Further under the Qutub Shahis they consolidated as ruling aristocracy of powerful chiefs and magnates blending the required Hindu and Muslim ways of life. They were given ruling positions and titles and used to not only control the masses but also to bring waste land into cultivation by forming new villages. When it comes to Nizam rule they transformed into modern landlords (locally called doras) with legal rights under, the ryotwari system. The Reddys and Velamas who were acting as deshmukhs, deshpandyas, maktadars and other revenue agents in the old system were parcelled huge amount of lands by the State when their watan right was abolished by the new revenue policy. Beside this they also grabbed vast tracts of land in the villages using their nexus with officials. Many of them also honoured with village

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police _patel_ and _Karnam_. From the early twentieth century the Kammass (another dominant peasant caste), of the Andhra also began settling down in Telangana as big landlords occupying vast tracts of land in the Godavari areas.\(^6\)

The Sudra upper caste immigration thus had developed a distinctive social and economic system in Telangana which was rooted in brahmanical values. Although the presence of the Brahman caste in the region was minimal, the caste practices were very much widespread in the region. The Dalits of Telangana were worst victims of these practices. Particularly _vetti_, _bhagela/jetham_ and _jogini_ practices reduced the Dalits to a sub-human position. Vetti practice was in existence from medieval period in Telangana. Under the regimes of the _doras_ almost all the castes were subjected to _vetti_ including Brahmans. However the Dalits were worst victims of this practice. Each Dalit family was forced to send one person to do _vetti_ in the houses of _doras_ and village officials. Their jobs includes cleaning of houses of _patels, patwari, mali-patel_ or _deshmukh_, carrying reports to police stations, taluk office, keeping watch on the village chavadi and the poundage, cleaning the village chavadi, and serving the official on their visit to village. The Dalits involved in shoe making, tanning of leather, making of leather accessories for agricultural purposes were forced to supply these to the landlords free of cost to the _doras_, while the other castes had to be paid for their services.\(^7\)

Another practice attached to dalits was _bhagela_ or _jeethagadu_. It is difficult to translate precisely what these terms mean. It signifies a sort of bonded labour with

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limited freedom. A large number of dalits were employed on these terms. Every landholder maintained a number of jeetagallu depending upon the land area and workload. This institution had been in existence for a long time in the state. Remuneration was generally yearly and in kind, besides interest-free advances on occasions such as children's marriages and festivals, and for daily needs like clothing and gunta chutta (a kind of cigar). The practice was that once a jeetagadu registered with a landholder it was difficult for him to extract himself; sometimes the bond extended to his children. Each landlord would have ten to fifty bhagelas – the larger the number of bhagelas, the higher their status and influence in society. Pratap Reddy of Ghanapur village of Mulugu taluka in Warangal district had forty-three bhagelas on his one thousand or more acres of land.

Jogini/murali (devadasi) was another heinous practice in the dalit communities. Unmarried dalit girls were dedicated to local goddess and they were being used by the caste-Hindus. This practice existed from the medieval period. Joginis were leading a disgraceful life of prostitution. The important atrocious practice imposed on Dalits across the subcontinent was untouchability. The Dalits of Hyderabad had begun waging war against these practices. The modern education was crucial in creating such a consciousness.

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Educational Development and Social Awakening

From the late nineteenth century, Hyderabad State began to pay more attention to the general welfare of the people although serious political reforms were initiated only at the end of the Nizam's regime. The last Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan played a crucial role for the development of education in the state. Unlike the British colonial ruler, the Nizam endeavoured to develop an indigenous education system in the state combining both English and Deccan cultural values. Importantly it was a synthesis of both old and new. Although the medium of instruction was in Urdu, which was official language of the state, English was taught as second language from the school level. The last Nizam, indeed, paid special attention to get all the important science and engineering books translated into Urdu. In this sense one can see a true nationalist in him.11

From the 1880s onwards, many educational institutions were established in the state. The total number of schools in the state in 1872-73 was 141 in the districts and fourteen in Hyderabad city.12 Over the following decades there was a remarkable growth, and by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century the number of schools were one thousand and this rose to 4,500 by 1936 while the aggregate number of pupils had risen from 65,000 to 3,27,000. When the last Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan ascended the throne in 1911 the total expenditure on education was nine and half lakhs and this was increased to over a crore by 1936.13

11 Modern Hyderabad, talk given on 10th March 1936 at the Indian State Broadcasting Station, New Delhi, by Sir Akar Hydari, Finance Member, the Nizam Government (published by Government of Hyderabad, 1937, p. 2.
13 Ibid., p. 4.
In the beginning, the dominant peasant castes began taking advantage of the educational opportunities. However the subaltern castes also later on began realising the importance of education and sent their children to school. Indeed the last Nizam had put special efforts to spread education among them. Apart from the general school, special schools were established for women, tribal and depressed castes.\(^\text{14}\)

There were 97 depressed castes or Harijan castes according to 1931 census in the state. Out of the 20,02,290 total dalit populations in the state, 10,65,153 were in Telangana.\(^\text{15}\) Hyderabad city had 1,00,450 dalit population in 1941.\(^\text{16}\) The Nizam Government established a Trust for the development of education and welfare of the depressed castes, which was chaired by the Finance minister. Out of the eight members of the Trust four were representatives of depressed castes.\(^\text{17}\) It is reported that more than two and half crores of rupees were spent for the welfare and educational development of depressed castes annually during the last years of the Nizam rule. In 1945 there were 186 special depressed class schools in the state, in which medium of instruction was Telugu. In the same year 8,764 depressed class boys were studying in these special schools and another 7,500 in the general schools. Education was generally provided free of cost till primary level to all. However, for tribal and depressed communities it was provided free of cost from primary to university level. Besides this they were also provided with hostel facility and

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\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 5.


scholarship in order to encourage them in education. The depressed caste students were also awarded scholarship to study abroad.

This rapid growth in education occurred against a backdrop-of what was known in Hyderabad State as the *mulki* (local) and non-mulki (non-local) controversy. The *mulkis* were local people of the state and the non-mulkis were outsiders – men brought in to reform the Hyderabad government. The mulki and non-mulki percentage of civil officers (total 476) in 1886 was 52 and 42 per cent respectively, and 5 per cent were European officials. A considerable number of non-mulkis were imported into the state during the Prime Minister ship of Salar Jung I from north India, particularly from the United Provinces. Until the late nineteenth century, non-mulkis had no access to political power, but later on they became quite influential in the state and began holding political posts as well. The local Muslims as well as the Hindus were not prepared to tolerate this. The growth of education had by the early years of the twentieth century produced increasing numbers of unemployed youth in the state who blamed their failure on the alleged discrimination by the state against mulki. The educated youth of the dominant peasant castes, particularly-the Reddy, Velama and Kapu, formed their own caste associations from the beginning of the twentieth century, and these identified themselves with the mulki agenda.

