CHAPTER IV

AUTONOMOUS GENDER AND CASTE MOVEMENTS IN ANDHRA PRADESH: AUTONOMY OR FRAGMENTATION?
In the first part of this study, we pointed out certain cardinal dichotomies between the movements that were potentially fragmenting the social movements in Andhra Pradesh. We also argued that through a more integrated and comprehensive approach to social reality at each of the levels-material, discursive and strategic-movements can potentially overcome fragmentation and forge durable solidarity. However, the approaches developed in each of the first three chapters are not mere theoretical elaborations delinked from concrete material conditions in Andhra Pradesh. There are certain social-material conditions, along with the dichotomised practices, which are the basis for these approaches. In other words, the focus of this chapter would be to enumerate in detail the history of autonomous caste and gender movements in A.P to locate the various cardinal dichotomies and also those alternative processes, which are drawing the movements together, and making durable solidarity a plausible reality. This circuitous method has been adopted so that a more comprehensive empirical study of the movements can be done with the theoretical elaborations in the backdrop.

**Autonomous Women’s Movement In Andhra Pradesh.**

The discussion around women’s issues and the origin of women’s movements in Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) can be traced back to Telangana people’s struggle (1946-51). The impact of issues and questions raised by the women who participated in this armed struggle and also by later women’s groups has been quite significant on contemporary women’s movement in A.P. In fact, one could say there is a clear continuity in the nature of issues being raised, especially with reference to the relationship between women’s interests and the communist led armed movements, which have considerable presence in the contemporary political scenario of A.P. The aspiration for autonomy by some of the women’s groups can best be understood in light of the historical trajectory of debates around women’s issues, right from 1950’s to the recent years.
Telangana armed struggle was primarily against the feudal order. Feudal oppression was structured around amassing of land and various discriminatory cultural practices relating to dalits and women. Forty percent of the area of the entire state came under the jagirs (i.e., hereditary property of those revenue officials who were loyal to the asif jahi nizam), *samsthanams* (land under traditional Hindu rulers who paid annual tribute to the nizam) and sarf-e-khas (land administered by Nizam and his family for their personal expenses). The remaining sixty percent of the territory was directly under the administration of the state government and ryotwari system operated here, wherein the middlemen played an important role in collecting huge land revenue. They amassed enormous stretches of land and became landlords. (For instance, the Pratap Reddy family possessed around 1,50,000 acres of land.)

Because of such complete centralisation of ownership of land, the majority of landless population was subjected to various dehumanising practices. One of them being *vetti*, which meant free services had to be rendered to the landlord by the people of various castes- blacksmiths, carpenters etc. ‘Most of the agricultural labourers on whom vetti obligations fell were from the lower and untouchable castes of Malas and Madigas’. Similarly, the tribals were exploited under the *bhagela system*. The bhagela serfs were customary retainers tied to their masters by debt. Unable to repay their debts, they continued to work as domestic or menial labourers, generation after generation.

The conditions affecting women were ‘doubly oppressive’. They were not only affected by the economic oppression of the landlord and the moneylender but also exploited physically and sexually. Rape was an everyday reality. Apart from all this *Adi bapa* or concubinage was prevalent. “Adi bapa was a form of concubinage peculiar to Telangana where a young girl usually from a bonded family had to accompany the bride

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1 Stree Shakti Sanghatana, We were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People’s Struggle, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989, p.4.

2 Ibid, p.5

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to her husband’s house to tend her mistress, and to provide sexual services to the master.\(^3\)

The nature of oppression of upper class and caste women was qualitatively different. Purdah, child marriage and early widowhood were some of the dehumanising practices. However they did not play an active role in the Telangana people’s movement.

There was a shift in the political situation of the Hyderabad state with the assertion of cultural rights by the Telugu people with the establishment of Andhra Jana Sangham in 1921. “Soon the Andhra Jana Sangham converted itself into the Andhra Maha Sabha which was to be the focal point not only of the social and cultural but also of political activity.”\(^4\) AMS was initially an assemblage of people with different views but gradually it came closer to Andhra Communist Party. Under the leadership of the communists the AMS assumed the character of a mass organisation. By November 1946 the decision for armed resistance was taken and village defence squads were formed. Struggle against the landlords of various districts was intensified. This armed movement brought some radical changes in the otherwise rigid and oppressive feudal structure of the Telangana region. This is where the issue of relation between women and communist movement becomes extremely significant. It not only influenced the politics within communist movement but also had larger ramifications in sowing seeds for the emergence of autonomous women’s groups in AP. Any conceptualisation on autonomy and solidarity between women’s movement and the left movement has to, inevitably, begin here. Paradoxically, the issues raised by women in this armed struggle became the inspiration for both women in the present day armed struggles and also the autonomous women’s groups.


It was the communist party, which mobilized the rural women of Telangana for the first time in the history of this region. They not only gave them education but also took up issues that directly affected women. They mobilized women around not only wages and other economic forms of feudal oppression but also issues such as childcare, wife beating, hygiene and the right to breast feed infants during work. Sangham (as the communist party was often referred to) also initiated action to get local authorities to construct lavatories for women. It is clear that communist party did take up women oriented issues during the course of their struggle. However, the problem was the 'politics' or lack of it behind these struggles. “We do not find that there was an awareness of these gender specific areas as valid sites of political struggle, … mobilisation around these issues drew their loyalty and support without leading to an increased awareness of the nature or source of that subordination”5. It is the ‘specificity’ or autonomy to politics behind women’s issues that was missing in the radical left’s perspective on mobilisation of women. It was the specific autonomy women’s issues needed from macro transformative agenda of an armed anti-feudal movement, and the fundamental changes that the agenda itself had to undergo in light of the specificity of women’s issues. The dialectical interaction between specificity of women’s struggles and the anti-feudal nature of the struggle was what was missing and thereby instead of becoming a site of emancipation, Left politics emerged as a new form of authority. New forms of authority could be felt at various points- from recruitment to post movement consequences.

Party often found it very difficult to absorb women into its rank risking its reputation and alienating public sympathy. There was often possibility of propaganda that if women enter in large numbers there would be no ‘morality’ left in the communist party. Party leadership often took ambiguous stands on this. This often led to ‘reinforcement of traditional ideologies’. “So women had to fight against traditional beliefs and feudal outlook even to become a part of the political struggle. That

5 Vasantha Kannabiran, 1989 op.cit, p.187.
supporting the women in these personal struggles and politicising the context of that struggle could have brought a new and progressive philosophy into existence was apparently a possibility that the party did not realize.  

Once women managed to enter the party and in some cases into the squads, they were often relegated to 'secondary' and 'supportive' roles. Though there was ideological recognition to transform traditional roles, 'everyday behaviour invariably relegated domestic chores to the women'. While few women carried guns they were generally helpful in cooking, taking messages, nursing wounded comrades, etc. In fact, P. Sunderayya's chapter on women in history of Telangana people's struggle refers to a letter from a young women who joined the squad in 1950 and was an active cadre. She wrote, “We women are still looked upon with the old outlook, that we are inferior. Any slip or mistake we commit our leaders come down very heavily on us... why have you not allowed any woman to participate in actual guerrilla raids on the enemy”.

Apart from not only neglecting the issue of the division of labour, party could not evolve a policy on problems of child birth, sexuality, unmarried women, and reproduction, that directly affected women in the party. Women comrades were forced to give away children after they were born. Party considered these more as ‘personal’ problems of individual cadre rather than a ‘political’ question that had important cultural dimensions. Single women were considered as a problem for the ‘moral purity’ of the party. There was an implicit but definite pressure to marry that operated on the women. Marriage was a way of defining in more clear terms the status of the women and also to avoid the problem of unwanted sexual advances. There was definitely an attempt to settle these problems as and when they arise. Given the exigencies of the situation perhaps the party could not evolve a rational policy. But more importantly it was an ideological and political ambiguity born out of a definite lack of recognition of the 'specificity' of women's problems and the absence of encouragement for a parallel...

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6 Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989 op. cit, p.263
7 Ibid, p.24
struggle within the party on these issues. This attitude of the party got clearly reflected in its 'depolitisized' responses to these situations and "it was diluted into a moral problem, a guilt at having violated family happiness. Once again there is no analysis on it as a political issue that had to be addressed if the movement was serious about women". These moral terms according to which women were defined and judged were that of the private domain- 'the domain of the family, household, domestic labour and reproduction'. The dichotomy between the moral/personal and the political conditioned the women's role and struggle within the party.

The power – patriarchal relations got structured in the party and not only were the problems of women moralised but any political discussion was often considered as violation of party discipline. Women were warned under party discipline not to support other women under criticism. There was a sort of undeclared prohibition on women rallying around issues specific to women. This delimited the focus of the party and often left it with no sophisticated analysis of the issues of culture and ideology. Those who wished to raise issues of culture had to face the rigid prism of economism. "In turning away from issues of culture and consciousness and viewing organisation purely as a matter of political organisation the old relationships of power and authority are not only reproduced but also reinforced". While the domain of the operation for the party was politico-economic, women raised issues that strictly belonged to the socio-cultural domain. This uneasy relation between these two domains or 'levels' of the party activity and the women cadre often resulted in marginalisation of a set of issues through authoritative political interpretations. Thus a bifurcation of issues emerged (as presented in the base-superstructure model).

