SECTION – II
Chapter 1

Development as Synergy of Freedoms: A Theoretical Prelude to a Subaltern Enquiry into the Political Economy of Konaseema

Amartya Sen’s Approach to Well-being as a Tool of Subaltern Inquiry

In this section, attempt is being made to bring into relief the subaltern thrust of all the diverse strands of methodology, as elaborated by me in the introductory chapter, and launch an enquiry into the political economy of Konaseema, standing under the same hermeneutical thrust. In the same process, I have tried to place an indigenous complement to the dominant Gramscian perspective adopted as a methodological tool for the entire inquiry,\(^1\) by creatively engaging the insights employed by Amartya Sen, in his recent work entitled Development as Freedom.\(^2\)

Though Sen is a Smithian liberal by inspiration, his works do project a potential subaltern thrust, which seems to echo our own concerns. Sen gives prime importance to freedom as an ideal and a process, in the struggle of the people, in search of development and well-being. So too, he is insistent on the agency of those striving for development, which is a multi-faceted and integrated goal. The themes of autonomy, agency, freedom, and resistance to ultimate injustice and deprivation – themes by now familiar to the readers of Sen, are also components of a Gramscian subaltern perspective. There are indeed meeting-points between Gramsci and Sen. Hence, the elaboration of a framework along Sen’s approach to political economy, as a hermeneutical tool in the inquiry into the political economy of Konaseema, is not in opposition to Gramsci. It is employed as a dialectically mediational complement to Gramsci, from the Indian, and more concretely, from the Konaseema Madiga point of view.

\(^1\) The inquiry already has a subaltern perspective and thrust, which itself serves as a framework. But as indicated already, grappling with the complex and earthy reality of the Madiga subaltern calls for a multi-dimensional approach - a collapse of borders.

Gramsci attempted to go beyond the economism implied in doctrinaire Marxism, by elaborating the cultural and the social, as the added dimensions of a subaltern search for identity, autonomy and critical consciousness, on the one hand, and the hegemony exercised by the forces of dominance, on the other. The interrelationship between the economic, the socio-cultural and the political in Gramsci’s approach to subaltern history must not be lost sight of, in any of our attempts to articulate the aspirations and strivings of the subalterns. This forgetfulness, according to Sumit Sarkar, has been the methodological pitfall of those authors engaged in the Subaltern Studies Project, which made them veer away from the originally intended Gramscian course.  

By invoking the hermeneutical mediation of Sen, what we intend achieving is to bring to the foreground the dimension of the economic, which is central to the reality of the subaltern Madiga. But this is not to be at the expense of the socio-cultural and the political. Sen, as the elaboration of his insights will reveal to us, is not merely an economist, but an advocate of political economy, which once again is pluridimensional in its approach to the inquiry into human welfare. Moreover, the epistemological standpoint of positional objectivity, as advocated by Sen, lends itself to an elaboration of a subaltern political economy, privileging the downtrodden, in the cause of Antyodaya (awakening of the least).

From Economics to Political Economy

As opposed to the approach of the dominant tradition of economics, Amartya Sen, from the methodological point of view, adopts the standpoint of the classical political economy of Adam Smith, Robert Malthus, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill and others. Under this view, the influences of political and social institutions and ideas are considered as part of the framework of economic analysis. Thus, for the authors cited above, who would have described themselves as political

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economists, their discipline would have come across as naturally interdisciplinary, collapsing different boundaries. For Sen, this natural interdisciplinary perspective of classical political economy is profoundly important for analyzing economic problems, like hunger. The choice of the title "Political Economy of Hunger", for the book, which addressed the issue of hunger, as he himself acknowledges, was a reminder of the broad perspective to be adopted, while approaching a problem like hunger. Standing within this perspective of political economy, the main themes of Development Economics of Amartya Sen can be delineated under the following themes.

Development as Freedom

Development as Freedom, for Amartya Sen, as a perspective in political economy, is an arrival point, as well as a methodological departure. It is the sum total of many an analytical framework developed by Sen, in the context of grappling with several burning issues of political economy, facing the third world. Sen, through his 'science of human welfare' has addressed issues like famine and endemic hunger, rampant poverty and growing unemployment, and population explosion and the phenomenon of countless missing women. These issues of political economy are indications of persistent inequalities and multiple alienations suffered by the exploited of humanity, the many unfreedoms fettering them.

In his vision of economics as the science of human welfare, Sen moves away from the standpoint of traditional economics, which lays stress on wealth and its creation. He also is at variance with the neo-classical approach to income, whether personal or national, considered as the sole measuring rod of wealth. He looks beyond wealth to freedom as the end and means of development, laying stress on the agency of the individuals and communities in the process of development. Various freedoms can be viewed from under the aspect of opportunities (e.g., longevity, secure employment, avoidance of illness and morbidity, peaceful and crime-free


communities etc.). They can also be viewed from under the aspect of the processes of attaining freedom (participation in the political process, deliberations regarding social choices).

 Freedoms, being not only the primary ends, but also the principal means of development, have to be understood in the empirical connection that links freedoms of various kinds, with one another. Political freedoms like free speech and elections help to promote economic security. Social opportunities, in the form of education and health-facilities augment economic participation. In turn, economic facilities, in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production can help to create personal wealth, as well as public resources, much needed for social development. This mutually strengthening and synergetic dimension of freedoms has its implications for our understanding of development as freedom, in its evaluative aspect, as well as an end to be achieved by the free and sustainable agency of human beings, in search of autonomy and well-being.

 On the evaluative side, this involves the need of assessing the requirements of removing various unfreedoms, which the members of the society may suffer from. This process is not unrelated to the process of economic growth and accumulation of physical and human capital, but its reach and coverage go beyond the variables of income, as we have already indicated. The intention is not to fix one homogenous and immutable criterion of well-being, once and for all, but to draw attention to the varied aspects of the process of development, each of which requires

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8 Cf. Ibid. P.11.

9 Synergy refers to the symbiotic model and process, wherein, in a two variable case, the growth of one variable depends on its own level and a multiplicative term involving it and the other variable in the system. This paradigm of synergy follows the simulation model proposed by Hakan H. in his book Synergy (Berlin and New York: Springer Verlag, 1977), p.296, as quoted in Santosh Mehrotra and Richard Jolly (eds.). Development With a Human Face: Experiences in Social Growth and Achievement (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), p.463. The editors of the book use the concept of synergy to describe the situation in which the effects of investment on health and education is enhanced by the presence of high economic growth and lower levels of income-poverty. Sen describes several examples of this type of synergetic interrelationship in Development as Freedom, pp. 22-53. The typical example is that of Kerala, where the low levels of economic growth co-exist with high level of human and social development, and considerable levels of income-poverty reduction. See also Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 27-86, for comparative perspectives on the interrelationship between human capital, freedom, social opportunity and economic development.

attention. There will be differences in the weights and rankings accorded to different freedoms, as per the circumstances of the communities and individuals, and their individual requirements.

This presupposes that the freedoms have their instrumental, as well as constitutive character. For example, the question, whether political participation and democratic dissent are conducive to development, which would have been asked under the income paradigm of economics, would appear as to have been defectively formulated, under the paradigm of freedom as development. This is because, under the paradigm of development as freedom, freedom is constitutive, as well as instrumental, as all freedoms are interrelated and mutually advancing.\(^1\)

The process of development corresponds to these multiple interconnected freedoms, and this in turn calls for plurality of institutions and mechanisms, involving private initiatives as well as public arrangements. The people are to be seen in this perspective of freedom, as the end and not merely means of development, as being actively involved in shaping their own destiny. They are active participants, and not just passive recipients of development programmes. The state and the society have to play their extensive roles of strengthening and safeguarding human capabilities. But theirs is a supportive role, and not one of delivering finished products and projects.

**From Income to Entitlement: Well-being, Freedom and Capability**

The notions of human well-being and capability as elaborated by Sen undergird his broader framework of the theory of development as freedom.\(^2\)

For Sen, the appropriate space for evaluative purposes, as far as well-being is concerned, is that of substantive freedoms, and not utilities, as claimed by the welfarists. Neither is the evaluative space for well-being provided by primary goods.


as claimed by Libertarians like John Rawls. Capability, that is, the capacity to choose a life one has reason to value, according to Sen, provides the proper evaluative space for well-being.\textsuperscript{13}

The life of a person can be seen as a sequence of things a person does or states of being a person finds himself/herself in. These states of being, or the actions he/she performs, are termed as the “functionings” achieved by him. Capability refers to the alternative combinations of functionings from which a person is able to choose. It basically means the range of options, the person has in deciding what kind of life to lead. The evaluative focus of the “capability approach” can be either on the functioning vector (the person’s actual achievements or realizations) or the capability set (alternative functioning vectors, she can choose from). Given the heterogeneity of freedoms, as indicated earlier, capability perspective is essentially pluralist. If in the case individual freedom, being quintessentially a social product, there has to be a two-way process in the evaluation and weightage of different freedoms, even more so, in the case of social choice regarding freedoms. It calls for consensus, arrived at after public debate. The choice depends on the informational base available on different freedoms and unfreedoms, without a priori weightage, accorded to any set of freedoms or goods.\textsuperscript{14}

Poverty can be identified as capability deprivation, an understanding that concentrates on deprivations that are intrinsically important, unlike low income, which is only instrumentally important. Relative deprivation in terms of incomes can yield absolute deprivations in terms of capabilities. At times, though the gap in income may be negligible, the difference can be a matter of survival or extinction, especially if the person had been already on the point of starvation. On the other hand, enhanced capabilities like better health and education can lead to an increase in the quality of life. It synergistically leads to increased productivity and higher income, helping people to be free of income poverty as well. Again, Kerala may be

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Sen, Development as Freedom, pp. 74-86.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. Ibid. The UNDP’s Human Development reports makes partial use of capability approach, but not without its critics, who favour the real-income framework, given its ready operational metric. Cf. Ibid. P. 74.
an example in this regard, of having reduced income poverty, in spite of moderate record of economic growth.\textsuperscript{15}

Understanding of poverty as capability deprivation helps us to understand the related theme of entitlement approach, especially with regard to the analysis of food crisis. The entitlement of a person stands for the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person, in his capability range can acquire through legal channels. Especially in the market economy, a person could be reduced to starvation, if some change in his endowment (original exchangeable bundle of ownership) happens due to alienation of land, or loss of labour-power due to ill health. Similarly, if change occurs in his exchange entitlement mapping (fall in wages, rise in food prices, drop in the price of goods he produces and sells), it would prevent him from any longer acquiring any commodity bundle with enough food. Famine is one such case.\textsuperscript{16}

Along with the examples of other famines, Sen cites the example of the great Bengal famine of 1943, where 3 million people died. There was fish in plenty, and food in plenty. But the fishermen with the luxurious commodity of fish for sale, starved because the price of fish had failed to keep up with that of rice.\textsuperscript{17}

Like famine, which can be understood in the light of poverty as capability deprivation, there are the interrelated phenomena of undernourishment and undernutrition. What is to be noted is that a person’s capability to avoid undernourishment may depend, not merely on the intake of food, but also on the person’s access to health care, medical facilities, elementary education, drinking water and sanitary facilities. Similarly the prevalence of epidemics and disease in a particular area may also be a factor influencing undernutrition.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 87-91.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, \textit{Hunger and Public Action} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 5 for the distinctions between slump famine and boom famine, and the descriptions of Bengal famine, which was a boom famine.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, p.44.
Further on the Economics of Starvation, Class Conflict and Ideological Alienation

As already noted, those who possess no other means of production, except their own wage labour, are particularly vulnerable to vagaries in labour market conditions. A decline in wages vis-à-vis food prices or an increase in unemployment can spell disaster for this particular class. Especially with the dramatic and unimpeded march of capital even in developing countries, the landless wage-labourers have recurrently become victims in modern times. In the subcontinent, the majority of the famine victims, in the 19th and 20th centuries have been from this group. The vulnerability of wage-labourers can be really acute, especially in the intermediate phase, in which the number of wage labourers becomes large, but a system of social security has not yet developed. In many countries, together with the increased possibilities of exchange with nature (production), and the ensuing enhancement of living conditions, especially in the rural areas, there has set in environmental degradation (deforestation, desertification), posing grave threat to the rural population.  

Apart from the vagaries of wage and weather, another important factor, which has caused and sustained many famines in history, has been the inflexibility of governmental polices undermining the capability of several sections of the population to command food. Political dogma and authoritarian political power often lead to disastrous governmental policies, making it difficult for millions of people to earn a living. The Soviet famines of 1930s and the Kampuchean famines of 1970s may be cited as examples. Political ideologies can be creative of forces combating world hunger and can have determined influence on the state policy. But it can also happen that ideological state actions can also include dogmatic pursuit of policies, driving large sections of population to penury and deprivation. Thus ideological politics has become an inescapable part of the economics of food and starvation.  

