SECTION - III

Chapter 1


Introduction

Against the background of the salient features of the political economy of Konaseema traced out in the foregoing chapter, in the present chapter, I endeavour to map the consciousness of the Madigas of Konaseema, from a subaltern perspective. Following the lead of the Gramscian themes of contradictory consciousness,¹ an inventory of the Madiga consciousness is to be elaborated in dialogue with the socio-economic and cultural experience of Madigas of Konaseema.

Grammar of the Inventory

Given the overall thrust of the enquiry, the concrete intent of this chapter is to move along with the Madigas of Konaseema, in their quest for identity, bringing into relief their subaltern agency at work in their struggle for survival and autonomy, everyday protest and subaltern subversion.

The subaltern agency of the Madiga is also at play in the ritual of his daily labour, which leaves no space and time for gods and rituals. Ritual, though in traditional anthropology stands for standardized and repetitive symbolic activity, involving supernatural realm, in contemporary understanding, anthropologists understand it to mean people’s emotionally charged interdependence and societal arrangements. It is a key to understand people’s social dependence. So, by adaptation, ritual can be defined as symbolic behaviour that is socially standardized.

and repetitive.\textsuperscript{2} ""We have no prayer rooms in our huts nor in our colonies. When the cock crows, we get up and go for work. We work till the sun sets. Work is backbreaking. This carries on from day to day. This is our religion."\textsuperscript{3} The same subaltern agency can be retraced in their myths of origin and identity, celebrated in memory and performance by the Madiga satellite castes like Bhogamvallu and in their field songs, sung especially by the Madiga women, in protest and assertion, as weapons of the weak. Adijambavuḍu is one such symbol.

"We have no gods." If the Madigas did not have their god/desses, they do have their symbols, which are venerated as their kuladēvathalu by some, and as symbols of power and identity by others, sandwiched between their godlessness and the ūrūdēvathalu (village goddesses). It is the liminality of these symbolic figures, which make them potent instruments in the negotiations of power and identity. Mātangi is one such powerful symbol.

The subaltern agency and creative resistance of the Madiga, is equally at work in the rituals of rural solidarity, performed at the visits of the goddess, at the onset of the epidemic and other calamities or the annual votive celebrations for the village deity. These rituals offered space for the Madigas, for negotiation of power and the contestation of hierarchies, in the subaltern idioms of inversion of the ritual and symbolic universe. "We have no gods. We used to worship the gods of other castes, as per custom." \textsuperscript{4} If we can employ a category of "religious consciousness of the Madiga", it would make sense only in the context of the continuum between their godlessness and the worship of the village goddesses, in ritual solidarity. This ritual continuum, with the inner contiguities of the symbols, which emerge in myths of identity and origin, and the liminal symbols of power, is indicative of the actual agency of the Madiga himself/herself, in struggle and creative resistance to assert his/her identity and autonomy.


\textsuperscript{3} In personal communication with the elderly womenfolk of Uppalaguptam-21/10/1998.

\textsuperscript{4} In personal communication with the elders of Ambajipetta-23/10/1998.
The underlying grammar of this unfolding inventory of Madiga consciousness is that, the Madiga subaltern consciousness is not a static but dynamic continuum crossing many boundaries, in interpenetration of agency, contestation and domination. This agency is not to be essentialized, as it has been done by some contributors to the Subaltern Studies. Further this dynamic agency of the Madiga is played out in the arena of the “everyday”, in the production, negotiation, transaction, and contestation of meanings, in a “local” key, within the wider networks and relations of power.

Idioms of Necessity

It is my submission that, as Amartya Sen pointed out, it is the struggle for development, in terms of freedom, basically economic freedom that primarily informs the subaltern quest and agency of the Konaseema Madigas. I am very well aware that, as Sumit Sarkar points out, subaltern agency cannot be reduced to the economic alone, or even to the political. But as Sarkar himself points out at a later stage, in the context of his critique from within, of the Subaltern Studies, the economic has to be an integral element of the programmatic agenda of the analytical project of the subaltern’s life and agency, if it is not to degenerate itself into a sort of culturalism. Eminent historians like Edward Thompson, and Gramsci himself have warned us against this reductive culturalism, which can arise, in the absence of attention to the economic domain, in our approach to the study of the subalterns.

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7 Cf. Section II, Chapter 2, subsections entitled “Development as Freedom” and “From Income to Entitlement: Well-being, Freedom and Capability”.


We have to attend to the idioms of necessity at play in the consciousness and
the lived worlds of the subalterns. As Stephen Parish illustrates, in South Asia,
especially in the context of the lives of the untouchables, the hierarchical idioms of
pure and impure,\textsuperscript{10} exist intermingled with the idioms of resistance and desperation.
The idiom of hunger, which is an idiom of necessity, co-exists with the cultural
coherence presumed in the idiom of purity.\textsuperscript{11}

Politics of Consciousness and the Political Unconscious

To attend to these idioms of resistance to hierarchized power and desperation,
hunger and necessity, we need to have an ethnographic orientation of the “politics of
consciousness”. This approach attempts to go beyond the assumption of the “nearly
total and evaluative consensus” in hierarchy, among the high and low caste actors.
This consensus exists only in the ideal level, and is only a methodological artifact,
an analytical objectification of the dominant discourses. In reality, even within the
structure of hierarchy, there is the cultural and political consciousness of the actors,
subaltern actors, which is equivocal and ambivalent. In that consciousness, the
warring forces of meanings, alternative identities and commitments, subscribing to
hierarchy and resisting it exist.\textsuperscript{12} This politics of consciousness includes within it a
political unconscious, with its dialectic of blindness and insight regarding the culture
in which they live, which they can resist, but has no power to overthrow.\textsuperscript{13}

This theme of the political consciousness and the political unconscious
developed by Parish is akin to Gramsci’s own theme of contradictory consciousness.
But as Parish states, Gramsci seems to make too sharp a distinction between the two
phases of the consciousness of the subaltern, namely the autonomous and the
dominant. Parish is not in opposition to Gramsci. But going along with the insights

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Louis Dumont, trans. by Mark Sainsbury, Louis Dumont and Basia Gulati, 
Homo Hierarchicus: Caste System and Its Implications (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998),
where the author uses the binary of purity/pollution as the hermeneutical and heuristic key to analyze the
phenomenon of caste system, interpreted as an expression of the overarching and all subsuming
idiom of hierarchy, which governs the socio-economic reality of South Asia.


\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Ibid., p. 202.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Ibid., p.13.
from cultural psychology, provided by Spiro Melford, which according to him would complement Gramsci, Parish asserts the need of capturing the shifting multiple consciousness, which occurs when an individual internalizes several images of the world and self.\textsuperscript{14} This ethnographic approach of multiple consciousnesses does greater justice to the creative resister, that subaltern is, than the attempts to reify him/her and the subaltern consciousness.\textsuperscript{15}

**Methodological Inspirations**

In the present chapter, I have drawn inspiration from the ethnographic methodology of Parish, as employed by him in trying to get into the world of Newars, and bring into relief the *Homo Dialecticus*, co-existing in multiple consciousness with the *Homo Hierarchicus*, in the subaltern Newar.\textsuperscript{16} Evidently, it is because there is much in common with the subaltern Madiga of Konaseema, Andhra Pradesh, of South India and the Subaltern Newar of Bhaktapur in Nepal. Both are untouchables of South Asia, who are in multiple consciousnesses, creatively trying to resist the hierarchical stranglehold of *dharma*, which has made them outcastes-untouchables.\textsuperscript{17}

I have drawn methodological inspiration for this chapter also from Saurab Dube, who has dared to tread alternative pathways, in the ethnographic process, while trying to interpret for us the untouchable pasts of the Satnamis of Chhattisgarh.\textsuperscript{18}

In the following sections, I have as far as possible, attempted launching my hermeneutic, centered on the direct conversation of the Madigas, as they came across to me in field-interviews. This goes along with the key subaltern principle that the subaltern himself is the hermeneutic, the subject of his own interpretation.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. *Ibid*. pp. 238-239.


\textsuperscript{16} Cf.*Ibid*. p.100.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. *Ibid*. pp.185-186.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Saurab Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*, pp. 2-3.
of his own earthy subaltern reality. This also avoids the danger of apotheosis of the subalterns, by supplementing what we would like to see in ourselves, or centering them, by subtracting from them all agency and autonomy, by fitting them into our cultural and theoretical polarities. 19

Madigas in Creative Resistance: Political Economy of Hunger, Landlessness and Labour

When I was in the hamlet of Linepetta, the very first village, where I happened to be for my live-in experience, I saw the boys at play in the evening. One of them, bigger than the others by name Lowaraju, when asked by me whether he was studying, replied: "I am not studying, I am in pālēruthanam (tied labour)." It meant that he was attached to the family of the landlord for a fixed period of time, doing all the household duties, at the beck and call of the master. His father would have entered into a contract with the landlord for payment, in kind, as the custom goes, for a few bags of paddy. As the catechist of the area attested afterwards, these contracts would be re-written on the day of mṛugasirakārthika, at the end of rohinikārthika (the hottest days of summer) when the first rains of the southwest monsoon, were due to appear, and when the cycle of cultivation for the year would commence. 20

Pālēruthanam (tied labour) or vettichākiri (mortgaged labour) is a type of rural bonded labour in which usually the children are sent in contractual labour by their fathers, towards the payment of long-standing debt, which is contracted on occasions like marriage of the daughter, or some other function. Further stay in the villages confirmed that vettichākiri was rather prevalent among the Madigus, in the villages of Konaseema, like many other parts of South India. 21 During my entire fieldwork, there was only one village, which attested that there was no vettichākiri in their village.


20 In personal communication with Satyanadham, the catechist of Linepetu-16/05/1998.

That tied labour was in vogue among the Madigas of Konaseema, together with their landlessness, was recalled from his memory by Venkataramana, during the group interview, I had with the village elders of Gopalapuram. The oldest among them reminisced “When I was young, we all had land, small plots. We and the mangalis (barbers). Slowly, we had to palm off our land to the Reddys-debt upon debt. Some had to move away from here. Our kulam (caste) had our manyam. We had to sell it for food. I started my life as a tied labourer, say, at the age of our Ganapathi’s small grandson. Of course, I was much fatter than he is, not emaciated like him. We cannot survive with our labour.”

Often tied labour is only euphemism for ongoing bonded labour in mitigated conditions, under the socio-economic hegemony, as we shall see later in this section “There is still tied labour in our village. We have to still pay back the money advanced by the Reddy. We are unable to pay back. There are 10 families in vettichākiri.”

Survival: The Primordial Subaltern Posture and Strategy

The reason why Madigas were finding it extremely hard to survive, in spite of the newfound prosperity brought to Konaseema through the boon bestowed on the land by the white god, Cotton Dora, has been indicated in the preceding section on the political economy of Konaseema. Their wages, which were paid in kind, were never too high. And they never rose, in proportion to the prosperity brought to the land. The immigration of people into the newly green and rich Konaseema from

22 Manyam is the rent-free land given over to the service castes, in lieu of the services rendered to the village in general, and the revenue officials in particular. Cf. Hemingway F.R., Madras District Gazeteers- Godavari (Madras: Government Press. 1907, p. 179, where he mentions that the inam lands assigned to barbers and chamars were not enfranchised.

23 In personal communication with Mr Venkataramana, the Madiga elder of Gopalapuram village – 13/10/1998.

24 In personal communication with the peopled of Uppalaguptam-21/05/1998.

25 It is heard that in many areas of the Godavari delta, Sir Arthur Cotton, the mastermind behind the Godavari irrigation network is deemed to be a god, who rescued the delta from the near-chronic famine conditions. The statue of Cotton finds its place along with the other deities, in the family pantheon.
Vizagapatnam on the north and from parts of Rayalaseema, made the labour cheaper, and the grain price higher.²⁶

Apart from the vagaries of the prices and wages, that the peasants and labouring classes in South India, especially in the latter half of 20th century, and even afterward, were on a slender margin of subsistence, is a fact attested to by subaltern historians. Apart from the vagaries of nature, which might accentuate the situation, the underlying reason for this situation of endemic hunger lay deep in the socio-economic and political subordination of the peasantry.²⁷

The living testimony of the Madigas of Pullelikurru village has already been presented in the preceding chapter in the context of the political economy of Konaseema.²⁸ I return to that earthy, human, subaltern experience, to elaborate the subaltern hermeneutical potential of that living trace of hunger:

In the earlier years, we used to feel the pangs of hunger. We had nothing to eat except the carcasses. So we used to have a good helping from the meat of dead animals and share it with our neighbours. We kept ourselves alive by eating meat. So hunger is behind our meat eating. Malas and Madigas used to share meat. Our Fathers used to mortgage sheets of tanned leather to get money from Komattis (money-lenders). Our ancestors had land, though in small plots but through generations of mortgaging, at exorbitant rates of interest (baruvaddi and chokravaddi), we lost our land. To escape hunger, we used to eat tatikayalu (palmyra fruits) and drink ganji. Our gullibility used to be exploited to the maximum. We had to depend upon our landlord for our livelihood, as we do even today.”²⁹

The passage/fall of this text from oral testimony to the literate version must not compel us to miss out on the subaltern agency and the creative resistance subconsciously coded in this testimony of life. Hunger binds/frees people to speak the idiom of necessity. The stigma of pollution is erased by the necessity to remain alive. “I am alive. Therefore I am”. Survival is the primordial subaltern posture, perspective and agency. Eating carcasses is a necessity and a strategy. Clearing the dead cow, not to pollute the Brahmin and the Komatti (Baniya) may be a divinely ordered duty in the language and code of hierarchy. The dead cow and its hide may

²⁶ Cf. Section II, Chapter 2, subsection entitled “Famine, Endemic Hunger and Elusive Well-being”
²⁸ Cf. Section II, Chapter 2 “Famine, Endemic Hunger and Elusive Well-being”.
²⁹ In personal communication with the people of Pullelikurru - 22/05/1998.
be also my right, under the village *jaymani* order. Eating it, for being alive- to be is a necessity, protest, and an act of creative resistance.

It is a strategy of survival for the Madiga and his/her community, but also an act of protest against the Komatti, who exploits them. It is also an inversion of the idiom of *Homo Hierarchicus*, which sanctions his being an exploiter, who relativizes the Madiga by denuding him of his land, the mark of identity, and means of subsistence and survival. Madiga’s being alive-survival is the ultimate resistance, foundational protest and primordial strategy. It is a counter-strategy against the exploitative strategy of the Komatti, which keeps them in penury and starvation.

Eating carcass, together with the Mala, in spite of the traditional enmity between the two communities is an act of solidarity, in the strategy of survival, and protest, against hierarchy, which stigmatizes both the Mala and the Madiga. “Malas and Madigas *used* to share meat” ⁹⁰ is a celebration in memory, of the solidarity of survival and protest. In the context of the *Dandora* movement, which was reaching its crescendo, when I was holding this group interview in Pulletikurru, the remembering of this *communitas* of survival, of the Madigas and Malas was also a protest against the Malas at different layers.

At the surface, it meant that the Malas, who now pretend, due to the newly gained upward mobility, that they do not eat carcasses, and who join other castes in deriding the Madigas as polluted, must not be in amnesia of their own past. It also meant that their upward mobility, at the expense of the Madigas, their own brothers, would be protested against, as it was being done through *Dandora*. It was also a memory of the past solidarity, in view of a potential future solidarity. ⁹¹

Eating carcasses may be polluting. But it is nourishing, and more than a mere weapon in the strategy of survival, especially if it is available in plenty. Madigas and Malas survived the endemic hunger of daily lives and the hard-hitting famines like

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⁹¹ *Myths are not lacking*, both among Malas and Madigas, almost akin in content, which symbolically indicate that both the castes were brothers, and separation happened in the context of the mis-adventure of a meal.
the Madras famine, by eating carcass. Not only did they survive, but also flourished.\textsuperscript{32}

But when his right even to the polluting carcass is denied to him by the Komatti, who used to "exploit our gullibility to the maximum", Madiga has to rely on the palmyra fruit, on which the jackal also survives, to be alive. "The fox has many ideas but the hedgehog has one big idea."\textsuperscript{33} Madiga survives the famine and the Komatti, in dependence, in resistance, speaking and living the language of hierarchy, but constantly protesting against it. He, like the fox has many ideas and stratagem of survival. As indicated earlier, there were also reports by the colonial administrators that the Madigas, as a caste were wont to poison the cattle of the ryots, in view of gaining access to their carcasses and hide.\textsuperscript{34} "We used to get beaten up for stealing things because we used to be hungry."\textsuperscript{35}

The Limits of Power: Hegemony and the Moral imagination of the Madiga

As I entered the Linepêta village, a crowd of villagers gathered around me. One of them was conspicuous in his display of reverence and obeisance to the scholar, from the big city of Madras, who had come to stay in their village for a few days. To all my questions, he, being an elder, who had land and standing among the landless Madigas, was giving the answer. But with his hands closing his mouth and slight bow and the accompanying closure of "chittam". And I asked him "Why do you find yourself saying "chittam", after every answer. Next morning, he volunteered the answer to my query.

"You are asking me why I am constantly using the word' chittam', whenever I am talking with you, especially while answering your questions and queries. Chittam means 'as Thou sayest' or 'let Thy will be done'. As you might know, we have been for centuries under the Rajus, Reddys. Kammals, and the Kapus, the dominant castes of the area. And they used to treat us like slaves. Chittam is the word used by us in their courtyards, while in conversation with them, with folded hands and one hand at our mouth. This has gone into the texture of our language. Though we are apparently free of their stranglehold these days, it comes to our mouth - Chittam."\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. David Arnold, \textit{Famine and Peasant Consciousness}, pp. 74-75.

\textsuperscript{33} Attributed to Archilocus, the Greek poet, as quoted in Yogesh Atal and Elsie Oyen (ed.), \textit{Poverty and Participation in Civil Society} (New Delhi: Aabhinav Publications, 1996), p. 40.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Hemingway, \textit{Godavari}, 1907, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{35} In personal communication with the elders of Kandalapalem-12/10/1998.

\textsuperscript{36} In personal communication with Manda Venketeswara Rao, Linepetta-17/05/1998.
Konaseema, as well as the other areas of East Godavari had been under different Zamindaris, like that of Pitapuram, Peddapuram and Kabileswarapuram.\textsuperscript{37} The British had bestowed title of the Rājā on them. Collection of revenue under the Permanent Settlement entailed coercion and a culture of extortion had become the order of the day. The peasants used to adopt the method of ‘passive resistance’ running away from the villages, but to of no avail. They were forced back into their villages to continue cultivation of their non-yielding lands.\textsuperscript{38} The commission appointed to look into the alleged cases of torture, in the Madras Presidency had taken note of these coercianary methods.\textsuperscript{39}

This culture of coercion and dominance, interiorized by the dominant landowning castes of the region, was replicated in turn, in their dealings with the impoverished peasants and labouring castes, like the Malas and the Madigas.\textsuperscript{40} The language of caste hierarchy evidently provided the symbolic structure, required to convert this assertion of power into hegemony, eliciting consent. And as my informant Venkateswara Rao, in his reflexivity communicated, “Chittam “ was a symbolic code, a short-cut icon for that hegemony.

Many Faces/Phases of Subaltern Agency

The subaltern response to this construction and maintenance of hegemony has been a vast and varied continuum, of which total subordination and open revolt would be only extreme manifestations.\textsuperscript{41}


\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Report of the Commission for the Investigation of the Alleged Cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency Submitted to the Right Honourable the Governor in Council of Fort Saint George on the 16\textsuperscript{th} April, 1855- Appendix C.No.3: Rajamundhry, p.v., Gaze the Press, Fort St.George, Madras, 1855 (State Archives of Tamil Nadu, Egmore - Chennai).

\textsuperscript{40} Cf.G.N. Rao Dimensions of Land Control, pp. 61-68.

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Sumit Sarkar, The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy, p.274.
It could take the form of gratitude for the benevolence shown by the villagers of Uppalaguptam, to the caste lady and the benefactress, who donated the land for their huts, but coupled with resentment for their backbreaking work in the fields of the very same caste landlords. "We all found some land - 2 cents, 3 cents and 5 cents each, held on a joint pēṭā (land deed). And our pēṭa (Madiga colony) is called as Dharmpēṭa because it was given to us by Sikkam Ramayamma, a caste lady, in charity." 42

The muted militancy of the subalterns in this case is brought into relief, only when we are able to juxtapose their gratitude and their resentment. It is projected, when we are able to appreciate the moral imagination and reflexivity, which links both that their backbreaking work is religion and ritual, as good as, even better than the dharma of their caste benefactress.

Moral imagination is that which empowers the subaltern, to think out, imagine, construct alternative possibilities, even when living with/ within the moral order of hierarchy.43

The field songs of the Madigas are examples and indications of the moral imagination, by which they construct alternative possibilities. The following is an excerpt from a field song, with overtones of protest, against low wages and abusive language of the landlords, which were often interspersed with sexual innuendoes:

Get into the cart
Come for work
Come all
Coolie is only 50 paise
We don’t come
Don’t come out with your words of abuse
Only our husbands have the right to abuse us.
You are so sweet with your words
Not when you pay us a pittance of 50 paise
After backbreaking work
If it is for your abuse
We are not for it44

42 In personal communication with the elderly Madiga womenfolk of Uppalaguptam-21/05/1998.
44 In communication with the Madiga womenfolk of Krishna Nagar, Ethirulanka-28/10/2000.
The ladies of Krishna Nagar, who sang this song for me, from their memory, did recall that the Brahmin landlord used be annoyed and angry, to hear them sing this song.

**Fatalism and Submission as Hidden Agency**

The subaltern agency can also take the form of extreme submission bordering on fatalism, as we see reflected in the submissive bemoaning of the subaltern actors of Uppalaguptam, over wretched plight of their economic status. ""We have no land. We still continue doing our kulavruti, shoe making and beating of drums (dappulu). We are the least. We have no courage. We are not brave enough to question - to take revenge. We don’t want to be suppressed by anybody or we don’t want to suppress anybody." 45 But this apparent resignation to the power of the system or seeming ‘fatalism is nothing other than the clothing worn by real and active will when in weak position’. 46

The subaltern of yesterday, who is in the clutches of fatalism, because he is in contradictory consciousness, and an object of reality, tomorrow, as he takes hold of his autonomous consciousness, he becomes the agent, a historical person, an agent, necessarily active and ready to take initiative. 47 The agency-laden reminiscence-memory of Apparao of Enugapalli and his companions reveal this mindset of the subaltern, going through the Gramscian rite of passage:

> We used to be members of the dappulu (Madiga Drum) troupe. Now the troupe has disappeared. At that time, there was no canal. We are growing coconuts since 15 years. We were forced to work for the Kapus in their fields and not allowed to work in our own land, in the delta of Godavari, given to us by Indira Gandhi. ""We have no common burial ground. Godavari takes us away, when she is in flood. We are small in numbers."' We Madigas suffer quietly. But if driven to the corner, we don’t keep quite. We retaliate. Bhagwan is our strength. We, Madigas give gowravam (respect) to others. 48

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45 In personal communication with the people of Uppalaguptam-21/05/1998.
47 Cf. Ibid.
48 In personal communication with Appurao, Pethuru and Ponnath of Enugapally-10/10/1998.
Dappu troupe is the identity marker of a prim and proper Madiga hamlet, which can boast of an identity. Dappu as a symbol of Madiga identity and his contribution to the political economy of the village is celebrated in Madiga memory, through songs. As the Madigas celebrates the dappu in song, they also make that celebration into a space of protest against their alienation from the political economy of the village. The following song in honour of the Madiga and his dappu is a window to that symbolic protest, as well as identity assertion:

Oh come forward Madiga
He is everywhere.
His drum moves the entire village
If the big man’s daughter is to be married,
Madiga’s drum must be there
When the caste people die, he takes the death news
His drum breaks all news to the village
If the goddesses are to be moved, the drum must beat
So too to awaken the village benefactors
Oh come forward Madiga

From the celebration of dappu, as a mark of identity and protest, we move on to the Madiga memory, as a mark of identity. Indira Gandhi’s bestowal of land is reminiscent of a phase of growth in social agency and autonomy, as we shall we see later in the section. This newfound autonomy is still being threatened by the dominant caste of the village, the Kapus. The Madigas are ready to retaliate if need be; though by the nature of their caste, given their self-understanding, they give due respect to other human beings. The autonomy, which is being threatened from outside, is still not complete, from within, in as much as, the Madigas do not have their town burial ground, again a mark of identity, autonomy and human dignity. But the Madigas of Enugapalli is crossing the threshold of subaltern critical consciousness, in their awareness of their lacks, and in their striving to overcome these lacks.

Moral Imagination and the Symbolic Constructions of Equality

“We are saving the village. The village does not save us.” 50 This cryptic utterance of a Madiga elder from the Madiga colony of the Ambajipetta village, is

49 In personal communication with Bhaskara Rao, Ex-Panchayat Member, Kommanagiri 19/05/2001.
indicative of the subaltern agency of the group, but with a veiled protest against the
dominant section, which deprives them of their due share in the resources of the
village, under the symbolic construction of hierarchy. It is an order that marginalizes
them, and suppresses their role in the making of the village, relegating them to the
margins of history. "We are saving the village. The village does not save us."

"Look at our plight, in this section of the village. To the north, where Kapus
live, there is current. To the south, where the Malas live, there is current. To the
west, where the Brahmins live, there is electricity. But here, here alone there is no
electricity. This is a symbol of our lives. We are in an island of darkness."  

When Akumarthy Suryanarayana Rao, the ex-sarpanch of Mungandapalem,
points to the Madiga quarters of his village and grieves the plight of the Madigas, he
was not engaging himself in political demagogy. There was indeed neglect of the
Madigas, in the village, as elsewhere in Konaseema, and Andhra Pradesh. As he was
deploying the symbolic contrast of light and darkness, to portray the condition of the
Madigas of the village, he was engaging himself in the exercise of his moral
imagination. He was constructing an alternative symbolic order of equality, in
defiance of the prevalent order of hierarchy, in which the unequal treatment of the
Madigas was religiously sanctioned, their plight constructed as their fate. Neither the
Hindu civil society, nor the state, apart from the still unimplemented constitutional
provisions, has recognized the aspirations of the Dalits like the Madigas to
modernity.  

Glimpse into the Political Economy of Suppressed Marginality

Mr. Ramudu of Mummudivarapadu village, in his long and moving account
of the plight of the fellow Madigas of his village, and the Madigas in general, was

50 In personal communication with the elders of Ambajipetta-23/05/1998.
51 In personal communication with Akumarthy Suryanarayana Rao, Ex- Sarpanch of Mungandapalem
53 Gopal Guru, "Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity" in Romila Thapar (Ed), India: Another Millennium.
p. 125.
hinting at this modernity lost on the Madigas, when he volunteered the following account. He had the distinction of having travelled outside the state as a military man. It is a rarity among the Madigas, as per their own account of their caste traits, in contrast to the Malas, who are migratory by caste traits, as we shall see below. In fact, he gave his interview in Tamil, having heard that I had come from Madras. His account ran thus:

We Madigas are bhāagyavantaḥ (fortunate people), but kāsthajeviṇaḥ (struggling people). When we go for work, in the Reddy’s fields, far away from our homes, the Kapus nearby impregnate their women as well as ours. What we are left behind with, are Vaddi (interest) and Pani (work). All our privileges are taken away by the higher castes. There are no loans for us. Government offers houses for us, as part of the Housing Scheme. But where are we to make ten thousand rupees, which is our contribution? I still live near the canal, under the tree. Because we are kāsthajeviṇaḥ, we are able to bear everything. We are born such. We will grow such under the tree. There is no unity among us. We are in despair. There is no sympathy for us. We are still in untouchability. Soon, we will be overwhelmed by labour because we have no money. It is so very difficult to stand against, when we are not able to stand, stand together. If there is road, there is no light. If there is light, there is no road. There are 60 thousand Malas and 30 thousand Madigas.  