The tension in the relation between the party and its women cadre got reflected not only in the different domains of the functioning but also the strategy of transformation. The way women cadre related to the transformatory goals of the party

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8 Ibid, p.25
9 Vasantha Kannabiran, 1989 op.cit. p.198.
were distinct from the macro anti-feudal struggle of the party. While party was struggling against forced labour and landlordism and feudal structures, women joined the party more as a "place of refuge, a sanctioned or legitimate opportunity for escape from the confinement of the family, of womanhood, and the microdynamics of oppression..."\(^{10}\). It is for the emancipation from these microforms that women joined and related to the party. Women activists later reflecting and writing on the movement commented with amusement that, "we heard almost nothing about planning or decision making, or of macro-political or tactical problems being discussed"\(^{11}\). Thus, strategies of transformation got bifurcated into macro-revolutionary and micro-social reform strategies.

Under severe state repression by the Indian army, the politbureau of the party took the decision in 1951 to call off the movement after prolonged discussions. Once the movement was called off women were asked to go back to their homes, unaware of the fact that majority of the women joined the movement to escape this very 'home'. "It was this lack of awareness of what it meant for them to go back and complacency of the assumption that the home was their place after all, that really hurt the women"\(^{12}\). They all went back to the private world to bear the burden of their family. Some of them begged to feed their children, some carried liquor and worked as wage labourers and some (as a husband put it) were simply 'eating and sleeping'. They earned no means through their participation in the struggle to redefine their lives and give a new meaning even after the struggle. This clearly reflected how marginal they were to the struggle and how distant the struggle was from them. The fact that, for instance, women did not get land rights in the land distribution programme reflects the unchanged status of women.

It was after almost fifteen years that there was an opportunity to reassess the relation between women's issues and the left movement during the Srikakulam uprising.

\(^{10}\) Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989, op.cit, Pp.29-30.
\(^{11}\) Ibid, p.29.
\(^{12}\) Ibid, p.272
of 1967-71. This movement was primarily based among the tribal people under the leadership of the Naxalites. It was a peasant revolt with people from both tribal areas and the plains. It was primarily against the landlord-state nexus for access to forest produce, tribal lands etc. The movement in general did not generate women leadership in the guerrilla squads. Those women from plains who did assume leadership positions were in fact often women who had relationship with the leadership of the party (either as their wives or as their daughters).

However, the more significant aspect of this movement was that it formed separate women's organization, as part of the movement for the first time. Girijan Mahila Sangham was formed after the movement took a militant character. "These Sanghams were instrumental in mobilising women for meetings, processions, protest marches, public meetings and strikes"¹³. However, it is important to comprehend that these Mahila Sangham's were 'loose associations which were structurally not always distinguishable from the main Girijan Sanghams'. The role of women in such movements contributed for a clearer conceptualisation of what autonomy meant, for the women in contemporary autonomous women’s groups.

The decade of 1970's was marked by the formation of various separate women's groups with varying levels of autonomy from the overwhelming influence of the Marxist-Leninist groups and the armed struggle led by them. Not only were the women's issues brought to the forefront but also the relation with the M-L parties began, for the first time, to be more openly debated about and conceptualised in more political and ideological terms. It is however interesting to note that in all these separate women's groups, it was either the sympathisers or ex-members of the M-L groups, who were in the leadership ranks.

Along with Telangana and Srikakulam armed movements various CPI (M-L) groups continue to inspire the youth in the urban areas, from the middle classes. It was this inspiration coupled with the increasing conflict women of the urban-middle classes entered into with their traditional family values at home, and also the progressive ideals they encountered through their education and political atmosphere in the educational institutions. Women students began to take active part in the movements such as anti-price rise, along with CPI M-L student groups such as PDSU. However, in course of their interaction with male leadership in such movements they realised that it was necessary to have separate women's organisations not only to discuss and prioritise women’s issues but also to mobilise and provide more opportunities. This sparked off discussions with M-L student organisations whether it is necessary to have separate women’s organisations. “The principal response of male students was that it was anti-Marxist to have a separate women’s organisation, that women are not a class by themselves; that only an economic revolution would ultimately and automatically emancipate women....” 14 It was obviously very difficult to break free from the ideological perspective of M-L groups, not only because of the intellectual dominance of Marxism in those days but also the mass following these groups enjoyed in various pockets of AP. The question that obviously troubled women activists was whether micro-level organisations/ movements make any sense or impact before the macro movements, aiming at large structural changes.

However, at a city convention held on 29th September 1974, an organisation called the Progressive Organisation of Women (POW) was formally established. Around 500 members registered. The political and ideological relation with M-L mass organisations was still very ambiguous. It was only felt, at this stage, that separate women’s organisations were necessary but the nature of autonomy was not clearly conceptualised. This ambiguity is clear from the manifesto of POW. To continue their

tie with the M-L groups on the one hand and yet proclaim some separateness on the other, they divided the manifesto into 'long term goals' and 'immediate demands'. While the long term goals refer to the fight against feudal economy, foreign exploitation, monopoly houses and fight for 'production-oriented education system' and propagating scientific socialism, the immediate demands included legislations against dowry, child marriage, obscene art degrading women and laws for implementation of equal pay for equal work, and inheritance rights. These demands and struggles were divided as if one had nothing to do with the other. There was no clarity as to at what points there was a commonality of interest with ML parties and at what points was there a need for separateness or autonomy. What autonomy meant was fuzzy at this point of time in the development of women's movement in AP.

Within a years functioning of POW, emergency was declared in the country. Most of the important members of the POW including the president of the organisation were arrested and implicated in various cases. At the beginning of 1976 almost all the activities of POW were paralysed and it disintegrated. It is interesting to observe that while at the beginning of POW activities it claimed to have very few M-L activists as its members, 'by the time state of emergency had been declared eighty percent of the organisers of the POW had become members of the M-L parties'. While it clearly began as a separate organisation for women, it got gradually merged with M-L activity and then disintegrated. This reflects that autonomy at this point of time referred only to the organisational form and structure and nothing beyond it. What should be the role of activists in separate women's organisations who also sympathise with M-L parties? How are the political ideological perspectives different from an armed movement? How could urban, middle class, upper caste organisations relate to predominantly rural based movements of the M-L parties? What separate strategy was necessary to organise women of the middle classes? These were some of the questions that could have

concretised the idea of autonomy around a more differentiated notion of totality but were left completely unanswered.

In fact, the early disintegration of POW led to a sort of dichotomising of interests by the women's activists who believed in a more substantive notion of autonomy. As one of the women's activists writes that, "due to the Marxist–Leninist orientation of POW, the struggle had to assume a 'proletarian' base which was sought in the bastees. One is left wondering what middle class women can do 'for' bastee women (or peasant women) unless they have first broken the sexist and patriarchal fetters which keep them down?"16

Autonomy came to mean *separateness of constituencies*. In other words, while women's movement had to concentrate on urban middle class women, M-L parties could concentrate on rural and urban poor. Instead of distinctness of 'politics' that can mobilise all sections of society, autonomy for women's groups outside the M-L parties and mass organisations came to mean mobilisation of a distinct constituency or section of the society. This ambiguity around what autonomy meant could very well be the reason why these women's groups remained more as urban based activist or research groups without much of mass following (most of the autonomous women's groups in AP continue to be small groups without any presence in the rural areas or for that matter mass following in the urban areas).

However, experiments such as that of POW definitely brought onto the agenda the issue of autonomy of women's organisations from the radical left groups. Immediately after the emergency in 1977, Stree Shakti Sanghatana was formed with women who had left and liberal leanings. They attempted to work on issues they believed would be of priority to the women and also formulate a perspective closer to the experience of the third world women. They rallied women around issues such as demands for women's hostels, against rape, dowry, communal violence, etc. Such organisations

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16 Ibid, p.60.
struggled more as pressure groups rather than mass organisations and therefore gradually converted themselves into research groups. Such experiments led to the formation of groups such as the Feminist Study Circle in 1979. Formation of such groups was not only out of an explicit ideological perspective but also, interestingly, by members who earlier belonged to the various M-L groups. Formation of the Feminist Study Circle was the result of a controversy over a condolence resolution arranged for Chalam, a powerful literary writer on women's issues such as sexual repression, demolition of family system, etc. As the leadership of UCCRI (M-L) was unhappy about this ideological drift, women activists had to resign to the party membership. There were also individuals who walked out of Civil Rights organisations such as Organisation for Protection of Democratic Rights (OPDR), where no autonomy for women's questions was recognised. Feminist Study Circle concentrated on organising discussions, public meetings and publications. Gradually such groups could not however sustain their activity, and limited themselves to organising discussions and a few publications. Most of such groups were marginalized in the political scenario of AP because of their failure in mass mobilisation. They remained as study groups with individuals who were not part of a 'social movement', in any proper sense. These groups had to struggle for legitimacy of their activities and ideas in a context where ML groups were successful in mobilising large sections of the society, especially in the rural areas.

The issue of mass movements for structural transformation (which was central to the idea of a revolutionary movement as against a reformistic one) became a pertinent issue around which the legitimacy of the idea of autonomy got structured. Moral and ideological notion of autonomy had to confront political mobilisation of large sections of the society by the ML groups. Feminists attempted to confront these attacks on their legitimacy by arguing that all mass movements (or revolutionary movements) need not have the same structure as that of ML movements and instead women's movements would be more 'sporadic', 'spontaneous', and 'leaderless'. Feminists in AP, in fact,
argued that these alternative forms of mass movements are more democratic and are representative of an autonomous feminist perspective. They further argue that for sustained mass mobilisation, like that of the ML groups, the organisational structure has to be rigid with a ‘top-down’ approach, where many members of various social sections (like the women, dalits, etc.) find no representation. Masses also became mute spectators rather than active participants in such movements.

