Chapter-IV

SCHEDULED CASTES IN ANDHRA PRADESH

History tells us that Scheduled Castes have no history of their own. They have been marginalised as objects of the state rather than being treated as the subjects. They are treated as targets of philanthropic and social work rather than citizens of a nation who have equal rights as other citizens to all the benefits that are given to them as worthy citizens. Instead, they have been pushed around and subjugated and exploited at every point in their life. Thus, their status needs to be uplifted and all the atrocities meted out against them, put to an end.

Table IV.1

PERCENTAGE OF SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES TO TOTAL POPULATION IN ANDHRA PRADESH FROM 1961 TO 2001 CENSUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Scheduled castes</th>
<th></th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>13.81</td>
<td>13.82</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>13.27</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>14.84</td>
<td>14.85</td>
<td>5.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>15.95</td>
<td>15.90</td>
<td>15.93</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Directorate of Census Operations, Government of India.

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Table IV.2
**Chandalas**: The various inscriptions do not convey much information about the Chandalas - the untouchables. The famous Malkapuram inscription states that a free feeding house was set up by Vishveswara Sambhu to feed all the needy including Chandalas. It is well known that the untouchables stayed on the outskirts of the villages.

The Dibbida copper plate inscription of Mastya Arjuna, dated S.1191 (A.D. 1269) refers to a tank intended for the use of Antyas (Antyajataka) while delineating the boundaries of the gifted village. This clearly suggests that those who belonged to the lower status of society were not allowed to use the common tanks of the village and that separate tanks were excavated for their use.

Thus, the Chandalas were treated as untouchables during the period in question. They were engaged by the local administration to perform certain menial duties such as cleaning the village streets, removing the dead animals, etc. Some of them were also appointed as messengers and village guards. Making leather goods was one of the professions adopted by one section of this community.

Chandalas were often expected to render service without any special remuneration, a practice which is known as Vetti (free labour). However, some land was allotted for their subsistence as evident from the term Chandala Kshetramu mentioned in the Chevuru plates of Eastern Chalukya Amma.

**Advent of Virasaivism and Vaishnavism**

The advent of Virasaivism and Vaishnavism brought a considerable change in the

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plight of the Chandalas. Since both Saivism and Vaishnavism considered absolute devotion (Bhakthi) as the supreme quality, the practice of casteism was taken to be irrelevant by them and hence the people of all castes including Chandalas were taken into the fold of these two sects provided they accepted and practised Bhakthi in all sincerity. Thus, we see in Palanati Veera Charitramu, for feeding of all castes and communities, who embraced Virasaivism in one and the same time and place. The Basava Puranam and Panditharadhya Charitramu have several stories of the followers of Virasaivism who belonged to all communities including the Malas and Madigas who were among the Chandalas. Thus, it is clear that Virasaivism made efforts to build up a casteless society in which the Scheduled Castes enjoyed self-respect.

The Scheduled Castes

There are about sixty castes which are recognised as SCs in Andhra Pradesh, they account for 16.19 per cent of the total population in Andhra Pradesh. Mala and Madiga are numerically more important SC castes in the State. The Madigas, in terms of caste hierarchy are the lowest and are mainly concentrated in the Telangana region. The Malas are considered as sub-caste menials and are found mostly in coastal Andhra region and in the Chittoor district of Rayalaseema region.

As the esteemed historian Mallampalli Somasekhara Sharma rightly observes: “Society is always a complex problem and more complex is the pattern of the Hindu society; it is not so easy to give a clear and detailed picture of Hindu society as it evolved through centuries of its development with the many exogamous and endogamous divisions”.

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Table IV.3
Hence keeping this and the limitations of the present work which is a micro-level study of the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, the scholar proposes to give only a brief account of the important castes and communities other than the SCs which constitute the society of the period in question.

**Structure of the SCs**

Before we go into the details of the living conditions, socio-economic and politico-cultural conditions of SCs, it should not be out of place to record a brief account of the structure of the untouchable castes.

