CHAPTER-VI

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Nellore district, the southern most administrative unit of the coastal Andhra Pradesh, is known for its economic importance being a source of producing paddy, the staple food of the coastal people. And also mica, a mineral often used in electrical appliances, as it is a bad conductor, and also known for its political significance with the seats of power and the centers of trade. Such economic and political significance of this district is due to the geographical location of the district and the geological features that the landscape exhibit.

Nellore district presented a good number of political elites. Both before and after the emergence of Andhra Pradesh, this district played a prominent role in India’s freedom struggle. To the various peasant movements and anti-zamindari agitations, Nellore district contributed leaders of the finest quality and highest caliber. This district has its share in contributing some of the notable personalities to the political history of the country both in the past and present generations. Amarajeevi Potti Sri Ramulu, Rebala Laksmi Naras Reddy, Bezawad Gopala Reddy, AnamChenchu Subba Reddy, Vennelakanti Raghavaiah, were some of the most important personalities of the past generation.

The peasant movements, anti-zamindari and anti-inamdar agitations were organized in Nellore district. Nelluru Venkatrama Naidu, a pioneer of anti-zamidari struggle in the district. Nalluru Venkatram Naidu, Jupalli Ramakrishna Rao, Petluru Govinda Reddy, Saram Chencureddy and Vennelakanti Ragahavaiah, were the prominent members who started ‘Nellore District Zamindari ryots Association’ on 19th October 1929 encouraged by Prof. N. G. Ranga. Although Communists too were associated with the movement, as they were not very strong to lead the movement. N. Venkatarama Naidu started a Telugu weekly ‘Zaminroytu’ to highlight the plight of the peasants under the Venkatagiri zamindar and championed the cause of freedom struggle.
During Freedom movement the social awakening in Nellore district was remarkable. The movement to eradicate the malady of 'untouchability' reached its peak Nellore district played very prominent role in the propagation of 'khadi' movement and 'anti-arrack' movement. In boycotting, of auction and also of liquor, Nellore stood high in the whole of India. The movement of boycotting foreign cloth too was successful, since the leaders and people participated with the same enthusiasm. The movement which was started in Nellore town proved to be an irritant to the British government.

In Nellore district the 'Harijan' movement was started during the second decade of 20th century. Chaturvedula Krishnaiah, Bndla Ramaswami, D Hanumantha Rao, Vennalakanti Raghavaiah and a host of others actively participated. One of the widely reported activity regarding the entry of 'Harijans' into temples. Potti Sriramulu, Joint Secretary of "Hindu Samskara Samiti" and other Congress activists organized common lunch or dinner (sahapankti bhojanamulu) with 'Harijans'. Such was the political awakening experienced in Nellore district in the pre-independent era.

The Nellore district figures quite prominently in the contribution it made to liberation from the British imperialist rule under the leadership of Reba Lakshmi Narasa Reddy, Potti Sriramulu, Bezawada Gopala Reddy, A.C. Subba Reddy, Vennelakanti Raghavaiah, a revolutionary Puchchalapalli Sundariah, Bezawada Ramachandra Reddy, Ponaka Kanakamma and a host of others. The Home Rule movement gave rise to state of activity in the district. The district exhibited again its political awareness on the eve of the visit of the Simon Commission.

Even though the Muslim population of Nellore district is fairly large during the period under consideration, no instances of communal clashes and political rivalries between Muslims and Hindus were reported. A complete communal harmony is prevailed in this district. Even at the present movement the same situation is prevailing.
Ever since Andhra State came into existence key portfolios were held by the leaders of Nellore district. When there was mid-term elections to the Andhra State Assembly were held soon after T.Prakasm Pantulu's government was voted out of power in a no confidence motion, Bezawada Gopala Reddy from Nellore district, became the Second Chief Minister of Andhra State. He was a minister in the C.Rajagopalachari's cabinet in the Composite state. Later he was minister in the central government and became Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Every Chief Minister gave due importance to the political leaders of this district and inducted invariably one leader from this district into his cabinet.