Cf. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

Cf. Ibid., pp.6-7, for a historical analysis, which traces the roots of the great Irish famine, to the cultural alienation of the ruling Britain, from the Irish. Cf. also Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom, pp. 170-175.
Co-operative Conflict

Another concept, which might throw light on the economics of starvation, especially from the point of view of entitlements, is that of co-operative conflict. For example, it is in the interests, both of the industrialists, as well as the workers that the factory should run well, and they have to co-operate with one another towards this. But the difference of interests, of larger profits for the owner and better pay and working conditions for the workers can indeed conflict. Co-operative conflict can operate also in the households, in a latent way, in the context of gender division. The classical political economists, especially Marx was keenly aware of the correlation between entitlement deprivation and the disaggregation of classes. The contrast between the economic positions of the proletariat, peasants, traders, and capitalists was the backbone of his analysis. This perspective of co-operative conflict between different occupation groups is of prime importance in the understanding of entitlements, and the related analysis of the genesis of famines and starvation.\(^{21}\)

Sen is very emphatic that there is no evidence to doubt that any famine in the modern world, which could not have been prevented by human action. In fact, many poor counties, especially democratic ones do prevent them. When people die of starvation, it is due to a massive social failure. And always those who fall victims are from the bottom layers of the society, such as the landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, poor peasants, pastoralist nomads and urban destitutes. Famines are always divisive phenomena, result of the conflict of socio-economic and cultural interests. Contrary to the statements that are often made, there does not seem to have been a famine in history, in which victims came from all classes of society. This dimension of conflict is suppressed in the analysis of famines. What has been stressed very often is the element of co-operation, as a social challenge involved in confronting hunger and famines. This approach evades the pervasive element of conflict, which is a constitutive element of any society.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) The structural affinity between Sen's Co-operative Conflict, as an economic category, and Gramsci's contradictory consciousness, as an identity-autonomy category cannot be missed. Both are mediating the element of conflict, in the relations of production and the consciousness of the subaltern, respectively.

Sen considers the protective security provided by the state, in the form of social security nets, as well as opportunities for participatory democracy, as antidotes against famines, endemic hunger and sudden destitution. They are both instrumental freedoms, preventing devastating crises, which, in turn are aids towards a life, which the people have reason to value.\(^{23}\)

**Contemporary Prodigals and Projectors: The Need for an Impartial Spectator**

Taking the cue from Adam Smith, Sen warns us of the modern day prodigals and projectors, who cause harm to the environment, by fouling air and water. In economic policy, following Adam Smith, Sen advocates the development of social values and a sense of responsibility, apart from state intervention. Sen derives inspiration for this stance from the humanistic thrust to political economy, as mirrored in *The Wealth of Nations* and the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.\(^{24}\) Following Smith, Sen believes that there is a spontaneous space for an 'impartial spectator', in all human beings. This space enables them to resist the evil of environmental degradation, and the consequent deprivation of the masses.\(^{25}\)

This space might exist in the liberal universe of Adam Smith and Sen, who believe in the ethical thrust of capitalism, is spite of its aberrations.\(^{26}\) But for the Madiga of Konaseema, who experience poverty as capability deprivation, environmental degradation in the form of conversion of cultivable land into prawn farms is an everyday reality. It dwindles the area of land under cultivation and the potential for their work, driving them to penury.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{23}\) Cf. Amartya Sen, *Development and Freedom*, pp. 178 - 184, for Sen’s proposal for the prevention of famines, which includes fostering of democracy, as a way of life. See also *Hunger and Public Action*, pp.60-61.


\(^{27}\) There has been also a court-injunction against the conversion of land for agriculture into space for aquaculture.
Sahib, who refused to yield to the Raju landlord, who tried to grab his ancestral land, is only a symbolic representative of thousands of Madigas, who face a bleak future, in the wake of globalization. His father had killed a Raju, a high caste landowner, amidst a protest of rebellion, in 1972. Sahib threatened to repeat the incident, if the Raju, who was trying to get hold of his ancestral property, adjoining his prawn farm, in political connivance with G.M.C. Balayogi, the then Lok Sabha Speaker, and the M.P. from the area. In Konaseema, much farmland had been brought under prawn farming, already in the late 1980s, in the wake of the liberalization of economy. Many of the Madiga agricultural labourers have been thrown out of work, after the conversion of the agricultural lands into prawn farms. Conversion of agricultural land into prawn farms also affects the fertility of the land, due to increased levels of salinity. Sahib’s parting words to me, during the interview were, “Now too we are in struggle. Now too we are being hunted down.”

This incident is a symbolic indicator of the impassioned human and subaltern agency of the Madiga, who has the human capital, that is, economic productivity, and more than that also the human capability, the capacity to lead the life he has reason to value and the capacity to strive towards it. Human beings have productive resources, but not merely in the reductive sense of the economic only, but also in the domains of the social and political. These resources have to be augmented, so that they can act synergistically, thus enhancing the agency of the Madigas. This synergetic enhancement of the processual agency of the Madiga is possible because human beings are not merely means of production, but also ends of it.

Their experience of freedom is instrumental, as well as constitutive. This experience of agency and freedom calls upon them to be responsible to themselves and to others, for their destiny. As Marx rightly emphasized, human beings are capable of “replacing the domination of circumstances and chance over individuals by the domination of individuals over chance and circumstances.”

28 In interview with Sahibu of Adavipeta village, on 15/03/1999.
30 Cf. Ibid., pp. 282-292.
In the third chapter of this section, devoted to the struggle of the landless subaltern people of Konaseema for acquiring land, as well as the their right to minimum wages, we shall existentially and contextually elaborate on this theme further.

Synergy of Freedoms as Empowerment and the Negative Symbolic Surplus of Caste

The constitutive and instrumental aspects of freedoms and their synergetic inter-relationships are important components in the political economy of Sen. While social development, in terms of literacy, health and education enhance human capability and help people to lead less vulnerable lives, it also helps in the increase of human productivity. Thus human capability and human capital are interrelated. 32 This is the backbone of his contention with the so-called Lee thesis, 33 which justifies the curtailment of political freedoms, so as to achieve economic growth, invoking the so-called Asian values, especially the supposedly Asian value of submissiveness to authority. In the context of India, Sen is aware that there has to be a wide redistribution of economic opportunities, including land, if the talk of freedom as constitutive and instrumental, and human well-being, as capability, has to make any substantive sense. 34 He is also aware that there are other dimensions of inequality, apart from inequalities in income, like divisions based on age, gender, education, occupation and caste. 35

32 Cf. Ibid., p.260.

33 Lee thesis, often discussed in the context of Human Rights and the so-called Asian values, is named after its exponent, Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, who asserted that freedoms and rights hamper economic growth. Cf. Ibid., p. 148.

34 In this context, though affirming the synergy of the various programmes by different nations, enhancing the various dimensions of human capabilities, like social development, economic growth, and income-poverty reduction, Mehta and Jolly in no unclear terms, warn us that special attention must be paid to those in conditions of absolute poverty. "Without public action directed at the poorest and the most vulnerable, there is no guarantee that with economic growth and improvements in social indicators, poverty will automatically decline." This quote is from Santosh Mehta and Richard Jolly, Development With a Human Face, p.57.

Inequality is a social failure on its own, which is growing, even with a growing decline in poverty. Economic reforms, as Sen hopes will help in the expansion and diversification of employment opportunities and in turn undermine the traditional caste hierarchy, based on rigid occupational structure and gender bias. Judicious economic reforms, leading to diversification of occupations and greater emphasis on literacy, may reduce the inequalities based on caste, gender and other personal attributes.  

But as Sen himself notes, “Surveys carried out in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal show how, in the same village, some privileged castes can be found to have enjoyed near-universal literacy for several decades, while literacy rates are still close to zero among disadvantaged castes, particularly for females.” Literacy as an instrumental freedom may reduce the inequalities arising from caste. But then caste seems to be a crippling phenomenon, which cannot be wished away, and which is the radical source of inequalities. Sen, following his Guru, Adam Smith may be a nurturist, believing in the infinite capacity of human beings for improvement. But caste, in the Indian context of hierarchy, seems to be a nature, condemning people to non-possibilities. The Dalits and among them the Madigas of Konaseema and elsewhere labour under this negative and all pervasive impact of caste. The experience of the Madigas and the other ex-untouchables, who are still engaged in the stigmatized and polluting kulavratti, their caste profession of skinning and tanning animal hide can testify to the alienation caused by caste. They are employed in the traditional profession, but alienated from its fruits:

The leather industry in India has been modernized and technology and market have taken over the art and skill of the Madiga. Now those who matter in the industry, which fetches nothing less than Rest. 8000 crores per annum, for Bharat’s ex-chequer, are the Brahmin, the Baniya, the Kamma, the Reddy and the Muslim, not to mention the all-gobbling Globalizing Market itself. The stigma of pollution by leather has been removed by the Mammon of big money. In the bargain, the Madiga, the Chamar has been alienated from his own work and product, his sweat and blood. This is not the language of Karl Marx in a new avatar! This is the raw fuel of the Madiga, still doing the polluting work, whether at home, in his crude set up or in the modern leather factory, where technology has taken over. Madiga still provides the manpower, does the dirty work, and earns a pittance. The removal of this alienation from the life and work of the Madiga is a question of his Human Rights and the Right to be Human.

36 Cf. Ibid., pp. 96-98.
37 Cf. Ibid., p. 97.
39 In Interview with Dr. Nandi Joseph, Senior Assistant Director, Central Leather Research Institute Chennai- 30/08/2000. Dr. Joseph has initiated several schemes for the training and welfare of the Madigas, and the Chamaras in general.
Caste, to coin a neologism, seems to be a negative symbolic surplus, radically nullifying the potency of the synergy, of the positive capabilities of the people, to strive towards the fullness of their humanity. Caste is a negative empowerment, a negative surplus, debilitating development, which 'is indeed a momentous engagement with freedom's possibilities.'\textsuperscript{40} There is an experiential radicality in the nature of caste, which eats into the self-respect\textsuperscript{11} of the subaltern, who suffers from the marginality of his/her caste. It undermines the economy of the synergy of freedoms, which is thematically central to Sen's discourse on development as freedom.

Sen's approach to freedom does bring out the economic mediation necessarily implied in a freedom-oriented discourse on the political economy of development. But the painful reality of caste, as an identity marker, especially in the earthy rawness of subaltern experience is better captured in the cultural and the symbolic mediation, a terrain landscaped by Gramsci’s identity-autonomy oriented critical discourse. In the lived agency and consciousness of the subaltern, this dialectical tension between the ideal of autonomy, and the facticity of fractious identitie(s) is awaiting processual resolution.

A hermeneutical unfolding of the collapsible, but irreducible layers of that agency-consciousness call for a dialectical and complementary mediation. In this task, the discourses, both of Gramsci and Sen, can be invoked, as tools in the cultural and economic layers of mediation, respectively. Caste, which is a sociocultural construct, acts as a radical marker of identity, at the originary moment of symbolic affirmation. But its impact is deeply felt in its all-pervasive in-carnations in the down to earth realm of political economy.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{40} Cf. Amartya Sen, \textit{Development as Freedom}, p. 298.

\textsuperscript{41} Cf., Ibid., p. 136, where Sen quotes John Rawls's argument that self-respect is "perhaps the most important primary good."

\textsuperscript{42} In this context, see Partha Chatterjee, "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), \textit{Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society– Vl.} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 169-209, for an interpretation of caste from the Indian and subaltern point of view, under Gramscian mediation. The author discusses caste as a subaltern phenomenon, in the light of subaltern religiosity of protest. The laboring body of the subaltern also becomes a site of socio-economic protest, resisting its commodification in the nitty-gritty of political economy.
In Konaseema, there is the phenomenon of the Madigas migrating to Ongole in Prakasam district, to work in numerous brick kilns there. They move in groups of families, when the work become scarce in Konaseema, for a period of four to five months in a year, and return towards the beginning of monsoons, in time for transplanting the rice paddy. Apart from the Madigas, who are agricultural labourers, there are households of other castes, who are also wage earners. But to my knowledge, they do not migrate.\textsuperscript{43}

Even before the onset of globalization, under the colonial and capitalist commercialization of agriculture in the Godavari delta, the Madigas had been alienated from their traditional trade of skin tanning and footwear making. They had to slowly move into agricultural labour, to meet with stiff resistance, at the initial stages, from the Malas, who considered agricultural labour, to be their traditional preserve. The traditional caste rivalry between Malas (right-handed) and Madigas (left-handed)\textsuperscript{44} might have passed through this competitive stage, in the changing vicissitudes of political economy, when the Madigas tried to make inroads into the traditional Mala preserve of agricultural labour. This cultural-symbolic and socio-economic rivalry has been heightened after the micro- Mandalization that took place, in the context of the \textit{Dandora} movement, which demanded a further division of the reservation scheme, so as to benefit the Madigas and the other weaker sections. Madigas always saw the Malas to be getting ahead of them through their cunning, conniving, servile and self-serving ways.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} See in this context, the observation of Sen on the occupational basis of famine and endemic hunger cited earlier. In a similar fashion, he does see a connection between population displacements and destitution. "But population displacements and water contamination are not just 'natural' events. There is close link between destitution and displacement, which has been observed in numerous famines, in Africa as well as elsewhere. The roots of water contamination also include social elements, influenced by economic destitution, distress migration, and upheavals in living conditions. Cf. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen \textit{Hunger and Public Action,} note 24, p. 44.