Paradoxically, the decade of 1990’s began with one of the largest and most powerful mass movement of women in the post independence era. The anti-liquor movement was a large movement with thousands of women participating and this time, apparently, for important ‘structural’ changes in their social conditions. It obviously attracted varied and conflicting interpretations from various corners. The issue of the autonomy was negotiated till the 90’s vis-à-vis radical left politics, however with the antiliquor movement it became more complex, with the discussion on autonomy of dalit women from urban middle class women. Dalit politics, by 1990’s came to occupy very important social, political and ideological space in AP. Anti-liquor movement exemplified the politics of all these groups and opened new vistas in characterising the nature of the autonomy in more definite and substantive terms.

Anti-arrack movement began in August 1992, in a remote village of Dubagunta of Nellore district. Women of the village stopped vending of arrack in their village after three men lost their way and drowned in a tank. Women stopped arrack carts and jeeps from entering the village. Eventually the village arrack shop was closed down and gave relief to women, from abject poverty and domestic violence. This important incident found its way into the reading material of the literacy primers for adult education. Dubagunta village incident was written as a story (‘advallu ekamaithe’-if women unite), which was widely popularised by the Government initiated Akshara Deepam Programme, actively aided by the volunteers of Jana Vignana Vedika (organisation of the CPIM). Thereafter, the harmless literacy campaign created a wave among the women of, initially,
As Anveshi, Feminist group of Hyderabad, says there was no single origin of the movement and the aforesaid story was one of the most prominent and known origins of the movement. However, more controversial issues around which the writers representing dalit, women’s and ML organisations have widespread difference of interpretation are those pertaining to the cause and effect of the movement. It is interesting to observe that the differences of interpretation persist not only among dalit, feminist and ML organisations but also even between various women’s groups. Some of the feminist organisations have argued that it was the ‘personal tragedies’, mostly domestic violence (which in fact forced some to commit suicide) that led to the struggle against arrack. Anveshi group conducted a field survey of the movement and observed that, “women kept bringing up the daily harassment they and their children suffered at the hands of men who came home drunk and in an abusive mood” 18. According to them single most significant impact of the movement was on the gender relations. Women had become more confident and united against men even at ‘public spaces’ like the arrack shop. They overcame personal shame in making both their husbands abusive behaviour and the resistance they are offering public.

However, other feminist groups disagree that family alone was the focus of the anti-arrack movement. Instead, women in this movement went beyond the traditional and conventional divisions between the public and private, in order to comprehend the hidden linkages between family violence, and the state and the liquor lobby. They understood that behind their abusive husbands was the whole support structure led by the arrack contractors, police, goondas, legislators, ministers, officials and bureaucrats 19. By realising the nature and character of the edifice of the state and other related structures,

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not only have the women in the anti-arrack struggle made personal issues political but also compelled various social and political groups to realise that family is as important a site of political mobilisation as caste and class.

These interpretations are however in contrast to those who have written representing the ML groups in the state. They have argued that anti-arrack movement is against the ruling classes, state and its economic policies. These are in fact the 'structural' reasons against which they are struggling. In 1980's, the unemployment was on the rise, there was no substantial increase in the wages, prices of essential commodities increased by 30-50 percent, and the subsidised rice scheme (Rs.2 kilo rice) was withdrawn. These policies were the direct outcome of the States unwillingness to displease affluent by taking their growing wealth and the nexus with the liquor lobby for easy and quick sources to enrich themselves. Coupled with this withdrawal of welfare policies was a policy of a state to increase its revenues through excise duty. It was collecting not less than Rs.1200 crores in 1990-91, almost double of its previous years income of Rs 611 crores of excise duty. According to ML groups and their representative writers, it was this 'objective' condition that was 'subjectively' perceived in arrack as the major cause of ruin of their living conditions and family life. Anti-arrack movement was therefore primarily against the state and the liquor contractors. "The antiliquor movement has not merely raised a women question as being portrayed by the press and a section of the intelligentsia but also targeted its attack on the nexus between the so-called people's representatives, police and arrack contractors". They, however, further argue that this objective situation had a definite 'extra-economic' dimension, i.e. 'the gender specificity of the suffering'. Finally commenting on women's contribution to the anti-arrack movement they say that, "to their credit it can be said that they have converted a

21 Ibid.
women’s movement to a people’s movement which among other issues of class and state power is equally concerned with women’s question” 22.

Feminists have also argued that anti-arrack movement is ‘also’ a struggle against the state and the liquor lobby. However, the important distinction lies in the fact that feminists argue that women confront these structures more as ‘gendered’ institutions working against women’s interest rather than as political and economical structures against ‘peoples’ interest. Only through their specific ‘experience’ as ‘women’ do they learn the necessity of struggling against the state and the liquor lobby to get relief from domestic violence and poor living conditions. The issue of domestic violence being the nodal point, makes the anti arrack movement a women’s movement rather than a generic attack against the state and class. They have privileged a process mediated through the subjective ‘experience’.

Feminists have argued in detail that it is this classist and economistic approach that has often landed ML groups in quite paradoxical and ironical situations. Feminist groups do acknowledge that ML parties fought the first battle against arrack, since 1980’s. They took up the issue of arrack to mobilise people as part of their land struggles. Since 1981, ML parties began organised attack on arrack contractors, unlike earlier times when they use to attack and punish the locals who use to illegally prepare arrack. By march 1982, the prices of arrack soared and created problems for the rural poor. They were pushed to subsistence living. As a reaction to this ML parties came out with the demand for reducing the prices of arrack. They carried out a series of attacks on the contractors to reduce prices. By 1983-84 this struggle spread to almost all the districts of Telangana.

In 1988, for the first time prices of arrack were reduced. In the districts of karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal arrack prices reduced from Rs.55 a litre to Rs. 27.
There were two immediate consequences with the reduction in the prices of arrack. While the contractors began to prepare and sell arrack illegally and made crores of profit, state lost out on the excise revenue. Arrack began to be illegally sold in the arrack depots itself. This led to the second consequence, where rural poor began to consume more arrack as they could afford to drink more with the same money. It created further distress in their domestic life.

Feminists are now arguing that because ML parties took up the issue of arrack as part of land struggles, i.e. arrack as an impediment to peoples mobilisation, and as a class issue i.e. against the contractors, landlords and the state power, it not only built paradoxical situation where it was demanding price reduction and also asking rural poor not to consume arrack, but also failed to recognise the suffering of women and the potential rural women had to protest and struggle against arrack and the social conditions in the villages. ML parties therefore could not wage any mass struggles except the direct action of the *dalams*.

Feminist groups further argued that anti arrack movement also brought forth novel and radical forms of organisation and mobilisation, into the politics of mass movements. Most of them argued that anti arrack movement demonstrated a ‘leaderless’ mass movement, which is specific to the women’s approach to the mass politics. According to them it is “an extremely interesting outcome of the struggle (is) that there is no central leadership, (and) with women independently taking up local agitations and initiatives in their own villages, the movement is truly dispersed”. This was the general pattern in almost all the villages, notwithstanding minor differences. They observed, “in some we were told to wait for a kind of spokesperson and listen to her. In some the literacy volunteers had played an initiating role, while in others all the women who had

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24 Anveshi, 1993, op.cit, p.89

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gathered to meet us wanted to speak collectively of their achievements. The truly participative character (unlike the ML movement) is demonstrated by the fact that the state could not attack or curtail the movement by arresting key organisers. It is organisationally a genuinely 'spontaneous' social movement with only external support from the various youth and dalit organisations. In fact, ML parties are incorrect in criticising that feminists from the urban areas could not provide any leadership to this movement and this therefore demonstrates the ineffectiveness of their ideology. On contrary, feminist groups argue, such criticism is born out of a belief in 'vanguard' notion of hierarchical relations within the social movements. Anti-arrack movement has demonstrated the depth of democratic practice and that struggles for empowerment of women cannot have centralised leadership.

CPI (ML) parties and writers sympathetic to them believe that anti-arrack movement was an organised movement with continued efforts from various organisations. To begin with, “there is an echo of support for the CPI (ML) ban on liquor among Nellore women who seem to have been inspired by it”. The courage women have displayed has a political history and is not a romantic and a 'spontaneous' outburst. In 1989 when repression was reduced under the Chenna Reddy’s regime, PWG had more mass support and following and therefore took up the demand for complete prohibition of arrack. By 1990, in Nizamabad out of 587 arrack shops 351 shops were closed. From this district out of the regular revenue of 6crores to the state government it could manage only 4 crores. In October 1990, new excise year began but due to the threat of PWG there was no auction of arrack. Contractors demanded police protection and it began to be sold in police stations. Can feminists afford to ignore such a long history of struggle against arrack and argue that it was a 'spontaneous' movement? Even after the movement began it could sustain for such a long time out of sustained efforts of various organisations in their continuous planning in mobilising the rural women. Village

Ibid.
committees were formed in all the districts, and “these committees received political and moral support from the state level mass fronts like Jana Vignana Vedika, the Progressive Organisation of Women and Andhra Pradesh Dalit MahaSabha. In Nellore district alone where the present mass movement initially began, the movement is organised by the Anti Arrack Coordination Committee comprising thirty-six voluntary organisations. In Chittoor district there are 250 voluntary organisations comprising mostly village committees ...”28. In other words, movement was definitely influenced by the politics and ideology of various political organisations and village women were organised under the leadership of these organisations through the village committees, where all the decisions regarding the present and future course of action were taken.

Similarly, the ‘leaderless’ characterisation of the movement was also criticised by some of the feminist groups themselves. They argue that, “the movement is perceived by some as leaderless helps to push towards a characterisation of it as ‘non-political’”29. It has similar impact as emphasising ‘familial impulse’ behind the women’s militancy. Paradoxically, these were some of the objections- moralising instead of politicising women’s problems- raised by feminists themselves about Telangana armed struggle.

