CHAPTER - VII
CONCLUSIONS
The caste system began to acquire new functions and dimensions in the changing socio-economic and political ambience of the pre-independence period. However, changes in the caste system notwithstanding the grip of this institution on the social matrix did not loosen to any appreciable extent. Caste continues to persist, albeit in a different form from its feudal ‘embodiment’. After the achievement of Independence and introduction of electoral politics in a traditional society, caste gained a new role for itself.

Changes in the institution of caste cannot be fully comprehended in isolation from the changes in economy and politics. Changes in caste as a system are closely related to the changes in the economic sphere, while the transformation of castes as interest groups is intrinsically related to the introduction and spread of democratic politics.

The Introduction of democracy, which has been effective in India since Independence, while dismantling the traditional authority structure, at least theoretically, has contributed to the growth and consolidation of castes as interested groups. In view of the fragmentation and factionalism within caste groups and alignments and realignments among them, political parties no doubt cut across caste groups. But because of the compulsions of electoral politics, no party can ignore the caste factor except at its own peril. At every stage in politics, the leaders of political parties, have to engage in ‘Caste-rope walking’. The importance of caste increases as we go down the political hierarchy from the parliamentary constituency to the village panchayat. Religious and sectarian leaders and the Mathadhi Patis (Monastic leaders) also play a crucial, though covert, role in the mobilisation of the caste factor for political purposes.

Thus during the second half of the 19th century we can see many changes in economic and social spheres. In the economic sphere, it led to the rise of the dominant peasant castes, rich peasantry and a middle class. Balijas have been traditionally a trading community and the rate of literacy among them was quite high. As said earlier some of them were warriors from the medieval times. Among them the Kapus are Gazula Laxmi Narasu Setty of the Madras Native Association, Raghupati Venkata Ratnam of the Andhra Brahma Samaj and K.V. Reddy Naidu of the later day justice party.

Economic and social advancement among the non-brahmin castes and the gradual migration of Brahmins to urban areas leaving the land ownership primarily to the dominant
peasant castes, made the latter to enjoy immense social power. Due to the economic changes brought about by the beginning of the 20th century caste groups like the Kammas, Reddis and Telagas or Kapus became prosperous peasant proprietors and enjoyed economic and social prominence.

Of all these communities, Kammas of the Delta districts strike out as unique case of the emergence of rich peasant class in Andhra. In Coastal Andhra the other castes like Gavaras in Visakhapatnam district, Telagas, Kapus and Balijas in Godavari districts are only prosperous to the level of Kammas. But in other districts of Coastal Andhra, the Kapus, Telagas and Balijas are small peasants and tenants.

By the 30's of the 20th century tenancy both on the Zamindary and Ryotwari lands appear to be in existence at a significant level. In the post-depression period, with a weakened bargaining power, the small peasant/tenants were at the receiving end. Not only they were hard pressed in the credit market but even in commodity and land markets the domination of the rich peasants ever eager to consolidate and strengthen their land-base appears to be complete. Thus land control was increasingly passing on into the hands of the rich peasants at the expense of the small peasantry.

Curiously, this process appears to be reversed in parts of Delta-districts in recent times, i.e., in the post-1960 period. While the Brahmin land holders drifted away from villages to the nearby towns in search of jobs in the urban areas from the 50's of this century, the Kamma rich peasantry has of late, developed a taste for money making avenues in the urban and semi-urban centres. They are drifting to professional services construction business, film-making, real estate, hotels and industry. As they are loosing touch with the land, the other middle peasant cultivating castes like Kapus, Goudas etc., are buying up the lands and houses of the Kammas, thus bringing in a new caste balance into operation. The process has just started in recent times.

Under the influence of the western civilisation, the caste system was losing its rigidity. New groups were taking up various professions displacing old ones. The Balijas were now forced to seek new pastures and took up agriculture, where they encountered stiff competition from agricultural communities like Vokkaligas in Karnataka and Kammas and Reddis in Andhra. Besides, under the changed political conditions farming
was not as profitable as it used to be. Thus the community gradually lost its predominant position socially and politically and became one of the backward castes in South India.