\textsuperscript{45} These word-portraits of Malas by the Madigas are gathered from my field-interviews of the Madigas in Konaseema, especially Murrumulla of Island Polavaram Mandal. They give insight into the self-portrait of the Madigas themselves, who consider themselves to be a caste, marked by self-respect, who prefer penury to mobility, gained through opportunistic servility.
Taking a cue from Sen, the Madiga community of Konaseema, and elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh, has to do some soul searching as to whether they are to preserve their traditional trade, as a marker of identity or to forego it. This calls for a public debate as to which of the two values or freedoms are to be given more weight, tradition or mobility. This question has to be addressed, especially in the context of the cultural-symbolic ambivalence and the pressures of political economy, which has come to the fore, with the advance of Globalization.46

The challenge, as Kancha Ilaiah proposes, is to have mobility, through tradition and identity, especially through the preservation and enhancement of the traditional skills of the Dalitbahujans, in this case, the Madigas.47 The insightful comments of Dr. Nandi Joseph on the alienation of the traditional trades and skills of the Madigas, and the consequent deprivation attain timely relevance and significance in this context.

The interrelated themes of the onslaught of globalization, consequent alienation of identities, negative surplus of caste, deprivation of the means of livelihood, and the phenomenon of migration will receive further elaboration, in the second chapter of this section, against the wider framework of the political economy of Konaseema.

After these preliminary theoretical considerations on Amartya Sen’s thematic of Development as Freedom, whose applicability to the concrete subaltern politico-economic context of Konaseema, is already in emergence, we now enter into a historical overview of the political economy of Konaseema. Our discussions, which will serve as a launching pad for the other sections, will be centred on the key thematic of well-being as capability.


Chapter 2

Well-Being as Capability: Changing Vicissitudes of Political Economy in Colonial Konaseema

The Land and Its Eco-determinants\(^1\): Konaseema (Godavari) in Subaltern Memory\(^2\)

Konaseema (the end country) is the name given to the triangular island between the Vasishta, Vaimanikyam and Gautami branches of the Godavari and the sea. Geographically it comprises of the whole of the central delta of the Godavari river. It is co-terminus with the revenue division of Amalapuram of the present East Godavari district. Amalapuram revenue division presently consists of sixteen mandals (revenue sub divisions), including the Nagaram island.\(^3\)

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1. The word eco-determinants fall within the new perspective of ecological approach to history and historiography. Ecodeterminism is a heuristic device, which can aid in the enquiry of the differential development of different eco-zones, in the areas of food production, labour organization, social stratification and cultural values. For example, the five traditional eco-zones or thinais of Tamilnadu have been studied under the aspect of their differential eco-determinism. Cf. G. Aloyius, Religion as Emancipatory Identity: A Buddhist Movement among Tamil under Colonialism (New Delhi: Mew Age International Publications, 1998), pp. 24-32. The author cites historians like Burton Stein, David Ludden and Christopher Baker, as scholars of this new ecological approach, though they do have variations of approach within them. Cf. Ibid., note 2, p. 26. Konaseema, which is the central delta of the Godavari, has its own eco-determinants.

2. Cf. Sanal Mohan, “Theorising History in the Context of Social Movement: Challenges to Reigning Paradigms of History” in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Mallick (eds): The Struggle for the Past: Historiography Today (Chennai: Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 2002), pp. 101-105. For memory as a mode of historical imagination and historiography. See also Edward W. Soja, Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 53-82, for a treatment of the much needed shift of discourse from an epistemology of space to an ontology of space, wherein the author brings into relief the thematic of Triadetics of Space, developed by Lefebvre. This triadetics of space attempts to go beyond the prevalent epistemological discourse on the Firstspace (objectivity and materiality) and Secondspace (visual interpretative representation in art and architecture) to a Thirdspace (remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost or never sighted), not by negating the first two, but by integrating them into the third. This ontological triadetics tries to achieve a transformation by rebalancing our approach to reality that is dominated by the dualistic dimensions of Historicality and Sociality, by integrating Spatiality of lived being and becoming, into our theorizations, enquiry and praxis. As I shall indicate, the subaltern memory of Konaseema is inscribed by the triadetics of the historicality, sociality and in a very special way, by the spatiality of Konaseema, giving rise to what can be called a human geography of Konaseema.

The Delta of Godavari, of which Konaseema is a part (the central delta) is a wide expanse of rice fields dotted with gardens of plantains, betel and coconut, with countless palmyras. This is in contrast with the uplands of the district, which form a gently undulating plain. The hilly areas of the Tribal agency consist of broken, forest-clad hills.\(^4\) The soil of the delta is alluvial, while the uplands are made up of red ferruginous earths varied by small areas of black regar.\(^5\)

The landscape does shape the vision of the people of themselves and the nature. During my field interviews, I came to gather that the people of Konaseema, consider the people of the uplands to be more educated, having greater contact with the 'outside world', in contrast with themselves, who were bounded by the river, and had not travelled outside the delta. This was due to the absence of the facilities of communication like bridges, until recently. On the other hand, people of the uplands have the image of the Konaseema people, even their own caste folks, who were labourers like them, to be immensely rich, blessed with the bounties of nature and the fertility of land.\(^6\)

Before the construction of the anicut across the Godavari by the British engineer, Arthur Cotton, the whole district suffered cruelly on several occasions from drought, and the famine caused by it. The first of these famines is the one, which lasted from 1790–1792. The second visitation of the famine was in the form of what is called the Guntur famine, lasting from 1832-1833. Though it did not affect the district directly, its ravages were so deeply imprinted in the hearts of the people; it became an era from which they reckoned dates. The influx of people from the affected districts, did affect the grain price, as we shall see in the next section, and there was great distress on account of that. The unfortunate cycle that lasted twelve years following the Guntur famine saw the population, which stood at 738,

\(^4\) Cf. F.R. Hemingway, *Godavari*, p. 3.


\(^6\) In personal communication with Rajado of Yeleswaram, hailing from the upland taluk of Yeleswaram. He was my research assistant for a short while, and himself a Madiga. His impressions were about his own fellow-Madigas - 15/10/2001.
308 in 1821, decreasing itself to 538, 836 in 1839-40. Godavari fell into a state of distress, than any of the Northern Circars.

It was the effect of these visitations that ultimately forced the colonial government to build the anicut across the Godavari, to harness the waters of the mighty Godavari. Godavari gathers its water from vast and distant tracts, and is not affected by the local failure of rain.\(^7\)

After the anicut had been built, and the canal system was stabilized, the delta has never felt the want of water. The delta produces vast quantities of food, required for the subsistence of its inhabitants, and provided vast field for labour. Even the famine of 1876-1878, called dhaata karave (famine in the year of dhaata) did not affect the district, though the influx of famine stricken people from Ganjam and Visakhapatnam, did affect the grain prices.\(^8\) This situation noted by Hemingway has drastically changed now, as we shall see in the subsequent sections.

But in the memory of the Konaseema, there is paradoxically inscribed, not only drought, but also of the inundations by the sea, and the fury of Godavari in flood. There are records of inundations at least from 1706 onwards. These inundations are often accompanied by storms of cyclonic nature. The people of coastal Andhra usually await them in the period between October and November, and heave a sigh of relief, when the cyclone has not visited them in a certain year. The most recent inundation was in the year 1996, which took more than thousand lives in the island of Balasuthippa beyond Amalapuram. The accompanying cyclone left the coconut palms of the region denuded, and the people are yet to recover from its negative economic impact.

It was not an infrequent experience for me during the field work, to have come across people, still in the matrix of orality, reckoning to themselves their age, saying, “During the 1953 Godavari (meaning by it, the inundation by Godavari), I was a small boy of, may be five or six.” Before the anicut was built, destructive

\(^7\) Cf. F. R. Hemingway, Godavari, pp. 136-141.

\(^8\) Cf. ibid., p. 136.
floods were more constant. But they do occur now and again, when Godavari breaches her own banks and encroaches into the neighbouring landscape, changing its face and destroying lives and damaging standing crops, which are in fact, her own bounty. The devastating flood of recent memory was that of 1986.⁹

Hemingway reports that the cattle mortality was rather high especially in the central delta and Ramachandrapuram, where fodder was scarce, the animals were crowded and the ground, saturated with moisture. The cattle used to be suffering from the absence of grazing and deficient food at one time, and feeding on coarse quickly grown herbage at other times.¹⁰ The dwindling space for grazing for the cattle, which told upon the fortunes of their kulavrti (traditional occupation) has been a constant theme narrated by the Madigas during my fieldwork. It is a spatialization of their lived experience,¹¹ of being alienated from their familiar habitat and occupation, as Godavari delta was getting ever greener, in the post-anicut period, and during the Green Revolution of Post-Independence period.

The chief diseases suffered by the cattle in the district, as noted by Hemingway were foot and mouth disease (gollu), anthrax (domma), rinderpest (peddajadyam), fever (kurama) and malignant sore throat (sugalirogam). After enumerating the diseases of cattle, with keen observation, Hemingway also adds another supposed source of the death of the cattle. The cattle were said to be not infrequently poisoned by Madigas, who thereupon eat their flesh and appropriate their hide.¹² Cattle death and the demand by the higher castes for clearing the carcass is an experience constantly celebrated in the Madiga folksongs. The subaltern agency at play in the alleged crime of poisoning the cattle, attributed to the Madigas cannot be detached from the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema, as the subsequent sections will throw light on.

⁹ For a historical account of the inundations, cyclones and floods which affected Godavari district. Cf. Ibid., pp. 141-147.


¹¹ My observations on Thirdspace, given in note 2 above have special relevance here.

Unlike the uplands of the Godavari district, delta has been free from Malaria, but cholera is endemic throughout the delta. In 1892, as many as 13,600 persons died of cholera in the district. As Hemingway testifies and as celebrated in songs in praise of the goddess, small pox has been a constant visitor to the district, claiming 18,000 lives in 1878. The power of the Christian god or the Prabhu (Lord Jesus) has been very tangibly felt in containing the demoness/goddess of small pox and cholera, as has been revealed to me during the fieldwork. Hemingway's acknowledgement of the contribution of the Christian missions, in the area of medicines and health, gives credence to the faith of the people in the 'healing touch of the Christian god's power'.

Even as early as 1907, Hemingway noted the problem of sanitation prevalent in the delta, as the pressure of increasing cultivation leaves little wasteland around the human habitat, and the drinking water gathered from the canals is often polluted, inviting cholera to the homestead. The problem of sanitation has not decreased over the years, as brought home to me in the fieldwork, as human beings feel increasingly hemmed in the dwindling spaces around them, making even the task of answering the nature's call a difficult prospect.

Space ceases to be a category to be recorded in statistics, but becomes a dimension of human existence and lived experience, getting into its very texture and memory, breaching the boundaries of the Firstspace, and the Second space, to emerge as the Thirdspace. Topography metamorphoses into human geography.

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13 Cf. Ibid., pp. 149-150.
14 Cf. Ibid., p. 151.
15 Cf. Ibid., p. 150.
16 In personal communication with the Madiga womenfolk of Krishna Nagar, Erivilanka – 28/10/2000
17 See note 2 above, on the thematic of Trialectic of Sapec and the theme of Thirddspace, as over against Firstspace (history), and Secondspace (sociality). Thirddspace as developed by the French Marxist philosopher Lefebvre, integrates the other two ontological and epistemological dimensions, bringing into relief, the inscription of human memory by space.
Thus drought and famine, flood and cyclone, fury and benevolence of Godavari, cholera and small pox, and ill health of cattle and the dwindling grazing space are encoded in the Thirdspace of the Godavari delta and Konaseema, in particular. These eco-determinants form the texture of the lives of the subalterns of Konaseema, and their political economy of survival.