The strategy adopted by the movement was also an extremely contentious point of interpretation. Feminists have interpreted the means and symbols used by women as bringing the family into the open -public- and asserting their identity as ‘women’, more than anything else. “We only need to remind ourselves of some of the methods women brought to bear in the course of the agitation such as attacking the contractors and excise department officials with ‘house hold weapons’ like brooms and chilly powder, refusing to cook or eat and publicly shaming their men”30. Household goods that are closely associated with their everyday life and identity were given a new political meaning and symbolically redefined. In other words, ‘sara movement is a significant elaboration of

politics of everyday life'. "While the women's success in reducing or even preventing arrack sales has directly affected the state and can be seen without much effort as a classical 'political' action... The women are also articulating many domains of their life in political terms and as political issues"\textsuperscript{31}. These include issues such as hunger, ill health, lack of education for children, constant debt, their belongings-the pots and pans and all their clothes-pawned for buying sara and their mental anguish. Along with the politics of everyday life, the strategy of the anti arrack movement also represented a politics of the possible. "In tying their politics to the specificity of their location (their slogan is maa ooriki sara vaddu-we don't want sara in our village), in demarcating a domain over which they can exercise control, the anti arrack women seem to be envisaging and engaging in a politics of the possible"\textsuperscript{32}. These strategies were often perceived as completely different, and contesting the armed-macro strategies of the ML groups.

It is intriguing to observe that the same strategies have been interpreted by the Marxist writers to be symptomatic of ML groups inspired 'militancy' rather than any passive micro level politics. "The women's struggle (on the other hand), took a number of forms of picketing the arrack shops, in some cases confiscation and destruction of the arrack sachets, forming of battalions (my emphasis) of women who could keep watch on the male members who are vulnerable to drink... "\textsuperscript{33}. It was in fact clear throughout the movement that while the CPIM cadre and those of their women's organisations and the autonomous women's groups insisted on peaceful and lawful methods of protest, cadre of the Dalit and CPI (ML) organisations encouraged more violent forms of protest\textsuperscript{34}. It is definite that most of the Marxist writers felt that, "where women were on their own or too strong-willed for those trying to organise them, their anger at the violence they have

\textsuperscript{31} Susie Tharu, 1994, op.cit, p.112
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid p.114
\textsuperscript{34} K.Balagopal, 'Slaying of a Spirituous Demon' EPW, Nov 14, 1992, p.2460.
suffered as a consequence of arrack has led them to forms of protest more violent than even the most militant organisers advocated"  

These differences between the autonomous feminist organisations, around the issue of militancy and violence, with not only ML groups but also Dalit organisations, adds another dimension around which the issue of autonomy gets crystallised and concretised. These differences between non-violent/armed/militant means and peaceful/symbolic means are not only symptomatic of a varied perception and discursive articulations but also of 'structural' distinctions in the location of the activists of different movements. The caste and class of women in feminist groups is different from those rural women who were part of the movement. "Whether one likes it or not the women cadre and leaders emerging from this movement will pose serious questions in future. The questions that the grassroots women pose to husbands, activists and parties-to entire civil society-will be radically different from the ones that the urban middle class women (my emphasis) have posed so far "  

Reacting to this statement by an important leader of the caste movement in AP, a section of feminists have referred to it as an 'utter misrepresentation of women's movement'. They have argued that there are no differences between urban upper caste feminists and the women in rural areas. On contrary, in 1970's feminists had already supported and encouraged the practice of publicly speaking about domestic violence. However, feminists were criticised as urban middle class women who practice and propagate ideas relevant only to their lives and not to the lives of the rural women. Anti arrack movement has cleared this misconception. It is now clear that rural women also think about family and domestic violence and their ideas are no different from that of the feminists. Feminists, in other words, deny the ('internal') difference between women of various social sections. This difference is perhaps obvious when some of the feminists themselves have observed that in the lists of issues supplied to the rural women as part of the literacy programme, by women's groups, women's

35 Ibid.
37 Kalpana Kannabiran, 1995,op.cit p.163.

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problems explicitly figured in it along with matters related to the economy, health, environment, and caste. Arrack came at the very end. It surprised organisers that the women chose not to take up the issues marked in the list as ‘theirs’, but attacked arrack instead. Leaders of women’s groups who came from urban middleclass families could not grasp the issue that affected rural women the most. Only when we comprehend the nature of social life can we understand why exactly are women protesting against it and what is the nature of the protest. As some of the feminists have rightly argued that, “from middle class perceptions of the nature of the drunkenness, especially where the poor are concerned there is a great danger of psychologising and medicalising the problem... perhaps there is a greater need to deal with men’s uninvolvement in family life rather than, say with the urgency of providing de-addiction tablets”.

After the anti arrack movement the problem of autonomy and solidarity attained new dimensions. Paradoxically, it not only brought women’s issues and movement to the cencentre stage but also opened the debate on the cleavages within the women’s movement. In other words, the rural dalit women now demanded autonomy from the urban feminist movement. The issue of dalit women’s movement came up elsewhere also by the mid-nineties. Dalit men and women, for instance, questioned the populism of peasant movements such as the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra, for representing the interest of rich farmers, which directly contradicted the interest of dalit agricultural labourers over the issue of minimum wages. Similarly, “dalit women are also not well disposed to the eco feminist call for development of environmental consciousness”

Dalit men and women uprooted saplings planted by the social forestry department, in the Aurangabad district as dalits are denied both the land as well as access to common property resources of the village. These experiences do not get recognition in the analysis of non-dalit, urban women activists. Thus, “ dalit women defined the concept of dalit strictly in caste terms, refusing the claim of upper caste women to dalithood. Dalit women activists quote Phule
and Ambedkar to invalidate the attempt of a non-dalit women to don dalit identity” 42. They do not deny that there could be gender issues (for instance against the Hindutva campaign) on which urban feminist and dalit women could forge joint struggles and thereby avoid ‘ghettoisation of dalithood’. Thus rural dalit women’s movement emerged as an ‘internal’ part of women’s movement but demanded autonomy and raised a different set of issues.

Dalit women also have points of conflict with dalit men over issues such as political marginalisation, lack of representation in leadership, ownership of land, etc. Dalit men however should not view this as divisive but carrying positive emancipatory potential for the dalits. Thus, dalit writers would argue that dalit women’s movement has a specificity of its own even vis-à-vis dalit men. However, it is ‘within’ the contours of an enlarging dalit movement.

Specificity of dalit women’s struggle, both as part of an expanding dalit movement and autonomous of urban feminists, got exemplified in the post anti-arrack movement phase in AP. In 1994, dalit women of the Madduru village in Kurnool district waged a significant land struggle, reflecting the expanded consciousness after their participation in the anti arrack movement. Dalit writers have argued that as part of anti arrack movement they learned that all their demands were partial and not substantive. Neither could they prohibit liquor nor could solve their problem of poor living conditions. It is from here, the dalit women of Madduru village, who were active in the anti arrack movement, decided to wage a land struggle and that too under their own leadership 43. In 1994, 60 dalit women formed ‘Ideal Women’s Association’ and decided to occupy the barren land at the outskirts of the village, belonging to the government but used as a field for grazing the cattle of the landlord. This of course led to a confrontation with the landlords and their goons, who finally attacked and forced dalit men and women to flee to

42 Ibid
Kurnool. Even in the post land struggle phase at the camps put up, dalit women were active and in leadership positions, unlike the previous camps set up after the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres.

Madduru land struggle influenced both the ML and the autonomous women's movement in AP immensely. ML groups such as Janashakti formed mass organisations such as DAFODAM, where they recognised dalits and minorities as significant subjects of New Democratic Revolution. They also organised an international Communist revolutionaries meet in march 1995 and argued that Indian revolution should negotiate with caste, class and gender together as strongly interdependent struggles. Madduru land struggle also demonstrated that to bring all social movements together for comprehensive social change legal-constitutional methods of struggle have to be aligned with militant-armed struggles outside the purview of law\(^44\). Feminists also accept that caste and women's question are much more closely intermeshed. 'Manhood' of the caste is defined by control over women of that caste and therefore to humiliate women of other castes is to question the 'manhood' of that caste and mark them as impotent. It is therefore that frequently, as part of caste hatred, dalit women are often sexually assaulted and paraded naked in the streets\(^45\).

Thus, dalit women's movement as an 'internal' movement within the autonomous women's movement brought into relief three pertinent political processes. Firstly, they demanded autonomy from the urban feminist movement and thereby demonstrated that autonomy and solidarity can co-exist. Secondly, they brought to the fore those issues, such as minimum wages, land reforms, common property resources, etc, that were being demanded and fought for by the ML movement and established a commonality between the 'external' and 'internal' movements. Thirdly it was a movement that was interestingly 'internal' to both the women's and the dalit movement, and thereby bringing

\(^44\) Ibid, p.16.
them closer. In other words, movements now confronted an 'integrated material life', without any artificial discontinuities between them.

By mid 1990's the democratic consciousness for autonomy spread across the social movements. Not only were dalit women seeking autonomy from both the urban feminist movement and also the dalit movement, but various mass organisations of ML groups also raised the issue of autonomy of these organisations vis-à-vis the Party. Civil liberties and democratic rights organisations, cultural fronts, etc, were all demanding more autonomy in deciding the agenda of their struggle. Some of the human rights activists attempted alternative theorisation -outside Marxism- to account for conflicting interests between various social groups. However, according to feminists these activists, though have raised relevant questions, have completely obliterated the historical context, provided by the autonomous women's movement, as part of which they were raising these questions. In fact this tendency to arrogate to themselves the novelty of these issues is part of the 'hegemonic practice' of the radical left groups. It is however paradoxical that those alternative political discourses, which shared commonality with some of the social movement's discourses, were visualised as a 'conspiracy' by these very movements. For instance, while feminists agreed with the political issues raised by the human rights activists they still believed that there was a 'conspiracy' to both shield the ML groups (with which these activists were fiercely differing) and the contribution of the autonomous feminist groups.

