

# Political Culture of Dalits in Telangana

Ambedkar

Department of Political Science, University College of Arts and Social Sciences, Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

**Abstract:** *The Telangana state sought to ascertain the political parties' ideologies with regard to the Dalit community's main relationships, political activism's conceptualization, their problems and difficulties in resolving the socioeconomic and political activities in the state, and the ideological responsibility of Dalit political factors. The majority of the data was gathered from respondents about the Dalit community's political activities. Dalit perceptions on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's ideological legacy*

**Keywords:** Dalit Communities, Political activists, Socioeconomic, Sociopolitical Ideology, Ideological Legacy

## 1. Introduction

India, the sub - continent of Asia has some unique features with regard to political, economical and cultural aspects. Among these, the social and cultural scenario of India is highly complicated. Caste system, a heinous social practice exists nowhere in the world but for Indian sub - continent. Caste in India was not simply produced by Hindu religious texts but shaped by ecologies, languages, religion, modes of production and political system. The Dalit movement specified the point that emancipation of the untouchables is not an isolated task. Similarly, social transformation cannot ignore the various layers of caste discrimination.

Telangana witnessed many socio – political and cultural movements like Adivasi Movement, Telangana Peasant movement, Anti – Arrack Movement, Telangana Statehood Movement, Naxalite Movement, Tendu Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Women's Movement, Students Movement, Environmental Movement. And in almost all the movements the role of Dalits is undeniable and also they played a crucial role in most of the movements. Arguably they played a major role in the transformation of the society as it is now.

The study has been restricted to Telangana State. Telangana region has a historical specificity of caste - class dynamics. A kind of solidarity between Dalits Movement and Radical Left practice is found in this region, which is specific to this region.

This study begins with Telangana region of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh State as it used to be then. During the course of this research Telangana region acquired, through its relentless struggles, Statehood. And in all further discussions the Telangana State is considered as Telangana region because the Left and Political culture of Dalits which this study is going to analyse cannot be studied in isolation or can be restricted to strict geographical boundaries.

And also, this study focuses mainly on Radical Left politics rather than traditional Left politics. The reasons are: first, there is no noteworthy change in their (traditional Left parties) outlook towards Dalits and Dalit issues. Second, after the formation of the Andhra Pradesh state in 1956 the traditional Left party could not make a remarkable impact on state politics or could not influence the State government policies involving Dalit issues. In total, the traditional Left

parties failed to recognize adequately the historicity of Dalit problem. On the other hand, the Radical Left parties were involved in the grass roots level of rural mobilization for the last four decades, and have shown a greater degree of sensitivity to the concrete nature of the caste in the structures of dominance.

## Caste System and its Historical Background

Hindu social system is marked by a unique and unnatural division of labour which dehumanizes and degrades all those who come under this system. The Purusha Sukta in the Rigveda, the sacred text of caste Hindus, declares that the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra have come from different parts of the Creator Brahma's body. The Brahmins come from his mouth, the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his foot, to perform societal functions, as priests, warriors, entrepreneurs and the servile class. This arbitrary classification was named the Varna or caste system.<sup>2</sup> The rigid and congenital assignment of labour inevitably involved the legitimization of various mechanisms and ideological superimposition of Hindu sanctified dogmas of purity, pollution and heredity, over and above the impersonal doctrine of Karma by the politico - religious power, and its incorporation as a rigid division of Hindu society.

## The Idea of Dalit

Dalit as a word was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed class'; a term the British used for those who are now called the Scheduled Castes.<sup>3</sup> "In 1970s The Dalit Panthers revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women, and all those being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion. "So Dalit is not a caste but it is a social category."

Etymologically, Dalit means what which is made Dal. 'According to the Sanskrit – English dictionary of Monier Williams, 'dal' means multi - sected, broken into pieces, fractured, violated, destroyed, subdued, exploited, kept disunited, and powerless. They are the Shudras and among them the Adi - shudras. They are called by different names by the dominant such as: 'Avarnas', Outcastes, 'Panchamas' 'Dark - skinned Dasyua', 'Rakshasa', 'Nishidas', and 'Mlechas.' In the strict sense of state recognition, Dalits

today mean the Scheduled Caste (the ex - untouchables) of our country.