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The establishment of Osmania University in 1918 led to an escalation in these conflicts and also opened doors for communal politics. Both Hindus and non-mulkis opposed the introduction of Urdu-medium classes in the university as they felt that this was done deliberately to encourage local Muslims to fill administrative posts. In the process Muslims were denied access to them. \(^{22}\) A new dimension was added to these conflicts when the Arya Samaj supported the caste-Hindu peasants. The Arya Samaj was established in the state in 1891 and converted itself into a political platform from the beginning of the twentieth century in order to protect the interests of the Hindus. \(^{23}\) This gradually encouraged communal conflict in the state. In response to the Arya Samaj, the Ittehad-ul-Muslimin (generally called the Razakars) came into being in 1927 to protect the local Muslims interest. These interlinked conflicting groups and communities had support from across and beyond the state and various groups began entering the state in support of their own religious communities and castes. \(^{24}\)

Interestingly these developments led to the emergence of identity politics in the state. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph the dominant castes were organising and forming their caste association from the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas the subordinate castes were started organising themselves only from the 1920s. However the depressed caste movements were more widespread in the state than in the Telugu-speaking areas of Madras Presidency. The last Nizam recognising the importance of preservation of these communities' history and culture

\(^{22}\) Leonard has argued that this was deliberately done by non-mulki officials in order to divert the mulki-non-mulki politics. See her *Hyderabad: Mulki-Non-Mulki Conflict*, Pp. 65-106.


had encouraged them with lavish donations for organising their community meetings. Many community associations were running schools for their community children with the government aid, beside articulating and representing community aspirations and demands.²⁵

These were the social and political conditions that actual led the movements that we can properly term as Dalit Movements. However the consciousness such as Dalit or Depressed classes or to be precise the non-Brahman identity has its roots in 10th century AD with the rise of Bakti Movement which I will discuss briefly in the following pages. Then the social reform movements such as Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj further strengthened Dalit identity that led to the fight for the share in the political space.

**Bakthi Movement and Non-Brahman Consciousness**

Bakti Movement started in 13th Century AD. The Bakti poets by questioning the religious restrictions on worship, in a way directly questioned the Brahmanical hegemony on religion and religious practices. By preaching all are equal before God, they created a split in the Hindu social order. They brought in Brahman and non-Brahman identity. Dalits who were denied entry in to the temples naturally took to these people.

The first phase of the identity formation of dalits may be said to be the Bhakti movement, which helped construct an identity in opposition to the Brahmin identity. The mystics who led the Bhakti movement include Ramananada and Radias in the north, Chaitanya and

Chandidas in the east, Eknath, Choka Mela, Thukaram and Narsinha Mehata in the west and Ramanuja, Nimbaraka and Basava in the south. Their contribution to the anti Brahmin thought lies in opposing caste distinctions and asserting equality before God. M.G.Ranade called the Bhakti movement being unbrahminical. 26

Bakti poets paved the way for Dalits to identify themselves as anti-brahmanical thereby created a new non-brahman identity consciousness.

**Social Reform Movements and Awakening of Dalit Consciousness**

Social reform movements have helped to bring a change in the way caste parameters operated in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Some of the principles of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj greatly influenced the Dalit leaders in Hyderabad like Bhagya Reddy Verma and Arige Ramaswamy. In Fact Bhagya Reddy Verma, in the beginning worked on the lines of thoughts of Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj. They propagated ideas like stopping the sacrifice of animals before the Gods, Stopping the drinking habits among Dalits and avoiding eating meat.

Another significant characteristic during this phase was centrality endowed to temperance, reform itself evidence of the influence of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj ideology on the emerging outcaste intelligentsia. Bhagya Reddy Verma (1888-1939) laid the foundation for Dalit Movement in the region. He was actively associated with the

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caste-Hindu organisations especially the Bramo Samaj, which were to have a decisive impact on his own ideology and agenda of action.\textsuperscript{27}

It was the Arya Samaj which conferred on him the title ‘Verma’ in an annual function in 1913 for the social service he rendered to the society. Thus he became Bhagya Reddy Verma\textsuperscript{28}.

Arya Samaj was founded by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswathi in 1875 at Bombay. The advocates of Arya Samaj in Hyderabad took pledge to devote their free service to the poor Hindus in their struggle to restore the civil and religious liberties. It has been hailed as one of the most potential and dynamic socio-religious movements of the day. It had a great impact on the life and thinking of the people particularly of the Hindus in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. It propagated the message of Arya-Samaj; (a) Equality of all human beings, (b) Condemnation of caste system, (c) Equal opportunities of education and refinement, (d) “Back to Vedas” and “India for Indians”\textsuperscript{29}.

The Arya Samaj in Hyderabad state was founded in 1880 in Dharur Taluk of Beed district which acted as head office to guide its activities. In 1892, the Arya Samaj of Hyderabad was started in Residency area, later renamed as Sultan Bazar. The first president here was Pandit Kamata Prasadji Misra, and he continued to remain at its helm 1932. He infused great vigour into the activities of Arya Samaj.


\textsuperscript{28} To know more about him see the article written by Yagati Chinna Rao in Samathara Magazine published in May 2007.

established many branches of Arya Samaj throughout the state and helped the spread of education through libraries and schools.

Though their objectives were high it seems they never really worked for the equality of all human beings especially within the Hindu religion. They worked to create an ideal Hindu religion. Their interests were more political than social.

The autocratic Nizam regime also effectively repressed political developments. The Congress and communists alike hardly made a beginning, even through front organisations, until late 1930s. Instead the Arya Samaj took on political importance, and fed into the Congress movement to give it a Hindu nationalist tenor. 30

The Nizam's government efforts to increase the number of minority by proselytising majority was questioned and checked by the Arya Samaj. Thus, the Nizam's government changed their attitude towards Arya Samaj and began to place a number of impediments before it. It grew so much that the normal functioning of Arya Samaj had become impossible. 31

Brahmo Samaj was established in 1828 in West Bengal by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Samaj aimed at reformation of the Hindu society and the religious beliefs. The Samaj not only focused on Sati, Child marriage etc, the issue related to dominate castes but also chalked out programmes for depressed castes. The programmes were mainly focused on openings schools for Dalits and also supporting their amelioration.


Hence it has become the welcoming shelter for Dalits who tried to escape from the cruel practice of discrimination in the name of caste. Dalits strongly believed and supported its sincere objective in building a casteless society. Bhagya Reddy Verma, Arige Ramaswamy and Kusuma Dharmanna were among the active workers during 1920s.\textsuperscript{32}

Bhagya Reddy Verma being a preacher and leader of the ‘untouchables, was the first person to be brought in contact with the reformers of the Brahmo Samaj movement. He rendered very valuable service in spreading this Movement in Hyderabad city.\textsuperscript{33}

Though these Reform movements helped to bring a change in the consciousness of Dalits, Presents day Dalit critiques like Prof. Adapa Satyanarayana strongly opines that these reform movements like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj were formed to reform and strengthen Hindu religion.\textsuperscript{34} They never really wanted or worked for the upliftment of Depressed Classes or eradication of caste system. And one cannot deny their opinion when we see that though Bhagya Reddy Verma and Arige Ramaswamy followed Brahmo Samaj, they never advocated their brethren to follow them in this particular case. P. R. Venkataswamy, who was instrumental in keeping the Telangana Dalit history alive, also writes that our Dalit leaders had their own reservations in joining those organisations.