There is the idiom of necessity in the language of Ramudu, who could not make it in life, in spite of his sojourn outside Konaseema. Life of an untouchable in the hierarchical society is not easy. Each actor in the stratified society is the object of redundant processes and structures of control. It is indeed the life of a Kashtajevi – of risk - of violence, force, sexual exploitation (the Kapus impregnate our women), scarcity and isolation (living under the tree).

The political and economic realities generate a culture of dissimulation, self-deception, of a political unconscious, blindness and suppression of the critical self. This multiple consciousness is part of the process of the journey of the subaltern to critical consciousness. The cultural critique of the subaltern has to come from within the tradition and culture, the dominant tradition. There is the risk of falling back into the dominant tradition. Yet the subaltern remains an individual, capable of constructing a critique on his own, of the dominant culture, of his own experiences. He is his own hermeneute.  

54 In personal communication with Mr. Ramudu of Mummudivrapadu-10/10/1998.

The capacity of the Madiga for self-reflexivity, and the construction of a critique of the exploitative hierarchical order find its echo in the following excerpt of a field song. It is a song sung often sung by the Madiga womenfolk, an imaginary dialogue between a Madiga lady, and the Kapu landlord.

Hey Madiga lady, my good lady, where has your husband taken off to?
He had promised to come for work
He has gone to collect the Tangodi barks
Will not come soon, until he gets everything
Will not appear soon
He had promised me shoes
When can I have them?
He will not come soon

The dialogue between the Kapu landlord and the tenant Madiga woman is about the whereabouts of her husband, who has not kept his promises to go for work and make shoes for the landlord. The lady is pleading for time. This dialogue sung by women during their work in the fields, is a reproduction of their own life, always under threat from the Kapu landlord. As reflected in the song, landlord appears at unearthly times, especially when the husband is away on work. The song as a playback of their own lives is a mode of protest against the harshness of the Kapu’s treatment, his socio-economic exploitation and sexual advances. Sexual advances and exploitation of the Madiga women, by the higher caste landlords, as Ramudu indicated, were very common.

**Stories of Resistance and Betrayal: Agency and its Ambivalence**

I would like to conclude this section on Creative Resistance of the Madiga, with the narration of the struggle of the Gopalapuram Madiga community for a piece of land, which they thought would be their own, but which is still not theirs.

I let Ganapati, one of the Madiga elders narrate the story:

Now I am old. But I want to fight out the case regarding our land. Many years ago, one night, after we had returned from work, two prominent Reddys of the village came to our peta and made a proposal. 'Have you seen the wasteland across our village? It comes to around 5 acres and 18 cents. Why don't you together clear that land and make it cultivable? We will get the patta for you.' We, in our innocent enthusiasm started work on the land and cleared it, got it ready for cultivation. When the work was over, the Reddys showed their true colour. After having beheaded the village munsif and changed

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56 In personal communication with the womenfolk of Kommaragiri, Patha Madigapeta-25/10/2000.
the records, to the effect that much of the cleared land originally belonged to them, they staked their claim to more than 3 acres of the said land. We have filed a case in the court. As usual, the case is going on from court to court. Eight of us are still fighting.

There was once an attempt to get the entire land for us, after a series of conscientization-programmes, the culmination of which, was supposed to be the Dharna at the Ravulapalem town square. But on the last day, to the disappointment of the organizers, nobody turned up. Most of the Madigas had been brought up by the Reddys. This was a setback for the movement.

We have to get back our land. Some of us are dead. But we will stand together. Things are moving. MRO has promised to send the Surveyor.

The Madiga, the untouchable, in his need for land, and identity through it, gets trapped in the greed and the consequent dissimulation of the dominant caste. On the crucial day of the dharna, nobody presents himself/herself at the revenue official’s office. This “letting down of the cause”, this fickleness of the Madiga, their ingratitude, has been a constant theme during my encounters with the social activists and the well-wishers of the Madigas, who attempt at ‘conscientizing’ them. But the Madiga has let them down often, perhaps repeatedly.

What perhaps eludes the enlightened social activist is that in the world of the subalterns, the logic is that of immediacy and daily struggle. In this logic of the daily struggle, his master, the dominant landlord matters for him, his favour. The idiom of necessity takes over, leading to the emergence of the politics of the unconscious. The causes of the group, the higher cause of the land, are all subservient to the logic of daily survival. Gramsci would call it contradictory consciousness, in his sharp distinction between the dominant consciousness and the autonomous consciousness. Parish would like to stay with the many possible shifts and slides, which may mediate between the dominant and the autonomous - multiple consciousnesses.

Though the patron-client relationship\textsuperscript{57} may not be the ideal paradigm to describe the link between the Madiga and his landlord, who may buy him up, with money or gift, the link between them is intimate. During a group interview, the Madiga elder used a Telugu word for conveying the near-filial intimate nature of the relationship, between the landlord, who may abuse, harass, ill-treat himself, his children, and perhaps sexually exploit his wife. The word was lanki, meaning by it.

the closeness, which one feels to the *longōti* (loincloth), which one wears. Along with rebellion and resistance, submission and collaboration are also weapons deployed from the subaltern armoury, in the strategy of survival, which is the primordial subaltern posture.

Perhaps the many frustrations, which they have met with, in their encounter with the social activists, intellectuals who have come from outside, to tell them about their lives and struggles, would have disenchanted them. So too bureaucratic apathy and red tape (as indicated below) would discourage them from risking participation in struggle for identity, autonomy and land, as the reaction of the villagers to the ongoing land issue. "What is the use of phoning up to Chandrababu Naidu? Is he going to solve all the problems, straight away, sitting in his office at Hyderabad? Even if he gives orders, the Collector might be on leave. This is all 'māyālokaṁ' (illusory world). About the land case, what do we know? The surveyor may be play-acting, in collusion with the Reddys. There is no unity among us. Unity is essential for us. There is nobody here to stand up to the 'Raithulu' (landlords). The Madiga *kulam* here is rife with dissension. We have been an agonizing lot, in my younger days – even now. Ours is a culture of agony."

In the next sub section, we shall examine the passage of the Madiga from the culture of agony to the growing culture of assertion.

**Untouchable Pasts**

"My journey from untouchability to touchability can be traced from coffee served in coconut-shells to glasses held by coconut leaf splinters. From being beaten with sticks like cattle in the fields, to the present stage, where I am emboldened to

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58 In personal communication with Kolli Veeraraju from Madikki, Alamuru-16/05/2001.


61 In personal communication with Mr. Venkatarao, the eldest Madiga of the Gopalaparam village-09/10/1998.
ask to the Panchayat authorities. 'Why don't you extend the drinking-water line to the Madiga colony, as you are supposed to do? When I came into this village to my antagarīllī (mother-in-law's house), I was receiving 4 annas per day as coolee, 8 annas when my daughter was 8 years old, Rs. 2/- when she was 10 years old, Rs. 5/- when she was 20 years old, Rs. 10/- when she was 25 years old and Rs. 20/- when she is 30 years old.' 62 This is the testimony of Satyamma, a recognized leader among the womenfolk, as well as the menfolk of Linepetta. Her journey is indeed symbolic of the Madiga emergence to the subjecthood of reality, of identity, autonomy and critical consciousness.

Leather as Signet and Stigma: Problematizing the Kulavrūti of a Resurgent Caste

As the Madigas grew in their identity consciousness, with the onset of Dandārā, and they started owning their caste, and their kulavrūti, leather, until now despised, as a matter of pollution for the masters, and a memory of derision for those on the margins, attained a new symbolic value—the symbol of the caste. "We are proud of our kulam." This newly gained pride was proudly displayed by the signboards, which appeared, at the entrance of the Madigapētas, which read "Jambavapēta".

"We are experts in dealing with leather. One of our Madiga craftsmen once carved the miniature of the king's throne in leather, which was used by him as royal insignia. Surgery has come from the Madiga trade, of cutting up the animals. Madiga knows the source of every sickness. They are good Doctors." 63 All these words in praise of his kulam and the etiology of his kulavrūti, and the material of his trade, were uttered by Akumarthi Suryanarayana Rao, who also described the plight of his kulam, in the contrasting symbols of light and darkness. The Dandārā movement had attempted gathering the repertoire of stories about the Madigas and had tried to make use of the material as a site of assertion, contestation and mobilization.

62 In personal communication with Satyamma of Linepetta-17/05/1998.

63 In personal conversation with Akumarthi Suryanarayana Rao, Ex-Surparch of Mungudupalem-13/10/1998.
The revalorization of leather as a symbol also brought to the fore the discourse on the value of leather as a commodity, and the alienation of the Madigas from leather and their age-old kulavruti. I have already hinted at it towards the end of the preceding chapter on the political economy of Konaseema, and its implications for the Madigas, in the context of globalization. The debate is on, as to whether to hold on to leather and the kulavruti, and if the option is made for the traditional profession, how viable it is going to be, especially in the context of the Dalit search for an alternative modernity. \(^{64}\)

If Kancha Ilaiah, as I have quoted him above, \(^{65}\) calls for a restoration and revitalization of the traditional skills and trades, as a means of mobility and identity assertion, Gopal Guru, the dalit ideologue, thinks this process to be a self-defeating endeavour. \(^{66}\) This debate on the kulavruti of the Madigas as an identity marker and its viability as a trade, in the wake of globalization. As Amartya Sen demands, the abandoning or continuing of traditional trades must be made a matter of public debate, being a concern regarding the rights of the people. \(^{67}\) It has to be debated at the grassroots, and not as a matter of decision for elite leadership of the Madigas only, \(^{68}\) because at the grassroots, the Madigas are divided, perhaps still evolving a consensus, regarding their kulavruti, as the following gleanings from the field indicate.

"We are Charmakāruulu (skin workers). We are eleven families entirely dependent on this kulavritti. We don’t go in search of dead animals always. Now we buy the leather sheet from the market. The entire family is involved in the processing, if we are curing the skin of a carcass. We don’t make much profit. We

\(^{64}\) Gopal Guru, *Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity*, pp.133.

\(^{65}\) Cf. Section II – Chapter 1, note 45.


\(^{67}\) Cf. Section II – Chapter 1, subsection entitled, “Synergy of Freedoms as Empowerment” and The Negative Symbolic Surplus of Caste”.

\(^{68}\) Cf. Gopal Guru, “Politics of Lobbying” in *The Hindu*, August 26, 2000, where he makes a critique of Dalit politics, which is devoid of the involvement and participation of the Dalits at the grassroots level, regarding concerns of their lives, like whether caste is not to be considered as an expression of racism or not.
just break it even. Earlier, the boys used to come and take away our girls, after paying the bride price. Now things have changed. We have to pay enormous amount of money to marry off our girls."  

"As we find it difficult to make both ends meet, through our kulavrutti, we take to other works, especially coolee works in the farms. Through making shoes, we are, at times, able to earn only as little as Rs. 25/- per day. Going to the farm is profitable. Our caste, usually, even now, does not take up to any other work, except our kulavrutti. When we are forced to take up some other work, especially farm-work, along with the Malas, not too infrequently, we hear this taunt: 'Don’t come to work. You don’t know how to do manual labour.'  

I have quoted the examples of the Madigas of Kattaralanka and Ambajipēta, to indicate the fact that in spite of the involvement of a greater number of Madigas, in agricultural labour, going along with the vicissitudes of the political economy of Konaseema, there are Madigas, in several pockets of Konaseema, who still depend on the kulavrutti for their sustenance and survival. So a debate on the viability of kulavrutti both as a source of survival and as an identity-marker is timely, and in place.

There are suggestions as to help the Madigas relying on kulavrutti, through the establishment of work co-operatives, which would improve their financial capability and enhance the skills of their trade. This also would help them overcome the stigmatization they suffer under ritualized hierarchy, which cannot be de-linked from its economic dimension. 

This concern is on the renewed and broadened agenda of the Danjōra movement.


70 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Ambajipetta-23/05/1998.

71 In this context cf. Section - I, chapter 1, Note 38, where I quote Dr Nandi Joseph, the former Assistant Director of Central Leather Research Institute, on the still prevalent economic exploitation of the Madigas engaged in Kulavrūti, and their soci-cultural alienation, in the idiom of polluting untouchability, inscribed by ritualized hierarchy.

72 In personal communication with Manda Krishna Madiga-07/08/2001.
Shifting Symbols and Sliding Motives: Appropriation and Redefinition of Ambedkar

"Now we have started the Madiga Dandöra. The movement is catching up. One or two of us have been killed. We have not achieved our aim. But we are struggling. For many, we don't matter. For example, we are the ones who put up GMC Balayogi, a Mala, as Speaker of Lok Sabha. But for our help, he would not have won the elections. But we are nowhere now." 73

Words similar to these uttered by Akumarthi Suryanarayana Rao were also uttered by the people of Devarapalli Chivvaripuntha, with even more vehemence. They too feel let down by the Malas, especially by Mr. Balayogi, who, according to them rose in the political horizon on the common Dalit card, especially supported by the Madigas. The political leanings of the Madigas are towards the Telugu Desam party, to which Mr. Balayogi belongs.74 Malas on the other hand, were, given their traditional leanings, were supporting the Congress party, also given the then political equations in the state. It is this political amnesia of Mr. Balayogi, and the Malas in general, the Madigas are resenting.

The impact of the Dandöra movement in the Madiga horizon of Konaseema is also visible in the form of the recently emerging statues of Babu Jagajeevanram. Madigas consider him to be their leader and symbol. This rather recent entry of Jagajeevanram, though not replacing Ambedkar, but alongside him, is indicative of the individuation of Madiga political reality, vis-à-vis the Mala and the Dalit scenario. These shifts in symbols are indicative of the Mandalization of the Indian politics and more especially, the Micromandalization of the Andhra pradesh political scenario, especially after the appearance of Dandöra.

Symbols speak - give food for thought. Manda Krishna Madiga, the Dandöra supremo, spoke to me on the hermeneutical praxis behind the newfound juxtaposition of the images of Ambedkar and Babu Jagajeevanram in the

74 In personal communication with the people of Devarapalli, Chivarripuntha-19/05/2001.
Madigapētas." Babuji is as great a leader, like Ambedkar. He may not have been an ideologue like Ambedkar, but surely, in praxis, he was as great. If Ambedkar fought the Brahmin hegemony in the Congress from the outside, Babuji did it from within, standing up to the stalwarts, including Nehru, for the cause of the Dalits. He was not an opportunist. He was the voice of the Dalits.

It is to be noted that though Ambedkar, as an ideologue spoke on behalf of all untouchables, being a Mahar himself, he was siding them in Maharashtra, which fact, the Mangs resented. So too during his journeys in Andhra Pradesh, he visited only the Mala hamlets." This critique of Ambedkar is indicative of the redefinition of Ambedkar, which is already happening in parts of Andhra Pradesh, beyond the essentialization of Ambedkar's thought on the one hand, and ideologization on the other.  

_Dandōra_ was seen as an alternative to the mainline state politics, which was not furthering the Madiga cause, in spite of the wider representation for the Madigas, especially in the Telugu Desam party. "After NTR, our pride has gone up. We have eleven M.L.A.s (Madigas). But who dares to speak up for the caste? Now the Dandōra has come. The youth are strong."

Madiga Standstill and Mala Mobility: Replication of Hierarchies

Madiga identity consciousness has been always present, episodically perhaps, as Gramsci would have it, even earlier to Dandōra, but Madigas were losing out to the Malas in the politics of numbers. "In the 1950s also, Malas and Madigas were playing a game of one-upmanship. 'Who is greater?' A certain Judge, Veeraswami, a Madiga, constructed a visibly big house, right in the Brahmin enclave of Amalapuram, as symbol of Madiga assertion, to prove a point. From 1950s onwards, the consciousness is on the rise."  

75 In personal communication with Manda Krishna Madiga, the leader of the Dandura movement-07/06/2001. 
77 In personal communication with Dr. George Victor, professor of Philosophy, Andorra University. Visakhapatnam-06/11/1998.
"All the Mala leaders of the State emerged from Konaseema. There were a number of Malas, who migrated during the British period to Rangoon, Kuwait and Iran. They are a Migratory People." 78 The migration of the Malas to Rangoon during the colonial era has been cited as one of the reasons for their having attained economic mobility, over the Madigas. They acquired land back home, in Konaseema, with the hard-earned money in Rangoon. 79 Reddys were dominating the business in Rangoon, where the members of the other castes, who were unskilled, were taken in large numbers. 80 The colonial government, at one point in time had tried preventing the unskilled workers, from the Madras Presidency from going across to Burma. 81 Whatever be the case, the Madigas did not migrate in search of employment and mobility, like the Malas dared to do.

Though the Madigas were not economically as mobile, as the Malas, the Madigas had something to boast of, as testified by Prof. George Victor. "Ten percent of the Madigas are bright skinned and very fair, whereas ten percent of them are very dark. Because of the fair skin of a few of them, the Madigas used to feel superior to Malas. An expression of the tribal culture – the number game, once again! In this number game, the Madigas never formed the creamy layer." 82

I would add that it was not only the politics of numbers, which was at play here, but also the politics of replication of hierarchy, 83 making the complexion of skin, a site of contestation, a symbolic construction of superiority, based on the

78 Ibid.
79 In personal communication with the elders of Devaguptam Ravalapalem, when being enquired of the reasons for their lack of economic mobility, and the edge the Malas of the same village had over them, in land and other resources-23/10/2000.
80 In personal communication with Kolli Veeraraju, Madikki, Alummuru-16/05/2001.
82 In personal communication with Dr. George Victor-06/11/1998.
apparent closeness of the Madigas, to the Aryans/Brahmins in complexion. But then, if replication of caste relations can be a weapon for the hierarchy, by the indirect sanctioning of oppressive relationships, it can also be a weapon with the untouchable, a strategy wherein a subtle fusion of resistance and collusion takes place. It is a highly ambiguous form of resistance, because it denies hierarchy (denying my low position), by reproducing it (by elevating myself, by making others lower than myself).

If the replication of hierarchy is at play, in the context of the mutual relativization the traditional idiom of brother/enemy, that is the Mala and the Madiga, the phenomenon reproduces itself between Madigas and Madigas:

Among us there is division between Panimādīgalu (those who follow kulavrati) and Paterumādīgalu (those who took up agriculture like the Malas). Again, among us, the Kamatham Madigalu are those who are trained in the traditional skills of a Madiga and are often employed by a Khamma or any other higher caste landlord. The traditional skills are tanning, shoe making, mat making, basket-weaving and climbing the trees. These are our skills and our trades in which we take pride. These are also our troubles and our burdens. We still depend upon the landlord for our livelihood, as we do even today.

These divisions between Panimādīgalu and Paterumādīgalu take place under the grammar of political economy, say, the shifts in trades and professions. But there is indeed a replication of hierarchy at play there, as in many areas of Konaseema; these groups consider themselves to be exogamous, and even beyond the boundaries of commensality.

Apart from these two groups, there are other satellite castes of Madigas, like Madiga Bhogamvallu (dancers and ritual prostitutes for Madigas), Madiga Mastilu (acrobats), Madiga Dekkali (beggars and storytellers of Madiga myths of identity.

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84 See in this context, the subsection entitled "Brahmin – Madiga marriage", where I present the Madiga myths of identity, and their use of the code of hypergamy/hypogamy, as a tool of identity assertion. Through these, the Madigas assert their closeness and affinity to the Brahmins.


86 Ibid., p.207.

87 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pulletikuru – 22/05/1998.

88 In personal communication with Mr Abbulu, Telugu Pundit of Don Besco High School, Ravulapalem, and the resident of Mummidivarapadu – 11/12/2001.
and origin) and other groups like Madiga Goshangilu and Madiga Vishnavas. As variations on the same theme, there is the replication of hierarchy, among these satellite groups themselves and Madigas, vis-à-vis them, either as a weapon of hierarchy, or as an instrument of resistance against it.

From Submission to Revolt: Endpoints of a Strategic Continuum

Though rare, history of Konaseema does not lack in cases of Madiga revolt, which may be the open expression of subaltern militancy- one end of the continuum, the opposite of submission. The following three examples are indications of this.

"Two years ago, we had some trouble in the village, between the Kapus and ourselves, around the temple festival. Two of our young men had been assaulted. And we rose in retaliation. The entire pēṭa was mobilized and there was tension in the air. Police arrived on the scene in time. IPC section. 144 was declared. So, further trouble was averted. But we stood up to the Kapus. Next day, in great strength, we took out a procession to the temple, and offered pūja there, in defiance of the Kapus. The case was brought to a compromise. From that time onwards, there is peace, eerie, though it may be." It is to be noted that the expression of revolt included a contestation of ritual space, and an inversion of ritual practice. Usually, even now in Konaseema, the dalits are not allowed entry into the caste temples.

"There is a story of resentment and rebellion in the recent past. Once, all of us Madigas together managed to intimidate and drive away, the Kapus and the Brahmins, who were from time to time, troubling us, claiming ownership of this.


86 In personal communication with the elders of Mummudivarampau-10/10/1998.

87 Cf. Saurab Dube, "Myths, Symbols and Community: Satnamparth of Chhattisgarh" in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), Subaltern Studies — VII (Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1997), pp. 141-146, for an account of the interrogation by the Satnams of the religious symbolic universe of the dominant Hinduism, through a process of appropriation, rejection and inversion of the various elements of this universe. See also Dube, Untouchable Pasts, pp. 4-7 and 213-215.
thōta (grove) which is our habitation for nearly hundred years." 92 There was no physical assault—but standing up in numbers, united, against the Brahmin and the dominant caste alliance, their strategy of intimidation.

As the Madiga elders of Kandalpalem reminisced:

There is no Tirugabāṭi (rebellion) nature in us. We are peace-loving people. But 40 years ago, there was an incident. One of the Kapus was going by the place where our boys were playing marbles. He felt that they were on his way. And he beat up one of the boys. In retaliation, after our panchayat, we went as one body to the Kapus' street and shouted 'Champēstāmu' (We will kill all of you.). There was a compromise meeting afterwards. From that time onwards, there is peace. We don't cow down to anything. There is no truth in the mantra, 'Madigas cannot change or will not change'. Of course, it is difficult to change but we are changing. 93

The assertion and the agency of the Madigas are also manifested in the context of the power politics in the institutions related to land. "We have a Nehru Society here, which is a Lanka Land Co-operative Society. In 1995, there was a fight between the Madigas and the Kapus, who belong to a different Land Societies. The fight was naturally over the disputed land. Afterwards, there was compromise in the Kothapēta Magistrate Court."94

In three of the four cases narrated above, there was compromise. It is an idiom of subaltern resistance. Compromise could also be a weapon, especially when show of strength and the power of mobilization carry home the message of revolt and assertion to the dominant castes. Also there is at work here, the dynamics of co-operative conflict, as brought home to us by Amartya Sen, especially when the economic interests of both the superordinate and the subordinate are at work. 95 Even here the subaltern strategy of collaboration 96 is at work, as we see in the village of Mungandapalem. "Here fifteen Madigas and sixteen Kapus own the Lanka land. These Madigas are close to the Kapus." 97

92 In personal communication with Marthamma, of Kesanakurrupalem-19/05/1998.
93 In personal communication with the elders of Kandalpalem-12/10/1998.
94 In personal communication with Apparao of Yenuguppaliki-10/10/1998.
95 Cf. Section Two, Chapter I, subsections entitled "From Income to Entitlement: Well-being, Freedom and Capability" and "Co-operative Conflict".
96 Cf. N. 58 above.
97 In personal communication with Mallavarapu Gangachalam of Mungndapalem-13/10/1998.
When the entitlements increase, through personal striving or through the interventions of the state, the subaltern’s power of autonomy also increases. Education as entitlement is also part of this process. This was brought home to me through the testimony and reflexivity of Kowju Peddaveeriah of Enugapalli.

My father was a farm labourer. We, sons were in pākēruthanam (tie labourer) for Rs.200-300, till we got the patta for the delta land, which we have occupied. Indira Gandhi gave us this patta. When I was married too, I was in pākēruthanam. My wife has studied till 9th standard. Because my wife was educated, my children did not have the misfortune of entering into pākēruthanam. In our younger days, we used to eat jowar and ragi. Eating rice was a luxury and a celebration. I managed to build a house for myself but my father did not succeed. When my mother was alive, we used to stay in a very small house, with a single room and a small verandah."

I taught my children. I planted coconut in my one acre of land. My father’s one acre of land was taken back by Godavari. We work with the mud. We always have work. We survive by working. We used to work for the Kapus, till they wanted us to work, beyond sunset. We used to graze the cattle. When I was young, for the adult male, they used to give Rs. 1 and for the female Rs.50. We used to be frightened. We used to be beaten now and then. We used to do all the work. Now we are not under the threat of the Kapus or of the Khammas. Now all children have acquired knowledge, their children and our children."98

As Sumit Sarkar rightly comments, to which I have already alluded earlier in the section, in the subaltern discourse, the Gramscian intent of the interpenetration and mutual conditioning of the different spheres of subaltern life, especially the economic has to be stressed. Otherwise the subaltern would always logically remain a subaltern, except in literal inversions, which is utopian. So too in subaltern agency and consciousness, the dialectic between domination and autonomy have to be recognized. They are not to be treated as separate, impenetrable domains. Domination, which is considered as irresistible, would make autonomy illusory.99

Political Economy of Survival and the Unreachability of Education

The erstwhile district of Godavari boasts of being the very first district in the entire Madras Presidency, where the experiment of Rate Schools100 was initiated by

98 In personal Communication with Kowju Peddaveeriah of Enugapalli- 10/10/1998.


100 Rate Schools were those educational institutions, which depended on the local contributions made by the villagers, especially the agriculturists. Rate Schools are associated with the new economic buoyancy experienced by the coastal districts of Godavari and Krishna, around in the second half of 19th century. See C. Upendranath, Growth of Education in Andhra: A Long Run View (Centre For Development Studies, Trivandrum, 1994), p. 24 and Note 42. See also J. Mangamma, Rate Schools of Godavari (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh State Archives, 1973).
G. N. Taylor, the then sub-collector of Narasapole division, with the aid of funds from the local ryots. This was in the year 1858. The experiment was later introduced to the present East Godavari district. The Rate Schools benefitted mostly the wards of the upper class ryots.

But the culture of education, which was brought already in the last century, did not seem to have knocked at the doors the dalit colonies, although there was, what were called Board Schools in the villages. The failure of children to attend schools even after being enrolled has to be attributed in a very large measure to the economic backwardness of the rural masses and the money value a child represents to its parents by way of physical assistance it can offer either in the fields or at home. This was even truer of the Madiga hamlets, as they give evidence, not so much about the distant past, but of recent occurrences:

Although we send our children for education, almost all of them drop out because of our poor financial condition. Some of our boys were studying in Don-Bosco, Ravulapalem. Though everything there is supposed to be gentlemanly, our boys used to be punished out of proportion. Also we have to pay the fees. So they left the Schools.

As the run-up to the Dandora movement made the Madigas keenly aware, sometime towards independence or after it, the Malas got ahead of them in education, which in turn made them ready by the 1950s to reap the first fruits of the positive discrimination or the reservation extended by the state, to all the Dalits. During my interviews, it was very evident that they were trying to grapple with this Mala mobility, "ahead of us by 20 years", both emotionally and intellectually.

"During the British period, a few years before Independence, the Raja of Pitapuram, a princely state, comprising parts of East Godavari founded a Harijan hostel and school, just to prove his 'Human Rights Record', during the durbargh thrown by the British Viceroy. In this institution for the Harijans, the entire inmates

102 Cf. Ramesan, East Godavari District Gazetteer, pp.188-89.
103 Ibid. 191.
104 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pothavaram-14/10/1998.
were made up of Malas. There was not even one Madiga. This is something to ponder over in the context of your research.\textsuperscript{105}

“If there are 150 persons in the Administration of a Mandal or Taluk, 100 will be Malas, 30 Madigas and 20 B.C.s. How does this state of affairs come about? This goes back to the poor educational background of the Madigas. Take for example the case of my own village, Talapudi:

\textbf{Comparison of Educational Levels Made by Dr George Victor during the Interview}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Madiga Students & Malā Students & Standard \\
\hline
1960 & 10 & 10 & Till 8\textsuperscript{th} std \\
1966 & 6 & 10 & Till 10\textsuperscript{th} std \\
1970 & 1 & 10 & Till 10\textsuperscript{th} std \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

All the Malā students passed the 10\textsuperscript{th} standard and secured government jobs. But only one Madiga managed to cross the 10\textsuperscript{th} standard. That is my humble self.