The Kapus are the numerically largest community in Andhra Pradesh, with 18.6% of the State population. As we mentioned earlier, the Kapus have a number of sub-castes of which Balija, Telaga, Ontari, Munnuru Kapu and Turpu Kapu are predominant. All these sub-castes appear to have been named after either their occupation or place from which they hailed. Though these sub-castes are spread all over the state of Andhra Pradesh, the concentration of the Kapu and Telaga is more in the Coastal Districts, the Balijas in Rayalaseema and the Munnuru Kapus in Telangana area. Further in the case of Kapu sub-sects though they are called with different names, Kapu is a name for all the sub-divisions. There are no taboos on commensality and connubiality. These endogamous groups are not hierarchically arranged and consider them as in groups. Agriculture is their hereditary occupation in which bulk of the people are involved. Thus these sub-divisions are all rivulets and streams in the ocean of Kapus.

Traditionally these groups have occupied a similar position in the caste hierarchy, below the dominating castes, but above the Dalits. By the early 20th century most of these groups had settled down as cultivators, their differences seem to originate in slightly different ritual status, as well as class and occupational differences which prevailed in earlier times, but there has never been a taboo on inter-marriages and inter-dining among these jatis. However the tendency towards cross-cousin and maternal uncle-niece marriages has meant that in practice, there have not been as many marriages among the different jatis as there were among the sub-castes of the dominant Peasant castes.

The Madras Presidency and especially the Andhras are proud to have pioneers in the Freedom Movement beginning even before the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, as is illustrated by the noble example of G.L.N. Setty. He belonged to 19th century and his efforts were directed to protesting in a peaceful but effective manner against the encroachments on the civil liberties of the Indians by East India Company Government. His activity was all embracing not only in the political field but also in the social, economic and religious spheres of native states. Peaceful methods of agitation under the name of Satyagraha adopted later by Mahatma Gandhi had the beginning in the methods followed
by G.L.N. Setty. At a time when electoral bodies were not introduced when public opinion in its true sense was absent, when there was no means of association between the Government and the governed, G.L.N. Setty played the part of the people’s leader. Without allying himself with the vested interests, G.L.N. Setty became the friend of the people. In the history of the National Movement, G.L.N. Setty occupies a prominent place, for his efforts could be seen before the Mutiny. He was one of these unnoticed and forgotten gems which shine with lustre only when they were discovered and noticed by the world.

In the middle of the 19th century, we can see the emergence of important personalities in the Kapu caste, who excelled in literary and social reform activities and who left an impact on the social consciousness of people of Andhra. They were, Samineni Muttu Narasimham Naidu, Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, K.V. Reddi Naidu and others.

With the British introducing the Ryotwari system, along with the improved irrigation in the coastal districts, Kapus began to emerge, as a strong peasant caste carving out its own socio-economic and literary space. Such a consciousness was first expressed in the form of Samenini Muttu Narasimham Naidu.

Another prominent Kapu was K.V. Reddi Naidu. Apart from Kurma’s distinguished positions and his invaluable individual contribution to every one of the portfolio he held, his views on one or two matters deserve special attention. They were first as for industrialisation of the country. Reddi Naidu was positive that it was industrialisation alone that was going to liquidate poverty in our country. This has been one of his favourite subjects. Sir Kurma’s one great desire was to see that India became an important country by solving all its internal problems such as caste, poverty and a host of other social and economic problems and then achieve its Independence.

No name has been so revered and respected as Raghupati Venkat Ratnam Naidu’s in the first four decades of the present century. Brahmarishi Venkata Ratnam Naidu was one of the great luminaries of A.P. born in a Kapu caste. He rose to great heights in the public life of the country and made a mark as a great educationist, social reformer and a saint par excellence. During the British days, persons having good qualifications got
better prospects of life. But unlike the man of his age, he was not interested in money or power. As a Brahma Samaj leader he was spreading the gospel of Brahmoism preaching its tenets and himself living according to them. As a social reformer, he laid stress on social purity. Apart from the above personalities, there are persons who came from Kapu caste and have participated in the National Movement.

In the Andhra Pradesh context, the Kapus as the largest group in the state are behind in all the fields particularly education, politics, industry and business. However, in the district like East Godavari because of their numerical strength (18%) and control over land, they are playing a fairly forceful part in district politics. But in other districts they are picking up slowly in education, economy and political spheres.