**East Godavari in Historical Perspective**

The earliest historical mention of Godavari appears in the inscriptions of Asoka, the Buddhist ruler of great Mauryan empire. The monarch conquered the Kalingadesa, the tract of land lying between the Mahanadi in the north and the Godavari in the south.¹⁹ The area remained under Buddhist religion, in all probability, until the middle of the seventh century. Apart from the indications of Buddhist influence in the area, there are also a number of Jaina relics and images scattered throughout the district. In Nagaram and Amalapuram taluks, there are many large riveted wells, which for some unknown reason are called Jaina wells.²⁰

**East Godavari district** has come to be a homogenous unit only recently and its component parts had been ruled by various dynasties at different periods of time, such as the Mauryas, Satavahanas, Vishnukundins, Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, Imperial Cholas, Velmaati Cholas, Kakatiyas, Mansuri chiefs, Reddis of Kondavidu, Gajapatis of Orissa, Qutb Shahis, Mughals and Asaf Jahis. These successive dynasties, which ruled East Godavari delta, along with the British, who came after them, have left their imprint on the political economy of Konaseema, in successive layers.²¹

The English had established their first ‘factory’ on the Eastern coast at Masulipatnam in 1632, under the protection of the ruler of Golconda. Subsequently, they set up factories at Injaram, Bendamurulanka and Madhavapallyam

¹⁹ Cf. Hemingway, *Godavari*, p. 3
(Madapollam), which were located respectively at the mouths of Gautami Godavari, Vainatēyam (a branch of Vasīghta Godavari), and Vasīghta Goadavari. The Chintz, a fine variety of cloth produced in the Masulipatnam area was a craze in the Imperial Durbar of the Mughals. It was primarily for gathering the products of these indigenous cloth manufacturers, that the East India Company established their “Factories” at Masulipatnam, Injaram, Madapollam, Visakhapatnam and other places along the Andhra Coast. These “Factories” were in effect godowns used to stock the cloth manufactured by the native weavers on the orders of East India Company. 22

The British took possession of the area of East Godavari, as a result of a treaty, which they entered into with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1766, whereby the Northern Circars (except Guntur) were ceded to the British, in lieu of an annual tribute of nine lakh rupees and military assistance, whenever required.23

The Company had near monopolistic rights over the cloth trade. Whereas the agents of the company could move freely around the region for purposes of trade, the gunastahs of the local merchants had to obtain a perwanah from the Governor to go to the interior and transact business with the weavers. The Company’s gunastahs used to extract bonds or Muchlikkas from the weavers, which compelled the latter to sell the clothes at prices fixed by the Company. Fines, floggings, penalties and harassments of the weavers were the order of the day. The company’s agents used to engage in the forcible seizure of goods from the private merchants, as well as the weavers. The trade of the private merchants was subjected to heavy transit duties. Thus the East India Company attempted to become a monopolist in the product market and the labour market at the end of the 18th century.24

The Dutch had their factories at Jagannathapuram (presently part of Kakinada) and at Palakot, a few miles up the river from Narsapur. The French too

23 Cf. F.R. Hemingway, Godavari, pp.33-34.
had their sway over the region for a brief period, until they surrendered to the British at Coconada in 1759, after having taken asylum with the Dutch, in their factory.25 The erstwhile French enclave of Yanam, known to the locals as French Yanam, is a territory circumscribed by East Godavari.26

In the early British period, the constituent parts of the present district were first administered by the Chief and Council of Masulipatnam. But in 1794, Collectors, responsible to the Board of Revenue, were appointed at the towns of Kakinada and Rajamundhry. In 1859, the erstwhile districts of Rajamundhry, Machilipatnam and Guntur were reconstituted into Godavari and Krishna districts. Later, following upon the execution and extension of the great irrigation schemes of the Godavari and Krishna rivers and taking into account of the ensuing administrative burden, the districts of Godavari and Krishna were further readjusted. The present district is the residuary portion of the erstwhile Godavari district, after some taluks had been transferred to Krishna district in 1904, and subsequently formed into West Godavari district in 1925. In 1959, the taluks of Bhadrachalam and Nugur were transferred to Khammam district.27

The Zamindars in the region came into prominence, after the English took over the territory. They were either descendants of either the Hindu rulers or the Muslim rulers. Some of the Zamindars resided in the hills, the chief among them being the Mansabdar of Rampa. Others resided in the plains. The principal ones among them were the Rajas of Peddapuram, Pitapuram, Kota and Ramachandrapuram.28 These Zamindars had their lands in Konaseema.

The district was very much involved in the freedom struggle. The swadeshi movement found its echoes in the district, especially in the towns of Kakinada.


Rajamundhry, Ramachandrapuram and Amalapuram. The Non-co-operation movement of 1920 saw the district immersed in political turmoil. Another important event in the history of freedom movement in the district was the holding of the annual session of the A. I. C. C., at Kakinada in 1923. The district responded to the call given by the National Congress for Civil Disobedience in 1932. In 1933, when Gandhi visited the district, as part of his campaign for the upliftment of Harijans, the district threw open the temples for Dalit entry.29

Famine, Endemic Hunger and Elusive Well-being

Sen's elaborations on famine, endemic hunger and undernourishment have special relevance for a consideration on the political economy of Konaseema, especially from the subaltern point of view.

The agrarian economy of pre-ancient coastal Andhra, presented a dismal picture, if we are to go by the economic portrait sketched by an eminent economic historian, who has done pioneering work on colonial coastal Andhra and its economy:

The agrarian economy of Coastal Andhra was in a state of stagnation followed by decay in the first half of the 19th century. The Introduction of Permanent Zamindary Settlement during 1802-1804 had strengthened the forces of exploitation in agriculture. Unfavorable seasons, depression in agricultural prices, abolition of “Government Factories” in 1829 and consequent outmigration of weavers, famines and decline in cropped area had not only caused a sharp fall in land revenue but also accentuated the miseries of the agricultural community. Exports of piece goods, for which the region was so famous in earlier times, fell at alarming rate. The frequent occurrence of droughts and famines also slowed down the rate of growth of population, resulting in forced cultivation and use of torture in the collection of land revenue. Irrigation was neglected and transport by road and water was in a miserable state of affairs. In short, cultivation became an unprofitable proposition in the first half of the 19th century.30

29 Cf. *Ibid.*, 43-45. In this context, the anti-British stance taken by the villagers of Vadapally, a village in Konaseema, in the year 1931 is worthy of special mention. The protest was over the fact that the British did not comply with the request of the villagers, to have a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi held at the head of the annual temple procession, thus politicizing the ritual space, as an expression of their support to Gandhiji and the freedom movement. This information is gathered from the plaque commemorating the event, erected at the premises of the local Venkateswara Swamy temple.

As indicated by Rao, the introduction of Permanent Zamindary Settlement between 1802 and 1804 strengthened the forces of exploitation in agriculture. The disadvantages of the Permanent Settlement were manifested in the highhandedness of the uncaring Zamindars, leading to the extortion of the ryots, and the impoverishment of the villages. The Zamindari system was a bad memory, causing economic stagnation, making agriculture, an unprofitable proposition leaving far reaching impact on the economic fabric.

Inadequate infrastructure, in terms of irrigation and transport, especially in the pre-ancient coastal Andhra, unfavorable seasons, heavy tax burden, famines and decline in population, unregulated import of cheap food-grains from Burma were the factors, which adversely affected the already stagnant economy, and told upon the lot of the peasantry, and the labouring classes. Between 1820 and 1850, monsoon was unkind to the Andhra ryots. The great Guntur famine of 1832-1833 did take a heavy toll on the population and caused the large-scale outmigration of population. The severity of the tax burden was acutely felt by the peasants, especially on account of the low agricultural productivity and the rather sharp fall in agricultural prices.

The picture of stagnation and decay of agricultural economy of the region was complete, as indicated by Rao, with the added factor of the collapse of handloom industry, beginning with the closing decades of the 18th century, and more visibly, in the first quarter of the 19th century:

34 Cf. G.N. Rao, “Agrarian Relations in Coastal Andhra Under Early British Rule”, Social Scientist, 1977/61, pp. 19-29. The Company had passed the regulations regarding the Permanent Settlement on 13th July 1802, under which the “proprietary rights” over Zamindary lands were conferred on them by granting a deed of permanent property. The Permanent Zamindary system was already in vogue in the Bengal Presidency and the Madras Presidency was introducing it. In tide over the numerous difficulties, they had met with, in the collection of revenue and their dealing with the Zamindars, under the systems prevailing until then. In practice, however, the Permanent Settlement in the Permanent Zamindary system created greater problems in the collection of revenue, and contributed towards the stagnation of agriculture. For further details on the conditions of land ownership patterns and land control in coastal Andhra, cf. G. N. Rao, “Dimensions of Land Control in Coastal Andhra: A Historical Review” in Conference Papers - Second Annual Conference of the Andhra Pradesh Economic Association, 10 – 11th March, 1984 (Warangal: Kakatiya University), pp. 51-68.


34 Cf. Ibid., p. 226.
But with the abolition of the Company’s factories in 1829, followed by the import of the western textiles and a depression in agricultural prices that lasted a quarter of a century ending with 1852, exports of piece goods from the district registered a sharp decline. In the quinquennium of 1821-25, piece goods worth Rs. 8.68 lakhs were annually exported from the district. Between 1846-49, annual value of exports declined to a mere Rs. 2.01 lakhs.  

In the rural economy of coastal Andhra, where the two sources of revenue and income were the flourishing weaving industry and agriculture, the decline in one had a negative impact on the other.  

As Rao rightly argues, till the advent of the British, the handloom industry was strongly interwoven with the rural agrarian economies, giving certain stability for the rural economy in general. This interdependence was important on two counts. First, the handloom industry had its assured market in the rural areas, especially for its coarse varieties of production, and even for its finer varieties. And second, more importantly, the fluctuations in the levels of employment did affect the fortunes of the agricultural labourers, because a decline in the handloom industry would witness an influx of new entrants in agriculture, as that was the only source of alternative employment for the displaced weavers. This in turn did tell upon the scale of the real wages and the purchasing power of the agricultural labourers, most of whom were drawn from the ranks of the outcastes and untouchables.  

The fall of many Zamindaris, owing to the ill functioning of the Permanent Settlement, led to the drop in demand for fine cloth. As the Proceedings of the Board of Revenue testify, “... it appears that although the number of looms is on the increase still the trade is only about a third of what it was before the Famine, the profits of the trade have greatly declined.” Formerly the weavers had great advantages and the certainty of their track. There were consequently independent

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37 Cf. Ibid., pp. 221-222.

and substantial men among them. They are now a more numerous caste perhaps now, but poorer and their earnings were uncertain. "  

As indicated by these reports, the fall in handloom industry, which did not always mean a fall in the number of looms and weavers, was precipitated by the competition in prices, abolition of the East India Company’s ‘Factories’, famines, migration and deaths. 40 The small peasants and a section of the labouring class, like the Malas, the Imdras and other socially backward communities seem to have joined the weaving industry, as the market for coarse cloth had been still left untouched by the influx of British textiles. 41

This situation of stagnation in agriculture and economy was overcome by the construction of anicuts across the rivers Goadavari and Krishna, in the early fifties of the 19th century and the region witnessed remarkable agrarian expansion, in the post-anicut period. 42

After the anicut was completed and the canal system was developed, the farmers did not take up to irrigation agriculture immediately, as they found the water-cess to be very high. Though the delta was eventually brought under the cultivation of paddy and cash crops, and of sugarcane to a lesser extent, the fortunes of the commercialization of agriculture were mixed, as far as the peasants were concerned. There was initial lack of enthusiasm among the farmers, to avail of the newly provided facilities of irrigation, due to high water cess and lack of proper drainage in the irrigated areas. The rigidity of water rules, by which the ryots were prevented from reverting their wet lands into dry land, was another deterrent in the enthusiasm of the farmers, in initially taking up to irrigation. Stagnation in rice production was also due to the poor transport facilities. 43

40 Cf. Ibid., 242.
41 Cf. Ibid., pp. 239-240.
42 Cf. Ibid., 243.
After the initial lack of enthusiasm, there was a fillip in the availling of the irrigation system by the farmers, and a consequent increase in the output in the wetlands. This was following upon the demand for grain from the famine stricken areas of the Presidency, in the aftermath of the severe famine called dhaata karuva (famine in the year of data).\textsuperscript{44}

But this temporary rise in demand for rice, though improved the lot of the farmers, left untouched the fortunes of the labouring classes, which definitely included the Madigas. In the subsistence economy of Godavari district, which was in a period of transition to a commercial economy and agriculture, wages were partly determined by custom, but increasingly by the forces of demand and supply. At this particular juncture, Godavari had to absorb immigrant poor from the Northern districts of Ganjam and Visakhapatnam. This weakened the bargaining power of the wage-labourers. Possibly during the famine of 1866 and certainly during the daatha karuva (famine), a large number of indigent families had migrated and settled down in both Godavari\textsuperscript{45} and the adjoining district of Krishna, which was undergoing a similar transition as that of Godavari.\textsuperscript{46}

Whereas the attached labourers or the farm servants were paid in kind, and were not adversely affected by the fluctuations in grain prices, the casual labourers working in the farms and in other areas, were entirely paid in money. The revenue official, A. J. Stuart, responding to the enquires made by the Board of Revenue in 1872 stated:

\begin{quote}
On the whole, by far the greatest part of the population was poor and had little beyond food, clothing and shelter: in no country in the world was taxation so high in proportion to the income of the people it was raised from: and little or no advance was observable in the condition of the masses and certainly none in that of the labouring classes (emphasis author's).\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

By 1891, thirty to thirty-five percent of the rural population in the paddy-growing taluks of Godavari were agricultural labourers. During the eighties of the

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Ibid., pp. 42-44.