He (Bhagya Reddy Verma) became a Brahmo but he did not advocate its adoption by ‘untouchables’. Had he done it there would not have


\textsuperscript{34} Personal Interview with Prof. Adapa Satyanarayana, August 30, 2014.
been the need for the existence of the organisation of the ‘untouchables’ and his leadership. So, to gain their favour and support he was with the Brahmos and helped them in their propaganda.\(^{35}\)

Furturh Yagati Chinna Rao says:

Though Ramasawmy had faith in ‘Achal Siddanth’ and Brahmo Samaj, he firmly believed that Dalits were separate from Hindus.\(^{36}\)

**Emergence of Dalit Politics**

As already mentioned in the beginning, this chapter studies the Dalit Movement chronologically in detail by dividing the movement into five phases. We can say that the Dalit Movement in Telangana began in the year 1906, because this was the year in which Bhagya Reddy Verma started his Jagan Mitra Mandali, which we can call as the first Dalit Organisation that worked for the Dalit cause.

**Beginning of Dalit Movement: 1906-1930s**

The Dalit movement in Hyderabad started with the establishment of Jagan Mitra Mandali in 1906, an organisation of untouchable, by Madari Bhagya Reddy Varma.\(^{37}\) It started the work of reform and awakening social consciousness among the untouchables. As part of the Mandali’s activities Bhagya Reddy Verma organized ‘Harikatha Kalakshepams’ regularly at the end or beginning of which he used to speak to Dalits. In these meetings, Bhagya Reddy Varma spoke eloquently about


\(^{37}\) Bhagya Reddy as the founder of the Mandali is subject to conflicting opinion. See Venkataswamy, P. R. *Our Struggle for Emancipation.* Vol. 1. Secunderabad: University Art Printers, 1955, p. 3.
Dalit’s social and economical conditions and the ways to overcome their miseries. During these meetings he told them that they were the original inhabitants of the country, and that the others had migrated from central Asia for their livelihood and the main reason for their backwardness was their ignorance and illiteracy and Hinduism’s treachery. Jagan Mitra Mandali, by its name and activities, was really a friend of the poor and uneducated masses which tried to educate the untouchables about their social maladies.38

Its members believed in Buddha's humanist philosophy and were against the Vedic dharma, the Varna system, and offering animals to appease deities, and preached vegetarianism. Buddha Jayanthi was celebrated every year on ‘Vaisakhi poornima’ day from 1913 until 1938. They also organized inter-dining called ‘preeti bhojanam’ among all untouchables. This gave a possibility for a feeling of oneness, and brought them together to fight for betterment of their brethren.39

In 1910 Bhagya Reddy Verma founded ‘Darsha Pracharini Sabha’ as a branch to Jagan Mitra Mandali. Through this organisation he tried to enlighten Dalits by explaining them that the root cause of Dalits deplorable condition is Hinduism’s treachery. He also published and distributed books and pamphlets to educate and enlighten Dalits.40

39 Ibid.,
Bhagya Reddy Varma founded the Manya Sangam in 1911. Through this organisation he worked against animal sacrifice, drinking alcohol, davadasi/jogini tradition. The principal aims and objectives of Manya Sangam were:

1) To educate all children of the untouchables;

2) To eradicate child marriages;

3) To prohibit non-vegetarian food and intoxicants in marriages and other auspicious functions;

4) To eliminate the 'Devadas' known as 'Jogini' or 'Murli' or 'Basavi' tradition widespread in the community.

At the general committee meeting held on 19th January 1913, Sangam elected an executive body, to fulfill their aims and objectives. The Manya Sangam was established with members including Vellati Seshaiah, a building contractor, Jakkula Muthaiah, owner of a bakery, Venkataram, the superintendent, M.L. Audiah of public works department and other employees of the Hyderabad public gardens.\textsuperscript{41}

He also founded \textit{Adi Hindu Murali Nivarana Mandal}i specifically to fight against the practices like jogini, devadasi, basavi in the name of God. He also urged the Government to help in eradiating this evil tradition.

He also founded \textit{Ahimsa Samaj} in 1912 to propagate vegeterianism among dalits. May be because Dalits are blamed for eating dead animals, and to uplift them from this social disgrace he founded this organisation. This organisation got a name change in 1915 as \textit{Jeevaraksha Gyana Prachaara Mandal}i.

In 1912, Bhagya Reddy Varma organized the Swastik Dal with the help of 35 Dalit volunteers. It was based on the activities of Humanitarian League of which Bhagya Reddy Varma was a full-time preacher. They worked on parallel lines to that of the Red Cross Society, but their symbol was an orange swastik, the Buddhism symbol. This band of passionate volunteers did yeomen services during the epidemic days when plague and cholera broke out in and around Hyderabad. In 1925, when plague broke out again the epidemic took a serious toll in Hyderabad. The Swastik Dal volunteers served the desolate, tended the unwell and cremated the dead bodies. Their actions and timely services were recognized and awarded accordingly. These volunteers participated in various activities of local organizations and rendered services to many others, including the Indian National Congress meeting at Kakinada and the cow conference at Gudiwada.42

With the establishment of Suneethi Bala Samaajamu in 1912 another great leader Arigay Ramaswamy enters into Dalit Movement. He started this organisation with the principle object of temperance. He caught hold of some of his friends, reformed them and carried on his work of social reform among Dalits with the help of his reformed friends.43

Ramaswamy had belief in Achal siddantham and Brahmo Samaj, yet he firmly believed that Dalits were a separate identity from the Hindus. He formed an Adi-Hindu Jatiyonnati Sabha in 1922, with Konda Venkataswamy as president and


43 P. R. Venkataswamy, Our Struggle for Emancipation. Secunderabad: Universal Art Printers,1955, Pp.4
Arigay Ramaswamy as vice-president and J. Papaiah as its secretary.\textsuperscript{44} Since its beginning, it received huge support and existed as a substitute organization to the Adi-Hindu Social Service League.

In 1912, another Dalit leader, Madari Audiah, under the influence of the activities of Bhagya Reddy Verma, started another Manya Sangam of Ghasmandy, and carried on his activities in Kummaraguda, a locality in Secunderabad, where he lived. The object of his organisation was mainly based on Manya Sangam of Bhagya Reddy Verma. He urged his brothers to abandon liquor and preached against animal sacrifice and child marriage. It was very tough job in the initial stages to stop the age old custom of drinking, eating meat in social functions, and in matrimonial and funeral ceremonies. There was a strong opposition from the ‘orthodox’ section of the Community but he continued his activities in a serious and effective way.\textsuperscript{45}

M. L. Adaiah founded another reform association known as Sanghabhivruddi Samajam. Though oriented towards social reform, the members of the organization developed a community spirit by involving and assisting people during their social functions, particularly ritual ceremonies like marriage, death, etc.\textsuperscript{46}

However, for Hyderabad, the crucial year was 1922. Almost immediately afterwards the Madras government accepted request of the Dalits to be addressed by their regional name prefixing Adi, i.e., Adi-Andhra, Adi-Dravida, etc. The Manya Sangam established in 1911 by Bhagya Reddy Varma was renamed Adi-Hindu Social Service League in 1922. He organized the first All India Adi-Hindu social conference

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 5.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., Pp.18-19.
in Hyderabad, under the presidentship of T.J. Papanna of Belgaum in the Bombay presidency, with M. L. Audiah as Chairman of the reception committee.