Terms such as 'opportunist attack' and 'garb' are not only symptomatic of the apparent mistrust between the social movements but also of a strong underlying dichotomy that has emerged between theory and practice, as part of the ongoing dialogue between the movements. While there was a definite influence of the politics of each movement on the

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practice of the other movements (as is evident from various instances cited above), at the level of theory or political discourse no movement acknowledged the contribution of the others. Social movements are still, by the end of 1990s, engaging in self-arrogating discourses that are blind to the contributions of other movements. The issue of autonomy now seems to be structured around the dichotomy between theory and practice. The validity for such an interpretation can be drawn from one of the latest debates between autonomous feminists and the PWG.

On the occasion of thirty years of the Naxalite movement, a commemorating volume was published and as part of that feminists wrote analysing the role of the ML movement vis-à-vis the women’s issue. They argued that, “in 1980 some factions of the ML parties started establishing women’s organisations. This did not however bring about much change in their basic attitude towards women. They did not acquire any gender specific ideology, because these women’s organisations too believed that their problems would be solved only through the achievement of long-term goals” 47. In fact, ML parties themselves accept this position and do not find any irony in changing their practice without concomitant ideological changes. The People War Group, in their reply to the above article argues that there is no basic ideological/theoretical shift in ML party’s stand. They still believe that women’s problem is essentially part and parcel of class exploitation. However, they have changed their position as far as practising this perspective is concern. Earlier separate struggles and organisations were not realised as essential for women’s emancipation, now however they believe to the contrary. This however, they argue, is not specific to women but is part of the overall shift of party’s stand on mass organisations which are unlike hitherto considered essential 48. Arguing that these are mere ‘organisational’ changes negates the autonomy granted by forming separate organisations, in a sense. The specificity of politics and political perspective

behind mass organisations is neither granted any primacy nor conceptualised in clear terms. It could, for some, sound ironical that ML parties that believe in primacy of ‘praxis’ rather than mere ideological formulations (‘philosophers have interpreted the world the point however is to change it’) seem to undermine changes in practice, in such cases. It is this bifurcation between theory and practice that belies any easy conclusions on the issue of solidarity.

This dichotomy, referred to above, however subsumes a long history of dialogue and significant differences between autonomous women’s groups and the ML parties. According to the later, autonomous women’s organisations are born as part of state’s own agenda. In 1960’s there was a wide scale spread of armed struggles all over the world and people’s faith in parliamentary path was fast eroding. Given this context, state was interested in taking up some superficial welfare programmes for women. This is at least very clear after 23 years where most of these organisations are either funded by the government or by the ‘imperialist countries’. In fact, organisations like the Feminist Study Circle later got converted into funded organisations like Asmita and Anveshi. They further argued that autonomous women’s organisations neither criticised State violence nor repression on ML group’s women’s organisations. This is partly because these organisations have no consistent view on the character of the State. Land, shelter, health, food, clothing, education and employment, none of these issues can be realised by autonomous women’s organisations. They however declare that they are prepared to forge solidarity with all women’s organisations that do not take foreign funding from ‘imperialist countries’ (often the reaction to this by the feminists has been that, it is ML parties which completely base their experience more in the international communist movement rather than in the immediate problems of the people in AP) 49. Thus, the story of the growth and evolution of the autonomous women’s movement, structured, concretised and defined autonomy around certain dichotomised issues. These dichotomies could both potentially fragment and if worked into continuums, could enable

movements to protect their autonomy and forge durable solidarity. The process of the emergence of autonomy movement- independent rural dalit women’s movement- within the autonomous women’s movement seems to create conditions that can transform the dichotomised issues into a more integrated approach of transformation and avoid potential fragmentation of the movements. It is around this internal-external continuum a tentative theory of solidarity would be briefly elaborated in the concluding chapter of this work.

**Autonomous Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh**

Autonomous urban feminist groups undoubtedly constructed the conceptual and political space for independent struggles to emerge and possess a degree of legitimacy. Most ML groups already had the experience of engaging with both the idea of autonomy and autonomous groups. They were definitely more sympathetic, in course of time, in understanding the’ identity aspirations of dalits in AP since in mid 1980’s.

It is imperative to comprehend that the dalit discourse, that has emerged from contemporary autonomous dalit organisations, is pertinent in looking back and conceptualising the relation between the communists and the dalits right from the days of Telangana armed struggle and before. It is in light of the present discourses, one realises that most of the Andhra Communists came from the main upper caste non-Brahmin castes. In their regional leadership P.Sundarayya, Ravinarayana Reddy, etc, were all Reddys, while C.Rajeshwar Rao, B.Basavapunnaiah, etc, were all Kammas. Their caste did make a difference to the kind of issues that got priority within the communist movement. None of these leaders themselves ‘subjectively experienced’ caste oppression and humiliation and therefore could not completely recognise the pressing need to combine the land struggles with an equally important issue of cultural and social discrimination. They could neither clearly articulate the role caste played in the economic relations in the villages. For instance, “communists (could not) recognise the

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way in which vethbegar was articulated in terms of caste and represented the traditional feudal form of caste exploitation and labour” 51.

Similarly, as part of the Telangana armed struggle most of recruits in the dalams did come from the dalits, however communists very rarely took up the issue of untouchability. Communists aimed at unity, which they felt, could be achieved by addressing economic problems that are common to all the poor sections of the society 52. While unity is definitely imperative for any land struggle, how it gets articulated with caste differences is a much more complex issue than the linear notion with which communists operated. The purport in formulating these points is to highlight the fact that communists did not create an alternative political and ideological hegemony that could give dalits a sense of dignity in order to overcome caste hierarchy and achieve the unity, that communists were so earnestly struggling for. In fact, the dichotomy between *unity and economic struggles* on the one hand and *caste differences and cultural hegemony* on the other, is the nodal point for the contesting discourses between the dalits and ML groups in AP, even to the present day.

Though, the social roots of an autonomous dalit movement can be traced to some of these issues, the contemporary independent movement originated with the massacre of dalits in Karamchedu, in coastal Andhra Pradesh, in 1985. The Karamchedu massacre had its roots in the complex economic, political and cultural changes this village witnessed over the past quarter century. In 1970’s the Kamma small peasants of Karamchedu who were well versed with tobacco cultivation began to migrate to far off districts like Karimnagar and began to cultivate tobacco on larger portions of land. “While the migrant Kamma farmers struck gold in tobacco and cotton cultivation elsewhere, the others in Karamchedu did experience the spill over effects” 53. The scheduled castes filled this vacuum and graduated to share cropping and field tenancy.

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51 Ibid, p.288
52 Ibid, p.311.

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Most scheduled caste families graduated to become small peasants. Some among the youth also got educated and acquired jobs.

These changes in the economic positions of the SCs were in conflict with their extremely demeaning social position in the village. Practices of untouchability, extreme subordination, sexual exploitation of women and bonded labour, all began to be questioned and 'experienced' in a changed context. Politically also, Karamchedu did have a history of Left politics which did make a difference to their consciousness. “Almost isolating the landlords, the Kamma small peasants, tenants and agricultural labours along with the harijans and others aligned themselves with the communist party. In 1950’s, Karamchedu was a veritable bastion of the communist party and the major segment of Kamma settlement in the village is even now unbelievably called 'Moscow'\(^{54}\). The contradictions between all these 'levels' compounded to only result in the ghastly massacre of 17\(^{th}\) July 1985. The incident clearly depicts cultural assertion by the dalits and the intolerance to the changing situation on the part of the Kammas. On July 16\(^{th}\) a Kamma boy watered the buffalo at the steps of the water tank of the dalits and letting out the soiled water into the tank meant for drinking water for the dalits. A lame dalit youth and a young dalit woman protested against this \(^{55}\). This immediate incident resulted in the massacre in the early hours of 17\(^{th}\) July, killing six and injuring around 25 men and women who after that had permanently deformed bodies and minds.

Immediately after the incident, villagers ran to the nearby Chirala town and set up a camp (shibiram). It is around this camp that dalit struggle with demands and issues 'specific' to dalits emerged. Initially, dalit leaders began to mobilise dalits all over the state around the issue of cultural assertion against the dominance of upper castes. This assertion for an autonomous movement demanded autonomy from both state institutions and the mainstream parties and also the radical left movement led by the various ML groups. Dalit leaders protested and rejected ML group’s depiction of the incident as

\(^{54}\) Ibid, p.2.
\(^{55}\) Ibid, p.9.
‘landlords attack against labourers’ (title of the pamphlet distributed by one of the ML groups). Instead, they argued it is ‘Kamma landlords’ attack on ‘Madiga coolies’. Along with autonomy from the ML groups, dalit leaders also rejected state institutions and even dalit leaders within them, both political representatives as well as bureaucrats. Dalit bureaucrats were characterised as ‘dalit dalaries’ (dalit compradors)⁵⁶.