**The Problem of Hierarchy**

The Scheduled Castes and sub-castes everywhere in India, lack consensus on any hierarchical order among them and Andhra Pradesh is no exception. Each of these castes argues for a superior status in comparison with other untouchable castes.

In some coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, the two dominant Scheduled Castes – Malas and Madigas - eat beef, water-buffalo meat and the camion of cow and buffalo. However, Madigas are considered inferior to Malas since they work on leather. But in the districts of Telangana and in some parts of Rayalaseema, Madigas claim superior status over the Malas, and do not eat the meat of water-buffalo and camion. The hierarchical position of these castes has been a long-standing problem often leading to conflicts and tensions in Southern Andhra Pradesh.

The hierarchy among the untouchables, whenever it is claimed is based on different principles: proximity with higher caste, association and incorporation in the village life and emulation of the dominant high castes. These norms exist along side the ideology of ritual purity and impurity but their importance is much greater than the latter.
table IV.4
Table IV.4a
Table IV.5
Association with High Castes

The important criterion for claiming a superior status among the untouchables is their association with high castes. This typical character of the feeling of superiority is quite widespread among the Scheduled Castes. Even among the high castes, a socially inferior person always tries to link himself with a person of high rank either by extending his kinship network or by friendship in order to elevate his social status.

The Yanadi tribe (a new untouchable community) of Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh) is divided into Reddy or Raithu and Sarkar (government) groups until recently. The former group considered itself superior to the latter because of its association with the Reddy caste, which dominates politics and economy in this area. The Reddy Yanadi group lives in villages along with the other castes whereas the Sarkari Yanadi groups isolated themselves, living in the forests serving the State forest department.

The principle of association ranks the groups within the village just as it ranks individuals within the group. Through proximity to higher caste people which equals economic and political centrality provides an untouchable with a higher state. This principle of hierarchy among untouchables can be found if social distance in everyday social intercourse is taken into account. In Andhra Pradesh excluding Telangana, there is a pattern of demographic distribution of Malas and Madigas who are predominant in south western districts whereas Malas are predominant in number in eastern and Southern districts.

In every village there are separate Mala and Madiga hamlets integrated with the village functionally. The services rendered by them to the village are Vetti (by village servant), digging graves for the dead bodies and high castes, sacrificial animals during
village rituals, *Neerukattu* (watering the fields) and *Bandila* (guarding the fields from stray cattle).\(^5\) For these services they are given rent free lands called *Manyam*.

**Malas Minimum Dependence on High Castes**

These services are rendered to the high castes by either Malas or Madigas wherever necessary alternatively or simultaneously. These services are distributed between these two Scheduled Castes. The implication of the state of affairs is crucial as it determines the social status of these people.

Even though the caste Hindus assign high status to Malas, the association of Malas with high castes is limited. The village administration included Munasab, Karanam and four village servants until 1984, while the first two positions were held by high castes that have been abolished and stored, others have been continued. Out of the four village servants one is a Mala, one is a Vetti Mala and the remaining two are Madigas.

**Patron-Client Relations**

Further, Malas have been living independently on their own either as workers or agriculturists. Thus, their association with high castes has been minimum whereas Madigas depend on high castes for their work as farm servants. Madigas maintained patron-client or landlord-servant relationships by way of *Kamatalu* until 1975. They have been giving what is called *Pydimudupu*, gift brought by the bridegroom to Kamma landlords whenever they are married.

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\(^5\) Those who water the fields are called *Neeru Kottu Vallu* while those who guard the fields from stray animals are known as *Bandilolu*. 
Table IV.6
Table IV.7
Thus, Madigas who are assigned the lowest status have been maintaining closer relations with high castes compared to the two other untouchable castes. Because of this, Madigas emphatically deny the inferior status ascribed to them as against the superior status to Malas who dissociate themselves from the high castes.

**Incorporation in the Temple Rituals**

The second principle operating behind the hierarchy among the Scheduled Castes is incorporation in the ritual and reception of temple ‘honours’ of the high castes.