This conference was held for three days (29th – 31st March 1922) and attended by Dalits from regions including Bombay, Pune, Karachi, Akola, Amaravati, Nagpur and Raipur which gave an all India nature to the meeting. Many delegates from the coastal Andhra region of Madras presidency participated. The first two days of the session was allocated only for the Dalits and the third was an open session for all Adi-Hindus, caste-Hindus and others. Many Hindu reformers and philanthropists, such as Justice Rai, C. Balamukund, Pandit Kesava Rao, Seth Lalsji Meghji Jain, Prof. Narayan Govind Wellinkar and R.E. Reporter were spoken on the occasion. The Manya Sangam became the main organization of the Dalits in Hyderabad.

In 1922, Arige Ramaswamy founded another organisation called Adi-Hindu Jatiyonnathi Sabha. He felt the need of an organisation to counteract the authority and influence of the caste-Hindus on the Panchayat Board and to establish a parallel panchayat system. He conducted weekly meeting regularly at the residence of Konday Venkataswamy at Kummarguda which were addressed by Arige Ramaswamy and Bhagya Reddy Verma. He invited members of the community to attend the meetings and the members of the community also looked up to the Sabha as a symbol of their hopes and aspirations and a corporate body to which they could represent their grievances for redressal. The main object of the Sabha being social reform, the poor

47 Belgaum now in Karnataka state earlier belonged to the Bombay Presidency.


50 There seems to be disagreements regarding year of founding of this organization.
people of the community sought the help and co-operation of the members of the Sabha in their social functions. There were number of enthusiastic young men in the Subha to render social service to the needy under the inspiring leadership of Arige Ramaswamy.  

This organization aimed at removing immoral appellations regarding the identity of Adi-Hindu and non-Aryan egalitarian traditions along with the customary aims of internal reforms in Hyderabad state. In the 1920s and late 1930s, they organized many conferences in Hyderabad State but unlike the coastal regions, with less rural support.

The year 1922 saw the emergence of another great Dalit leader, B. S. Venkat Rao, in Telangana Dalit history. In this year B. S. Venkat Rao with the co-operation of Madari Govindarajulu and Madari Venkataswamy started an organisation under the name “The Adi-Dravida Sangam” in Bangaru Basti, Gasmandy. This organisation was an imitation of the Adi-Dravida Sangam of Madras Presidency. Its main objective was the removal of Devadasi system which was rampant in Bangaru Basti.

In 1925, Bhagya Reddy Varma organized an exhibition of handicrafts including paintings, sketches, and sculptural works. Another novel arrangement was made by the Adi-Hindu community at Residency Bazar (now known as Sultan Bazar),

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Hyderabad which was inaugurated by Goswamy Rajah Dhanrajgiri Narsingirji.\textsuperscript{54} The idea behind the exhibition was to illustrate that Dalits were in no way less skilled in fine arts and crafts even though they had no facilities and opportunities to develop their skills.\textsuperscript{55} In 1925, the Manya Sangam organized Adi-Hindu youth gymnastics at Prem Theatre grounds under the presidency of Kodi Ramamurti Naidu, the Indian heavy weight champion. He was very impressed by the well-disciplined presentation of skills in the use of ancient arms by the Dalit youth and remarked that it was a matter of pride that the Adi-Hindus have retained the art of using ancient weapons with excellent skill. He further noted that they were really the sons of 'Bharat Mata' who sacrificed everything and preserved Bharatiya culture.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1927 B. S. Venkat Rao formed the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha along with C. S. Ethirajan, K. Ramaswamy, Arigay Ramaswamy and others, and tried to bring a new awakening among Dalit masses. He also extended financial help for the opening of a Library and Reading Room which was called “Adi-Hindu Library.” Worker of the community regularly met at the library to discuss their difficulties confronting them.\textsuperscript{57}

The year 1931, we can argue, marked the split between Malas and Madigas of Telangana region which ultimately culminated in the formation of MRPS in 1994 about which I shall discuss briefly in my forth coming pages. In this year Arigey Ramaswamy founded Arundathiya Mahasabha, a separate organisation for Madigas


\textsuperscript{56} Participation in that exhibition was predominantly from the youth belonging to the Madiga community Madigas were traditionally leather workers in Andhra Pradesh. See Yagati Chinna Rao’s \textit{Dalits Struggle for Identity}, New Delhi: Kaniska Publishers, 2003, p.196.

with Madigas as working committee members. Only president and wise president were chosen from caste- Hindus who were pro-Dalits.

In the beginning it appeared very harmless, as the two organisations were considered the two wings of the community. But the subsequent political changes in the State brought about a great change their outlook and instead of in terms of community, they put forth their demands in terms of sects. This resulted in the disruption of the solidarity of the community and weakened its position on the political map of Hyderabad. The formation of the new body, from the view point of divides and rule policy, produced deleterious effects on the body politic of the community.

Arigey Ramaswamy’s efforts to bridge the gap between Malas and Madigas did not become fruitful. Till then there was no separate organisation within the Dalit Community. It became evident that within the Dalits there were differences in opinions and certain sections within Dalits were not given equal importance. P. R Venkatraswamy says:

The gulf of deference between Mala and Madiga was widening day by day.... He (Garikala Mallesh Rao) suggested a separate organisation for Madigas to achieve their legitimate rights. But Ramaswamy hesitated to take ant hasty step in that direction lest it might cause a split in the community. So he went to Bhagya Reddy Varma and sincerely pleaded for the cause of the Madigas to give them a place of equality with the Malas. But Bhagya Reddy ridiculed his Utopia ideas. Ramaswamy warned him of the evil consequences of his short-sighted policy.
Bhagya Reddy bluntly told him to have his own way and he was not in the least bothered about it.  

This new organisation created a split between Adi-Hindu Social Service League, led by Bhagya Reddy Verma and Adi-Hindu Mahasabha led by B. S. Venkat Rao. Arundatiya Mahasabha supported Adi- Hindu Mahasabha upsetting the balance of power.

A Phase of Political Turmoil: 1930s-1950s

Though the Telangana Dalit Movement was confined to Hyderabad, it was strong in terms of organisations and articulation of Dalit cause. However, the quickly changing political scenario at the national level has severely affected the Dalit movement in Hyderabad. The Hindu-Muslim tensions in the Nizam Dominian have created a space for Dalits to organise and fight for their rights within the Hinduised society. The entry of Ambedkar into Dalit Movement in Maharashtra has had a great effect on Dalit Movement in Telangana. Many organisations have been founded based on Ambedkar ideology.