If you ask me, why the Madigas are in such a poor condition, the only available answer with me is ‘Nature must be at fault’. In 1952, Mr. B.S. Murthy, a Malā became a minister of Andhra Pradesh. He started many hostels for the Harijans, especially in East Godavari. But all the inmates were Malas. When I used to apply for scholarship as a Madiga, I never used to get it.”\textsuperscript{106}

The testimony of two post-graduate Madiga students of Andhra University, Waltair revealed that the Madigas are yet to catch up with the Malas, in the field of education, as the socio-economic debility still hampers their educational aspirations:

\textbf{We Madigas have woken up to the world of education only very recently. Now we have started availing of the reservations, which the Malas were already doing one or two generations ahead of us. So, even though we have reached at the University level in education, we do not have the infrastructure as the Malas have at present. Both of us would be in the same class, studying the same subject. When we write home, asking for money to purchase books, we draw a blank because our parents are still poor, struggling to keep themselves alive. They are coolects, as before and cannot save much. Whereas, the parents of…}\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{105} In personal communication with Prof. George Victor-06/11/1998.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
the Mala students are government employees (Teachers, Clerks, Revenue officials etc.) and have saved money. Most of them have acquired land. But my father is a rickshaw-puller. In the hostel, there is ragging-physical, and more than that, acutely psychological. We, Madigas are made to feel and ask ourselves. "Why must we study?"

This existential gap, which reflects the “idiom of necessity” at work in the Madiga world, and the gap between the Malas, have been brought home to me through the informal surveys, I used to conduct in the villages, as part of my interviews.

As we have already seen, the Madigas are traditionally landless people. Their kulavruti, of skinning carcasses and tanning leather, considered to be polluting, which engaged the entire family, provided for them only minimum for livelihood. Consequently, from the economic point of view, more children meant, more work and more money, in the survival economy. When the dictates of political economy of hunger become an overriding concern, education and other amenities look distant possibilities and luxuries. Survival looks a more important and immediate need than education and the ensuing mobility through it, which looks very remote and elusive. The observation of the East Godavari Gazetteer, in 1979 seems to coincide with our conclusions.

Another reason extended by the Madigas, for not availing of the hostel facilities provided by the government and other agencies seems to be that they are too attached to their children, to send them far away. This is unlike the Malas, who by their caste ethos are not afraid to make their children venture out into the world.

Whether it is “Nature at fault” or the “Political Economy of Hunger and Survival”, the unreachability of education and the consequent loss of mobility are etched into the Madiga consciousness. But with the Dandorā behind and ahead, they are being equipped to translate the sense of loss into determination to catch up with the lost years- “The Mala is ahead by twenty years.”

107 In personal communication with Prasad and Mohan Rao, Madiga Post-Graduate students, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam-06/11/1998.

As I have indicated earlier, during my interviews, to my question, whether they could trace any event in their memory, which awakened their identity consciousness, almost all the Madigas drew a blank. They could remember only Danḍorā movement, as a major event, which awakened their identity consciousness, in a big way.\(^{109}\) Earlier to this, there had been surely political awakening among them, after the Karmchedu and Tsunduru atrocities, where Madigas had been killed. The awakening, mobilization and response to these events would have been achieved, under the auspices of Dalit Mahasabha, which had been in existence from 1985 onwards.\(^{110}\)

Until 1994, the two prominent Scheduled castes, the Malas and the Madigas, though at loggerheads with each other, trying to prove the superiority of one over the other, were acting together, under the common banner of Dalit Mahasabha. When the Danḍorā (another name for ḍappu-drum, the symbol of the Madiga) Movement, was founded under the leadership of Krishna Madiga, to demand the rights of the Madigas, they parted ways. As a reaction to the Madiga Danḍorā, the Malas founded the Mala Mahanadu.

The following statement of the two university students conveys the then prevalent mood. “Malas are appropriating the lion’s share of the welfare schemes. For the Madigas, sincere Paper Work is going on. Malas show co-operation among themselves. Malas tolerate ill treatment. So, they could go up on the socio-economic

\(^{109}\) This is not to deny the sporadic events of Madiga uprising, in different hamlets of Konaseema, against the highhandedness of the upper castes, especially, the Rajus, as in the story narrated by Sahibu. Cf., Section 1, Chapter 1, subsection entitled “Contemporary Prodigals and Projectors: The Need for an Impartial Spectator”. The other revolts have been already discussed in the section entitled “From Submission to Revolt: Endpoints of a Strategic Continuum” in this Chapter.

ladder. Madigas do not have as much tolerance as the Malas. There are 70 lakhs Madigas in the State and 56 lakhs Malas.”

The political rivalry between the two groups was accentuated, when the Madigs, under the Madiga Reservation Pōraṭa Samiti started demanding that the recommendations of the Justice Ramachandra Raju Commission, regarding Reservations be implemented. The Commission submitted its recommendations to the Government of Andhra Pradesh in May 1997.

Of the sixteen recommendations, ten were accepted. The Government decided to classify the sixty Dalit castes in Andhra Pradesh, into four categories, for 15% reservations in the State. While, after Mandal Commission Report, Reservation is the burning issue at the national level, categorization within Reservation is the issue in Andhra Pradesh. While the Madigas demand this categorization, the Malas were vehemently opposing it. This had led to clashes between them in several places and at least ten Madiga young men have been killed in different incidents.

The Dandōrā Movement and the Madiga Reservation Pōraṭa Samiti did mobilize the Madigas all over the State, in the demand for the Categorization of Reservations and they have achieved their aim.

But in Konaseema itself, the reactions to the Dandōrā movement were mixed. The main reason for this being, that in the predominantly agricultural tract that is Konaseema, Malas, the traditional agricultural labor-caste outnumber the Madigas. This is unlike the case in Telengana, where the Madigas outnumber the Malas. The skeptical mood of the Konaseema Madiga was expressed to me during the interview. “What is the use of Dandōrā when we are so few in numbers? Where will we reach with all this talk? After the Mala Mahanadu, which took place in

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111 In personal communication with Prasad and Mohan Rao, Madiga Post-Graduate students of Andhra University-06/11/1998.

112 The commission was appointed by the Andhra Pradesh government to study the demands of the Madigas that the quota of reservations allotted to the Dalits of the state be further rationalized and streamlined, so as to enable the weaker sections like the Madigas to avail of the opportunities provided by the positive discrimination, to a greater extent. Cf. D. Samuel Jesupatham, “The Evolving Dalit Scenario”, Integral Liberation, September, 1998/2 (3), pp. 145-146.

113 Cf. Ibid., p.146.
reaction to Dandöra, even the Malas are looking upon us with enmity. In Konaseema, we, Madigas are few. Dandöra is all right in other places, where there are larger numbers for Madigas. Here we are not up to confronting.” 114

Apparently, there had been reports that the Konaseema Madigas were trying to demand a special quota of reservations within the categorization already demanded by the Dandöra Reservation Póra Samithi. The reason was that they considered themselves more backward than the Madigas of the rest of the state.

To allay the fears of the Konaseema Madigas, about the paucity of numbers of the Madigas in Konaseema, and the very viability of the movement, in the wider scenario of the state, the Dandöra leaders organized the inaugural rally of the movement, right in Amalapuram, the heart of Konaseema. It was the launching of the movement. Around a lakh of Madigas were gathered, to the surprise of the Konaseema Madigas themselves, and the other castes. It was a show of strength, as well as a confidence building measure. 115

The movement had the ideological support of the Left ideologues, and other radical thinkers. “Until ten years ago, the Marxist and Naxalite Movements were strong in Telangana. Now the Madiga Dandöra has come to the fore. The Radical Dalit writers in general, including Malas, have given support to the Madiga movement. These include prominent Mala writers. Madiga Reservation Póra Samithi (MRPS) is a movement of the oppressed. As Jesus Christ said in the gospels ‘Good news is preached to the poor’, and not to the sons of the rich.” 116 This support from the Left was acknowledged by Krishna Madiga during my interview with him.

In the run-up to the climax of the Reservation agitation, the Dandöra did mobilize the Madigas in great numbers. The rich repertoire of cultural resources, which is in the Madiga memory and tradition were re-appropriated, especially, the myths of identity and the myths of origin of the Madigas, along with the rich

114 In personal communication with Apparao of Eaugapalli-10/10/1998.
115 In personal communication with Krishna Madiga, 07-06-2001.
collection of Madiga folk-songs. This in itself is a great achievement. Women were also mobilized in great numbers.  

After the achievement of the very first of its agendas, namely, the categorization of reservations, it looked as if the movement had lost its momentum and initial elan. On the contrary, the interview I had with Krishna Madiga, the Dandora leader, indicated that the movement is still active, and getting even more vibrant ideologically.

At the ground level, some Madigas are skeptical about the usefulness of ABCD (Categorization of the Reservation Scheme), which the Dandora has achieved. This is because experience has shown them that the manipulations of the higher castes can outdo all the advantages of the renewed reservation schemes:

I do not know about Dandora. I don’t know about the problems of Dandora. Only one thing I know. The landlords manipulate the records and take away our jobs. In the list of eligible candidates, the names of our young men and women are deleted and instead, the names of the Reddy boys and girls are written. This, I know to be true.  

The leadership of the Madigas has to take the Movement beyond the limited issue of Reservation, to larger issues like, Minimum Wages Implementation for the agricultural labourers, many of whom are Madigas. The implementation of Land Reforms could be an equally burning issue on the agenda, as most of the Madigas are landless. This would demand political will and the will to collaborate with the other Dalit groups, especially the Malas, and the entire Dalitbahujan, along the lines envisioned by Kancha Ilaiah, the Dalitbahujan ideologue.

But during my movement among the Madigas of Konaseema and of Telengana, I have come to gather, especially from Madiga grassroots activists, that they feel this proposal of Ilaiah, to be all too utopian. For the Madigas, this sounds next to impossible. For them, after the intra-Dalit Mandalization of political

117 In personal communication with Krishna Madiga, 07-06-2001.

118 In personal communication with Ganapati, Gopulapuram village-09/10/1998.

discourse, in Andhra Pradesh, a-la-Justice Ramachandra Raju, the Mala is the Other, as Thurston also observed in the beginning of the century.

The following piece of information becomes a window to the enmity between the Madigas and Malas. During my fieldwork, I came to know the Madigas have a secret language, which is known only to the initiated among them. Only those who are found worthy are taught it. It is a coded language, perfected over the years, as a device to pass on messages in the presence of the dominant castes or enemies, especially the Malas. My informant told after much persuasion, that the word for Mala in the language was soluvāḍu, which is indicative of the utter derision, in which the Madigas hold the Malas.

As I noted earlier, the traditional enmity between the Malas and the Madigas turned more acerbic after the demand by the Madigas for the categorization of the Reservation quota. It looked as if the cleavage between the two sections of the Dalit Community would never be healed. So too the proposal of Ilaiah for the formation of a solidarity of all the Dalitbahujans, meaning by it, the Dalits, as well as the castes, which are termed in the Schedule as OBCs (Other Backward Castes) seem an unreachable dream.

The reason being that, going by the realpolitik at grassroots, the backward castes at lower rungs of the caste hierarchy seem to be their worst enemies to the Dalits, even more than the Brahmins, given the power equations in the state. Brahmins may provide the remote ideological groundwork for the dominant hegemony that marginalizes the Dalits, but those who confront the Dalits immediately at the ground level is the backward castes at the lower rungs, which have, of late come to acquire power and resources, and moreover political clout.

But my interview with Krishna Madiga revealed that he, as well as the core group of the Madiga ideologues is thinking in terms of working towards Dalit Bahujan solidarity, even including the Malas. Now that the basic socio-economic problem of the Madigas, that is the reservation had been redressed, there could be issue-based collaboration, while working to achieve Dalitbahujan solidarity. But Krishna Madiga was wary of joining hands with the poorer sections of the higher
castes. They cannot be trusted. They kill Madigas. It is not the rich landlords and caste people who kill Madigs, but the poorer strata of the higher caste groups.\textsuperscript{120}

Gopal Guru, another Dalit ideologue also sees Dalitbahujan solidarity to be in emergence, in different states. The common meeting point of the Dalits and the OBCs would be gross neglect of their socio-economic aspirations, they are facing, especially consequent upon the onslaught of globalization. The Dalits and the lower sections of the society, which suffer exploitation, under the nexus between sarakar, sahukar (Baniya) and Brahmin, under the sanction of ritualized hierarchy, see themselves further emargiuated, in the wake of globalization, the dynamics of which, is tilted to their advantage by the same unholy nexus, in connivance with the market forces.\textsuperscript{121}

Another very important issue, which has been very strongly advocated by the Dalitbahujan ideologue Kancha Ilaiah, is the appropriation and highlighting of the traditional skills of the Subaltern peoples\textsuperscript{122} like the Madigas, as I have already indicated. The civil society at large has to engage in a participatory debate with the Dalits on the preservation and strengthening of the traditional skills and trades of the Dalits, which are also their identity-markers.

In the case of the Madigas, this would imply the valorization, modernization and technologization of their traditional skills and trades of skinning animals, tanning hide and footwear making. This cultural and economic valorization would sanitize the trade of the ritual stigma still attached to the trade, and consequently to the Madigas. Instead of Madiga, being exploited, by being made to do the same stigmatized work of skinning and tanning, and the profit from his work, filling the coffers of the state, and of the higher caste entrepreneurs, Madigas, individually and

\textsuperscript{120} In personal communication with Krishna Madiga (17/06/2001).

\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Gopal Guru, Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity, pp. 134-35.

\textsuperscript{122} Cf. Kancha Ilaiah, Why I am not a Hindu, pp. 120 -123. It must not be forgotten that Ilaiah's much quoted and discussed and derided book, as the subtitle consciously indicates, is also a Critique of Brahminical Political Economy. Also see Ilaiah, “Productive labour, Consciousness and History: the Dalitbahujan Alternative”, in Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society - IX, Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Eds), pp. 165-200.
collectively, have to be made entrepreneurs, through co-operative societies, catering to their traditional trade. 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.

Another dimension to be catered to, to facilitate the emergence of the Madigas, is the prevention of the extinction of the various cultural groups, which form the satellite castes of the Madigas like Madiga Bhogamvallu (Madiga Chindollu), Madiga Masti, Madiga Dakkali etc., and are peripheral even to the Madigas. Those among the Madiga sub castes, considering themselves to be the higher Jatis, consider these as ‘Low’. The replication of hierarchy is rampant at the grassroots. Many of these communities are performing artists, on the verge of extinction, along with their art forms.

123 In this context, see Kancha Ilaiyah, “The Bhopol Declaration” in The Hindu, 20 January 2002 (Chennai Edition), p. 10, where Ilaiyah makes an analytical overview of the Bhopol Dalit Declaration, which was a response to the Bhopol Document, which was prepared with the initiative and involvement of Mr. Digvijay Singh, the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh. It set an agenda of socio-economic reform of the nation, combining politics and power, with the aim of socio-economic transformation of the nation, with due share for the Dalits in it. The Bhopol Declaration calls for land redistribution and the democratization of capital. In this context, it calls for the facilitation of the emergence of a stronger Dalit entrepreneurship, to tap the full potential of the Dalit labour power, especially in the context of the growing privatization of economy; also Gail Omvedt, “Diversity: Bhopol and Beyond”, The Hindu, 21 February, 2002 (Chennai Edition), p.10, where Omvedt calls for a greater diversified representation for the Dalits, women included in the public, as well private enterprises of the country. See also Aditya Nigam: “In Search of a Bourgeoisie: Dalit Politics Enters a New Phase”, Economic and Political Weekly, 30 March, 2002, pp. 1990 –3, where the author critically analyzes the different dimensions of the Bhopol Declaration, and the ambiguities it entails, especially in the context of the broader alliances in society called for, for the success of the Dalit struggle in the sphere political economy. It also critiques the negative stance taken by the Declaration vis-a-vis the social movements, on the assumption that all social movements are anti-dalit in orientation.

124 In this context of the discourse on Human Rights, see the pathbreaking article by Felix Wilfred, “Human Rights or Rights of the Poor: Redeeming the Human Rights from Contemporary Inversions” in Felix Wilfred, Asian Dreams and Christian Hope: At the Dawn of the Millennium (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), pp.98-121. Another article by Felix Wilfred, entitled, “Religion in Search of New Mediations”, in Ibid. pp. 269-304, in spite of its rather catchy but misleading title, places a challenge to the sciences, to make knowledge, not as a weapon of power, but an instrument of service for the human beings, especially the underprivileged, following the paradigm and the methodology of Liberation Theology. See also C.T. Kurien, Global Capitalism and Indian Economy (Delhi: Orient Longman), 1994.

125 Justice Ramachandra Commission does take note of them and have placed them in Category B, on the grounds that, “both the ‘Madiga’ groups and the ‘Relli’ groups of communities are not adequately represented either in public appointments or in educational institutions compared to their respective populations”, in Summary of the Main Recommendations of the Justice Ramachandra Raju Commission and those accepted by the Cabinet Committee, Government of Andhra Pradesh.
Development of a Welfare Economics, and re-interpretation of Economics, as a science of Human welfare will empower the subaltern peoples like the Madigas, in whose lives, poverty and 'Stand-Stillness' is the result of social, cultural and economic alienation. A collapse of borders in our disciplines is called for, if we are to journey along with the Madigas, in their appropriation of their cultural sources and their identity.

The Madigas are in emergence. This process has to give rise to, as well as be carried forward by the organic intellectuals, from among the Madigas themselves.

State and Community: Madigas, Democracy and Nationalism

If Dandora was an “Exodus” experience, which brought the Madiga identity-consciousness to the fore, and projected it to the level of political consciousness, there are two other icons, which are remembered by the Madigas of Konaseema, as harbingers of socio-economic freedom to them. I heard them being uttered in every hamlet, in connection with the watersheds in their ongoing journey to self-respect, identity and autonomy.

"After N. T. Rama Rao came to power, consciousness of Telugu honour and prestige was created and thereafter, consciousness of Dalit identity began to emerge." Here Satyanadam was, in his reflexivity and perceptiveness, trying to retrace the emergence of Dalit identity in Konaseema. It had been the result of wider happenings in the state, after N.T. Rama Rao’s vow to redeem the Telugu pride. The


127 See Felix Wilfred, "Religion in Search of New Mediations", especially where he quotes Karl Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach, as applying to Social Scientists, if they fail to allow their investigations to be informed by transformative praxis, p. 293.

128 Cf. Gramsci, Selections from Prison Note Books, p.23, where he mentions about the gap between the people and the intellectuals, in countries like India and China.

129 Exodus, as recorded in the second book of the First Testament, was a liberative experience for the Hebrews, who were under slavery and bonded labour under Pharaoh, from the vantage point of which they could look back and forward in history, write their history, develop a historical consciousness.

130 In personal communication with Satyanadam, Lincpetta-16/05/1998.
moorings of that vow might have been his Kamma caste consciousness, but it had its impact on the entire Telugu psyche.

"In 1945, when I used to study in the school, the B. C. boys used to sit on benches. We were sitting on the floor. No benches for us. No access to drinking water from the common pot. For us, they used to write on the wall, not on the board. ‘Emergency’ of Indira Gandhi gave us mukti (freedom). Prior to that, we were made use of." When I met him in 1998, Suryanarayana was at least 50 years of age. But in his memory, there is only one milestone, in his, and his community’s journey to selfhood and human dignity. That is Indira Gandhi- and the “Emergency”- 1975-1976.

Indira Gandhi is a shortcut icon for the Madigas, for land reforms, the assigning of Godavari delta lands to the Dalits, and steps taken towards the concrete removal of untouchability. They may not be able to join in the liberal drawing-room discourse on the excesses of the Emergency, but they know that it was the beginning of a journey to freedom and dignity. It was the moment when the Constitutions of India, framed by Ambedkar, one of their own, started becoming a reality in their lives. Indira Gandhi’s name had been uttered by Appa Rao and several others during the field interviews.

Indira Gandhi and N. T. Rama Rao are icons of power, power of the state, which were benevolent and liberative for them. They are etched in their subaltern memory, in their Thirdspace.

As Apparao of Enugapalli remarked:

We have, seemingly, many privileges from the government. But the Kapus do not allow us to enjoy them. They occupy all the government posts, along with the Malas. They block all the funds, without allowing the money to reach us. Only those who work in the households of Kapus, come to know of the benefits and avail of them with the help of their masters (Kapus). Nobody informs us about the benefit schemes because we are S.C.s. We are behind others. 132

131 In personal communication with Akumarthy Suryanarayana Rao, Mungandapalem- 13-10-1998.

132 In personal communication with Apparao, Enugapalli- 11-10-1998.
Here Appa Rao is speaking for himself and for many of his fellow Madigas, who are aware, that, being Dalits, the Indain state bestows on them many privileges of positive discrimination. But they do not reach them, due to the manipulation of power by the dominant castes. The logic of the lankī (client-patron relationship) is at work. This was the experience of Ganapati of Gopalapuram regarding the reservations.

"We always give but we never receive. We are waiting for the President of India, K.R. Narayanan, to consider our case for categorizations of reservations (ABCD). After all, he is one among us."\(^\text{133}\) Here the people of Mummudivarapadu, along with the other Madigas of the state, were awaiting the President's assent to the bill passed and sent by the Andhra Pradesh State assembly, on the categorization of the reservations. Eventually the President gave assent. They knew Mr. Narayanan was a Dalit and would do justice to them.

"We, Madigas are always down. Other castes are out to put us down. By delaying certificates and signatures, they are keeping us away from education and jobs. We will never come up. Politically, we are backward. We give respect to all but nobody respects us."\(^\text{134}\) These words expressed by the Madigas of Kandalapalem expressed their culture of agony, of pre-ABCD days. The categorization of ABCD and the initial victory of Dandborā are yet to trickle down to the Madiga hamlets of Konaseema, and elsewhere, as equality of opportunities, justice and as fruits of positive discrimination to them.

Meanwhile the forces of cultural nationalism, which questions the logic of positive discrimination for the Dalits, are on the rise, as warned against by none other than the President of India himself.

Though the provisions of reservation in educational institutions and public services flow from our constitution, these provisions remain unfulfilled through bureaucratic and administrative deformation or by narrow interpretations of these provisions. It seems, in the social realm, some kind of a counter-revolution is taking place in India. It is forgotten that these benefits have been provided not in the way of charity, but as human rights and as social justice to a section of society who constitute a big chunk of our population, and who actually

\(^\text{133}\) In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Mummudivarapadu 10/10/1998.

\(^\text{134}\) In communication with the Madiga elders of Kandalapalem, 12-10-1998.
contribute to our agriculture, industry and services as landless labourers, factory and municipal workers. There are signs that our privileged classes are getting tired of the affirmative action provided by constitutional provisions.\textsuperscript{135}

There are also forces of globalization at work against the Madigas in Konaseema, as elsewhere. As we have already noted in the chapter on the political economy of Post-Independence Konaseema, acres of farmland are being converted into shrimp farms, as part of the growing drive towards aquaculture. This is in flagrant violation of a standing Supreme Court order. The Rajus and the other landowning castes are benefitting from the onslaught of globalization, as the export of shrimp brings them money, at the expense of the land and the labouring people, like the Madigas.

The Madigas are looking to the State to intervene because "Given the lack of resources and exclusion from the structures of opportunity, the Dalits will have a serious stake in the Indian state, and unlike the upper castes, cannot desert it."\textsuperscript{136} Given this political exigency, they have to strive towards redefining nationalism, under the idiom of egalitarianism, so as to achieve the material realization of their cultural aspirations.\textsuperscript{137} The Dalits in their struggle cannot engage themselves in a counter-positioning of state and community, because they still look to the state for protection of their rights, and the definition of their identities.\textsuperscript{138}

Conclusion

In this section, attempt has been made to elaborate the layers, which go to make up the subaltern consciousness of the Madigas of Konaseema. The concentration has been on the daily struggle of the Madiga, in his/her experience of landlessness, labour and hunger. This is the ritual of his life, where the political economy of survival, in the idiom of necessity, dominates. I submit that this moment


\textsuperscript{136} Gopal Guru, Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{137} Cf. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138} Cf, Saurab Dube, Untouchable Past, pp. 210-11.
of the godlessness — liminal symbol-ritual continuum of his/her life has to be privileged. Other two moments of the continuum, are to find their hermeneutical elaboration, embedded in this moment of daily ritual of his/her body, his/her struggle and work. They are not mere 'subjects' constituted in the discourse of power, though they do negotiate power. They are not mere sites for cultural discourse, not mere symbols in a cultural system. They are embodied symbols, actors in flesh and blood-actors, who live.

To understand their struggle for autonomy and resistance, their politics of consciousness, and the political unconscious, we need an anthropology of embodied knowledge, sensitive to politics and economy — political economy. We need to develop a philosophy of praxis, sensitive to common sense of the people. This work, and especially this section, and in that, this chapter, which struggles to mediate the ritual of the daily resistance and commitment, ritual of the Konaseema Madiga, is a moment in the weaving of that anthropology of embodied knowledge.139

Chapter 2

Jāmbavuṭṭu as Symbol of Resistance and Autonomy: Critical Consciousness of the Madigas in their Myths of Identity

Performance as Protest: Ongoing Subaltern Demand for Socio-Political and Economic Space

G.W. Briggs, in his work, *The Chamars*, describes the Madigas thus:

>The great leather-working caste of the Telugu country is the Madiga. He lives in the outskirts of the village. He is described as coarse and filthy, as an eater of unclean food, and as a user of obscene language. He works in leather, and serves as menial and as a scavenger. Many Madigas are practically serfs. Most of them are field-labourers. They beat drums at festivals. In some parts of the country they still have their prerequisites (jjaiṇān), but these are disappearing under competition. They perform the revolting parts of bloody sacrifices, and aid in removing the demons of disease. Their girls are often dedicated to temple service (baṣavaṭ). The cast is divided into a number of endogamous divisions with exogamous septs, some of which seem totemistic. Widows are re-married. Divorce is easily secured. They have a punaḥvai, or council. They both bury and burn their dead.¹

Contrast this portrait with that of Veerabāhuṭṭu, a Madiga, on his way to the market, to buy none other than Harischandra, who has run into penury, and is selling himself. On the way, the Madiga is singing himself away to glory and the lyric of his song, can be roughly translated as follows:

> Please give some way, make some space for me. I am from an esteemed family.
> If I don’t tell you the truth, you will tell me to get out of sight
> If I deliberately refuse to tell you the truth, even then you will cast me away.
> If I cross you without asking, you will blame me, “Don’t Pollute”
> If I ask your leave and then go, even then you will question me
> I am going to buy somebody, who is on sale, on the road - it seems he is good
> I am going to buy him, since my wife has told me so. ²

Though these lines are taken from a wandering troupe’s enactment of an oft-enacted common scene, it is pregnant with self-assertion and protest against an existing oppressive order of things. It is an artist’s signature on his creation, especially, the first line “Please give me some way, make some space for me. I am from an esteemed family.” In words couched in irony and protest, he is expressing


² In personal communication with Sokka Venkatarao, in oral communication of the song sung by him, as young boy, as he was acting the role of Veerabāhuṭṭu, in the play entitled Harischandra, enacted by the nomadic Madigabhoganvallu -19-08-2000.
his resistance to the existing order, in the context of the enactment, removed from
the real life situation, but very much reflecting it.\footnote{See Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, \textit{Castes and Tribes of Southern India - 5} (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1987), p.318 for the stock real-life answer of the Madigas, when asked about
their caste. \textquotedblleft When asked concerning their caste, the Madigas always reply, \textit{\"{}Memu pedda inti valamu,\"{} i.e., we are of big house}.\textquotedblright{} See J. C. Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance}, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985) and \textit{Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts}, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press 1990), by the same

\textbf{Kulapūrdās as Identity-Markers and Carriers of Subaltern Ambiguity}

In the preceding section, in the process of tracing out the dynamic inventory
of Madiga consciousness, we have gathered together the layers of their multiple
consciousness of creative resistance, as brought into relief in the political economy
of hunger, landlessness and labour, and as lived out by the Madigas in the ritual of
their daily struggle for survival. In this section, we shall attempt at gathering
together the layers of the same creative resistance and critical consciousness, as
reflected in their tales of origin or myths of identity.