However, caste conflicts were witnessed in the political field. Casteism was evident in the selection of candidates in elections. Political parties evolved their strategies and nominated their candidates purely on caste considerations. The politically dominant castes in Nellore district are Reddy and Kamma. Before carving out of Prakasam district in 1970 the northern part of Nellore district's i.e. Kandukur division, political scenario was dominated by Kamma caste and in the remaining divisions Reddy caste was in total command. However after 1970 after the Prakasam district is formed, the Reddy caste dominated the political scenario of Nellore district, in the three divisions, i.e. Kavali, Nellore and Gudur. In this connection it would be relevant and useful in recall the state political background to the political fortunes of Nellore district.

The political system of Andhra Pradesh is characterized by four areas of conflict: caste, faction, party and region, all of which overlap and interact. The three regions Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana, although all Telugu speaking, are historically developed as separate entities with distinct characteristics and provide three sub-areas within the state. Political power is largely in the hands of members of the dominant agricultural castes of Reddy, Kamma, and to partially Velama, who rival with each other, but do not act as solid blocks. The most important units in the political process are the factions, mostly led by members of the dominant castes, but including other castes and communities. The pattern consists of irregular vertical structures of factions, which cover several districts and comprise sub-factions,
mostly on a district basis and nuclear factions, consisting of few individuals. These factions tend to align, particularly before elections into two, sometimes more statewide factions, normally one led by the incumbent action Chief Minister and the other by another contender for the office. These alignments are temporary, so are the loyalties of sub and nuclear factions, which change their state leaders according to the perception of their interests and are becoming increasingly mobile. However, the main factions with their leaders and a hardcore of followers have remained fairly stable for the past decade and longer. Factions are typical of the Congress party, the phenomenon being less developed in the other parties. The Congress party dominated the state political systems and politics, although there has been, strong electoral support for the Communist party. Since the split in the Communist party in 1964 their strength in the Assembly has been greatly reduced. The Swatatra party was originally fairly strong, particularly after 1967 elections, but had since been almost absorbed by the Congress. No party than the Congress played any significant role in this state, till 1983, when the regional Telugu Desam Party emerges as an effective alternative to the Congress (I) for six years up to 1989.

In the very First General elections, the lone Lok Sabha seat from Nellore district was won by Bezawada Ramachandra Reddy an Independent. In the second General Elections the Nellore Lok Sabha seat was made a dual member seat and this time the Congress Party bagged it. During the third General Elections this district got two Lok Sabha constituencies, one was Kavali and the second was Nellore, based on delimitation committee report. This election saw the victory of the Indian National Congress in both the constituencies by getting their nominees Bezawada Gopala Reddy and B. Anjanappa elected. In the fourth General Elections the Indian National Congress bagged two Lok Sabha seats R.D. Reddy and Anjanappa of Indian National Congress were elected from Kavali and Nellore. For the fifth Lok Sabha elections Puli Venkata Reddy from Kavali and Doddavarapu Kamakshaiah of Indian National Congress were elected. Due to delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies Kavali and Udayagiri Assembly constituencies of Nellore district were annexed to Ongole Lok Sabha constituency. Likewise Sullurpet and Venkatagiri constituencies
were annexed to Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency. Hereinafter the voters from Nellore district had to vote for three Lok Sabha seats. In the sixth General Elections, which were conducted in the post emergency period the three Lok Sabha seats were bagged by the Indian National Congress inspite of Janata party wave in the Northern India. However by the time the seventh General Elections were held the Congress Party was split into Congress (O) and Congress (I). During the elections for seventh Lok Sabha the Indira Congress won three seats i.e. Ongole, Nellore, and Tirupati.

The tragic death of Smt. Indira Gandhi in an assassination Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. In 1984 he went for a fresh mandate in 1984. Incidentally in 1983 N.T. Rama Rao matinee idol of telugu screen started a regional party i.e. Telugu Desam Party to save and protect 'atmagouravam' of telugu people. It was successful in driving its slogan self respect of telugu people and more say in the administration to the states, into the masses and could change the mood of the voters in the state. The voters of Nellore district too swayed by the charisma of N.T. Rama Rao and his slogan. In the mid-term elections conducted to the Lok Sabha in 1984 the Telugu Desam Party swept the polls and registered victory in all the three constituencies i.e. Ongole, Nellore, and Tirupati.

However the fortunes of Telugu Desam Party fell in bad days by 1989 and it experienced erosion in its ranks and popularity. Important leaders left the party and its allies withdrew their support not only in this district but also in the state. Hence it lost the three Parliament constituencies in the General Elections conducted to Congress (I) Party.