As a symbolic representation of an autonomous struggle, dalit leaders decided that only dalits would occupy the dais and address others on the issue of Karamchedu. It was decided no upper caste, however radical and sympathetic to the dalit cause, would be allowed. This demand of only dalits was one of the earliest forms in which autonomy got articulated in AP. All those dalits who were part of the communist movement were now re-articulated discursively as ‘dalit communists’⁵⁷. Ambedkarism emerged as the guiding philosophy for an independent dalit ‘social revolution’, which was later referred to as a ‘New Dalit Democratic Revolution’ both as a continuation and counter to the ML group’s struggle for ‘New Democratic Revolution’. Such alternate discursive articulations created conditions for movements to rethink their position vis-à-vis each other. In course of two months struggle after the incident, dalit leaders also argued that there is need for ‘dalit organic intellectuals’, who could alone conceptualise the aspirations of dalits. They also argued on numerous occasions that ‘political power for dalits’ was the essence of an independent dalit movement.

Struggle to both rehabilitate the dalits who left Karamchedu and punish the culprits took numerous forms. August 15th was observed as a black day, followed by dharnas, indefinite hunger strikes, etc. However none of this could pressurise the government to take proactive measures. On 1st September 1985, finally a public meeting was organised where dalits from all over the state were mobilised rallying under the slogan ‘Chalo Chirala’. PWG’s cultural wing Jana Natya Mandali took an active part

⁵⁶ K. Illiah, ‘Caste or Class or Caste-Class. A Study in Dalit Bahujan Consciousness and Struggles in AP in 1980’s, NMML, New Delhi, 1995, p.27.
and its lead singer Gaddar (who himself is a dalit) inaugurated the meeting. This signified both the proximity an independent dalit movement wished to have with ML groups such as PWG, as well as firm resolve to maintain autonomy by projecting dalit leaders, writers, singers and conceptualising a discourse specific to the dalit problem.

At the end of this historic meeting, formation of a state level autonomous dalit organisation-Dalit Mahasabha (DMS)—was formally announced. Two prominent dalit leaders were elected unanimously as its office bearers. Later, in February 1986, DMS held its first state level conference at Tenali and released its manifesto. It created interest among various sections of the society in general and ML groups in particular as it was the first attempt to articulate and conceptualise the idea of autonomy.

The manifesto in complete contrast to the way dalit movement was built in the few months after Karamchedu, declared its principles, strategies, organisational structure and demands that made the distance with ML groups rather thin and ambiguous. In the manifesto dalits are defined not as particular castes or social groups subjected to particular forms of discrimination and oppression. Instead, all peoples belonging to various religions, castes and classes subjected to various forms of economic, social and political discriminations are all together referred to as dalits (in a sense, close to the Marxist idea of a ‘universal subject’). It in fact very specifically declares that those socially discriminated through the practice of untouchability are only a fraction of this larger identity called dalit.

The idea of autonomy now referred more to a ‘strategy of transformation’ rather than any constituent group. The manifesto argues that for ‘unity’ to emerge among the exploited groups, negotiating social discriminations in the form of caste differences play an important role. It therefore needs specific attention and independent ‘strategy of transformation’. DMS has to struggle to realise this ‘hegemonic unity’ between the poor.

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peasants from all castes including the so-called upper castes. This autonomous ‘strategy of transformation’ was part of the principles and organisational work of only Buddha, Phule and Ambedkar. Historically Congress party offered only piece-meal benefits never implemented more fundamental demands of transformation such as land reforms, minimum wages, legislations against the practice of bonded labour and untouchability. Communist parties on the other hand suffered from ‘economic determinism’ and neglected various forms of social discriminations. An independent dalit movement was therefore aiming at both a ‘social revolution’ as well as a ‘cultural revolution’, along with socialisation of land and capital.

Again, in complete contrast to the struggle after the Karamchedu incident, DMS’ manifesto declared no clear programme to gain political power. In fact it declares that in order to remain away from ‘political temptations’ it would not admit people who were earlier members of any political party. In other words, it wished to remain as a social organisation at the grassroots within the civil society, with its important demands being land, education, water, library facilities, information rights, etc, which would contribute to obliterate social discriminations. DMS not only made land the focus of its struggle but avoided contentious issues like parliamentary politics, to keep open its option of carrying out joint activity with the ML parties. It should however be observed that dalit movement itself has the legacy of formulating a programme that is close to the militant-armed politics of the ML parties. It cannot, perhaps, be denied that DMS also formulated its programme under the influence of programme and principles adopted by the Dalit Panthers of Maharashtra in early 70’s.

Dalit Panthers had also defined ‘dalit’ as a reference to schedule caste, schedule tribes, neo-Buddists, all labouring communities, landless labourers, poor farmers, women and minorities. Their immediate friends were declared as the ‘genuine radical Left’ or the revolutionary organisations carrying out class struggle. However, their

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60 Ibid, p.13
struggle was not just against the existing class system but what they ingeniously referred to as ‘Hindu feudal order’\textsuperscript{61}. Dalit Panthers very boldly pronounced that all struggles based on caste, devoid of a generic and broader social and economic concerns are all ‘casteist struggles’. They therefore believe that for the emancipation of dalits, there is a need for ‘total revolution’, which fights for socialism and not ‘psuedo nationalisation’ and therefore legal petitioning, demands for subsidies, and electoral methods were obsolete\textsuperscript{62}.

DMS, as the first separate dalit organisation not only continued to mobilise dalits all over the state but also began to respond to various atrocities on dalits. They took up legal battles against the upper caste culprits in most of the cases. For instance, in the Karamchedu massacre it filed cases against the main accused (Chenchu Ramaiah) in designing the massacre. The government also constituted a judicial enquiry under the pressure of DMS, which however declared that ‘it could not find any clear cut reason behind the massacre, hence it is inconclusive’\textsuperscript{63}. While the court case dragged on inconclusively on 6\textsuperscript{th} April 1989 a PWG guerilla squad physically eliminated the main accused. PWG also condemned DMS for its legal struggle abandoning its initial revolutionary and agitational struggle. Dalit leaders however argued that, though PWG’s act gained a lot of admiration among dalits, it is important to pursue legal and constitutional means as long as dalits had trust in them. It is part of the struggle by DMS to expose the laws, judiciary, police and the entire state machinery of the caste bias they suffer from. Dalit movement without denying the need for militant struggle, Pursued other forms of struggle. Dalit leaders believe that the specific form of oppression of dalits made it necessary to carry out the struggle on various ‘fronts’.

It is within this backdrop of an emerging politics of solidarity, DMS officially launched its journal called ‘Nalupu’ (black) in April 1989. Its focus and purpose clearly

\textsuperscript{61} Dalitha Pantherla Manifesto (Telugu), Navayuva Samakhya, Vijayawada, 1996,p.15.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, p.20.
\textsuperscript{63} Ratnam, 1998, op.cit p.117.
reflected this need to evolve a broader strategy for the dalit movement. It clearly reflected the need to forge solidarity with ML parties like the PWG and yet fight for the benefits the existing socio-legal system offered. Nalupu emerged as an important platform reflecting the nature of the dalit movement and the possible directions it would take in times to come. Though it was published for a short span of four years (1989-93), when it was discontinued, ‘every educated dalit and the whole dalit community felt that their potent leader had vanished’\textsuperscript{64}. In fact, in most of the issues of Nalupu it was repeatedly propagated that it is not just a journal but also a ‘movement’ by itself.

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

Another significant feature of Nalupu was the various debates it carried on issues pertinent to the ML movement. It repeatedly argued, through its editorials, that ML movement is a political struggle for issues affecting the lives of lakhs of poor, adivasis and dalits. It also argued the violence indulged in by the Naxalite groups is only ‘counter violence’ to the violence unleashed by the State. Nalupu also protested against the ban on the PWG and the series of fake encounters against them. It also focussed throughout on the issue of land and various land struggles taking place in remote villages of AP. It highlighted various legal provisions in favour of land reforms. It also did accept that ‘revolution’ is a plausible means of transforming the society\textsuperscript{65}.

\textsuperscript{64} Illaiah, 1995, op.cit. p.38.
This however does not mean that Nalupu did not carry any ideological debate with the ML groups. Most important of them was the debate on using the available legal and constitutional means. Nalupu carried a series of articles on various institutions, part of the State structure. It reviewed various offices such as the office of the 'Patwari' in disposing land related disputes. It also projected the caste bias among some of the ML groups, for instance it carried a detailed coverage of an incident on march 7th 1993, where activists of the CPI (ML) PrajaPantha attacked and killed a dalit boy, due to organisational differences between them and Dr.Ambedker Yuvajana Sangham. They criticised sectarian tendencies in the ML groups that made any meaningful alliance difficult.

Nalupu also attempted to expand the contours of the dalit movement by avoiding any ghettoisation of its concerns. For instance, it addressed the sensitive issue of conflicting interest between the dalits and the Bahujans. It reported incidents of attacks by the OBCs on the dalits, reflecting the caste-class complexities. While on the other hand it agreed with Ambedkar’s interpretations that caste is both ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, in order to overcome the bifurcated nature of the movements. The dalit movement under the leadership of the DMS and its ideological propaganda through Nalupu – on the need to pursue both militant as well as legal methods, ambiguity over the meaning and identity of dalit, ideological proximity with Marxism – built an underdetermined and nebulous notion of autonomy and solidarity with the ML groups. Though the politics of solidarity with the ML groups was evident, it was definitely underconceptualised.

It was this underdetermined and underconceptualised ideological ambiguity that was decisive in determining the nature of autonomy that dalit movement sought from the ML groups. It was to negotiate with this that the dalit writers started yet another journal called ‘Edureeta’ (swimming against the tide), in May 1990. It was started by two
important dalit leaders, who were previously part of the Naxalite movement (while the editor of the journal came out of the UCCRI (ML) group, another important member of the editorial board was previously a COC member of the PWG). They together started the Marxist-Leninist Centre. It is interesting to note that while the journal declared its perspective as ‘Marxist-Leninist’ and as a ‘journal for revolutionary politics’, none of the ML parties owned it but it was the dalit organisations and writers who identified with it. It could well be because of ideological reasons. While for many of the dalit groups experiment to synthesise Ambedkarism with Marxism was acceptable, not so for many ML parties.