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Ibid., p. 51

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. G.N. Rao, “Transition from Subsistence to Commercialized Agriculture”, p. A-68.

nineteenth century, the price of rice increased by 25 percentage points, but money wage rates showed not only any absence of increase, but almost remained stationery below two percentage points. Thus it is to be noted that during the 1880s, real wages of the laborers had declined.\(^{48}\)

Canal irrigation, though injected forces of dynamism in the Godavari delta agriculture, the interesting aspect of the agrarian change was that the benefits of the growth process did not reach the rural poor, who constituted nearly one-third of the population.\(^{49}\)

This conclusion makes the claim of Srinivasa Raghava Iyengar that during the second half of the nineteenth century the agricultural wages had been doubled and a large number of labourers acquired lands, becoming *pattadars* (land-holders), to be a grossly exaggerated, if not chimerical.\(^{50}\)

On the other hand, as the backward agricultural economy of coastal Andhra, was undergoing transition from being a subsistence economy to a commercialized economy, the enterprising sections of the land-owning farmers, especially the Kammas invested in rice mills and competed with the Arya Vaisyas (Komatis) in the grain trade. The Komatis themselves were tapping the newfound potential of grain trade, moving their trade from the market towns, where they had hitherto confined themselves, to the interior.\(^{51}\)

As the agrarian scenario, moved from a subsistence economy to a commercialized economy, the fortunes brought about by the transition by-passed the toiling labourers, leaving them where they were always - at the level of subsistence, in the struggle for survival, with a feeling of the standstill in mobility.\(^{52}\)

\(^{48}\) Cf. Ibid., p. 52.

\(^{49}\) Cf. Ibid. p.58.


\(^{51}\) Cf. Ibid., p. A-63.

\(^{52}\) Cf. Ibid., p. A-68.
Applying Sen's category of well-being and capability to the Dalit situation of post-ancient Konaseema, we can conclude that there was no increase in capability vector index of the agricultural laborers, most of whom were Dalits. To prove the truth of this assertion about poverty as capability deprivation, rather than income deprivation, let the Madiga memory, recalling their plight approximately around 1920s, speak for itself:

Our families had at least a small piece of land each. But eventually our lands were appropriated by the Kapus, since we could not pay back to them our debts, taken on compound interest. We used to be very hungry. To survive, we used to cut the carcasses and share. The Malas also used to join us then. We had nothing else to eat but ripe palmyra fruits.53

In the next chapter of this section, we shall see how the condition of the Dalits, and especially the Madigas of Konaseema, has not improved, even in the Post-independence period, especially with regard to daily wages, ownership of land and education. The Madigas of Konaseema are still in struggle for the implementation of the Minimum Wages Act and Land Reforms. They are struggling for the Human Rights of the Dalits and the Right to be Human.

53 In personal conversation with the elders of Palletikuru, which was the first village to have embraced Catholicism, in the entire Konaseema. The eldest among them was around 70 years old, during my group interview in the summer of 1998. In this context, it is enlightening to read the autobiographical short story entitled, “Karuvu” (Famine), by Yendluri Sudhakar, a Dalit poet and writer of note. He is presently the Head of the Department of Literature, in Potti Srinamala Telugu University in Rajamundry. See Yendluri Sudhakar, “Karuvu” in Mallemogula Godugu: Madigakatulu (Hyderabad: Dandora Pracaranalu), pp. 100-103. Towards the end of the story, lines read thus: “When we were being starved to death like this and when each of us was wretched in pain then came the white men. They weren’t really our bosses. They were white gods who saved us. They showed us the Lord in famine! Such love we had never experienced! When I think of those days my heart becomes heavy!” “We can withstand bravely any kind of famine, but how they have made us untouchables and outcastes! When I think of that, it is like a spear piercing my heart!”
Chapter 3

Political Economy of post-Independence Konaseema: Subaltern Struggle for Human Rights, Land and Minimum Wages

Atrocity at Ankampalem¹: Inversion of Human Rights and the Negation of the Synergy Freedoms

In the first chapter of this section, we had alluded to the presence of caste, as the negative surplus, which saps the synergy of various freedoms in interrelationship. The following incident is an eye-opener and a window to the subaltern, especially the Madiga predicament, wherein the caste is woven into the texture of everyday political economy hindering development, and striking at the root of the subaltern yearnings for subjectivity, identity and autonomy. What is of ironical content in this atrocity is that it has taken place on the International Human Rights Day of 2001:

At 09.15 hrs on 10th December, when we were about to leave for Kakinada for a demonstration on the occasion of the International Human Rights’ Day, I was informed by Mr. Chakravarthi, our driver that a young boy had been tied to an electric lamp post at the village centre in Ankampalem. This village is dominated by upper castes. The boy was alleged to have stolen some grain from his landlord. Our union staff immediately went to the place and on enquiry, they learnt that Mr. Kantupudi Viswanatham of the same village had the boy tied to the post. Mr. Prabhakar and Mr. Machavara, our staff, managed to videotape the scene and while doing it were shouted at, insulted and manhandled. The people also tried their best to snatch away the camera from them. But they managed to escape from the scene safely, along with the camera, with the videotape, as evidence of the incident.

Immediately, after mobilizing the support of about hundred people, the matter was reported to the police. The police at first refused to record the complaint. Instead, they accused our staff stating that they were unnecessarily getting involved in such issues and creating unrest in villages. Finally the complaint was booked under IPC 341, wrongful confinement, a very minor offence. The boy had been tied to the post from early morning till 13.00 hrs. We have demanded that the case be booked under SC / ST Prevention Of Atrocity Act.

On further enquiry, we learnt that for the past three years Venkattaramana had been working as ‘Paieru’ (tied servant) for Mr Bugavarapu Somaraju, of the neighbouring village of Ankampalem, for a meager salary of Rs.8000.00 while the minimum wages act stipulates a salary of Rs.16, 000.00.

To this day the culprits have not been arrested and to add insult to injury, the MRO of Athreyapuram, Mr. Jawaharlal, who had been asked by the Joint Commissioner to investigate into the atrocity, has absolved the perpetrators of all wrongdoing. The police

¹The following account of this atrocity on a Madiga boy, employed by a Kamma landlord is gathered from the archives of PARA (People’s Action for Rural Awakening), which has made considerable impact in Konaseema, in the areas of the emancipation of women and Dalits and the defence of the rights of the Dalits. I am thankful to Rev Fr Thomas Pallithanam, the Director of PARA, who shared the firsthand account of the incident with me and made the relevant data available.
have refused to take action under the SC/ST POA Act. Plans are afoot to arrest the boy and charge him under relevant sections for theft!

On our own we have registered a private complaint to make sure that the case will be booked at least at a later stage under the relevant Acts. In the meantime effort is on by the police to work out a compromise, instead of bringing the culprits to justice. There is incontrovertible evidence against the landlords. They themselves have agreed that they illegally confined the boy, by tying him up to the electric post. He was held there from morning 7 o’clock till afternoon 11 o’clock. He was offered not even a cup of water all through this ordeal. He was abused by several people. He was not only tied up, but also beaten up by a number of people as well, foremost among them Mr. Sakkile Dhamaraju the Dalit sarpanch of the village. He beat him with his shoes. After this, others joined in beating up Venkataramana. They were quite aware that he belonged to the Scheduled Caste community, as immediately after tying him up, they sent for the caste elders of the Madiga community, to which he belonged.

They fined him a sum of Rs.500 for the alleged theft. The merchant of the same village, who had bought the paddy from him, was fined Rs.1000. The merchant belongs to the upper caste Vysaya community. The action of the people speaks of absolute caste bias, as they inhumanly humiliated a member of the Scheduled Caste community. It also shows that they had the intention neither to wait for his parents and caste elders, nor hand him over to the local police.

This is not an isolated incident. In September Mr. Poolamati Srinu of Vadapalli village of the same mandal, just 6 kilometers from Ankampalem was tied to a coconut tree for more than three hours on the pretext that he owed his employer, Mr. Gottumukkala Satyanarayanaaraju of Athreyapuram village, Rs.3600.00 that he had borrowed from him. The employer was demanding from him Rs.7000.00 as payment with interest after three months. In the mean time he had made Srinu work for nearly three months for absolutely no payment. The agreement was that he would pay Rs.1500.00 per month for his work. The case is still to be investigated!

Caste is alive and kicking! It does not survive because some “stupid” government regulation wants it entered on the school register. Neither Venkataramana nor one half of the crowd that watched with sadistic pleasure and the other half in impotent anguish had ever had the fortune of coming under influence of the “stupid” government stipulation.

The subalterns of Konaseema, as anywhere,² have been accused of engaging in theft, individually, and more especially collectively even earlier. It had been a label, attached to several of the lower castes, including the Madigas, as we have noted earlier.³ The criminality of the subaltern castes had been an effective dominant construct, by which the higher castes always kept them at the margins of society,

² See James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). pp. 267-71, for an account by the author, of the rural thefts in Sedaka, in rural Malaysia as a sign of protest against the wealthy farmers. The peasants resorted to petty thefts as part of a survival strategy in the political economy of Sedaka, which was fast being commercialised under Green Revolution, pauperizing the small peasants. See also Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 67-100, where he treats of the ambiguity of the rural crimes associated with the subalterns, and the code switching which takes place between hunger-evoked petty thefts and theft as individual and collective subaltern protest.

³ Cf. note 12 of Chapter 2 above.
extracting their labour, but not making them sharers of power. This demonizing of
the subalterns had religious association of purity-pollution, and received the official
stamp of approval of the sarkar. Hemingway describes the activities of some of these
‘criminal tribes’, in association with the fact that Godavari held an unenviable
position among the districts of the Madras Presidency, in respect of the total number
of crimes occurring within it.⁴

The atrocity against the Madiga boy narrated above, is a widow to this type
of demonizing the subaltern castes to exploit their labour, and the inversion of
human rights discourse,⁵ which undergirds it. The traditional Brahminical ascriptive
religious discourse of purity-pollution sanctions such treatment meted out to the
Dalits. As it happened in this case of the atrocity described above, the governmental
agencies, which are to be the guardians of the human rights, flout human justice, and
the basic human rights, by interpreting the law, in favour of the rich and moneyed
class and caste.

The rights of the boy to his deprived wages is forgotten. His foundational
right to be treated with dignity is the victim of class amnesia, because his alleged
crime is weighed heavily against him. The case is made out to be one of incursion by
the Madiga boy into the human right of the landlord to his private property,⁶ his land
and its produce.

Having by now acquired a sense of the ground realities of the field of
Konaseema, and its socio-cultural equations and its political economy, I can safely

⁴ Cf. Hemingway, Godavari, pp. 193-198, where he states that certain tribes like the Yanadis
(Nakkals), Pachayappas, Malas and Peddinti Gollas were considered as criminal castes.

⁵ For an insightful and pathbreaking contribution on the negation of Human Rights to the poor and
the downtrodden, on account of the inversion of the of the very Human Rights discourse in favour of
the mighty and the rich, and the consequent alienation and a-historicisation of Human Rights, see
Felix Wilfred, “Human Rights or Rights of the Poor?” in Asian Dreams and Christian Hope: At the
Dawn of the Millennium (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), pp. 98-112. The author calls for the overcoming of
this alienation and the historicisation and re-interpretation of the Human Rights from the standpoint
of the victims, the suffering concrete flesh and blood subjects.

⁶ Cf. Ibid., pp. 110-112, where the author uncovers the farceal obfuscation by which, the discourse
of human rights is tilted and interpreted reductively to safeguard the right to private property of
benami legal entities like the Multinational corporations, rather than the right of the starving children
of Sub-Saharan Africa, to food, water and shelter.
assert that the atrocity perpetrated on Venkattaramana by the higher castes with impunity, was possible because he was a Madiga. The game of numbers and the caste equations in the political scenario of Konaseema, characterized by fragmentation add credence to my assertion.

According to 1991 Census, Andhra Pradesh had the fifth largest concentration of S.C. population (7.60%) in India. Among the 23 districts of Andhra Pradesh, East Godavari had the highest concentration of S.C. population. But in Konaseema, Madigas are a mere minority of about 4% of the population, though in certain pockets of Konaseema, they are numerically strong. This 4% of the Madigas together with the Malas (18%) form 22% of the total population of the area. This way, the Malas far outnumber the Madigas among the scheduled castes. But the Kapus, a land-owning backward caste who form 30% of the population, is the single largest caste group of Konaseema, and wields immense political clout locally. The Kapus and the Malas extend mutual support, especially given the fact that, they form the bulk of agricultural labour and have close ties of patron-client relationship. The other castes like the Rajus, who claim Kshatriya status, the Reddys and the Kammas are numerically very small, but do own land.