As we have already noted in the introductory part of this section, there is a
political consciousness of the subaltern at work, critiquing the dominant ideology,
from within hierarchy. If ideologies subvert or legitimize authority, caste ideologies
also contain these elements of subversion and legitimization.\footnote{Cf. Dipankar Gupta, \textit{Interrogating Caste: Understanding hierarchy and difference in Indian society} (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000, pp. 72-73.}

As different castes maintain distinct notion of their original heritage,
onontology is an important component of ideologies of all castes, which compete
among themselves in the construction and assertion of their identities,\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} P. 73.} especially
through their \textit{Kulapūrdās}.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} P. 73.}
Kulapurāṇās are inherited oral texts, not as piece of recitation, but as cultural metaphor, an interactive text, which explicitly relates members of a social group to its own self and to the other social groups. Esoterically the kulapurāṇā reveals what a group thinks of itself, and exoterically, it projects what others think about it. That means that purāṇā is a cultural text, which is inalienable, which lives within the group as a force of sustenance and a device of social identity. They are performative texts, which are alive and not frozen. Kulapurāṇa of a particular caste is katha, a narrative tradition, which acts as an identity marker, in as much as it fixes its role in the social order. It acts as a device that helps the community both to uphold the social order on the one hand, and express its own worldview on the other. In as much as the kulapurāṇa, as katha performs this dual role of affirming the social order, as well as questioning it from the point of view of the lived-experience of a group, its role as an identity-marker is ambivalent. It is a carrier of an ideology, capable of subversion, as well as legitimization of authority.

Kulapurāṇās of the different castes trace out the origins of the different castes, against the background of ontology, constructed by the group, often out of preexisting material. Both the dominant and the subaltern communities engage in this ‘ontologizing’ of their identities.

Jāmbavuḍu, as the focal identity symbol of the Madiga caste

The identity myths or the tales of origin of the Madigas are no exception, to the abovementioned tendency of ‘ontologizing’ of identities, as a hermeneutic of the passages of the Jambapurāṇām, will shortly indicate. Jambapurāṇām is the

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7. In this context, see Partha Chatterjee, “Caste and Subaltern Consciousness” in Ranjit Guha (ed.) Subaltern Studies-VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society, pp. 200-203, the section entitled “The Genealogy of Insubordination”, where the author retraces for us the attempt by a marginalized, subaltern religious sect, to appropriate and manipulate the myths, especially of creation, belonging to the Sivite Nāth cult of Eastern Bengal.

Kulapurāṇa of the Madigas, ritually enacted by the nomadic sub-sector called the Chindu Madigas, in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, and by the Madiga Bhogamvallu in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. The Chindu or the Bhogamvallu are the bards of the Madiga community.

As our enquiry, in the present chapter is not on Madiga mythology, but on the subaltern agency of the Madigas, as reflected in the focal myth of Jambapurāṇa, I do not intend to enter into an exhaustive study of the rather detailed myth, but rather enter into an hermeneutical engagement of those pertinent passages, which have bearing on the ritual of the daily struggle of the Madigas for survival and well-being.

"Madigas were the first caste before the beginnings. They have their origin in Jambavudu, who was born before the golden egg. Before the Sudra, the Vaisya and the Brahmin, Madiga is."9 This celebration in memory by the Madigas, of the primeval origin of Jambavudu, the symbol and the originator of the caste, and in him the primeval origin of the entire caste, even before the origin of the dominant castes, can be traced to the origin of Jambavamuni, in the atbhutayuga. This is narrated in Jambapurāṇa. It is enacted as a dialogue between Jambavudu and a Brahmin. Contrary to the dominant scheme of yugas, which consist of four yugas, the Madiga kulapurāṇa divides the yugas into eighteen.

In the first of the yugas, in this scheme, which is called the nandamirana, yuga, the adidēvuḍu or Parambrahma is born. From his womb, through the recitation of pranavamantra, the five Vedas emanated. So too the water, lotus-stalks and other flowers. These emerged in the anantayuga. After the close of the anantayuga, during the adbhutayuga, through the immersion of the paramāntra in the pranavamantra, there arose a whirlpool both gross and subtle. From this pool of water, there emerged a subtle spring of water, which fell into the lotuses. After a few days from among the lotus, there arose Jambavamuni. His head was adorned with several locks of hair, and his body was covered with hair, like that of a bear. And he had strength like that of the bear. And amidst the lotuses, he engaged himself in Tapas. Thus the adbhutayagamati came to an end.10

Subaltern Reversal of Dominant Constructs of Hierarchy and the Negation of Dominant Rituals as Tools of Power

In the above passage, apart from the very evident burden of establishing the origin of Jambavudu, and through him the Madiga caste itself, the Madiga agency is

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9 In personal communication with the people of Pulletikuru- 22/05/1998.

10 Cf. Bittu Venkatesvarlu, Jambapurāṇa, pp. 4-5.
subtly appropriating for itself the capacity for tapas, which is usually considered as the prerogative of the Brahmns. This is a hidden transcript. This appropriation of the capacity for tapas, which is the identity-marker of the Brahmns, is borne out by the internal evidence of the text itself. As puranic time unfolds, in the bimayaka yuga, parabrahma approaches AdiJambamuni, who is in intense tapas on Sudimam mountain, for making a skin pouch, in view of melting the panchalohas (five metals), needed for the marriage of the Trimurthis. Jambavudhu declines the request on the grounds, that being born of lotus and pranavamantra, and being engaged in tapas and asceticism, he would not take upon himself the sin of animal slaughter.

The dilemma is overcome when Paramatta, creates a son called Yugamuni, for Jambavamuni, from his own right shoulder. This son Yugamuni would be killed by Jambavamuni, to procure the raw material needed for the manufacturing of the skin-pouch used for the melting the metals. Yugamuni, in turn curses his own father, for having killed him that he would lose all his capacity for tapas and ascesis, and would be turned into a chandala and an untouchable. Upon this the father pleaded with the son, that it was not right on his part to have cursed him so heinously, as he had killed him not out of revenge, but to keep his promise to the Paramatta. Yugamuni relented and mitigated the curse upon his father.

"After a period of five thousand years, the curse of untouchability will be gone and all peoples will embrace you." As the father was freed of his curse, the bones of Yugamuni, which had been thrown off, were reborn. But Jambavudhu told him that as he had died and risen, he was not fit to be with his kinsfolk, and would have to be outside the castefold, and beg from the Madigas, sitting on the dung-beap. Thus Yugamuni is made the origin of the Dekkali caste, which is the satellite caste of the Madigas. They are dependent on them by ritual begging.11

At one stroke, the purāṇā, has asserted the 'original innocence' of the Madigas, vis-à-vis the killing and skinning of animals, and placed a strategic alibi for the replication of hierarchical relationship between themselves and the satellite

castes, like the Dekkali. It provides an etiology of the satellite castes, dependent on
the Madigas. It is also a contestation of the Brahminical view of the Madiga caste, as
polluted and deserving of their state, through fate.  

The purâṇa also symbolically asserts the right of the Madigas to be alive - as
human beings, as we encountered in their primordial subaltern posture to survive.
The kulapurâṇa also challenges the primacy of the Brahmin, as a model to be
imitated and emulated in the aspirations of the marginalized castes, in search of
identity, autonomy and upward mobility. This reversal is coded in the curse and
negation of the Brahminical ascetical leanings of Jâmbavudu, the origin and symbol
of the caste. Simultaneously, the tendency to appropriate the power of tapas, usually
the prerogative of the twice born is also present, as Jâmbavudu himself has his
power from tapas and the pranavamantra.

Underexposed and Conflictual Political Economy of the Ritualized Hierarchy
of Caste

As the Purâṇa unfolds, we have the oft-quoted myth of Jâmbavudu being
called upon to move the carcass of Kamadhenu, the celestial cow, and the eating of
putrefied meat by him:

After the marriage of Siva and Parvathi, as they were enjoying a pleasure-ride in
the forest, Parvathi had her menstrual flow, and she threw off her bloodstained loincloth on
the ground. It fell on a heap of cow-dung, near a chaunnangi tree. On their return to the
same spot, they saw a child lying in the place of the bloodstained cloth. The boy was taken
home by the couple and named Chenniah, as he was born near the chaunnangi tree. Parvathi
left the boy near Kamadhenu as her guardian. He was given the gifts of three voices-
dâsasvâku (servant’s voice), vishavâku (poisoning voice), and amrutavâku (nectar-like
voice). When he had the taste of the milk of Kamadhenu, which tasted like amrutham
(nectar), he thought to himself, how much more delicious the flesh of the cow would be. As
this thought passed Chenniah’s mind, the cow gave up her life, near the place where Siva
used to sit in tapas. At the death of Kamadhenu, all the gods assembled together. They
wanted to remove the carcass of the cow from the holy precinct of the venue of Siva’s
tapas. Though they tried to pull her off with all their might, they did not succeed in moving
the cow. Thereupon they asked Chenniah, to seek the help of Jambavanani, who was
born before the earth itself, as he would have some way of tiding over the problem.
Chenniah went over to the place, where Jambavudu (the advanced in years) was offering
pûja. He called out to him, “Oh! Grandfather, come down to us – Madigira, instead of the
full expression (na dagaranaku di gi ra- come down to us). As he had the gift of vishavaku
(poisoning voice), his expression Madigira stuck to Jambavudu and his folk. Thus the
name Madiga.

12 Cf. Deepankar Gupta, Interrogating Caste. p. 73.
13 Cf. Ibid. p. 134.
As Jāmbavuṇḍu approached the place where Kamadhēnu was lying dead, Jāmbavuṇḍu caught by the hind legs, and pushed it away. The gods were surprised at the ease with which Jāmbavuṇḍu accomplished the task of removing the cow. The gods asked Jāmbavuṇḍu, to prepare the meat of the cow, together with his grandson, Chennaih. Jāmbavuṇḍu placed Chennaih, in charge of cooking the meat. While the meat was being cooked, a piece of meat fell off the pot. Chennaih blew over it and put it back in the pot. Once again a piece of meat fell off the pot. Chennaih put it back in the pot once again, after blowing over it. As the entire meat would be polluted, the gods refused to it. It was putrefied and stench emitted from the cooking vessel. The gods would not eat the meat. They told Jāmbavuṇḍu and Chennaih to eat the meat. At this Jāmbavuṇḍu was enraged and asked Chennaih as to what had happened. Jāmbavuṇḍu scolded him, addressing him, “Nee Amma Malanela” (Your Mother, begone you Malai). Thus he abused the Malas. When the gods insisted that he eat the putrefied meat, Jāmbavuṇḍu said, “Whatever has happened let it be. But you have left me in this polluted place, and I will not remain here. Morning is fast approaching and it is the onset of Kaliyaga. Human beings are about to be born. What would be my reward for all my service to them?” The gods insisted that he ask whatever be his choice. He asked in symbolic forms for a share in the agricultural produce and participation in village rituals.  

This myth, and its various variations, have been often limited to stand as an etiology for the Madiga caste. But we must not miss out on its hermeneutical potential, by being blind to the hidden transcript of conflict at various layers written into it. Jāmbavuṇḍu, who come down from his primeval heights of tapas, at the behest of the gods and goddesses, and who marvel them with his ease in moving the holy celestial carcass of Kamadhēnu, is here a symbol of subaltern protest, with all its conflict, ambiguity and ambivalence.

His words “But you have left me in a polluted place. I will not remain here” are the words of every Madiga, the untouchable and the chanḍāla, of the Indian subcontinent. The untouchables came to represent the final limits of life in the community. In ownership and possession, they were made to be masters of only donkeys and dogs, in kinship, the lowest pratiloma group, of sansāra, the lowest of human birth, of life, as scavengers of death, of normativeness, as executioners, and the spatial reach of dharma, by being peripheralized to the above areas.  

15 A variant of this myth is given in the Mysore Census Report, 1891, as quoted by Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, Castes and Tribes of South India-IV: K-M (Asian Educational Services, New Delhi- Madras, 1987), pp. 315-316.
What is often forgotten and remain underexposed in the texts of dharmasāstras, as well as the annals of ahistorical socio-historical scholarship is the context of the political economy of this hierarchized ritual marginalization. Behind and beneath the visible ritualized symbolism of asserted lordship of the dominant classes, there is the unrecognized, exploited and the suppressed economic contribution of the alienated labour of the Dalits, the daily ritual\textsuperscript{17} of their sweat, blood and tears.\textsuperscript{18}

This peripheralization of the Madiga at different levels, especially in the socio-cultural and economic spheres, is indicated by the location of the Madigapēṭa in a village. “The dirty water from the āru (caste segment) has to flow through the Mālapēṭa to the Madigapēṭa, before it goes out of the village. The Madigapēṭa has to be located at the downside of the village.”\textsuperscript{19}

Interrogating the Dominant Benevolence: Unmasking the Alienation of Subaltern Labour

The Madigas, through the medium of the kulapurāṇa assert their contribution to the political economy of the village and society. The rendition is in the mood of satire and protest. The concerned portion of the kulapurāṇa is paraphrased here:

\begin{quote}
Whoever be, and whichever be the caste, those deserving of the eight gifts, upon my leather thong
You call us Madiga, Madiga, what may be your caste, I pray
Without the touch of my matted locks, not even the royalty’s daughter has her ornament - upon my leather thong
The row of chappals in the Reddy household, not without the touch of my matted locks - upon my leather thong
\end{quote}

If I am of low estate, without me how will the higher ups mangage?
Without my leather thong, the Komatī has no scales to weigh

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. note 2 in the preceding Chapter, where ritual is defined as symbolic behaviour, indicative of people’s social dependence and their emotionally charged interdependence and societal arrangements. The daily labour and the daily struggle of the Madiga, in this sense is a socially standardized and repetitive drudgery, indicative of his more than dependent existence, but not negating his subaltern agency.


\textsuperscript{19} In personal communication with Prof. George Victor- 06/11/1998.
The jug in the shepherd's house, only with my leather thong
Without leather no cartridges for the militia of the feudal lord
Without leather no grazing the sheep by the shepherd
The weaver's art too can't do without leather straps
So too the support under the potter's pot
So too the oil monger's oilskins

So too the donkey's reins in the washerman's house
And the Bhogamvallu (bards) do not beat their drum without my leather strap
Maddala for the Bhogams and the Tappeta for the gods
And without my leather strap, the Muslim butcher's jackknife doesn't slide
Nor do the barber's shaving knife

So too the stonebreaker's sledgehammer needs my leather strap
And the temple priest's cymbals

Without the touch of my matted locks, no sacred thread for the Brahmin, upon my leather strap
So too the shepherd's knife

The parting gift, which Jāmbavuḍu demands for his services for humans and gods, before the onset of kaliyuga, after having lifted and removed the carcass of Kamadhēnu, is the share in the agricultural produce and the village rituals, for him and his people. Ironically, these are the two things, which have been denied to the Madigas, and the people like them, from time immemorial, or only extended to them by the dominant castes grudgingly. This is in spite of the fact that, as Jāmbavuḍu tells the Brahmin during the enactment of the kulapurāṇa, that he, the Madiga and his work, symbolically depicted through the ubiquitousness of leather, is the backbone of the political economy of the village. Here the anti-structural overtones of the kulapurāṇa come to the fore. Jāmbavuḍu is hoping for a reversal of roles, at the end of the kaliyuga, a journey back into pristine unpolluted state of power, the state of the origins, the state of the firstborn, before the trimūrthulu, and even gods. The performance subverts, protests against their actual state of suppression in the society, and their alienation from their labour and its fruits.21

Etiology of Kulavṛtti: Political Economy of Survival as a Hermeneutical Tool

As noted in the preceding chapter, after the onset of the Dandöra movement, leather as a symbol of the Madiga caste has been revalorized, and the stigma and the disdain attached to it undergone an inversion. The finale of the jambapurāṇā is in Jambavuḍu, satirically ridiculing his antagonist, the Brahmin for his having to take his footwear to his forehead, while crossing the river. The Brahmin symbolically has paid respects to leather, the Mādigakulam and their polluting profession. More than that, by implication, the Brahmin has established that the work with leather is the highest of all professions. But ironically, even here the Madiga requires the seal of the Brahmin, to testify to the superiority and purity of his profession. What is at play is the ambivalence of a reversal and conformity to the hierarchical order. But then, that is the form often the everyday protest of the subaltern protest takes.

But this revalorization of leather as a caste symbol, and the symbolic reversal of the role of the polluting caste profession of footwear making, as depicted in the finale of the kulapurāṇā has to be read also against the context of political economy. The hermeneutical potential of the reversal, from the hierarchical binary matrix of purity/pollution is not to be denied, as the following myth gleaned from the field indicates.

Venkateswara Swamy’s Sandals

"Jambavuḍu stitched a pair of sandals for Venkateswara. But he did not pay the remuneration to him. Jambavuḍu went to Venkateswaruḍu once, twice, thrice ... but he did not receive the remuneration. Thereupon, Jambavuḍu placed a chit in the hundi (treasury) of Tirupati temple, as a reminder. The chit was sent to Venkateswaruḍu. By that time, Venkateswara was dead. Pūjārī was asked about the payment. As the payment could not be done in time, as a mark of indebtedness, the

22 Cf. Biu Venkatesvaru, Jambapurāṇā, p. 36. See also Sudhakar Reddy, Negotiating Conflicts, p.21.


24 Cf. the subsection entitled “Leather as Signet and Stigma: Problematizing the kulavṛtti of a resurgent caste” in the preceding chapter.
sandals of Venkateswara were kept in a newly built shrine for the sake of worship. At Tirupati, even today, these sandals are used as saṭagōpam (headgear) – a means of blessing, the devotees."  

This myth gained wide currency among the Madigas, as the Dandora movement was reaching its climax. Apart from the aspect of symbolic revalorization of leather and the sanitization of their kulavrutti, they were interpreting the myth, to be a symbolic and ritual indication of the collective debt, the nation has to pay to them, for their contribution to political economy. They, as a caste, along with the other stigmatized castes like Chamars, across India, are waiting for justice. Partial redressal of this collective debt was realized, when their demand for an intraclassification of the reservation scheme was granted, both by the legislature and the judiciary.

Myths of Hypergamy as Tools of Identity Assertion

Marital bond has often been a strategy of alliance between communities. But rarely, the phenomenon of hypergamy between castes has been made into a tool of social mobility, and identity assertion. The Madigas, if not in real life, at least in myth, have made use of this strategy of mobility and identity assertion, as the following myths testify.

Jāmbavuḍu Vs Krishna/Rama

"There is a scene in the purāṇas where Rama was seen falling at the feet of Jāmbavuḍu. There is also another scene wherein Krishna, another avatara of Vishnu, is fighting with Jāmbavuḍu in his old age. When he realizes that his opponent is Rama himself, in another form, he recalled that he had a desire to enter into combat with him, when he was younger, and complained that he had become old and blind, and had met him late. Nevertheless, he was grateful to Rama, for having granted his desire, at least in his ripe old age."  

25 In personal communication with the people of Kandulapalem- 12/10/1998.

26 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pulletikura – 22/05/1998.
"Krishna came in search of Shyâmanabhaka flower to the garden of Jâmbavuḍu. He had been goaded on by Rukmani, his wife, to fetch the flowers by all means and at any cost. This ensued in a fight between Jâmbavuḍu and Krishna. During the fight, Jâmbavuḍu realized that Krishna was none other than Rama, the avatar of Vishnu, with whom he had wanted to fight in his younger years. Jâmbavuḍu asked Rama to bless him and thanked him for fulfilling his desire, in his old age and in his blindness. He requested him to take away the flowers, along with his daughter, Jâmbavati, who was the keeper and the carrier of the flowers."  

Brahmin - Madiga Marriage

"Vasishta, was a Brahmin and a rishi. He was in search of a wife for long, and found in Arundhati, a chandâla, a fitting partner. He fell in love with her and married her. This was actually arranged by the gods, to distract him from his tapas. The members of his Brahmin community took this alliance between a Brahmin and a chandâla, as an affront. So too, the brothers of Arundhati, the outcaste, cursed her for having married outside the caste. 'You shall never have marital pleasures. You shall always remain as a star in the sky and bless all the couples, which are getting married. All will see you always.'

The marriage between Vasishta and Arundhati, who is known to Madigas as Āranjñothi is celebrated in Madiga folk songs. The fact that the marriage is a hypergamy, from the Madiga point of view, is consciously stressed:

Bēpanḍu, Bēpanḍu anṭadu kāni, Bēpanḍu māṅkiki pedda allaḍu
(You say Bēpanḍu,26 Bēpanḍu. But he is the eldest son-in-law to our family)
Āranjñothi Āranjñothi anṭadu kāni, Āranjñothi māṅkiki pedda adapaḍuḍu
(You say, Āranjñothi Āranjñothi. But she is the eldest sister-in-law to our family)  

27 Ibid. The present version communicated by the people is a variant of the original myth, given in the Bhagavata Purâṇa. There Krishna is in search of, not syamantaka flowers, but actually the syamantaka jewel. The search takes him to a cave inhabited by bears. The elder of the bears, being Jambavan, who with his bear-like thick matted locks appeared like a bear. After a stiff fight, Jambavan yields and hands over the jewel to Krishna, and as a sign of alliance and reconciliation, also his daughter Jambavati in marriage. Cf. Ganesha Vasudeo Tagare (ed. and trans.), The Bhagavata Purâṇa - Part IV in Ancient Tradition and Mythology 1st Edition - 10 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1978), pp. 1608-1613.

28 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Pullekururu - 22/05/1998.

26 Bēpanḍu is the sarcastic way of describing a Brahmin.
Both these myths, describing the marriage between Vasishtha and Arundhati, and the marriage between Krishna and Jambavati find their place in the Jambapuranā. The evident tone of the dialogue, which describes the marriages, is one of identity assertion and the removal of the stigma of pollution, through hypergamy.\(^{31}\)

Another related myth is that of the ostracization of Vasishtha by the other rishi, on account of meat eating. The myth is akin in content to the fall of Jambavuḍu to the state of pollution, after the cooking of the meat of Kamadhenu.

"Vasishtha was put in charge of cooking the meat, during a yajna, while the other rishi were away. As they were returning, they saw Vasishtha bending forward to catch a piece of meat, which had fallen out from the pot. The rishi misinterpreted this action to be meaning that he was greedy and he was trying to eat the meat, without sharing with them. They cursed him to be an outcaste along with his descendents, for no fault of his own, because he was trying to save the meat from getting soiled. Moreover, he was the leader of the group."\(^{32}\)

Whether this strategy of identity assertion through the mythical representation of hypergamy can be termed as Sanskritization or considered just as the expression of the need for mobility, the affinity between Madigas and Brahmins is in the identity-consciousness of the Madigas.

"There is a relationship between Madigas and Brahmins. As the Brahmins wear the thread, the Madigas wear the leather belt. Knowledgeable Brahmins and Komatis give us respect. Between Brahmins and Madigas, the practice of untouchability is less severe. The Brahmins are averse to Malas, more than us. Even the other castes consider Malas as more untouchable than ourselves and of lower caste than the Madigas."\(^{33}\)

\(^{30}\) This is an excerpt from a folk-song sung to me by the Madiga women of Kommaragiri.


\(^{32}\) In personal communication with the people of Pulletikuru — 22/05/1998.

\(^{33}\) Ibid. See in this context Saurab Dube, "Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh" in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds.), Subaltern Studies: Writings in South Asian History and Society-VII (Delhi: Oxford university Press, 1997), pp. 151-154, for a discussion on the appropriation of the juneu, the sacred thread by the Satnamis, at the behest of Balakdalas, their second Guru. It was a strategy of
Thurston does report the purported affinity between the Komatis and the Madigas, and of a custom among the Komatis, wherein they are bound to invite the Madigas for the marriages in their families. Though this may not be done directly, at least it is done symbolically. A similar custom existing among the Brahmins, that of having to invite the Madigas for the marriages in their families, was reported to me during the field-interviews.

Whether it is hypergamy in myth or real life, or whether it is the ongoing invention of the etiology of kulavruti, in the anti-structural idioms, with all its attendant ambiguity and ambivalence, power and political economy are present as two intertwined strands, in the search of the Homo Dialecticus for autonomy and identity. As opposed to Dumont's Homo Hierarchicus, who was conceived to be a static category, product of an ideology, Homo Dialecticus is an active subject, who, in his/her agency, becomes a manufacturer of, and a 'subverter' of ideologies.

The constructed affinity of the chandala, the Dalit and the Madiga to Brahmins can be easily understood, if power is also recognized as a motor in the engine of caste mobility. The Kshatriya, who actually wielded power and even subdued the Brahmin, the wielder of ritual power, had to be feared. It was dangerous to get close to him, to pretend to be a Kshatriya. In the logic of the ground reality of power relations, a claim in symbol or ritual to Brahminhood is less open to upper caste retaliation than a claim to Kshatriya status.

appropriation of the dominant symbols of caste assertion, but not necessarily implying Sanskritization. See also Fiona Bowie, The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 79-81, on the politics of dress, as a strategy in the negotiation of boundaries, especially in the context of the Tshidi Zionists of South Africa, a church group, and other churches. For a discussion on the political and ritual symbolism of dress, in the struggle of the subaltern caste of the Nadars of South Travancore, during the 18th century, see David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, pp. 110-114.

Komatis are the Telugu trading caste, spread all over South India. For the numerous legends, indicating the possible affinity between Komatis and the Madigas, Cf. Thurston and Rangachari, Castes and Tribes of South India- 3, pp. 325-331.

In personal communication with Prof. George Victor- 06/11/1998.

See in this context the warning of Kancha Ilaiah to the Dalitbahujans, against the fast emerging power block of the Neo-Kshatriyas, who act in nexus with Brahminical patriarchy, undermining the process of the Dalitization of India's political economy. Cf., Kancha Ilaiah, Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy (Samya: Calcutta, 1996), pp. 36-53.
It is the non-aggressive posture of Brahminism that made Brahmin model more appealing in earlier lower-caste identity assertions. In today’s conditions, when the dominance of the village oligarch is less intense, many castes do claim with impunity, Kshatriya status for themselves, and get away with it. But the situation of the Madigas of Konaseema is still very distant from this demonstration of power and might. They are still afraid of their Kshatriya masters, the Rajus. Direct confrontations of power are only an extreme and distant possibility, though Dandora has awakened them. Until they are able to grasp at the power principle, and the politics of numbers tilt to their advantage, they have to play the Brahmin, subvert the ideology of hierarchy and struggle to claim their due in political economy.

Conclusion

What we had been attempting to achieve in this chapter has been to apply the hermeneutical matrix of the daily ritual of the Madiga, as we traced out in the preceding chapter, to the myths of identity and the tales of origin of the Madigas. In this endeavour, I have relied mostly on the literary version of the performance-text of Jambapurāṇa, the Kulapurāṇa of the Madigas.

With Jambavamuni, the ancestral elder of the Madigas, who is also the protagonist of the kulapurāṇa, as the focal symbol, I have engaged myself in a diachronic hermeneutic elaboration of the varied themes of the Madiga subaltern assertion, as they emerge in ritual performance in the kulpurāṇa. This was undertaken in dialogue with the daily life-ritual of the Madigas. Contrary to the prevalent view of dominant anthropology, which sees performance and ritual, as safety-valves of the hierarchical structure, or as pace-makers for the system, the Jambapurāṇa, can play an anti-structural role, especially if approached under the hermeneutical keys of power and political economy.