In the changing context of political scenario in the state in the last decade the Kapus are now trying to assert their identity and are demanding their share in the power structure. In search of a separate new identity they are now trying to bring together under the rubric of Kapus with similar cognate groups. As mentioned earlier, spread in different regions of the state, they are digging out their historical roots of their common origin. They formed a common platform known as ‘Kapunadu’ to articulate their grievances. One of their immediate demands is that they should be included in the list of backward classes.

Recently, some efforts were made to unite all these sub-castes through a caste organisation, ie., Kapunadu. Of course, there is some awareness of unity among these various sub-castes in the face of political and economic challenges, yet it is only a starting point. But the consolidation of Munnuru Kapus, Balijas and Telagas had remained unconsummated. In contrast the consolidation has been complete in the case of Kammas, but the Reddis are successful to a certain extent.

Thus, the participation of the Kapus in politics is relatively a recent phenomenon. They realised their powerlessness of their caste in the recent past. They also realised that access to modern political power means control over economic and educational opportunities. Being a largest caste in numberwise, if they achieve caste solidarity, they will occupy the political power. For that they concentrated on education and economic
activities. This we can observe in the starting of educational institutions by the Kapus in some areas. And also as the people of most industrious in the urban areas they are mostly in the tertiary sector. Now they are improving their economic activities by spreading other spheres like cinema, News Paper, rice-mills etc.

Caste has been an important factor in the politics of Andhra Pradesh particularly, after the formation of T.D.P. when the significance of the caste has become more and more pronounced and open. Further, the encouragement of political parties also helped the caste to gain political prominence. It is now a well established practice for the state leadership of the various parties to select Kapu candidates for a number of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats because of their numerical strength.

In this context it is necessary to analyse the process of socio-economic and political developments that have taken place in Andhra in the past. This will help in understanding the general conditions under which the Kapus are trying for their rights. Further, they are in a position today to challenge the dominance of the traditional land owning classes in the political as well as in the rural economic spheres. It will take time to come to the level to that of Kammas and Reddis, because the size of the kapu families are more compared to that of Kammas and Reddis. Further the feeling of oneness among the Kapus has started just recently. It was a long term objective, which we could not expect within a short period.

The Non-Brahmin movement in the South has to a large extent sidelined the Brahmins from positions of power and educational institutions. During the freedom movement the Congress leadership in Andhra came from Brahmins, but it was gradually shifted to Reddis, Kammas and Velamas. By 1956, the Reddis took control of the Congress Party.

Thus the trend of Andhra Pradesh politics depended on the C.M. and his caste. Even though other castes have their representation in the ministry. From 1956 to 1983 the Reddis dominated the political life in Andhra Pradesh. From 1983 N.T. Rama Rao mobilise the people on the basis of Telugu unity and obtained financial strength from his own community, for whom he had to give preference.
From 1956 onwards the Kapus have been in the politics of Andhra Pradesh and also in almost all the major political parties, but nobody could reach the high position. Though the Kapus are there in the Assembly, parliament and in ministries, they are not in a position to compete with the Reddies and Kammas. But this has been changed from 1983 onwards.

Though the Reddis are spread out in different factions, but struck together when Reddy interests are really threatened. Likewise N.T.R.’s political leadership also symbolise the Kamma aspirations and made them rally round him.

One of the most important factors that contributed to the economic development of the Reddis and Kammas is the caste based social network in business, industry and agriculture. The caste consciousness and identity became instrumental for successful economic development. Their caste consciousness and solidarity have given them an edge in business and industry because of their propensity to help one another as a means of improving the status of caste as a whole. Now Kapus are also trying to achieve this.

Further, the economic dominance and caste solidarity of Kammas was strengthened by the emergence of T.D.P. in 1983 under the stewardship of N.T.R. The emergence of T.D.P. provided a source of inspiration for the Kapus to mobilise on similar lines. This is observed in the increase of the strength of M.L.A.s from this caste.

We can also say that some Kapu leaders played their part in influencing the Kapus in increasing their consciousness. They are Mandali Venkata Krishna Rao, L.L. Das, Bandaru Ratnasahpathy, P. Shiva Sankar, V. Mohan Ranga Rao, M. Padmanabham and others. Among them the last four persons played a crucial role in the awareness of Kapus particularly from 1980’s.