The Kammas are the ruling caste now, in as much as they form the backbone of the Telugu Desam party, which is in power in Andhra Pradesh now. Both N.T.Rama Rao, the founder of the party, and the incumbent chief minister, Mr.Chandrababu Naidu, belong to this upwardly mobile, land owning caste. The Kammas and the upwardly mobile castes, after having reaped the positive gains of the commercialization of agriculture in Krishna and Godavari deltas, moved over to the urban areas of Andhra Pradesh, to invest their newly gained financial resources in real estate and in the service sector. Some of them, especially the Kammas moved over to other areas of the state, where the land was still cheaply available and further

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8 In personal communication with Mr Suryanarayana, Dalit Land Struggle Agitation activist associated with PARA- Ravulapalem, Konaseema - 17/12/2001.
invested in agriculture, taking advantage of the facilities provided by the Nagarjunasagar canal system.  

So, though the Kammas are numerically only a minority, as a caste, they have both financial and political clout. The stance of the Dalit surparch of the area is explained by the dynamics of ambiguity inherent in subaltern solidarity. In the subaltern logic, survival through collaboration is preferred to a direct confrontation with the powers that be, which can prove both futile and fatal. Madigas and other economically and socially backward castes have been kept away from mobility, through these dominant strategies of demonization of the lower castes. Such instances of Human Rights violations are dime a dozen, in East Godavari in general, and Konaseema, in particular, almost often in connivance with the law-enforcing agencies.

The following diagrammatic report, gathered from the PARA Documentation Centre bears ample testimony to my assertion. PARA, which is a nodal agency for several other voluntary agencies and social movements, concentrate in Konaseema, under a networking project called Konaseema Initiative. It networks with two other N.G.O's, SCOPE (Society for Community Participation and Education in Rural Development) and SPHOORTHI. PARA’s initiative in acting as a watchdog of Human Rights violation in the area has been acclaimed.

See Table below for Human Rights Violation of Dalits in the Project Area of Para.

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9 See also in this context, G. N. Rao, "Dimensions of Land Control in Coastal Andhra: A Historical Review" in Conference Papers - Second Annual Conference of the Andhra Pradesh Economic Association, 10 - 11 March, 1984 (Warangal: Kakatiya University), pp. 66-70, for an insightful analysis of the changing patterns of caste equations in coastal Andhra Pradesh in the wake of the commercialization of agriculture in the post-anicut period, and in the post-Depression years of 20th century.

10 Cf. Ranjit Guha, Elementary Aspects, pp. 195-208, where the author analyzes the various shades of collaboration with the enemy, from among the ranks of the subalterns themselves, during a movement of resistance.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>CASE NO.</th>
<th>LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY</th>
<th>LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>KIND OF VIOLATION</th>
<th>OFFENDER NAME</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>CITY/LATITUDE/LONGITUDE</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>01/01/00</td>
<td>20:10</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
<td>Physical Assault</td>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>02/02/00</td>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Anywhere</td>
<td>Sexual Battery</td>
<td>Jane Smith</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Human Rights Violation on Details in the Project Area of Para**

- **Position**: Chief
- **Department**:
- **Date**: 01/01/2000
- **Time**: 20:10
- **Location**: Anywhere
- **Kind of Violation**: Physical Assault
- **Offender Name**: John Doe
- **Sex**: Male
- **Age**: 30
- **City/Latitude/Longitude**: Los Angeles
Amartya Sen correctly analyzed that apart from lack of income, the denial of freedoms, especially those of Human Rights themselves, hampers the development of the masses. The history of the oppression of the Dalits of Konaseema, and the Madigas in particular bears out the truth of this assertion on the interlink between the lack of development of the people and the suppression of their freedoms. The atrocity at Ankampalem stands out as an example for the extreme vulnerability of the Dalits vis-à-vis the issue of Human Rights.

Their lives have been inscribed by the stigma of skinning of carcasses and submerged in the process of curing hide in the curing vats. The stigma of leather and the stink of the crude curing vats have been symbolic of their low polluted state and struggle for daily survival:

Coarse leather for the manufacture of country shoes is made by the Madigas all over the low country. Their method of tanning is very elementary. The hides and skins are soaked in a solution of chamam to remove the hair, then in clean water for a day, next for ten days in a decoction of the bark of the habul (Acacia arabica) tree, and finally they are stitched into bags, which are filled with habul bark and soaked for a week in water.

Apart from the stigma of pollution and the struggle for survival, the history of the Madigas stands inscribed also by the predicament of landlessness and lack of socio-political and economic mobility. Their story is one of the denial of Human Rights and the Right to be Human. Their history is a saga of their subaltern struggle against the exploitation of the dominant classes, which have deprived them of their land and their just remuneration, for their backbreaking labour. In the following subsection, we shall capture in a few broad strokes, the struggle of the Dalits of Konaseema, for land and through it for upward mobility, and a share in the prosperity of Konaseema.

Dalits of Konaseema and their Struggle for Acquisition of Land

As indicated in the introductory section of this chapter entitled "Konaseema in Historical Perspective", much of East Godavari, and especially the fertile Central

11 See in this context Chapter 1 of this section notes 10, 15 and 34 above, where I have alluded to the synergy between human freedoms and human productivity and capability, and also Cf. Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), the section entitled "Globalization: Economics, Culture and Human Rights", pp. 240-242.

Delta, known as Konaseema, had been shared between different Zamindaris. In Island Polavaram Mandal, Kesinakurru, Thillakuppa and Muramulla were under the Kapileswarapuram Zamindar. The last scion of the erstwhile Zamindari household was S.B.P.K. Pattabhiramrao. He was also the Central minister for agriculture and Co-operatives. The area of S.Yanam was under the Kotipalli Zamindar. Mandapalli belonged to the Pitapuram estate.

On 27th October 1948, the then Madras Government passed the Zamindari Abolition Bill and on 7th September 1949, the bill became an Act under the title, Zamindari Abolition Act. In East Godavari, there were about 556,340 acres of land under the different Zamidaris.

What is of interest to us from the subaltern point of view is that the Dalits, either before the abolition of the Zamindary system or after it, were not the owners of land, except for the manyam or inam (gift or remuneration for service rendered) lands assigned to them. The Dalits were not allowed to own land, as per the injunctions of Manudhravasastra. Both in the Ryotwari and Zamindary systems, the Dalits were outside the fold of those who could own or even aspire to own land. The Zamindars leased out their land only to the upper castes. Apart from the laws of Manu, scriptures like the Aitihārya Brāhmaṇa, Taittirīyabrahmaṇa and Panchvimsabrahmaṇa and Puruṣasūkta were cited as authoritative texts to keep the Sudras (non-twice born castes) under the subjugation of the dominant castes, denying him ownership of land, or even aspiration to the ownership of land.

13 Cf. Seshagiri Bhadriraj, Andhrapradesha Raithu Udyanalu (Hyderabad: Telugu Academy, 1990), 44.
14 Cf. Ibid., p.13.
15 Cf. F.R. Hemingway, Godavari, p. 179. See also G.N. Rao, Dimensions of Land Control, pp. 55-56, for a succinct description of various kinds of inam lands, in coastal Andhra, before and during the colonial period.
The movement for land for the tiller, which culminated in the passing the Tenancy Act, by which those who were cultivating the temple and endowment lands on lease, became the owners of those lands, did not in any way benefit the Dalits. The land struggles, initiated by the Communist Movement had only benefitted the Kammas, Reddys and the Kapus. The Dalits were kept away from the ownership of land, even by the Communist movement, because the Tenancy Act was cunningly manipulated, to benefit the upper castes and the OBCs. It is a known fact that in Andhra Pradesh, like in Bengal and Kerala, the leadership of the Communist Movement rests with the upper castes.

After the enactment of the Zamindari Abolition Act, those who benefitted were the BCs and the OBCs. In Andhra Pradesh, out of the 39,000 landowners, who share the ownership of the 4,50,000 acres of Temple and Endowment lands between them, 90% are BCs and the OBCs.  

The truth of the above observation is revealed in the fact that, among the forty cultivators of the vast tracts of land, under the trusteeship of the Siriraju Vatsavai Butchi Seethayamma Jagapathibahadur Maharani Dharmasatram, Peddapuram, there are only eleven S.C. cultivators.

Similar is the situation with the land-holdings of the Kakinada MSN (Malladi Satyalinga Nayakar) Charitable Trust. As per the records, the Trust owns lands, which were being cultivated by the Dalits like Malas and the Madigas, and by the backward castes like the Chakali, and Chettubaljis. In the past, families belonging to the Dalits and the backward caste had cleared the forests and made the lands arable. The names of each family, which did the clearing of the land is attached to the land. The holdings are known as pōḍak (clearing), and each family’s name is suffixed to each pōḍak. The records show that many of the pōḍak, end with the suffix gāḍa, a suffix, used by the upper caste landowner to address the Dalit labourer, instead of the respectful suffix gāru, which they appropriate for themselves, as a mark of respect and honour. Behind this semantic and phonetic

17 Cf. Ibid., pp.1-2.
18 M.V. Prasad, Daññu - Bhūnīsamaya, p. 21.
differential, there is the ubiquitous negative surplus of caste, and a history of exploitation. The land holdings, presently owned by the MSM Charitable Trust, would have been owned by the Dalits, who worked hard to clear the forest, but eventually forcibly evicted from those lands, invoking Manudharmasatru and its injunction against the Dalit ownership of land.\(^\text{19}\)

The Green Revolution, which Indian farming witnessed after the 1960s, benefited the big farmers, whereas for the small farmers of the backward rural areas, it was less than a blessing because of the rise in prices, which it brought about.\(^\text{20}\) In 1969, Indira Gandhi, addressing the Chief ministers’ Conference, observed, “The warning of the time is that unless the Green Revolution is accompanied by a revolution based on social justice, I am afraid Green Revolution may not remain green.”\(^\text{21}\)

As gathered by me from the fieldwork, the Dalits of Andhra Pradesh, and especially Konaseema, started enjoying the ownership of land, with a certain amount of security and stability only from the days of the Emergency. Though the days of emergency are described as ‘dark’ in India’s history, they are considered as the ‘era of light’ by the Dalits, a boon given to them, by the all powerful and all benevolent Mother, Indira Gandhi. The events of 1970s, which reflect the ‘realpolitik’ of those days, bear testimony to the truth of the Dalit construct of Indira Gandhi as their benefactor. Either because Indira Gandhi felt that the power base of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh, which was predominantly Reddy, was being eroded, by the threat from the Left, or because she wanted to create a vote bank among the rather large contingent of S.C.s in Andhra Pradesh (15-18%), and broaden her power base, she started befriending the SCs from 1970 onwards.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Cf. Ibid., pp. 26-31.

\(^{20}\) Cf. Seshagiri Bhadriraj, Raudha Udayaithu, p.11. See also Keith Griffin, Political Economy of Agrarian Change: An Essay on the Green Revolution (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 73 as quoted in James Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. 80, to the effect that the changes effected by the Green Revolution tend to increase relative inequality. Though this statement is quoted in corroborative support of his own discoveries of the Mada region of Malaysia, it could be applied to the paddy rich Konaseema, which has gone through India’s own version of Green Revolution.