As far as the elections to the Assembly are concerned the very first General Elections conducted under the new constitution in Nellore district were to the Legislative Assembly of Madras State Legislative Assembly, since Nellore was a part of Madras State. In this election the Nellore district had eleven constituencies. Out of 11 constituencies 4 (Kandukur was a dual member seat) seats were bagged by Indian National Congress, the Communist Party of India bagged 3 seats, 2 seats were won by Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party, and Independents won in 2+1 seats. (Nellore Assembly segment was a dual member seat). From this once can
conclude that Independents were equally popular and powerful to get elected. It was the personality of an independent candidate that made him secure the seat and nothing else.

When separate Andhra State was formed with capital at Kurnool the members of erstwhile Madras Legislative Assembly continued to be the Members of newly formed Andhra State. This district faced first mid-term election to the state Assembly in 1955 when Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu’s government was voted out of power. In the mid-term elections the Nellore district had 14 Assembly segments, Buchchireddypalem, Gudur and Venkatagiri being dual member seats, the voters of these segments elected two members. Out of 14 seats the Indian National Congress could enlist its success in 9 seats, the Communist Party of India bagged 3 seats, Praja Party and an Independent shared 2 seats. Bezawada Gopala Reddy who was returned from Atmakur constituency became the second Chief Minister of Andhra State. The formation of ‘visalaandhra’ on 1st November, 1956 paved the way for Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy to become first Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

The next General Elections were held for the State Assembly in the year 1962 in which the Congress Party made good progress and made inroads into rural areas and mobilised the masses. Therefore it saw the success of its candidates won the election with good convincing majority. As per the new delimitation committee’s report the Nellore district got 17 Assembly segments and the dual member constituencies were once for all deleted. In this election the Indian National Congress Party won in 14 constituencies, the Communists could register victory in only 2 seats and an Independent won the Sarvepalli seat. Thus it is proved beyond doubt that the 1962 elections gave a strong hold for Congress Party in the district. The local leaders of the Congress Party made it point to maintain the mass contacts and keep the village level party workers in good books. Many a public work was taken up benefiting the rural areas of the district. Industrial sector too received impetus during the period under consideration. That paved the way for realignment of political forces in the district. Congress Party undertook interest in mobilizing the people to strengthen its cadre strength at village level. The district leadership of the party evinced keen interest in marinating their relations with the cadre.
During the third General Elections held in 1967 to the State Assembly the Nellore district witnessed the emergence of the Swatantra Party, a right wing party, which made a spectacular presence among the rural masses. It won 4 seats out of 16 segments, the Congress Party won in 6 seats only, in spite of its cadre strength. The Communist party maintained its hold in Sarvepalli and registered its victory only in this segment. The Bharatiya Jana Sangh bagged the Nellore seat for the first time in the political history of Nellore district. However the Independents won 4 seats to the dismay of the Congress leadership. Thus this General Election proved that the leadership and their policies were more important than the cadre strength. The voters who were concern more about the developmental activity of their region, exhibited their political awareness and maturity in these elections by giving a mixed result. Another interesting point was that the Communists started loosing their well laid ground in the district. As there was mid-term election to the Lok Sabha in the year 1971 the simultaneous elections to the state Legislative Assembly was delinked.

In the fourth General Election to the Legislative Assembly which was held in the year 1972 the Congress Party captured 8 constituencies out of 11 constituencies. In 1970 the Kandukur division which had 5 Assembly segments became a part of Prakasam district, hence only 11 constituencies are remained in Nellore district. Other 3 seats were won by the Independents. By the time the fourth General Elections were held the Congress party gained strength. Interestingly the Swatantra Party, the Communists and Bharatiya Janasangh could not make their way. The fifth General Elections which were held in the aftermath of national emergency in 1978 the Congress (I) Party under the leadership Smt. Indira Gandhi proved its popularity among the masses in the district by winning in 10 constituencies in spite of Janata wave in the northern India. The Udayagiri Assembly segment was won by M. Venkayya Naidu, a Janata party candidate. This victory could be attributed to personal contacts with the voters of this constituency and individual popularity but not to the Janata party wave.