Madigas are generally associated with the village rituals. There used to be three village rituals: *Theppa Thirunala, Katalamma Pongallu* and *Munindamma Jatara*. During these rituals Madigas beat. In *Theppa Thirunala*, they swim in the village reservoir to bring back a goat left on a raft floating in water.⁶

The goat is then shared by Madigas during the *Poleramma* festival. Madigas take buffaloes from high caste people who offer them to the goddess Poleramma. The other untouchable castes do not have much role in these village rituals. From the Mala *Asadis* are hired by Kammas for village rituals. Therefore, incorporation of Madigas in the rituals is greater compared to the other Scheduled Castes. This given them prestige and status.

**Dekkali**

The relationship of status becomes clear with the lower status assigned to the Dekkalis. They beg from Madigas and the latter say that Dekkali is a ‘half-caste’ and not a full caste. It means that this caste has not been incorporated in the village of caste

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system and does not have any particular occupation or service to render to the high castes. They are marginal and remain at the periphery of the caste system. Because they are not within the caste system, Dekkalis are considered inferior to Madigas.

**Control of Political Economy by the Dominant Castes**

The third aspect in structuring the untouchable castes lies in the limitation of political and economic role, relationships of the local dominant caste over the other castes. Political power in Indian villages is brought about by the control on land ownership of land. Wherever a group consolidated the numerical strength and occupied vast traces of land, it generated a territorial social organisation in which hierarchical relations were manifested. The dominant caste that controlled a large extent of land and labour produced inequality and created hierarchical relations with the less dominant or numerically weak caste or sub-caste and other castes. Thus, we find the uneven territorial distribution of different caste groups, predominance of certain caste people in one area and some other castes in other areas.

The structure of the caste system may also be viewed from a different perspective of extra-village organisations and relationships with the dependence castes. Some high castes have developed a symbolic relationship with subordinate castes. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh there is a caste called *Vipravinodin*, the members of which used to be professional conjurers and collected alms only from Brahmins. Similarly, the *Pitchakuntala* caste people were bards and genealogists for the Reddy or Kapu caste. Thus, economically and politically dominant castes maintain attached castes.

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9 *Gazetter, 1974, p. 45.*  
Further, the dominant caste controls and organises the rest of the castes in the village not only on daily needs but also at specific times such as village rituals. In Andhra Pradesh, such village rituals are popularly known as _Jatharas_ wherein all important castes like washermen (Chakali), Potters (Kummari), Barbers (Mangali), Toddy tappers (_Kallugeetha_) and untouchable Asadis are required to participate by taking up different roles. Such rituals generally exhibit the domination of a high caste.\(^\text{11}\)

The Mala and Madiga castes, besides participating in these village rituals, conduct similar rituals in their respective live localities separately and utilise the services of their sub-castes.

**Caste structure in a village**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brahmin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barber → Dominant Caste ← Artisan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washerman ↑ Potter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structure of Mala and Madiga castes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mala Dasu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asadi → Mala ← Mala Mangali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malamastin ↑ Mala Chakali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ Pambala</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Untouchable – Sub-castes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sangari / Matangi guru</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dakkali → Madiga ← Madiga Mastin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑ Chindu ↑ Kommuvaru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑ Erupula ↑ Binedu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Untouchable Sub-castes

The functional relationship of several untouchable sub-castes in Andhra Pradesh suggest a limitation or adoption of the rituals of local dominant high caste.

The numerically dominant Mala and Madiga castes look like a parallel full-fledged community within the broad framework of the Hindu society.

Each caste is divided into several sub-castes such as Dasari, Mastin, pambala, Binedu, Asadi, Chindu, Dekkali, Kommuvaru and Sangari.

In the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, Madigas, the central caste has six satellite castes. They are Sangari - spiritual guides, preachers of caste defined moral standards, caste rules and conduct - Bindu or Baindla, Erpula (whose members participate in village rituals) Sindu or Chindu consists of drama troopers who also supply women dedicated to goddess Matangi, Mastin (acrobats) or Dommari and Dekkali (beggars). These satellite castes are mostly nomadic and numerically marginal.