As Parish insightfully remarks, the *Homo Dialecticus*, through his politics of consciousness and the political unconscious, standing within hierarchy, is striving for equality, though often it is an utopia. But the struggle for equality, through protest and submission, contestation and conformity, appropriation and reversal is important for the survival of the subaltern, and his/her ongoing journey towards autonomy, identity and critical consciousness.⁴⁰

In the next chapter, we proceed further with the tracing of the dynamic inventory of the subaltern consciousness of the Madiga, as it reveals itself in another symbol and ritual, in the Madiga cultural texture, namely, the institution of the Mātangi. Mātangi is yet another moment in the subaltern ritual continuum, that is the life and consciousness of the Madiga, which stretches from the ritual of his daily labour, through the *kulapurāṇa* as ritual-performance-protest, and Matangi as feminine liberative symbol of community solidarity, to the solidarity-assertion during the ritual celebration of the goddess, during her visit to the village.

Chapter 3

Mātangi as Symbol which Plays the Goddess: Assertion of Autonomy and Negotiation of Power

In the preceding chapter, making the Jāmbavapurāṇa, as the locus of our discussion, and centred on the focal symbol of Jāmbavānu, we engaged ourselves in a hermeneutical elaboration of the various layers of the Madiga subaltern consciousness, as they emerge in the ritual performance of the Madiga kulapurāṇa. The attempt was the second moment in our ongoing hermeneutical task of tracing out the dynamic inventory of the Madiga consciousness. The first had been to celebrate hermeneutically, the daily ritual of the Madiga, in his labour and struggle for survival. The hermeneutical elaboration of the kulapurāṇa has brought to light the theme of the subaltern reversal of the dominant constructs of caste hierarchy and the negation of the dominant rituals, as tools of power.

The elaboration has also brought into sharper relief the political economy of the ritualized hierarchy of caste, by interrogating the dominant benevolence, which, in its pathology of power, suffers from the amnesia of the subaltern contribution to the society, through its labour. Thus, the hermeneutical elaboration of the anti-structural dimension of the kulapurāṇa, revealed its potential, as a tool of subaltern protest, especially to challenge the state of the alienation of the subaltern labour from itself, due to the stigmatization and the exploitation by the super-ordinate strata of society.

The ongoing elaboration of the etiology of kulavruti, in the kulapurāṇa, in its anti-structural idioms, is aimed at unmasking the underexposed and conflictual political economy, beneath the ritualized hierarchy of caste. So too, the mythical celebration of the hypergamy, an additional theme in the kulapurāṇa, though not free of ambivalence, is a subaltern tool of assertion of identity.

In the present chapter, we enter the third moment of tracing out the dynamic inventory of the subaltern Madiga consciousness. Here we attempt, at a hermeneutical elaboration of the symbol of Mātangi, which has been celebrated in life, song and performance by the Madiga memory, in their ongoing journey towards
autonomy and their everyday struggles, in the negotiation of power. Mātangi is a liminal symbol, in as much as she is portrayed at times, as the attendant of goddess Ellamma, or at other times, as an independent goddess, Mātangi or Māthamma. She is also portrayed as the goddess who possesses a chosen female devotee, who has to undergo further initiation, to become a Mātangi, who will be possessed with the power of the goddess Mātangi, and who will play the goddess.

Mātangi in the Madiga Myths: A Symbol of the Feminine and the Agent of Liberative Fecundity and Solidarity

Mātangi, as a symbol of Madiga identity and solidarity was very much alive in the Madiga memory, even before the newfound revalorization of all the symbols related to the Madiga caste identity, at the wake of the Dandora movement. This was brought home to me, during one of the last group interviews, I had with a group of Madigas of Konaseema. The spokesperson was using martial imagery to convey the symbolic relevance of Mātangi, to him in person, and collectively to the group. "We have to take up the knife of rebellion and revolution, which has been thrown by Mātangi, and which has been left behind." 1

The evident message was an exhortation to the fellow-Madigas to carry forward the spirit of rebellion and protest, which is symbolized by Mātangi, especially in the context of the newfound awakening of the Madigas, in the context of the Dandora movement. If Mātangi fires the revolutionary imagination of the Madigas, others hold her, the kuladēvata of the Madigas, in high reverence, as the goddess of protection and the giver of well-being:

In West Godavari, there is a place called Mannungopalam, near Godugudem. There our kuladēvata Māthangi is worshipped. All the lorry drivers stop their vehicles and do their pūja before the statue of goddess. If pūja is not done to her by the drivers or the cleaners, their vehicles get stuck on the way. There is a vast lake adjoining the small temple. During the annual festival, 100 goats will be killed as sacrifice. She is worshipped as Sakti. 2

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1 In personal communication with Kolli Veeranju, Madikki, Alamparu- 16/05/2001.

The myths related to Mātangi, fall within the Vaishnavite legends, woven around the mythical figure of Rēnuka, who is considered as the source of šaktis. The šaktis are considered to be her incarnations. A theme running through these legends is the fight between Rēnuka and Rākṣās (demons). According to the hypothesis put forward by Elmore, the Rākṣās are the aboriginal tribes spoken of in the Ramayana, yet to be conquered by the Aryans, and the šaktis are symbolic of those tribes, who assisted the Aryans in conquering the aboriginal tribes.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 87-91.} In the following section, I intend paraphrasing the chief stories related to the symbolic figure of Mātangi and engage into a hermeneutical dialogue with these stories, which form part of the religio-cultural resources of the Madigas, so as to draw out the empowering and emancipatory potential of the symbol of Mātangi.

\textbf{Transposed Heads of Mistress and Slave: Contested Sites of Symbolic Constructions}

A popular myth, which has many variants, describes the story of the beheading of Rēnuka, the source of šaktis, married to the ill-tempered Brahmīn rushī, Jamadagni, and weaves the origin of the Mātangi into it.

One day, as usual, Rēnuka went to the riverside, to carry water for her husband Jamadagni, who was engaged in his daily rituals. As she was looking into the river, she saw the reflection of Karthavyaveerarjuna, the warrior, who at that moment happened to be flying across the sky. She allowed her thoughts to rest on his image, and after that she could not, as was her custom, roll the water into a ball to take it home. She was obliged to return home empty-handed. Due to her loss of chastity, Jamadagni ordered her to be killed. When Parasurāma, his son shot the arrow to kill his mother, the arrow, which severed her head, took off also the head of a Madiga slave, who was following her. When Parasurāma secured the promise of his father to reanimate his mother, he himself went to attend to the matter. It was early in the morning and still dark. He found the head, and placed it on the trunk. At the sprinkling of the holy water over the dismembered body, it lived. Parasurāma saw another head and trunk lying nearby, and recognizing the face of the slave, he joined the head and the body and caused her to live also. As the light was growing, to his sad dismay, Parasurāma discovered that he had actually mixed the heads and bodies. His mother’s head had been attached to the slave’s body and vice versa. He did not want to commit another double murder to set matters right, and so was compelled to bring both the women to his father’s presence and ask his forgiveness. Jamadagni was angry but at last consented to accept as his wife, the woman, who had Rēnuka’s head. He made the other woman, an inferior deity, and she became Mātangi.\footnote{Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 103-104.}
In another variant of this story, no one else except Rēnuka was reanimated:

Rēnuka, who is known as Ellamma, had taken refuge with the pariahs, who refused to deliver her to Parasurama. He, at any rate, killed all the pariahs and brought the head of his mother to the rishi, who was highly pleased. At the request of his son, as a reward for having fulfilled his command, unlike his other two sons, Jamadagni granted that Rēnuka be reanimated. He gave the head of his mother to Parasurama. On his return, Parasurama could not find the body of his mother, among the dead bodies of the pariahs. He therefore placed the head of his mother on the body of one pariah woman, and brought it back to life. Jamadagni, when he saw her said that his wife had turned into a pariah woman, and sent away both the mother and the son, away from his presence. Parasurama became a great king and Ellamma became a goddess.3

This version was narrated to me also by a social activist Madiga youth.6 The narration had added symbolic significance, due to the following reason. On the day of the interview, he was returning from a great event - of having taken over the surplus land, of about hundred acres, from the landlords, as a result of a long-time mobilization of the landless Dalits of Konaseema. In his mind, the story of Rēnuka or Ellamma being protected by the Madigas, considered to be pariahs, had significance, in the context of the distribution of land taken over, through the efforts of the Dalits of Konaseema.

The first version, where the heads of Rēnuka and Māntangi are interchanged, according to Elmore is an attempt by the Brahmins, at co-opting the Māntangi cult, by providing a Brahminical etiology for it, and attaching the goddess to the Hindu pantheon.7 Whitehead recounts a similar version of the beheading and the transposing of the bodies, of the Brahmin lady and the Pariah woman. He concludes that the woman with Pariah body and the Brahmin head was worshipped as Mariamma, and the woman with Brahmin body and Pariah head was worshipped as Yellamma.8

Apart from these orientalist readings of the myths related to Māntangi, there could be other readings and insights into the same myths, from a subaltern

6 In personal conversation with Machara Rao, an activist associated with the N.G.O. PARA (People's Action for Rural Awakening, Ravulapalem)- 15-06-2001.
hermeneutical perspective. The immediate message of the version of the myth, where the Dalits give shelter to the beleaguered Renaka, in flight, is that the Dalits are compassionate people, in and through their suffering and peripheralization. That they are able to stand in solidarity with those who suffer is part of their own self-representation, which has come across to me strongly, in my field research. Moreover, there is solidarity, among the Dalit women, which they are able to extend to the other womenfolk, even if they are of the higher caste groups. This solidarity could be a catalyst in the Dalitbahujan awakening, and the Dalitization of Indian polity and political economy.\(^9\)

Matangi and Ellamma are sites of this symbolic contestation, and negotiation of power. As Elmore rightly indicates, this symbolic appropriation is engaged in by the dominant Brahminical order as well, as a means of asserting power, through the co-opting of subaltern symbolic universe. The subalterns do resist the attempt by the dominant to co-opt and domesticate their religious resources.\(^10\)

Appropriation and re-deployment of dominant religio-cultural resources, as well as resistance to the co-option of their own religio-cultural resources by the dominant, is a strategy of the subaltern in identity assertion, at the ideological level. Unlike what Gramsci, and more especially, his followers theorized, the subalterns are more radical at the level of ideology, than at the level of behaviour. This is so because, in their behaviour, they are more constrained by the relations of power,\(^11\) and the logic of partial or hidden transcripts,\(^12\) and the "dull compulsion of economic relations."\(^13\)


\(^12\) *Ibid.*, pp. 284-290 and p. 321, where the author refers to the partial or hidden transcript of the peasants of Sedaka, on stage and backstage, as a means of resistance, under constraints of power.
Mātangi: Symbol of Subaltern Resistance and Assertion in the Socio-economic Space

Thurston narrates another variant of the Ellamma story, where Mātangi is pictured, not as identical to Ellamma, but as her collaborator and travelling companion. The story lends itself to a socio-economic interpretation of the subaltern symbol of Mātangi. This will enable us to see its relevance in the realm of the political economy of subaltern labour and identity assertion, which is one of the focal thrusts of this enquiry:

One day, Ellamma and Mātangi were going to Oragallu. On the way, the soles of Mātangi blistered and she sat down along with Ellamma under a Margosa tree. After resting a while, Mātangi asked permission from Ellamma to go to the Idiga (Telugu toddy tapper) of the neighbouring village, to get some toddy to drink. Ellamma objected to Mātangi’s request, since she knew that, the Idiga Gauda, being a Lingayat, would compel Mātangi to wear the lingam. At Mātangi’s persistence, Ellamma gave her leave. Ellamma transformed herself into an anthill, and Matangi, in the guise of a young maiden went to Idiga Gauda, with her cane, and the basket, which form her insignia. At her request for toddy, Idiga Gauda became angry, divested her of her insignia, and beat her up, after tying her to a date palm. Idiga Gauda and his wife further ill-treated her, but she managed to escape and went to Gauda’s brother. He treated her kindly and offered her sixty bullock-loads of toddy. All this toddy was poured by the man, into the shell of a margosa fruit, which, Matangi was holding in her hand, and half it was not filled. Only after an additional quantity of toddy, extracted from few palms, the shell became full. Matangi was so pleased with the Idiga’s treatment of her, that she blessed him, and instructed him to leave three date palms untouched in every grove, as Mātangi trees. On her return to Ellamma, it was resolved that the elder Gauda should be inflicted with all kinds of diseases, as punishment for the ill treatment meted out to Matangi. When Matangi, in the disguise of a young woman, approached the Gauda, with fragrant powders, Gauda purchased it in large quantity, for a great sum of money. But on using the powders, he became afflicted with manifold diseases, like smallpox, measles, cancer, asthma, gout, rheumatism, abscesses and bed-wores. Matangi then appeared before the Gauda, as an old soothsayer, whom the Idiga consulted, and upon acting on her instructions, he was cured of all the ailments. Thereupon, coming to know that all his misfortunes had befallen him, due to his lack of respect for Matangi, he became an ardent devotee of Ellamma. 14

Applying the first two moments of our journey of tracing the dynamic inventory of the subaltern Madiga consciousness, which has become part of the

relations. See also the work by the same author, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) which throws light on the subaltern strategies of everyday protest, withdrawal and appropriation, as means of asserting their dignity and rights.

13 Cf. James Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. 246. Here the author refers to the expression of Karl Marx, where Marx refers to the compulsions of the day-to-day imperative of earning a living, which evidently becomes a sort of obstacle to open and full-scale resistance against the repression by the dominant.

hermeneutical texture of our endeavour, as a hermeneutical tool to the text of this myth, the reading gives rise to new meanings, taking us before the text. This is an attempt to read the text, in the context of the underexposed and conflictual political economy of the alienation of the subaltern Madiga from his own labour, and his struggle to free himself from the casteist violence that forces the Dalit to define all ‘time’ and ‘space’ in terms of necessity, and not of choice.\(^{15}\)

The story is probably of Madiga origin, and gives the mythography of Mātangi’s victory over the higher castes.\(^{16}\) Like in many other stories, my reading is that though Ellamma and Mātangi are portrayed as two individual goddesses, they are one symbol of the one sakti, a subaltern symbol – a subaltern construct of solidarity and creative resistance. Both are female victims, who survived the vengeful male antagonism. They stand for the corporate Dalit and subaltern identity and sakti (power). They symbolize the revelation of power on the margins. The very fact of displacement from the dominant system bestows a power of resistance and agency on the victim.\(^ {17}\)

As we have seen earlier, subaltern assertion and resistance is expressed in multiple consciousnesses, which involves the two dimensions of politics of consciousness and the political unconscious.\(^ {18}\) These layers of politics of consciousness, which resists the hierarchy from within, and the political unconscious, which acquiesces to the hierarchy, both of which are present in the *Homo Dialecticus*, are mirrored by the twin figures of Ellamma and Mātangi, the reflections of the one subaltern sakti (power of resistance).


\(^{16}\) Cf. W.T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, p. 103. Whitehead also recounts another story, where Mātangi appears as the helper of Peleramma, the subaltern goddess, to reestablish her worship, after the Brahmin king, displaced her from her temple and tried to suppress her worship. See Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, pp. 103-106.


\(^{18}\) Cf. notes, 11-14, of section entitled “Politics of Consciousness and Political Unconscious”, in Chapter I of this section, where I quote Stephen Parish, citing his understanding of multiple consciousnesses, in variance with, though not in negation of the Gramscian theme of Contradictory Consciousness.
As we see in the myth, Ellamma knows about the ritualized domination of the dominant castes, as indicated by the warning to Mātangi, about the Idiga's demand for making her wear the lingam. But her discouragement of Mātangi's going to the village, is a symbol of the political unconscious in the subaltern. The subaltern in his/her political unconscious, in spite of his/her knowledge of the constructs of hierarchy, acquiesces to the hierarchy, due to the dull compulsions of economic relations or other pressures of hierarchy. She symbolically recedes herself into the anthill, her place of refuge, the symbol of political unconscious. This in itself is a subaltern strategy.

Mātangi, on the other hand stands for the layer of the politics of consciousness, in the subaltern multiple consciousness, as reflected in her persistence in going across to the village, to demand from the Idiga, toddy (economic and ecological resource), to quench her thirst, in spite of her painful physical condition (blistered soles) and the potential threat of the ritualized domination (wearing of lingam). The domain of political economy, to which the subaltern contributes, but from which, he is denied entry, is controlled by the dominant castes by exploiting the interplay between cultural schemes, social relationships, religious meanings and ritual power.¹⁹

Her being denied toddy, and being divested of her insignia, and being tied up and beaten are symbolic of the denial to the subalterns, their legitimate entry into the space of political economy and the ritual and socio-economic space. The Dalits and subalterns of India, in the past, under the feudalistic jajmani system, have been denied access to social space and time. Their skills and knowledge had been appropriated, resignified and patented.²⁰

A social auditing of India reveals that their freedom was denied to them. The Dalit had to pay for her freedom twice, in as much as she had to sell her labour as commodity only in order to buy the commodity, necessary for her physical survival.


Her purchasing power was conditioned by her access to the market, which was always behind the market prime time. The labour of the Dalits are always downgraded and ghettoized often in the sanitary sections of the employment sectors. Their living space, whether in the city slums or in the village colonies, are again ghettoized, like in the past. So is the case with education, as they are denied access to educational institutions of the land. 21

Like the elder Idiga and his wives, who ill treated, bound and beat up Mātangi, the goddess, the symbol of subaltern assertion and resistance, the patriarchal Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Baniya nexus, through the symbolic domination of ascriptive religion and its hierarchized gods and goddesses, holds sway over the socio-cultural space and the political economy of the country. 22

Up to now, we had been delving into the myths of Mātangi-Ellamma, to bring out the hermeneutical potential of the symbol of Mātangi, as celebrated by the Madiga memory, in myth. Now, we move on, on our hermeneutical journey into the modes and structures, in which the symbol of Mātangi had been institutionalized, in the Madiga communities. This is in view of thematizing the hermeneutical potential of the institution of Mātangi and the ritual, which invests it with power, of subaltern resistance and assertion.

Purifying Pollutant: Mātangi as the Sanitizing Eruption of the Untouchable Feminine into the Hierarchical Space

The Orientalist in Edgar Thurston could not miss out on the satirical in the scene, wherein he saw Mātangi, the lowborn Madiga priestess, occupying the prime of place in the processions, during the village festivals, wearing her necklace of

21 Cf. ibid., pp. 63-66. See in this context the enlightening and penetrating comment of Karl Marx. "The [sic] owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour - power as his own commodity, that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realization of his labour-power." Karl Marx, Capital, Frederick Engels (ed.) trans. by S. Moore and E. Aveling (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1906), pp. 187-188, as quoted in Peter Robb, "Meanings of Labour in Indian Context" in Peter Robb (ed.), Dalit Movements and Meanings of Labour in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 28.

cowry, and marching behind the master of ceremonies, who would be carrying her insignia, consisting of a knife, wooden shoes and trident. All these, including the necklace would have been placed in the village well for three days, before she dons them, on the day of the festival, for which she arrives on special invitation.23

Her presence is sought after for the festival of the village deities. What was more comical for the Orienatalist eyes of the Victorian Englishman was, the fact that the lowborn lady, running round and round the master of ceremonies and his family members, who were standing in attendance, was spitting on all of them uttering meaninglessness exclamations and touching them with her stick. The woman is considered to be the incarnation of the goddess Mātangi, the favourite deity herself.24

Though he could capture the satirical and the comic in the festival scene, involving Mātangi, he was baffled over the cleansing and the cathartic, in the physically polluting aspects of the ceremony, the twice born were ready to undergo, which, normally they would abhor and avoid like plague. They usually would avoid even the shadow of the untouchable, and that too a woman, within their walking space. As Thurston notes:

Her touch and saliva are believed to purge all uncleanness of body and soul, and are invited by men who would ordinarily shun to approach her, and it passes one’s comprehension how she should be honoured with the task of purifying the soul and body of high class Reddis and purse-proud Kormatis. It must be said that only very few Brahman families keep up this mysterious ceremony of homage to Mātangi. She is allowed to come into the house that is to pass the outer gate. There she besmeared a certain spot with cowdung, and places upon it a basket. It is at once filled with cooked food. A layer of rice powder covers the surface of the food, and on it is placed a small lamp, which is lighted. She then holds out a little earthenware pot, and asks for toddy to fill it with. But the Brahman says that she must be content with water. With the pot in her hand, and wild exultant songs in her mouth, recounting her humiliation of Brahman and Kṣatriya, of saint and sovereign, she moves quickly round the assembled men and women, scattering with a free hand upon them the water from the pot. The women doff their petticoats, and make a present of them to the Mātangi, and the mistress of the house gives her the cloth she is wearing. The men, however, with strange inconsistancy, doff their sacred threads, and replace them by new ones after a bath.25


24 Cf. *Ibid*.

Elmore who nearly quotes in full, the above scene described by Thurston, and considers Mātangi to be possessed by the spirit of Mathamma, during the procession, gives a thoroughly Orientalist interpretation for the entire process. His framework of interpretation is that of the Dravidian fear of the devils and evil spirits. The Brahmin reverence for Mātangi is not so much arising from the desire for purification, as from a fear of the devil that is Mātangi, and the need to placate her. In the fear of the devil, the Brahmins share a common lot with the Dravidians (Elmore’s term for the followers of aboriginal or non-Brahminical indigenous religion). The willingness of Brahmins to be spat upon by Mātangi, and to be touched upon by her saliva, which during ordinary circumstances, would have been highly polluting, is just to escape from the evil that would come upon them from Mātangi. Fear, and not desire for cleansing, is the logic governing the Brahmin eagerness and haste to shower the Mātangi with presents and their humble submission to her vile humiliations.

If he uses the logic of fear as a hermeneutical tool by extension to the Brahmins, in the case of the Dravidians, the same logic of the primal fear of the devil, and the evil spirits is elaborated and applied with utmost ease. By allowing themselves to be spat upon by the Mātangi, the people become immune in two ways. First, as in the case of the Brahmins, Mātangi, being a devil, her favour must be won, by placating her, even though through an unpleasant means. The second is that, after having consented to be spat upon by the Mātangi, the Madiga untouchable woman, who is the limit case of polluting untouchability, no worse devil would dare to attack or possess them.

While being appreciative of Elmore’s sympathetic interpretation of the Mātangi cult, in the light of Dravidian fear of the devil and the evil spirits, I venture an alternative interpretation, from the Madiga subaltern viewpoint.


27 Ibid., p.142.

28 Ibid.
Few Preliminary Psycho-sociological Considerations on the Transaction of Power and Religious Trance

As indicated in the title of the chapter, it is my submission that Mātangi is a subaltern symbol, which plays the goddess, Ellamma-Mathamma. She is on ritual occasions, being possessed by the goddess—becoming the goddess. She is in potency to assume the power of the goddess, and thus become a symbol of subaltern assertion and negotiation of power vis-à-vis the dominant castes. To elaborate this point, I rely on the insight of McKim Marriot, a-la Michael Moffat, on the non-dualistic nature of the transactions of power between the human world and the world of gods and goddesses, especially the subaltern goddesses.

Unlike in the Western dualistic understanding, where the world of gods are opposed to that of the humans, in the subaltern context, human actors, irrespective of caste rank, can be thought to rank above certain gods, and therefore capable of commanding them, not withstanding the fact that they are desirous of a favour from the specific sakti of the lower divine beings. Added to this, in this non-dualistic transaction, humans themselves possess or acquire sakti, and can be venerated and worshipped as gods by other human beings, and possibly other gods. Moreover, humans often become gods after death, and gods can incarnate themselves as humans, covertly, as well as overtly.29

Thus the key distinction of Indian religiosity is not between “human” and “supernatural”, but between worshippers and the worshipped. The latter possess sakti or power, relative to the former. In indigenous Indic understanding, the beings, which are usually divided as humans and non-humans, in the dualistic understanding of Western scheme, can fall in either category.30 There can be a negotiation of power with the gods and their intermediaries.31 Depending on the rank in the hierarchy, there could be a mediation of power, either downward or upward.32


30 Cf. Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 239.

32 Ibid., p. 259.
Before I enter concretely into the hermeneutical elaboration of Matangi, as a symbol of subaltern assertion and negotiation of power, a phenomenon, which requires clarification is that of possession. From a psychological point of view, possession or religious rapture stands for a particularly violent form of unconscious incursion in an ego that is relatively weak, and still not fixated in consciousness. Unlike in the past, recent researches have shown that religious trance is not mere chaotic hysteria, but a structured, and in some cases, highly formalized phenomenon, which can be creative of culture and enriching of consciousness, both for the group and the individual. Religious trance is often a kind of highly ritualized reflex, and a vehicle for embodying the mythological traits of deity, rather than a mere psychological outlet for repressed personal drives. In religious trance, that someone who is highly possessed, by the deity, is able to articulate repressed social grudges of the collective, is indication of the fact that the disordered unconsciousness, in all its histrionic display, is subjected to cultural control. Though India’s dominant tradition discredits oracular possession, it is very much part of the texture of subaltern tradition, and a means of social integration, and restoration of collective solidarity.33

The occult power of the oracle arises from his/her liminality - his/her vulnerable position in the hierarchical order. He/she is either a member of an underprivileged caste or tribe or an aberrant personality, with inclination towards psychological disorders. But by his/her very position of being thrust out of the confines of the society, recovers a power, beyond the reach of the conformist. Besides violence, ritual possession is India’s way of canalizing social protest. Oracle is the voice of the oppressed, from the margins, demanding redress.34


Possession, in traditional anthropology and sociology, has been considered as a safety valve, to contain the possible fissures in the society. "L [sic]icensed ritual of protest and rebellion is effective so long as there is no querying of the order within which the ritual protest is set, and the group itself will endure." This dictum is exemplified in the account of the festival of Holi, which provides outlet for repressed personal drives.

Recent anthropological studies have taken cognizance of the potential of ritual to trigger off social inversions and become instruments of role reversals, not merely for the period of ritual play during the festival or carnival, but also following upon it, expressing protest and accentuating conflict. This is especially true of possession or religious trance and magical interpretations, during subaltern uprisings.

With this methodological excursus and preliminary discussions behind us, we are ready to revisit Thurston and Mātangi-in-possession and people in attendance, to go through the satirical and the comic, and hermeneutically capture the cathartic, the resistant and the assertive in the symbol, that is Mātangi, who plays the goddess—Ellamma/ Mathangi, in possession of the goddess.

Symbol, which plays the goddess: Carnivalesque Catharsis or Penetration of Hierarchic Hegemony?

If the Orientalist in Thurston did not miss out on the satirical and the comic, in the scene in which the untouchable lady was strutting around and spitting her

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saliva on the Brahmin, Reddy and the Komatti, it was because of the carnivalesque about the situation. As in Marriott's description of Holi, already mentioned earlier in the section, and the Medieval carnivals of Catholic Europe, there is evidently a role reversal here, and a degree of catharsis. The unconscious sociological catharsis is at a deeper layer, lying beneath the spiritual cleansing, sought after by the higher caste, males and females, spat upon and touched and heckled by the Mātangi-goddess-in-possession. This social catharsis is entwined with the negotiation of power, between the worshippers and the worshipped, in this case, through the downward mediation of power, through Mātangi.

The carnivalesque, in this spiritual negotiation of power is also brought to the fore, by the forgetfulness of the anxiety, regarding purity-pollution, usually exhibited by the higher castes. The anxiety about the pollution of the bodily margins, which is the psychological substratum of the caste system, is temporarily overcome. This gives way to the Holi-like situation, where the roles are reversed, and the untouchable, becomes touchable, and touches the twice born, ridicules, abuses and humiliates them. The wooden slippers of the untouchable woman are being carried by the twice born master of ceremonies.

The bodies of the twice born relax, the margins are left unguarded, and the untouchable is given entry beyond the outer gate. Even her saliva, the most polluting of substances find space on the bodies of the non-untouchables. The attire, one of the foremost symbols of domination, under the guise of spiritual worship and munificence, but not without the subconscious yielding to the carnivalesque unguardrdness, falls off the female bodies, according to their echelons of

40 For the play of ritual during the carnivals and the symbolic role reversals implied there, see David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, pp. 144 - 48.