However the political atmosphere in the state witnessed a revolutionary change in the year 1983. Until then the Congress party and its leaders were
unchallenged in the state. They maintained their dominance in the state in spite of their factional, individual, regional and caste differences. The birth of Telugu Desam Party headed by a charismatic leader N.T.Rama Rao changed their fortunes. At this time the Janata Party too was disintegrated and erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh emerged as Bharatiya Janata Party. The Telugu Desam Party grabbed the opportunity and started en cashing the then prevailing uncertain political atmosphere in the state and its party supreme who toured the length and breadth of the state and espoused the cause of ‘andhrula atmagoursavam’. With this slogan and added charisma of N.T.Rama Rao brought quick changes in the moods of the voters. The General Elections held in the year 1983 the Telugu Desam Party swept the polls. It captured 10 Assembly segments in Nellore districts and the Udayagiri Assembly seat was won by Bharatiya Janata Party nominee M. Venkayya Naidu, being an ally of Telugu Desam Party. Particularly in 1983 the voter gods told in unequivocal voice for the first time that their support could not be taken for granted. The Telugu Desam Party’s victory was stupendous and it got an overwhelming majority in the legislature. The 1983 elections must be viewed as fresh instances of the influence of the public desire for better politics and governance on electoral outcomes. This desire had become widespread and it was likely to persist till it was accommodated in an adequate measure by political parties and leaders.

N.T.Rama Rao had started on a promising note with a small cabinet emphasizing the values of austerity and economy in government expenditure, punctuality and quick decisions. Reduction in the number of state corporations, anti-corruption drive against, ban on capitation fees, introduction of Telugu as the official language in administration, and starting of Telugu Ganga project in the district were undertaken solemnly within a short span of time. But the reduction in the age of superannuation of government employees drew flak and it was unacceptable to the employees. His resolve for scrapping of Legislative Council was received with mixed reactions.

N.T.Rama Rao came back with a massive victory in the mid-term elections held in 1985 after N.Bhaskara Rao episode. But the Nellore district voters did not
approve the Telugu Desam Party's policies this time as they did in 1983. In this
election the Congress (I) was able to come back by capturing 4 Assembly seats out
of 11 seats. Thus the voters warned the Telugu Desam leadership that their approval
can not be taken for granted unless they change their policies. Later N.Rama Rao's
individualistic style of functioning, caste alignments, family members domination
took the shape of a cyclonic wave against N.T.Rama Rao, thus his party was routed
in the 1989 elections held for the state Assembly. The Telugu Desam Party drew
blank in these elections in Nellore district which returned the Congress (I) in all the
11 constituencies. However, the installation of Telugu Desam Party government in
Andhra Pradesh was both a promise and a warning. It was promise in the sense it
made an eloquent protest against the illegitimate central encroachment and ardent
will to map out a new route to development. It was a warning in the sense that an
excess of localism might ultimately be disruptive of India's national integrity.

Although the political parties interested in building and strengthening their
vote banks based on caste, or religion they did not neglect the development of the
district. Nellore district like other districts in the state is prominently agricultural.
The great majority of the population in the district is therefore, engaged in
agriculture and its allied pursuits. About 71% of the total work force as per 1981
census is dependent upon agriculture sector either as cultivators or agriculture
labour. Food crops accounted for 84.4% of the total cropped area. Rice is the staple
food in the district and paddy covered about 55.9% of the total cropped area in the
District. As there are no major river systems in the district except Pennar and
Swarnamukhi. Both these rivers and some other rivulets flowing in the district get
dry for most part of the year and carry heavy floods during the rainy season and thus
found to be not of much use to development of canal irrigation in the district. To
overcome this government of Andhra Pradesh at the instance of local political elites
and the general public started Somasila Project and Telugu Ganga project to provide
better irrigational facilities in the district. In Nellore district, since the economy is
predominantly an agricultural one, industrial development in the initial stages was
mainly agro based. But with the setting up of 7 large and medium scale industries,
the impetus had shifted to the establishment of more ancillary and other demand based industries. Besides the large and medium scale industries, there are about 1,200 small scale industrial units in the district. Thus the industrial sector, with an investment of Rs 2,482 lakhs, provides employment to about 13,250 persons.

By an overall assessment of the working of political system in the district, one can safely say that in spite of general illiteracy and poverty, the masses showed a strong common sense and political wisdom in electing their representatives. It was true that certain political controversies led to sharp confrontations among the various political groups. This was understandable in a district like Nellore, because of its vastness, long history, political factionalism and many diverse interests.