From the above account, we note that the social structure of the Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh is based on diverse principles such as proximity to political and economic centre, incorporation in the village or caste system, participation in the village rituals and dependency on the political and economic power of the dominant castes. These principles underlie the most articulated idioms, purity and impurity.12

12 Ibid.
Table IV.8
Table IV.9
Table IV.10
Table IV.11
Table IV.12
Table IV.13
Table IV.14
An Overview

Untouchables in general depend on the dominant castes of their locality which control land, economy and political power. Whichever untouchable caste or sub-caste that associates with the dominant caste claims superiority of status over the other Scheduled Castes or sub-castes. This association of the Scheduled Caste with the dominant caste is concerned not only with providing labour force but also participation in the village rituals by taking low roles assigned to them. The grades within a sub-caste are related to their specific services rendered to the dominant caste and other high castes. The grade which is close to or has easy access to political and economic power—village administration—claims superiority in relation to the rest.\textsuperscript{13}

SCs are scattered all over the State of Andhra Pradesh. They are not concentrated in large number in any particular district or mandal. Further, they are divided within themselves into several sub-castes. Internal social hierarchy, economic differentiation and dispersed population have always influenced the strength and weakness of SC’s awakening and unity.

Each of these has a specific function in relation to the two main Scheduled Castes – Malas and Madigas. The sub-castes are “professional groups as each is identified with a particular profession.”

Each of the main castes has an exclusive religious head, in case of the Malas, \textit{Karmayya} was the religious head. He is not a Mala. He belongs to a non-untouchable caste. However, similar to the Vallur Pandarams, they have \textit{Maladasari} who functions as priest. Madigas have \textit{Matangi guru} as the spiritual leader.

In both castes there are separate Asadi sub-castes, medicine men and exorcists. They also participate in village rituals, reciting verses or praising goddess. Similarly, Mastins are roving acrobats for both castes. For narrating stories of the village goddess, there is a separate sub-caste called Binedu for both castes. They substitute the Asadis in the village rituals if necessary.

The Madigas have in addition to Binedu, the Pambala sub-caste which can substitute for both Asadis and Binedus.\textsuperscript{14} The Pambalas are accompanied by Kommuvarus wherever they go to participate in rituals.

Dekkali is the custodians of Madigas legendary lore and is the most detested caste. They accept food from Madigas. But they are not even allowed to enter the hamlets of Madigas.

Malas have a praising sub-caste which narrates semi-historical stories concerning the Palanadu region (Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh).

There is another sub-caste called Chindu which stages dramatic scenes from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. In some places, there are \textit{Mala Chakalis} (washer men) and \textit{Mala Mangalis} (barbers) but similar sub-castes are absent in Madiga caste.

Each village consists of some families of Mala and Madiga castes and sometimes one or two sub-castes. These sub-castes are ‘functionaries’ and are scattered about. On an average, one family is found to represent one profession for every 15 villages. Their

\textsuperscript{14}Pambala is a Mala sub-caste while Binedu is a Madiga sub-caste.
dependency on the economically and numerically dominant castes, Mala and Madiga speaks of the autonomous nature of these castes with reference to their sub-castes.

Within the SCs, there is also a regional dimension. The Malas are in majority in coastal Andhra districts out of the total population of Malas, 75 per cent hail from the Coastal region of Andhra Pradesh. Madigas are mostly spread over the Rayalaseema region, 60 per cent.

Madigas, who were traditionally leather workers, gradually transformed into manual labourers. Around 17 per cent of them were dependent on their traditional occupation in 1921 and 68 per cent of them worked as agricultural labourers. It has been estimated that less than 10 per cent of SC communities owned agricultural land. Hence, their main source of livelihood was manual labour. Being at the bottom of the social hierarchy and burdened by tradition they performed all sorts of impure and odd jobs.

The access to education was quite negligible for SCs during the pre-Independence period. No social or political organisation really championed their cause till about the middle of the nineteenth century. It was only the Christian missionaries who provided them solace, comfort and self-respect.

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