43 Cf. note 36 above.

44 See note 27 of Chapter 2 of this section.

dominance. What is still striking is the negation and ritual reversal engendered, by the self-shrining by the male bodies of their sacred threads, 46 the ritual inconsistency of which is caught by the Orientalist, but critical and cynical eyes of Thurston.

In the negotiation of power, mediated by the Mātangi, and her healing, divine, maternal, and feminine touch, the body, that is the memory of the hierarchical codes, 47 is led to a catharsis, a cleansing, an erasure of the codes of hierarchy. This is indeed carnivalesque, where the body, in the grotesque realism, characteristic of the carnivalesque, and the peculiar aesthetics, which is integral to that realism, attains to its cosmic, universal, cosmic, and all-people character. This grotesque body, the fruit of the catharsis, is an open body, calling for an open, and non-hegemonic society. 48

The tapping of the liminal, the subaltern, the sanitizing, the penetrating 49 potential of the symbol of Mātangi will prevent the co-opting of the liminal aspects of the carnivalesque and its potential for transformation, 50 thus not turning the carnivalesque into a negation of negation, and a reversal, which becomes a legitimization of the hierarchy. 51

Mātangi - A Sanitizing Symbol of Subaltern Penetration

Amidst the satirical, comic and the cathartic, which we have divined, in the divine and sakti-filled performance of Mātangi, and her worshipper’s reciprocation,

46 See Saurab Dubey, “Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh” in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies-III: Writings on South Asian History and Society, pp. 151-154, for the conflict of castes, which arose, and the colonial government’s intervention, following the appropriation of jaune (sacred thread), as a mode of ritual assertion, by the Satnamis, who were considered untouchable by the twice born.


49 Penetration is a term borrowed by James Scott from Anthony Giddens and Paul Willis. By this term, within the context of the village of Sedaka of Malaysia, he means the capacity of the peasants, to pierce through, to see through the self-serving interests of the rich farmers, landlords and outside officials. Cf. James Scott, Weapons of the Weak, p. 318.


51 Cf. Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects, p. 34.
the element of protest and penetration, present there, must not elude us. This is symbolically visible in her recounting the humiliation, she has brought to the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, saint and the sovereign, as Thurston does not fail to note. This is the deployment of the comic and the satirical, towards the interrogation of dominant society, which engages itself in the language of euphemizing its own domination - economic, cultural, and ritual.\(^52\)

But the poor are able to penetrate through the euphemism of the rich, on the basis of their daily material experience. This happens because, unlike what Gramsci, and more especially his neo-Marxist followers thought, ideology does not hang in the air. The poor have the weapon of the “Hidden Transcript”, which is acted out, behind the power-laden on stage relations. Any hegemonic ideology, overly idealized contains within itself, contradictions, that permit to be criticized in its own terms.\(^53\)

Mātangi, is singing exultantly over the humiliation of the rich, because the poor are able to penetrate through their euphemisms. She is the prophetess of the utopia, to which Gopal Guru drew our attention, where the Dalits - the Madigas, will be able to define time and space in their own terms.\(^54\) The poor, in their reflexive symbolism, desire and strive for equality. In spite of the sense of doom, and the sense of inevitability, which we project on to them, they always conceive of alternatives, in their own revolutionary way, unlike what the philosopher of ultimate freedom, through negations, Jean Paul Sartre thought. The poor resist the present, and have their utopias, in the here and now. Even the Holi and the carnival need not be conceived as stopping at structure-reinforcing pseudo-reversals. They do get out of hand. That is why the authorities, in the past, have tried to substitute the carnivals with passion plays.\(^55\)

\(^52\) Cf. ibid., p. 306-309, 314. Euphemization is the process by which the elite devise stratagem, to keep the poor under economic and other types of domination, through social practices, which are seemingly beneficial to the poor, but at a price paid by the poor themselves. The State and the ruling parties also engage in this through subsidies, and the like.

\(^53\) Ibid., pp. 315-317.

\(^54\) Cf. note 34.

\(^55\) Cf. ibid., pp. 30-31.
The evil spirits, which speak through the possessed low-caste servants, of the Nair tharavdlus of Malabar, act as the conscience of the rich. This happens because the Nair landlords presume/believe that the malevolent power of the spirits reflects the envy and resentment, that their less fortunate low-caste servants should be harbouring towards them.\textsuperscript{56} In the context of ritualized performative protest, the poor and the subalterns, the world over, become the conscience keepers of the rich. \textit{Mātan gi}, who is possessed by the goddess, can be a symbol of these malevolent spirits, which penetrate through the innermost heart of the rich, their euphemisms, and the hegemonic designs. The ideology produced by the ruling class contains within itself, the symbolic raw material for the most damning critique, at the potential service of the \textit{Mātan gi}s, who can exult over the humiliation of the dominant, in penetration of the euphemisms of the dominant.\textsuperscript{57}

The symbolic relevance and role of \textit{Mātan gi}, is to initiate the code-switch from the pseudo role reversal, which sustains the status quo, to the malevolent spirit, which exposes the hegemonic euphemism of the dominant, to be the priestess of the subaltern sakti, officiating at the rites de passage, from catharsis, to penetration.\textsuperscript{58} This will empower the subalterns, to be constantly evoke what Nietzsche called “uprisings in ethics”, in resentment and hope, bringing forth alternative symbolic constructions,\textsuperscript{59} interrogating the dominant ideology, like \textit{Mātan gi}-in-possession, exulting in song over the humiliation of the Brahmin, Kṣhatriya, sage and sovereign.\textsuperscript{60}

Conclusion

\textit{Mātan gi}, in its masculine or feminine form, has been present in the literature of India, from the time of Mahabharatha onwards. But it always had a \textit{chandala


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 339.

\textsuperscript{58} Ranajit Guha, \textit{Elementary Aspects}, p. 91.


\textsuperscript{60} See E.R. Clough, \textit{While Sewing Sandals}, pp. 86-89, for a legend regarding \textit{Mātan gi}'s treacherous role in the war in the Carnatic, in which Mohammed the Third captured Kampula in 1388.
association with it. In Sanskrit dictionaries, both Arundhati and Mātangi are described as the "wife of Vasiṣṭha". Arundhati was born to Matanga mahārshi and Matangi kanya. They were of low origin. This Arundhati, the daughter of low-born parents was given in marriage to Vasishta, the Brahmin mahārshi.

But this chandala feminine figure has survived the passage of time and narration, to become a symbolic residue, part of the texture of the religio-cultural resource of the Dalit Madigas. What we have been attempting in this chapter is to capture the hermeneutical potential of this symbolic residue, by seeing how she is celebrated in the lived memory of the subaltern peoples of today. We then moved on to the myths, which celebrate her memory, and then to the ritual. As it has been brought to light, Mātangi, as a cultural resource, has been appropriated by the Dalits, as a site of identity assertion and contestation of dominant constructions of their caste. We also have seen, how as a symbol, which plays the goddess, Mātangi, as a symbolic residue, can become a means of empowerment and negotiation of power.

It has been observed by sociologists that religions, as they reach maturity, have, by and large, tended to domesticate the feminine urge for leadership that emerges within them. Especially in the Indian context of ritualized marginalization of the untouchables and women, power has been imagined as feminine, but its controlling forces, predominantly masculine. This is a subtle mode of domesticating and co-opting feminine power, engaged in by the structures

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61 For an itinerary of Mātanga/Mātangi in ancient Indian literature, see ibid., pp. 77-82.
62 Ibid., p. 56.
63 In personal communication with Ebenezer Kesinakuru- 19/05/1998.
64 A symbolic Residue for me, is that which defies being evened out, in and through the multi-layered contexts, the group negotiates and which, acts as a memory trigger for the group, on its subaltern journey from submergence to identity, in history.
of patriarchy. Mātangi, as a symbolic residue, defies that peripheralization and dominant gendering of identities, giving hope for alternative symbolic constructions.

This chapter is the third moment, in our hermeneutical journey of tracing the dynamic inventory of the Madiga consciousness. The chapter, which applied the preceding two moments, of Madiga's daily ritual and the elaboration of the hermeneutical potential of the focal symbol of Jāmbavuḍu, to the presence of Mātangi, in the living memory and the mythical narrative, has provided us with a launching pad for an ongoing search for tools for feminist approach to reality, from a Madiga Dalit perspective.

In the next chapter, which is to be the last chapter of this section, standing on the hermeneutical discoveries, which have ongoingly become part of the texture of our hermeneutical engagement with Madiga consciousness and praxis, we will attempt at a hermeneutical elaboration of the portrait of the Madiga, as it appears, in his engagement, in the moments and movements of ritual, rural solidarity, in his village.
Chapter 4

_Homo Economicus as Homo Ritualis_: Solidarity in Ritual without the Consensus of Ideology

In the preceding chapter, we had dwelt on the symbol of Mātangi, with its cathartic and the cleansing dimensions, as well as its capacity to penetrate through the ritualized hierarchy, which undergirds and legitimizes the dominant constructions of caste identity. The present chapter is the last unit of this section, in which we are attempting to trace the dynamic inventory of the Madiga subaltern religious-identity consciousness. Here I venture into sketching the portrait of the Madiga as a _Homo Economicus_, emerging from the shadows of the _Homo Ritualis_, through a hermeneutical engagement with the different moments and movements of ritual activity, in which the village gives expression to its allegiance and devotion to its goddess, during the annual festival, or on occasions of her visit, in the form of epidemic or any other malady, or even the fulfillment of votive or propitiatory offerings.

The duration and the rhythm of this rural ritual motions is also concomitantly a socio-political and economic space, wherein the village celebrates and affirms to itself, in a transitory fraternity, the solidarity of the incommensurable identities and castes, dominant, as well as subaltern, within it.

_Homo Economicus Within the Homo Ritualis_: Political Economy of the Ritual Taming of the Village Goddess.

The questions, which are being addressed in this subsection, and which have implications for the next two subsections are: What is the mode of continuity

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1 Cf. Dilip Menon, "Intimations of Equality: Shrines and Politics in Malabar, 1900-24" in Peter Robb (Ed.), _Dalit Movements and Meanings of Labour in India_ (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 244, where he uses the term to drive home the point that the attempts made by the social movements of the period cited, to remove inequality, were couched in religious terms. The socio-political process, which the movements set in motion, saw considerable intermingling of rural relations, labour and religious worship. Menon refers to the possibility of _Homo Economicus_ residing in a 'devout heart', which I have termed as _Homo Ritualis_.

2 Cf. _Ibid._, p.254. According to Menon, the sense of community evoked through common worship of the low caste gods and the higher caste deities, especially of the Nayar households, which merged into, apparently in a seamless web of worship, did not hide the dissonances, making the fraternity or the sense of community, transitory.
between the Madiga, the Homo Economicus (for whom the art of survival is the daily ritual), whom we described as the first moment of the ritual continuum, and Madiga, who is the Homo Ritualis, who officiates at the high point of the bloody sacrifice of the buffalo to the village goddess, as the expression of the allegiance of the village to the goddess, and as a mark of its own internal, hierarchical solidarity? In other words, to apply the tool of the hermeneutics of suspicion, are there some discontinuities lurking behind this continuity or continuum between the Homo Economicus and the Homo Ritualis that the subaltern Madiga is?

An examination of the religious texture of village India, in our case, the Telugu village, and the ritual drama, which unfolds there at the visit of the goddess, will throw light on our hermeneutical task.


In the texture of village India are interwoven a continuum of deities and demons, benevolent and malevolent. Among them, there are the powerful local folk deities, especially the village goddesses, who appear passive at ordinary times, but whose role becomes all too important during an epidemic or other crisis like drought, flood, famine and other disasters. The response to the crisis is an orgy of ritual activity, centred on the village’s goddess. She is considered responsible for the health and safety of the village, and she may be responsible for the very epidemic or crisis in the first place, given the non-dualistic economy of power and folk logic in vogue in the village.

This observation of Brubaker, though general in nature, is also proved to be true for Godavari delta, as testified by Hemingway. He states that the gods of the Godavari could be classified under the fourfold scheme of the village goddess (grāmadēvata), caste deity, proper to each caste, family deity (virudu, meaning hero.


4 Cf. notes 29 – 32 and 41 of the preceding chapter for the logic of non-dualism in the economy and transaction of power between gods, deities and demons, where I rely on Moffat, who in turn draws inspiration from McKim Marriot.
or the soul of some dead bachelor in the family) and *pēranṭam* (spirit of some woman outlived by her husband, accorded apotheosis, after their alleged reappearance announcing their immortality).⁵

"There are gods and goddesses like *Bhookalamma, Samalamma, Pullalamma, Thalamma, Pōthuraju* and *Vēdalaswamy*. We have a ceremony of cutting the cocks and *kaviṭiṭāthu* in their honour."⁶ In the list enumerated from memory by the villagers, only male exceptions are *Pōthuraju*⁷ and *Vēdalaswamy*. With very few exceptions, the village goddesses are not the consorts of superior male gods, like the superior goddesses, who have emerged in the Sanskritic tradition, after the interaction between the Aryan and non- Aryan elements. On the other hand, neither are they sexually inactive.⁸ These humbler goddesses, outside the Aryan heartland, have been present in one form or the other, especially South India, for millennia. They are independent, powerful, and strongly ambivalent, with regard to their powers, in as much as they can be benevolent, as well as malevolent, punishing, as well as protecting, bringing disease, as well as healing the devotees of their maladies.⁹

Most of the spirits are the spirits of ancestors, and almost universally human beings returned to earth.¹⁰ The worship of *pēranṭalu* is a common custom in the


⁶ In personal communication with the people of Uppalaguptam: 21/10/1998. *Kaviṭiṭāthu* is a votive celebration during the festival, wherein the devotees dance, carrying the decorated images of the gods and goddesses, often in stylized motions of trance.

⁷ Cf. W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1994), p. 17, where he quotes Whitehead for an elaborate and nuanced description of *Pōthuraju*, as the brother or husband of the village goddess or her attendant. He is never mentioned as an independent deity. The sacrifice is always offered to him in conjunction with other deities.

⁸ For the thematic of the sexuality of the female goddess, her lustful passion and herself as mirroring the menstruating virgin in the heat of unfulfilled passion, and the association of goddess's natal in Kerala, with agriculture, puberty and menstrual rites, see the very enlightening and insightful article, by Sarah Caldwell, entitled "Bhagavati: Ball of Fire" in John Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (ed.), *Dēvi Goddesses of India*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1998), pp. 195-226. See also Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of Goddess Kali* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), of which the article cited is an excerpt. See also Brubaker, *The Untamed Goddesses*, pp. 154-159, for similar hermeneutical explorations into the symbolism of sexuality, violence, heat, the sacred and healing in relation to the village goddess of South India.

Telugu villages. A pēraṇṭalu is a virtuous woman, a faithful wife, who has borne children, and who leaves behind her husband at death. The Madigas are wont to worship the pēraṇṭalu, the virtuous women, who die leaving behind their husbands, as household deities. They are worshipped in the family shrine, symbolically represented as red dots painted on the wall, smeared with saffron, to which a necklace, with beads attached, is fastened.

Apart from the pēraṇṭalu, there are folk deities, who are subaltern, in their conflictual and violent origins. They, so to say, ascend from the feet of the society, from the underside. They were often historical persons, who were in conflict with the unjust system of casteist and feudal society, and its laws and injunctions.

Elmore pictures for us one such Madiga hero-god, in the figure of a Madiga horn-blower, who was treacherously attempted to be killed, because he had developed illicit relations with the daughter of a rich caste Hindu, but laid down his life in valour and vengeance. Contrary to the custom of only the female goddesses being worshipped, he, though a male god and a Madiga at that, is worshipped under the symbols of a small golden horn and a pair of golden drums. Examples of female deities, who rose to divinity from blood and murder, avenging their deaths, are Kanaka Durgamma and Podilamma.


12 in personal communication with Mr. D. Veeraraju (Telugu Pandit) - Kakinada- 9-08-2000.


15 For details of the etiology of the story, which Elmore attests to be historical, W.T. Elmore, Dravidian Gods, pp. 65-67.
From the tribal context, we have the examples of Sammakka and Sarakka, who defied the authority of the Kakatiya emperor, Prathapa Rudra, during his expeditions to extract tax and tribute, in times of acute drought and famine, from the tribal areas of Mulugu, beyond the present day Warangal. These heroic women, who became martyrs for the people, are celebrated as divine spirits and tribal goddesses, in the annual festival called Medaram jatra. They are goddesses from the battlefield.  

The subalterns like the Madigas are involved with the hardships of agricultural labour and the struggles related to the production of life-giving food. They are intimately in touch with the rhythms of the Earth Mother's fertility and propagation. It is a matter of little wonder then, that most of the subaltern deities are goddesses. They are spirits who are very close to them in their day-to-day affairs and life struggles, who reach across to them in care, protection and potent defence, whether it is from the marauding demon hordes or from the assault of the dominant classes and castes. They are goddesses with whom they can converse, cry in rebellion and protest, whom they can manipulate, and with whom, they can bargain and make deals. These goddesses can take possession of the subaltern people and make known their will through them.  

As noted earlier, the benign goddesses also give protection against the onslaught of the malevolent spirits, which are ubiquitous, especially in the boundaries between the villages, the mythical wilderness, the abode of the ghosts and evil spirits. The dead people return to live in their original surroundings, in the form of ghosts, if they had not been fed, while they were alive, or until they attain

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17 Cf. Ibid., pp. 64-70.
the status of ancestors, through proper rites, after the cremation.21 “In sleep, kalu
dayum will come to take us away. There is also gali (ghosts of the dead). The evil
spirit enters into us. We have left all these superstitions. [But] When we get sick, we
go to the bhutavaidyulu (spirit-shamans).”22

Whether the Madigas now consider their being possessed by the spirits,
benevolent or malevolent, as superstitious beliefs of the past, the world of the spirits,
and the fear of possession by the spirits were very real to them and had been woven
into the texture of their consciousness. The bhūtās and the bhūtavaidyulu did and
still occupy a powerful place in their religious consciousness.23

During the fieldwork, though my enquiries as to their having recourse to the
bhūtavaidyālu in the present day would almost often meet with strong denials, there
have been exceptions to the trend of denials. “A few months ago, something
happened to my sister’s son. She and her mother-in-law took my nephew to an
Allopathic doctor. He was given number of injections, each costing Rest. 250/-.
But of no avail. The sickness did not decrease. He was getting worse. Then they
took him to the bhūtavaidyūḍu. He gave them a thread over which, the spells had
been cast. They tied it around his hand and he was healed. So, sometimes when we
have recourse to the bhūtavaidyūḍu, there is reason for it”.24

Apart from fear, or beyond fear, there is a pragmatics and a subaltern
political economy at work in the Madiga’s recourse to the spirits and the spirit-
shamans, then and now. The logic behind the subaltern Madiga’s having recourse to
spirit healing is the non-dualism in his approach to reality, where he sees the matter
and spirit, as not opposed to each other, but as a continuum. This non-dualistic logic
is deeply embedded in the matrix of the material texture of the subaltern religiosity


22 In personal communication with Ekchottu Mariamma- Pathavaram village – 14 - 10 - 1998.

accounts of the elaborate rites of exorcisms and healing of evil possessions by bhūtavaidyālu(spirit-
shamans) in Telugu villages.

24 In personal communication with Lovaraj, the Gurna Nowkari- Bhavanipet- 18-03-1999.
of the Madigas.\textsuperscript{25} It lends itself to holistic healing, around which the Indic approach to psychosomatic healing too is centred.\textsuperscript{26}

"We used to believe in dayyālu (devils) and dēvatalu (goddesses). We used to have the practice of black magic."\textsuperscript{27} The Telugu word 'dayyam' in itself does not connote an evil spirit. It just means the spirit, though in practice, it is the fear of the evil spirits, which take up much attention. Therefore, the fear of evil spirits could be one of the hermeneutical keys to understand the Madiga subaltern religiosity.\textsuperscript{28}

We have to understand both dayyam and dēvata, in the context of the non-dualistic economy of power at work in the rural and subaltern context, and the ambivalence lurking in this dayyam-dēvatalu continuum, in terms of benevolence and malevolence. So subaltern worship cannot be reduced to mere despicable devil worship. Neither is it mere pure idolatry. The spirits worshipped by the subalterns, in the Dravidic ethos, are never reduced to the object of worship and quite generally have a human origin, as we have seen in the context of pēranjālu and the martyr-heroes.\textsuperscript{29}

If fear as a hermeneutical key is affirmed in understanding the subaltern religiosity, it is a fear informed by an eminent degree of materialist and non-dualistic pragmatism, coupled with a strategy to tap the sources of power available in the village cosmos. The worship of the subalterns is an expression of a pragmatics, that is, in order to avert the calamity, they try pacifying the deity, so that their quest and striving for prosperity is not interfered with. It is not that god will give them

\textsuperscript{25} Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Subaltern Religious Experience", p.60.


\textsuperscript{27} In personal communication with the elderly Madiga womanfolk of Kandalapalem- 12-10-1998. See Dilip Menon, "Intimations of Equality", p. 248, where the author alludes to the superior ability of the Parayans (an outcaste community of Kerala) who would outwit the Nambudiris (Kerala Brahmins), who practised sorcery without the loss of status. See also note 14 on the same page.


\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}
prosperity, but that the god/ goddess/ demon should be prevented from interfering with his welfare. 30 This is the logic behind the statement of the Madiga village elder, who, while persistently being asked to speak of their gods, had only the pragmatic answer, a near rebuttal, to all my queries regarding the divinity. "Our gods are made just for the occasion - temporary gods and seasonal gods." 31

The Awakened Goddess in Defence of Her Precinct: The Sacred in the Economy of the Village

The Madigas, who are subalterns, in their daily struggle for existence, which is the ritual of their lives, interweave economy and resistance, labour and worship, and are in constant negotiation of power, with the dominant communities and castes. The earthy and bloody goddesses/gods, who ascend from the dusty soil of their lives, reflect the concerns of their struggles, and are very much part of the daily negotiation of power, and the often submissive but hidden subaltern resistance to the structures and constructions of the dominant castes. 32 The ritual related to the village goddess is a mirror of this lived world of creative resistance and subaltern agency.

The village cosmos is built around the goddess, with the village celebrating in memory, the creation of the village, out of the surrounding wilderness. The village goddess fights the local demons, which break out in war from time to time. The crisis time festival can be imagined as a war, which the village goddess and her people are mounting against the marauding demons, especially in times of the smallpox, cholera, or other epidemic diseases. 33

Like in many other South Indian villages, the villagers of Godavari delta also have been frequent victims of these epidemics. To cite a statistical example, in the

30 Cf. Ibid. p. 38.

31 In personal communication with the Madiga elder of Razole- 01/05/1998.


river basins and the plains of East Godavari, which include Konaseema, in the year 1948, there were 26,171 victims of cholera and 13,422 in 1949.\textsuperscript{34}

In the village cosmos, wherein economic order, social interaction and sacred tradition, stood in an interlocked continuum, the \textit{dēvi} or the village goddess, who fights the disease causing demons, herself was seen as the cause of the epidemic, in her anger at the neglect of the sacrifice to her. If for the Christian missionaries and for the Orientalsit scholars, such a goddess was not better than devil herself, and posed a theological problematic, for the subaltern villagers of South India, the problem was not as agonizing, a theological conundrum.\textsuperscript{35} As we have seen already, the subaltern life and religiosity recognizes a multiplicity of divine and demonic beings, whose powers conflict with one another, together with the intense ambivalence, these deities project. What was even more paradoxical was that, the goddess, who was the inflictor of the malady, was also considered to be its victim, who manifests in herself the symptoms of the epidemic.\textsuperscript{36}

In Konaseema, like in many other South Indian villages, the disease is equated with the goddess, and at a deeper layer of the rural hermeneutic of the matter-spirit continuum, smallpox, especially is seen as the possession by the goddess, her grace-filled manifestation, however harrowing the experience of the fevered bodies may be.

\textsuperscript{34} Cf. \textit{Madras Administrative Report- Part II} (Government Press, 1954) - State Archives of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, P. 98.

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. Henry Whitehead, \textit{Village Gods of South India} (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983), p. 65, where he refers to the fact that in Coochamba (present day Kakinada and the district headquarters of East Godavari district), during the outbreak of cholera, the village goddess, Nukalamma, herself a goddess given to ill-temper, used to be replaced by the goddess Macidamamma, who was considered as the goddess proper of cholera.

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Richard L. Brubaker "The Untamed Goddesses of Village India", pp. 152-153. See in this context E.R. Clough, \textit{While Sewing Sandals}, pp. 91-95, where the author describes the cause of the smallpox epidemic, which struck the Ongole area, after the Raja of Gunsur, a prisoner of the British, passed that way. Rural interpretation of the cause of the epidemic was that Raja, a devotee of Mahalakshi, his \textit{ishaevata}, could not offer sacrifice to her, at which she was angry. While asked of the reason for his non-performance of the sacrifice, goddess was told that the English were preventing him, and they should be punished by bringing cholera and smallpox on their regiments. Thereupon the goddess struck Ongole with both maladies and terror reigned.
Servants on the Margins: Polluting Purifiers as Priests of the Goddess

Production and purification, social structure and ritual together make up the sacred system of the village, deeply rooted in land and the traditions of the locality. During the annual festival of the goddess, or during the visit of the goddess to the village, in the form of the epidemic, or other calamities, the role of the four castes, which render service to the village, is brought into relief. These castes usually are the potter, washerman, the barber and the untouchable caste. Through their hereditary occupations, they remove the various sources of defilement, and have the special responsibility in the removal of ritual uncleanness. Thus they help in maintaining the dominant community institution, which is embedded in ritual hierarchy, built on the dialectic of the binary opposition of purity-pollution.

Liminality as Power: Subaltern Agency and the Idioms of Necessity in the Buffalo Sacrifice

On the appointed day of the festival, the buffalo to be sacrificed is conducted around the village, by the Malas and the Madigas, who do take active part in the celebrations. The buffalo, while making its round of the village, is worshipped by the villagers. It is the right of the Madiga, to herald the coming of the buffalo, through the beating of his dappu (drum).

After the buffalo has been taken around the village, it is brought to an open space, near to where a canopy to receive the statue of the goddess, has already been made ready. This is followed by a series of processions, which is symbolic of the solidarity of the village, and more especially the ritual honouring and affirmation of the role of its service castes.


40 For details of these preparatory processions, symbolic of village solidarity and especially the ritual role of the four service castes, cf. Ibid, pp. 49-53.
After these elaborate processions and the smaller sacrifices, symbolizing the recognition of the role of the various service castes, commence the main sacrifice. The sacrificial buffalo is brought forward, and the Madiga, whose right and duty it is to kill the buffalo, kills it either by cutting its throat or by cutting off its head. The pool of blood and the water, which is poured over it, are carefully covered with mud, lest any outsider from any other village should come and steal it. The logic of the negotiation of power is at play here, whereby the villagers believe that, even if a small amount of blood is carried off to the next village, that village gets the benefit.41

The head of the buffalo is placed before the image, with a layer of the fat of its own entrails smeared over its forehead and face, so as to cover entirely its nose and eyes. Its right foreleg is severed and placed crosswise in its mouth. Some boiled rice is placed upon the fat on the forehead, and on it an earthenware lamp, which is kept lit all through the festival. The goddess is supposed to be taking the essence of the bloody offerings and leaving material substance to the people.42

In the villages of the Godavari district, as the buffalo is sacrificed by the Madiga, the blood is collected in a basin and nine kinds of grain and gram are gathered and put into it. The basin is placed near the idol of the goddess and the doors of the shrine are kept closed for three days. On the fourth day, the doors are opened, and the grains and the grams are separated from the blood and tested on the ground behind the shrine, in order to see which of the grains have sprouted. Whichever is found sprouted is regarded as the right kind of grain for the year, as marked by the goddess, to be sown that year.43

It is recalled by the villagers that the panchāngam (almanac) was read just after the buffalo sacrifice, so that the villagers could know in advance, whatever was awaiting them, by way of fortune and misfortune, from the hands of the goddess. The revenue officials of the area also would be present for the function.44

41 Ibid. pp. 50-51.
42 Ibid., p.51.
43 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
44 In personal communication with Kolli Veeraraju from Madikki, Alamuru, 16-05-2001.
Towards the small hours of the morning, another important part of the ritual is enacted, the center of which is often a Madiga, at times a Mala, but any rate, an outcaste. After the large quantities of rice, which is offered to the goddess is shared by the villagers, some of the rice is taken and a ram is sacrificed over it. The blood is collected and the entrails of the dēvara pōṁ (sacrificial buffalo) is mixed with it. The intestines of the lamb, which has been sacrificed earlier, are put over the neck of the outcaste, and its liver is placed over his mouth, while another outcaste takes the basket of rice soaked in blood and mixed with the entrails of the buffalo. Then a procession is taken out, with these two figures in the middle. The man with the liver in the mouth is worked out to a state of frenzy and is supposed to be possessed by the spirit. He has to be held by ropes, to prevent him from rushing away.