### **Caste and its Interface with Left Politics**

The caste system is the historical specificity of Indian society. In the mainstream sociological perspectives which dominate social science thinking on caste, caste has been conceptualized as a traditional and pre - capitalist institution and as a primordial marker of social identity.<sup>4</sup> The implicit assumption here is that with the development of capitalism caste would lose its potency and become increasingly irrelevant<sup>5</sup>. But contrary to this assumption, caste has not declined in its importance but rather with modernization it proved to be more explosive than before. In fact it would be an exaggeration to state that with the process of modernisation, caste has assumed a modern form and become part of modernisation process itself. Therefore the analysis of caste has to transcend the modernity - tradition perspective that has been influential in the study of the caste system.

Apart from being a ritual category, caste also has been an important factor determining land ownership and control on the one hand and labour process on the other. It is these dynamics of caste which are crucial to this present analysis. What adds complexity to the caste system, according to B. R. Ambedkar, is the fact that caste has not only been the site of division of labour but also division of laborers. Because of this the unity of laborers on caste basis becomes difficult. This is a challenge to the social movements that have been centered around or articulated caste as an important question. Any such project has to theoretically address, practically deal with caste as a structure of inequality and discrimination.

### **Left Movement and Its Ideological stance**

The 1920s saw the emergence of Marxism, asserting new theory of exploitation and liberation, claiming to have a total analysis applicable to India as to any society. It was rapidly picked up by a group of young, educated and mostly upper - caste radical nationalists searching for a mass base of the movement and eventually founding new communist and socialist parties. It also began to assert a powerful influence on the thinking of Left Congressmen such as Nehru and his colleagues.

Its influence lay in its seductive strength, and it was an influence exerted not only on Indian activities but also on academics, to the extent that a large number of the Marxist - influenced theoretical and empirical studies even during the 1970s and 1980s identified their radicalism with their assertion that behind the apparent reality of caste ultimately lay class and its dialectics, a 'class content to a caste' form.

### **Political Organisation in Hyderabad**

Formally, the supreme authority was the Nizam, presiding over a "political and social structure from medieval Muslim rule (that) had been preserved more or less intact" (Smith, 1950: 28). This was certainly true as far as the jagirs were concerned but it was also true in another respect: the Nizam had the equivalent of a royal retinue, consisting of big

industrialists, administrators and government officials. These were usually Muslims; though Hyderabad's population was predominantly (81 per cent) Hindu. The Nizams of Hyderabad had ruled since 1723 when Asaf Jahi had founded the dynasty by breaking away from the Moghul Empire. They had retained close relations with the British who stationed a permanent force of 9000 troops in Secunderabad, on the northern outskirts of the city of Hyderabad.

### **Ambedkarite Perspective on Caste and Class**

Dr B. R. Ambedkar while talking about caste said: "The caste problem is a vast one, both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that portends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but one capable of much wider mischief, for as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with the outsiders: and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem.

### **Phase - I: Caste, Class Interface in Telangana Peasant Insurrection**

Land was the central issue on which the socio - economic and political conditions in the State depended. The exploitation of people also centred on land and agriculture since agricultural farming was the main occupation of about 60 - 70% of the people in the State. As it has been already discussed, in the second chapter of this thesis, the social and political conditions which had shaped up the Movement, now this study will explore the interaction between Dalits and Communists. The growing influence of the communists in delta region slowly spread to adjacent Telangana region. A few young radical members like Raavi Narayana Reddy within the Andhra Conference turned to communism and converted the cultural forum (Andhra Mahasabha started as a cultural forum) into a mass militant organisation. Through Andhra Conference young communists voiced the peasants' grievances, paid more and more attention to agrarian problems in Telangana. The agrarian slogans and demands of the communists included abolition of vetti, prevention of rack - renting and eviction of tenants, reduction in taxes, revenues and rents confirmation of occupancy (patta) rights of cultivating tenants and so on, which naturally attracted the poor peasants, tenants and labourers to the Andhra Conference. This strategy also held different strata of the peasantry together. The agrarian social structure was conducive to an insurrectionary movement and the post - war political developments and economic crisis provided an impetus to a sustained peasant revolt that lasted nearly five years.

### **Phase - II: Interface between Dalit Movement and Radical Left Practice in Telangana**

It was the above scenario that formed the backdrop of the peasant struggles waged by the CPI (ML) groups during the 1970s and 1980s in Telangana region. In this phase an attempt is made to draw the dynamics of interplay of caste with class in the Radical left mobilisation in Telangana during the 1970s and 1980s. It acquires importance in view of the fact that it could mix the question of anti - feudal struggle with subaltern caste mobilisation by facilitating unity among them. Further, this movement also threw up an

organic leadership subaltern society, for which reason it stands out an important political experiment.