In 1936, B. S. Venkat Rao led the delegation to the Maharashtra Asprishya Youth’s Conference at Pune, This conference was presided over by N. Shivaraj and addressed by Dr. Ambedkar. Influenced by the speeches of Maharashtra Dalit leaders, they organized the youth league of Ambedkarites with Venkata Rao as president and Venkataswamy as secretary. It’s aims were to organize the youth to support Ambedkar in leading the untouchables out of the Hindu fold, to enlighten the

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59 Ibid.,
people of the troubles of Hinduism and to organize a dynamic campaign of social-economic disabilities and deprivations.\textsuperscript{60}

On the insistence of Ambedkar, Venkata Rao presided over the Bombay presidency Mahar-conference at Bombay held on 30th May 1936.\textsuperscript{61} Soon after, Venkata Rao was nominated to Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in 1937, to the defence council of Nizam in 1943, elected unconditionally to the Nizam's Legislative Assembly in 1946 and became the education minister under the leadership of Mirlaik Ali in 1947. A genius and an active personality, his followers conferred on him the title of Rao Saheb. He sacrificed all he had for the community and died as leader of the community.\textsuperscript{62}

By the later part of the 1930s, disputes arose on pro-Muslim versus Ambedkarite reaction to the declaration of departure from Hinduism. The state branch of Harijan Sevak Sangh at Hyderabad was formed in 1933,\textsuperscript{63} the Congress preparation to reconvert Dalits into Hindu religious fold which had only a minor impact and Ambedkar's decision to give up Hinduism was described as a real 'bombshell' in motivating immense debate on conversions throughout the country.\textsuperscript{64} Several Dalit leaders and activists became active, including Kusuma Dharmanna, a great poet, in the coastal Andhra region. P. Veerani, a Hyderabad Dalit confronted Gandhi in his 1935 visit, and later became a propagandist for Islam under the name of P.V. Sardar

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., Pp. 80-101.


Syam Sunder (1908-73) was another pro-Muslim Dalit activist. After the intensified Hindu-Muslim clash of 1938-39, B.S. Venkata Rao also began to work in this direction.

Venkata Rao was elected as president of the Depressed Classes Association with K. Jagannadham as its secretary. On 71 May 1938, the association sent a note to Akbar Hyderi, the prime minister of Hyderabad, urging for separate electorates and demanded their representation in municipalities and local boards based on population. This was followed by the declaration of constitutional reforms in July 1939 which not only polarized Dalit opinions but also formed divisions among Dalits leaders.

During these days of confusion, Bhagya Reddy Varma, an all–India Dalit leader from Hyderabad, passed away on 18th February 1939. This was a major loss to the community and the movement as a whole because his commitment to Dalits upliftment and relations with pan-Indian Dalit leaders Caste-Hindus and Muslims organizations for Dalit cause was irredeemable.

Later leadership was marked by exhaustive competitive struggles. However, there were ideological and political differences even earlier in Hyderabad state Dalit


66 Ibid., p.654.

autonomous movement but in 1940s, these differences were more of a longing for power and leadership leading to occasional confrontations.⁶⁸

Most of the young radicals, including J.H. Subbaiah and Venkata Rao, who were connected with the Depressed Classes Association, were involved in quarrels that reached its peak and led to a division in the organization. Subbaiah accused Venkata Rao of helping Kusuma Dharmanna in working towards propagation of Islam.⁶⁹ Later, he joined Arigay Ramaswamy along with a major number of youth and started revitalizing the Hyderabad state Adi-Hindu Maha sabha. This split sustained until 1942, when both factions went to Nagpur to attend the founding meeting of the scheduled caste federation in July (18- 20) 1942.⁷⁰

Though they appealed to Dr Ambedkar to facilitate unity among the divided leaders of the Hyderabad state, the differences could not be patched and resulted in the organization of another scheduled caste federation. Without an official attachment to the all India body; the revived Adi- Hindu Mahasabha was compounded in it. They chose Subbaiah as president and Venkataswamy as general secretary, and adopted the Nagpur resolutions.⁷¹ By this time, the personal competition of factions turned into organizational competitions between the Depressed Classes Association (DCA) and Scheduled Caste federation (SCF) to lead the Dalit community in Hyderabad State. The Depressed Classes Association took a stand of pro-Muslim orientation and


propaganda gained nourishment from the fact that the Nizam was actually implementing some reforms, including distributing wasteland to the Dalits, while the communists were under attack by the Nizam razakars.

The use of the Indian army hampered the progress of these reformers while the congress progressed little in the state for Dalits, but emerged as a Hinduistic organization based exclusively on the representation from the Brahmans, land lords, middle-class peasantry and the upper castes.

The Dalit organizations in Hyderabad were divided into six groups working all together until the late 1940s. With the British declaration of transfer of power in February 1947, the Dalit organizations were nonplussed. The state of Hyderabad issued a declaration of independence on 11 June 1949, which set off increased factionalism among the Dalits. The biggest groups were still the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) led by Subbaiah and the Depressed Classes Association-(DCA) led by Venkata Rao. While the DCA approved the constitutional reforms, the SCF, along with the congress and communists discarded them.

Both the dominant organizations of Subbaiah and Venkata Rao, R.P. Venkataswamy and Shyam Sundar came together under the banner of the Independent-Scheduled Castes Federation that proposed conditional acceptance of the reforms,\textsuperscript{72} whereas an Arundatiya Mahasabha, based primarily on Madigas pressed for a separate electorate and conditional acceptance in the elections. Venkata Rao and Syam Sundar were elected, while five more members were nominated.\textsuperscript{73} Both these


elected leaders shaped their pro-Muslim position and appealed to the Dalits to extend their support to the Nizam's ruling classes of Hyderabad to sustain political power.74

In addition, the Adi - Hinduism Social Service League, later revived by M.B. Gautham, son of Bhagya Reddy Varma, also rejected the reforms, as did the Dalits grouped around Arigay Ramaswamy and working in the fold of the congress.75

Contrary to earlier Dalit movements and urban based internal factional mobilizations of Dalit leaders, some of the local Dalit leaders organized several meetings at the grass root level in spite of the Dalit leaders' personalized politics on one hand and the congress and Muslim co-optive attitudes on the other. For instance, Butti Rajaram (1911-78) organized rural masses in Karimnagar district, and Kusuma Achalu in Nalgonda. Rajaram organized many public meetings under the presidency of J.H. Subbaiah, K.R. Veeraswamy in the district.76 Soon after, the Telangana armed movement dominated rural Telangana on one hand, while on the other; both the DCA and SCF Dalit groups conflicted with each other to mobilize Dalits on Ambedkar's ideology. However, by then Ambedkarites in Hyderabad state had become feeble both organizationally and politically.

Here, an interesting alliance was emerged between the Dalits and communists at the time of the 1952 elections in the-state. Although it was against Ambedkar's liking, it was beneficial to the Dalits at least for a short period. The Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF henceforth) allied with the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF

74 Ibid, Pp.386-87.
henceforth) (the front organisation of banned communists) and contested in the election. PDF won 36 seats out of the 45 contested seats in Telangana. Two of them were former members of SCF. In addition ten socialist Dalits allied with PDF's own seats, while SCF itself won five assembly seats and one Parliament seat with the help of PDF. However the merger of Telangana into Andhra State in 1956 had consolidated Reddy feudalism further, in the region. In the newly formed Andhra Pradesh feudal Reddy leadership which blended with modern politics had not only crushed down the Communist Party but also Dalit politics in the State by early the 1960s. It was during this period many Dalits began sheltering in the Communist Party as grassroots activists as the electoral alliance had already set a stage for such migration, although a considerable number of Dalits had gone into the Congress fold.

Diffusion of Dalit Movement in Telangana: 1950-60s

However, the Dalit politics began fading owing to larger developments in the state as well as in India. Particularly the Indian government's police action on Hyderabad in 1948 had serious impacts on the Dalits movement. Following the police action Dalits were subjected to serious repression by both armed forces and local landlords because of their pro-Nizam stand. The landlords evicted the Dalits from their assigned lands distributed by the Nizam and took them back. Notwithstanding this repression, many Dalits took shelter in Congress or its affiliated Harijan

associations. Venkat Rao was arrested. Shyam Sunder escaped the wrath of the military government as he was sent by the Nizam to Europe to represent Hyderabad's right to independence before the U.N.