The ryots and the outcastes accompany these people in the procession, brandishing clubs and swords, and throwing limes into the air, to drive off the evil spirits. As the procession moves around the village, people shout “Food! Food!” The man who carries the basket of blood soaked rice sprinkles it over the houses to protect them from evil spirits. As he walks along, he sights the evil spirits, and falls down in a faint. Then lambs have to be sacrificed on the spot and limes thrown into the air, and coconuts broken, to drive away the evil spirits and bring the man back to his senses. The procession moves around the village in frantic excitement, till the day dawns, when it returns to the canopy, where the great mother is reposing in tranquility.

During the final ceremony in the night, the image is taken from the canopy by the washerman and the Madiga carries the head of the buffalo, with the leg in its mouth and its forehead and nostrils smeared with the fat, and the lit lamp atop its head. During the procession, which traverses itself to the boundary of the village, the Madiga, carrying the head of the buffalo leads the group, followed by the washerman, carrying the image of the goddess, and at the rear, the small cart. During

45 Cfr. Whitehead, Village Gods, pp. 52-53, 56,62, 65 and Elmore, Druidium Gods, p. 128, where Madigas are shown to carry the blood soaked rice, to trace with it, the village boundaries and ward off the evil spirits. In some villages, the Malas also undertake this task.

46 Cf. Whitehead, Village Gods, pp. 52 and 56.

47 Cf. Ibid.
the procession, the pedda (Elder) Madiga, who carries the head of the buffalo becomes possessed with the goddess, and utters the messages from the goddess.\textsuperscript{48}

When the procession reaches the boundary of the village, the group goes ahead for a short distance, into the neighboring village. The āsādis (ritual singers of the potter and barber castes) chant the praises of the goddess, and some turmeric is distributed to all the people, and finally, the image of the goddess, divested of all its ornaments, is placed on the ground and left there. The light on the head of the buffalo is extinguished, and the head is carried off by the Madiga, to his house, for a feast. The purpose of transporting the goddess into the lands of the next village is that the wrath of the goddess will be transferred to that village.\textsuperscript{49}

Another explanation, which also falls within the logic of the deity-demon-human continuum of the subaltern religiosity and the negotiation of power is that, as the procession moves through the village, to its boundary and beyond, the evil spirits are gathered together and expelled from the village, the sacred precinct of the goddess, and confined to the anarchic outer space, where they belong.\textsuperscript{50}

The carrying of the head of the dēvara pōtu (sacrificial buffalo) is considered to be a very dangerous and inauspicious office. The Madiga, who is supposed to officiate at the task, require great persuasion, with inducements from the village headman. It is believed that gigantic demons are sitting on tall treetops, to swoop down and carry him away, in order to snatch the rice and the buffalo’s head, which, he, in some places, carry together. This, as already been mentioned, is to sprinkle the blood soaked rice, so as to make a cordon around the village, and to prevent the entrance of the evil spirits.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 54.

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. Richard L. Brubaker, “The Untamed Goddesses of Village India”, p. 152.

In the ritual orgy of the goddess-festival, the village acts in many ways like an afflicted human body trying to expel a virulent infection. Madiga is in the liminal space between the village, which is properly the precinct - sacred space of the goddess, and the untamed, chaotic space, the wilderness, the abode of the untamed evil spirits.

The ritual is also a space of contestation and negotiation of power. The question of precedence in offerings gives rise to disputes among the leading villagers. In Gudiavada, in Masulipatnam district, there was a case pending before the sub-divisional magistrate, between the Zamindar and the munsiff (village magistrate), as to the precedence in the offering. So too the carcasses of the animals, sacrificed during the ritual, become a symbolic space of assertion of dominance and status. The heads of the animals are the lot of the priests of the goddess for the occasion, that is, the pujaris or the issadilu, the potters, washerman, barbers, Malas and Madigas, and others who take any official part in the sacrifice.

We may not be flying in the face of evidence, if we hermeneutically read into the assertion of the right of the servants and priests of the goddess, to the remainder of the offerings to the goddess, an idiom of necessity. It could be cited also an instance of the praxis of the 'subsistence ethic', within a 'moral economy of the peasant', given the situation of oft-visiting epidemic and endemic hunger, prevalent in the Telugu villages, especially of pre-Cotton Godavari. The carcasses of the private sacrifices are taken away by the offerers themselves, but the public

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52 Cf. Richard L. Brubaker, "The Untamed Goddesses of Village India", p. 153. See also Samit Sarkar, "The Conditions and nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Co-operation, c. 1905-22" in Ranajit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 309, where the author states that as regards the subalterns are concerned, the dividing line between religion and magic can become very thin, and especially during moments of heightened excitement, the popular sentiment can reach the apocalyptic, leading to a belief in total transformation.


victim belongs to the headman of the village. The rice, fruits and vegetables are distributed among the various officials.56

In Godavari, the public victim is shared between the officials, in the order of their status. The main portion is sent to the headman’s house, the hind portion is shared between the musniff and the karnam (revenue record keeper).57

The Madigas, who have to be persuaded to officiate at the baliharana (procession with the blood soaked rice and the head of the deva potu), and play the dangerously liminal role of the priests of the goddess, in the climactic act of the ritual battle between herself and the demons of the wilderness, are offered inam (rent-free lands) as traditional remuneration. Often cases used to come to the court, as to who had the right to kill the buffalo. As the goddess and the ritual could not wait for the tedious and the long winding legal procedures, the issue would be settled by the village elders, pending an appeal to courts.58

As in the case of the dominant castes and classes, the Madiga too exploits to the maximum, the codes of political economy and symbolic contestation, which are written in the ritual space of the festival, the warfare between the goddess and the demons. He expresses his striving for economic autonomy and the identity of his caste, ordinarily at the stigmatized margins, but now brought to the central space, as he plays the priest of the goddess.

Hot Coals and Cool Waters: Subaltern Potential of the Hermeneutic Ambivalence of the Goddess

Heat, which signifies energy and passion, is one cumulative symbol, which opens the door to the cluster of meanings, which lie at the dynamic depths of the subaltern consciousness, as it immerses itself in the ritual orgy, at the visit of the goddess. In the language of folk medicine, balance between, heat and cold indicates

57 In personal communication with Kolli Veeraraju from Madikki, Alamuru – 16/05/2001.
health. The affliction of the epidemic is indicative of overheated condition of the body. Overheated are those who are possessed by the goddess, during the affliction. ³⁹

Goddess herself manifests the heat of her aroused state, the heat of her newly vivified energy, and the heat of her sexual arousal. The anger, with which she afflicts the victims of the disease, as well fights the demons, are also expressions of her heat, symbolized in some places by the firepot, which burns during every night of her festival, alternating with the water pot during the daytime, symbolizing the benevolent side of her nature. Not only the goddess, the demons are also bearers of excessive heat, in the disease, they inflict, the heat of their appetite, including the erotic, and the heat of pollution, they spread. ⁶⁰

The festival response of trying to expel the disease/ demon is expressed in rhythmic dance, inviting possession by the goddess and stirring up people's devotional fervour and their passions. ⁶¹ “We used to worship other gods and goddesses for fear of small pox and cholera. Some of our women used have Poonakam (the state of possession by the goddess and the accompanying trance) of the goddess. Now also the Kapus have this practice. We don’t have.” ⁶²

People fight fire with fire, in the idiom of the folk medicine, which cools heat, by heat. The frenzied fervour and devotion of people is at times expressed by the ritual walking on incandescent coals, ⁶³ as the womenfolk of Enugapalli recalled:

On the banks of the Godavari, we used to have the pūja for Kondalammathali, ⁶⁴ headed by the Gottas (shepherds). They used to dig a long and deep pit, where they used to prepare fire. As part of the ‘mrokkubadi’ (votive offering), we used to walk in the nippugundam (fire-pit) and we used to cry out to the goddess for our needs. Especially, young mothers, for fecundity and for children. ⁶⁵


⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 157.

⁶¹ Cf. Ibid.

⁶² In personal communication with the elderly Madiga womenfolk of Kandalapalem – 12/10/1998.


⁶⁴ Kondalamma is the considered to be the deity of the Agency area or one of the Hill deities of Bhadrachalam area, brought to the plains. Cf. Census of India 1961- Vol. II- Andhra Pradesh – Part VII-B (3) – Fairs and Festivals – 3. East Godavari District. p.55.
During the field research, I personally witnessed the fire waking on the last day of the festival, held in honour of the local goddess, Manikyālamīna, at Muramalla. The āsādis, who belong to the Kummari (potter) caste lead this climatic act of the month-long ritual celebrations.

To add to the heat of the fire, blood, which is a hot substance, is poured out in abundance. The pollution, which is already present, is increased through the handling of the blood. The frenzy of the festival again invites the demons, which have to be warded off. The epidemic and the festival are but two dimensions of a single event, where the continuum of the divine, human and the demonic is operative and all the three are supercharged.  

In the performance of the ritual, in the overheated company of the deities, demons and fellow-humans, where energy, physical, emotional and spiritual is released, the subaltern Madiga imbibles the symbolic energy, to protest against the very social system, which suppresses and emarginarates him as the polluted one, alienates him from his skills and exploits his labour, but now momentarily exalts him as the priest. He becomes aware of his power on the margins, gains critical consciousness.

In the mesocosm that is the village, at war with the evil spirits, the Brahmin is not the priest, but the washerman, the potter, the barber and more especially the Madiga. Brahmin is not in the center of power, whether political or spiritual.

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66 In personal communication with the elderly Madiga womanfolk of Enugapalli 10-11-1998.


68 Cf. Declan Quigley, “Conclusion: Caste Organization and the Ancient City” in David N. Gellner and Declan Quigley (eds), Contested Hierarchies: A Collaborative Ethnography of Caste among the Newars of the Kamandu Valley, Nepal, p. 311, where Quigley quotes Levy’s assertion that the ritual resolves the tensions within the city. Through ritual, the city, that is the mesocosm expresses its unity to the world.

69 Cf. Ibid., pp. 311 - 315, where he challenges Dumont’s idea of the centrality and the supremacy of the Brahmin priesthood, by stating that in Nepal and Sri Lanka, the royalty has precedence over the priestly class. The service castes and untouchables, engaged in the purification rites are also
There is a paradox here. Those who are engaged in works of purifying, in the ordinary rhythm of the village, are ordained to do the most polluting jobs, when the village undergoes transformation, in the heightened ritual rhythm of the village, when the village, so to say, is built and sustained by the ritual. This paradox and ambiguity reflects the ambiguity, which the goddess herself takes on herself. Only a goddess, with a streak of the demoniac can deal with the demons. Madiga is possessed by the goddess. He is the lover of the goddess. The Madiga is a polluting purifier, invested with power, but still on the liminal margins. He saves the village, but no one saves him.

He is like a king, who through rituals, is transformed to be god, through whom order and well-being are continually regenerated. But unlike the king, the Madiga remains a possessed, but polluting carrier of sacrifice, in the liminal state between the Goddess (her sacred space) and the demons (chaotic wilderness). In Koneaseema, in spite of the manyams, which are an inducement and a compensation for the Madiga, for playing the priest and the consort of the goddess-demon, exposing himself to the chaotic forces of evil, in the negotiation of power, the Jajmani system does not give the assurance of hereditary holdings, making him a royal Vajamana of the sacrifice. He is still under politico-economic subjugation. He does not become the Vajamana of the sacrifice, because his hereditary holdings (manyams) are expropriated from him, through usury, when he has to answer the call of hunger, in his primordial posture for survival.

70 Cf. Ibid., pp. 301-303, where Quigley elaborates the theme of the city as a microcosm, between the microcosm, that is the individual and the macrocosm, of the larger universe. Mesocosm of the city is built on ritual, integrating the religious and the secular.


72 Cf. Ibid., p. 155. Here Brubaker states that given the ambiguity of the sexual relationship between the goddess and the demon, in some villages of South India, the untouchable is considered to be a consort of the goddess, as he is the most like demon, being the least, in the caste hierarchy, as the demon is in the divine hierarchy. The untouchable is made to stay within the precincts of the temple, as the temporary husband of the goddess, for the duration of the festival. At times the buffalo, to be sacrificed also is also given the euphemistic title of the "lover of the goddess".

73 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Ambajipetta - 23/05/1998.

74 Cf. Declan Quigley, "Conclusion: Caste Organization and the Ancient City", p.309, where he quotes Hocart, to be stating that through ritual, the king is assimilated to the gods.

75 Cf., Ibid., p. 320, where he argues that the foundation of the jajmani system is in the replication of the royal function, where the dependent castes are joined to dominant landowning households.
After the ritual orgy and the visit of the goddess, where he is projected as the man of power in liminality, he recedes into his subaltern existence, only recharged through ritual performance, of his daily struggle for autonomy and identity. He is under the burden of debilitating purity-pollution dialectic, arising from Brahminical injunctions, entwined with the ‘dull compulsions of economic relations- political economy'.

Marx’s statement that economy can be the religion of everyday life makes great deal of sense, in the context of the daily struggle and the ritual immersion of the Madigas of Konaseema, in as much as religion and economy stand not in a dialectical opposition of ideology and infrastructure, but form part of a cultural structure, which is informed by power. This structure defines the nature of ritual activity, dominates the internal functioning of the economy and determines the trajectory of social formation. In the ‘web of significance’, that is life, subaltern agency of the Madiga, priest and victim constructs meanings in his struggle for survival, identity and autonomy, because meaning and practice stand in dialectical relationship in the confines of human practice as an intentional unity.

In South India, for those of the lower castes, becoming patrons of temples was one way of ascending the caste ladder, which privilege was denied to the untouchables, because they were kept out of the control of land, due to their allegedly extreme impurity. The dominant strategy was to depict the untouchables as

Quigley belabours the point that the principle behind the *jajmani* system is not the political/economic subjugation, but hereditary nature of the landholding relationship, buttressed through ritual, paradigmatically exemplified in the Vedic idea of the *Yajamaṇa* of the sacrifice.

76 Cf. Ibid., p.323; also Saurab Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community*, 1780 – 1950 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 10, where the author argues the point that the principles of ritual hierarchy of purity/pollution and the ritual principle of caste dominance are intertwined and not separate.


78 Cf. Ibid., p. 336.

79 Cf. Ibid., p. 23.

80 Cf. Ibid.
lower than impure, and as persons, who, on no account should be permitted access to land. Ordinary impurity was no impediment to ownership of the land, and subsequent patronship of the temples. But by depicting the untouchables, as those who are lower than impure, they were given the rights, only to work a piece of land, but never to own it, and thus denying them subsequent patronship of temples.\textsuperscript{81}

In Jaffna, the dominant Vellalar landlords used to avail of the ritual services of the untouchable priests, and make them imbibe ritually unclean food, offered to the demons, possessing impurity, as well as tagum (inauspiciousness or disorder). The aim of the dominant ritual was to stigmatize the untouchables as similar to the 'fools of the forest', meaning by it, those tribes who dwell in the forests, close to the untamed and chaotic primordial forces of the wilderness. The dress code imposed upon the untouchables was also meant to give them a wild appearance. They were not allowed to wear a shirt, cover their breasts, cut their hair, use umbrellas and wear shoes. Moreover, the untouchables were deemed to be fierce and noisy, with their hair sticking out in all directions. All this was part of the Vellalar strategy to have a tight grip over the monopoly of the means of reproduction.\textsuperscript{82}

This dominant strategy of the stigmatization of the untouchables and the subsequent denial of ownership, in the name of ritual uncleanness, has its echo also in Konaseema, as I have gathered from the fieldwork. "The Rama temple, managed by the Kapus, has land under it. But we do not have access to that land. Even if we have it, it is only given on lease."\textsuperscript{83}

Notwithstanding the claims to the contrary, that caste, uprooted from its ritually determined, ideological, economic and political contexts, has ceased to be a unit of the ritual-status and hierarchy, the situation for the Madigas of Konascema, has not changed over much. With the onset of Dandjorā, and the Micro-Mandalization attendant upon it, Madigas have been forced to awaken themselves to

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Enagapalli – 10/10/1998.
the reality of competitive politics. But caste, as an expression of hierarchy and the ritually defined status has not disintegrated.\textsuperscript{64}

This brings us to the consideration of the dissonances in the in-built ritual solidarity of the different layers of the society of Konaseema, as it is lived out in the actual context of the post-Cotton agrarian economy of Konaseema, which was being fast commercialized, under the capitalist economy.

Transitory Fraternity and Solidarity of Incommensurable Identities: The Operative Praxis of Ritualized and Hegemonic \textit{Communitas}

On the occasion of \textit{Samkrānti}, which is a major festival in the Telugu country, the Madigas, used to be singing their folk songs, for entertaining the caste households, and also to earn some money, through ritual begging. The Madigas, perhaps led by the Pedda Madiga (Madiga Elder), himself brandishing a Madiga knife, an instrument of their work, used to intone the following stanza, which formed a running theme of many of their folk songs:

Sivathale, leilayyaa, which caste has brought in the difference of castes?
The small knife, and the big knife are mine; and I indeed am the daring Veerabahuḍu
Oh ignorant Madiga lady, where has your husband taken off?
He has gone Sir, he has gone Sir, for removing the bark of the red \textit{thamma} tree.
Newborn calf has died and where does your husband go?
He is here Sir, he is here Sir, hiding behind the pots
Oh ignorant Madiga lady, where has your husband taken off? \textsuperscript{65}

For the Madiga, knife has a symbolic meaning. It is his instrument of work, with which he skins the carcass, cuts the bark of the trees, needed for curing the leather, and also on ritual occasions, at the visit of the goddess, kills the \textit{devara pōtu} (sacrificial buffalo). Like the \textit{ḍappu} or \textit{tapaṭa} (Madiga drum), it is another symbol of his identity. During the Madiga marriages, the bridegroom is given a knife, as a sign of his mādārikam (Madigahood), his own adulthood, and as reminder to him that he has to look after his wife, earning his living with the same knife.\textsuperscript{66} Now holding the same knife, the Madiga elder is identifying himself, along with him the entire


\textsuperscript{65} This song is gathered in personal communication with the elderly Madiga womenfolk of Thillakuppa and Kommaragiri – 25/10/2000.

\textsuperscript{66} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Kommaragiri – 25/10/2000.
Madiga caste, with Veerabāhuḍu, their Puranic hero, who bought king Harischandra, who had fallen in penury, and employed him in the cremation ground, as his assistant.  

In the performative context and genre, natural to Madigas, the song depicts a common scene in any Madiga peṭa, the conversation between the landlord, who has come in search of the Madiga tenant. In characteristic subaltern satire, which is couched in the humblest of submissive posture, the song brings out the inner revolt and hidden resistance of the Madiga, against the system of ritualized social hierarchy, and the political economy, which marginalizes him/her. This is achieved through the contrast, which is brought into relief between the knife wielding Veerabāhuḍu/ Madiga hero and the Madiga, whom his wife describes to be hiding behind the large and round, mud vats, used for curing leather. The Madiga is interrogating the differential system of the caste, which has placed him at the lowest rung of the hierarchy. “Who has brought in the differences of caste?” It is an interrogation and an assertion of caste identity.

This interrogation of ritualized hierarchy and the assertion of identity are embedded in the Gramscian theme of ‘religion as contradictory consciousness’, and the related theme in political economy, of ‘co-operative conflict’. Religion is an ideological unity of opposing tendencies, a universal, dominant moral code asserted as valid for the society as whole, on the one hand, and on the other hand, struggle to reject this dominant code by the subordinated, when the autonomous layer of their consciousness comes to the fore, especially during conflicts.  

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87 Cf. note No.2 of the Chapter 2 of this section.


89 Cf. note 3 of Chapter II of this section, where I cite James Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.

90 Cf. section entitled Theoretical Frameworks of the Research, the subsection entitled Gramscian thematic of the interrelationship of religion and common sense.

91 Cf. Section II - Chapter 1, subsection entitled, “Co-operative Conflict”.

can be an expression of the co-operative conflict between different interest groups, in the realm of political economy, and the asymmetry of power within different groups.  

The Madigas did not have any trek with the Brahminical gods, in the public ritual space. What they usually describe as "We have no gods. But we worship their gods" refers to the ārudēvatalalu (village goddesses), commonly worshipped in the village. We have delineated in the preceding section, the ritual expression of this worship, and the Madiga’s liminal role in it. These village deities, the centres of rural solidarity, were considered to be the gods/ goddesses of the backward castes. The Madigas as we saw, immersed themselves in the ritual of the goddess, as the servants of the village and the priests of the goddess, and as her consort.  

But the Madigas who prided themselves to be the Peddintivāllamu (We are people of the big house) and made their newly-weds ride the elephant, during the wedding procession, did contest the ritual space and appropriate and re-position the dominant symbols of religiosity. They constructed a ritual symbolic universe of their own, in the context of the matrix of the material texture of the divine-human continuum, woven into their struggle for survival, their daily ritual. Appropriation and re-positioning, as subaltern strategies of contestation were attempted with regard to the Brahminical as well as the Dravidic gods/goddesses, if Madiga memory, scripted in their folk songs can be taken as witness:  

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94 The Madigas of Konasemma had the custom of engaging the elephants for their wedding processions, while all the other castes hired the horses for the same occasion. This was evidently a strategy to assert their caste status and their self-understanding as the ‘great people’. This detail regarding the elephant riding Madiga was conveyed to me in personal communication with Mrs. Suryakantamma, a resident of Vadapally village, and herself a Kapu – 20/10/2000. Cf. Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 66-68, for transport as a symbol of status and dominant assertion. Cf. also Saurab Dube, “Myths, Symbols and Community: Satanpanth of Chhattisgarh” in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Ed), Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society p.149.  
95 Cf., Saurab Dube, Ibid., p.143.  
96 This is an excerpt from the Madiga Folk song, gathered in personal communication with the elderly Madiga womenfolk of Kommaragiri – 25/10/2000.
They call us, Madiga, Madiga, but my eldest son-in-law is a Madiga.
They say Āranjyōthi, Āranjyōthi but Āranjyōthi is my eldest daughter.
When the bride and the groom pass this way, they worship Āranjyōthi.
The peddakāpu, peddakāpu is coming, give the big stick, give the big stick.
Madiga, the ignorant one, where did your husband go?
Why Sir, what may be the reason of your sudden calling?

The slavery under the Kapus is contrasted with the glory of Arundhati or Āranjyōthi, who is married to Vasiṣṭha, the Brahmin Rushi. She is venerated by all the newly wed couple, from Brahmin to Chandla, as the auspicious star. The reference to the eldest son-in-law as being Madiga is a veiled reference to Vasista, who has become a Madiga by hypogamy, thus asserting the exalted state of the Madiga caste. In another folk song, Mātangi, another kuladēvata of the Madigas, like Āranjyōthi, is attributed to be kalimonta (empty pot), the gōlem (round and large curing vat), an essential tool of work for the Madiga. So too the entire tool basket (panibutta) is personified as Pallālama, a popular deity of the area.

Yet another instrument of work, the sharpening stone (nurai) is attributed to be Nukālamma, the goddess, of ill temper, the goddess, who thrashes the ūrudēvataha of Coconāda (Kakinada). If all these personifications of the tools of work into deities, are appropriations of the goddesses of the backward castes, the Kapus, the Kummaris, and similar ranking castes, Dhanalakṣ̄̄mi, a goddess from the Brahminical fold, the Brahmin-Baniya goddess of wealth, has also been appropriated and pressed into service at the workplace by the Madiga. She is celebrated in the Madiga folk song as the personification of bakula, yet another tool of work.

This attempt of the Madigas to deploy the hegemonic religious symbols, Brahminical and Dravidic, in the context of their religious matrix of material texture of the divine-human continuum, is an example of the differential appropriation of

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97 Cf. the section on Brahmin – Madiga marriage in Chapter II of this section.


99 Cf. note 35 above.

100 Cf. Kancha Ilaiah, Why I am not a Hindu, pp. 76-78.
symbols by the subaltern culture, of the dominant symbols.\textsuperscript{101} There is a subaltern hermeneutic of resistance and assertion at work here, which, while admitting of the common code of the ritual, deploys it, by reframing it, in its context of struggle, to give rise to different meanings.\textsuperscript{102}

If the Vellalars can use the ritual to construct the untouchables as ‘fools of the forest’, the untouchables can reframe the gods of disorder, to be gods of order, martyrs and heroes and make them into rallying symbols of assertion.\textsuperscript{103} In the case of the subaltern Madigas of Konaseema, for whom economy is the religion of everyday life,\textsuperscript{104} gods of ritual hierarchy are reconstructed as helpers and collaborators in their daily ritual of skinning, curing and tanning the hide of the carcasses. Religion and economy stand in a continuum. Religion is economy and economy is religion.\textsuperscript{105}

Given the fact that there are elements of the dominant and the autonomous, in the religiosities of the Madiga, it is a superimposed religiosity.\textsuperscript{106} We can say that Madiga subaltern religiosities stands under the Gramscian thematic of ‘Contradictory Consciousness’. It is this contradictory character, which gives the subaltern Madiga religiosity its emancipatory potential.\textsuperscript{107} The ritual continuum, which seems a seamless web from the ritual of the daily struggle of the Madiga, to his immersion in the ritual of rural solidarity and the taming of the goddess in heat, is not without its echoes of dissonance at various layers.

From within the experience of the Madiga, there is continuity between the ritual that is his daily struggle for survival, and the deployment of the goddesses and

\textsuperscript{101} Cf. Saurab Dube, “Satnampanth of Chhattisgarh”, p. 144, especially note 54.


\textsuperscript{103} Cf. Ibid., pp.296-298.

\textsuperscript{104} Cf. notes 78 and 79 above.

\textsuperscript{105} Cf. Friedman, System, Structure and Contradiction, p. 326.


\textsuperscript{107} Cf. Ibid., pp. 64-66.
the gods of the dominant castes, at the service of his own survival. This includes his officiating as the priest and servant of the goddess, during her visit to the village. But in the context of the village, given the asymmetry of power, the fraternity, supposedly achieved in ritual solidarity is only transitory, in as much as there is incommensurability of identities, of the high, and the low castes, in the ritualized hierarchy persists. This dissonance is indicated in the subaltern agency of the Madiga, in search of identity and autonomy. It may be expressed in submission or protest, in and through the solidarity of the ritual, or even through the lanki (the intimate sense of mutual allegiance between the landlord and the Madiga, akin to client - patron relationship),\(^{108}\) or even through the idiom of necessity. This contradictory consciousness at work in the ritual texture of Madiga religiosity, which gives it its emancipatory potential, is revelatory of the limits of ideological domination in the formation of social consciousness.\(^{109}\)

The scene amidst the ritual orgy of the baliharapa, where the Madiga, priest and consort of the goddess has to be persuaded with inducements, by the village headman, to play his role of the priest of the goddess, is indicative of the resistance of the Madiga to ideological domination and co-option. Elmore describes another scene, where the Madigas again have to be persuaded to engage themselves in the ritual abuse of the members of the higher castes, who are intuitively aware of the logic of the 'temporary truce' and the 'safety valve',\(^{110}\) at play in such anti-structural rituals. But Madigas have to be persuaded to abuse the higher castes, even to the point of being beaten up.\(^{111}\) The ritual of subaltern protest emerges from within, in its agency, resisting to be co-opted.