In this context, the contribution of V. Mohan Ranga Rao and M. Padmanabham is specially noteworthy. These two were responsible for the Kapu emergence in the recent period. The untimely death of V. Mohan Ranga Rao left M. Padmanabham to take the responsibility on his shoulders. Without Mohan Ranga Rao and M. Padmanabham we can not expect the Kapu movement to this extent.
It may be said that the idea behind bringing these groups under one nomenclature was to make a difference in the political arena in terms of numbers, as well as to revive inter-marriages among the Jatis and thereby enlarge their geographical spread, since each of these groups were concentrated in a few districts in different regions of the state. In terms of economic status, it was only the Kapus in the Godavari delta who constituted prosperous peasant cultivators, the rest constituting a substantial proportion of the small and marginal and urban lower middle classes with a dominant presence especially in the tertiary sector.

The Kapunadu movement was highly significant among the Kapus in terms of ethnic identity, opportunity, structure and politicisation. While the movement had not changed the Kapu’s everyday life in any drastic manner, it had in more subtle ways helped them to realise their collective strength and potential. Kapu ethnicity was double edged; on the one hand it promoted common identity and a sharing of common values and on the other it had a cognitive change which manifest in situations of conflict against opposition reference groups. Kapu ethnicity was nourished and kept alive by the Kapu movement. Further a high degree of politicisation backed by the Kapu movement had enabled the Kapus to bring about a shift in the balance of power relations in Andhra Pradesh.

For the first time the Kapunadu united all the sub-castes of Kapus on common platform. The movement literally brought the entire Kapu community on to the streets. This was due to Mudragada’s personal image. Mudragada as an individual had a good name for his non-corrupt, clean image. Though a late comer, to the movement because of his standing among the people of his caste and in the politics of East Godavari district, Mudragada has emerged as the Champion of the Kapu cause. According to Mudragada it was not a political movement but a social movement, intended to secure justice for the poorer sections among the Kapus.

The Kapu movement for reservations gathered momentum and spread all over the state. In the case of Kapu movement, Mudragada was able to generate voluntary and spontaneous response from among the Kapus. Further, Mudragada and his followers brought a mass awakening all over Andhra Pradesh through formal and semi-formal associations. They transformed the general urge into specific programme of action. However, no where the movement took a violent turn.
There are people from Kapu caste who contributed to the society in their respective fields. From administrative side we have Ajay Naidu and I.J. Naidu. Like wise, P.V. Rangaiah Naidu, Ragala, M.V. Bhaskara Rao from IPS. From legal side we have Justice A. Lakshmana Rao and P. Shiv Shankar and Rajya Lakshmi. In the academics we have from Kapus, the most important personalities like Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, Sri Ram Govinda Rajulu Naidu, M.V. Rao, Ramakrishnaiah and R. Radhakrishna. K. Rajyalakshmi who became the Vice-Chancellor of Padmavati Mahila university, Tirupati was a prominent women academician from the Kapu caste.

In the performing arts like Music, Theatre, Painting etc., we have several people from Kapu caste and their contribution to the society is worthy to be mentioned. They are Dwaram Venkataswami Naidu, Yella Venkateswara Rao, Achanta Venkata Ratnam Naidu, Eelapati Raghuramaiah. In the Theatre side, particularly, in cinema, Kapus stands supreme in certain fields. First photographer, first studio owner, hero, heroine, and director belong to this caste only. They are R. Venkaiah R. Prakash, Kannamba, etc. In the recent period also we have S.V. Ranga Rao, Dasari Narayana Rao, and Chiranjeevi who excelled in their fields as the tops in the cine industry. There are other persons like P. Nageswara Rao, Master Venu, Eedida Gopala Rao, Thota Tharani who excelled in their fields.

Particularly in the literature and journalism we have prominent persons from Kapu caste who not only were famous in Andhra Pradesh but also in the country. In the first place we have Tapi Dharma Rao Naidu who excelled in both the fields. But in journalism, we have M. Chalapathi Rau who achieved a world recognition for his journalistic contribution. He achieved a distinction of being spent almost his entire career as a journalist in one newspaper.