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

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

b) invite discussions on caste by both revolutionary groups and autonomous dalit organisations. It was supposed to be a platform for all progressive groups to negotiate their theoretical and ideological differences so as to make unity between them possible

Edureeta was autonomous of both the dalit movement led by the DMS and the various revolutionary groups. It was for the first time, in the context of AP, Edureeta began a critical debate on the politics of the dalit movement. It was critical of DMS for believing in solving dalit issues as fragmented from all other social struggles and also for appealing to the same upper caste State, which was perpetuating caste discrimination in the state. It analysed the shifts in the programme of DMS and cautioned it against its politics of mobilising just SC s and ST s not addressing issues concerning the Bahujans and other poorer communities. It also criticised DMS for neglecting its original agenda to struggle for land and instead restricting to demanding

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compensation and reservations from the government. Edureeta was definitely in search of a new framework that could radicalise the dalit movement against its possibilities of getting ghettoised. It also believed that carrying a critical dialogue with the dalit movement would open new avenues for politics of solidarity.

On the other hand, it raised series of critical issues on the practice of ML groups in the state. It highlighted that ML groups though express outward support for autonomous women's and dalit movement by being active within them, they always attempted to either merge this movement with ML groups or try to take over the leadership positions so that they could be subsumed under class struggle. Similarly, it was also pointed out that ML groups hegemonised the discourse over autonomy by branding all those seeking autonomy as 'revisionists,' 'careerists,' 'opportunists,' 'stooges of ruling class' and 'agents of imperialism'. This is so primarily because they believe in recognising autonomy only as a tactic to accommodate these groups as they too enjoy mass support. It was also argued that constituting most of the women's and caste wings of ML organisations is again only a tactical move and these organisations do not enjoy any organisational or ideological autonomy. In the political discourse on autonomy, Edureeta raised the issue of a significant dichotomy between tactical notions of autonomy as against substantive. The debate on the moral, political and ideological legitimacy of a tactical approach opened new dimensions in the dialogue on solidarity.

The sectarian and tactical approaches were also the mediating factors for the 'fragmentism' between ML groups themselves. They get divided into groups and subgroups and have not developed means to accommodate ideological and organisational differences. It published a detailed list of the number of ML groups in AP.

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MARXIST-LENINIST GROUPS IN AP

1. CPI (ML) PW
2. CPI (ML) PRAJAPANATHA
3. CPI (ML) VIMOCHAN
4. CPI (ML) PRATIGHATANA
5. CPI (ML) LIBERATION
6. CPI (ML) REDFLAG
7. UCCRI (ML) JANASHAKTI
8. UCCRI (ML) SANKETHAM
9. CCRI (ML)
10. MARXIST-LENINIST CENTRE
11. MATRU BHUMI (MAOIST)

The dichotomy of tactics vs substantive notion of autonomy leading to 'fragmentism' subsumes a more important dimension within the ML parties. Edureeta traces it to the lack of representation in leadership to members from more organic social groups such as the dalits and women. They argue that most of the leaders of ML groups come from the upper caste, petty bourgeois strata, which join the movement during the student days from elite institutions. Their 'petty bourgeois' and 'upper caste' tendencies get reflected later on in their functioning and decisions. They also suggest that Naxalite leaders such as T.Nagi Reddy, Com.Pulla Reddy are all perceived, inspite of their radical credentials, as upper caste leaders belonging to the landed community. The movement therefore fails to get organically integrated at the grassroots where dalits constitute the struggling majority. As a possible solution, they suggest that it should be made mandatory to have only members coming from SC, ST, and OBC communities of the society to assume leadership positions. Most of the dalit organisations fiercely agreed and propagated this idea in AP. They felt that it is only by adopting and incorporating the principles evolved in each movement that they can forge solidarity. In other words, while the dalit movement is taking up the land issue and recognising armed method as valid and

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70 Edureeta, op.cit, May 1992 (Special Issue on 25 years of the Naxalite Movement)
legitimate political means, ML groups should incorporate the principle of distributing land in accordance with caste, so as making it mandatory to have only dalits as their leaders.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Dalits in leadership positions} as a means to overcome the dichotomy of \textit{tactics} and \textit{fragmentism}, was rejected by the various ML groups. They countered by arguing that communists are those who have genuinely overcome caste, class and gender prejudices and therefore to fix them in these categories (acquired by birth) is a reductionism and they also argue that the underlying assumptions of Edureeta’s experiment is either to combine or equate Marxism with Ambedkarism which would always remain an aborted attempt, as Ambedkar at worst was a ‘petty bourgeois reformer’ and at best a ‘radical reformer’. They cited instances of atrocities on SC s and ST s as part of the repression on the armed movements in Tebhaga and Telangana that Ambedkar did not condemn. He therefore had limited and constitutionally constrained notion of transformation.\textsuperscript{72}

With the intervention of Edureeta in the on going dialogue between the dalit groups and the ML organisations, it got concretised in terms of distribution of land on the basis of caste, making it mandatory to have dalits as leaders in all ML groups and to theoretically accept the combined philosophy of Ambedkarism-Marxism as the only alternative for the Indian situation. These alternatives got further legitimised at the beginning of the decade of 90’s with the Chundur massacre. It was again, on the lines of Karamchedu, a retaliation by the upper caste communities, not against demands for higher wages or land, but about identity assertion by the dalits for self-respect and dignity. This time in Chundur, on 6\textsuperscript{th} August 1991 more than 10 dalits were brutally killed.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
Immediately after the incident, in spite of the fierce ideological differences, ML and the Dalit groups formed ‘Joint Action Committee’, with DMS, CPI (ML) Vimochana, UCCRI (ML), Socialist Revolutionary Forum, Ambedkar Youth Association, etc. What was significant about the joint activity was the influence dalit and ML movements seem to have had on each other. While the dalits openly declared that ‘counter violence’ is essential for dalit movement (they now demanded that they would bury the dead right in the middle of village and are ready to confront the upper castes, unlike the Karamchedu victims who refused to go back to the village and confined the struggle to a nearby town). Similarly, the ML groups accepted that cultural issues such as dignity and self-respect would be the focus of the struggle and also that only dalits would lead the struggle. This remained as the most significant yet an aborted attempt to forge durable solidarity, due to the drastic changes in the nature of the dalit movement at the beginning of the decade of 90’s.

It was at this critical juncture in the history of the autonomous dalit movement in AP, that Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged to occupy the social and political space created by the former. At the second state level convention of the DMS, in 1988 at Vizag, strong differences emerged among the leadership over the issue of alliance with BSP. A section of DMS (led by its president) were for alliance and an active role in electoral politics. They issued a pamphlet titled ‘BSP Evarikosam, Endukosam’ (BSP, for whom and why) to explain their position. Another section of DMS boycotted and argued its need to remain autonomous from all political organisations and working more as a front for ‘social revolution’ through agitational- militant politics rather than convert into a political party.\(^{74}\) However, DMS, Dalit Kala Mandir, Dalit Writers, Artist, and Intellectual United Front (DWAIF), Ambekar Youth Association and also a few dalits in various revolutionary organisations, gravitated and finally joined the BSP.

\(^{74}\) Ratnam, 1998, op.cit, p.119
BSP now emerged as a political party with the features of a ‘radical social organisation’. “Dalit movement in AP expected that gravitation of social forces away from the movement of civil society towards the BSP may have a significant impact on its character and structure and therefore criticism that BSP is a statist party because of emphasis on political power was believed to be overstretched75. BSP emerged as a nodal point around which the distinction between the civil society and the state apparently collapsed. It was expected that this character of BSP, with merger of autonomous dalit organisations, would be able to effectively counter both the mainstream political parties as well as the ML organisations.

One of the immediate gains that the dalit movement perceived with its merger with BSP was its success in drawing together the dalits (SCs and STs) and the Bahujans(OBCs), which the autonomous dalit movement had failed to do. It was observed that there was an upsurge in the backward caste whose youth especially in northern Telangana districts gravitated towards the BSP76. Kanshi Ram in course of his campaign argued that it was due to BSP’s efforts that the OBCs gained new consciousness and to counter it the Congress party was trying to vie them by constituting the ‘OBC Commission’. The combination of being a social movement and a political party apparently created a larger space for dalit politics than what autonomous movement could.

On the other hand, BSP had to counter the ML groups and the consciousness it had already built among the dalits of the state. Some of the dalit writers characterised the rise of BSP as the 'social revolution', which the ML groups had failed to carry out. With the BSP gaining power at the centre there would be ‘total revolution’ and this is what is the Indianised version of the ‘New Democratic Revolution’ and after this there is only ‘Socialist Revolution’ to achieve. As Ambedkar predicted, BSP would establish State Socialism. Not only was the revolutionary language appropriated by the BSP but also

76 Ibid, p.2585.
their agenda. Its leaders announced that land reforms would be implemented in the Telangana region. Further, it would lift the ban on the PWG, call back paramilitary forces and stop all the fake encounters. The leaders of the various dalit groups attempted to continue the programme of solidarity with the ML parties even from within the BSP. However, parliamentary path vs armed revolt emerged as the most significant dichotomy and important ML groups like PWG, now distanced themselves from the dalit politics, as pursued by the BSP. Thus, the legal constitutional means, which were part of the autonomous dalit movement, now propelled it to get 'institutionalised'. The careful balance it was attempting between agitational – militant means and legal – constitutional means could not continue and the latter subsumed the former.