\(^{22}\) In personal communication with Suryanarayana, Land Struggle Activist of PARA- Ravulapalem-17/12/2001
Her strategy was to take the wind out of the sail of the Communist bid for power, by weaning away the S.C.s from the Left bastion. She introduced the legislation for the Minimum Wages, which would benefit the S.C.s, most of whom were poorly paid agricultural labourers. She also introduced land reforms in 1975, and there was a specific stipulation in the Land Reforms Act, by which the Porambōkā (grazing lands under governmental control or common village ownership) lands had to be handed over to S.C.s. In 1976, the government also passed the Assigned Lands Prohibition of Transfer Act, by which it wanted to prevent the alienation of the land distributed to the Dalits and tribals, through the machinations and money power of the rich.\(^\text{23}\)

Indira Gandhi also gave a direction to the bureaucracy to the effect that the S.C.s who were occupying the surplus lands owned by the landlords were not to be arrested, on the complaints by the landlords. Only after consulting the MROs (Mandal Revenue Officers), the police was to arrest the S.C.s for alleged cases of encroachment (Memo - 2854 Police 77-1, dated 27-10-77).\(^\text{24}\)

These moves towards obtaining land for the Dalits, initiated by Indira Gandhi, were seen as rays of light in their history of darkness by the Dalits of Konaseema and of India in general. They were indeed attempts at the historicization of Human Rights and attempts at interpretation of Human Rights from a “deprivational perspective” of development.\(^\text{25}\)

In Konaseema, only very few scheduled caste members, and still fewer Madigas can boast of real ownership of land. Though many own land _de jure_, the _de facto_ owners are the Kapus or the Rajus of the area, depending upon their clout and prominence. Even the _Lankabhūmi_ (the delta lands, immediately adjoining the Godavari) or coastal lands assigned to the S.C. communities and the fishermen communities, have been, in effect, alienated from them, through the political and financial clout of the upper caste landlords. One exception, which in a way proves

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 13.
\(^{25}\) Felix Wilfred, _Human Rights or Rights of the Poor?,_ p. 114.
the rule, is that of Bucchi Maheswara Rao, the S.C. M.L.A. from Konaseema. An analysis of latent dynamics and the political game behind his ownership of land will prove the significance of the foregoing paradoxical comment:

In Konaseema, Nagaram and Mummudivaram are Assembly segments reserved for the S.C. community. But the Kapus, who wield numerical and political clout, call the shots during the elections. The Rajus in Konaseema are financially sound, have man power, but the Kapus are more united and have organizational capacity, and the number game, as the SCs rightly perceive, tilt towards them. They have 30% of votes. They have money and men. So in the socio-economic arena, the Dalits liaison themselves with the Kapus. Kapus even organize the SCs. There is an ingrained feeling among the Dalits that, without their nod of approval and their blessings, they cannot get on ahead.26

So only those SCs, who are at the beck and call of the upper castes, and endowed with their blessings, come to own the land, overcoming the hurdles placed by Manudharmasastra and the ritualized hierarchy, which with its unwritten laws, still bind the Dalits into immobility.

Yet how does Bucchi Maheswara Rao, the Mala M.L.A. manage to be the richest landowning S.C. in Konaseema? The answer is pure and simple. When the temple lands are being auctioned out, the upper castes will not appear for the auction, as a reward for all the services rendered to them by Mr. Maheswara Rao as their M.L.A. Nobody overbids him or his men. The key to the socio-political dynamics behind his land ownership is client patron relationship.27

As P.R. Rajagopal notes:

In no sphere of public activity in our country since Independence has the hiatus between precepts and practice, between policy pronouncements and actual execution been as great as in the domain of land reforms. With resolute and ambiguous political will, all the other short-comings and difficulties could have been overcome; ... Considering the characteristic of the political power structure obtaining in the country, it was only natural that the required political will was not forth-coming.28

This absence of political will bemoaned by the ex-Chief secretary of Bihar is reflected to be true to reality, if the following petition affixed below is any indication.

26 In personal communication with Mr Suryanarayana, Dalit Land Struggle Convenor - PARA. Ravulapalem - 17.12.2001.
27 Ibid.
28 P.R. Rajagopal, Social Change and Violence. p. 49.
This is the petition filed by the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Bahujana Vyavasai Vruthidarula Union, to the district Collector of East Godavari, with the plea that the court order against S.B.P.K. Pattabhiramarao, the scion of the erstwhile Kapileswarapuram Zamindar, and the Ex-central minister for agriculture and cooperatives be implemented. The court order is towards the implementation of the distribution of the surplus lands in the illegal possession of S.B.P.K. Pattabhiramarao, to the S.C.s of Konaseema.

The petition is symbolic of the ongoing struggle of the Dalits of Konaseema for the just implementation of the land reforms, and the acquisition of lands, which are due to them.
Andhra Pradesh Dalit Bahujana Vayasi Varuthidarula Union

Door No.10-25511, Taraka Rama Nagar.
Amalapuram - 533201

Secretary (E.G.Dt.): I.Suryanarayana
Date: 26th November 2001

To

Sri A.Satish Chandra I.A.S.
District Collector, & District Magistrate
E.G.Dt. (A.P)
KAKINADA.

Sir,

Sub:

1. Former Central Minister, Rajahyamundry M.P. Sri S.P.B.K.Satyanarayana Rao (Kapileswarapuram Jamindari) Lands situated at Kapileswarapuram, Kothapeta, Rajanagaram, and Rangam Pata Mandal in E.G.Dt. are declared as Ceiling Lands by Supreme Court.


4. Dr.Justice Pummiya Commission submitted in his report in page No.303 to Distribute Ceiling Land to the Poor Dalits and in Page No.312 to evict the Landlords from Government Lands. Regarding this A.P.Government issued G.O.Ms.No.92, Dated 3rd October 2001. We demand to implement G.O.Ms.no.92 immediately.

5. Basing on the Central Government instructions to evict the Landlords from Fertile Lands (Banjaru Boonulu) basing on 1969 Crash Program to Distribute the Government Lands to the Poor people.

6. We are seeking a Special Officer to hand over the Ceiling Lands (Kapileswarapuram Jamindari) for distributing to the Eligible Persons and to implement of Supreme Court Judgement.

7. We are seeking Advertising; if anybody violates Land Ceiling Act he will be punished for 2 years Imprisonment or Rs.2000/- fine or both. According to A. P. Land Reforms Act (1973).

Supreme Court delivered the judgment dated 5th January, 1982 as per the Judgment Jamindari lands declared as ceiling. In E.G. Dt., Rajahyamundry Revenue Division, Kapileswarapuram Village Kapileswarapuram Jamindaru sold away their Lands On 16th.

The description of this Land Dispute Case and the allied struggle for the implementation of the court verdicts is taken from the Land Struggle Archives - Documentation Centre of PARA, Ravulapalem, Konaseema.
17th, of December 1971. These sales are not valid according to A. P. Land Reforms Act 1973. Supreme Court full bench delivered the same judgment in Civil Appeal No.3338 of 1984 A. P. Land Lords ceiling cases dismissed on 29th March 1990. Kapileswarapuram Jamindaru and his family sold away their lands in 40 L.C.C.Cases (Rajahmundry) 897 Acres 72 Cents of land, which was declared as ceiling Land.

Lands were sold after January 24th, 1971. These sales were not valid based on Supreme Court Full Bench Judgment, as these lands come under Land Ceiling Act. Basing on the Conditions of Land Ceiling Act, transactions done on White papers are not valid. Basing on these points all the transactions done by Kapileswarapuram Jamindaru are not valid. So we request you to hand over these lands and appoint a special Officer to acquire these lands.

We request you to solve the Land Ceiling Cases immediately and order the Government Officials. Whatever facts we know we have put before you. If any body violates the land ceiling Act he is punishable for 2 years imprisonment or Rs.2000/- fine or both. We request you to advertise above said punishments according to land reforms Act (1973).

Yours Faithfully

(Suryanarayana)

Added List of Documents:
3. List of Names of Occupiers of Ceiling Lands.

Copy to:
1. The Honourable Chief Minister, A.P., Hyderabad.
2. The Sub-Collector, Rajahmundry.
3. Revenue Division Officer, Padapuram.
4. Revenue Division Officer, Amalapuram.

I have highlighted this case, from among many other cases and the struggles of the Dalits of Konaseema, because of its symbolic value, in as much as the Ex-Zamindar of Kapileswarapuram, turned central minister for Agriculture and Cooperation is the defendant in the said case. As we may note, the apex court of the land has given its final verdict and the concerned authorities are not able to implement the court decision, depriving the subaltern Dalits of their right to the surplus lands. Justice delayed is justice denied indeed! In the absence of resolute political will, even minor roadblocks become formidable in the journey of Indian land reforms.30

30 Cf. P. R. Rajagopal, Social Change and Violence, Ibid.
The relevance of this case is further brought into relief, when placed against the observations of the Revenue Ministers Conference of 1985, "Sizeable areas in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have gone out of the total quantum of surplus land as a result of court decisions. Even the land already distributed had to be denotified in many cases causing considerable hardship to the assignees who had invested resources."\(^{31}\)

Like in other areas of India, in Konaseema too, all aspects of Land Reforms have not been implemented. Remnants of feudalism and absentee landlordism continue in several states. As we have noted, Andhra Pradesh and Konaseema are no exception to this tardy state of Land Reforms. More importantly, the bureaucracy belonging to the landed class has sabotaged the legislation, imposing land ceilings. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-5) Report admitted that out of the 15.74 lakh hectares of land, identified as surplus land, as in March 1980, only about 9.56 lakh hectares of land have been taken possession of by the states and only 6.79 lakh hectares have been distributed.\(^{32}\)

This tardy implementation of the Land Reforms evidently curtails the accessibility of the Dalits, and in our case the landless Madigas of Konaseema, to agricultural land and self-employment in their own land, which enhances their dignity and the synergy of freedoms in their lives, to borrow from Amartya Sen. Towards the tail end of the 1980s, "[O]nly 22.1 per cent of the SC workers cultivated the land as (independent) self-employed workers, whereas among the non-SCs the percentage was more than double: 48.6 per cent."\(^{33}\)

In the next sub section, we enter into yet another area of the synergy of freedoms in the subaltern context, the area of the Minimum Wages Act, which, by

\(^{31}\) Ibid.


its very poor implementation, in fact has contributed negatively to the subaltern aspirations to socio-economic mobility in Konaseema.

**Minimum Wages: Launching Pad and Touchstone of Mobility in Konaseema’s Subaltern Universe**

“The first important legislation to provide legal protection against exploitation to the poor was the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.” 34 But as far as Konaseema is concerned, the socialist and Nehruvian liberal democratic thrust of this foundational piece of legislation, was not be taken for granted. It had to be ongoingly won through struggle:

> Ever since the time of Arthur Cotton, who set up the beautiful canal irrigation system, this is a “land flowing with milk and honey”...but only for the rich and the powerful, for the socially “high born”. For the poor and the Dalits life is a struggle to keep body and soul together. Long hours of backbreaking labour and a pitance to take home as wages at the end of the day. Nature’s blessings for the landed high castes have not trickled down to the agricultural labourers in terms of just wages. 35

These words of the social activist Pallithanam give vent to the frustration of the people, over the callousness of the very bureaucrats, who are supposed to implement the stipulations of the Minimum Wages Act. But the bureaucrats collude with the landlords, to compromise on the interests of the labourers.

The subaltern agency of the Dalits, especially the womenfolk is expressed in protracted struggle, boycotting work and going hungry, in the absence of just wages. But success of the struggle, which should be counted in terms of removing the gap between the Minimum Wages in the register of the government and the wages paid by the landlord, is seldom achieved, though stories of real success are not lacking.

To quote one example, in the particular struggle held in Srinivaspeta of Kothapeta Mandal in 1996, the labourers succeeded in raising the wages from Rs.10 for women to Rs. 21, as stipulated in the Minimum Wages Register and from Rs.12


for men to Rs. 35 for men. Behind this success story and its climax, there were the agonizing days of hunger, foisted cases and being dragged to the police station on trumped up charges, and the ever-present ambiguity of subaltern solidarity, which express itself in shifting loyalties, between the cause of the struggle and the loyalty to the landlord, as a way of survival, than open confrontation.\textsuperscript{36}

But this victory of the struggle is not a once and for all story, as the landlords and the bureaucracy get back into their beaten tracks, once the steam of the struggle is let off, and the labourers too get weighed down by the concerns of daily survival. The extent of the yawning gap between the Minimum Wages, as stipulated by the government and the wages on the ground in agrarian Konaseema can be understood by comparing the Government notified Minimum Wages Act for the year and the daily wages in vogue for the same period as given on pages 67 and 68.

The struggle for the Minimum Wages has its deeper significance, given the fact of the differential between the real wages and the money wages. As we have seen in the context of the post-anicut colonial Konaseema, during the last decades of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the real wages of the agricultural labourers in Konaseema were on the decline, though the money wages were on the increase. A similar situation was discovered by a comparative study of the Real Wage levels, of the different districts of Andhra Pradesh for the 1970s, in the post-Green Revolution era.

The conclusions of this Survey revealed that in spite of the rise in money wages, the trend in the Real Wages was one of stagnation, as the Consumer Price Index and the retail prices kept ahead of the money wages, which were high, as the money value went up. The Real Wages showed any indication of rise only with the fall of the price of rice since 1974-75, this in spite of the rising trends in agricultural production in Andhra Pradesh as a whole.\textsuperscript{37} The Survey clearly indicated that the Real Wages Trend had been that of stagnation, especially in the 1960s and the


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**STATEMENT SHOWING THE WAGES BEFORE STRUGGLE**

ANNEXURE - 9 of "Remuneration the Celebration of Hunger"
<table>
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<th>Name of the Village</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Handicapped</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
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### Statement Showing the Wages After Struggle

<table>
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<th>Name of the Village</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Handicapped</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anexurie</td>
<td>24 of &quot;Reminiscing the Celebration of Humanism...&quot;</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
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Another revealing factor of the survey, and of special interest to Konaseema is that both the Godavari districts fell from the top positions to middle level positions, in the post-Green Revolution period.39

What the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes observed way back in 1980s still holds good for the agrarian situation in Konaseema. “It is most unfortunate that even the prescription of minimum wages, leave aside their actual payment, has been the cause of infliction of the most inhuman atrocities on the helpless agricultural labour when they dare to demand wage prescribed by Government officials.”40 The Commission observed that the Minimum Wages fixed by the centre and state governments fall far below the poverty line. It also emphasized the need of organizing the agricultural labour, a task which the NGOs like PARA is engaged in a radical fashion, so that the condition of the labouring classes might improve and they might cross the poverty line, a stated objective of the VIIth Five Year Plan. It underlined the failure of the governmental apparatus in organizing the unorganized sector, which chiefly consists of agricultural labourers, of Dalit origin. This failure has been due to the social structure, which dominates and controls the government.41

For the agricultural labourers, this ongoing struggle for the securing of Minimum Wages has to carry on, because it is the source of their livelihood, survival, nay the launching pad of their mobility. But this subaltern struggle for survival has taken on new dimension, in the context of Globalization. The negative impact of Globalization is felt in Konaseema in the area of aquaculture.