With this sort of political and factional disturbance, the Dalit masses in rural areas were being influenced into different ideologies without any clear direction and objectives. If the coastal Andhra Dalit movement ended in 1940s with the establishment of Brahman-led congress hegemony, the Hyderabad movement broke into pieces due to factional leadership and climaxed with the "police action" on the Telangana movement, and integration of Hyderabad through police action into the Indian union in 1948. 80

Therefore, for the Dalit activists in the State, there was a strong need for an alternative ideological plank and to continue the fight against oppression and injustice. This unrest ultimately resulted in the establishment of Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangalu (Ambedkar Youth Leagues) at various places in the state

**Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams in Telangana:**

Bojja Tarakam became the moving force behind the founding of the first such Sangham in 1971 Nizamabad district and registering it. Tarakam, a lawyer by profession, was a staunch Ambedkarite and Naxalite sympathizer. Under the banner of Yuvajana Sangham, Tarakam started organizing the landless agricultural labourers, and daily wage workers in the beedi and cigar rolling industry. The Dalits and other working classes themselves approached him to redress their grievances. Tarakam prepared memoranda on their behalf, submitted them to the authorities concerned,

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arranged protest rallies and argued the cases in court. In the process, the Sangham activities spread to several other districts such as Karimnagar, Medak and Adilabad. Mallepally Laxmaiah, a Dalit activist, stated that more than a thousand Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams got established between 1987 and 1990. This massive size of Dalit organisations have directly led to the formation of BSP (Bahujan Samajwadi Party) in Telangana. The Yuvajana Sangham along with the CPI (ML) Ryty Coolie Sangham, led many struggles against the upper caste landlords. Both the Sanghams united in their demand for an increase in the wages of the landless agricultural labourers and the beedi and cigar industry workers and for better treatment of farm servants.

Legislation governing small-scale industries provided many benefits and welfare facilities to the beedi workers, but the indifference of government officials combined with the ignorance of these benefits by the workers, led to their poor living conditions. Tarakam, after he was elected president of the beedi workers' union of Nizamabad, took up these issues and led many successful demonstrations and huge rallies and strikes against the lethargic bureaucracy and the state government. One of these strikes, lasting twenty-five days, demanding the implementation of the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, resulted in its successful outcome

The conscientization of the Dalits, however, led to general discontent and distrust against the upper caste Hindu establishment, adding to the general national crisis which culminated in the imposition of internal emergency in 1975-77. During this period, many Dalit leaders and activists were arrested. Tarakam was imprisoned.

The revocation of the Emergency in 1977 resulted in the massive resurrection of Yuvajana Sangham activities. Many new Yuvajan Sanghams were formed and

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worked autonomously in their localities. It would not be exaggeration to say that each village has a Sangam which is systematically connected to the main body at the district level through mandal branches, the number of Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams in Karimnagar district alone stood up to 1200 by late 90s.\(^{82}\) Efforts were made to coordinate the work of these Sanghams, and to form a state level association. The result was the formation and registration of the Andhra Pradesh Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham in 1977\(^{83}\). Thomas Rao was elected president and S.S.R. Bhupathi became the general secretary. The other leaders associated with it were P. V. Rao, S. Ramakrishna, J. Rajgopal Rao, M. Prem Kumar and J.B. Raju. The activities of the state level Sangham were limited mainly to the state capital. The Sangham along with the Scheduled Caste Employs Welfare Association started night schools for the Dalits, and nearly 220 slum dwellers were organized in Hyderabad city. P.V. Rao took up the *Jai Bheem Patrika* and opened a new column called 'Raktastruvulu' (Tears of Blood), chronicling the atrocities on Dalits.

**Installation of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Statues:**

The making of modern statues appears to involve a double movement\(^{84}\). And Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams have rightly chosen the path of erecting Ambedkar statues all over the State apart from the occasional, sometimes spontaneous agitations. Stressing the importance of such statues Robin Jeffrey says:

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\(^{83}\) *Personal Interview* with Bojja Tarakam, October 8, 2014.


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“Statues were a way of exalting a ruler or a representative of a particular group, of bringing him constantly into the public eye and of thereby inducing people to regard him as powerful, great and legitimate-people who should be supported, not overthrown.”

The campaign produced remarkable consciousness and identity among the Dalits in Andhra. In villages and towns, the statues were installed in the centre of Dalit colonies. In big cities, they were installed mainly at the city’s crossroads. The statues, showing Ambedkar standing, symbolized self-realization and self-respect. His raised right hand would be pointing to the distant horizon, signifying the intended goal. His left hand held either his book *Kulanirmulana* (Annihilation of Caste) or the Indian Constitution. His keen eyes and broad forehead portrayed the maturity of his intellectual calibre. The statues were intended to create a strong effect not only on Dalits but on every viewer, reminding them of Ambedkar's three mottoes: Educate, Agitate, Organize.

The Dalit identity was asserted through erection of the statues. It could rally the Dalit sections, from illiterates to educated employees behind this issue, as there was a tremendous enthusiasm among them to reconfigure their leader. By mid 80s all the district headquarters and major towns had come to find the statues of Ambedkar being erected in central places. Subsequently these statues have played a symbolic role in mobilising the people. In all the districts including Hyderabad these statues have become venues for the Dalit rallies.

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Ambedkar's statues also became a focal point in the celebration of Ambedkar's birth and death anniversaries. The statue at Tank band, Hyderabad, installed in 1968, became almost a pilgrimage every 14th April, which is Ambedkar’s birth anniversary, the event being marked by a distinct festive mood. In 1978, Chief Minister Chenna Reddy made it an official function. Thereafter, the event used to be marked by two functions near the statue, one by the state officials with full state honours, and the other by the Dalits themselves. Dalits from different districts and Taluks would pour into the city holding aloft banners, shouting triumphant slogans, and singing songs of solidarity, accompanied by dance. The cynosure of the cultural function would be Gaddar's performance.87

Thus the installations of Ambedkar statues have their own historical importance, which profoundly reveals the whole spectrum of socio-cultural, political and psychological dimensions of the Dalit movement. The statues have both subjective and objective expressions. They have been used as the devices for the expression of not only the self-respect but also to communicate the social ideas. Moreover, they have been used as a powerful means of political agitation and reflect the publication of the future hope of the present oppressed Dalits. In many cases, experiences shown that the Dalits have an emotional symbolic attachment with the statues. Any kind of dishonour and defile of the statue would result in the display of unrestraint indignation and protest from the Dalits. Thus the study about the installation of Ambedkar statues in a complex subject and comprises more than one factor, which had profound political implications for the Dalit consciousness and identity.

87 Personal Interview with Gaddar, 2 Nov. 2014.
The eighties opened with a marked degree of Dalit assertion in Telanagana. The Dalits expressed a distinctive, more active enthusiasm and participation to build up an effective youth and workers' movement. Their discontent was emphatically expressed by observing Independence Day and Republic Day as black days.