The class - oriented struggles of the communists did help Dalits. Their daily wage was increased. Some of them even got land for themselves. They got education and a social space in the society to articulate their grievances. Dalits were definitely more close to Naxalite party than any other political party. Naxalite party on the other hand, within its theoretical limitations, has recognized certain sections of poor as Harijans, and worked to eradicate the practice of untouchability in the villages. Therefore there were never tensions between Naxalites and Dalits. There always existed a kind of solidarity between Left parties and Dalits in Telangana by 1980s.

### **Karemchedu, Chundur Massacres: Impact on Dalit and Radical Left Politics**

In the history of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh the massacres of Karemchedu in 1985 and Chundur in 1991 are the most shameful events. There were many incidents before and after Karemchedu and Chundur in which many innocent helpless Dalits were killed, but I have chosen these two events. The reasons for choosing these two are: first, no other incidents had generated so much debate and discussion about Dalit and Radical Left politics as these two incidents; two, due to constraints of time and space and to stay focussed on my study of the interface, but not to undermine the severity of other incidents. Though the incident took place in Andhra region of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh state, Karemchedu massacre becomes indispensable in the study of dynamics of caste - class interface. With this incident both radical left movement and Dalit movement went through a remarkable transformation. The independent Dalit movement that emerged after Karemchedu had forced Radical left parties to reconsider their ideological stance.

### **Dandora Movement and Radical Left Parties Stand**

Radical Left parties expressed their solidarity to the Dandora Movement. The demand for categorisation of SC reservation into four sub - groups is aimed at stopping the dominant group from using all the benefits and thereby to new class differences within the Dalit community. Malas emerged as a new class within Dalit community. The role of reservations in the socio - economic development of the Dalits has been immense. They have facilitated Dalits access in to educational institutions and government employment, which in turn, invariably fostered the emergence of sizeable middle class among them with guaranteed earnings, security, and the prestige that comes with government employment.

### **Data analysis**

The examination of Telangana political behavior and Dalit ideology. The analysis of Dalit activism in Telangana. The study had been analyzing the situation while taking into account the problems and difficulties. The analysis from northern Telangana's ideological conclusions was based on the integration of ideology of Dalit activities gathered from the chosen villages (districts). Dalits are discriminated against by the progressive political communities, according to an analysis of Dalit social standing in Telangana state. Because of their dependent socio - political situation, the bulk of dalits lack confidence. The unidentified

discrimination in the social life was represented in that status. The study found that the governing political parties and leaders neglected to mention constitutional rights, which were inclusive of social life. Parliament and state governments, which are constitutional organizations, should uphold Dalit rights. The Dalit worldview implies equality and protection against socio - evil barriers, despite the fact that Dalits are not treated equally in Telangana state's socio - cultural practices.

## **2. Conclusion**

Ambedkarite Political culture of Dalits in Telangana has got its roots in Radical Left Movement in this region. Left Movement has successfully exposed the hegemony of upper castes on Dalits and gave Dalits a cause and reason for united struggle against the oppressive regime. This consciousness has helped the Dalit in furthering their cause and fight for the social justice. Madiga Dandora Movement is a contemporary example which has shaped up and supports my arguments. Even the huge support base of Dalits and their active participation in separate Telangana State can be viewed from this perspective.

## **References**

- [1] AbbaSyalu Y. B., Scheduled Caste Elite: A study of Scheduled Caste Elite in Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad: Haijan Studies Centre, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1978.
- [2] Awad, Milind., "Historical Context of the Idea of the Dalit", Think India Quarterly, Vol.13, No.3, 2002.
- [3] Bailey, F. G., Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963.
- [4] Balagopal. K., Probing in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts, Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1988.
- [5] Dumont, Louis., Homo Hierarchies: The Caste System and Its Implications, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- [6] Edwardes, M., The Myth of the Mahatma: Gandhi, the British, and the Raj, London: Constable, 1986.
- [7] Francine R. Frankel., India's Political Economy - 1947 - 2004: The Gradual Revolution, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- [8] Guha, Ranjit (ed.), Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, Volume I to 9 Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- [9] Hanumantha Rao, G., Caste and Poverty: A Case Study of Scheduled Caste in a Delta Village, Malikipuram: Savithri Publication, 1977.
- [10] Iyengar, S. Kesava., Economic Investigation in the Hyderabad State 1929 - 1930, Vol.5, Hyderabad - Deccan: Government Central Press, 1931 - 32.