Aquaculture/Konaseema Globalized: Waters of Pollution, Land of Salinity and Labourers in Starvation

Andhra Pradesh coastal zone has 723 sq.kms. area under aquaculture including an area of 400 sq. km under fresh water fish culture. Shrimp farming is

38 Cf. Ibid., pp. 45-47.
39 Cf. Ibid., p. 47.
40 P. R. Rajagopal, Social Change and Violence, p. 47.
41 Cf. Ibid., 48-49. Cf. also Ghanshyam Shah, “Poverty Alleviation Programmes in India”, p. 160, for a stringent indictment by the NCRL (National Commission for Rural Labour) of the inadequate approach by the State Secretariats, which are supposed to be dealing with the Minimum Wages, and their ignorance of ground realities of rural agricultural employment.
taken up on large scale in Nellore, Prakasam and East Godavari districts. This aquaculture activity has attracted severe criticism from environmentalists on account of several factors.

The uncontrolled growth of aquaculture is eating into the subaltern fabric of the political economy of Konaseema, as more and more agricultural lands are converted into shrimp farms, resulting in the reduction of wage rates and the dwindling labour opportunities. It also results in land grabbing, as the landlords try to take over the small holdings, owned by the Dalits, in view of broadening their shrimp farms. Thus globalization in Konaseema results in the denial of Human Rights to Dalits.

Further, uncontrolled growths of brackish water aquaculture units and their intensive farm practices have brought severe strain on the surrounding environment. In their undue greed for quick money, agricultural landowners unscrupulously convert their land into aquaculture farms. Moreover, in many cases of large-scale aquaculture units are located far beyond the Coastal Regulation Zone, and the seawater is being pumped well inside the hinterland. This will pose a potential threat of contamination to ground water, as well as soil salinisation. Thus, already scarce productive land resource will be progressively rendered saline. A huge quantity of freshwater is needed for corporate aquaculture farms in order to dilute the sea water (salinity around 25,000 mg/l). This will result in converting the precious and scarce freshwater into saline water. 42

As per the governmental regulations, 60% of the coastal land is to be given to the fisherman, and for the SCs. But just now the lands have been gobbled up by the landlords. The small-time fishermen along the coast are not able to follow their traditional occupation of shallow water fishing, precisely due to the environmental hazards caused by the aquaculture industry as we have seen above. They have lost their traditional approach areas for fishing, as they have been encroached upon by

42 For this entire section on the fast growing aquaculture industry and the environmental threat being caused by it, I am indebted to http://www.apscreb.org/scripts/sc_chapter6.html (Source: Shore Area Development Authority [SADA], Andhra Pradesh, 2000.)
the aquaculture tycoons. Water is getting polluted and the land is turning saline. Polluted effluents from aquaculture ponds are destroying the eggs laid by the fish along the coastline.\(^4\)

There is no strong eco-movement among the fishermen (*Agnikulakshatriyulu*), because the leaders of the communities, which have strong caste ties, are being managed and bought up by the Rajulu, who own the fishponds. They share a part of the profit or harvest of the fish, with the leaders of the fisherfolk, to contain their possible backlash. Thus the otherwise militant communities of the *Agnikulakshatriyulu* have been domesticated through their own leaders *pethandoralu* (leaders).\(^4\)

By an approximate estimate, 20% of the Konaseema’s cultivable land has been converted into aquaculture ponds, reducing the scope for the traditional agricultural labour. The coolie rates have decreased, and so the people are forced to migrate to Krishna district, whereas in the post-anicut period, as Hemingway noted, Godavari district was a safe haven for the emigrants from the other drought-stricken districts of the Northern Circars.

In Krishna district, the migrant labourers from Konaseema have to struggle against the local labour force, which do not welcome them. In 1997, in Pamaru in Krishna district, there was an incident in which six labourers of Katraikona village, of Katraikona mandal of Konaseema, died apparently in a tractor accident, but willfully caused by the opposite group. The incident was actually a settling of scores over earlier disputes, involving womenfolk. The cases were filed and the government had even given compensation to all the victims.\(^4\)

**Globalization and the Displacement of Labour**

In the context of Globalization and the liberalization of economy, there are also the Multinational Companies making their presence felt in Konaseema, in their *desi* (local) avatars. For example, within the last three years, a Power Giant has

\(^4\)In personal communication with Mr Suryanarayana, Land Struggle Convenor, PARA, Ravulapalem- 17/12/2001.

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid.
appeared in the Devarapalli village, under the name Oakland Konaseema. The company, which mushroomed, so to say under the people's eyes, has bought up land in hundreds of acres, as a single block, depriving the Madigas, who were dependent on those lands, of their labour and livelihood. The Company was apparently started to produce power at cheaper rate, availing of the Natural gas supplied by O.N.G.C. (Oil and Natural Gases Commission), a public sector undertaking, which has dug several wells, in the Godavari Basin. As a result of this seemingly beneficial alliance between the Sarkār and the globalizing forces of technology, the subaltern people have become victims.\textsuperscript{46}

The reforms demanded by the Brettonwood institutions, in the name of structural adjustments coerce the governments to scrap the labour laws all together, instead of extending protection to the unorganized sector. In India, more than 70% of the rural households are small marginal farmers or landless laborers. In irrigated areas like Konasemma, they have about 200 workdays per year, and in the rain-fed areas of the country, approximately 100 days. The landless farmworkers become the 'untouchables' of the New Economic Policy. The lifting of controls on cotton yarn exports in 1991, following the liberalization of trade, had led to starvation deaths, among weavers of Andhra Pradesh.\textsuperscript{47}

As we have noted, the voracious advance of the aquaculture industry in Konaseema has led to the deeper alienation and displacement of Madiga agricultural labourers of Konaseema, from their place of work, and their sources of livelihood. They were already on the brink of starvation due to constant underemployment, discrimination in employment and poor implementation of the Minimum Wages Act. Their socio-economic mobility had already been hindered due to their inaccessibility to land, caste discrimination and the drain of economic surplus from the area.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} In personal communication with Pedda Veeriah, the Madiga headman of Chivvaripuntha, the Madiga hamlet of Devarapalli village, where Oakland Konaseema is constructing its 'factory' - 22/10/2000


\textsuperscript{48} Cf. B. Sarveswaran Raw. A Study of Rural Poverty and Inequalities in a Developed District (Agro-Economic Research Centre, Andhra University, October, 1976, Unpublished), p. 105. The Study is
This already debilitated mobility is further hindered by the onslaught of the forces of Globalization. Globalization has led to a regressive tendency of landlordism, wherein the ownership of farmland gets concentrated into fewer hands, as it is happening in Konaseema. Large agriculturalists not only follow capital intensive farming displacing traditional labour, but also pressurize the state into doing away with the land-ceiling laws, building up a strong advocacy for larger rams.

Champions of economic reform, may engage themselves in the fatalistic discourse, wherein disparity in wages, income and wealth are presented as being ‘necessary part of the transition’, related to economic reforms, in the context of inevitable process of globalization. They also predict that increased inequality can raise poverty in the short run, but the advantages of globalization are to eventually trickle down to the lower socio-economic strata. But the question being asked by the flesh and blood Madigas of Konaseema is how short is the short run, and how long is the transition?

Globalization and Dalit Brain Drain in Konaseema

According to the reading of Mr. Job, globalization has accelerated and augmented the capital drain from Konaseema, and from East Godavari. The drain of capital had already started with the commercialization of agriculture. The big farmers, the Kammas, the Rajus and of late, the Kapus are investing their money in the cities, leaving their land behind for the tenant farmers to cultivate.

based on the analysis of socio-economic data from the Taluk of Ramachndrapuram, East Godavari District. This Taluk is bordering Konaseema, pp. 121-128.


50 Cf. Note No.28 of Chapter I of this section, where I recall the story of Sahib, who resisted the attempt of the Raju landlord from taking over his farm, to broaden his own aquaculture farm.


Among the Dalit agricultural labourers, who are a little enterprising, intelligent, articulate and vocal, and who are capable, do not want to remain as coolies. They aspire to become tenant farmers. They take land on lease from the landlord, and cultivate. They may also employ labourers. They also work as coolies after their tenant-cultivation is over. But as tenant farmers, they gain the social status of a farmer. He rises in the social ladder. This in itself sounds good. Apparently they are attaining mobility, or at least on the way to it. But what is the price, they have to pay for this?

First of all, they have to compete among their own people to get this land. They have to pay greater amount to get this land. After getting the land, it becomes a great favour shown to them by the landlord. There is a patronizing effect. They have to be under the control of the landlord. They have to obey him. They have to try not to displease the landlord, lest he takes away the land. This is a subtle form of hegemony exercised by the landlord. These are unwritten conditions or laws operative as codes in the hegemonic transaction between the landlords and the subalterns.

There is yet another layer to this hegemony without domination. There is a mechanism by which the control of the landlord or the elite is operative over the Dalit tenant farmers. It is the landlord or the local grain merchant who advances the money for cultivation. They give this money to them at a greater rate of interest than the bank rates. The condition binding this advance of money is that the repayment should be in grain, and not in money. He always collects back the grain, at the end of the harvest, at a rate lower than the market rate. Dalit tenant farmers lose both ways. They lose their freedom, as well as their money. They lose everything. They lose their grain. They give much more than what they should give, by way of returns. Of course, they have some status of the elite, being deemed landholders. Their opinion is respected. In fact, they act as conduits of the political views of the upper castes to the agricultural labourers. Through them, the higher castes buy off the votes of their fellow-agricultural labourers. In the patron client relationship prevalent in the village, they act as middle links or kingpins. Through them the political opinion, thinking and scenario of the village are shaped by the elite. A consensus is obtained.

The number of tenant families is increasing only, because the real landlords are leaving Konaseema proper and going to the cities. A sort of benami ownership of land is on the rise. The lands are getting orphaned. The tenant farmers will fill this gap. It is as if the Zamindary system is back, wherein the lands were being parcelled out. The real owners return once a year, to get their share of the harvest. And those tenant farmers are very faithful. The Kapu’s and especially Kamma’s money will be invested in the theatres and hotels of Hyderabad or Visakhapatnam. Apart from the capital drain from Konaseema, it also causes the brain drain from the Dalit fold. The potential Dalit organic intellectuals end up as traditional intellectuals, as agents of the dominant forces.  

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54 In personal communication with Mr. Job Puhenparaackal - 11/12/2001.

55 Ibid. In the context of this discussion on the drain of organic intellectual leadership from the Dalit camp, see also Cf. Antonio Gramsci, Quentin Hare and Geoffrey Novell Smith (eds). Selections from Prison Note Books (London: Lawrence and Wish art. 1971), pp. 15-23.
Overview of the Section

Past Five Year Plans and the Green Revolution, poverty as capability deprivation, in its various forms persist in Konaseema, as elsewhere in India, proving the fallacy of the "Trickle Down" theory, as the dominant strata of society corner the benefits of development, leaving the deprived groups high and dry. In India, we cannot delink poverty and untouchability, even as we cannot delink religion and political economy.

For the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema, history has not ended with the seemingly irreversible onslaught of the market. They are making history in their will for survival, in their struggle of the everydayness, asserting their subaltern subjectivity and agency, in the small spaces of hope of their daily lives, in their bodies.

Whether it be the struggle for Human Rights or Minimum Wages, for the acquisition of land or against the forces of Globalization, the struggle of the subaltern Madiga is the struggle to fulfil a lack, and thereby to constitutive his subjectivity. In other words, it is the struggle of the Konaseema Madiga to survive, in and through the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema, which forms the texture of his/her Thirddspace.

The historical tour de force through the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema would have revealed to us the multidimensionality of the endemic

57 Cf. Ibid., p. 161.
58 Cf. Ibid., p. 152
59 Cf. Fukuyama Francis, End of History and the Last Man (New York, 1992), as alluded to in David Harvey, Spaces of Hope, p. 176.
61 Cf. David Harvey, Spaces of Hope, pp. 121-130.