Likewise in science and technology, M.V. Rao and K. Rama Rao excelled in their respective fields. In sports, the Kapus contribution was very high not only in state and national level but also in the international level. Not only that we have a lady cricket commentator from this caste at national level. In cricket we have world famous cricketers from this caste like C.K. Naidu and his brother C.S. Naidu. In Tennis, Football, Carroms also Kapus played a prominent role.
Other prominent Kapus were Adibhatla Narayana Das, Kodi Ramamurthy and dramatist Suribabu who excelled in their respective fields.

The significant contributions made by the Kapu leaders in the field of Social Reform, Administration, Education, Journalism and culture was imulated by the contemporary Kapu leaders was organised themselves into a close knit body to work for certain political privileges. The Kapunadu movement was basically the result of such historical memories of the past wherein several Kapu leaders distinguished themselves both at the regional and national levels.

Sociology abounds in concepts which have varied and often contradictory meanings, and are premised upon opposing theoretical frame works. Ambiguity has been a particularly key element in the chequered career of the concept of community in the social sciences, with meanings ranging from a conservative, to a seemingly progressive mobilisation of common feelings and interests for social change that is implied in the term ‘Community Development’. Given the fact, that “communities are some of the most active agents of political practice” in modern times.

Just as social scientists have used the term community in a very general sense, so also in popular usage, the term has been used to refer to caste, class and other similar categories. However, one can find instances where groups mobilizing themselves around an identity, not only refer to themselves as a community, but also the other as a community, especially when they have antagonistic relationship with the other community.

The larger question is how mobility is achieved in a caste.

The Kapu caste, for instance, underwent a significant transformation in the 1980’s in the wake of the Kapunadu movement which attempted to gloss over the internal differences (including economic ones) among the Kapu ‘sub-castes’. Subsequent to this manoeuver, not only did the leaders of the movement claim that theirs was the single largest caste in the state but also one which was politically under-represented and socio-economically backward.

There have been recent attempts to broadbase the movement by converting it into a larger movement consisting of all the backward classes and communities and seeking greater political representation. What is intriguing about this alliance is that it involved the
simultaneous mobilisation of Kapus and other castes under the leadership of a man who was attempting to emerge as the spokesperson of the above groups.

Thus a third force in the Andhra Pradesh politics is often heard spitting fire, but is nowhere to be seen. Its protagonists, are searching for some film personality to head the third force, and the names of Chiranjeevi and Dasari Narayana Rao have been cropping up most often notwithstanding their being elusive.

The idea of a third force came to the fore on the eve of the 1989 Assembly elections. Those were the days when the maverick Mudragada Padmanabham, resigning from the N.T.R's cabinet, in 1988 was waging a relentless battle against TDP and NTR. By identifying himself with Mudragada and his movement Dasari made his intentions clear. It was also the time when the CPI had fallen out with the TDP. CPI stalwarts N. Giriprasad and Ch. Rajeshwar Rao moved close to Mudragada and Dasari. The atmosphere was conducive for the emergence of a third force with Mudragada-Dasari combine, Kapunadu and CPI at the core. Several meetings were held between Dasari-Mudragada on one side and CPI representatives on the other. Ch. Rajeshwar Rao and Mudragada addressed several public meetings jointly. After several rounds of talks Mudragada and the CPI were disenenchanted with Dasari who developed cold feet. The disenchantment was so intense that Mudragada refused to talk to Dasari even on phone.

Thus a serious attempt at third force became abortive, thanks to film personalities used to running with the hare and hunting with the hound.

Since 1982 the Kapus have become a major pressure group within the state demanding greater share in political power. This is particularly reflected in the recent political scenario where the Kapus are becoming a powerful force as against the Reddis and Kammas. Further the BC status problem has come up along with the TDP and played an important role in changing the Governments in elections of 1989 and 1994. In otherwords, Kapus have always been volatile. Though they have been supporting the congress for a long time like other BCs, they have voted in favour of TDP in 1983 and in 1985 elections and again changed their support to Congress in 1989 elections. Again in 1994 elections, they supported the TDP. Thus they were changing loyalties quite frequently.
In a transitional society caste remains and is bound to remain an important factor in the socio-political life. The Kapu, Telega and Balija etc., it is argued, are one and the same but have regional variations. All these castes are endogamous groups. Of late, there has been an increasing awareness among these castes to dissolve their endogamous sub-divisions and to merge with each other as a solid group to fight their demand for B.C. status and their political opponents. From the backward caste groups Kapu community seem to be better placed in influencing the decision making process in the elections today.