Though BSP could not gain any seats in assembly elections, it propelled process of conversion of dalit social movement into a ‘political movement’. In the post-BSP phase in AP, dalit organisations made an independent attempt to come together and form a political front and contest in elections. One such experiment was the formation of Mahajan Front, with around 22 prominent dalit organisations. It constituted important sub-caste dalit mass organisations such as the ‘Madiga Dandora’, ‘Mala Samarabheri’, etc. Mahajan Front however attempted to appropriate, like the BSP, the revolutionary language and declared that they would be more radical than the BSP, as they understand the distinction between ‘social justice’ and ‘socialist justice’. Their struggle was supposedly against both ‘Brhamanism and Capitalism’.

At the end of the decade of 90’s, dalit movement was at a crossroads. The discussion around the issues of autonomy and solidarity got structured around the irreconcilable conflict, at least in the context of the Andhra, between parliamentary path and armed insurrection. It took another major massacre against the dalits for the earlier aborted debates to revive. However, the context this time around was much more complex than the caste vs class debates between the autonomous dalit groups and the ML organisations.

78 Mahajan Front, Ummadi Ennikala Pranalika (Telugu), Mahajan Front, Hyderabad, 1999, p.2.
In fact, this complexity was very similar to the one women’s movement experienced and was symptomatic of multiple levels of contradictions. Women’s movement at the end of 90’s had to problematise the issue of autonomy not only vis-à-vis the ML groups but also the dalit movement and the rural based dalit women’s movement. Similarly, the dalit movement had to negotiate not only with the ML groups but the demand for autonomy from the sub-caste groups. The sub-caste movement has to be conceptualised as an ‘internal’ movement demanding autonomy from the dalit movement. It raised issues similar to the demands made by the ML and the autonomous women’s movement. It was in 1995 that the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) came into existence. Both the important leaders of this movement, Krishna Madiga and Krupakar Madiga, had previous association with the naxalite organisations. MRPS raised the issue of ‘classes within caste groups’ that got consolidated due to the disproportionate appropriation of reservations by the Mala community and demanded that 15 per cent quota allotted to the SCs in the state be subdivided and fixed quotas allotted to properly identified sub-groups of the 59 dalit communities. This demand was very close to that raised by the ML movement and had the propensity of drawing dalit movement closer to the ML movement. The MRPS also opened up the debate on those 90 per cent Madigas who reside in villages and need land and not reservation. Similarly, various organisations pressed upon MRPS to demand 50 per cent reservations for women to be implemented within the sub-division of SC reservations into A, B, C, and D groups. MRPS also debated on whether privatisation would benefit or rob the dalit communities of whatever opportunities they had.

Paradoxically, MRPS also brought into relief the limitations of identity politics through the mode of articulating some of their demands. MRPS argued that neo-Brahmins such as Malas are more dangerous than Brahmins and therefore are bigger enemies. Such demands raised the important question of whether identity politics are not narrowing the scope of the social movements and incapable of addressing larger social issues in general

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and issue of solidarity in particular. It was this compounded complexity that got exemplified in the Vempentta incident.

In Vempentta village, in the Kurnool district of Rayalseema region in AP, factionalism was the dominant culture. The entire economic, political, and social life of the village was under the control of the factions led by the landlords who had direct links (either as MLAs or through control over the representatives) with either the TDP or the Congress. Around 1980, CPI (ML) Peoples War Group entered this village to build a struggle for land and increase in the wages. Around 1996, under the party’s leadership temple lands were occupied by the landless labourers. This land was redistributed among 80 Madiga, 56 Mala and 129 backward caste and lower class (which included some upper caste) families. Each family got half-an-acre land. As there were more landless families among the Madiga community more land was distributed to them. These struggles and access to land definitely gave a sense of confidence and dignity to the Madiga families in the village. They were also now more openly part of the mass organisation of the Peoples War Group. This obviously earned the wrath of the upper caste Reddy landlord family, which dominated the village, along with the ex-sarpanch who belonged to the BC community. As a counter strategy to the PWG, both the landlord and the ex-sarpanch mobilised the OBCs and the Malas of the village under the pretext that injustice was done to them in the distribution of the land. They went to the extent of organising a social boycott of the Madiga families in the village.

Madiga families were forced to organise their own market to sell their harvest and their own panchayats. This further sharpened the conflict between the landlord, malas and the OBCs on the one hand and PWG and Madigas on the other. Along with this as part of organisational rivalry in a village, Pratighatana another ML organisation ironically joined hands with the landlords to weaken the hold of PWG, which was by then very strong over the landless labourers (predominantly Madigas) of the village. As part of this

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rising conflict, PWG killed ex-sarpanch, who as aforesaid was a BC. As the reaction to
this, already polarised village across caste-class lines flared up in a brutal massacre of
men and women of the madiga community, by the landlords with the active support of
the Malas and OBCs on 16th July 1998. They lit a pyre and threw 9 Madiga men into it
after brutally killing them (after chopping off their hands and in some cases their heads).

This is the bare outline of the incident in Vempentta, which left a number of
questions unanswered-what was the nature of the primary contradiction in the village-is it
caste or class; what is the relation between conflicts between sub-caste and dalit politics
on the one hand and ML politics on the other; what is the role of the armed strategy by
the ML groups? These questions divided the perspectives of dalit, ML and Human
Rights activists and organisations. It however has to be acknowledged that all these
organisations spontaneously formed a United Front to protest against the incident (i.e.
primarily against the landlords and the connivance of the state). This United Front
included to a name few, Dalit Bahujan MahaSabaha, BC Welfare Association, PUCL,
APCLC, PDSU, POW-Stree Vimukti, AIPRF, VIRASAM, etc. On 2nd August 1998,
they organised a joint state level convention on the incident. This convention was meant,
for the first time in the history of the social movements in AP to discuss the differences
and the possibility of consensus between these organisations.

Caste organisations such as the Dalit Bahujan Mahasabha have argued that one of
the important dimensions of the incident was the caste blind politics of the PWG. They
could not foresee the possibility of mobilisation on caste lines by the landlords. Not only
could the landlords mobilise the Reddy families but also other OBC and Mala
communities. Caste differences make collective mobilisation and hatred easy. Some
Dalit writers have argued that Vempentta was always a communist village but there were
never such incidents. The reason being that the leadership of the communist
organisations was with the 'Reddy communists' and therefore enjoying the close
patronage of the Reddy landlords. The communist groups and the landlords entered into
a conflicting situation because the leadership shifted into the hands of the dalits. It is
interesting to observe that these leaders of the PWG belong to the Madiga community and which could be a reason why they had more following among the madigas.  

Some of the dalit writers also recognised that there was a caste contradiction between the SCs and the OBCs. It is because of this complex situation that Ambedkar believed violence had a very insignificant role in social transformation. They also argued neither squad action nor individual annihilation could be a solution for any of the problems as they reflect an apolitical-militarist approach, which cannot handle caste contradictions. This was a definite shift from the earlier indecisiveness in the dalit movement over armed militant methods of struggle. As a method of resolving caste conflicts dalit organisations suggested distribution of land and wealth in accordance with the 'population percentage of different castes' and making dalit bahujan groups part of the 'State power'.

It is important to note that dalit politics, at this stage, had to negotiate the dichotomy between consolidations of caste identity as against caste annihilation. Identity politics (or politics of recognition) have limitations in converting dalit politics into struggles for caste annihilation and therefore had to overlook the issue of sub-caste struggles. Dalit movement in AP developed no means of either negotiating or resolving this conflict. As ML groups have been 'caste-blind' in their approach, dalit movement has been 'sub-caste blind'. These 'internal' cleavages within the dalit movement are similar to the ones women's movement developed and refused to acknowledge between urban upper caste feminists and rural dalit women.

The PWG in its reply to the accusations of leading a 'caste blind struggle', argued that there were not only Madiga men and women among those killed but also four men belonging to the BC community, and it is also a fact that majority who took part in the

82 Ibid, p.70

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massacre were men of OBC community who were the followers of the ex-sarpanch, other than a few Mala men who were traditionally with the landlord’s faction. Similarly, land cannot be distributed on the basis of caste but on the basis of landlessness. For instance, there are powerful landed factional leaders from the BC community, how do we characterise these bahujans? Replying to a phase used by one of the dalit writers, they wrote, it is ‘Manu’s justice’ that is implemented in Vempentta but by the ex-sarpanch, who was himself a BC. ML organisations argued that unity among the dalit bahujans could be achieved only by recognising the ‘classes within these caste groups’.83

The experience of autonomous caste movement has been different from that of the women’s movement in AP. Not only were there number of occasions when they spontaneously and temporarily forged solidarity, forming United Fronts and Joint Action Committees to both fight against common causes and sought out differences, but also considerable impact of one movement on the other could be observed. These could well be because of the strong structural commonalities that both the movements shared. Subjects of both the movements were from the poor, landless communities, predominantly rural and subjected to violence by the State. However, as ‘structures’ alone do not condition the movements and their outcome, there have been both instances of possible fragmentation and solidarity between the Dalit and the ML movement. The sub-caste movement that has emerged as ‘internal’ to the dalit movement seems to raise demands similar to that of women’s movement and also the ML movement. In the process of protecting internal autonomy and solidarity with the sub-caste movement, dalit movement might convert the various dichotomised practices- at material, discursive and strategic levels- into continuums and forge a more durable solidarity with the external movements as well.

83 V.Guruvayya, Vempentta Maranakanda (Telugu), Diksuchi Prachuranalu, Srikakulam, 1999, p.40.