Madiga as Insider–Outsider: Towards a Subaltern Genealogy of Solidarity without Consensus

The Madiga, the servant of the village on the margins, raised to be the priest and consort of the goddess, within the carnivalesque communitas, created in the duration of the ritual orgy of taming the angry-gracious, goddess-demon, does protest, perhaps mutely, even when he carries the evil spirits of the village to the wilderness, in the company of the devi. He protests also outside the ritual, over his insider/outsider status, within the caste hierarchy, resisting the taming of his protest in the transitory fraternity and the over glossed hegemonic communitas, much too celebrated by Victor Turner, and also by authors like McKim Marrriot. Their overly reconciliatory approach while acknowledging the anti-structural, as a dialectical category, misses out on the contradictory character of the superimposed religiosity of the subalterns, and in the bargain, emasculates the emancipatory potential of their sigh of protest.

My subaltern gleanings from the research field of Konaseema, gives voice to the feelings and the silent protest of the Madigas, against their exclusion from the ritualized space and time, controlled by the dominant, and also from the political economy, closely linked to and dominated by the ritualized hierarchy.

The festival of Manikyālamma, which is the village festival of Murumulla, on the banks of the Godavari, is still recalled with nostalgia by the Madigas, most of whom are Catholics of the nearby Roman Catholic parish of Kommaragiri. They still witness the festival, though not participate in it actively. I too had witnessed the festival with them during my fieldwork in the summer of 1999. When they recalled their participation in the festival in the earlier days, there was indeed a tone of protest:

112 Cf. note No. 38 of Chapter 3 of this section, where I allude to the approach of David L. Kertzer, which indicates the subaltern potential and the protest imminent in the carnivalesque, taking the symbolic relevance of the carnival, beyond the ‘safety valve’ approach of classical sociology. Cf. also Kevin Hetherington, Expressions of Identity: Space, performance and Politics (London: Sage Publications, 1998), pp. 134.


The grāmādevata is Manikyalamma, the goddess of the BCs, worshipped mainly by the Kummarilu (pooters). We were given entry to her temple only recently. We do not know actually what to do inside the temple, though at earlier times, we used to sacrifice chicken outside the temple. Once a year, she comes in procession to our colony also. We believe that she looks after us. Walking on fire, drinking the blood of fowls, which are sacrificed, and Pottaraju dances are some of the other rituals we perform.

The foregoing protest by the Madigas was over their exclusion from the physical space of the temple. Though given entry into the ritual space, very recently, the Madigas are protesting against the politics of exclusion, they were subjected to. The search for inclusion, was underlying all the rituals, enumerated by them in detail, and performed by them as a manifestation of their allegiance to the goddesses, who protect. Their rituals were symbols of protest over the exclusion, given the inherent logic of the subaltern strategy of protest, through submission and appropriation of the dominant religious landscape. Only difference is that way back in history, it was performed; now it is being verbalized, given their passage from orality to literacy.

Their performative immersion in the ritual, by way of dance and drinking, even drinking the hot blood, was a manifestation of the subaltern logic of immediacy, earthiness, expressed in the proximity of the tactile, in opposition to the dominant strategy of exclusion, achieved through the economy of the visual, which stressed the spatial distance between the deity and the devotee. The spatialities involved in subaltern mode of worship are characterized by dynamism, mobility and constant flux, and stand in direct contrast to the rational organization of elite spatialities. While the elite privilege distance and gaze, and sanction greater

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115 See Dilip Menon, “Intimations of Equality”, pp. 273 – 275, for a discussion on the ‘Temple Entry Movement’ in Kerala, culminating in the Vaikom Satyagraha, which had the underlying motive of fighting untouchability, and the attendant exclusion of the Dalits from the ritual space of Hinduism. Note Menon’s poignant observation that Gandhi and the Congress approached the problem of untouchability, rather reductively, by seeing untouchability only in terms of physical and ritual cleanliness, not locating the problem in the context of social and economic realities.

116 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Linlepāla – 16/05/1998.


intimacy with the divine for the upper castes, it excludes and marginalizes the lower castes. The subalterns on the other hand, prefer intimacy and touch in their ritual spatialities.\textsuperscript{119}

This sense of exclusion and distancing through elite spatialities is replicated in the same village, in the temple of Veerāndraswamy, where there is a wedding for the Lord everyday, and the garlands are ever green, but only for the elite.\textsuperscript{120} To date, we have no entry in the temple of Veerāndraswamy, who is a Brahmin god. Mallamma is also a Brahmin goddess, Maradamma, of Rajulu. Other goddesses are Mangamma, Mahalakshmi, Sahyamma and Pōthuraju.\textsuperscript{121}

The story is no different in Uppalaguptam, where as we saw earlier, they had no time for gods and goddesses, and where backbreaking work, from dawn to dusk, was their ritual and worship. "We are not allowed entry in the Shivālayās, Ramālayās and Durgammagudiḷḷu (temples of Durgamma)."\textsuperscript{122} The reason for their lack of time for "their gods", gods of the Brahmins and the backward castes, apart from the harrowing labour, was also their spatial exclusion from the precincts of those high gods, by the elite ritual doublespeak, ambivalence, which prevented the gaze of the Madiga from falling on their god/goddesses.

The Madiga subaltern experience of Enugapalli bears witness both to the contradictory consciousness, characteristic of subaltern religiosity, as well as the elite strategy of exclusion of the Madigas from the core of the ritual space, to the margins, setting the seal on their socio-economic and cultural peripheralization:

We used to worship Subbakāyudu, Vishnu, the snake-god. We used to offer flowers and gifts outside the temple. The Kapus and Settiballijal used to enter the temple, where there was the image of the snake-god. We used to worship Kondalammathalli. We could go near this goddess, offering plantains, fruits and flowers, asking for fulfillment of our wishes. We also used to worship Rāvulammathalli, but we did not have entry in her temple. We used to work in the premises but not enter inside. The Āṣadalu used to do the worship there. Not the Brahmins. These were the temples of the Kapus.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{119} Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 148-149; also Saurab Dube, \textit{Satnampath of Chhattisgarh}, p.149, especially Notes Nos. 68 and 69.

\textsuperscript{120} Cf. \textit{Census of India} – 1961, \textit{Fairs and Festivals – East Godavari}, p. 21, for the details regarding the wedding of Veerāndraswamy, conducted daily, as votive offerings from higher castes.

\textsuperscript{121} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Līnepēja – 16/05/1998.

\textsuperscript{122} In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Uppalaguptam – 21/10/1998.
Kancha Ilaiah, the Dalitbahujan ideologue has called for forging solidarity of the backward castes and the Dalits, seeing both groups as subaltern peoples. needing liberation from the Brahmin-Baniya yoke of socio-cultural hegemony and economic bondage. But the ground reality of the villages of Konaseema, reflected in the ritual space, as testified by Sarojini, recalling her childhood days, has not changed over much, as to facilitate this solidarity yet. For the Kapus, the Madigas are Dalit workforce, destined to work in their fields, and that they are to be in that state of excluded bondage, has to be communicated in the language of the ritual.

Though Madiga has managed to appropriate Subbarayudu, the snake-god, the symbol of Vishnavism, as much as the Kapus and Settibaljis have done, themselves Sudras, still the ritual cleavage is enforced through the elite ritual spatialities. The solidarity of the village around the goddess remains only for the duration of her visit, when Madiga is her priest, but not translated into the texture and rhythm of daily life, informed by the dull economic compulsions. Though Brahminic ritual supremacy is displaced, the Asadis have taken their place, in the temple of the village deity, Ravulamma, owned by the Kapus. As I indicated earlier, to the temple lands, of the Kapu temples, the Dalits have access, if at all, with difficulty.

Given the constraints of political economy, reinforced with ritual spatialities of exclusion, and the number game, which goes against them in many pockets of Konaseema, the Kapu remains the Other, the enemy of the Madiga, in Konaseema, though perhaps, not to the degree as the Malas are.

Kondalammathalli, a goddess, who has descended form the hills of Bhdrachalam, has been appropriated by the Madigas, into the texture of their lives, although in Emugapalli, she is considered to be the goddess proper of the Gollas (shepherd caste). The Gollas, still not tied down by agriculture, is nomadic and their goddess also moves with them. Her worship has not attained the degree of

123 In personal communication with Sarojini – 09/10/1998.
124 Cf. Chapter 1 of this section, notes 119-123, of the sub-section, Dandirı: A Retrospect and a Prospect, where I quote Ilaiah’s call for Dalitbahujan solidarity. Gopal Guru’s vision for the same, and also Ilaiah’s call for the recognition and rejuvenation of the traditional skills of the Dalitbahujans.
125 Cf. note 83 above where I quote the Madiga elders of Emugapalli on this theme.
centralization, as the worship of the gods/goddesses of the Kapus, the landed agricultural dominant caste of Konaseema, with its attendant ritual spatialities of the Sanskritized Brahminical worship. The Kondalammathalli worship is still retaining its subaltern mood and mode of decentralized, non-mediated earthiness and open-endedness. So she could be worshipped on the banks of Godavari, where she could be prevailed upon, through fire walking.

If the god, who is in the temple does not privilege the Madiga subaltern, with his darsan, his gaze, because he is being monopolized by the Brahmins and the other higher castes, through the dominant strategy of the elite ritual spatialities, neither is the Madiga privileged by his visit, when the god moves out of the temple, with his consort in procession. It is an ironical paradox, that the Madiga, who is the consort of the goddess, her lover and her priest, during her angry/gracious manifestations, the Madiga who is the arouser of the goddesses, through his dappu, is earmargined by the god/goddess, possessed by the ritual grip of the dominant castes. The higher castes monopolize the mapping of the trajectory of her procession.

"The god never used to come to our quarters during the Oorègimpu (procession). We have no gods. Those their gods, are our gods. They Panchamulu (Malas) have no gods."

In the political dynamics of the spatial carnivalization of the car procession of a temple, the space traversed by the deity, is politically charged and given over to dynamism and constant flux, especially when the trajectory of the procession intersects with other spatialities, governed by other interests or deities.

The Madigapeta of Ambajipeta, the commercial town of Konaseema, is not galvanized by the flux and dynamism caused by the procession of the deity, as it is

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126 See section above entitled "Hot coals and Cool Waters - Subaltern Potential of the Hermeneutic Ambivalence of the Goddess".


128 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Ambajipetta – 23/05/1998.

out of the trajectory of her procession. It is on the margins, where gods, controlled by the Brahmins and the backward castes do not appear. Perhaps the Madigas, who arouse the goddesses, and galvanise the village, can only protest over their marginalization from the ritual space, through their potent subaltern silence. The dynamics of the negative surplus of caste is the key to this non-galvanizing emargination.

This silent protest is a contestation of the moral order constructed by the dominant, an indication of the opposition within the whole, in spite of the mood of festivity in the village, whether it be during the ritual orgy, where the Madiga is the centre, or when he is on the margins, like during the procession of the god, which does not galvanize the Madişapeţa. Turner’s Communitas, to a great extent explains the solidarity, which, we have seen happening in the village, during the visit of the goddess. But it does not adequately explain the lived protest over the absence of the visit of the god to the Madişapeţa, during the procession.

The solidarity, supposedly built on ritual, or expressed in ritual, given the asymmetry of power, is ambiguous. Communitas can be a tag, a label, for a generalized social bond, a transitory fraternity, which appears during the ritual of solidarity, or the solidarity of the ritual. There are two models simultaneously at play here – one of structure and hierarchy, and the other of anti-structure and equality. But their ambivalence can be tapped, either to be geared towards a ritual of solidarity, or to a riot of violent assertion, if not explicit and explosive, but implicit, silent, nonetheless potent, an expression of the subaltern protest, present even in submission. There is disorder, lurking within the order of the communitas. Communitas, which fosters caste consciousness, informed by the principle of hierarchy, does not threaten the system. But Communitas combined with resentment over the denial of equality – power, wealth, prestige and freedom can threaten the fabric of caste system.¹³¹

This is the resentment underlying the silent protest over the non-entry of god in their peţa, the logic of their rejection of their (backward castes) gods. In this

rejection of *their* gods, the Madigas are in solidarity, even with the Malas, their traditional rivals, in the political space, who 'also have no gods'. It is the same resentment, which causes the Madiga rebellion, against the Kapus, in the ritual space of the village festival, in Mummudivarapadu.  

The experience of the Outsider-Insider, in the ritual space, felt by the Madigas of Uppalaguptam is reconfirmed in Potavaram:

We have our goddesses. Masinamma for childbirth and sickness. Eranamma-Paidimmathalli is our *grāmadevā*. We have a yearly *jātra* (pilgrimage) to Gangadēvi *guddi* (temple). It is a temple nearby. But we have no entry in the temple. Mathangi and Arundhati are our Kuladevathalu (ancestral goddesses) but there is no special worship in their honour and no special occasion for their festivals.

The strategy of subaltern taming of the spirits, appropriation and repositioning of the gods of the elite, are at work here also. *Eranamma-Paidimmathalli*, two figures, clubbed together by my informant, is a goddess represented by the dog, *as I gathered during my stay in Kommuragiri, a Madiga stronghold*. *Eranamma*, in the form of a decorated dog, used to be brought on the day of the naming ceremony of the child and kept under the cot. This veneration of *Eranamma* was in view of invoking the protection of the goddess, so that the dogs would not attack the children. For a male child, a bitch used to be brought to the room and for a female child, a dog. *Eranamma* used to be given rice before everybody else. The subaltern goddesses arise from their surroundings. They protect them from diseases and grant them prosperity.

The participation of the Madigas in the *Gangadēvi jātra*, without the entry in the temple, is an indication of the fact that *Gangadēvi* is a goddess of the higher castes and so the elite ritual spatialities are invoked, excluding the Madigas from

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132 Cf. Chapter 2 of this section, subsection entitled "From Submission to Revolt: Endpoint of a Strategic Continuum in Chapter".

133 In personal communication with Chiina and Suryarao - Jambavapētu, Potavaram - 14/10/1998.

134 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Kommuragiri - 11/03/ 1999.


136 See Diana L. Eck, "Ganga: The Goddess Ganges in Hindu Sacred Geography" in *Dēvi: Goddesses of India*, pp. 137–153, for an insightful analysis of the myths concerning the Ganges, which present her as the liquid consort of the gods, as liquid sakti, and as Mother Ganga.
total participation. But from the side of the Madigas, there is an element of protest/rejection of this exclusion, in and through the mood and mode of the *communitas* of the pilgrimage.

During my fieldwork, given the closeness of the Godavari, which is ambivalent in its power, both for creation and destruction, and given the fact that Godavari was being worshipped under the name of Ganga, in the delta, I ventured into enquiring of the Madiga womenfolk, whether they worshipped Godavari as a goddess. Their firm reply was, "We don't address Godavari as goddess Ganga. But we used to have other gods like Sathyamma, Sullalamma, Nookālamma and Kandālamma."\(^{137}\)

Probably, Godavari, though very close to them in physical geography, ritually, and in the subaltern economy of spirit-power transaction, in human geography, looks very distant, seen as a deity of the dominant landlord-castes of the delta. Eramma, the dog-goddess is evidently closer to the logic of the subaltern religiosity and its matrix of matter-spirit continuum.

The *kulādvathalu, Mātangi and Arundhathi* (*Āramiyōthi*), though celebrated in Madiga folk songs, as symbols of pride and emulation, as stated earlier by me, are never strictly worshipped. That is why I have placed them as contiguities, along with Jambavudu, appearing in the ritual continuum, between the moment of the *Homo Economicus*, engaged in the ritual of daily survival, and the *Homo Ritualis*, the servant-consort-priest of the goddess, in her ambivalent divine-demonic, angry-gracious manifestation.

The social dynamics at work, behind this exclusion of the subaltern Madigas is captured for us in the words of a Madiga:

*The Sudras and the B.C.s do not have any trek with the Brahmin gods like Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Only the Sudras and the B.C.s have a role in the rural village festivals. The Dalits do not have ritual participation. They only cut the animals outside the temple and sing vulgar songs. In the rituals, if at all, the Dalits have the opportunity of a nominal participation, the Madigas stand a closer chance. The Malas do not stand a chance at all.*

\(^{137}\) In personal communication with the Madiga womenfolk of Kandalpalem-12-10-1998.
Neither do they crave for it. Twenty to thirty percent to of the Madigas involve themselves in the temple functions. But among the Malas, this is limited to ten to twenty percent.\(^{138}\)

If the Sudras and the backward castes have no trek with the Brahmin gods, they have appropriated them, as a means of their identity assertion. This ritual assertion cannot be delinked from the growing economic mobility, which the Sudra castes, especially Kammas and the Kapus have attained, due to the commercialization of agriculture.

In turn, the exclusion of the Madigas and the Malas from the ritual space is, as I indicated, is a dominant strategy to impress upon the Dalits, their low status of existence, as dependent labourers. This is self-same pattern of the strategy of the Vellalars of Jaffna, who keep the untouchables from the eventual temple patronship, by depriving them of control of land, by constructing an image of the “fools of the forest” about them.

But the subalterns like the Madigas, in spite the coarseness of their language,\(^{139}\) as observed by Dr. George Victor, are not vulgar fools. The vulgarity and coarseness of their language is indicative of their subaltern protest, a reflection of their life-struggles, unlike the refined, ordered, transcendental language of the dominant religiosities.\(^{140}\)

Even the apparently Sanskritized, transcendental idiom implied in the following statement of an elderly Madiga ideologue like Ebenezer, “We are Shiva worshippers from the beginning. One who worships god will not be wealthy; what

\(^{138}\) In personal communication with Dr. George Victor, Professor of Philosophy, Andhra University. Visakhapatnam. Dr. George is a Madiga from Talappudi, West Godavari, having relatives in Konaecama – 06/11/1998.

\(^{139}\) Ibid.

\(^{140}\) Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Subaltern Religious Experience", pp. 72-74. For a description of the coarseness of subaltern religious language, see Dilip Menon’s description of Kodungalur (Trichur District-Kerala) Bharani festival, during which, lewd songs about the goddess in the temple, as well as the passers-by would be sung. Dilip Menon, "Intimations of Equality"; p. 255. See also Sarah Caldwell, “Oh terrifying Mother”, pp. 128-129 and 164-167, for a description of the events during the Bharani festival and the nature and content of the Bharani songs. The festival is associated with Bhagavati, female goddess, noted for her ambivalent nature, fierce and graceful, menstruating virgin, having insatiable sexual desire.
we need is Truth and not wealth."141 must not deflect our attention from its subaltern thrust and intent. Ebenezer is not uttering the transcendental truth of some ascriptive religiosity, which despises wealth. Rather, in ironical idiom, characteristic of subalterns, is protesting against the lack of autonomy and well-being of the Konaseema Madiga, and calling for a struggle, to grow in critical consciousness.

My fieldwork has given indications that at least in some villages, the Madigas were having the privilege of the right to conduct the village festivals, as a symbol of their status. Eventually, as they met with impecuniousness, their right to conduct the feasts were usurped or sold off, or even surrendered. "Formerly, we Madigas were conducting the feasts, as our right. Later on, we sold off this right to other castes, when we were on the point of starvation."142

The situation is similar to that of Bhuniya kamiyās (bonded labourers) of Bihar, whose málikṣ (local magnates), bought and controlled the protection and patronage of the málik dévataś, ambivalent village deities, who endorsed the existing hierarchies, in turn, extending their rights over Kamia’s person and possessions. This custom of trafficking in gods also reinforced the hegemonic notions of status, purity-pollution, ‘traditions’ of subordination, and fostered caste-based divisions between people of similar socio-economic standing.143

Madigas have already been giving concrete expressions to their subaltern reflexivity and protest over their exclusion, by constructing alternative ritual space for themselves. “For our pelli (wedding), we have mangalasūtra (marriage pendent), a flower garland and rings. Our elders officiate at the ceremony. We don’t call in the Brahmins. We bury our dead, while others cremate their dead.”144 “Among us, there are Madiga Brahmins, well versed in the mantras, who officiate at our marriages.

141 In personal communication with Ebenezer, Kesinakurupalem -19/05/1998.

142 In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Goodala, Allavaram Mandal – 23/10/2000.


144 In personal communication with the Madiga womenfolk of Kandalapalem – 12/10/1998.
Otherwise our own elders officiate at our marriages. Some people, who want to show off their newly-gained wealth call upon impoverished Brahmins, who are not unwilling to come for our ceremonies.\footnote{In personal communication with the Madiga elders of Kommaragiri – 11/03/1999.}

If at all there were traces of Sanskritization, in the ritual emulation of the Madigas, it was not the Brahminical style and models, that were resorted to, nor was purity-pollution complex the main concern of the Madigas.\footnote{Cf. Dipankar Gupta, Interrogating caste: Understanding hierarchy and difference in Indian Society (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 134-135.} Their foremost concern was the redressal of economic grievance or protest over the socio-cultural exclusion.\footnote{Cf. The field song of protest integrated in the subsection entitled “Many Faces/Phases of Subaltern Agency” of Chapter 1 of this section. According to the testimony of the Madiga womenfolk of Krishna Nagar, who sang for me this particular song, though it had no ritual content, it was sung during the ritual space of a wake or funeral, to air their grievances and protest against the economic exploitation, they were suffering at the hands of the Brahmins, who owned the temple lands, and employed them as labourers.} Through ritual, the elite attempt to define and construct a hegemonic identity for the people,\footnote{Cf. David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics and Power, p.175.} but ritual is equally a weapon in the hands of the poor, in defining a new collectivity, and alternatives.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., p. 181; also Stephen M. Parish, Hierarchy and its Discontents, p. 174 on the subaltern people’s capacity for reinterpretation of the dominant symbols for subverting the dominant worldviews.}

If Durkheim is lauded for his sociological genius in recognizing that ritual builds solidarity, without the actual sharing of beliefs, the subaltern in the Madigas of Konaseema, seems to affirm Dukheimian genius. The Madiga celebrates the ritual together, with the Kapu and the Kamma, but he has different thoughts from them, and about them - solidarity without consensus.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 176.}

Ritual may have succeeded in achieving the Gluckmanian ‘temporary truces’ between the Madigas, the people of the Big House, who rode the royal elephants, during their weddings, and the higher castes, but not in concealing the conflicts
arising out of political economy, as in the case of Kommanapalli Sahib,¹⁵¹ or during the skirmish between the Malas and the Madigas, during the festival at Vadapally.

At Vadapally, perhaps for the first time in the pre-Dandôrâ history of Konaseema, the Malas and Madigas laid hands on one another, in caste frenzy. It is recounted that the Malas crossed the path of the Madigas, as they were engaged in the ritual beating of the drum, during the festival. This encroachment of the ritual space, which perhaps lent itself as a forum for the airing of many a socio-economic and political ire, led to an altercation, ending in the killing of some of the Malas.¹⁵²

Conclusion

The spiraling hermeneutical pilgrimage, which we undertook, in the space of the four interrelated chapters of this section, would have revealed to us that the dynamic experience, which we were trying to delve into, namely, the religious consciousness of the Konaseema Madiga, is a multi-layered and rhizoid phenomenon. ‘Religious Consciousness’ itself is a shortcut icon, a cohort and prismatic concept, with a cluster of features tied on to it, as on to a peg.

In and through this hermeneutically heuristic concept, we have thematized the polyvalence of the subaltern Madiga religiosity, in all its multi-layered contradictoriness. In the landscape of the religiosity of Konaseema, where the sacred weds political economy, we witnessed history assisting at the birth of the subaltern identity of the Madiga, as he traverses the ritual space between the Homo Economicus, at one end of the matter-spirit, divine-human continuum, and the Homo Ritualis, on the other.

The ritual continuum, as we have hermeneutically divined, is poised between the primordial ritual of the daily struggle of the Homo Economicus, and the immersion of the Madiga into the ritual orgy of the goddess in her angry/gracious manifestation, which metamorphoses him into her priest/consort, the Homo Ritualis.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Section II - Chapter 2, subsection entitled Contemporary Prodigals and Projectors: The Need for an Impartial Spectator.
The processual and ritual pilgrimage of the subaltern Madiga is an embodied performance of protest,\textsuperscript{153} replete with polarized contradictions.

In this possession-dance of contradictions, stigmatization and apotheosis vie with one another for the center-stage, playing out their roles, under the ritual masks of various symbols of signification.

The rhythms of the \textit{dappu} beat, the arousal of the goddess, journeys as \textit{dappu} artistes over the land, the dangerous walk of the servant-turned priest-consort, adorned with the ritual regalia of the entrails, the liver of the victims, dear to the goddess, and the lamp-lit head of the buffalo, the insignia of the victory of the goddess, are sites of social centrality - of apotheosis, symbols of autonomy and identity Assertion.

Labouring in bondage for survival, praying outside the temple, but not allowed entry into it, god/dess not entering their quarters, because the dominant map his/her trajectory, being dictated to, and being deprived of the right to name and own time and space as their own because of the ritual of labour, are sites of marginalization - of stigmatized peripheralization.

The subaltern Madigas, in their contradictory consciousness, or their multiple consciousness, expressing itself in the politics of consciousness and the political unconscious, are able to exploit these very contradictions, in the art of their survival, their primordial subaltern posture. This struggle/ skill for survival is manifest/latent in their religiosity, which appropriates and re-positions, the symbols of dominant religiosity, in contestation of their strategy of exploitation, ultimately domesticating, inverting these very symbols into survival symbols of political economy. We have

\textsuperscript{152} In personal communication with Mr. Veeriah, Velicherru – 16/05/2001.

\textsuperscript{153} Cf. Partha Chatterjee, "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness", pp. 203-207. See also Fiona Bowie, \textit{The Anthropology of Religion} (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 70-81, where the author presents the people as active agents in the constructions of their identities, especially in and through their bodies, challenging the hegemonic structures, in an inversion of power. See also Saurab Dube, \textit{Samampalth of Chhattisgarh}, p. 146, where the author quotes Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Comaroff on the thematic of the role of the body in the construction of 'self'.

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cited examples from the Madiga folksongs, for this fine art and alchemy of subaltern contestation and conversion.

So, my assertion that Madiga religiosity is a ritual continuum between the ritual of daily survival and the ritual immersion in/of village solidarity remains. The symbols of  Mātangi/Āramjōthi, and the ancestral symbol of Jāmbuvaḍu, who are not worshipped as god/desses, are contiguities within this broad ritual continuum.

From the perspective of the Konaseema Madiga, his/her journey from Homo Economicus to Homo Ritualis is a continuum, an experience of continuity, for the Konaseema Madiga. But vis-à-vis the dominant, from the perspective of the without, there is also a layer of discontinuity at play in this journey. Existentially, this experience of discontinuity is woven into the texture of the cleavages between the Madiga religiosity, and the dominant religion. There is the solidarity of ritual, without the consensus of ideology. Though the dominant imagine that the hegemony, supposedly achieved by their dominant religious constructions and spatialities, are total, monolithic, and homogenous, there is the inherent logic of exclusion, and the subaltern protest to it at work.

Madiga religiosity, which has its matrix in the matter-spirit, divine-human continuum, as it is lived out in the struggle for survival, and autonomy, is indicative of the fact that Madiga locates the sacred, wholeness and salvation in this world.\textsuperscript{154} This is revealed in his praxis, wherein there occurs the collapse of borders between the concerns of religiosity and political economy. Marx’s remark that religion is the general theory of the world, logic in popular form, universal source of consolation, as well as the protest (emphasis author’s) against real distress is verified in the context of the religiosity of the subaltern Madiga of Konaseema.\textsuperscript{155}


Political economy and religiosity, in the context of the Madiga religious consciousness, is embedded in each other, mirror each other, flowing into the daily ritual of their struggle for survival and identity. I have also indicated the persistent and overriding presence of the feminine in Madiga religiosity and symbolic universe during the course of this section. The symbols of Mātangi and Āranjōthi, as well as the near total goddess orientation of Madiga ritual immersion are proof of this.

In the next section, we shall witness the encounter between the Konaseema Madiga, whose religious-identity consciousness, we have attempted tracing, and Christianity, in particular, colonial Catholicism, which arrived on the scene, towards the end of what is termed as the Vascoda Da Gama epoch of Asian history.\textsuperscript{156}