Caste in Indian context, covers both the 4 varnas mentioned in the Vedas and carried on still further in time, into jatis. Today the varnas have receded into history and only the jatis are relevant. There are regional differences in the social position of the different castes.

Elite sections of Kammas and Reddis have been at the helm of affairs in Andhra Pradesh for the last 40 years. With caste-consciousness rising in all parts of the country, how can a single caste dominate any area?

Obviously, to those groups within a caste, which had gained money or power to aid their desire for upward mobility, could attempt seriously to improve their status. Unable to escape from their ignoble backgrounds, they were forced to contemplate establishing a new status category for their whole caste. But it is by no means clear that their energy in pamphleteering and polemic made much impact on the less privileged members of their caste, who formed the majority and whose ambitions were limited by lack of power.

In most regions of India, the middle and lower middle level castes enjoy numerical strength and this had resulted in becoming politically significant.

But what is happening at present also provides evidence. Caste as groups are asking for representation in Government through membership of political parties and by demanding tickets for candidates of their own castes in the elections. This means that every caste believes that it is as eligible for participation in Government as any other caste irrespective of its position in the traditional stratification. This phenomenon undermines
the traditional hierarchy. At the same time it indicated caste solidarity. In this regard, it is observed that a particular caste supports one party in one election and another party in the next. The Kapus have long been subjected to cumulative deprivations which include - Political deprivations - political power and material deprivations - economic, educational and employment opportunities.

It should be noted that numerical factor alone does not make a caste dominant. It cannot be taken for granted that everyone in the dominant caste is economically well off. As it happens, one of a few rich peasants/landlords enjoy a dominant position in relation to other members of their own caste. A situation arises in which even though weaker members of the caste acquire influence indirectly in relation to the other caste groups.

In areas where the Kapus, Telagas and Balijas were numerically strong, they emerged as the dominant castes. Further it has been pointed out, in those areas, as far as the Kapu caste was concerned, their economic position, social standing and the numerical strength have made it the dominant caste in the villages. But it is not the case with the whole of Andhra.

A historical analysis of the dynamics of caste hierarchies show that the relative position of a specific caste in the intermediate category is not fixed permanently. While some castes could improve their position (ex: Kammas and Reddis) the others have lost their position (ex: Ontari, Kapu, Telaga and Balija). These sub-castes have been experiencing downward mobility.

The castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya, Velama, Reddi and Kamma have almost always monopolised ritual, economic and political power. Though Ontari, Telaga, Kapu and Baliya sub-castes are listed in forward castes they were never anywhere near the above mentioned forward castes.

Further, though the Ontari, Kapu, Telaga and Baliya sub-castes are numerically large, their strength has not been translated into political power because of lack of economic resources. Though their’s is a single largest community, still Kapus have never had a reasonable share either in productive resources or in instruments of power. In this respect their position is not superior to other backward castes, such as Kalingas, Yadavas,
Gaudas etc. Adding to this the Kapu and its sub-castes has become proletarianised and pauperised due to large size of their families, division of land holdings into small and unviable units, lack of expansion and diversification of economic activities.

The Kapus migrated to villages in irrigated areas and growing cities as manual workers and subsistence migrants i.e., those who migrate to overcome poverty and distress and to earn livelihood. Thus cultural differences operating through perceptions, values and world views between upper and dominant castes on one hand, Kapus and peasant backward castes on the other influenced their responses to the growing opportunities and development process, thereby their status and position in the society. Just as one advantage leading to another advantage, one disadvantage leads to several other disadvantages.

It is generally accepted that the democracy is essentially a game of numbers in a positive sense. Every section of the society should get representation in the political institutions if democracy should be meaningful. Large groups should invariably have decisive role in the political processes. But this will not happen in one day because democratization of political process and transfer of power from oligarchic and elitist groups to populous groups is painfully slow process and is beset with several obstacles. This is what has exactly happened during the last four and half decades. If we examine the trends and patterns of distribution of political offices such as Parliament Members, Legislators, Ministers, Panchayat Samithi Presidents etc., among different castes it is very clear that the numerically smaller castes with economic resources and educational achievements such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya, Velama, Reddi and Kamma have had lion’s share in the political offices.