Under the Congress rule, atrocities of on Dalits increased. Even the Congress Dalit leaders were publicly humiliated. The Congress Dalit MLA, Masala Veeranna was denied temple entry, and Jagjivan Ram was denied the opportunity to become the Prime Minister. In protest, the Yuvajana Sanghams along with all progressive and radical organizations gave a call to observe Republic Day 1982 as a Black Day. Black flags were hoisted throughout the state on that day. In Hyderabad, nearly 50,000 people were mobilized and gathered at the Ambedkar statue near Tankband in a peaceful procession carrying black flags. Chief Minister, T. Anjaiah was greeted with black flags when he went to attend the Republic Day parade. Shocked by this display, Anjaiah ordered the police to take action. The police, without prior intimation, lathi-charged and tear gassed the peaceful demonstration. The lathi charge continued for nearly six hours. The fleeing Dalit men, women and children were chased up to three kilometres.

The increasing oppression of the Dalits under the Congress rule and the ruling party's indifference to their plight frustrated the Dalits who denounced the government. In the ensuing 1983 Assembly elections, the Dalits played a crucial role in defeating the Congress party, which had hitherto ruled the state unopposed. The newly formed Telugu Desam Party meanwhile made extravagant and attractive populist promises. The concept of pseudo-Telugu upper caste-dominated nationalism

and Telugu pride was capitalized in the form of votes. Against the Twenty-Point Programme of the Congress, the Telugu Desam formulated a Fifteen-Point Programme called *Pragathi Patham* (Progressive Path) which mainly addressed the weaker sections. Thus, expecting a better future for them, the Dalits voted in favour of Telugu Desam.  

**Satyashodhak Social Research Centre**

In 1990s, Osmania University professors and other academicians started Satyashodak: Centre for Social Research to respond to ongoing social process and people’s experimentation therein, concentrating on questions raised by anti-caste, class and gender initiatives.

One of their pamphlets defines their work as: “...Satyashodhak collective dissatisfied with the dominant perspectives and disciplinary specificities governing the protection of knowledge alternatively view the questions raised by the grassroot Dalit anti-caste, class and gender initiatives and articulations as constructing the point of departure for the basic social science research. Satyashodak consider themselves equally responsible to disseminate the knowledge produced through dialogue with these movements in the larger social and intellectual milieu through seminars, workshops, awareness campaigns and publication of research material and through this wish to play a catalytic role in helping the popular initiatives to realise their historical potentialities.”

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90 From, A position paper by Satyashodak Social Research Centre, Hyderabad.
Thus intellectuals also played a crucial role in sustaining and forwarding the Dalits and other oppressed peoples’ cause.

**Dandora Movement and Democratisation of Dalit Politics: 1990–Present Day**

The ‘90s forms a crucial phase in the Dalit political history of Telangana. It is in this decade the internal tensions and contradictions between Dalit castes began to surface. The new government did not help the Dalit cause. It was viewed as a change in the regime—from Reddy Raj to Kamma Raj. The formation of Madiga Resevation Porata Samithi (MRPS), popularly known as Dandora Movement in 1994, marks the split between malas and madigas in Telangana. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, we can see the tensions between the two dominant castes within the Dalit community long back in 1933, which is when Arige Ramaswamy formed Arundathiya Mahasabha, an organisation for Madigas. A series of incidents; one of which is a marriage ceremony between a Mala boy and a Madiga girl, which Bhagya Reddy Verma seriously opposed, led to the formation of this organisation. Arige Ramaswamy pleaded Bhagya Reddy Verma to treat Madigas equally with Malas but Bhagya Reddy Verma did not heed to his suggestions. From this it becomes clear that Madigas were never treated equally with Malas even then. In one of his articles Prof. Muthaiah states:

Bhagya Reddy Verma, who was then the leader of Adi Hindu Social Service League, expelled the mala leaders Arige Ramaswamy, Adayya and P. R. Venkataswamy from the mala caste when they attended

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91 Personal Interview with Krishna Madiga, 12 Nov. 2014. (Krishna Madiga is the founder of the Madiga Dandora Movement which spearheaded the movement for sub-categorisation of SC reservations.)
mala-madiga inter-caste wedding on the grounds that this went against mala tradition.

Bhagya Reddy Verma denied a share to madigas in the Adi Hindu Bhavan, built with donations from patrons, on the grounds that madigas did not contribute one paisa to its construction. Resenting this anti-madiga attitude of Bhagya Reddy Verma, the expelled leaders Arige Ramaswamy, P. R. Venkataswamy, Adayya and others established the Arundathiya Mahasabha in 1931.92

Had they addressed the differences then there would not be this split between Malas and Madigas today. Assertion of Madiga identity and fight against the inequality meted out to them within the Dalit community started then and resurfaced when Mrs. Sadalakshmi, a minister in Congress government, gave a memorandum regarding categorisation of Scheduled Castes to then Chief Minister Jalgam Vengal Rao in 1972. She was the follower of Mudigonda Lakshmaiah who was the leader of Arundathiya Mathunga Mahasabha in 1940s. Again in 1992 in Adi Jambava Arundathi Mahasabha she strongly argued for categorisation of SC reservations. Her guidance and directions played a central role in the formation of MRPS.

The MRPS was founded by a few self-conscious assertive Madiga youth on 27 July 1994 at Edumudu village in Prakasam district. This is in stark contrast to the earlier Dalit organisations which were urban based and headed by well off educated Dalits. Apart from the common caste and caste related problems they addressed; there was very less for the common Dalits to relate themselves to their caste organisation.

But with MRPS this has changed. It started in a village with a rural base of only 20 members under the charismatic leadership of Manda Krishna Madiga, and within a few months they were already a political force to be reckoned with at the state level.

“There always existed a gap between the rural uneducated Dalits and their leaders in urban areas. In contrast, the Madiga Dandora has produced new Dalit organic leaders who are semi-literates and rural based youth. For the first time in the history, this leadership has brought their community on the streets to raise their voice about their rights and plight.”

One of the main reasons of the movement was the seething discontent among Madigas over their relative backward status compared to Malas. The immediate factor was their contempt about the monopolisation of resources and reservation facilities by Malas. They complained that though the Malas are relatively lesser in number than the Madigas they were benefited more by the reservation policy. As a result, they initiated a movement to fight for justice, popularly known as “Madiga Dandora”.

The term ‘Dandora’ refers to their traditional profession. Traditionally, the drum ‘Dappu’ was used to make several public announcements in the village. MRPS leaders have used the cultural symbols extensively and effectively in their movement. The word ‘Dandora’ itself lost its common meaning and stood for strong assertion of Madiga identity and political rights. The whole movement became famous as ‘Dandora Movement’. Dappu became the symbol for Madiga identity and unity. Now, we don’t see any rally or meeting without the use of this musical instrument. The sound of Dappu, before the movement, was associated with death of some member of

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the society. But after the movement the sound of Dappu became the clarion call for Madigas to come out and fight for their just cause. In Jangam Chinnaih’s words

“...the Madiga’s cultural and productive symbols like drums, such as “Aeree” and “Gootam” have been brought into the main stream, and they act as the symbols of revolution, which unite their community. So popularisation of cultural symbols and making them the symbols of political assertion is a new facet, which has been brought about by the Madiga Dandora.”