The combined per cent of the above dominant castes in the legislative Assembly was 47 in 1957 and 46 in 1989. Thus there is only a marginal difference between 1957 and 1989 with regard to their representation in the legislative assembly. In this regard the position of Kapu, Telaga, Ontari and Balija is not better even when compared to the backward castes whose representation increased from 38 in 1957 to 59 in 1985. Moreover, backward castes such as Kalingas and Gavaras constitute only 0.30% each of total population of the state, but have one M.P. each from them. Whereas Ontari, Kapu, Telaga and Balija castes with a strength of 18.60% have 3 M.Ps. from them. Similarly in
the state legislative and the Cabinet, the position of Kapus is not commensurate with their population strength. With regard to the representation of Kapu caste in the cabinet there has been no substantial improvement between 1956 and 1994. The corresponding percentage increased from 7.7% in 1956 to 28% in 1982 but gradually fell down since then and further to 10.5% in 1994.

In Andhra Pradesh even though the efforts to bring together all Kapu sub-castes date back to early 20th century, there has been renewed and sustained attempt to achieve that for the last 17 years or so, with a specific demand to include them into the list of Backward Castes. There has been a very serious sense of relative deprivation among these groups and their disappointment at not being heard and frustration at being neglected has resulted in choosing diametrically opposed political options with significant fortunes for political parties. Expression of dissatisfaction on a massive scale occurs only when the just demands are not properly considered and conceded.

The commitment to long term goals and the ability to defer immediate gratification are considered as necessary for economic and social development of societies by social scientists. The culture and styles of life of Kapu, Telaga, Balia and Ontari groups also reflect such value orientation. Their inability to take advantage of the rapid economic and technological changes are largely due to conservatism and absence of materialistic values. For example not even a single major industrialist in the state belongs to or a single industrial firm is under the control of this group.

In the process of economic change and social mobility India’s increasingly participant communities have grown more politically self-conscious and this self-consciousness has deepened existing cleavages.

Though the Kapu community is said to be the single largest caste in Andhra Pradesh it has now become a very backward class, both economically as well as socially on account of several reasons.

Since this community is very vast, one does find a few individuals who have managed to come up all by themselves, in certain professions and civil services. An odd member of this community reaching the top of either the filmworld or civil service cannot
be held against this community. They could reach the top by their own merit, hard work etc., They can only be termed as the “creamy layer”. But under this “creamy layer” are large multitude of under nourished and impoverished members of this community struggling to remain alive. The majority of this community still remain more backward than most of other castes listed in Backward Classes.

Being born into a particular castes in accidental. We have little control over our upbringing in caste structure. After a certain age we continue to live in the culture of our own caste through a conscious decision. Having been born into a caste, very few can consciously move out of their caste culture.

Moreover the Kapu movement for reservations has manifested and latent repercussions in the social and political spheres of Andhra Pradesh on a large scale.

While in a democratic set up pressure is a legitimate weapon, it cannot be allowed to be executed in such a manner that all legitimacy is lost. Kapus have a right to pressurise the system for their piece of the cake. But why could they not take backward castes with them. Does not it call for some soul-searching. It would be good if they remember that the reservation policy has not been enunciated to solve the political and economic problems of various communities. It can not be used to solve the problems of rising expectations and decreasing opportunities, for all sections of the population, in the job market and the educational sphere. Since there has been very little economic progress, such a development was bound to rise.

The Kapus in their fight against the Government, take the help of other backward castes, but only in a limited extent. In 1985’s Vangaveeti Mohan Ranga Rao, was something of a hero for a wide cross-section of the Vijayawada city’s poor. Almost a decade after his death, stories of his generosity, concern for his supporters and bravery continue to circulate. More importantly, the fact is that Ranga in his own way forged an alliance between the Kapus and the lower caste poor of the Vijayawada city. When these lines are being penned, there are News Paper reports that a life sized bronze statue of V.Mohan Ranga Rao was unveiled in Vijayawada with all fun-fare. There have been recent attempts to broad base the Kapunadu movement by converting it into a larger movement consisting of all backward classes and communities and seeking greater
political representation. The movement, called Telugu Talli, led by Dasari Narayana Rao, is only a beginning in this process.