The striking thing that Madigas did was add the prefix ‘Madiga’ to their movement and all related activities such as “Madiga Dandora Movement,” “Madiga Dandora Rally,” and “Madiga Dandora Meeting.” Even they started suffixing their caste name to their name to assert their self respect and confidence and to identify with their own caste men. This is a clever intentional subversion of meanings associated with certain words. Earlier the term “Madiga” was considered to be demeaning and was used abusively by the caste-Hindus. They began to add their caste name with pride. The leaders of MRPS began to call themselves as Krishna Madiga or Krupakar Madiga. This tradition spread over to rank and file of MRPS across the state. K. Balagopal in his EPW article observes that:

“The first and most audacious thing the Madigas did was to suffix the caste tag to their names. Krishna became Krishna Madiga, Krupakar became Krupakar Madiga and so on down the line. In a society that


addresses any number of Krishna Shastris and Krishna Reddys respectfully the discomfort this caused was most amusing to watch. As ‘Madiga’ has served as term of abuse, whether directed against a Madiga or otherwise, it was most discomforting to be confronted someone who wanted you to address him as ‘Krishna Madiga’. And when people confessed to themselves that they found it embarrassingly absurd to think of someone as Krishna Madiga, they were forced to ask themselves why they did not find it absurd to think someone as Krishna Sastri, Krishna Reddy or Krishna Naidu.96

The leaders were successful in communicating effectively to their Madiga community. By explaining their history, culture, the position of reservation facilities and their position in society they made them conscious of their status. This provided a platform to the Madigas to unite and organise themselves. They used the elements of culture excellently and transformed them into political tools to play it on political arena.

Another important dimension of the success was that it was not identified or loyal to any political organisation, at least in the beginning. The MRPS leadership instilled confidence among the Madigas by rejuvenating consciously and positively an earlier demeaning caste identity. Thus, elevating Madigas to a self-conscious position and making them proud of their “new” identity. This facilitated mobilisation and organisation of the Madigas to fight for their demands for categorisation of the existing reservation policy according to proportionate population.

96 Ibid.,
The MRPS leadership has explicitly expressed that their demand for a reasonable share in the Scheduled Caste (SCs) reservation was justified, as Madigas were not benefited out of the reservations and have remained backward. On the contrary, it was argued that the Malas have availed benefits disproportionate to their population. Their contention is that all the sub-castes of SCs should receive benefits in proportion to their population. They further declare that there are certain sub-castes or jatis like the Rellis, who are more backward than the Madigas. Therefore such backward groups among the SCs should be provided their due share. This logical exposition of the ‘Dandora’ leadership for the classification received wider acclaim.

After securing from the grass root level by organising meetings, rallies, and padyathras, the MRPS was successful in mobilising one lakh Madigas from all over the state. They proceeded to Hyderabad, the state capital, to demonstrate their strength and to press for their demand. Finally the state government appointed a one-man commission on 10th September 1996, headed by a retired judge of Andhra Pradesh High Court, Justice Ramachandra Raju to enquire into the issues of Dalit reservation in the state and the demand raised by the MRPS.

The commission has found that the Scheduled Castes are a very heterogeneous group with wide disparities in social, economic, cultural, occupational, and educational levels. In such a situation constitutional provisions and several Supreme Court judgments support the need for rational categorization to ensure equity and to rectify injustice.

The commission inferred that the Mala and Adi Andhra communities, both individually and the group of communities belonging to the Mala and Adi Andhra group, have so far been enjoying to a large extent a greater share in public
employment than their percentage share of Scheduled Caste population. According to the commission "there is disproportionate distribution of reservation benefits in favour of the 'Mala' group and 'Adi Andhra' group of scheduled caste communities compared to their respective populations. Both the 'Madiga' group and 'Relli' group of communities are not adequately represented either in public appointments or in educational institutions compared to their respective populations."

The Commission suggested "categorization based on most backward to least backward among Scheduled Castes." Accordingly, the "Relli" group of communities is the most backward among the Scheduled Caste communities. Thus they were categorized as "A" with percentage entitlement of 1% both in public appointments and admission to educational institutions. The "Madiga" group of communities is the next most backward among the Scheduled Caste communities. They are categorized as "B" with percentage entitlement of 7% both in public appointments and admission to educational institutions. The commission recommended that the "Mala" group of communities is receiving the benefits of reservation wholly disproportionate to its population. They are categorized as "C" with percentage entitlement of 6% both in public appointments and admissions to educational institutions. The "Adi Andhra" group of communities is receiving the benefits of reservations wholly disproportionate to their population. They are categorized as "D" with percentage entitlement of 1% both in public appointments and admission to educational institutions.

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98 Ibid.,

99 Ibid.,
The commission also made clear that the categorization made into "A," "B," "C," and "D" groups does not apply to posts or admissions to educational institutions in the central government or in central government corporations or central government public sector undertakings.

Meanwhile the MRPS intensified its struggle throughout the Andhra Pradesh. The commission at last submitted its recommendations to the Andhra Pradesh government on May 28, 1997 for its executive action. The then Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government immediately responded to the commission's recommendations and issued government orders Number 68 and 69 classifying the Scheduled Caste reservations as "A," "B," "C," and "D" groups as recommended by the Justice Ramachandra Raju Commission. However, the Mala Mahanadu resumed an anti-categorization movement vehemently opposing the division and demanded that the government should withdraw the orders issued classifying the Dalits into four groups. It argued that the division of reservations is the divide and rule politics of dominant castes and Dalits should fight united against the caste annihilation.¹⁰⁰

Unconvincingly, Mala Mahanadu raised two issues: one is that the concerning of reservation benefits by Malas attributed to their individual "merit" and argues that although the Madigas have been oppressed by the upper castes but they are unforthcoming because of their marked occupancy, and the Madigas were expected to repeat the cycle of skill acquisition, improvement in competitive spirit and "merit" for any modern occupational ladder.

Any failure to do so on part of the Madigas is not the result of Mala betrayal. In fact, the Madigas are simply not willing to do the hard work that Malas did a generation ago in order to get the first leg up the ladder. Secondly, the division of reservations have been artificially induced by the upper castes in order to stimulate hostility and conflict and to prevent all exploited groups from joining together to end their mutual exploitation led by the Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh.

With this understanding the Mala Mahanadu challenged the government orders in the Andhra Pradesh High Court and the honourable Court suspended the government orders on technical reasons saying that the state legislature has no competence to make any law in regard to bifurcation of the Presidential List of Scheduled Castes prepared under Article 341(1) of the Constitution. The legislation was bad because the Report of the National Commission on Scheduled Castes was not placed before the Legislature as required under Article 338(9) of the Constitution of India.\(^\text{101}\)

However, considering the importance of the ‘Dandora’ movement, the Andhra Pradesh government enacted "Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes" (Rationalization of Reservations) Act 20 of 2000 based on the Justice Ramachandra Raju commission's recommendations. Again Mala Mahanadu went to the Supreme Court challenging the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalization of Reservations) Act 20 of 2000.

\(^{101}\) Ibid.
The Supreme Court in its verdict said that the mini classification based on micro distinctions is false to the very egalitarian spirit of Indian Constitution and violates Articles 14, 15 and 16 which constitute the basic structure of the Indian Constitution\textsuperscript{102}. Though there is a temporary impasse on the division of reservations as demanded by the Dandora movement, the movement has brought out yet other important questions before the Dalit movement as the democratization in Andhra Pradesh.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.